

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter first provides a discussion of the findings reported in the previous chapter. Issues pertaining to the research questions are subsequently raised and conclusions drawn. In the latter sections, implications and recommendations for further research are offered.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The 102 e-mail messages in the data have been examined for main clauses and subordinate clauses. The findings reveal that clauses in the imperative mood occur in the most number of instances (105 instances; some messages have more than one occurrence of the clause). Clauses in the declarative mood rank second in the number of occurrences (94 instances), while clauses in the interrogative mood occur in the least number of instances (13 instances). The corpus also reveals a larger number of main clauses compared to the number of subordinate clauses. This seems to reflect the "simple, straightforward" (King: 1997) style that is typical of business communication as statements without subordinate clauses usually appear to be simpler in structure and more direct in their expression.

The subordinate clauses in the data consist mainly of purpose and reason clauses. The purpose clauses in the corpus are often used to support or justify requests made by

the executives while the reason clauses are employed to convey reasons for suggestions, decisions and requests by the executives.

5.1.1 Main Clauses

I. Clauses in the Imperative Mood

In analysing clauses in the imperative mood found in the data, the beginning of each of the clauses was examined as it was felt that it is the beginning of the clause that has brought about variations of this type of clause in the e-mail messages. The corpus reveals the following 9 ways of making requests:

- a) requests with 'please'
- b) requests in question forms
- c) requests with 'do'
- d) requests with 'hope that'
- e) requests with 'would / will appreciate if you ...'
- f) requests with 'need to'
- g) requests with 'just'
- h) requests with 'kindly'

i) direct imperative clauses

The above forms of expressing a request are arranged in order of the frequency of occurrence in the data. Among these 9 forms of making a request in the data, requests with 'please' are the most common form of expression (59 instances) while requests in question forms rank second in the number of occurrences (22 instances). The other 7 forms of expressing a request occur less frequently in the e-mail communication of the business community under study. The form of requests using 'please' has 4 variations - 'please' + verb + object, requests starting with 'please let us know', 'please' + verb + preposition and requests starting with 'please take note / make sure / remember'. Among these, the variation 'please' + verb + object is the most predominant feature in the corpus (39 instances).

As for requests in question forms, there are four common types of such question forms in the data namely those beginning with modal auxiliaries like "can", "could" or "may", those using tentative expressions, one using a 'wh-word' and one using the auxiliary verb "do". The modal "can" is found to be the preferred choice in the data compared to "could". Requests using tentative expressions like "Is it / Will it be possible to?", "do you think we can ...?" and "wonder whether you should" were usually used by senders of the e-mail messages to ask special favours from recipients. The other types of requests expressed through questions using "do" or a 'wh-word' were used by message senders to ask recipients for related documents or to fix appointments. These types of requests were found to be very rare in the data. The modal "may" is also rarely

used in the e-mail messages, occurring in only one instance.

Requests using the auxiliary "do" in the data are used to convey a sense of urgency and appeal to the requests. It is significant to find that this type of request occurs significantly in 8 instances of the data, indicating that the e-mail medium is also used to convey appeals to recipients.

The other six types of request forms occur rarely in the data; between 2 to 4 instances. A gentler and subtler form of request in the corpus uses "hope that" to express the request in terms of a felt need on the part of the senders of the e-mail messages. The occurrence of requests using "would / will appreciate if you ..." seems to indicate that the e-mail communication examined has drawn some influence from its business environment which practises certain formulaic expressions used in conventional business writing. In some instances, the formulaic expression "We would appreciate it if you could" is shortened by the omission of "We would" from the beginning of the sentence.

The data also reveal requests embedded in statements using "need to" or only the word "need". Another form of request uses "just" which seems to reduce the immensity of the request made as "just" often has the same meaning as "only". Requests which start with the word "kindly" are also rare in the data, perhaps because the word has a formal implication and is not very appropriate in e-mail communication which usually encourages an "informal, conversational style of writing" (Angell & Heslop: 1994).

The lack of frequency in the occurrence of direct imperative clauses in the data

shows that this feature is not a preferred choice among the executives in the e-mail communication examined as this form of expression is not a polite way of conveying an instruction.

II. Clauses in the Declarative Mood

There are two forms of clauses in the declarative mood in the corpus namely clauses giving information and clauses conveying promises. In analysing clauses giving information, 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. The simple present tense appears to be the most predominant tense form in the data, suggesting that e-mail communication is largely used to transmit information on current matters in the business community concerned.

The findings also reveal that e-mail communication in the particular business community was used to convey actions which had been conducted prior to the sending of the e-mail messages examined. Such clauses often use the present perfect tense form of verbs. At times, these clauses act as opening statements in the messages.

Another significant tense form revealed in the findings is the present continuous which is used in 10 instances of the data when senders wanted to inform recipients that certain other documents (usually in hard copy form) would be sent to recipients very soon. In the corpus, the present continuous is also used to inform recipients of

concessions or incentives senders are offering to clients.

In conveying promises, the e-mail messages examined show evidence of a higher frequency in the use of the auxiliary "will" in comparison to "shall". The brevity of the spelling of "will" and the applicability of its use to all kinds of personal pronouns in addition to its indication of certainty could have perhaps contributed to its frequent occurrence in the data.

In short, the tense forms in clauses with the declarative mood in the corpus seem to be dominated by the simple present, the present perfect and the present continuous tenses. This could reflect that e-mail communication in this business community is usually used for informing recipients about current matters in the company, actions which have just been conducted and actions which are in the process of being carried out. These issues would thus correspond with the tense forms mentioned. Another aspect of the verbs used is that most of the clauses with the declarative mood are in the active voice. This could be due 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 style (Angell & Heslop) that e-mail is known for.

III. Clauses in the Interrogative Mood

The findings further reveal that there is a much smaller number of clauses with the interrogative mood in the e-mail messages compared to clauses with the imperative

and declarative moods. In examining clauses in the interrogative mood, the researcher has also found that 'yes / no' questions are larger in number compared to the occurrence of 'wh'-questions in the corpus.

5.1.2 Subordinate Clauses

The subordinate clauses in the data consist mostly of purpose clauses and reason clauses. The purpose clauses are used to indicate the purpose of the message senders' earlier requests. One interesting fact which appears in the data is that all the 7 purpose clauses in the e-mail messages start with the conjunction "so that". The modal auxiliary "can" is also commonly used together with the verb in most of the purpose clauses to indicate the ability of the sender to take a follow-up action only if the request is met by the recipient.

In the corpus, the reason clauses also complement most of the main clauses in the imperative mood as they are used to inform recipients why particular requests have been made. The findings reveal that such clauses start with conjunctions which have a shorter spelling like "since" and "as" while those with a conjunction which has a longer spelling like "because" are non-existent in the data.

5.1.3 Other Discourse Features

Besides examining grammatical features in the e-mail messages, the study also looked at other discourse features in terms of their openings and closings, paralinguistic cues and simplifications of language.

i) Openings and Closings

The data reveal that a significant percentage of the e-mail messages do not have any opening salutation (38%). It is observed in the data that most of the messages without opening salutations are usually those which occur as immediate replies to earlier queries or as responses to previous communications.

The majority of the e-mail messages however do have opening salutations ranging from "Hi /Hello + Name" to one which is as brief as just "Hi". In some messages, a more formal "Mr / Miss ..." is attached to the salutation with "Hi / Hello" especially if it is the first time a sender is addressing the recipient, or if the recipient is holding a high position in his or her company. In cases where the senders have been communicating with their recipients regularly, only the name of the recipient is stated in the opening salutation. The opening salutation used in conventional business writing, "Dear + Name" is found to be rarely used.

To address recipients in a personal way, some of the message senders also resorted to including the vocative in the text of their messages, for instance: "Thanks En.

Aziz for your prompt reply". This feature occurs because it saves space in each e-mail message. Perhaps, it is also because e-mail communication is known to be similar to conversation in terms of style.

Different forms of opening statements exist in the data, ranging from expressions of thanks to exclamatory statements. The majority of the messages (74%), however, do not have any obvious opening statements as they go straight to the message proper itself. Based on information given by the key informant, the recipients of these messages were colleagues of the senders as well as their business partners and regular clients.

Expressions of thanks form a significantly frequent form of opening statement in 12% of the data. These expressions vary from one which is as brief as "Thanks, Yvonne" to one as long as "Thank you for your prompt reply". It is interesting to note that in some of the messages, an expression of thanks even appears as the only statement in each message.

An elliptical statement like "Noted with thanks" is also understood as an acknowledgement of the e-mail message received. The sender of the message is at the same time letting the recipient know that due attention would be paid to the message received.

Statements making reference to a communicative activity preceding a certain e-mail message are another form of opening statement in some of the messages examined. If a message sender has had a face-to-face communication or a telephone conversation with the recipient, reference to this activity is made in a phrase like "As I've spoken to

you, we need ... ". In other messages, direct reference is made to communication or attempts at communication with the recipients of the messages on the telephone, in an expression like "I've tried calling your phone but unable to reach you ..." (sic) or in a more formal one like "With reference to our tele-conversation, I would like to inform you ...". However, the latter type of expression which is more formal, is not commonly found in the data.

Although few in the corpus, expressions of apology appear to indicate 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, such as "Sorry for late reply", showing again the quick communication style of e-mail as well as its informal tone.

It is also significant to note that the majority of the e-mail messages (56%) do not have any closing statements. This could be attributed to the fact that the writers of those messages felt that the closing salutation they included later in the messages are sufficient as closings. Most of these e-mail messages include the word "Thanks" or "Regards" in their closing salutation which the senders probably consider to be a sort of closing statement cum salutation. The rest of the messages have closing statements like expressions of thanks, of apology and those using "Hope to hear ...". Just like opening statements, expressions of thanks once again appear to be the most predominant among the types of closing statements. This indicates that although e-mail is known as a medium for quick communication, closing statements to thank recipients are not usually

ignored. Expressions of thanks vary from the abbreviated form "Tks" to "Thanking you in advance" / "Thank you for your attention and hope you'll have a wonderful weekend".

Instead of a conventional and formal closing as in conventional business writing, some of the messages end with "Hope to receive your reply soon". This feature seems to have substituted the usual closing statement in conventional business writing, "We look forward to receiving your early reply" (Treece: 1989). The informal tone is further enhanced by the deletion of the personal pronoun, "I" or "We". At times, expressions of apology with the personal pronoun "I" or "We" deleted are used to close the e-mail messages.

Closing salutations in the e-mail messages also seem to differ from those in conventional business writing such as "Yours sincerely" and "Yours faithfully" (Angell & Heslop: 1994). The closing salutations which are commonly used here are of 4 types: "Regards + Name (+ Job Position)", "Name (+ Job Position)", "Thanks / Thank you + Regards" and "Thanks + Name". The feature "Regards + Name (+ Job Position)" seems to be the most common closing salutation in the data.

A substantial 40% of the e-mail messages do not have any form of closing salutation perhaps because their senders 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 feel that it is a norm for messages to end without any closing salutation.

ii) Paralinguistic Cues

The study also reveals that the e-mail messages have very few paralinguistic cues. Only 2 out of the 102 messages examined have the expressives "Oops" and "Oppppppps!". The two messages are addressed to colleagues of their senders. As there is no evidence of 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.

iii) Simplifications of Language

In comparison to expressives, there is more evidence of simplifications of language especially abbreviations. The abbreviations found in the data include *TQ*, *TQVM*, *Tks.*, *thks.*, *Rgds / rgds*, *u / U*, *ASAP / asap*, *Pls.*, *PO*, *cc* and *PC* for *thank you*, *thank you very much*, *thanks*, *regards*, *you*, *as soon as possible*, *please*, *purchase order*, *duplicate copy* and *personal computer* respectively. The abbreviation "u" or "U" is the most frequently used in the data to denote the second person pronoun.

To express thanks to their colleagues, business partners and clients, most of the executives chose "TQ" above all the other abbreviated forms of expressing thanks. The

abbreviation "PO" is familiar to the business community to indicate purchase order while the abbreviation "PC" for personal computer shows the influence of the world of information technology. The abbreviation "cc" assumes a new implication in the data to mean 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.

In the corpus, there are 16 instances of subject-pronoun omissions. In all the instances, the first person pronoun is 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 convey an informal tone in their communication. 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.

The data however reveal only 4 different types of contraction used namely *I'm*, *I've*, *Here's* and *They're*. 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. Thus, we can see here that although e-mail communication is generally known for its informal style of communication, there is a limit to the informal tone conveyed, such as in terms of the types of contractions which are used.

5.2 Issues pertaining to Research Questions

This section attempts to relate the research questions stated in Chapter 1. Subsequently, conclusions are drawn during the discussion. To recapitulate, the research questions of this study are:

- 5.2.1 What are the typical or recurrent grammatical features of e-mail discourse and their functions in a local business community?
- 5.2.2 How does communicating using the electronic mail system influence language forms in the e-mail discourse of the community?
- 5.2.3 What are the differences between language in the e-mail communication of the local business community and language in conventional business writing?

5.2.1 What are the typical or recurrent grammatical features of e-mail discourse and their functions in the local business community?

Based on the findings discussed in Chapter 4, it can be concluded that clauses in the imperative mood and clauses in the declarative mood are recurrent grammatical features in the e-mail discourse of the local business community studied. On the other hand, clauses in the interrogative mood are not as recurrent a grammatical feature in the e-mail discourse of the selected business community. This seems to show that while e-mail communication appears to be mainly used for requesting and for informing, it is

used less for the purpose of inquiring.

As the e-mail medium is often used for "quick communication" (Angell & Heslop: 1994), the direct and concise form of expressing a request using "*please*" + *a verb* + *an object* seems to be the most preferred imperative clause in the business community. This form of expressing a request is concise compared to other forms of request often used in conventional business writing such as "I would appreciate if you could". The use of the word "please" in addition to the basic imperative clause renders it a polite form of request appropriate enough for business communication, while at the same time, conveying firmness in its meaning to the recipient of the message.

The data have revealed that requests are also widely expressed through question forms beginning with the modal auxiliary "can". Requests using tentative expressions such as "Is it / Will it be possible to ...?", "do you think we can ...?" or "wonder whether you should ..." were used to ask special favours from recipients. The modal "may" is however rarely used in the e-mail messages, occurring in only one instance when the sender of the message wanted to express a request in connection with a complaint made earlier.

It is significant to find that the form of request using the auxiliary "do" occurs in 8 instances of the data. This could be attributed to the sense of urgency or appeal conveyed by the auxiliary "do", thus indicating that e-mail communication is also used to convey appeals in the selected business community.

The corpus has also yielded two main types of clauses in the declarative mood

namely those giving information and those conveying promises. It can be seen that the tense form which occurs the most frequently in the clauses giving information is the simple present tense. Since this tense indicates that the information given in the e-mail messages holds over time or the issue related is operative at the time the messages are sent, the high frequency of its occurrence in the data seems to indicate that e-mail communication is largely used to transmit information on current matters in the business community concerned.

The second most frequently occurring tense form in the data is the present perfect tense form. This tense form occurs mostly in opening statements of the e-mail messages studied, and clauses using verbs in this tense seem to act as reference points for subsequent statements in the same messages. 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. Such cases indicate that e-mail communication in the business community complements or acts as 'follow-ups' to other forms of communication like making telephone calls or sending faxed messages.

Another significant tense form in the corpus is the present continuous tense which is used when the senders of the e-mail messages wish to inform the recipients that certain other documents (usually in hard copy form) would be sent to the recipients. In the corpus, the present continuous is also used to inform recipients of concessions or incentives senders are offering to clients.

Besides giving information, the corpus has also revealed the use of 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". In this type of clauses, the auxiliary "will" is used more frequently compared to the auxiliary "shall". Perhaps this is because "will" can be used in relation to all kinds of personal pronouns, besides also indicating certainty. These two factors could have perhaps contributed to its frequent use among the e-mail writers.

Besides the predominance of the simple present, present perfect and present continuous tense forms of the verbs in clauses with the declarative mood in the data, it is also found that most of the verbs are in the active voice. This could be due 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.

The data also reveal that subordinate clauses are fewer in number compared to main clauses. Thus, there are more sentences with just the main clause. This seems to reflect the "simple, straightforward" (King: 1997) style that is typical of business communication.

The subordinate clauses in the data consist mainly of purpose and reason clauses accompanying main clauses in the imperative mood and in the declarative mood respectively. Purpose clauses accompanying main clauses in the imperative seem to indicate that request statements often have to be justified for when they are made in the e-mail communication of this business community. Reason clauses, on the other hand, are

often used to convey reasons for suggestions, decisions as well as requests by members of this business community.

5.2.2 How does communicating using the e-mail system influence language forms in the e-mail discourse of the local business community?

From the discussion of the findings in the preceding chapter, it can be observed that the e-mail system could have influenced the use of certain language forms in the e-mail discourse of the business community.

The discussion reveals that senders often use certain phrases like "take note", "make sure" or a word like "remember" in their e-mail messages expressing requests. This seems to be a deliberate move to emphasize to recipients the necessity to heed their request messages since a message that does not attract the recipient when s/he scans its "first screenful" (Angell & Heslop: 1994) often runs the risk of not getting read or of being deleted.

The quick communication style of the e-mail system is also seen as having probably brought about the use of contractions in e-mail messages of the business community such as the use of *here's*, *I've*, *I'm* and *They're*. According to Angell & Heslop (1994, 56), a contraction also helps the writer of an e-mail message to achieve a warm, down-to-earth tone. Perhaps this is what the writers of the e-mail messages with such contractions in the corpus hope to achieve. However, the use of contractions was

found to be low in frequency among the e-mail messages examined, probably because the message senders in this particular local business community did not wish to convey too informal a tone in their e-mail communication as contractions do convey such a tone too.

In addition, the nature of the e-mail system is seen to have influenced the openings and closings of e-mail messages studied. The corpus reveals that there are messages without any form of opening salutation, a phenomenon which could be due to the possibility that senders of the messages felt that an opening salutation was not necessary since the e-mail system had already asked them to indicate whom the message was for at the beginning before they started typing the contents of their message.

Although few in number, the data reveal the existence of expressives like "oops" and "Opppppps!" in e-mail communication between executives and their colleagues. According to Murray (1988), such expressives exist in e-mail communication since the electronic medium cannot make use of channels of communication like facial expression, volume of voice or tone. However, since there is no evidence in the data of similar expressives in messages between the executives and their business partners or clients, 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 using expressives. Moreover, it could 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.

It has also been found that there are several forms of abbreviation in the corpus

namely *Pls.*, *ASAP / asap*, *u / U*, *Rgds / rgds*, *TQ*, *TQVM*, *Tks*, *thks*, *PO*, *PC* and *cc*. The abbreviation "u" or its capitalised form "U" denoting the second person pronoun seems to be the most prevalent in the e-mail messages. Most of the messages in the corpus are addressing the recipients directly; thus, the frequent use of the second person pronoun. The abbreviated form of the pronoun is used to save time and space in composing the messages through the electronic medium while at the same time, conveying an informal tone.

Among the abbreviations to express thanks, "*TQ*" seems to be the most preferred among the writers of the e-mail messages in the corpus perhaps because it is the most familiar and shortest form of expressing thanks compared to the other abbreviations for the same purpose. Here again, we see that language choice seems to have been influenced by the e-mail system.

The other forms of abbreviation like "*pls*" for "please" and "*asap*" for "as soon as possible" are found in e-mail messages which express request. The abbreviation "*PO*" which means "purchase order" is familiar to the business community. Abbreviations like "*PC*" and "*cc*" show the influence of the world of information technology and the e-mail system respectively.

The quick communication style seems to have also influenced the choice of the modal auxiliary "can" above "could" in conveying requests. The modal "can" is the preferred choice of the executives in the selected business community probably because "can" is shorter in spelling and is a more direct way of requesting (*Collins Cobuild*).

5.2.3 What are the differences between language in the e-mail communication of the local business community and language in conventional business writing?

One of the obvious differences between language in the e-mail communication of the local business community studied and language in conventional business writing is the frequent use of the form "*please*" + *a verb* + *an object* to express requests. This form seems to be preferred by writers of e-mail messages in the corpus compared to the form "I would appreciate if you could" which is often used in conventional business communication. Perhaps this is because the former, "*please*" + *a verb* + *an object* is more direct and concise for the e-mail system.

In conventional business writing, the word "kindly" is often used in expressing requests as it is a formal and polite form of expression (Treece: 1989). However, the present corpus shows very little use of such a word for requests as the majority of the e-mail messages studied use the word "please". This could 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). If at all the word "kindly" was used in the e-mail communication, the formal connotation of the word was in fact toned down by an exclamation mark at the end of the request statement, as in "Kindly follow up!" (S. 11).

Instead of using the word "Dear" to start opening salutations just as in conventional business writing, the corpus reveals frequent use of "*Hi*" or "*Hello*". This feature could have been used to avoid the air of formality and stiffness which would have

accompanied an opening salutation like "Dear Mr / Ms. ...". At times among interactants who are familiar with one another, the "Hi" or "Hello" is even dropped from the salutation. This form is more concise but is able to serve its function of addressing recipients of messages in a personal way.

The e-mail messages in the corpus are however not totally devoid of conventional business writing expressions such as "*would / will appreciate if you could / can ...*" or its *passive form "will be very much appreciated"*. At times, such formulaic expressions borrowed from conventional business writing are shortened with the subject and copula deleted, perhaps to lessen the time spent in typing the message as well as to reduce the formality of the expression.

The findings have also shown that closing salutations commonly used in conventional business writing such as "Yours sincerely" or "Yours faithfully" seem to have been replaced by more concise expressions like "*Thanks*", "*Thank you*" or "*Regards*". Such a substitution confirms that e-mail communication at the workplace has a quick communication style which is less formal than conventional business communication.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations for English for Business Communication

The above conclusions bear some implications for the designing of future teaching and learning materials related to English for Business Communication (EBC).

As far as the syllabus for EBC in local tertiary institutions like the National University of Malaysia is concerned, e-mail communication for business contexts has yet to be introduced. The study has shown that e-mail communication is a complementary tool to other mediums of communication among members of this business community. Thus, there arises the question of whether elements of this type of communication should be incorporated into courses which purport to prepare tertiary students for the working world outside the walls of academia.

If e-mail communication is to be introduced to the EBC syllabus, it is hoped that the findings of this study have helped to shed some light on the type of grammatical forms and discourse features characteristic of e-mail communication in a local business community. Course instructors and course designers could perhaps be enlightened on the types of language forms and functions to draw their students' attention to, and to spend more time on. The situations whereby e-mail communication has been used in the 'real' world could also be a rich source of setting tasks for learners to participate in e-mail discourse which has business contexts.

5.4 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

The study is based on the collection of e-mail messages from a single company. By developing a framework to investigate discourse features of data from e-mail communication in the selected business community, this small-scale study has demonstrated an approach to analysis for future e-mail research. If the approach is

applied to larger-scale studies, it may help to define the use of the medium and to develop appropriate pedagogic guidelines for EBC instructors. If a similar research is conducted on e-mail communication in a different kind of business community, its findings could also verify the conclusions made in this study.

As this study has examined e-mail messages which perform different communicative purposes, there is no definable genre for the messages. Swales (1990) defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes". Since the e-mail messages in the data carry out different communicative purposes in the business community they are found in, they do not belong to a single genre. Perhaps, a future study could focus on only a set of e-mail messages which share a common communicative purpose to see whether there is any identifiable genre in those messages.

5.5 Conclusion

In summary, this study has revealed that the e-mail messages found in the selected community were mainly written for requesting and informing, using different types of structures. In addition, main clauses in the declarative mood are mostly found in the simple present tense. Other discourse features like opening salutation, opening statement, closing statement and closing salutation are also found in the e-mail messages although they are not compulsory for such a communication.

It is hoped that the findings and conclusions to this study have shed some light on the nature of e-mail communication in the local business community and at the workplace. Other researchers might perhaps consider taking up further investigation into this type of communication, perhaps in a different sort of business community, to confirm or dispute what has been revealed and concluded here. Ultimately, it is hoped that learners, instructors and course designers of EBC in particular, and of communication at the workplace in general, can benefit from such an endeavour.