



AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF QATAR (CCQ) STUDENTS' ARABIC AND ENGLISH EMAILS TO FACULTY

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Abstract:

This study analyzes Arabic and English emails written by CCQ students to focus on both the formal as well as grammatical issues. The emails in general have missing parts, such as Introduction, Conclusion and Closing parts. As for the mechanical and grammatical side, both emails in Arabic and English have various and numerous errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. In Arabic emails, spelling is a major factor, while punctuation errors are highest in English emails. Some English emails have sentences that lack linking verbs and sentences with problems in the article system. L1 interference is a major factor here. As for Arabic, some students wrote sentences where English structures supersede Arabic sentence structure. Students wrote sentences (S+V), when the normal structure should be (V+S). More importantly, some of the errors come from the email genre or students' sacrificing formalities and protocols for the sake for speed and convenience. Chat language and online communication are factors, too.

Keywords: error analysis, Arabic emails, English emails, L1 interference, reverse transfer, multiple-competencies, hybrid genre, chat language

1. Introduction

Both faculty and administration at the Community College of Qatar (CCQ) realize the importance of electronic communication and e-learning. E-learning supports, parallels and even sometimes replaces classroom traditional settings, while emails somehow replace face-to-face and office hour meetings. Electronic instruction and emails are essential now with the Coronavirus outbreak where many schools have shifted to online instruction and testing. At CCQ, it is mandatory that professors provide their official email addresses in the syllabus and on Blackboard. Professors have to answer students' emails and take them seriously as they have become part of the learning process and academic work.

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Understandably, these emails constitute another learning venue, allowing a more personal and more nuanced exchange between faculty and students. Students at CCQ express themselves more freely and more frequently online. As a result, faculty may receive so many emails per term. Hence, these emails constitute a vital venue for communication and education. However, most of the emails received lack basic elements or suffer from format, language and mechanical errors besides errors in protocol and etiquette.

It is these poorly-written, sometimes incomplete or uncourteous, emails that usually attract attention and become a subject of discussion and a matter of concern. The underlying questions are: Why do most students write emails that lack basic elements and require editing? Why do most of these emails lack proper introduction, conclusion and closing, not to mention mechanical and grammatical mistakes? Consequently, professors wonder whether they should overlook these lacks and errors or point them out to the students. Should professors merely focus on the message or should they demand that students adhere to standards of effective academic writing?

On the one hand, language professors may not want to thwart students' self-expression by providing negative feedback; on the other hand, they expect students to write proper and professional emails and apply their knowledge of genre and language—particularly since emails have become part of academic and work settings. To put it differently, should language teachers insist on accuracy or sacrifice this element for the sake of fluency? The researchers have various views in this regard, and they argue that answering these questions requires understanding the types of errors and lacks before setting out to amend or instruct.

Moreover, the researchers want to find out if the emails students write in their native language, Arabic here, are better than those written in English—the students are none native speakers of English. Thus, the researchers have agreed to analyze a sample of students' emails written in both languages. The emails under study were sent to the researchers in the fall of 2019 from the classes each of the researchers teaches. This error analysis study uses a research tool developed as an email rubric by Steven M. Gerson (2015) in his book, *Writing That Works*. The researchers use this Table because it covers the basic elements of a well-written email in academic settings.

The researchers collected a pilot sample and analyzed it. This sample includes ten emails written by students in Arabic and ten in English. Based on the pilot study, the researchers agreed to proceed with the research. In general, students made many mechanical, grammatical and etiquette errors. Most of the emails did not include a Subject; a high percentage of the emails lack a Conclusion and a Closing. Both emails in Arabic and English had errors in sentence structure, omissions, additions and ordering errors. Hence, the researchers have decided to proceed with a bigger more representative sample.

2. Previous Research

Most studies focus on email as a genre in terms of Swales and Bhatia genre analysis and Speech Act Theory. For example, AlAfnan (2015) investigates the communicative moves in emails at a private Malaysian educational institute using Swales's (1990) move-step approach. AlAfnan (2015, p. 9) concludes that email writers use six framing and eight are content moves. AlAfnan (2015, p. 9) also finds that email writers send emails to perform basically four communicative purposes: *"discuss issues, enquire about issues, courier documents or files or inform about academic or organizational issues."*

In another more complicated study, AlAfnan (2017) also details the consistent moves or parts emails have. These moves constitute the major email elements or parts. They very closely reflect the items in Table 1 used in this study: topic/subject line, salutation, discussion/ body, closing/ conclusion, and signature. More importantly, AlAfnan's interesting findings resonate with the inconsistencies the researchers have identified in the emails under study. He explains that the email genre comprises elements of business letter, memorandum and business fax as well as elements of digital instant communication, such as the use of paralinguistic features like emoticons, symbols, abbreviations and so on; he also explains that some emails have mixed styles: spoken versus written features. Writers who lean toward the spoken style would not usually edit or proofread their emails; their emails usually have typos and other surface errors. Although his study overlaps with error analysis, it is still basically a genre study. Interestingly enough, he attributes some of the surface errors to email genre rather than to interlanguage or intralanguage factors.

Qasim, Hussain & Mahmoud (2015) analyze emails written by Pakistani employees; they state that business emails display both oral/ informal as well as written/ formal characteristics. The email has features that are close to face-to-face conversation, yet it is inscribed as a text/written form. This accounts for the mix of styles and the mixed levels of formality that vary according to relationship between the different interlocutors. The researchers recognize that the errors the emails have may also be due to genre, particularly digital communication. These findings may help account for some of the local errors both Arabic and English emails studied here have.

Other researchers carry out genre and Speech Act analysis by pairing the writings of NNS and NS of English. They compare and contrast the rhetorical moves or speech acts performed by NNS vs. NS. Such studies also consider cultural difference as factors affecting email genre and moves. For example, in a very informative research on native and non-native students' e-politeness, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) examines the moves students make when they send request emails to faculty. Nevertheless, the research does not focus on error analysis and email basic elements per se. In addition, the sample of study comes from graduate students, while this study focuses on college level students. Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) argues for pedagogical intervention with regard to instruction in and acquisition of politeness in digital communication. The researchers think that students may need formal instruction when it comes to business writing. Similarly,

Mehrpour & Mehrzad (2013) compare and contrast business emails written by native speakers to those written by Iranians in the work place; they found out Iranians tend to be more indirect when making requests. This current research focuses on NNS writing emails in Arabic and English though.

Other researchers focus on the significance of emails in academia. Weiss & Hanson-Baldauf (2008) argue that there is a strong correlation between students' academic achievement and their communication skills. Hence, they recommend email training so as not to place students who are not effective email writers at a disadvantage. The researchers concur that digital communication is a skill that college students at CCQ need to develop and refine as they need it in their academic and work settings.

In her analysis of emails, Kraichoke (2017) distinguishes between global vs. local errors. Global errors damage the message, while local errors do not. She classifies the sources of errors as "*interlingual and intralingual*" (p.12). Most studies that pair NNS and NS focus on the "*interference of L1 in the learning and production of L2, especially in the first stages of learning*". Other studies attribute language errors to factors other than L1. These errors happen due to intralingual factors: lack of knowledge or "*wrong application of rules or overgeneralization*" (Kraichoke, 2017, p. 12). The researchers (2020) use similar tools and taxonomies, yet they analyze emails written in L1 and those written in L2 to find out if students do better when they write in their mother tongue versus English.

Abbas and Eleyyan (2014) studied the most commonly used chat patterns in digital communication, focusing on Arabic language and exploring the positive and negative repercussions of that. The authors found that digital communication has its own characteristics. Arabic students use chat language or Arabizi. They mix Arabic alphabets and English numerals. Besides, other students use Arabic alphabets to spell English words. For example, they write "Thanks" using Arabic alphabets. Of course, the use of symbols and emoticons is another finding. This is an interesting phenomenon that merits study on its own in terms of code switching or maybe the novelties of chat language.

Napitupulu (2017) also conducts an error analysis of emails and classifies them into addition, omission; disordering and formation errors (p. 72). He believes that the major sources of these errors are interlingual and intralingual. While Norrish (1983, p. 21-42) classifies the causes of errors into three types: carelessness, first language interference and translation. He argues that carelessness constitutes the first factor. The researchers in this study concur with Norrish to a certain extent. However, "carelessness" needs modification. Students seem to feel more relaxed and to take more liberties in this hybrid or still evolving genre. A thin line separates email from chat and instant short messages; this may account for the surface errors that can easily be edited. That is, the researchers contend that if the writers of the emails view their emails the same way they view their essays, the number of surface errors will go down. For example, all of our students know that a sentence ends with a period. They apply this in other classroom writing tasks, but they do not seem to heed this rule most of the time when they hit the send button.

Interestingly enough, most research focuses on email in terms of genre analysis, speech acts in general – the subjects being graduate students or employees. Other studies

compare and contrast the moves performed by NS vs. NNS. This study focuses on college students. It does not pair NS and NNS as most studies do. The students write in their native tongue as well as in English. The researchers compare the performance of the same Arabic students when they use Arabic and when they use English.

3. Methods

3.1 Data, Study Community and Analysis Procedures

The data in the present study represent a subset of a larger data corpus: email messages sent by students to both faculty during the first month of fall term of 2019. The study community consists of 229 students; 125 students are enrolled in Arabic classes and 104 are enrolled in English classes. The study sample consists of 35 emails sent by students enrolled in Arabic classes and 35 enrolled in English classes. The email writers are both male and female Qatari CCQ students enrolling in one of the researchers' classes. Furthermore, this sample is a natural one: emails were not solicited. Moreover, only one email per student is considered; if a student sends more than one email, only the first email initiated by the student is analyzed.

The researchers secured students' consent to use their emails under anonymity in the study. Both researchers sent an announcement on Blackboard informing the students that one of their emails may be used in the study; the announcement also explained that neither their names nor any private information would be shared.

The study has ten items against which students' emails are checked: the first items concerned email basic elements such subject line and topic, salutation, introduction, body, conclusion and a closing; the study also examined structural/grammatical as well as technical issues. The email content and elements have been examined for any grammatical errors such as SVA, run-ons, fragments, wrong form, wrong tense and other issues. The study also considers whether the writers provide an accessible document design; this includes screen and line length and use of email highlighting techniques. Email etiquette is also another factor, but the researchers have not considered it in terms of Speech Act Theory; rather, the researchers have particularly considered whether the writer has started his or her email with proper salutation and has ended it properly with a closing and a signature.

3.2 Analysis Procedures

In this study, the researchers use error analysis taxonomies and technical writing book guides. In fact, the researchers have found that the tools of error analysis and vocabulary do not account for all surface errors students make. One issue is that error analysis pairs L1 and L2 and NS and NNS using native speakers as the standard. This study goes beyond language to focus also on email parts. The study also does not pair NS and NNS. Interestingly enough, some of the errors or shifts in style and protocol cannot be explained in terms of interference or overgeneralization. Rather, influence of L2 constitutes another factor and source of errors. So, the researchers use "reverse" or

“backward” transfer” and the notion of “multi-competence” and “bilingualism” (Cook, 2003; El-dali, 2014).

Table 1: Arabic and English Email Evaluation Checklist

		Arabic	Arabic	English	English
	Questions/Criteria met or not met	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Does the student provide the email identification lines (Date, To, From, Subject)?	90%	10%	50%	50%
2	Does the student’s Subject line provide a topic and a focus?	20%	80%	10%	90%
3	Does the student’s Introduction explain why he or she is writing and what he or she is writing about?	90%	10%	50%	50%
4	Does the student’s Body explain what exactly he or she wants or plans to do?	60%	40%	80%	20%
5	Does the student’s Conclusion explain what’s next, specifying when there should be a follow-up action?	20%	80%	20%	80%
6	Is the email Clear, answering reporter’s questions and specifying?	10%	90%	50%	50%
7	Is the e-mail Concise, limiting word length, sentence length, paragraph length, line length?	50%	50%	60%	40%
8	Does the e-mail provide an Accessible Document Design, using only such highlighting techniques as numbers or asterisks?	10%	90%	10%	90%
9	Does the e-mail achieve Audience Recognition by defining high-tech terms and Audience Involvement by creating a positive tone (versus a “Flaming” - a negative tone)?	60%	40%	30%	70%
10	Is the e-mail accurate, abiding by all grammatical conventions?	30%	70%	10%	90%
	Total Percentage	44%	56%	37%	63%

4. Findings

4.1 General

Emails written in Arabic and those written in English by students whose Arabic is L1 and English is L2 have both shown high percentages of errors and lacks. The Arabic emails are a bit better as the percentage of emails fulfilling the ten requirements is 44% while those in English are lower at 37%. However, both emails in Arabic and English show very low percentage of accuracy, less than 50%. In particular, emails in both languages generally did worst in item number 5: a proper conclusion by asking for a follow-up step or further action. Only 20% of the emails have included this element. Most of the emails end abruptly with the writer failing to ask for further action when the situation requires some follow-up. For example, some students inform the professor that they will not attend a class for a health reason, yet the student does not ask for information or missed classwork.

As for Item 1, email writers in both languages usually do not provide a subject in the Subject line although email senders are usually reminded that the Subject line is blank before they click send. This also applies to Item 2. Most email writers in either language do not provide an exact topic. Even when they use a Subject in the Subject line, it is not clear or focused. For example, a student would write "Essay" or "Absence" or "Class." The subject does not provide a clear topic or focus. For example, the student does not say, "Missing Class Today" or "Essay Two," or "Medical Excuse for Classes Missed Last Week." The only way to figure this out is to read the entire email. These inaccuracies can waste professors' time or such emails may not get immediate attention.

In Item 3, students do fine in general. They usually introduce and explain why they are writing. The Arabic emails are better; they have 90% of emails fulfilling it, while English emails fulfilled this item at 50%. Some students send emails merely to courier a file; they usually include a Subject line. Most of the courier emails do not have any content—only the attached file. It seems that the students feel that this is enough. Similarly, most students did better on Item 4. The students who included content in their emails explain and go into details. 60% of Arabic and 80% of English emails meet this item. Still this is an area that needs to be improved.

Arabic and English emails did very badly on item 5. Only 20% of the email writers include a conclusion part; most of the emails end abruptly; students fail to ask for further action or even establish good rapport or good tone. As for item 6, Arabic email writers are clearer than English email writers. Ninety percent of Arabic emails include details, whereas only 50 % of the English emails answer journalistic questions.

As for Items 7, only 50% of Arabic and 60% of English emails fulfill it. Rather, the emails are mostly brief: one or two sentences long. Instead of lengthy sentences or lengthy emails, students write very cryptic and short emails. This pertains to the email as a digital genre, seen as fast and convenient. As for Item 8, 90% of the email writers have not used it. This may be due to lack of knowledge or due to the dull qualities of these techniques or even rush. Students who send emails with no content or fail to edit the surface errors will not heed such techniques.

More importantly, only 60% of Arabic emails and 30% of English emails fulfill Item 9: Audience Recognition. This relates to Item 5. Many email writers in both languages end their emails abruptly. They do not include a Closing or even Signature. These are not only email elements; they also relate to email etiquette. Some of the email writers would be anonymous if it were not for CCQ's using official emails that also show students names. This is an area of concern for the researchers and faculty. Moreover, some emails would produce negative effect on the reader due to lack of Introductory as well as Closing elements. The ability to write courteous emails that recognize power relations and status and are not face-threatening or rude is very vital in college and at work. The researchers are also aware that this can be interpreted as impoliteness or at least carelessness. Thus, professors need to focus on this; it requires pedagogical intervention.

Finally, Arabic emails are a bit more accurate and more grammatical than English emails. More than half of the email writers make mistakes in grammar, usage,

punctuation and style. The researchers being language teachers think this area has to receive more attention. The explanations for these errors are various: interlanguage, intralanguage, reverse transfer, chat language and genre related issues. These issues are tackled in detail under the Arabic and English Email Errors: Item 10. In fact, Item 10 merits a section on its own, for email writers have numerous and various errors in sentence structure, grammar, punctuation marks and usage.

4.2 Item 10: Arabic Emails Errors

Spelling errors constitute the most common error in Arabic emails; the researcher explains these errors as intralingual: most students are not sure when it comes to the use of "Hamza" (a letter in Arabic alphabet, representing the glottal stop). Students tend to replace "Hamzatu L-qaṭi'" (ordinary hamza) by "Hamzatu L-waṣil" (Hamza of connection or initial hamza); for example, a student wrote, 'I wish' [Atamana] while he should have written [ʾAtamana.] There errors in this area were so common and this is a difficult issue in Arabic orthography.

The students also do not distinguish between the different manifestation of the "Ta' Marbuta" and "Ta' Maftuha" and the "Ha" at the end of the Arabic word. Students made so many errors in this area; the percentage of the errors was 80%. For example, a female student wrote that she was "ta'baneh" [tired or sick] when she should have written "ta'baneton." She used the [h] sound and alphabet instead of the [t] sound and alphabet at the end of the word. Some students did the reverse; they used "Ta' Marbuta" when they should have used "Ha" at the end. For example, instead of writing [minhu] (from him), they wrote [Minton]. This distorts the pronunciation and breaks spelling rules although such a mistake maybe due to neglecting to edit. Or possibly such errors happen as students do not distinguish between the different types of ending or morphemes in Arabic. One is a marker of female gender in general; the other one is a suffix that is usually attached to the verb when the speaker refers to him or herself or to the addressee or it is a suffix that marks sound feminine plural; while the [ha] is usually an original sound or a morpheme that represents third person pronoun in the objective case. For example, the speaker may say in Arabic [Ra'aytahu/ I saw him.]. The last morpheme "hu" stands for him. Thus, it is an attached third person masculine or feminine pronoun in the objective case (Haywood & Nahmad, 1964).

Moreover, some email writers mixed between certain alphabets in Arabic. For example, a student who wanted to write, "I cannot come to class" in Arabic [Al Huḍour] ended up writing "I cannot ban" [Al Huḏour.] These two alphabets are close in Arabic, but they occur in different words and they are not allomorphs. Many speakers of Arabic pronounce them the same as pronouncing them differently requires focus and effort. They reduce the two different sounds to one sound, namely the [z] sound and alphabet. This is a common phenomenon where usually colloquial Arabic tends to ignore these differences in pronunciation. It is like a common error. For if a speaker says "haḏara vs. hazara," he would be substituting "attended" by "banned" (something). In academic settings, such errors should be pointed out and corrected.

Some other common errors result from merging "Aleph" or "Al Yaa Al-Maqsura" (these different manifestations of the first alphabet in Arabic) and "Hamzatu L-wašil." For example, instead of writing "Fi Al Bayt" [At home] as two separate words, they wrote "filbayt" as one word. Another example is writing "AlTawila" [on the table] instead of "Ala AlTawila." Of course, the second shortened form is more economic. The researchers themselves know that spelling the words out as separate morphemes or words takes more time, especially if one knows that the definite article starts with "al" Aleph and Lam. Merging these words reduces the time and effort in composing a message. However, this is a violation of Arabic spelling and writing rules.

As for errors in syntax or grammar, the students have high percentages of that. Some students have failed to inflect nouns for subjective versus objective or dative case. Some students would use a subjective case when it is objective and vice versa. For example, a student writes, "غبت محاضرتان" instead of writing "غبت محاضرتين". This is another problematic area in students' emails. Many students have such mistakes. If students do not apply what they learn in classes about this basic grammatical difference, when will they do it? Both researchers emphasize that this area requires pedagogical intervention so that such errors will not be tolerated and become the norm, particularly when it comes to the written form. Students need to transfer their knowledge about correct usage and case when they write. The sources of these errors are either lack of proficiency or carelessness. This is an intralanguage issue.

Other less common structural or grammatical error happen when students usually use the nominal sentence "Al Jumla Al Ismiyeh" rather than the verbal sentence "Al Jumla Al Fi'liya." In formal Arabic, sentences begin with the verb (V+S). That is, if the sentence contains a Subject and a Verb, the verb precedes the subject unless there is an exception or a rhetorical situation requiring shifting of this usual word order. The students who have not followed this order obviously were not doing this consciously or for rhetorical purposes. Rather, the researchers argue that such errors result from literal translation from, or influence of, English language—reverse transfer here. For example, a student writes, "Al Muhadara ghibtu Anha," while in standard Arabic, it should be structured like this: "Ghibtu an Al Muhadara." The structure of English (SVC) supersedes Arabic sentence structure which is (VSC) in general.

Another area responsible for some errors or stylistic mixes is the use of chat language or Arabizi in some of the emails sent to the faculty. This results in some forms of code-switching, blending of Arabic and English, or transliteration of English words in Arabic alphabets. Some students have used symbols, short forms and even English numbers in place of Arabic alphabets. More than 30% of the students have issues with this. For example, some students who sent their emails wrote "Thanks" as a Closing, but they use Arabic alphabets to transcribe instead of using the Arabic word for that, which is "Shukran/شكرا". There are different possible explanations for that. Qatari community, being multicultural, tend to use a double ways of spelling shop posters or laws or certain streets names. They use the English term and then use the Arabic version alongside it. An instance of this is when a student writes that he or she wishes that the professor has

not dropped him or her. They would write the word drop using Arabic alphabets. This is a common usage at CCQ though.

4.3 Item 10: English Emails Errors

The email writers made all types of mechanical, grammatical and usage errors. The most common errors are in punctuation marks. Students ignore the comma after the salutation in many 90% of their emails. They write, "Dear Sir or Dr. or Hi" with no comma after. Moreover, when they write a statement, there is not full stop or any ending punctuation mark. For example, a student writes, "I missed the midterm exam" and move on to the next sentence if there is one. these errors can be explained either in terms of carelessness and rush or lack of proficiency—although students receive instruction on run-on sentences, sentence boundaries and the need for a comma after address, but they do not apply this when they write their emails. The email writers also made mistakes in capitalization. For example, students would capitalize words in the middle of the sentence or write proper names and titles in lowercase. Focusing on the message, students pay little or no attention to the mechanical or formal issues; probably students have their own email concept since they use short forms and they do not apply most of the rules they have learned in their writing. This applies to 90% of the writers, too.

Furthermore, more than 40% of the students have errors in the article system: they tend to add the articles where they are not needed. The article system in Arabic has rules that are sometimes opposite to the rules of the article system in English. For example, in English abstract nouns and mass nouns usually go without an article, whereas in Arabic they have the definite article "al" [the]. For example, a student wrote, "I gave the essay 2." Another student wrote, "So I won't be in a class." "Again after a few editing." Another student wrote, "I have the respect for class." Students are unable to choose among "a/an", "the" or "zero article." Such errors are mostly interlingual. Students who apply Arabic article system to English nouns tend to make such mistakes. Of course, lack of proficiency and carelessness are other possible factors.

Similarly, CCQ students have a problem with linking verbs. More than 40% of the emails have errors in this area. For instance, some students write, "This email to confirm...." "I hop[e] this one better than...." ... "That [is] why." Obviously, interlanguage or transfer is the major source of such inaccurate structures. Arabic language has nominal sentences. That is, one can describe the weather by just joining the subject with the adjective/predicate with no surface verb. For example, one can say, "Al Jaw Jameel." [The weather beautiful.] This will be a correct construction in Arabic in the present tense. "The verb "to be" is omitted when it has a present indicative meaning" . . . (Haywood & Nahmad, p. 23). Students who transfer this knowledge to English sentences tend to omit the linking verb as the above examples illustrate. Of course, not all omitted verbs are linking verb. For example, one student wrote, "I hope you having an amazing day." Omitting verbs that show tense as in "you having" are examples of sentence fragments, too. This is a serious issue that needs attention in writing classes. Of course, L1 transfer is an obvious factor in the sentences that lack linking verbs, but other errors need more

study to pin down. Still, lack of focus and lack of proficiency are other factors. Literal translation from Arabic into English can be detected in such examples though.

The third common errors were in verb form and tense; in general students do not seem sure when to use simple present or simple past; they rarely use present perfect; this is due to the difference in the tense system in English. Sometimes students at this level do not seem to be able to understand the different aspects or meanings of tense. For example, "I send the essay 2..." As for verb form, students have an issue with the verb form after modal verbs although this is an issue that as a language teacher I bring up; for example. A student wrote, "I could not came." Another example from another student, "I have to fixing." "I have already submit my essay 2." Such errors can be explained as either L2 transfer or as lack of proficiency. For example, Arabic does not have a clear set of modal verbs. Students here need more practice and need direct instruction.

Of course, students made all kinds of spelling, usage and strange errors due to lack of editing. These errors do not constitute a pattern though. Moreover, such errors are mostly due to not editing one's writing before hitting the send key. For example, one student wrote this message, "Please find attache the 2nd Journal, and I am re-seeding the same file..." If students run a spelling-check or take another look at the text, they may be able to edit "attache" and "re-seeding."

5. Conclusion

CCQ students considered in this study have made various mistakes whether in terms of email parts and protocols or in terms of mechanics and grammar. Most Arabic as well as English emails lack clear Subject Line and Topic; students struggle with the Introduction and Salutation part; some of them have not included sufficient details or sent blank emails couriering a document. The email writers had various problems when it comes to the Conclusion. Emails would end abruptly and thus would be uncourteous. Such lacks and inconsistencies require direct instruction with regard to business writing and particularly emails here.

Moreover, Arabic emails have serious issues in the spelling of the various types of "Hamza;" The fail to distinguish among different morphemes such as "Ta Marbuta," "Ta Maftuha," and the "Ha" at the end of words. They also merge morphemes such as the Arabic definite article "al" and previous morphemes resulting in new forms that are strange to Arabic language. The students also made grammatical errors when it comes to the inflection of Arabic nouns for case; they also made errors in sentence structure. The sources of such errors are mainly L1 transfer, reverse transfer, lack of proficiency, or digital new forms of writing that use abbreviations and emoticons and blending and transliteration and so on. All of these require pedagogical intervention. However, most of these errors are local ones; the email recipient is still able to understand the message. Similarly, English emails have all kinds of errors and lacks, which raises serious concerns about the students' writing skills. Students are not sure how to start their emails, formal or informal starts are both present. Some students wrote, "Dear Dr. and added professor's

last name; others used Professor's first and last name; still a number of students used the professor's first name ; the salutation ranged from using Arabic greetings such as "Al Salamu Alaikum" to hi or hello or Dear. Obviously, the students are divided between the formal casual or formal academic styles. CCQ should clarify this and set its own protocols. Students need to navigate among these choices and choose the right/best one depending on the relationships between the interlocutors; here there is a status and power difference. Thus, some instruction may be needed here. For example, some female students would send personalized emails with emoticons that are not proper, such as hearts or flowers.

As for the mechanical and grammatical aspects, students made all kinds of mistakes. But the most common ones are in punctuation marks, run-ons, fragments, verb form and tense. That is, some errors are omission, addition and ordering errors. However, the errors are mainly local errors. Their messages are clear most of the time.

The sources of these errors range from carelessness—most students hit the send key without editing or proofreading the message. Another explanation could be genre-specific. Students view email as casual and they are usually affected by chat language and other form of online exchanges. They tend to overlook punctuation marks and sacrifice accuracy for the sake of fluency or speed. Nevertheless, some of the errors obviously indicate areas where students need further instruction and training, such as verb form and tense use. More importantly, some of the errors are due to L2 interference, while others are due to reverse transfer. One important finding is the fact that students have multiple competences or fall back upon their Arabic, English and online skills (chat or Arabizi) literacies when they write these emails. Hence, pedagogical intervention is much needed to amend such problems; students also need instruction and more practice in technical writing and email genre; online yet official communication protocols so that they make the correct choices and use the more appropriate style or register.

5.1 Limitations and Suggestions for Future research

This research marks an initial step in the right direction. It studies CCQ's unsolicited emails sent to their professors in Arabic and English. The students know that their emails will not affect their grades. While students may receive outside help or even sometimes plagiarize some writing tasks, they usually write their own emails. These emails thus show their real strengths and weaknesses. However, an error analysis of these emails is not enough. Genre analysis, students' attitude, age and gender need to be accounted for in future studies. Further studies should look into students' age, gender and the status of L2 as factors affecting their writing. Although generally speaking Arabic is L1 and English is L2, not all students are exposed to L1 or even L2 in the same way; some of the CCQ students are exposed to different Englishes due to foreign workers and nannies who speak English as well as Indian or Bengali or Thai . English in Qatar is not only L2; it is also a lingua franca. So future studies may need to take this into account although it is a very complicated issue and access to such knowledge may not be easy or even allowed. Hence, although the researchers are aware of gender, career and demographic

differences, still at this initial stage, they could not account for all of this. However, this initial study provides a starting point for further studies.

The researchers, in some cases, could not identify a single cause of the error or lack. It is not clear whether students willingly sacrifice accuracy for the sake of fluency and speed, or whether the choices they make are due to L1 or L2 transfer or lack of proficiency. It is not clear if students opt for the wrong yet understandable alternative or just made a mistake. Thus, further research and even interviews with the email writers will be needed to identify the source of such errors. The email genre or medium is transforming as more young people use it and tend to lean toward the casual and the time-saving practices that overlook protocols. Is this a cultural trend or is this a weakness that needs to be addressed. These are questions that need further research. This issue of L2 and L1 and multicompetence is a multifaceted phenomenon. The researchers recommend further research to more specifically understand the sources of errors in both L1 and L2. The researchers also argue that multi-competence theory fits better in the analysis of students' writings since they live in a multilingual and multicultural environments with new forms or styles of communication emerging or crystalizing. Should professors and language resist such trends or should they accommodate and understand the shifts in style, mode and even power relations?

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