CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter reports findings from the analysis of e-mail messages from the business community under study, following the research methodology explained in Chapter 3. The e-mail messages were analysed for their grammatical features, functions and discourse features. It is hoped that such an analysis would provide some clues as to how people in business communicate through e-mail, and for what purpose(s). The findings are discussed under the following headings:

4.1   Grammatical features and Functions of e-mail messages;

4.2   Other discourse features of e-mail messages.

The analysis of grammatical features in this study is focussed on main clauses and subordinate clauses. As for other discourse features, the findings are reported under the sub-headings - paralinguistic cues and simplification of language.

4.1   Grammatical Features and Functions of E-mail Messages

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the grammatical features examined in the data are:

4.1.1   Main Clauses or Independent Clauses

4.1.2   Subordinate Clauses

4.1.1 Main clauses

The main clauses in the corpus are discussed in terms of the different moods they are in, that is whether they are in the imperative, declarative or interrogative mood. This focus of the grammatical analysis in the study is based on the fact that the identification of mood can be related to the different uses of language (*Collins Cobuild English Grammar: 1995*). According to *Collins Cobuild English Grammar*, the imperative mood is the mood used to tell someone to do something, the declarative mood is the mood used to make statements and to inform, while the interrogative mood is used to ask questions.

The data reveal that clauses in the imperative mood occur in 105 instances of the e-mail messages. Clauses in the declarative mood occur in 94 instances while clauses in the interrogative mood occur in only 13 instances. This shows that while e-mail communication seems to be mainly used for requesting and informing, it is used less for the purpose of inquiring. It should be mentioned here that some e-mail messages in the corpus contain more than one mood. For instance, a particular clause may occur in the imperative as well as in the interrogative mood. This section discusses findings on the various types of clauses under the following categories:

I.   Clauses in the Imperative Mood

II.   Clauses in the Declarative Mood

III.   Clauses in the Interrogative Mood

I.   Clauses in the Imperative Mood

As mentioned earlier, clauses in the imperative mood form the majority of clauses in the data. The imperative mood is the mood used to tell someone to do something (*Collins Cobuild English Grammar*). In clauses in the imperative mood, the subject is usually omitted and the base form of the verb is used. In analysing this kind of clauses in the study, the researcher looked at the beginning of each of the clauses as it was felt that it is the beginning which brings about variations in this type of clauses in the data. Based on this perspective, the corpus yielded the following forms of clauses in the imperative mood:

a)   Requests with "Please"

b)   Requests in question forms

c)   Requests with "Do"

d)   Requests with "hope that"

e)   Requests with "would appreciate if you could / can ...."

f)   Requests with "need to"

g)   Requests with "Just"

h)   Requests with "Kindly"

i)   Direct Imperative Clauses

The following table (Table 1) shows clauses in the imperative mood with their

number of occurrences in the corpus. The number of occurrences has not been converted to percentage as it is felt that this would not give a real picture of the data since there are cases where a particular feature occurs more than once in a message, while in another message, there may be no occurrence of the feature at all.

Table 1: Clauses in the Imperative Mood

Clauses in the Imperative Mood	No. of Occurrences
a. Requests with "please"	59
b. Requests in question forms	22
c. Requests with "do"	8
d. Requests with "hope that"	4
e. Requests with "would / will appreciate if you ..."	3
f. Requests with "need to"	3
g. Requests with "Just"	2
h. Requests with "Kindly"	2
i. Direct Imperative Clauses	2

The findings on the clauses in the imperative mood are discussed in the following sections.

a)   **Requests with "Please"**

From the above table, it can be seen that imperative clauses used as polite requests with "please", occur the most frequently in the corpus, that is in 59 instances. There are 4 variations of this form of request, as shown in Table 1 (a) on the next page.

Table 1 (a): Variations of Request with "Please"

Requests with "please"	No. of Occurrences
• "please" + verb + object	39
• "please let us know ..."	8
• "please" + verb + preposition	5
• "please take note/ make sure/ remember	7

As we can see in the above table, out of the 59 instances of clauses in the imperative mood, 39 of them consist of the form **"please" + a verb + an object**, such as in:

> *Please call / e-mail me if you have any queries. (S 14)*
>
> *Please provide the duration course as well. (S 44)*
>
> *Please reserve the 4 - 8/1/99 for the Sun Net Manager*
>
> *training for Motorola. (S 60).*

As the e-mail medium is often used for "quick communication" (Angell & Heslop: 1994), this direct and concise form of expressing a request seems to be preferred by the executives, in comparison to the other forms of request. Moreover, the addition of the word "please" to the basic imperative clause renders it a polite form of request (*Collins Cobuild of English Grammar*) which is appropriate enough for business communication. The key informant also confirmed the preference for this choice of request structure compared to the structure that starts with "could / can you please ...?" among executives as she felt the latter seems to imply that there is an option for the recipient not to meet the

request. She further reiterated that an expression such as "Please send the quotation to Shell" conveys a clearer meaning of firmness to the recipient of the message in comparison to an expression like "Could / Can you please send the quotation to Shell?"

The data also reveal that clauses of this type often contain "strong, vivid verbs" (Angell & Heslop: 1993), a characteristic which is also vital for "vibrant writing" (Angell & Heslop: 1993) of e-mail messages. Examples of such strong, vivid verbs in the corpus are *send, provide, call, advise, enrol, inform, confirm, reserve, remind, find and visit.* These verbs are mostly action verbs (Gregory-Smith: 1995) as the communication is aimed at getting the recipients to do something, as can be seen in the following messages:

.....please *send* the catalog .... *(S. 1)*

Please *find* the attached file in .... *(S. 6)*

Please *call* Ms Wong .... *(S. 10)*

... please *send* only one trainer .... *(S. 18)*

Please *reserve* the room .... *(S. 26)*

Please *inform* your customer to visit our .... *(S. 45)*

Pls. *provide* the duration course .... *(S. 44)*

Please *remind* them that this only applies to calls from customers and .... *(S. 61)*

Please *confirm* the date which you can allocate your staff .... *(S. 63)*

Please *advise* us on the date of your next training. *(S. 66)*

Please *enroll* your participants through our Course Enrolment Form. *(S. 76)*

Please visit our .... Training Centre homepage at .... (S. 101).

Since requests expressed in the form *"please" + a verb + an object* are more direct and concise, their recipients have "immediate access to (the) information" (King: 1997, 11). This form of "simple, straightforward writing", according to King (1997), is a necessary factor to effective business writing. Angell & Heslop (1994) similarly state that a long, verbose style of writing does not seem to work for messages in the e-mail medium, "where turn-around times are often measured in minutes" (Angell & Heslop: 1994, xi). Thus, it would seem that the form **"please" + a verb + an object** to express requests is appropriate for e-mail communication in the business community.

The data further reveal another form of request starting with **"please let us / me know"** which occurs in 8 instances of the corpus. This kind of clauses is often used when the senders of the messages are requesting for information, for example:

> *Please let us know the no. of participants attending* (the training) *or else, please let us know the preferred date* (sic) .... (S 5)

> *Please let me know if you have received them* (documents sent earlier) .... (S 14)

> *... please let us know the latest schedule for SRC training ....* (S 15).

It seems that *"let me / us know"* is a preferred expression to "tell me / us" in the cases stated because the former provides options to a recipient to reply the message either through e-mail, the telephone or any other medium of communication, while the latter

·form "tell me / us" implies the telephone as the medium of communication preferred by the sender. This observation was confirmed by my key informant. Such a phenomenon appears to indicate that language choice has been influenced by its social environment, which in this case, consists of several types of communication medium.

Another expression of polite requests in the data has the structure **"please" + a verb + a preposition** in 5 instances of the corpus, for example:

> *Please liase with our Course Coordinator* .... (S 53)
>
> *Please revert to me* .... (S 54)
>
> .... *please liase with our Sun trainers here* .... (S 60)
>
> *Please also liase with Mr. M. K. Koh* .... (S 60)
>
> *Please register with* Monica and c.c. me. (S 99).

This form of requesting, especially with verbs like "liase" and "revert", seems to indicate that the participants of the e-mail communication use the medium to encourage collaboration with one another at the workplace. Incidentally, the verb "revert" as a substitute for the word "refer" which is commonly used in conventional business writing, seems to be a word taken off from computer software. The use of this word by the legal adviser of the company to her colleague, seems to indicate that vocabulary choice is influenced by the electronic medium.

In the fast paced business world, drawing attention to crucial matters in a message is vital especially when volumes of e-mail can arrive in electronic mailboxes every day,

vying for the recipient's attention. According to Angell & Heslop (1994), a message that does not attract the recipient when s/he scans its "first screenful" (Angell et al : 1994), runs the risk of not getting read or of being deleted. This factor seems to contribute to the frequency of the request forms **"please take note ...."**, **"please make sure ...."** , and **"please remember to ...."**. Such forms can be found in the following messages:

> *Please take note that the training schedule is tentative .... (S. 6)*

> *Please take note that the special rate is only offered to ASI Group only .... (S. 53)*

> *Please take note that VVM-231 can only be conducted in our PJ training*
>
> *centre .... (S. 58)*

> *Please make sure the PC setup is ready by Friday afternoon .... (S. 17)*

> *Please remember to give us your Task Request Form .... (S. 19)*

> *Elaine, please remember to fax them our .... (S. 49).*

Adding phrases like "take note", "make sure" or a word like "remember" seems to be a deliberate move to draw recipients' attention to the importance of the requests. These 7 instances of the corpus consist of interactions among executives at ASC as well as between the executives and their clients. This indicates that this form of request occurs in e-mail communication among the executives themselves at the workplace, as well as in communication between the executives and their clients.

b) Requests in Question Forms

In the data, requests expressed through question forms occur in 22 instances, that is, second in terms of frequency after requests using "please". There are four common types of such question forms in the corpus namely those beginning with modal auxiliaries "can" or "could", those beginning with auxiliary verbs like "do", "is" or "are", those using tentative expressions like "wonder whether you should ...", and those using wh-words. These types of question forms expressing requests are shown in Table 1 (b) on the next page.

Table 1 (b): Variations of Request in Question Forms

Requests in Question Forms	No. of Occurrences
• Requests with "can"	12
• Requests with "could"	2
• Requests with tentative expressions	5
• Requests with "do"	2
• Request with 'wh-word'	1
• Request with "may"	1

In the first type of requests in question form, the modal auxiliary "can" or "could" is sometimes used with or without the word "please" to ask the recipient to do something for example:

> *He mentioned that he would like to meet U too - therefore*
> ***can** U make an appointment to see him either tomorrow*

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> or Friday afternoon? ***Can*** *I follow u too? (S. 24)*
>
> *Hi Zida,* ***can*** *I meet up with you to show you our advanced training*
>
> > *materials on next Monday afternoon? (S. 31)*
>
> *M,* ***could*** *U possibly send a mail to inform about the purpose / agenda*
>
> > *of this visit so that I can forward it to the relevant party in*
> >
> > *ASC? Thanks. (S. 33)*
>
> *Sorry M,* ***could*** *you please elaborate a bit on this Connection Program?*
>
> > *(S. 34)*

In the data, the modal "can" is used more frequently (12 occurrences) to begin the requests than the modal "could" (2 occurrences), perhaps because using "can" seems to be simpler (being shorter in its spelling). Furthermore, using "can" is a more direct way of requesting (*Collins Cobuild*) compared to using "could" although the latter is more polite and appropriate in expressing a request (*Collins Cobuild*).

Another type of requests in question forms in the corpus begins with tentative expressions (5 instances) like *"Is it / Will it be possible to ....?", "do you think we can ...?"* or *"wonder whether you should ..."* as in:

> ***Is it possible*** *we schedule the Outlook training on Tuesday 27/4/99?*
> > *Since Fung is the only person to attend, we could have asked*
> >
> > *the trainer to give the training in Shell House. (S. 3)*
>
> *As this training is more towards for internal staff, and we also*
> > *invite 2 customers to attend, one we charge but the other*
> >
> > *one is free,* ***wonder whether you should*** *charge me? (sic) (S. 13)*

Diong, since we do have the intention to setup our training center,
    do you think we can *speed it up. (sic)* (S. 41)
Will it be possible to *change the date? Since Sultan Selangor*
    will be Agong on 25/4/99 (sun), so mon might be holiday
    for Selangor. And, it is just before 1/5/99 (labour day),
    so might be difficult to get transport. (sic) (S. 51)

In the e-mail messages shown, the expressions *"Is it / Will it be possible to ....?"*, *"do you think we can ...?"*, and *"wonder whether you should ..."* contain an element of uncertainty on the part of the senders as they knew that they were seeking a favour from the recipients. Although less direct and much longer than the other forms of requests discussed so far, they seem appropriate in the four cases where the senders were asking for favours from the recipients. The favours concern a change in the scheduled date of training (S. 3, S. 51), permission to use a venue for no charge (S. 13), and a proposal to speed up an action. The tentative way in which the writers' questions began showed that they were uncertain as to whether their requests would be met but they hoped to be granted the favours anyway. This occurrence in the corpus seems to show that the hedged expression of conveying a request is not totally sacrificed with the advent of the quick communication style which the e-mail medium is known for, especially when the request is related to asking for a favour.

The data revealed a request expressed in a question form using the auxiliary verb "do" (Sample 43). In this request, the sender of the message is not only seeking for

information but is also requesting the recipient to send the related document, that is the

price list of the courses offered by the company:

Do U have the pricing for any of the following courses?? (sic) (S 43)

In the above case, though the question is a Yes / No question, the sender does not only expect the recipient to give an affirmative or negative answer. From the context and clarification by the key informant, it is found that the recipient is expected to send the related document stated in the question.

In the corpus, there is also another type of request expressed in a question form using a 'wh-word':

When will you be free to have a meeting with me? (S. 55)

In the above case, the question is actually used to request for an appointment with the recipient of the message. Information concerning the sender's intention is obtained from the surrounding statements in the e-mail sample as well as from the recipient's reply. As shown below, it is obvious that the sender of the message (referred to as A here), is not only asking when the recipient, (referred to as B here), is free to meet her but she expects B to fix an appointment with her to discuss the amended documents:

*I've amended some of the documents. **When will U be free to have a***

***meeting with me?** At the moment, anytime this week (except*

Thur. afternoon) should be fine. (S. 55)

I am afraid my schedule is a little tight (sic) this week. Can you make

it on Monday 24th May? If so, I will reserve it for you and

you can give me a call on Monday. (S. 56)

From the reply given in Sample 56, it is also obvious that the recipient, B has understood A's request since she says that she is afraid her schedule is "a little tight this week", implying that she cannot meet A that week, but suggests the following Monday for their appointment instead.

The modal auxiliary "may" is also used only once (S. 61) in the corpus to express a request although it is known to be a more polite expression. That particular e-mail message expresses the request as:

*.... **may** I request you to inform your staff that all receptionists should*

inform customers to call our ASC Training...(S. 61)

The choice of the word "may" seems intentional on the sender's part for politeness' sake, as just before this request in the message, the sender was reporting about some customers' complaints on errors made by the company's receptionists:

We've received a few complaints from our customers recently

regarding receptionists not knowing that we are conducting

Solaris training courses. Therefore, may I request you to

inform your staff that all receptionists should inform customers

to call our ASC TrainingCentre (Tel:) for any training enquiries.

(S. 61)

The word "may" in the above message seems to reduce any harshness that might have arisen in the course of reporting the complaint, and yet the tone conveyed is a cordial one to get the recipient to act on the request. The recipient in this case is the sender's colleague from another department, which perhaps explained the cordial tone since the request has to be expressed in a courteous and a more formal manner.

c)   **Requests with "Do"**

When a request starts with the auxiliary "do", it often sounds like an appeal *(Collins Cobuild)*. This feature occurs in 8 instances (S. 24, 44, 55, 59, 65 and 72) of the corpus for example,

> *Do let me know of the meeting... (S. 24)*
>
> *Do let us know if the date is okay as soon as possible ... (S. 59)*
>
> *Do inform me if U've (sic) not received (it) ... (S. 65)*

In the above examples, the use of "do" instead of "please" gives a sense of urgency and emphasis to the request, which is perhaps what the senders of the messages intend to convey to the recipients.

d)   **Requests with "hope that ..."**

Clauses containing "hope that" are also used to express request in the corpus.

They occur in 3 instances of the corpus when the senders were requesting for favours from the recipients, who were the e-mail senders' business partners, for instance in the following:

> *I hope that SUN (a business partner) can give us a better rate*
> > *than this price. (S. 12)*
> *I hope (that) you can help us to check on the payment .... (S. 29)*
> *I hope that you can help me to find out whether the cheque has been*
> > *cashed yet by Medidata. (S. 30)*

In the above cases, the phrase "hope that" expresses the request in terms of a felt need on the part of the senders. As it is a favour that the senders of each of the messages were seeking from the recipient, the senders probably did not want to sound too forceful in expressing their requests. A request in this form sounds gentler and subtler to the recipient compared to the more direct forms of request discussed in the earlier sections.

e)   **Requests with "would / will appreciate if you ..."**

It has been said that language choice is often influenced by its social milieu (Faigley: 1985, Chitravelu: 1993, Le Vasan: 1995). This is proven by the occurrence in the corpus of requests using the expression "would / will appreciate if you could / can ..." or its passive form "will be very much appreciated". This phenomenon seems to indicate that the e-mail communication examined in this study has drawn some influence from its

business environment which practises certain business writing conventions (Treece: 1989). This can be seen in the following examples:

> *We would appreciate if you could send us a confirmation on ... (sic) (S. 25)*

> *...we will appreciate if u can arrange (for) some people to help us ... (S. 36)*

> *Appreciate if you can quote me for the ... (S. 41)*

Sometimes, true to the quick communication style of e-mail, the formulaic expression borrowed from conventional business writing is shortened with the subject and copula deleted (as in S. 41 above), probably to reduce the time spent in typing the message as well as to tone down the formality of the expression. The abbreviation "u" for "you" as in Sample 36 also serves such a purpose. The recipients of the above messages are the senders' colleagues from other branches (S. 25, S. 41) and regular clients (S. 36) which could have accounted for the slightly informal tone conveyed.

f) **Requests with "need to" or "need"**

The use of "need to" or "need" in a statement expresses necessity or indicates importance (*Collins Cobuild*, 236). In the corpus, it appears in 3 of the e-mail messages as an indirect expression of request:

> *I've tried calling your phone but unable to reach you. I need to know more*
> *about your training requirements i.e. how many participants required*
> *for each course, preferred value of the training date etc. before I can*

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quote you. You may contact me ... (sic) (S. 7)

*The list I received from you is not complete. I **need** the list from 95. (S. 23)*

*We **need** you / your staff to assist us in conducting a few classes of Network*

*Admin. ... courses for the month of Feb & March 1999. We **need to***

complete conducting these project (sic) by end of March. Please

confirm the date which you can allocate your staff / yourself to

conduct .... (sic) (S. 63)

*I've tried calling your phone but unable to reach you. I **need to** know more*

about your training requirements i.e. how many participants required

for each course, preferred value of the training date etc. before I can

quote you. You may contact me ... (sic) (S. 7)

In the above messages, based on the context of the messages, the clauses with "need to" or "need" can be interpreted as requests embedded in a statement. For example, in Sample 7, the sender expects the recipient to inform her about the details of the training requirements stated in the message while in Sample 23, the sender of the message is indirectly asking the recipient to send him the "list" stated in the message. In Sample 63, the message sender is requesting for the help of the recipient or the staff at the Penang branch of the company to conduct some classes on the dates suggested in the message. Thus, we can see that the clauses with "need to" or just "need" are used to express requests and the use of "need to" or "need" implies the necessity or importance of the request to be met by the recipient.

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g) Requests with "Just"

A variant form of the structure "please" + a verb + an object found in the data is the structure **"just" + a verb + an object**. Here, "just" is used as a substitute for the word "please". There are 2 instances in the data with this use of "just" as in,

Just get him the indication figure by today. (S 8)

Just let me know the number of participants / classes & venue training

required .... (S 47)

With the use of the word "just" to head the request statement, it seems like the senders of the messages intend to reduce the immensity of their requests, as "just" often conveys the same meaning as "only" (*Collins Cobuild*).

h) Requests with "Kindly"

In conventional business writing, the word "kindly" is often used in expressing requests as it is a formal and courteous form of expression (Treece: 1989) but interestingly enough, it is used only twice in the corpus; in "*Kindly follow up!*" (S. 11) and "*Kindly advise*" (S. 41). This can be attributed to the formal implication of the word, "kindly", that is not very appropriate in e-mail communication which usually encourages an "informal, conversational style of writing" (Angell & Heslop: 1994, 56). In e-mail sample No. 11, the formality of the word "kindly" is in fact toned down by the sender's deliberate inclusion of the exclamation mark at the end of the request statement.

Direct Imperative Clauses

The term "direct imperative clauses" is used to refer to clauses which convey instructions but do not have any addition of words like "please", "just" or "kindly" to the base form of the verb used in the imperative mood. In the data, this type of clauses occurs twice, as in:

*Besides the above, **give me the price** (list) for NT Admin, Exchange*
Admin .... (S. 44)

Wish to seek your advice on the proper course identification for
*Solaris 7 ... Also, **advise in terms** of PROLUS scheme for*
above courses. (S. 71)

In the above messages, the recipients are the senders' own colleagues; this could have accounted for the direct imperative used. However, this kind of structure only occurs in 2 instances in the corpus. The lack of frequency in the occurrence of this structure shows that this feature is not a preferred choice among the executives as it is not a polite way of conveying an instruction. In the corpus, this structure is used together with other polite request forms (such as those discussed in the preceding sections) in the same message.

To conclude on clauses in the imperative mood found in the data, it can be seen that there are 9 forms of such clauses in the e-mail messages examined. One of these

forms which starts with "Please" occurs the most frequently in the data. The most common variation of this form is in the form of "Please" followed by a verb and an object. This form of request seems to be popular in the e-mail communication of the business community as it is direct, concise and polite. On the other hand, clauses in the imperative mood using "kindly" and direct imperative clauses are rarely found in the e-mail communication of the community. This has been attributed to the formal implication of the word "kindly" and the impolite implication of the direct imperative clause.

II.   Clauses in the Declarative Mood

A clause in the declarative mood has a verb at its centre, a subject before the verb and any object after the verb (McCarthy: 1991, 51). The declarative mood is sometimes called the indicative mood (*Collins Cobuild*). The corpus yields two main types of such clauses namely those giving information and those conveying promises.

The frequency in occurrences of the two types of clauses in the declarative mood is shown in Table 2 on the next page. Once again, the number of occurrences is not converted to percentage since there are cases where a particular feature occurs more than once in a single message, while in another message, there is no occurrence of the feature at all.

Table 2: Clauses in the Declarative Mood

Clauses in the Declarative Mood	No. of Occurrences
a. **Clauses giving information**	80
• Clauses with verbs in the simple present tense	30
• Clauses with verbs in the present perfect tense	19
• Clauses with verbs in the simple future tense	15
• Clauses with verbs in the present continuous tense	10
• Clauses with verbs in the future continuous tense	4
• Clauses with verbs in the simple past tense	2
b. **Clauses making promises**	14

The findings tabulated in the table above are discussed according to the following sections:

a) Clauses giving information

b) Clauses conveying promises

a) **Clauses Giving Information**

In the analysis of this type of clauses, the grammatical feature which is focussed on is the **tense form of the verb** used in a particular clause as the data reveal that there is a range of tenses used. This focus is aimed at discovering whether there is any relation between discourse types and the predominance of certain tense choices in the clause

(McCarthy: 1991).

Based on Table 2 on the preceding page, it can be seen that the tense form which occurs the most frequently in the corpus is **the simple present tense**, with 30 occurrences. The declarative clauses which use this tense form include those that inform the recipients of messages about the availability of certain things, a certain person to contact, the requirements of customers, the current fees charged by the company, the need for certain information by the sender, and so on. Some examples of these in the data are listed below:

Intel Penang **wants** a training course as follows ....The contact person **is** ....,

he **is** overall P.I.C. of Engineering. (S. 8)

ASC Training Centre can conduct MS Outlook 97/98 – Essential for User training

and the fee **is** RM 200 per participant for a one-day course at our PJ

centre. (S. 47)

The above customer has just purchased an Ultra 60 from the Java Fiesta

promotion which comes preinstalled with the latest Solaris 7. Will your

training center be able to train them on ....? They **intend** to attend the

training in January 1999. (S. 68)

Please enroll your participants thru' our Course Enrolment Form as soon as

possible if you have any staff who are interested. We **have** 4 more seats

available for this course. (S. 69)

A, Mr. Lau **wants** to meet us today at 11.00 a.m., he will be away the whole of

next week, I am having another meeting at Old Klang Road at 9.00 a.m.,

pls call my h/p. (S. 70)

Yeap, they (the customers) **want** *it to be conducted at ASC Kuantan Office.*

(S. 89)

The simple present tense in clauses like the above, serves to indicate either that the information given holds over time or the issue related is operative at the time the message is sent. The fact that this particular tense form occurs more frequently (30 occurrences) in the data, compared to only 14 occurrences of the simple future, also seems to indicate that e-mail communication is largely used to transmit information on current matters in the business community.

Besides the above uses of the simple present tense in the corpus, this tense form is also used when the senders wish to inform the recipients of certain files (which contain documents or details for the recipients' reference) which are attached to the e-mail messages, for instance:

> *Here's our soft-copy of our course outlines ... (S. 4)*
>
> *Here's our quote to U. (S. 19)*
>
> *Here's the files requested ... (S. 38)*

It can be seen in the above cases that the simple present tense of the "to be" verb, "is" has been replaced by its contraction *['s]*, presumably for quick communication through the e-mail medium. According to Angell & Heslop (1994, 56), a contraction helps the writer of an e-mail message to achieve a warm, down-to-earth tone.

In the declarative clauses that use **the future continuous tense** forms of verbs, the modal "will" occurs in 3 out of 4 instances of the future continuous tense in such clauses. In comparison, the modal "shall" is found in only one instance. This could be due to the applicability of "will" to all kinds of personal pronouns and its indication of certainty.

The future continuous in the data is used to inform the recipients of scheduled or planned actions at a predetermined date, for instance:

> *Is it agreeable (with reference to my quotation dated 15 April, 1999) that we send our 2nd trainer for the 29th April class? On the 28th, our trainer **will be conducting** the training for Fung of SMDS. (S.40)*

> *We **will be having** the Perl Programming training class on 28 Jun - 2 Jul at Motorola, SG. Way. (S. 69).*

As we can see in the above messages, the verb in the future continuous tense precedes a noun phrase which denotes a scheduled action or event, and a specific date set for that action or event.

The corpus also reveals that e-mail communication was used to convey actions which had just been conducted or completed prior to the sending of the e-mail messages. This type of communication would thus require the use of **the present perfect tense** form. This tense form occurs in 19 instances of the corpus. Out of these 19 instances, 17 are used as opening statements of e-mail messages and they seem to act as reference

points for subsequent statements in the same messages, for instance:

> I **have just faxed** over my quotation together with the Course Outlines
>> for the relevant courses for you.   Please let me know if you have
>> received them ... (S. 14)

> SC Ng **has just spoken** to me regarding the list of participants ... Please
>> provide the list ... (S. 22)

> I've **just faxed** to you our quotation for the PC rental. Please let me know as
>> soon as possible if you are interested. (S. 67)

> I **have passed** the Shell KL copy of HTML Training manual to SRC, I will
>> liase with Mr. W ... (S. 80).

In the above cases, the clauses in the present perfect tense which act as opening statements or reference points preceding subsequent statements in the e-mail messages, seem to be substitutes for the conventional form of making reference in business writing such as "With reference to our message faxed to you on / at ..., we would like to ...", which is a more formal structure compared to those mentioned in the four cases above.   A close examination of all the 102 e-mail messages in the corpus also reveals that only 3 messages have the conventional way of making reference:

> **With reference to** recent teleconversation, we pleased (sic) to inform you
>> the changes (sic) schedule for the following training date .... (S. 66)

> *With **reference to** our tele-conversation, I would like to inform you that our*
> *promotion for Offer 1 & 2 ends in Feb 1999. (S. 76)*
>
> *Is it agreeable (with reference to my quotation dated 15 April, 1999) that*
> *we send our 2nd trainer for the 29th April class? (S. 40)*

The recipients of the three messages above are the clients of the senders, and though the manner of making reference to a previous communication is more formal, sometimes the formality is reduced with the deletion of certain words. For instance, in Sample 66 the possessive "our" and the auxiliary verb "are" have been deleted from the statement, and in Sample 40, the addition of parenthesis to the referential statement makes it seem like an 'aside'.

In some of the e-mail messages, the present perfect tense is also used to convey the senders' attempt at making some other types of communication prior to sending the e-mail messages concerned, for example:

> ***I've tried*** *calling your phone but unable (sic) to reach you. I need to know more*
> *about training requirements .... (S. 7)*
>
> ***I've just faxed*** *over my quotation ... (S. 14)*
>
> ***I've just faxed*** *to you our quotation for the PC rental. (S. 67)*

Such cases as the above indicate that e-mail communication in the company complements or acts as 'follow-ups' to other forms of communication like making telephone calls or sending faxed messages. According to the key informant, e-mail communication forms

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about 30% of the company's overall communication. The company's overall communication consists of face-to-face communication, telephone calls, fax, voice-mail and formal letters. E-mail communication is resorted to when addressees of the messages could not be contacted at the office or by telephone due to the very nature of their job responsibilities for instance, sales executives or technical staff members who are often away from their work-stations; having to make personal calls on customers.

Another significant tense form used in the corpus is the present continuous tense which occurs in 10 instances of the corpus. The present continuous is used when the senders of the e-mail wish to inform the recipients that certain other documents (usually in hard copy form) would be sent to the recipients for example:

> *I'm sending you the hard-copies of our training manuals (2 copies) by DHL today. (S. 38)*

> *I'm sending you our latest course brochure & schedules for your attention. (S. 72)*

In the above examples, the present continuous is used to inform the recipients about the documents sent together with the e-mail message, which can be in the form of a file attached. Thus, this kind of message seems to act like a cover letter.

In other messages examined, the present continuous is also used to inform the recipients of the concessions or incentives the senders are offering to customers for instance:

*... we **are extending** a 15% off from our Standard Fees to Siemens ... (S. 76)*

*I **am keeping** 10% for future negotiation. (S. 100)*

Here, the present continuous tense also seems to convey the senders' stand towards what they are doing - that there is no doubt they are practising the policy / action they have stated.

b)   **Clauses Conveying Promises**

Besides giving information, the data also reveal 14 clauses which convey promises made by the senders of the e-mail messages. These clauses normally use the simple future or the future continuous tense form of verbs, with the auxiliary "will" or "shall" as in the following examples:

> *I **shall forward** to you the necessary information once I have the soft*
> *copy of the contents from our business partner. (S. 6)*
>
> *...I **will be faxing** them (some quotations) to you shortly ... (S. 57)*
>
> *We **will only charge** for one trainer's fee. (S. 18)*
>
> *We **will send** some system(s) to your site for SA135 training next*
> *week. Most probably **will deliver** them on Friday morning or*
> *afternoon, **will let** u inform once we are confirmed (sic). (S. 35)*
>
> *Would like to inform you that we **will send** the following machines to*
> *your site on tomorrow (fri) morning. (S. 36)*

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*I **shall give** U a-copy of my quote. (S. 50)*

*... I **will reserve** it for you ... (S. 56)*

*I **will fax** to you our quotation in a short while ... (S. 65).*

In this type of clauses, the auxiliary "will" is used more frequently (11 instances) compared to the auxiliary "shall" (3 instances). The factors contributing to this phenomenon could be similar to those stated in Section 4.1.1 (ii: a) above, which is that the frequency in the use of "will" could be due to a few factors. The applicability of its use to all kinds of personal pronouns as well as its indication of certainty could have contributed to its use among the e-mail writers.

To summarise the use of tenses in clauses with the declarative mood in the corpus, it can be seen that the tense forms which occur in the e-mail communication of the business community under study are the simple present, the simple future, the future continuous, the present perfect and the present continuous. All other tense forms in the English tense system not stated here, are not found in the corpus. Another outstanding aspect of the verbs used is that most of the clauses in the declarative mood are in the active voice. Out of the total number of 91 clauses in the declarative mood (77 giving information, 14 making promises), only 4 of the clauses are in the passive voice. This phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that the active voice is a more direct and a shorter form of language use, and thus is appropriate for the "quick communication" (Angell & Heslop: 1994) style that e-mail is known for.

III. Clauses in the Interrogative Mood

Clauses in the interrogative mood are used to ask questions (*Collins Cobuild*). Compared to the occurrences of clauses in the imperative mood and the declarative mood, clauses in the interrogative mood have a much smaller number of occurrences in the data. The corpus reveals that there are only 13 instances of such clauses, ranging from 'Yes / No' - Questions to "Wh" - Questions. The findings are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Clauses in the Interrogative Mood

Clauses in the Interrogative Mood	No. of Occurrences
a. 'Yes / No' - Questions	8
b. 'Wh' - Questions	5

It can be seen from the above table that there are more 'yes / no' - questions compared to 'wh'-questions in the corpus. Perhaps, this is because the senders knew that their recipients would give a quicker response when the type of response is stated more directly and clearly through 'yes / no' questions. This has also been observed by Angell & Heslop (1994, 24). All the 'yes / no' questions use the simple present tense form of the 'to be' verb, namely *are* and *is,* as in the following instances:

Are the ... support staff able to attend the scheduled training for next Thur? (S. 5)

Is it agreeable that we send our 2nd trainer for the 29th class? (S. 40)

Is the on-site training supposed to be conducted in Kuantan? (S. 90).

In the above cases, the interrogative mood is used to confirm the kind of information that the senders are seeking from the recipients. At times, the auxiliary "is" or "are" is deleted as in the example below:

I have another special request of ... training for my customer (3 persons on site

*training) in JB, **any issue for this**? (S. 75)*

In the above case, besides the deletion of the auxiliary "is" from the question, the word "there" has also been omitted, once again reflecting the shortened form of expression in e-mail communication. Incidentally, the question "any issue for this?" is also based on a kind of shared knowledge between the sender and the recipient - a jargon commonly used in the Malaysian business community, according to the key informant. The key informant clarified that the expression usually implies "Can we take up the case? Will there be any problem involved?" It is interesting to note here that such a brief expression is used to carry so much meaning. It also seems to convey an informal tone. The recipient of the above message is a colleague of the message sender from a branch office of the company. From the key informant, it is known that executives from the company's branch offices often liase with their colleagues from the Training Department in the company headquarters to arrange training programmes. Thus there is a certain degree of familiarity between the two parties which could have accounted for the informal tone and

the use of an expression based on shared knowledge in their e-mail communication.

4.1.2 Subordinate Clauses

As has been stated earlier in this chapter, the term "subordinate clause" refers to a clause which cannot exist independently on its own, and is usually connected to an independent clause or the main clause of the sentence. A subordinate clause helps to develop an aspect of the main clause (*Collins Cobuild*) and usually begins with a subordinating conjunction such as *although, since, if* or *as*.

The corpus actually reveals a smaller number of subordinate clauses compared to the number of main clauses. The majority of statements or sentences in the data are those that consist of only main clauses. This seems to reflect the "simple, straightforward" (King: 1997) style which is typical of business communication.

The subordinate clauses in the data consist mainly of two types:

i)   Purpose clauses *(Collins Cobuild)*

ii)   Reason Clauses (- do -   )

i)   Purpose Clauses

Purpose clauses are used to indicate the purpose of an action, and they begin with

conjunctions such as *in order to, so that* and *so as to (Collins Cobuild)*. The corpus reveals that there are 7 instances whereby purposes clauses are used (S. 20, 33, 35, 40, 44, 62 and 78). It is interesting to note that all the 7 purpose clauses in the data start with the conjunction "so that" and all these purpose clauses were written by different people for different situations. These clauses are often used to convey the purpose of the senders' earlier requests, for instance in the following examples:

> *Could U possibly sent a mail to inform (us) about the purpose / agenda of*
> *this visit **so that I can forward it to the relevant party in ASC?** (S. 33)*
> *Please let us know if you require our 2nd trainer **so that we can make the***
> ***necessary arrangement.** (S. 40)*
> *Please send us a Task Request form .... as soon as possible **so that we can***
> ***allocate our resources** for this project ... (S. 62)*
> *Please give me a call & e-mail to me as soon as possible **so that I will be able***
> ***to send our quotation to you soon.** (S. 78)*

In the above examples, it can be seen that each purpose clause (in bold print) normally follows after the main clause, usually a request made by the sender of the message. The modal auxiliary "can" is also commonly used together with the verb in the purpose clause to indicate the ability of the sender to take a follow-up action only if the request is met by the recipient.

ii)   Reason Clauses

Reason clauses are often used to indicate the reason for something and usually begin with conjunctions such as *because*, *as* and *since (Collins Cobuild)*. Similar to the occurrence of purpose clauses, the corpus also yields 7 instances of this feature - 4 of them begin with the conjunction "since" (S. 3, 13, 18 and 41) and 3 of them begin with the conjunction "as" (S. 11, 13 and 58). It is surprising to discover that reason clauses with the conjunction "because" do not appear at all in the corpus. One wonders whether this absence of "because" as a conjunction in the data is due to the fact that the word "because" is longer in spelling compared to the other conjunctions, "since" and "as". Then again, it may be due to the fact that "since" and "as" seem more emphatic, drawing more attention to whatever that follows which requires the recipient's attention.

The reason clauses in the data are usually employed to convey the reasons for suggestions, decisions or requests made by the senders for instance:

> *Since F is the only person to attend*, we could ask the trainer to give the training
>   in Shell House. (S. 3)
>
> *Since we found your training room is not occupied during that day*, we
>   thought it better and saves our time of setting up (a training room) too.
>   (S. 13)
>
> *Since these 2 sessions have less than 15 pax per session*, please send only
>   one trainer. (S. 18)
>
> *As this training is more towards for internal staff (sic), and we also invite (sic) 2*
>   customers to attend, ... wonder whether you should charge me? (S. 13)

> *Please take note that ... can only be conducted in our PJ training centre as we do not have the necessary hardware at our KK centre. (S. 58)*

In the above cases, the reason clauses beginning with "since" are often placed before the related main clause perhaps because the senders of the messages wish to draw immediate attention to the reason for the requests conveyed in the main clauses. In this way, the senders of those messages seem to be stressing on the reasons for the decision, suggestion or request that they are making. In the data, the reason clauses beginning with "as" are placed either before or after main clauses, but when placed before main clauses, they seem more emphatic.

4.2   Other Discourse Features of E-mail Messages

The other discourse features of e-mail messages in the corpus are analysed and discussed according to the following categories:

4.2.1   openings and closings

4.2.2   paralinguistic cues

4.2.3   simplifications of language.

4.2.1 Openings and Closings

The openings and closings to the e-mail messages in the corpus are examined and discussed under the following sub-headings:

i)   opening salutation

ii)   opening statement

iii)   closing statement

iv)   closing salutation

i)   Opening Salutation

Most e-mail systems start by asking the sender to indicate whom the message is for, and so it is thought that putting the addressee's name at the beginning of the message is not necessary (Pfeif: 1997, Murray: 1988). This seems to be the reason that out of 102 e-mail messages in the corpus, 39 of the messages (38%) are without any form of opening salutation. The recipients of these messages are colleagues, business partners and clients of the message senders, so the type of relationship between sender and recipient does not seem to be a factor influencing such a phenomenon. What can be observed is that these messages usually occur as immediate replies to earlier queries or as responses to previous communications. On the other hand, senders of the remaining 63 messages in the corpus still preferred to use a form of opening salutation. These findings

are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Forms of Opening Salutation in the E-mail Messages

Forms of Opening Salutation	No. of Occurrences	%	Corpus
a. Without salutation	39	38	102
b. Hi / Hello + Name	26	25	102
c. Hi / Hello + Mr. / Miss	13	12	102
d. Name only	11	11	102
e. Vocative included in the content	10	10	102
f. Dear + Name	2	2	102
g. Hi (without name)	1	1	102

As shown in Table 4, we can see that out of 102 messages in the corpus, 26 of them (25%) have the opening salutation, "Hi + First Name of the recipient" or "Hello + First Name of the recipient". Based on information provided by the key informant, it is known that the recipients include the staff of ASC as well as regular clients of ASC, and business partners of ASC. Out of the 26 messages which have this form of opening salutation, "Hi / Hello + First Name of the recipient, 7 of the messages are addressed to regular clients, 2 of the messages to business partners, and the rest of the messages to colleagues. The term "regular clients" refers to the staff of the client companies whom the senders of the e-mail messages, representing ASC have been interacting with regularly, and are therefore, familiar with. Some examples of such a form of opening salutation in the corpus are as follows:

Hi, Wai Hoong, (regular client, S. 5)

> *Hi, James, (colleague, S. 8)*
>
> *Hello, Elaine (colleague, S. 22)*
>
> *Hi Zida (regular client, S. 31)*
>
> *Hi Maggie, (business partner, S. 32)*
>
> *Hi Lim, (colleague, S. 90)*
>
> *Hello Aziz Yunus, (client, S. 84).*

This form of opening salutation conveys a friendly tone to the message, which is perhaps what the senders of those messages intended. Angell & Heslop (1994, 21) states that adding a greeting at the beginning of the e-mail message makes it more personal. Either a recipient's first name or surname is used in the case of recipients of Chinese descent. In the case of recipients' of Malay descent, their first name for example, "Zida" or their whole name for example "Aziz Yunus" is used in the salutation. It must be noted here that "Hi" or "Hello" without the name of the recipient appearing after it, is not as widely used in the corpus as there is only one instance of such a form (S. 37). This is perhaps because "Hi" or "Hello" without the name of the recipient seems less personal.

In the corpus, however, the form of opening salutation using "Hi / Hello" is not only limited to addressing people whom the senders of the messages are familiar with. This form is also attached to the formal Mr. .... / Ms. .... / Encik .... / En. ... for instance:

> *Hello Mr. Lee, (business partner, S. 7);*
>
> *Hi Mr. Chong, (customer, S. 30);*
>
> *Hello Mr. Lum, (branch manager);*
>
> *Hello Mr. Wong, (customer, S. 67);*

Hello Mr. Saravanan, (customer, S. 78);

Hello En. Aziz, (customer, S. 79).

This form of opening salutation exists in 13 messages of the corpus. Based on information provided by the key informant, it has been determined that out of the 13 messages, 10 are addressed to customers and prospective customers, 2 to a branch manager and 1 to a business partner. Addressing this group of people with "Mr./ Ms. ..." is more formal than using their first names, and thus, deemed to be more appropriate especially if it is the first time the sender of the e-mail message is addressing him / her, or if the recipient is holding a high position in the company. However, instead of using the word "Dear' to start the salutation as is usual in formal business correspondence, "Hi" or "Hello" is used instead, perhaps to avoid the air of formality and stiffness which would have accompanied an opening salutation like "Dear Mr./ Ms. ....". This feature makes it seem more like the opening of a telephone conversation or a face-to-face communication, thus contributing a conversational feature to the e-mail messages. Incidentally, the form "Dear Mr./ Ms. ... occurs only once in the corpus; in Sample 72: "Dear En. Hatta".

Another form of opening salutation occurring in the corpus is the form that uses the recipient's first name only without any word or title preceding it, as in "Angie" (S. 11), "Wai Hong" (S. 3), and "Fung" (S. 10). This type of salutation occurs in 11 of the messages whereby the interaction is between personnel of ASC themselves, as well as between personnel of ASC and their regular clients and business associates (based on information given by the key informant). In this form, "Hi" or "Hello" is dropped from

the salutation. Consequently, this form is more concise than the other forms discussed so far. Perhaps, this is the reason which has influenced the senders of the messages to adopt it as their opening salutation as it reduces time to type it out, yet serves the function of addressing the recipients in a personal way by using their first names. The data reveal that this kind of salutation occurs in messages to recipients who have been communicating regularly with the senders. The recipients are usually not those whom the message senders are communicating with for the first time, as confirmed by the key informant.

To address their recipients in a personal way, some of the senders of e-mail messages in the corpus also resort to including the vocative in the contents or the text of the messages, for instance:

> *Angie, as spoken, please send the catalog & the course content ... (S. 1)*
>
> *Thanks En. Aziz for your prompt reply. (S. 9)*
>
> *Thanks, Yvonne. I hope that .... (S. 12)*
>
> *Sorry Maggie, could you please ... (S. 34)*

This type of opening salutation is actually a variation of the salutation that uses the name of the recipient only, as has been discussed in the paragraph preceding this. It is resorted to perhaps because it saves space in each e-mail message. Another possible reason could be because e-mail communication is similar to conversation in terms of style. This form of opening salutation occurs in 10 instances (10%) of the corpus.

Opening Statement

The forms of opening statement in the corpus include expression of thanks (12%), statement of apology (4%), statement of introduction (2%), statement making reference (6%), and exclamatory statement (2%). Besides these forms of opening statement in the corpus, the rest of the corpus (74%) consists of messages which do not have any obvious opening statements as they go straight to the message proper itself.

The different forms of opening statements of the messages in the corpus are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Forms of Opening Statement in the E-mail Messages

Forms of Opening Statement	No. of Occurrences	%	Corpus
a. Expression of thanks	13	12	102
b. Statement of introduction	2	2	102
c. Statement of apology	4	4	102
d. Statement making reference	7	6	102
e. Exclamatory statement	2	2	102
f. Without opening statement	75	74	102

In Table 5, we can see that the expression of thanks forms a significantly frequent form of opening statement in the corpus, occurring in 13 instances or 12% of the corpus. Expressions of thanks range from as brief a statement as "Thanks, Yvonne" (S. 12) to one as long as "Thank you for your prompt reply" (S. 73). Some of the items which are included in expressions of thanks in the corpus include replies received, information provided, introduction (or recommendation made), feedback given, and special offer

made. Implied in these expressions is also an acknowledgement of messages received earlier. Perhaps, in the business world, expressing thanks is a way of establishing or strengthening solidarity with people whom one has to work together with, be they colleagues or business associates, as well as in communication with clients. Thus, this could have accounted for the fact that expressions of thanks appear as opening statements in 12% of the corpus, and in 3 of the messages in the corpus (3%), the expression of thanks even appears as the only statement in the messages, for instance:

> *Thanks, SC for the introduction. (S. 74)*
>
> *Thank You and I appreciate it. (S. 94)*
>
> *Thanks, Mr. Wong for your reply. (S. 97).*

The above expressions of thanks are just some examples in the corpus showing how senders of e-mail messages made an effort to convey their appreciation and gratitude to their colleagues, clients or business associates. Senders of e-mail messages in the corpus also make sure that prompt replies to their e-mail messages are acknowledged and appreciated. This is clearly shown in the following instances:

> *Thanks En. Aziz for your prompt reply. (to a client, S. 9)*
>
> *Thank you for your prompt reply. (to a client, S. 73).*

It is only through the e-mail system that the senders of the above messages could ascertain the promptness of their recipients' replies as the system records and types out the actual time when messages are sent out. In these messages, it can be seen that the

time difference between the messages is a matter of just a few minutes.

In the corpus, the expression of thanks is sometimes shortened to a statement like:

Noted with thanks. (S. 37).

Although the sender of the above message has not inserted the phrase "I have" before the word "Noted" and another phrase, "your message" after the word "Noted", the elliptical statement is understood by her recipient to be an acknowledgement of the e-mail message received. The sender of the messages is at the same time letting the recipient know that due attention would be paid to the message received. This seems to be an example of a shared meaning among participants in the e-mail communication of a business community.

Statements making reference to a communicative activity preceding a certain e-mail message are another form of opening statement in the corpus. This form of opening statement occurs in 7 instances of the corpus. (Please refer to Table 5.) As mentioned earlier, e-mail communication is a complementary tool to other forms of communication in the company (Section 4.1.1 [ii]: [a]). In the data, reference is often made to a communicative activity carried out before a certain e-mail message was composed. If the sender of the message has had a face-to-face communication or a telephone conversation with the recipient of the message, reference to this activity is made in phrases like:

As spoken, please send the catalog ... (S. 1);

As I've spoken to you, we need ... (S. 25).

Opening statements like those mentioned in Sample 1 and Sample 25, usually precede request statements. In 3 other messages, direct reference is made to communication or attempts at communication with the recipients of the messages on the telephone:

I've tried calling your phone but unable to reach you. (sic) (S. 7)

With reference to recent teleconversation, we are pleased to inform you ... (S. 66)

With reference to our tele-conversation, I would like to inform you ... (S. 76).

While the opening statement in Sample 7 as seen above is an informal way of making reference to the preceding communicative activity, the other two ways are more formal, almost similar to business writing conventions of making reference. However, this latter type of formal opening statement making reference is rather rare in the corpus, occurring in 2 instances only, perhaps due to its formal style of expression, as well as to the bigger number of words needed to express it. Angell & Heslop (!994, 56) observes that formal writing in e-mail can easily convey an impersonal tone that distances the writer of the e-mail message from the recipient.

Another form of opening statement is the expression of apology, appearing in 4 instances of the corpus:

Sorry for late reply. (S. 10)

Sorry Maggie, could you please elaborate a bit on this Connection Program? (S. 34)

> *Sorry SC & MK for the late reply in giving you our quotation for the*
> *required courses. (S. 65)*

> *I'm sorry Mr. Sea, I can't help you at all. (S. 83)*

In the above messages, apology is extended for late replies, inability to help the recipient, and also for a query. Although few in the corpus, such expressions of apology show that making apologies does play a part in the daily e-mail communication of the business community. At times, the first person pronoun and its copula are omitted from the expression of apology, as in Sample 10, Sample 34, and in Sample 65. In Sample 83, the contraction "I'm" is used in the expression of apology, making it seem like a conversational feature. Nevertheless, the apologetic tone is still transmitted through the statement and this kind of elliptical statement seems acceptable to participants of e-mail communication.

Two other forms of opening statements which are not as frequent in the corpus are statements of introduction and exclamatory statements. Each of these forms occurs twice in the corpus.

The two examples of the introductory statement acting as an opening statement of a message are:

> *I'm Angie Ng from ASC Training Services. I've tried calling you ... (S. 7)*

> *I am A. N. from ASC Training Services and I understand from my colleague,*
> *Mr. C.W. Yong that you have .... (S. 78).*

In Sample 7 and Sample 78, the introductory statements are meant for clients who obviously had not interacted directly with the senders previously. Even though the e-mail system shows the recipient who a message is from in the header, the senders of these two messages still felt it was necessary to introduce themselves personally to the recipients whom they were communicating with for the first time.

Exclamatory statements appearing as opening statements in the data make use of features like multiple letters and exclamation marks, as in:

Oops, sorry the refreshment should be ... (S. 85)

Opppppppppps ... ... !!!!!!!!! Thanks. (S. 95)

In Sample 85 and Sample 95 above, the exclamatory statements are meant to convey to the recipients the errors or oversight that they had committed in messages sent previously to the recipients. Such statements as in Sample 85 and Sample 95 make use of multiple vowels ("oo") and multiple consonants ("ppppp") to convey the sound one would normally make in speech at the discovery of an error one has made. This is another conversational feature of the e-mail messages. The multiple exclamation marks in Sample 95 are also used to indicate affect or an emotion (Murray: 1988, 12). This type of feature seems to be direct yet informal in conveying the senders' feeling of regret at having committed an error or oversight. However, the messages which have this feature were sent to the senders' own colleagues; thus familiarity could again be the factor which has brought about such a feature.

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The remaining data which actually form the majority of the corpus (74%) have none of the opening statements discussed so far. Out of the 102 messages examined, 75 started off directly with the message proper or actual content of the message, such as a request, a query, a declarative statement or a direct response to a question asked in a previous message. Based on information given by the key informant, the recipients of these messages are colleagues of the senders as well as their business partners and regular clients. Since the senders of the messages are familiar to these recipients, an opening statement is thus, deemed to be unnecessary. Furthermore, in the fast paced business environment and the choice of e-mail as a medium of quick communication, it is a norm that messages may not begin in the conventional way with social niceties included. In this sense, it is different from a telephone conversation whereby the caller would usually have to introduce himself in an expression like "Angie's speaking here" and perhaps he would also include a greeting like "How are you?" before he actually expresses his request or query. This lack of opening statement then seems to be in keeping with the style of e-mail communication.

iii)   **Closing Statement**

The data reveal the following forms of closing statements in the 102 messages:

a)   Expression of thanks

b)   Expression of apology

the corpus seem to be formulaic expressions taken from conventional business writing, for instance:

> ***Thanking you in advance*** *and hope you'll have a wonderful*
>
> *weekend. (S. 29)*

> ***Thank you for your attention****. (S. 40);*

> ***Thank you for your attention*** *& hope to get your full support*
> *in this matter. (S. 61).*

In the above messages, formulaic expressions (phrases in bold print) are taken from conventional business writing (Treece: 1989). However, at times, such formulaic expressions may be accompanied by other informal expressions normally not found in conventional business writing such as "hope you'll have a wonderful weekend" (S. 29) or "hope to get your full support in this matter" (S. 61). Both of these informal expressions however, seem appropriate in the context as Sample 29 ends a message requesting a favour from the recipient who is a client, while Sample 61 closes a message requesting cooperation from the head of another department for a solution to a problem. Expressing a wish or a hope in such a way seems to add a personal touch to the messages. Such a combination of formal and informal expressions are unique to e-mail messages, conveying a tone of polite professionalism mixed with a personal touch.

In some messages, the expression of thanks is casually phrased as:

Thank U & have a nice week. (S. 43)

Thanks so much. (S. 99).

The above expressions also show instances which have a tone of informality and friendliness conveyed to the recipients. In other messages, this tone is conveyed through the use of abbreviated forms like "TQ" for "thank you" (7 instances) and "TQVM" for "thank you very much" (2 instances).

Instead of a conventional and formal closing to business correspondence, like "We look forward to receiving your early reply" (Treece: 1989), 4 of the messages in the corpus use the closing statement beginning with "Hope to hear / receive ... " as in:

***Hope to receive** your reply soon ... (S. 12, S. 48)*

***Hope to hear** from you soon. (S. 14, S. 76).*

These two expressions seem to be less formal but they somehow still manage to act like gentle reminders to the recipients of the messages to give a prompt reply. The informal tone is further enhanced by the deletion of the personal pronoun, "I" or "We". Although this kind of closing statement is brief, it is polite, and thus appropriate for business communication via e-mail.

A similar kind of brief but polite form of closing statement is found in 2 of the

messages in the corpus, with an expression of apology, as in:

> *Sorry for all the inconvenience caused. (S. 44)*

> *Sorry for any inconvenience caused. (S. 66).*

One of the messages is addressed to a colleague while the other, to a client. Both messages ask the recipients to provide some vital information, and the expression of apology seems to convey the writers' concern over having to impose on the recipients. The expression of apology also adds a personal touch to the messages. The personal pronoun "I" or "We" with its respective copula has again been dropped from the statements, probably for the sake of brevity and informality, and also because the emphasis of the message senders seems to be on the "inconvenience caused" rather than on the senders themselves.

It is significant to see that 57 messages (56%) of the corpus do not end with any closing statement. The e-mail writers of those messages probably felt that the closing salutation they included later in the messages were sufficient as closings. Most of these e-mail messages include the word "Thanks" or "Regards" in their closing salutation (refer to the next section on closing salutations for more details) which they see as a sort of closing statement cum salutation.

The data reveal the following forms of closing salutation in the e-mail messages:

a)   Regards + Name (+ Job Position)

b)   Name (+ Job Position)

c)   Thanks / Thank you + Regards

d)   Thanks + Name

The different forms of closing salutation in the data with their frequency of occurrence are shown in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Forms of Closing Salutation in the E-mail Messages

Forms of Closing Salutation	No. of Occurrences	%	Corpus
a. Regards + Name (+Job Position)	44	43	102
b. Name (+ Job Position)	9	9	102
c. Thanks / Thank you + Regards + Name	6	6	102
d. Thanks + Name	2	2	102
e. Without any closing salutation	41	40	102

From the table above, we can see that the form "Regards + Name (+ Job Position)" seems to be the most preferred form of closing salutation among the e-mail writers. The "job position" is not always included in this form of closing salutation as not all the e-mail

closing salutation is preferred by the executives perhaps because it is a simple salutation, yet polite and personal in its tone. It seems to convey a cordial tone to the recipients.

The other form of closing salutation using just the name of the sender occurs in 9 instances of the corpus. Although this form does not seem as polite or as personal as the former, a close examination of the messages reveals that this 'lack' has actually been made up for earlier in the messages with closing statements like "Thank you" and "Thanks and Regards". It seems that closing salutations and closing statements are substitutes for one another in the corpus.

Out of the 102 e-mail messages in the corpus, 6 of them end with slightly longer closing salutations like "Thanks & Regards" / "Thank You and Regards" with the name of the senders, while 2 others end with "Thanks" in addition to the name of the senders. In these e-mail messages, it seems like "thanks" or "thank you" or "regards" have replaced "Yours faithfully" or "Yours sincerely" of conventional business correspondence as the two latter forms are considered to be "carryovers from the old-fashioned business letter" (Angell & Heslop: 1994).

In comparison to 60 % of the corpus which have one form of closing salutation or another, the remaining 40% do not have any form of closing salutation at all. This could be attributed to the fact that the senders of the e-mail messages knew that their names are already stated in the header of the messages. Some of the senders could also have seen their closing statements as substitutes for closing salutations. As the e-mail medium is often chosen for its quick communication style, participants of the e-mail discourse also

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feel that it is a norm for messages to end without any closing salutation.

4.2.2 Paralinguistic Cues

Murray (1988) in her study on computer-mediated communication (CmC) at an IBM community in America claims that since CmC cannot make use of all the channels of communication like facial expression, volume of voice, tone, and so forth, conventions are developing to represent paralinguistic cues. However, the e-mail messages examined in the present study reveal very few paralinguistic cues. Out of the 102 messages in the corpus, only 2 yield "expressives" (Murray: 1988) namely "Oops" (S. 85) and "Opppppppps!" (S. 95). Unlike the American data examined by Murray which revealed expressives used in comic strips (e.g. 'humpf'), multiple vowels to represent intonation contours (e.g. 'soooo') and multiple punctuation marks (e.g. 'how well did things go yesterday?????'), the local data do not have any evidence of such features. Perhaps, this is because the participants of the local e-mail communication examined here are not as expressive as their American counterparts. The two messages containing the expressives "Oops" and "Opppppps!" as mentioned, were addressed to colleagues, before expressing the error or oversight in previous messages sent to the recipients. As there is no evidence of similar expressives in messages to business partners or clients in the data, it could be surmised that either the executives were more cautious and reserved in their e-mail communication with the two latter groups of people, or the contents of their communication just did not warrant the need for the use of expressives. At the same

time, it could also be a cultural factor which has influenced this reserved style in e-mail communication among local business executives as Malaysians are generally not known to be very expressive.

4.2.2 Simplifications of Language

Murray (1988) in her research also reveals another salient feature of e-mail messages, that is simplification of language. This feature includes syntactic simplification, abbreviations and the use of quotation marks or 'case' (as in upper or lower case).

To examine the evidence of simplifications of language, the data in this study are discussed under the following sub-headings:

i)   abbreviations

ii)   syntactic simplifications e.g. subject-pronoun omission and contractions.

i)   Abbreviations

There are several forms of abbreviations in the data namely *Pls.*, *ASAP / asap*, *u*, *Rgds / rgds*, *TQ*, *TQVM*, *Tks*, *thks*, *PO* and *cc*. The frequency of their occurrence is shown in Table 8 on the next page.

Table 8: Forms of Abbreviation in the Corpus

Abbreviation	No. of Occurrences	Corpus
TQ	7	102
TQVM	2	102
Tks.	1	102
thks	1	102
Rgds / rgds	2	102
u / U	19	102
ASAP / asap	2	102
Pls.	8	102
PO	1	102
cc	1	102
PC	4	102

The abbreviation *"u"* or *"U"* occurs the most frequently in the e-mail messages of the selected business community. As most of the messages are intended to address recipients directly, it is therefore understandable that the second person pronoun is used frequently. The abbreviated version allows less time and space in composing the e-mail messages, and at the same time, conveys an informal tone.

The expression of thanks comes in 4 forms of abbreviation namely *TQ, TQVM, thks,* and *tks.* The first means "thank you", the second stands for "thank you very much" while the last two mean "thanks". The abbreviation *"TQ"* seems to be the most preferred among these four, probably because it is the most familiar and shortest form of expressing "thank you" compared to the others.

The other forms of abbreviation like *"pls"* for "please" and *"asap"* for "as soon as possible" are found in e-mail messages which were used to express requests. The abbreviation *"PO"* which means "purchase order" is familiar to the business community; another evidence of the influence of the social environment. The abbreviation *"PC"* for personal computer shows the influence of the world of information technology, while another abbreviation, *"cc"* assumes a new implication. This abbreviation in e-mail communication means sending a duplicate of the e-mail message to one or several other individuals through the e-mail system, and does not mean "carbon copy" as in the conventional sense in formal correspondence.

ii) **syntactic simplifications**

The different forms of syntactic simplification in the corpus consist of:

a) subject-pronoun omission

b) contractions

a) **Subject-pronoun Omission**

McCarthy (1991) states that subject-pronoun omissions are a common form of clausal ellipsis. Examples of such omissions given by McCarthy include "doesn't matter", "hope so" and "sorry, can't help you". In the corpus, there are 16 instances of

subject-pronoun omissions as shown in Table 9 below:

Table 9: Forms of Subject-Pronoun Omission in the E-mail Messages

Subject-Pronoun Omission	No. of Occurrences	Corpus
"Sorry ...."	5	102
"Hope to ...."	5	102
"Need to ...."	1	102
" Would like to ...."	1	102
" Wish to ...."	1	102
" Appreciate if ...."	1	102
"Wonder whether ...."	1	102
"Noted ...."	1	102

In all the above instances in the messages, the first person pronoun has been omitted. This omission could be partly due to the senders' intention to reduce time in typing out their messages and partly due to their intention to reduce formality in tone. It could also be in keeping with a conversational style whereby the messages in the form of responses to earlier messages were typed immediately upon reception.

b)   Contractions

Another form of syntactic simplification in the corpus consists of contractions like *I'm, I've, Here's* and *They're*. The occurrences of such contractions are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Use of Contractions in the E-mail Messages

Contractions	No. of Occurrences	Corpus
I'm	3	102
I've	6	102
Here's	3	102
They're	1	102

According to Angell & Heslop, the use of contractions helps the writers of e-mail to achieve a warmer, down-to-earth tone in a sentence. However, surprisingly, the data here show only 4 types of contractions used, as we can see in the above table. This is probably because the participants in this business community believe that excessive use of contractions may convey too informal a tone in their messages.

4.3   Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the corpus reveals a wide range of independent clauses to express requests in a polite way, and subordinate clauses like purpose and reason clauses. In addition, there is also frequent use of clauses in the declarative mood, indicating that e-mail communication is largely used in the company for the function of informing. However, in comparison to the high frequency of clauses in the imperative mood and in the declarative mood, the low frequency of clauses in the interrogative mood, seems to indicate that e-mail communication in this business community is less

preferred for making enquiries. If at all information was being sought for in the e-mail messages, it seems to be expressed more in polite forms of request for information.

The corpus shows little evidence of paralinguistic cues and simplifications of language, perhaps because the Malaysian business community is not as expressive as its Western counterparts in these aspects. It may also be due to e-mail users who are not very familiar with the use of paralinguistic cues and simplifications in their communication within the business community. However, a friendly, personal and polite tone is often conveyed through language rather than through the use of paralinguistic cues and simplifications of language.