TATJANA BOSULAJEVA

FORMAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF E-MAIL LETTERS

MA Paper

Academic Advisor: Dr. D. Verikaitė

Vilnius, 2007
FORMAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF E-MAIL LETTERS

This MA paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of the MA in English Philology

By Tatjana Bosulajeva
I declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged work from any source.

Academic Advisor: Dr. D. Verikaitė
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore formal and functional characteristics of e-mail letters. Two types of e-mail letters were subjected to analysis - formal and informal. The method chosen for the study was content analysis. The formal and functional characteristics of e-mails were compared to the formal and functional characteristics of conventional letters. The research demonstrated that formal and functional characteristics of an e-mail letter are similar to a conventional letter in many respects; however, an e-mail letter exhibits certain distinctive features.
INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is a general term used for a number of approaches that analyse written, spoken or signed language use. It is a study of language use beyond the sentence boundaries. Discourse analysis has been taken up in a variety of disciplines, such as, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, etc.

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language and speech. In the literature of linguistics, discourse analysis was given several names: text-linguistics, text analysis, conversational analysis, rhetorical analysis, functional analysis and clause-relational analysis. The most frequently used names are text linguistics and discourse analysis. Currently both theoretical and applied linguistics are concerned with discourse analysis.

Text linguistics as well as discourse analysis are disciplines that describe the system of language above the level of sentence. Text linguistics mostly examines written texts, especially their grammatical and semantic connection. Discourse analysis studies the conversation of two or more participants to find structures and strategies of conversation. The main object of discourse analysis is to understand the structure and function of language use to communicate meaning (Bhatia, 1993, 3).

The topics of interest to discourse analysts include:

- Various dimensions of discourse, such as sounds, syntax, speech acts, the lexicon, gestures, etc.
- Genres of discourse (different types of discourse in politics, media, education, science, business, etc.)
- The relations between text and context.
- The relations between discourse and power.
- The relations between discourse and interaction.
- The relations between discourse and cognition and memory.

Discourse analysis does not provide a tangible answer to problems based on scientific research, but it provides a deconstructive reading and interpretation of a text. The contribution of discourse analysis is the application of critical thought to social situations of hidden discourses, such as interpretation of the world, belief systems, etc.

Since one of the key areas of interest to discourse includes the description of varieties of language use, characterized in terms of what Reid called ‘register’, therefore it will be given a special attention in this paper.

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The Research Question of the Paper

Registers are defined as the text categories readily distinguished by mature speakers of a language, for example, novels, newspaper articles, sermons, etc (Biber, 1995, 132). From the point of view of language, register is a state of variation of the linguistic system – it is a functional variety of language (Leckie-Tarry, 1993, 274). Register analysis is a descriptive activity. As referred to by Leckie-Tarry (1993, 274), the range of registers explored in descriptions include language of narrative; language of advertising; language of news reporting; language of business communication and language of court room.

This paper examines one of the registers of written discourse – the register of an e-mail letter.

The research question, which is to be answered in the present study, is: to what extent formal and functional characteristics of an e-mail are similar to formal and functional characteristics of a conventional letter.

The main reason for choosing the register of letter for analysis was the fact that in spite of the invention of such devices as the telephone and the apparent casualness of other modern technologies, letter remains one of the most important means of communication. Moreover, an e-mail is a widely used means of communication nowadays that becomes extremely popular in the age of modern technologies.

An e-mail or electronic mail is the term used to describe any letters sent from one computer to another via the Internet. E-mail is a relatively new form of communication and its conventions are still in the making. It is the most widely used function of the Internet with millions of messages sent and received between private mailboxes daily and this number is growing all the time.

Today e-mail has come to be used for some of the purposes traditionally carried out by the handwritten letter, for example, sending of CVs, job applications or certain types of form-filling. An e-mail can be like a formal document, a letter or a memo. However, there is an understandable tendency to think of e-mail in terms of informality. Messages can be easily deleted and this suggests that their content can be unimportant. Despite this, in many workplace settings e-mails are seen as providing a more convenient way to show professionalism. It can help speed up decision-making and build stronger working relationships.

The Scope of the Research

30 formal e-mail letters of request and instruction and 40 informal e-mails of general friendship and congratulation were subjected to analysis. The material for the analysis was taken from the Internet e-mail boxes of different people who kindly agreed to submit letters for the purpose of investigation.

The Objectives of the Research

1. To make a review of writing conventions of formal and informal conventional letters.
2. To investigate formal and functional characteristics of formal e-mail letters.
3. To investigate formal and functional characteristics of informal e-mail letters.

The Data Analysis Method

The method of content analysis was used in the present research. The structure of formal and informal e-mail letters was compared to the structure of conventional formal and informal letters. Moreover, the quantitative method was used to illustrate the relative frequency of occurrence of the items and make the analysis more reliable.

The present MA thesis consists of an abstract, introduction, six parts, conclusions, summary and the list of references. The introduction presents a short overview of the discourse analysis, the aims of investigation, the materials and methods of analysis and the structure of the paper. Chapter 1 focuses on the theory of discourse analysis, the concept of register and the terminology. Chapter 2 reviews functional characteristics of formal e-mail and conventional letters. Chapter 3 focuses on the formal characteristics of informal e-mail and conventional letters and observes the function. Chapter 4 reviews punctuation rules in letter writing. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate formal and functional characteristics of e-mail letters and present the results of the analysis. The conclusions present an overview of the results of the analysis.
The Significance of the Research

The present study:

- Defines formal and functional characteristics of e-mail letters.
- It contributes to the knowledge of the theory of register.
- It extends to the existing knowledge of the academic discipline of linguistics and discourse analysis.
- It contributes to the teaching of writing of e-mail letters in the English language.
I. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE CONCEPT OF REGISTER

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. There are two types of linguistics: theoretical and applied. Both theoretical and applied linguistics are concerned with discourse analysis. One of the first views on discourse considered it as a form of spoken dialogue, in contrast to written texts. Later, discourse was thought of as a combination of both spoken and written texts. Moreover, discourse was referred to practices of talking and writing. Discourse analysis is a general term for a number of approaches to analyse written and spoken language use. The concept of discourse is thought of and taught in terms of written and spoken discourse. Widdowson (1996, 127) views discourse as “the use of language in speech and writing to achieve pragmatic meaning”. Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. The concrete representations of discourses are texts. They make a variety of forms: formal written records, for instance news information, academic papers; spoken words, such as conversations, discussions, interviews; media, for example television programmes, advertisements. Discourse analysis studies language in use: spoken data and written texts of different genres. The discipline began to develop in the late 1960s and 1970s in most of the humanities and social sciences. Discourse analysis is closely related to such disciplines as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology.

There are different specific theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches used in discourse analysis:

Pragmatic approach to discourse analysis is based on the philosophical idea that communication leads to the understanding of speaker’s intentions. Pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation. Scholars analyse the utterances which correspond to sentences but not texts.

The interactional sociolinguists explore how people from different cultures create different utterances in various contexts. Moreover, they study how the language functions in different conditions of social life and how it reflects different meanings. The approach deals with

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3 http://www.thefreedictionary.com
5 ibid.
6 http://www.thefreedictionary.com
factual utterances in a particular social context and examines how they are interpreted through linguistic means.

Conversational analysis is connected with philosophy. It has two theories: phenomenology and ethnomethodology. Conversational analysis examines how language creates and is created under the influence of social context.

Critical discourse analysis is interested in the exploration of the cases of social interaction. The study emphasizes the clash between institutional ideology and reality.

As it has been mentioned above, discourse analysis mostly studies the spoken interaction; however, it is also interested in written discourse.

At the end of 1950s and the beginning of 1960s numerous papers and books appeared which described particular registers of different languages. These books and papers also described the ways in which linguistic forms are influenced by the context of situation and by the communicative purpose. Many scholars have studied various registers. For example, Leech studied press advertising and the language of poetry. Ferguson studied ‘high’ and ‘low’ diglossic varieties and baby talk. Brown’s and Ford’s studies included American English address terms, Crystal’s included conversation, unscripted commentaries, legal documents, newspaper reporting, the language of religion and the Internet (Biber, 1995, 6).

Since that time there appeared many other studies of register in linguistics, education, rhetoric and anthropology. According to Biber (1995, 6), there are four groups of register studies: synchronic descriptions of a single register, diachronic descriptions tracing the evolution of a single register, synchronic descriptions of the patterns of variation among multiple registers and diachronic descriptions tracing changes in the patterns of variation among multiple registers. There is also difference in linguistic characteristics chosen for analysis, the methodology and the language studied.

There are various registers of written discourse: letters, newspapers, stories, advertisements, etc.

There are different terms that are used to describe situationally defined varieties: *register, genre, style, sublanguage* or *text type*.

The term *register* first came into use in the sixties. It was first used by Reid in 1956 and later developed by Ure. Many sociolinguists, such as Halliday, Ure, Ferguson and Hymes used the term register. According to Halliday, register is a variety according to use, in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times (Leckie-Tarry, 1993, 28). He identified three variables that determine register: *field* (the total event in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer), *mode* (the function of the text in the event, including both the channel taken by the
language-spoken or written) and tenor (refers to the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations among the participants involved). Field, mode and tenor collectively define the context of situation of a text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, 22). Ferguson defined it as “the linguistic difference that correlates with different occasions of use” (Biber, 1995, 7). According to Ure (1982, 5), “the register range of a language comprises the range of social situations recognized and controlled by its speakers- situations for which appropriate patterns are available”. Biber, Conrad and Leech viewed register as a variety of language that is associated with different circumstances and purposes (Biber, 2002, 4).

Other scholars could not come to an agreement of whether to use the term register together with the related terms of genre and style. The researchers Trudgill and Wardaugh used the term register to refer to occupational varieties, for example, auto mechanic talk. Other theorists, such as Martin, Threadgold, Kress, Reid preferred to use the concept of genre which they found more effective in representing the theoretical construct that intervenes between language function and form (Leckie-Tarry, 1993, 30). Leckie-Tarry noted that genre may be used to characterise a whole text, whereas register may be used to refer to sections within a text which are characterised by certain linguistic forms (Matthiessen, 1993, 233). The emphasis of genre theorists was on social and cultural factors, whereas register was defined either as conventional examples of a text or the device which includes both literary and non-literary text varieties (Biber, 1995, 8). Halliday employed the term genre in limited sense which has been common in literary discussion in the past (Leckie-Tarry, 1993, 30). Ferguson made a distinction between register and genre. For him, genre variation was associated with the type of a message that occurs regularly in the society. The examples of genre he gave were: chat, conversation, love-letters, newspaper articles and obituaries, while sports announcer talk or cookbook recipes were recognized as the examples of register. According to McCarthy and Carter (1994, 26), though features of the register may vary (e.g. the relationship established), the underlying genre pattern is usually maintained. Moreover, the scholars thought that texts in a genre must have a uniform, invariant organization. According to Bhatia (2002, 23), genres are defined in terms of the use of language in conventionalised communicative settings, which give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of specialized disciplinary and social groups. Moreover, every genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalised knowledge of linguistic and discoursal resources (Bhatia, 1993, 16).

The term style was used by Labov, Crystal and Davy. The term referred to the usage of language with the kind of evaluative sense. A notion of style had been used to study
conversational interactions. The interaction in various cultures had its own distinctive communicative style.

The term *sublanguage* was mainly used by the scholars Kittredge, Lehrberger and Grisham, who referred to it as “a subsystem of language that... [is] limited to a specific subject domain” (Biber, 1995, 9). These researchers claimed that each sublanguage has its own distinctive grammar. Their analysis was mostly focused on medical articles and Navy telegraphic messages.

According to Biber (1995, 10), no matter what is the topic, purpose or interactivity, text types are distinct with respect to their linguistic characteristics (lexis, morphology and syntax). The text belongs to a particular genre and has a static, finished system of macro-structural organization.

Register distinctions are usually defined by differences in purpose, interactivity, relations among the speaker and the addressee and circumstances. Moreover, registers can be defined by situational characteristics.

What emerges from the facts above, the concept of register is considered as a relationship between text and context, while genre is a goal-oriented social process closely connected with culture. Moreover, the existence of fixed or obligatory features arranged in a particular sequence allow us to define the limits of a genre, whereas optional features allow language users different choices to vary the form of language within a fixed generic structure (McCarty & Carter, 1994, 26). Although, register and genre supplement each other rather than oppose one another, in the present thesis I will adhere to the term register.

### 2. FORMAL (BUSINESS) E-MAIL LETTERS

E-mail could be considered as register since it fits the criteria presented by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 22): the field, the mode, the tenor. E-mails are determined by the subject matter (e.g. request, instructions, congratulation), the channel of communication (e.g. written) and the social relations among the participants involved (e.g. formal or informal).

E-mail is a term used to describe messages sent electronically from one computer to another via a network. E-mail letters are used in all sorts of business and personal communication. As referred to formal e-mail correspondence, it normally follows the structure of a conventional formal letter or memo.\(^7\)

Formal letters are usually called professional correspondence. The main difference between informal and professional correspondence is its tone. The tone of business letters should be formal and they should be typewritten. Nowadays due to a technological variety and availability it is not difficult to have these letters typewritten. The aim of a formal letter is to be as informative and objective as possible. It also should not be forgotten that a formal letter can be read by several people or even companies. In this respect it can be called public property as it may be read out at a meeting or at a conference (Collins 2005, 114).

Collins (2005, 117-151) distinguishes between the following types of a formal letter:

- Junk mail;
- Writing to banks;
- Bills;
- Writing to builders;
- Cancellations;
- Writing to church;
- Complaints;
- Holiday arrangements;
- Instructions;
- Insurance;
- Writing to MPs;
- Writing to parking authorities;
- Writing to police;
- Requests;
- Schools;
- Transport issues.

In the present paper I will concentrate on request and instruction e-mail letters.

According to Collins (2005, 115), there are certain main points that a writer should take into consideration while writing professional correspondence, such as accuracy, briefness, avoiding exaggeration and excluding irrelevant and unprofessional comments.

The text of an e-mail letter as any other text should comply the requirements of a coherent text. As referred to by Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 3) the text is a communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. Collins (2005, 115) suggests to take into consideration the following aspects while writing a formal letter:

- Intentionality;
• Informativity;
• Acceptability.

2.1. The Structure of Formal E-mail Letters

All letters in English are arranged according to a certain layout. The word *structure* or *layout* is used when we refer to a general arrangement (Alexander, 1965, 41). As referred to presentation, it should be noted that formal letters should be written in comprehensible and reader-friendly manner. It is important to write your address, the recipient’s address and the date. This will help the recipient respond easily and quickly. Before sending an e-mail, a person needs to know the recipient’s e-mail address. It normally contains *name@site.address*

The name is usually based on the user’s real name though not necessarily. It is very convenient to have several addresses: the one for personal emails and the other with the real name or abbreviation of the name for business purposes. The site address is the name of your Service Provider plus either a dot.com address or the initials of the country from which the e-mail is being sent.

The *structure* of a formal letter is very important. According to Crystal (2001, 95), an individual e-mail consists of *the header, the body* (*the greeting, the complimentary close*) and *the attachment icon.*

*The header or heading* contains the return address with the date on the last line. The inside address is the one to which you are sending the letter. It should be complete and include titles and names. As a rule, it also carries the full subject line provided by the sender. The subject line is important because it is the first thing the recipient receives together with the sender’s name. It has to be very specific as it is a crucial element in the receiver’s decision-making whether to read the particular e-mail or not. All in all, the header provides valuable information in a small space (Trask, 2005, 134).

There are certain elements that are peculiar only to e-mail letters. They can give some reference about the letter before the recipient reads it.

According to Crystal (2001, 95), the format of the header consists of four elements:

- The e-address to which the message is being sent (following *To:*), typed in full manually or inserted automatically by typing a prompt which calls up a character-string from an address-book; this is an obligatory element;
- The e-address from which the message has been sent (following *From:*), inserted automatically; this is also an obligatory element;
• A brief description of the topic of the message (following Subject:), inserted manually; this is an optional element, but the software will query its absence and it is considered efficient practice to include it;
• The date and time at which the message is sent (following Date:), inserted automatically by the software.

These are the main elements represented in the Outbox and Sent folders, under the headings To, Subject and Sent. When a message is received, they are the main elements represented in one’s Inbox where From replaces To and Received replaces Sent (Crystal, 2001, 96).

The greeting belongs to the body message. It can be optional in an e-mail letter. There are types of e-mail that have no greeting. They include first messages from people who do not know the recipient. Such examples are typical in the case of public announcements and junk mail. Some e-mails include an automatically derived ‘Dear X’ or ‘Hi, X’ in the openings. According to Crystal (2001, 101), there are messages without the word ‘Dear’:

- General word: Hi, Hello again, Hi there!, Bonjour
- General word plus identification: Hi from Pete, Goodday from Oz
- Intimate name alone: David, david, Dave, DC, dad
- Combination of general word and intimate name: Hi David, Hey D, Hello David, Hello DC, Good morning David, Hi dad
- Formal name: Professor Crystal, Professor

Between people who know each other, messages without greetings are promptly sent responses, where the responder understands the message as the second part of a two-part interaction. In institutions e-mails are used for sending out the information or instructions to all members of staff, so a personalized greeting is unnecessary (Crystal, 2001, 97). However, most of e-mails normally begin with the word “Dear”. As pointed out by Crystal (2001, 101), greetings with the word ‘Dear’ can be classified into:

- With intimate name: Dear David, Dear Dave
- With whole name: Dear David Crystal
- With title and surname: Dear Professor Crystal, Dear Dr Crystal, Dear Mr Crystal

The formula ‘Dear’ with intimate name presents the view of informal interaction between people who know each other.

Moreover, it is crucial to write the recipient’s name correctly (Collins, 2005, 34). People care about their names and if there is a mistake, this indicates that you have put not enough effort into the communication. When writing to a woman, a person should try to address her correctly. It is advisable to check whether she is ‘Miss’, ‘Mrs’ or ‘Dr’. If the person we are
mailing is an academic, then there is no problem in writing Dear Dr because almost every academic holds a doctorate. It is less advisable to write Dear Prof. In the USA, Canada and some other countries using the American system of academic ranks, many academics hold the title Professor. However, in Britain and other European countries very few academics hold the title Professor. Moreover, there is one more complication while mailing a stranger. In many cases it is difficult to understand the sex of the person we are writing to. Foreign names present all kinds of obstacles. Non-English names can be impossible to guess and even English names can be treacherous. It is strongly advisable to find out whom you are writing to (Trask, 2005, 47). While writing to a man, the same rules could be applied. If you are writing to a large company, it is always better to address the letter to a specific person.

The **body or message** is written as a text. The important information should appear in the opening paragraph. The clarity of the message on the screen is very important. Clarity involves both legibility and intelligibility (Crystal, 2001, 110). Legibility refers to ways of avoiding an unbroken text. An e-mail writer is recommended to use a line-of-white between paragraphs or to highlight points in a list with the help of a bullet or numbering facility. The use of bullet forms is an outstanding stylistic feature of e-mails. Intelligibility means avoiding misspellings. Many people do not read their message before sending it and often misspellings can make a reader pause or make the sentence ambiguous. However, some misspellings are a natural feature of the body message and they do not depend on the educational background of the writer. These misspellings occur because of the fast typing or a lack of editorial revision. The length of the text of the body message is relatively short. The majority are fitted into one screen view. Business e-mails can be longer in terms of lines and paragraphs per message. Formal letters usually have many single-line paragraphs and it reflects the need for length to disclose informational points. After each paragraph an extra line of space is left. The text of formal letters is left-blocked and is not indented. This gives a clean, neat look and appears businesslike.

The **complimentary close** is a short, polite piece of text that belongs to the body. It is either at the left margin or its left edge is in the center depending on the business letter style. Two lines should be skipped and the name is typed. According to Crystal (2001, 105), farewells in e-mails have important functions that are distinct from traditional letters. First of all, they are used as boundary markers, indicating that further scrolling down is unnecessary. Second, the farewell has an extended identity function. It identifies the sender to the immediate recipient.
A business letter should end with a phrase ‘Yours sincerely’. Formal letters should not contain postscripts.

In some systems, if a person chooses to attach a file to the e-mail, there is a space where the attachment icon is located (Crystal, 2001, 95).

2.2. The Structure of Formal Conventional Letters

According to Alexander (1965, 49), a formal letter consists of five basic elements:

- The heading (the return and the inside address);
- The salutation;
- The body (reference, information, purpose, conclusion);
- The subscription;
- The signature.

The heading contains the return address (your address), the inside address (the name and full address of the recipient) and the date. The name and the address of the person you are writing to must be included beneath your own address and against the left-hand margin. The inside address must be exactly the same as the one that will appear on the envelope. While writing to a man, his name should appear as ‘Mr.’ and the name. When writing to ladies the usual title is ‘Mrs.’ or ‘Miss’ with the name. In some cases we may address the letter directly to the company concerned, for example, Brown and Co., Ltd. Moreover, if you are writing to a person in a Company and you do not know his or her name, the letter may be addressed to ‘The Manager’, ‘The Director’, ‘The Principal’, etc. In business letters the ‘Block Style’ of address is common (Alexander, 1965, 49).

The salutation in a formal letter is always formal. It normally begins with the word ‘Dear Mr’, ‘Dear Mrs’ if the person you are writing to is known to you. In other cases, when the person is not known to you, you should begin with ‘Dear Sir’, ‘Dear Sirs’ or ‘Dear Madam’. A line should be skipped after a salutation.

The body is a written text. It normally begins with reference to previous letter, an advertisement you have seen, or an event which has prompted you to write, etc. The phrases that are normally used in reference are: ‘Thank you for your letter’, ‘In reply to your inquiry’, ‘I read your advertisement in…’, etc (Alexander, 1965, 50). In the second paragraph sometimes it is necessary to supply more details which are related to reference. Such paragraph is called information paragraph. In the third paragraph a writer must give the

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8 http://www.englishplus.com/grammar/00000143.htm
reason why he/she is writing a letter. Here you state clearly what you want. This paragraph is called purpose paragraph. In conclusion a writer normally uses some polite remark, such as, ‘I am looking forward to hearing from you’, ‘I sincerely hope…’, ‘I enclose a cheque, a sample…’, etc (Collins, 2005, 122). The paragraphs of a business letter are left-blocked and there must be a line between each paragraph to make it clearer and easier to read.

The subscription. When you begin a letter with ‘Dear Sir/Sirs/Madam’, you end the letter with a phrase ‘Yours faithfully’. However, if you address a person by name you must conclude with the words ‘Yours sincerely’ (Collins, 2005, 122).

The signature. A writer signs his/her name clearly in full in the way it will appear on the envelope. Formal letters should not contain postscripts.

In the case of request letter, asking for a favour should be a straightforward process. Normally, if the favour you require deals with information, you must get straight to the point and make it as easy as possible for the recipient to reply (Collins, 2005, 145).

As the letters of instruction are concerned, they should be very specific. It is best to be formal and concise. A writer should provide any references or account numbers clearly and not include any unnecessary details (Collins, 2005, 136).

3. INFORMAL (PERSONAL) E-MAIL LETTERS

Informal letters are also known as personal, friendly letters or social notes. An informal letter gives the means to express oneself in a more sensitive way than would be possible with speech. Collins (2005, 78) divides informal letters into such groups as:

- Apologies;
- Writing to children;
- Condolences and congratulations;
- Fan mail;
- Love letters;
- Polite request and rude letters;
- General friendship and thank you letters;

Apology letters are usually short and to the point. They express the regret for the bad behavior and present the apology.

Letters for children should be as clear as possible and they should not contain over-complicated vocabulary. They should also contain concrete suggestions or facts.
Writing condolences and congratulations can be difficult. According to Collins (2005, 84), while writing a letter of condolence a person should include: sympathy, comfort, offers of practical help, suggestions of normality, tact and religious sensitivity. Congratulation letters will largely depend on the person’s relationship with the one he or she is writing to.

Fan mail expresses the feelings of a person on different occasions. For example, a person could write to a celebrity about his/her joy after watching a particular film with his favorite actor. The most important rule in writing fan mail is that you should be specific about why you like this person’s work.

Love letters are very emotive and intimate. A person should avoid writing and sending love letters in the heat of the moment as the written words could make him/her regret later. This kind of letter may be a powerful force for the promotion of relationships.

A request involves a delicate asking for a particular favour. Writing a letter can show that a person really appreciates the efforts you are going to make.

Rude letters might be particularly appropriate where a problem with a neighbour is involved.

Friendly letters presuppose that your friends will want to hear what you have done lately and how you felt about what you have done. Moreover, friendly letters include holiday correspondence and electronic postcards.

Thank you letters are written when a person has done you a favour, for example, you thank for help or hospitality (Collins, 2005, 78).

In my thesis I will concentrate on general friendship and congratulation letters.

### 3.1. The Structure of Informal E-mail Letters

Crystal (2001, 95) distinguishes the following structural elements of informal e-mail letters:

- The header (heading)
- The body (the greeting, the complimentary close, the postscript is optional)
- The attachment icon

The header includes the address and the last line contains the date. As a rule, it also carries the full subject line provided by the sender. The subject line is important because it is the first thing the recipient receives together with the sender’s name. It has to be very specific as it is a crucial element in the receiver’s decision-making whether to read the particular e-mail or not. All in all, the header provides valuable information in a small space (Trask, 2005, 134).
The body is also known as the main text and the same requirements as for business e-mails are applied to it. The body includes a message a person wants to write. Before the text there must be a greeting. The greeting always ends with a comma. The greeting may be formal beginning with the word “dear” and using the person’s given name or it may be informal if appropriate.

Formal: Dear Jim.
Informal: Hi, Joe; Greetings.

The more detailed analysis on greetings is presented in chapter 2.1.

Normally in informal letters the beginning of paragraphs is indented. If it is not indented, a person should skip a space between paragraphs. One line should be skipped after the greeting and before the close. It is advised to use short, simple sentences because it is more difficult to read long sentences on screen. Each paragraph should not be longer than fifteen lines because short paragraphs are preferable to long ones. Moreover, it is difficult to read long messages on the screen. Clarity is also important and it must involve both legibility and intelligibility.

The complimentary close is a short expression usually of a few words on a single line and it belongs to the body. It ends in a comma. It should be indented to the same column as the heading. The usual range of formulae, known from traditional letter-writing, is employed in e-mails. The formulae perform the functions: affection, gratitude, expectation, communicative intent. The examples are: Lots of love, Best wishes, Thanks for everything, see you soon, Let me know if this isn’t clear (Crystal, 2001, 102). Most interpersonal e-mails end with a preclosing formula (Best wishes, Lots of love, etc.) and the identification of the sender. The influence of traditional letter writing is observed in the tendency to write the elements on a separate line and usually spaced away from the body (Crystal, 2001, 102). In informal interaction in farewells writers usually use the initial letter of the first name or both the first name and surname. Some consist of a person’s full name, address and communication details, such as phone, fax, e-mail, website (Crystal, 2001, 103).

Postscript begins with P.S. and ends with the writers initials. However, in most e-mails farewells indicate that there is no further text and it is unnecessary to use a postscripted text. Many e-mail readers do not read the text beyond the signature (Crystal, 2001, 105).

In some systems, if a person chooses to attach a file to the e-mail, there is a space where the attachment icon is located (Crystal, 2001, 95).

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9 http://www.englishplus.com/grammar/00000143.htm
3.2. The Structure of Informal Conventional Letters

The skills of writing informal letters are gradually changed by modern forms of communication, such as, a telephone, an e-mail, a fax, etc. However, social correspondence still remains a very intimate form of letter writing. According to Collins (2005, 78), social letters should always be handwritten. The reason for that is that an informal letter should convey personal thoughts. The more impersonal the format is, the less impact a letter will have.

Alexander (1965, 41) distinguishes between the following elements of an informal letter:

- The heading;
- The salutation;
- The body (the introduction, purpose, conclusion);
- The subscription;
- The signature;
- The postscript.

The heading consists of the sender’s address that is indented to the middle of the page. The inside address is written on the left and is followed by the date.

The salutation. A writer should address a friend by his/her Christian name: ‘Dear Tom’, ‘Dear Jane’. It is inappropriate to begin a letter with ‘Dear Friend’. While writing to relations, you may address them as ‘Dear Uncle Tom’, ‘Dear Aunt Jane’, etc. When a person is writing a friendly letter to somebody with whom he/she is not on Christian-name terms, it is recommended to address them as ‘Dear Mr.’, ‘Dear Mrs.’, or ‘Dear Miss’. If writing to a very close friend, you may begin a letter with the words ‘My dear’ (Alexander, 1965, 42). A line is skipped after a salutation.

The body has three parts: introduction, purpose and conclusion. As the introduction is concerned, a writer should begin a letter by referring to a previous letter he/she has recently received or to an event that impelled him/her to write. The common phrases of introduction are: ‘I have just this moment received your letter….’, ‘I am sorry it has taken me so long to reply to your last letter…’, ‘Thank you so much for answering my letter so quickly’, etc. The most important part of the letter is when you state the purpose of your writing. It is recommended to answer exactly the question you have been set. Moreover, a writer should include personal details which could make a letter interesting (Alexander, 1965, 43). A personal letter is usually ended with a polite wish and it is called a conclusion. It can take any form: for example, expressing the hope to see someone soon or sending regards. A space should be skipped between paragraphs.
The subscription depends on how well a writer knows the person he/she is writing to. The most frequent subscription for friends and acquaintances is: ‘Yours sincerely’. Moreover, a writer can end with such words as ‘Yours very sincerely’, ‘Yours affectionately’ or ‘Love’ (Alexander, 1965, 43). The expression ‘Best wishes’ could be attributed to a relative with whom a writer is not particularly friendly or to a close colleague with whom he/she feels having good working relationship (Collins, 2005, 35).

The signature normally comes underneath the subscription and should be written clearly. The signature depends on the relationships between the writer and the addressee. A person may sign with his/her full name, Christian name or even a nickname (Alexander, 1965, 43).

The postscript. If a writer wants to say something more after finishing a letter, he/she may add a few lines under the signature. What is added must be headed with the letters ‘P.S.’ (Alexander, 1965, 42).

As for the letters of general friendship, both language and tone play an important role in creating the right style of a letter to a friend. To liven up a friendly letter, a writer is recommended to use a lot of adjectives and adverbs (Collins, 2005, 90).

Collins (2005, 88) points out that a writer has to avoid being over-intimate. Moreover, when writing birth and wedding congratulations, he/she has to address both of the partners involved.

3.3. The Function of Letters

The function of both conventional and e-mail letters is communication and conveying of information. Every letter we write serves a specific purpose. The purpose of a formal letter could be to increase sales, give instructions, improve communication with employees, find a job, etc. The function of informal letters, depending on the relationship of sender and recipient, is an intimate communication\(^\text{10}\). The writing of informal letters gives an opportunity to express oneself in a more sensitive way than, for example with speech (Collins, 2005, 77).

However, there is a slight difference in the function of a conventional and e-mail letter. E-mails are formally and functionally unique. Such features as screen structure, message openings and closing, message length and dialogic strategies are central to the identification of e-mail as a linguistic variety (Crystal, 2001, 122). The function of e-mail letters is exchange (Crystal, 2001, 112). Already many people use it as a more immediate and practical way of sending formal letters and greeting cards (Crystal, 2001, 107). Letters highlight the

\(^{10}\text{Kinds of Letter Writing, available from http://www.britanica.com/ebi/article-203779}\)
relationship between the sender and addressees. Business letters are formal types of communication.

E-mail letters save time, since they can be sent within seconds to any corner of the world. According to Crystal (2001, 126), an e-mail is better than the letter in obtaining a quick response to an enquiry; but not for every kind of message. In scholar’s opinion, there is a widespread feeling that letters are better than e-mails for expressing negative content, such as breaking off a relationship or reporting a family death. However, he also points out that people tend to disclose themselves better on the computer, compared with telephone and face-to-face conversation. Moreover, an e-mail is easy to use as all it takes is to click on certain icons and anyone can write notes, memos, letters, etc.

As stated by Crystal (2001, 126), an e-mail has come to be used for some of the purposes traditionally carried out by the letter, for example sending of CVs, job applications or certain types of form-filling. It is a good business strategy as more and more companies tend to use an e-mail to communicate within the organization, to make new business contacts and maintain potential clients. Moreover, e-mails are very important in educational, business and other workplace settings where they are seen as providing a more convenient professionalism that can speed up decision-making and build strong daily working relationships. An e-mail has also emerged as a means of communication for people separated by distance and also for the cheapness of the medium (Crystal, 2001, 126).

4. PUNCTUATION IN LETTERS

Punctuation mark is an important means that provides clarity in writing and helps to convey meaning to the reader. When the conventions of punctuation are ignored, readers tend to become confused. According to Crystal (2001, 112), in e-mail letters punctuation marks are usually omitted and the underuse of punctuation can impede communication. In e-mail letters the confusion may normally occur because of the overuse or underuse of punctuation.

When writing a sentence, an author has to make sure that it expresses one complete thought. As described by Collins (2005, 55), punctuation helps the reader to grasp the meaning of a large text and divide it into smaller, manageable parts. Moreover, it helps to

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12 ibid.
13 ibid.
make the appearance of the text clearer and more attractive. In speech, people usually use gestures and intonation to give the prominence, while in writing, the function of clarification and stress is performed by punctuation.

As for the greetings in informal conventional letters, a comma is normally used after the opening salutation (Oshima & Hogue, 1999, 251). According to Swan (2005, 460), Americans usually put a colon after the opening salutation in a conventional formal letter; however, British usage prefers a comma or no punctuation mark at all.

The body of a letter is normally divided into paragraphs. As referred to Collins (2005, 40), paragraphs in conventional formal letters start on the left-hand side of the page and are not indented. This gives a letter a clean neat look. As for conventional informal letters, they are normally indented at the beginning of each paragraph. A new sentence has to start with a capital letter and at the end of a sentence various punctuation marks can be used, for example the full stop, the comma, the semi-colon, the colon, the exclamation mark or the question mark (Collins, 2005, 55).

As far as the complimentary close is concerned, a comma is normally used after a pre-closing pattern in formal and informal conventional letters (Collins, 2005, 119).

An e-mail letter is a relatively new form of communication and its conventions are still in the process of establishment. The conventions for e-mail writing are very important as the usual range of punctuation expressiveness may be seriously extended, for example, to Yes!!!!!!!! or WHAT???? (Crystal, 2001, 124). Different rules of conduct for e-mail letters are referred to as netiquette. Individual organizations make up their own set of rules. However, there is still no common book of rules to refer to. The lists of the e-mail etiquette point towards the awareness that appropriate conventions of e-mail writing are necessary15. As for the netiquette, certain rules of punctuation in e-mails can be observed. The conventional rules of punctuation can be applied to e-mail letters; however, the netiquette suggests not to overuse punctuation marks, such as exclamation mark. Both in conventional and e-mail letters exclamation marks are used for emphasis; however, it is recommended to avoid more than one exclamation, especially in formal e-mail letters. According to Crystal (2001, 122), the intensity of questioning in e-mails is greater than in traditional letters. Moreover, rhetorical questions and self-answering are also common in e-mails. When a writer makes a statement that he/she is not sure about, it should be followed by “!??” in informal e-mail letters16. As for

16 E-mail Etiquette, available from http://www.instruction.greenriver.edu/facultyteachingresources/Classroom%20Management.htm
ellipsis point (“…”), it normally indicates hesitation, a trailing off of thought or an incomplete statement (Perrin, 1987, 361). The overuse of ellipsis point can make a message difficult to read. Moreover, the whole e-mail letter should not be typed in capitals because this would be considered as shouting\footnote{ibid.}. 
5. THE STRUCTURE OF FORMAL E-MAIL LETTERS

As it was discussed in chapter 2.1 of this paper, the structure of formal e-mail letter consists of the header, the body and the attachment icon. The latter element could be optional in an e-mail.

30 e-mails of request and instructions were subjected to analysis in this paper and the following results were obtained.

5.1 The Header

As it was previously mentioned, the header or heading, according to Crystal (2001, 95) consists of four elements: To, From, Subject and Date. The header is an important part of an e-mail letter as it directly influences the receiver’s decision-making whether to read a particular e-mail or not.

The data analysis demonstrated that both the writer’s and addressee’s e-mail addresses consisted of the user’s real name plus his/her last name (30%). Several most representative examples were chosen to illustrate the case:

- anneceuppens@antwerpen.be
- cantic.dulcia@mail.telepac.pt

Moreover, there were instances when the first name of the user was abbreviated but the last name was presented in full (7%):

- szgyorgyi@uze.net
- mj bordado@netcabo.pt

The first two letters in the first e-mail address stand for the name Szakil and the rest of the e-mail address consists of the user’s last name Gyorgyi. The first symbol ‘m’ in the second e-mail address stands for the name Maria. First names were abbreviated because either the users tended to economise the space in the e-address line or they had the requirements of using no more than nine characters imposed by the service provider.

Other frequently used instances of e-mail addresses were those with the name of the user plus the name of the organization (33%).

- centrasirma@centras.lt
- rui@cantic.org.pt

In the above presented examples, centras and rui stand for the name of organization and the rest of the e-mail address is the first or the last name of the user.
Addresses with the names of organizations such as ‘office’ and ‘rondok’ were used in 30% of the analysed formal e-mails:

office@elb.cc
rondok@hotmail.com

It could be presumed that the users of the addresses containing names of organizations plus the user’s name or the names of organizations alone, represented a particular company. Moreover, such e-mail addresses were easier to memorise and to spell since they could be easily associated with the organization they worked for.

As far as the date is concerned, all e-mails contained the date as it is normally inserted automatically by the software.

The subject is a brief description of the topic of the message and it is normally inserted manually. 97% of the analysed e-mails contained subjects with the names of topics implying the idea of the content of the message:

Project lingua
Comenius
Application form EU project
Project meeting
About sending screenshots

However, there were instances (3%) when the subject was omitted. It could be inferred that the writer was in a hurry and forgot to indicate the subject of an e-mail.

To sum up the results of the header analysis, it could be noted that the majority of e-addresses contained a person’s real name, abbreviation of the name or the name of organization, while fictitious names were not used in formal e-mail addresses. Moreover, it could be pinpointed, that subjects of request and instruction e-mails reflected the content of the e-mails precisely.

5.2 The Structure of the Body of Formal E-mails

The body of formal e-mail, according to Crystal (2001, 95), consists of the greeting, the message itself and the complimentary close. All three parts were analysed separately in greater detail and illustrated by the most representative examples.
5.2.1. Greetings

Greetings belong to the body of the message. They can be optional elements in cases of public announcements and junk mail. As it was previously mentioned, Crystal (2001, 101) uses such terms as ‘a general word’, ‘an intimate name’ or ‘a combination of general word and intimate name’ to refer to greeting patterns. In e-mails of request and instruction the following types of greetings were observed: ‘Dear’ plus intimate name (53%); a combination of general word and intimate name (20%); intimate name alone (13%); ‘Dear’ plus general word (7%) and general word (7%).

‘Dear’ plus intimate name

The most frequent individual greeting pattern in e-mail letters was ‘Dear’ with an intimate name:

Dear Patrizia
Dear Irma
Dear Maria

It demonstrates that in e-mail letters of request and instruction communication is not as formal and strict as it could have been expected. It could be presumed that informal interaction appeared as a result of close and frequent cooperation between people.

A combination of general word and intimate name

Less frequently used instances of greetings that occurred in e-mails were the combination of a general word and an intimate name:

Hello Jurgita
Hi Jurgita

The above presented instances reveal the close relationship between the writer and addressee. Such greetings showed writer’s friendly attitude towards the person to whom he/she is writing.

Intimate name alone

The examples below illustrate the case when a greeting contains only the addressee’s name:

Arriving message:
Scott,
Please find attached two files for editing.
Such greetings are very informal and they could appear in the e-mail because of time-pressure. Moreover, it could be presupposed that the writer sent several e-mails with requests to the same addressee during a short period of time, for example one hour, therefore it was inappropriate to use ‘Dear Mr.’ in each e-mail letter.

**‘Dear’ plus general word**

*Dear friends*

*Dear future partners*

The above presented instances of greetings appeared in e-mails when they were addressed to a certain group of people that had to fulfil the same obligations or duty. Moreover, the writer wanted to address the same e-mail to all people concerned, therefore it was inappropriate to address a specific person. As a result, general words such as ‘friends’ or ‘partners’ were used.

**General word**

The following examples illustrate instances of greetingless messages as they contain no pattern of ‘Dear’ or ‘intimate’ name:

*Hello to all partners*

*Hello everybody*

Greetingless beginnings are informal and they are not typical of business e-mail letters. The reason for using general words in greetings could be the writer’s intention to establish closer relationship and create friendly atmosphere. Moreover, it could be presumed that the writer did not send an e-mail to one particular person but he/she had in mind all partners or the whole group of people concerned.

To sum up the results of the analysis of greetings in formal e-mail letters, it could be pointed out that the most frequently occurring type of greetings in e-mail letters of request and instruction were the informal ‘Dear’ plus intimate name, general words or a combination of both. Such greetings revealed the informal communication between people who know each other.

### 5.2.2. The Message

As it was previously mentioned, Crystal (2001, 110) regards the clarity of a message as a combination of legibility and intelligibility. Legibility is defined as avoiding a screenful of unbroken text, therefore a line-of-white is recommended between paragraphs and a bullet or
numbering facilities are used to highlight points in a list. Intelligibility is defined as avoiding
of misspellings.

The analysis demonstrated that a line-of-white was not characteristic of the analysed data. Only 33% of e-mails were written with a line-of-white. Though 67% of e-mail letters had no line-of-white, each paragraph in such e-mails started with a new line, though it was not indented. However, there were instances of a bullet and numbering facility employed in 13% of the analysed e-mails. This helped to highlight the most important points discussed in e-mail letters. Moreover, only 10% of the analysed e-mails exhibited instances of misspellings but they did not disrupt the understanding of a message.

As for the structure of messages, it could be pointed out that formal e-mails tended to be long in terms of paragraphs and lines. 40% of formal e-mails contained from 4 to 7 paragraphs. However, the most frequent number of paragraphs in the analysed e-mails occurred to be from 1 to 3 paragraphs (43%). Moreover, 17% of e-mails contained only a single-line. It could be presumed that when people communicated and exchanged messages frequently, for instance several times per day, they wrote shorter e-mails.

As far as the length of sentences is concerned, formal e-mail letters had long sentences because they helped to disclose the important points of the message. 60% of the analysed e-mails fitted into a single screenview. The rest 40% of e-mail letters needed the further scrolling as they were longer than a screenview.

As for the number of paragraphs in a message and their length, the analysis demonstrated that 43% of e-mails were from 1 to 3 paragraph length. The length of these paragraphs varied from 3 to 12 lines. The sentences were quite long since they had to convey as much information as possible. For example:

Dear Irma,

At Brussels Airport there is a shuttle-bus to Antwerp, it takes about 50 minutes and costs 8 euro per person.

Formal e-mails 4 to 7 paragraphs long were also frequent (40%). There were from 2 to 4 lines per paragraph in such e-mails. Sentences in such messages were long as well. For example:

Hello to all partners,

With these topics I mentioned in the project, we can learn more about different partner countries and I think that it is also good for such a complex thing like Lingua project to know the working partners very well and to have a very good working base.

In the above text, the writer tends both to instruct and to express his/her opinion about the issue, therefore the sentence is long.
However, there were e-mails of a single-line length. Sentences of such e-mails were short:
Scott,
Please find attached two files for editing.
It could be presumed that the writer forgot to attach files to his/her previous e-mail and later had to resend them enclosing a short message.
As for the opening paragraphs of formal e-mails, normally they started with a statement of a fact (57%). For example:
1. Dear Irma,
I have just sent a mail to Portugal.
2. Dear future partners,
I have fixed the basic application form now and I hope this is ok for all of you.
Opening paragraphs with acknowledgement were frequent as well (33%). For instance:
1. Dear Irma,
Thank you for the report.
2. Dear Irma,
Thank you for your flight-schedule.
However, opening paragraphs with interrogative sentences were rare in formal e-mail letters (10%). The questions were normally concerned with the subject-matter of the message. For example:
Dear friends,
Has the joint activity report been approved?
Formal e-mail letters that contained from 4 to 7 paragraphs normally had paragraphs with reference, information, purpose and conclusion. However, the analysed e-mails that contained from 1 to 3 paragraphs normally consisted of reference and information or information and purpose paragraphs mixed together in one paragraph. E-mails of a single-line paragraph length contained no reference and had either information or purpose paragraph.

5.2.3. The Complimentary Close

The complimentary close of the analysed formal e-mails consisted of a few words on a single line that were normally separated from the body by a line-of-white. Though the conventional pre-closing pattern in letters is ‘Yours sincerely’, ‘Yours faithfully’ most of formal e-mail letters ended with a pre-closing pattern: Best wishes/Best/Warm regards; Greetings (54%), Yours was quite frequent (33%) and the identification of the sender without any pre-closing pattern was observed in 13% of e-mails. It could be presumed that the above
presented patterns become characteristic of formal e-mail letters. Moreover, the analysis showed that in farewells writers usually used their intimate name or both the intimate name and the last name. However, there were rare instances of formal e-mail letters containing only the first letter of the writer’s name in the farewell.

The majority of formal e-mail letters ended with informal pre-closing pattern Best/Warm regards, Best wishes or Greetings. For example:

*Please let me know your comments.*

*Warm regards*

*Karl*

The assumption could be made that the informal complimentary close was used since in the process of cooperation the sender and the recipient became not only partners but also friends. By using informal ending, the writer expressed his/her amiability towards the recipient.

Another frequently used ending was *Yours*. It occurred in 33% of formal e-mail letters. For instance:

*Any questions, just mail them and I’ll try to answer them.*

*Yours*

*Karl*

From the instance presented above, it could be inferred that the writer tended to keep working relations with the recipient and wanted to show him/her respect.

One more interesting case in the complimentary close of the analysed e-mails was observed: the identification of the sender without a pre-closing pattern. For instance:

*Hi Jurgita,*

*Here’s the proofread “Oframax PIL” text.*

*Scott*

The text above demonstrates the established informal interaction between two people.

The analysis also demonstrated that 60% of the analysed formal e-mails contained farewells with the intimate name only. 10% of farewells ended with abbreviation of the writer’s first name. The rest 30% of e-mails contained both the intimate and the last name.

Postscripts were not found in the analysed formal e-mail letters.

To sum up, it could be concluded that formal e-mails of request and instruction tended to have certain features of informal e-mail letters, namely, the informal greetings and the complimentary close.
5.3 The Attachment Icon

The attachment icon is one of the elements in the structure of e-mail letter. This is a space where the user of the Internet could attach the file if necessary. Depending on the software, the attachment icon could be located either in the upper area of the screen under the heading or in the lower area under the space for the main text. The analysis demonstrated that the facility was used frequently. The senders of e-mail letters used the icon to send files, such as texts for translations, flight schedules, various documents and application forms, etc. 70% of formal e-mail letters were sent with the attachments. Though the rest 30% of e-mails contained no attachments, some of these e-mails gave references to the document or information in the body of the message. It could be presumed that the attachment icon is a very important element in the structure of formal e-mails since it helps to forward both the e-mail letter and the needed document or text saving the sender’s time and money.

5.4 Punctuation in Formal E-mail Letters

As it was previously mentioned, in writing, punctuation is used for clarification and emphasis.

The data analysis demonstrated that commas after greetings in formal e-mail letters were used frequently (80%). There were only 20% of analysed e-mail greetings with a comma omitted. The instances with a colon after the opening salutation were not observed in the analysed e-mail letters. It could be concluded that the use of punctuation marks in e-mails is similar to the use of punctuation in a conventional formal letter.

Only 17% of formal e-mails contained a comma in a pre-closing pattern of analysed e-mails. For example:

*Best Regards,*

*Greetings,*

In the above presented instances, the writer followed the rules of a conventional formal letter writing where a comma is needed after a pre-closing pattern.

However, there were instances of e-mails when a dash (13%) or an exclamation mark (3%) was used at the end of a pre-closing pattern. For example:

*Best wishes-*

*Wish you all the best!*
According to the rules of punctuation in conventional letters, a dash could be used instead of a comma, a colon, a semi-colon or brackets.

However, the majority of analysed e-mails (67%) contained no commas after a pre-closing pattern:

Yours
Warm regards

Though in a conventional formal letter a comma is normally used, formal e-mail letters tended to omit them in the complimentary close.

The text of the message was normally divided into paragraphs, except for the single-line length messages. However, first sentences in each paragraph were not indented. Moreover, new sentences normally started with a capital letter. However, there were instances when words were written in upper case in the message of the body, presumably to get the recipient’s attention, though such use of capital letters was not characteristic of formal e-mail letters. For example:

1. LINGUA
2. NA

The most frequently used instances of punctuation marks in formal e-mail letters were question marks and brackets.

Question marks were frequent in formal e-mail letters of request and instructions. It could be presumed that the constant use of question marks was predetermined by the purpose of e-mails, namely to ask for information, instruct and to ask the recipient to express his/her opinion on the issue. For example:

1. Can you please find two files for editing?
2. The meeting will be on 10th of October. Is this date still suitable for you?

Brackets were frequent in formal e-mail letters as well. Brackets were used to add details and provide additional information. For example:

Plan B: We meet in Vilnius but in the later days of November (the first half of November is largely taken up by autumn breaks).

By adding information in brackets it became clearer why the meeting was preferred at the end of November.

To sum up, it could be pinpointed that the use of punctuation marks in formal e-mail letters was similar to punctuation rules of conventional letters, except for the frequent use of question marks and brackets.
5.5 The Difference between Formal Conventional and E-mail Letters

The difference between formal conventional and e-mail letters lies in the header, the greetings, the body, the complimentary close and the attachment.

As for the heading of formal e-mail letters, it contains an e-mail address, the date and the time that could be inserted automatically and a subject line where the writer states the topic. The heading of a conventional formal letter normally consists of the sender’s address that is indented to the middle of the page. The inside address is written on the left and is followed by the date. In a conventional letter there is no subject line and the topic is normally stated in the body of the message.

While analysing greetings of formal e-mail letters, an interesting peculiarity was observed. The most frequently used greeting in formal e-mail was ‘Dear’ plus an intimate name, whereas the greeting in a conventional letter always begins with ‘Dear Mr’, ‘Dear Mrs’ or ‘Dear Sir’, ‘Dear Madam’. Moreover, such greetings as a combination of general word and intimate name; intimate name alone; ‘Dear’ plus general word or general word alone would not be normally used in a conventional formal letter. The analysis of formal e-mails also demonstrated that greetingless beginnings were used in business e-mails though they are considered informal and are not typical of formal conventional and e-mail letters. Such greetings presented the view of informal interaction between people who know each other well.

The body of a conventional formal letter consists of the reference, information, purpose and conclusion paragraphs. The results of the analysis of formal e-mails demonstrated that the introduction, purpose and conclusion (a complimentary close) paragraphs were present in e-mails. Formal e-mail letters that contained from 4 to 7 paragraphs normally had paragraphs with reference, information, purpose and conclusion. In some cases reference paragraph was omitted. However, the analysed e-mails that contained from 1 to 3 paragraphs usually had reference and information or information and purpose paragraphs combined together. A single-line length e-mail contained no reference and had either information or purpose paragraph. However, a conventional business letter would normally contain the reference, information, purpose and conclusion paragraphs and would never be written as a single-line.

The analysis of formal e-mails revealed a certain peculiarity. Though a business e-mail letter should normally end with ‘Yours sincerely’, it was noticed that all farewells were of informal character. There were only 33% of e-mails that ended with the pre-closing pattern ‘Yours’ and the identification of the sender, whereas a conventional formal letter would normally end with ‘Yours faithfully’ or ‘Yours sincerely’. It could be concluded that formal
e-mails of request and instruction tended to exhibit certain features of informal e-mail letters, namely, the informal greetings and the complimentary close.

As for the attachment icon, it is utterly characteristic of e-mail letters.

As far as punctuation in formal e-mail letters is concerned, it could be pointed out that it was similar to punctuation of conventional letters. The underuse of punctuation was not typical of formal e-mail letters of request and instructions; however, a peculiar use of question marks and brackets was observed in analysed e-mails.
6. THE STRUCTURE OF INFORMAL E-MAIL LETTERS

As it was discussed in chapter 3.1 of this paper, the personal e-mail consists of three parts: the header, the body and the space to attach the file if necessary.

Two types of informal e-mail letters – emails of general friendship and congratulation were subjected to analysis in this paper.

6.1 The Header

The originality of e-mails lies in that they have special devices that allow the recipient to get the information about the letter in advance. Before reading the main text, the recipient can be aware of the writer, the topic of the message and the exact time he/she got an e-mail.

The header provides valuable information in a small space. There is a limited scope for variation within headers because the information is normally predetermined by the software. The analysis demonstrated that the e-mail address both of the writer and addressee normally contains \texttt{name@site.address}. The name is usually based on the user’s real name or his last name or both. For example:

\texttt{Stephen.Hardreaves@sisa-antwerpen.be}
\texttt{manuel@telenet.be}

98\% of the analysed e-mails contained the address with the real name.

However, there were rare instances (2\%) of fictitious names as in following:

\texttt{Dr-Phantom@gmail.com}

Such an address is suitable for an informal e-mail exchange; however, it is advisable to have another address with the real name or abbreviation of the name for business purposes.

The subject line is important because it is the first thing the recipient reads together with the sender’s name. It could be considered an introductory element of the message. All the e-mail letters in the analysed data contained subjects with the names of topics. 63\% of e-mails had very specific subjects. Congratulation e-mails had the following specific topics:

\texttt{Happy New Year}
\texttt{Happy Birthday}
\texttt{Blessings}
\texttt{An e-card from….}
\texttt{Merry Christmas}

These subjects gave a preliminary idea about the content of the letter, that it will contain congratulations.
In general friendship e-mail letters, the subject normally contained general topics: 

*Hello, my dear friend*

*Friendship*

*Hello Irma*

*Eulia*

The above presented subjects are too general to interpret without the context of e-mails. The subject line *Eulia* or *Friendship*, where the writer simply writes her name or uses a general word, implies that she cannot decide what information is the most important in her e-mail.

Moreover, in e-mails of general friendship there were instances when the subject was omitted, it did not contain any topic. There were only 8% of e-mail letters without subjects. It could be presumed that the reason for this was the writer’s being busy or not sure about the subject of the e-mail letter.

As the data analysis revealed, the majority of e-addresses contained a person’s real name or abbreviation of the name, while fictitious names were not used in e-addresses of the analysed e-mail letters. Moreover, it could be noted, that subjects of congratulation e-mail letters had specific topics while the e-mails of general friendship had very general or no topics at all.

### 6.2 The Structure of the Body of Informal E-mails

As it was discussed in chapter 3.1 of this paper, the body of an e-mail consists of the greeting, the complimentary close and the postscript that is optional.

#### 6.2.1. Greetings

Greetings belong to the body of the message. They can be optional elements. As it was previously discussed, Crystal (2001, 101) uses such terms as ‘a general word’, ‘an intimate name’ or ‘a combination of general word and intimate name’ to refer to greeting patterns.

The analysis showed that the frequency of occurrence of the types of greetings was different in the analysed e-mail letters. In general friendship and congratulation e-mail letters the most frequently occurring greeting was ‘*Dear* plus intimate name (63%). The greetings ‘*Dear* plus general word ‘friend(s)’ or ‘all’ instead of the intimate name were also quite frequent. This type of greetings was used in 29% of the analysed e-mails. The instances with a combination of general word and intimate name were less frequent. They occurred only in
4% of e-mail letters. There were also 4% of e-mails that began with an intimate name alone and with a general word.

All the occurrences of greetings were analysed separately in greater detail and illustrated with the examples.

‘Dear’ plus intimate name

The most frequent individual greeting in the analysed e-mail letters was ‘Dear’ with an intimate name. This is the greeting pattern that is normally used in a conventional informal letter.

‘Dear’ plus general word ‘friend(s) and ‘all’

The following greetings were quite frequent - 29% of all e-mail letters exhibited the pattern. Such patterns were observed in the e-mail letters that addressed the message to the whole family. The writer had in mind the whole family as his/her friends:

Dear friends
Dear all

The use of greetings ‘Dear friends’ and ‘Dear all’ revealed close relationship and the writer’s positive and friendly attitude towards the people he/she was writing to. Moreover, differently from a conventional informal letter that is normally considered confidential and could be read by one person, an informal e-mail can be read by several people or the whole family. In some letters attributive constructions were used to highlight the intimate relationship between people and to convey the writer’s mood:

My dear friends
Dear friends so far away
Dear friends in Vilnius

A combination of general word and intimate name

Less frequently used greetings in the analysed letters were the combination of general word and intimate name:

Hi Loreta
Hi Irma

It could be presumed that people know each other well and there is no threat to insult a person by an informal general greeting ‘Hi’. This type of greeting occurred only in 4% of e-mail letters.
An intimate name alone or with general words

The greeting with the intimate name alone is very informal. Greetingless messages between people who know each other are usually promptly sent responses, where the responder sees the message as the second part of the previous interaction. For example, **Hello again from Austria**

The longer the person delays the response, the more likely the response will contain the complete greeting.

Moreover, the use of the intimate name alone can mean the lack of time for writing an e-mail. Such case could be illustrated by the following example:

Arriving message: **Irma, she told me that in Lithuania there is a boy…**

Response message: **Yes, Filomena…**

Besides social relationship, greetings with the intimate name alone or with general words are used because of time-pressure, the mixture of subject-matter and mood of the writer.

The results of analysis showed that the most frequently used greeting was ‘Dear’ plus an intimate name. Such greetings are preferred as they reveal social relationship, the mood and the writer’s attitude towards people to whom he/she is writing. Greetings with formal names or with title and surname were not observed in the data analysed. Moreover, while analyzing informal e-mails, an interesting peculiarity was observed. There were greetingless beginnings that contained no intimate name; however, such e-mail letters were few in number.

6.2.2. The Message

As it was already pointed out, Crystal (2001, 110) regards the clarity of a message as a combination of legibility and intelligibility. Legibility is defined as avoiding a screenful of unbroken text. A line-of-white, a bullet or numbering facilities and short simple sentences are used to avoid an unbroken text.

The analysis demonstrated that a line-of-white was the most characteristic of the analysed e-mails. 88% of e-mails were written with a line-of-white. 12% of e-mails had no line-of-white. A line was skipped only after greeting and before the close. However, there were no instances of a bullet or numbering facility in the analysed e-mails found. Therefore, it could be presumed that a bullet and numbering facility is not characteristic of personal e-mails.

Moreover, the results of the analysis of the structure of messages demonstrated that friendly e-mails were short in terms of paragraphs and lines when people communicated and exchanged messages frequently; however, the longer the delay in responding was, the more likely an e-mail would be longer. For example, congratulation e-mails have longer sentences.
because they express the writer’s feelings and emotions. Sentences reflected the writer’s mood and also his/her attitude towards people to whom he/she is writing. However, e-mails of general friendships usually have more paragraphs. 75% of the analysed e-mails fitted into a single screenview. The rest 25% of e-mail letters needed the further scrolling as they were longer than a screenview.

As for intelligibility or misspellings, in 10% of the analysed e-mails spelling errors were observed. These errors caused no disruption to the communicative process. It could be inferred that they could have occurred because of the fast typing or a lack of editorial revision.

The results of the analysis demonstrated that half of e-mails were of one paragraph length. The introduction and purpose were normally combined in one paragraph. The length of the paragraph varied from 1 to 5 lines. The sentences were short enough. Consider the following example:

Hello dear Loreta,
I hope you are better today. It’s only to say that the snail mail go to Lithuania today.
I wish you all best things!...

This e-mail is very short; however, it is informative and contains an element of general friendship.

In the following example, the message is of one paragraph length but the sentences are rather long:

Dear friends so far away,
Today your Christmas greeting arrived and we thank you very much for your wishes. We, too, hope that you will have a good new year 2007 in health and good luck […]

Two and three paragraph long messages were also frequent. 38% of e-mail letters contained from two to three paragraphs. This is typical of general friendship e-mails. The first paragraph usually starts with introduction, with the opening interrogative sentence, whereas other paragraphs contain purpose and conclusion. For instance:

Dear Karl,
How are you doing at the moment? I hope you had a rest after project meeting.
The sentences of the opening paragraphs are quite short as they are not explanatory.
The majority of e-mails began with an acknowledgement:
Thank you very much for your kind letter
Thanks a lot for your kind letter.
The other paragraphs contain the general information or the purpose of writing and the sentences are not long.
Four paragraph long e-mails were infrequent, they comprised only 13% of all the analysed e-mails. These were e-mail letters of general friendship. The opening paragraphs started either with the interrogative sentence or with the acknowledgement. The recent events and news were normally discussed in other paragraphs. The sentences were short.

Moreover, there were the instances of e-mails with five, six, nine and even eleven body paragraphs. However, they were rare, they comprised 25% of all e-mails. The average length of sentences in nine and eleven body paragraph e-mails was 2-3 sentences. The sentences in the longer e-mails were long enough because they described both mundane affairs and also writer’s feelings and emotions. These e-mails needed a further scrolling as they were longer than the rest of the letters.

The number of lines in the message is important as it helps to disclose types of relationship between people, for example friendship or business. The number of lines in messages of general friendship that were exchanged frequently (every 3-4 days) varied from three to seven lines. There were 50% of such e-mail letters in the analysed data. They contained the general information about current events. For example:

Hello dear Irma,
I hope you are better today. It’s only to say that the snail mail go to Lithuania today.
I wish you all best things!...
Many Kisses

The instance above shows that the writer knows a lot about the addressee’s life and current events, such as illness of the recipient. The word ‘today’ proves that the exchange between the writer and the addressee is frequent and their relationship could be friendly or close.

The e-mails that are exchanged less frequently, for instance every week or every second week, were longer and varied from seven to fifteen lines.

Dear Irma,
Back to work, it’s only to wish you a very HAPPY NEW YEAR 2007, with HEALTH, HAPPINESS and GOOD ENERGY!
Thank you very much for the Congratulations.
I’m glad that the snail mail had arrived. Do me a favor, just enjoy it… and don’t think crazy things about it!
We celebrated the new year near home, in my parent’s country house with Paul and Peter because I was a bit ill, very tired and I had to rest a few days to face the new year…
Well, I wish you ALL THE BEST
Many Kisses
From the text above, we can infer that the e-mails between the writer and the addressee were not frequent. The writer tried to give all the information about the recent events in his/her life that is why the message is longer. Moreover, there were several instances of letters that consisted of up to thirty lines per message. However, such examples were very rare and they were not typical of the analysed e-mail letters.

The number of lines in e-mails of congratulation varied. The e-mails that consisted only of congratulations were from three to five lines long.

Dear Loreta,
I wish you, your family and friends a very Merry Christmas!
May Santa Claus bring you joy and happiness!
Merry Christmas!
Love

The letters that contained both the answer to congratulations and the congratulation to the addressee, normally were up to ten lines long.

Dear friends so far away!
Today we got your Christmas greetings and we thank you very much for your wishes. We, too, hope that you will have a good new year in health and good luck!
As you wrote, there is a new member in the family: Emi! Heartily welcome on earth and may your little steps go in a good future! [...] With warmest regards to everybody
Your Monika

As far as intelligibility or misspellings is concerned, only 10% of the analysed e-mails contained spelling errors. No one is likely to be misled by the following mistakes:

A new year with happiness
With deligence
Recuperate you money

These errors cause no disruption to the communicative process and they occur because of the fast typing or a lack of editorial revision.

However, some misspellings can make a reader pause or make an utterance ambiguous:
Mainly abot the final report
I think there…
I was a bit ill, very tiered
6.2.3. The Complimentary Close

The complimentary close in informal e-mails was short and consisted of a few words on a single line. Most e-mails ended with a pre-closing pattern: *Best wishes, Lots of love, etc.* and the identification of the sender. The analysis exhibited that in farewells writers usually wrote their first name or both the first name and surname. Moreover, there were instances of e-mail letters that contained farewells with a person’s particulars.

The complimentary close in all e-mails consisted of a few words on a single line. All elements written on separate lines:

I wish you all best things!

Many kisses

Dulcia

The majority of e-mails (75%) ended with a pre-closing pattern: *Best wishes, Best regards, Lots of love, etc.* and the identification of the sender. Such endings demonstrate the warm relationship between the sender and the addressee. For example:

1. Best wishes to everybody.
   Yours-
   Irma

2. Best regards
   Karl

There were instances when a writer ended an e-mail with the word *Yours* that shows the writer’s respect towards the addressee. For example:

1. Yours
   Maria Eulia or

2. Yours
   Karl

Such cases were rare (10%).

87% of the analysed e-mails were signed only by the first name in farewells. For example:

1. Many kisses
   Dulcia

2. Many greetings
   Patrizia

3. Yours
   Karl
Occurrences with both the first name and the surname were infrequent since there was no obvious necessity each time to sign an e-mail in full if it was written to a close friend or an acquaintance. To sum up, there were 10% of e-mails signed with the first and last name. However, 3% of e-mails contained a farewell where a person used a pronoun instead of his/her first or last name. For example:

All my best
Me

Though it is not characteristic of farewells to have pronouns, there is no problem for the addressee to guess the author of an e-mail. The e-address from which the message has been sent is always given in the header since this is an obligatory element in every e-mail letter.

Moreover, there were instances of e-mails with the particulars of the sender, such as a person’s full name, address, phone, fax, e-mail or website. Consider the following example:

1. Maria Eulia
   Tel: 21 356 35 76
   Fax: 21 555 30 20 or
2. Stephen
   Stephen.Hardeaves@sisa-antwerpen.be

These particulars were normally given at the end of an e-mail after a farewell without the letters ‘P.S’; however, particulars are more characteristic of formal communication. The reason the writer gave additional information after the farewell in informal e-mails could lie in his/her choice of software options that allow inserting particulars automatically at the end of an e-mail. It could be presumed that the writer did not turn off the device while writing an informal e-mail letter.

As it was discussed above, in most e-mails farewells indicate that there is no further text and it is unnecessary to use a postscript (Crystal, 2001, 105). The data analysis showed that a postscript is not typical of general friendship and congratulation e-mail letters. One of the possible explanations could be that a writer can insert the information he/she forgot to write in any place of a body. Electronic facilities allow making changes in a text without any difficulty.

6.3 The Attachment Icon

As it was mentioned in part 3.1 of this paper, the structure of a personal e-mail consists of the header (heading), the body and the space to attach the file if necessary. In some systems the icon is located in the upper area of the screen under the heading, in other systems it is
found in the lower area under the space for the main text. This structural element of an e-mail letter could be optional; however, the analysis revealed that this particular facility is used frequently. The data analysis demonstrated that the writers of e-mails tended to use the attachment icon to send various files. 60% of congratulation e-mail letters contained a file with a greeting card. Only 25% of general friendship e-mail letters were sent with attachments. Mostly they contained files with photographs. It could be concluded that e-mails of general friendship contained less files since people sent photographs after certain events in their lives: birthdays, holidays, graduating from school or university, etc. People did not normally send photographs from their mundane lives. However, the tendency to use the attachment file is rising rapidly among the users of the Internet.

6.4 Punctuation in Informal E-mail Letters

As it was discussed in part 4 of this paper, the problem of punctuation in e-mail letters may arise since the overuse or underuse of punctuation.

The data analysis of punctuation in personal e-mails demonstrated that the use of commas after greetings was frequent (50%). However, the percentage of instances of greetings with the omission of a comma compiled 43% of analysed e-mails. It could be presumed that the senders of e-mails who omitted a comma either followed the punctuation rules of British English where the omission of a comma is allowed, or were under the time pressure and did not worry about the punctuation.

Moreover, there were instances of greetings that ended in an exclamation mark (8%). For example:

Dear friends so far away!

The exclamation mark in the above presented greeting gave prominence to the words ‘so far away’ and revealed the writer’s languish for friends.

Only 18% of personal e-mail letters contained a comma in a pre-closing pattern of all analysed e-mail letters. For example:

Many thanks and kind regards,

Lots of love,

In the above presented instances, the writer followed the rules of a conventional letter writing where a comma is needed after a pre-closing pattern.

However, there were instances of informal e-mails when a dash (5%) or ellipsis points (3%) were used at the end of a pre-closing pattern. For example:
Yours-

Many kisses to you, Neringa and everybody I know…

According to the rules of punctuation in conventional letters, a dash could be used instead a comma, a colon, a semi-colon or brackets. It could be presumed that the sender used ellipsis points as a means of economy that helped to omit the listing of names of people he/she wanted to congratulate. However, the frequent use of ellipsis points can make a message difficult to read.

The most frequently used instances of punctuation in a pre-closing pattern where those with no comma after a pre-closing pattern (75%):

Best regards
All my best

According to conventions of letter punctuation a comma is needed after a pre-closing pattern; however, informal e-mail letters tended to omit them.

The text of the messages was divided into paragraphs. However, first sentences in each paragraph were not indented. New sentences in informal e-mails normally started with a capital letter.

The most frequently used punctuation marks in informal e-mail letters were ellipsis points, question marks, exclamation marks and brackets.

The frequent use of ellipsis points was observed in 25% of analysed e-mails. For example:
1. It’s a crazy world… and your husband how is he and his leg???
2. Well, tomorrow will begin another work’s week. So… have a nice return to your work!
3. I hope my travel agent will be in a good mood…

The use of ellipsis points signaled a trailing off of thought and a shift to another topic in the first instance. In the remaining instances the sender used ellipsis points to omit the information.

Moreover, the analysis of informal e-mails demonstrated a very frequent use of question marks, exclamation marks and brackets. For example:
1. … and about your “Qualification category”? … you have done it? I hope that everything was ok!
2. It’s a crazy world… and your husband how is he and his leg???
3. Thank you for “the cooperation” ih! ih! ih!
4. I don’t know yet if it is possible to go to Germany (I fear not).
5. My health is also not so good (it is the “fourtys” problem, not a problem of “thirty’s” ih! ih! ih! ...).
The text above demonstrates a big concentration of punctuation marks in one sentence. In some cases it made the message difficult to read. The large number of question marks in the message revealed the concern of the writer about the recipient’s issues. The use of exclamation marks exhibited the writer’s emotional state and helped to create the joyful tone of the message. Brackets were normally used to explain the previous statement and add information.

To sum up the results of the analysis of punctuation in informal e-mails, it could be pointed out that the use of punctuation marks in informal e-mail letters was similar to punctuation rules of conventional informal letters in many respects. However, the overuse of such punctuation marks as ellipsis points, question marks, exclamation marks and brackets was characteristic of informal e-mails.

6.5 The Difference between Informal Conventional and E-mail Letters

The difference between informal conventional and email letter lies in the header, the body, the complimentary close, the postscript and the attachment.

As for the heading of informal e-mail letter, it is unique since it contains an e-mail address, the date and the time that could be inserted automatically and a subject line where the writer presents the name of the topic. The heading of a conventional letter consists of the sender’s address that is indented to the middle of the page. The inside address is written on the left and is followed by the date. In a conventional letter there is no subject line.

The most frequently used greeting in informal e-mail was ‘Dear’ plus an intimate name, the same greeting as in a conventional letter. However, the greetings beginning with ‘Dear’ plus word ‘friends’ and ‘all’ were quite frequent (29%) in e-mails, while the same greetings would be inappropriate in conventional informal letters. A conventional informal letter is considered confidential and can read by one person, while an informal e-mail can be read by several people or the whole family. Moreover, greetingless messages are only characteristic of e-mail letters. It is possible to write Hello again from or use the intimate name alone in e-mail letters; however, a conventional letter will always contain the word Dear or even My Dear.

Though the body of the message in both types of letters contains different elements, there is a similarity between them. The body of an e-mail contained the introduction, purpose and conclusion (the complimentary close). In case of one paragraph long e-mails, the introduction and purpose were presented in one paragraph with the conclusion written in a separate paragraph. In some of the analysed e-mail letters the introduction and purpose were written in
one paragraph with the conclusion paragraph omitted, whereas conventional letters normally have all three elements written in separate paragraphs.

The majority of e-mails (75%) ended with a pre-closing pattern: *Best wishes, Best regards, Lots of love, etc.* and the identification of the sender, while the most frequent subscription for friends and acquaintances in a conventional letter is: ‘Yours sincerely’. Moreover, a writer can end the letter with such words as ‘Yours very sincerely’, ‘Yours affectionately’ or ‘Love’. The analysis also demonstrated that postscripts are not typical of general friendship and congratulation e-mail letters. In e-mails farewells indicate that there is no further text and it is unnecessary to use a postscript, while in conventional letters a writer may normally add a postscript. However, in e-mail it is characteristic to give the sender’s particulars. Moreover, such device as the attachment icon is, without any doubt, characteristic of e-mails. This technological innovation contributes to effectiveness of written communication enabling the quick exchange of visual information.

The analysis of punctuation in informal e-mails demonstrated a distinctive use of ellipsis points, a question mark, an exclamation mark and brackets that was not characteristic of conventional informal letters.
CONCLUSIONS

The present study was an attempt to define formal and functional characteristics of e-mail letters. To achieve the best results, an e-mail letter was compared to a conventional letter. The results of data analysis demonstrated that the structure of an e-mail letter is similar to that of a conventional letter in many respects, though an e-mail letter exhibits certain distinctive features.

The analysis of formal conventional and formal e-mail letters demonstrated that:

• The similarity between formal conventional and e-mail letters lies in their structure. A conventional formal letter consists of 5 elements: the heading, the salutation, the body, the subscription and the signature, while formal e-mail consists of 3 elements: the header, the body and the attachment icon. Formal e-mail letters consist of the same elements, namely the salutation, the subscription and the signature; however, they do not function separately but belong to the body element of an e-mail letter.

• The difference between formal conventional and e-mail letters lies in the header, the greetings, the body, the complimentary close and the attachment. The heading of a formal e-mail letter contains the e-address, the date, the time and the subject, whereas the heading of formal conventional letter has only the address and the date. Contrary to conventional letters, formal e-mails can exhibit an informal tone, e.g. in greetings and farewells. The average body of a conventional formal letter consists of four paragraphs, whereas that of an e-mail varies from a single-line paragraph to seven paragraphs. As for the attachment, it is utterly characteristic of e-mail letters.

The analysis of informal conventional and informal e-mail letters demonstrated:

• The similarity between informal conventional and e-mail letter lies in their structure and greetings. A conventional informal letter consists of 6 elements: the heading, the salutation, the body, the signature and the postscript, whereas an informal e-mail consists of 3 elements: the header, the body with such elements as the greeting, the complimentary close, the postscript that is optional and the attachment icon. The most frequently used greeting in both informal conventional and e-mail letters is ‘Dear’ plus an intimate name. However, informal e-mails can be greetingless which is not typical of conventional informal letters.

• The difference between informal conventional and e-mail letters lies in the header, the body, the complimentary close, the postscript and the attachment. The header of informal conventional letter lacks the indication of time and the subject. As for the body of informal conventional letter, it normally consists of three paragraphs
(introduction, purpose and conclusion), whereas in the body of one paragraph length e-mails, which were the most frequent in the analysed data, the introduction and purpose are presented in one paragraph with the conclusion paragraph omitted. It could be concluded that informal e-mail letters tend to be shorter than conventional letters. The majority of informal e-mails end with a pre-closing pattern: *Best wishes, Best regards, Lots of love, etc.* and the identification of the sender, while the most frequent subscription for friends and acquaintances in a conventional letter is: ‘Yours sincerely’, ‘Yours very sincerely’, ‘Yours affectionately’ or ‘Love’. As for the postscripts, they are not typical of informal e-mail letters, although they are normally used in a conventional letter.

The analysis of punctuation in formal and informal e-mail letters revealed the following:

- Punctuation in formal e-mail letters was similar to punctuation of formal conventional letters. The overuse and underuse of punctuation was not typical of formal e-mail letters of request and instructions.

- The analysis of punctuation in informal e-mails demonstrated a peculiar use of a question mark, an exclamation mark and brackets. These punctuation marks were used unconventionally, normally more than once in a sentence.

Due to the fact that the scope of the present study is limited, the further analysis of the same register is recommended, as it would allow: to explore other peculiarities of the register, such as the use of shortenings or the emoticons.
SANTRAUKA

Šio darbo tikslas yra nustatyti kiek elektroninio laiško struktūra yra panaši į paprasto laiško struktūrą ir kokie yra skyrybos ženklų vartojimo ypatumai elektroniniame laiške. Remiantis darbo tikslu, buvo iškelti šie uždaviniai: 1) apžvelgti formalų ir neformalų laiškų rašymo standartus, 2) ištirti elektroninio laiško, kaip naujo registro ypatumus, 3) apžvelgti skyrybos vartoseną laiškuose, 4) išanalizuoti skyrybos ženklų vartojimo ypatybes elektroniniuose laiškuose.

Atliekant tyrimą, buvo panaudotas turinio analizės metodas. Tyrimo metu buvo išanalizuoti 30 formalų ir 40 neformalių elektroninių laiškų. Elektroninio laiško ypatumai buvo išanalizuoti kiekybiškai, iliustruojant juos pavyzdžiais.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad paprastas ir elektroninis laiškai turi panašumų, tačiau elektroninis laiškas turi ir tik jam charakteringų bruožų:


- Neformalau tradicinis ir elektroninis laiškai yra taip pat panašūs savo struktūra ir kreipiniais. Neformalas elektroninis laiškas turi visas struktūrines dalis, būdingas tradiciniam laiškui. Tiek neformalus tradicinuis, tiek elektroninis laiškas prasideda kreipiniu „Dear“. Neformalus elektroninis laiškas nuo tradicinio laiško skiriasi įžanga, pagrindinė dalimi, atsismušimais ir post scriptum naudojimu. Tradicinio laiško įžangoje nenurodomas laikas ir tema. Pagrindinę neoficialaus tradicinio laiško dalį sudaro 3 paragrafai, o elektroninių laiškų yra trumpesni, dažniausiai 1 paragrafo ilgio. Įprasta atsismušimas formuotė elektroniniame laiške yra „Best wishes/regards“, tuo tarpu tradicinis laiškas baigiasi „Yours sincerely“, „Yours very sincerely“, „Yours affectionately“ ar „Love“. Tyrimas parodė, kad post scriptum nėra būdingas elektroninių laiškų.

Taip pat tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad skyrybos ženklų vartojimas formaliai elektroniniame laiške atitinka skyrybos ženklų vartoseną tradiciniuose laiškuose, tačiau neformaliame laiške pastebėtas netradicinis klausutuko, šauktuko ir skliaustelių vartojimas.
REFERENCES


