

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

FRONTSTAGE AND BACKSTAGE BELF EMAIL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF A TURKISH-BOSNIAN COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

English has assumed the role of a global business lingua franca (BELF) at the turn of the 21st century, with an ever-increasing number of multinational corporations (MNCs) adopting English as either their official corporate language, or, the working language as a natural byproduct of a company's linguascape. This paper investigates the use of English in a business context drawing from the BELF paradigm, i.e. it sets out to compare and contrast the frontstage and backstage English in a multinational organization in written (email) communication, as an answer to a call by Kankaanranta et al. (2018), as this specific kind of study within this genre is still underrepresented and under-researched within the Global South setting.

The emails used in this study were collected from a small-sized Turkish-Bosnian international company based in B&H with a total of 10 employees. The approach adopted for the analysis of the study is discourse-analytical in its essence, supported by corpus analysis instruments. The analysis showed that the backstage English, primarily used among employees for internal communication, is indeed in most cases characterized by BELF features. Conversely, frontstage English, was shown to be aligned more closely with native English norms due to its role in corporate branding and external communication, although showing some variability as well. It is expected that the results of the study will help in understanding English communication nuances within this particular business context and help businesses foster clearer, more effective interactions across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: BELF, email communication, frontstage English, backstage English



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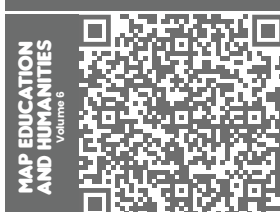
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Conceptual Background

As a result of complex geographical-historical and sociocultural considerations, towards the turn of the millennium, English has assumed the role of the global language used across different walks of life and for various purposes (Crystal, 2003). Among others, the business sector has witnessed its increasing prevalence throughout the globalization process, with an ever-increasing number of multinational corporations (MNCs) adopting English as either their official corporate language, or, the working language as a natural byproduct of a company's linguascape (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). As businesses transcended their mono nature and grew into multinational, multicultural, multilingual and multimodal organizations, or even into (translingual, transcultural and) transnational entities (e.g. Canagarajah, 2020; Räisänen, 2018), the underlying principles of language use within these peculiar workplace environments have come to the forefront of academic research. While acknowledging the interplay between different (both local and global) languages, most research still accentuates and explores the role of English as the lingua franca of the business world (e.g. Alharbi, 2016; Björge, 2007; Dedović-Atilla & Dubravac, 2022; Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010, 2013; Nickerson, 2005; Pullin, 2013; Takino, 2016, 2019, 2020; Yao & Du-Babcock, 2020).

This growing body of research, however, has sprouted from two different conceptual approaches and academic fields: one from the field of international management as a part of business communication studies, where English is seen as one of the instruments to be employed for successful organizational management (e.g., Piekkari et al. 2014); and another one from the field of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, as a part of English for business purposes paradigm, highlighting underpinning features of usage among users from different linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Ehrenreich 2010; Canagarajah, 2006; Cogo 2012, Pullin, 2010). These two strands of research seem to have gradually converged in terms of studies and pedagogical considerations, as they share the same interests and concerns (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012). One of the resulting theoretical constructs out of this pool of research is the concept of BELF, initially proposed by Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005). The notion, standing for English as a/the business lingua franca, has since been the subject of numerous studies (see the studies in the section ELF and

BELF), generating further insights and expanding the original proposition. This paper draws from this theoretical approach as well: more specifically, it sets out to compare and contrast the frontstage and backstage English in a multinational organization in written (email) communication, as an answer to the call by Kankaanranta et al (2018). This specific kind of study within this genre is still underrepresented and under-researched, particularly in this part of the Global South. Therefore, to bridge this research gap, this present study examines a pool of 125 English emails that a small-sized international Bosnian Turkish real-estate and design company located in B&H has either sent or received.

At this juncture, however, theoretical background and review of previous research in the following areas will be presented to provide a comprehensive introduction and rationale to the study subject: ELF and BELF, email communication in English, and frontstage and backstage English.

ELF and BELF

There have been varying definitions of ELF (English as a lingua franca) that can be, in simple terms, summarized to refer to 'communication in English between speakers with different first languages' (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). All other definitions underscore the same key notions, with the greatest dissenting point in the early stages being whether native English speakers should be included in the mix, with some early scholars excluding the group (e.g., House, 1999). However, today EFL interactions are understood to include both groups (Jenkins, 2006). ELF research is rather vast, and its divergent findings are beyond the scope of this paper; therefore, we will focus here on the quintessential features of ELF in business contexts, i.e. BELF, as this is the setting probed by this study.

BELF is described as a 'neutral and shared communication code' (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005, p. 404) utilized within the international business community with the main purpose of getting the job done (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010), which implies that it is owned by nobody and everybody, can not be linked to one specific community, rejecting the placement of native English speakers as measuring yardsticks for linguistic competence. Other features of BELF include the following: business-related vocabulary and the shared genre knowledge are crucial, as opposed to general vocabulary and, especially,

grammatical accuracy, as 'a grammatically and lexically "correct" message does not necessarily do the job, but a message with many "mistakes" may do so' (Kankaanranta, 2007, p. 56), thus pointing towards the relevance of the content over the form; dominance of 'let it pass' (Firth, 1996, p. 243) strategy, i.e. linguistic anomalies are ignored, as long as the meaning is clear (e.g., Pitzl, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2008); clarity, directness and simplicity are of utmost importance to get the message across (e.g., Cogo, 2016; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Pullin, 2013); backchanneling is frequently employed (e.g., Björge, 2010; Cogo, 2016); non-verbal communication strategies (e.g., Birlik & Kaur, 2020) and sociocultural competence (e.g., understanding different accents) (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011) seem to be critical in constructing a shared meaning; BELF is highly pragmatic, as hybridity, variation, flexibility, fluidity and adaptation are at its very core (Ehrenreich, 2010), and imply strategies such as simplification, code-switching/mixing and/or repetition (Choi, 2014, p. 17); rapport and trust building are pervasive, through strategies such as politeness (Nielsen, 2019), small talk (Cogo & Dewey, 2006); inclusion of local languages (e.g., Ehrenreich, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Pullin, 2010, 2013; Virkkula-Räsänen, 2010), or comic relief (e.g., Holmes, 2000, 2006; Kangasharju & Nikko, 2009); finally, accommodation and adaptation strategies (e.g., Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Nielson, 2019), as well as multicultural competence (e.g., Baker, 2009; Räsänen, 2016) also seem to be a part and parcel of BELF interactions. Overall, all these traits point to a shift in understanding English in business settings from a BELF perspective: the focus should not be placed on linguistic competence, but on the (global) communicative competence, where BELF is just one of its integral parts, together with business know-how and multicultural competence (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011); in addition, research and interpretation of communicative acts should not be conducted on isolated samples of discourse, as all communication is context-bound, and has to be analyzed as such (e.g., Nickerson, 2005).

The studies yielding these results focused on exploring several communicative genres, including: business face-to-face meetings and video conferences (e.g., Louhiala-Salminen & Charles, 2006; Nikko, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2010; Du-Babcock & Varner, 2008; Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2010), negotiations (e.g., Charles, 1996; Planken, 2005; Vuorela, 2005), as well as written

communication, which in most cases focused on email communication, as a prevalent form of business written communication in recent times. Therefore, the next section elaborates on earlier research on emails.

Email Communication: Previous Research

Email is recognized as the mainstay of business communication and is the most frequently used mode of communication in both in-house and external communication within the workplace (Guffey and Leowy, 2022). It is estimated that overall e-mail traffic, as the main mode of computer-mediated communication continues increasing 4 percent per year worldwide (The Radicati Group, 2019). Considering its undisputed popularity as a professional communication channel and its uniqueness as a channel that combines speech, writing and electronically mediated properties (e.g., Herring, 2004), numerous studies have been conducted on email communication in English.

Thus, a significant amount of research has been conducted in relation to email style, register, organizational patterns, or lexis and grammar (e.g., Dedović-Atilla & Dubravac 2022; Gains, 1999; Gimenez, 2000; Incelli, 2013; Kankaanranta, 2004; Nickerson, 2000; Rice, 1997; Roshid & al, 2018). Numerous studies investigated speech acts in emails, most frequently requests (e.g., Hofweber & Jaworska, 2022; Pan, 2012; Zhu, 2017). Some research, however, focused more on the interpersonal aspects of email communication, such as politeness, power balance, professional voices, or culture (e.g., Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996, Jensen, 2009; Lindgren, 2014; Millot, 2017, Richard & McFadden, 2016). This study will focus on exploring a few underlying features of BELF emails, including lexicogrammatical features, and email style and structure, within the context of frontstage and backstage email communication as proposed by Kankaanranta et al (2018). The concept is presented in the section below.

Frontstage and backstage English within "English as a Corporate Language" paradigm

In their proposition of the frontstage and backstage English dichotomy comprising an MNO's corporate language, Kankaanranta et al (2018) rely on Goffmanian (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of human social encounters with the language being at the core of interactions. The authors develop two

representations of English as corporate language. The frontstage English is seen as the official language and is characterized by the following: it represents the voice of the company; standard English as a native language (ENL) is a given; it is instrumental for corporate image and implies top-down approach (determined by the native speaker norm and the corporate management); it is typically used in one-way external communication. Conversely, the backstage English is seen as the working language and involves the following: it is used among individual MNC employees and is normally seen in two-way internal communication where the meaning can be negotiated; it emerges from bottom-up communication and is highly context-bound and it reflects linguistic, cultural and professional backgrounds of its users. Thus, the authors suggest that the frontstage English is ENL English, which is usually seen in public genres directed to an outside audience, such as corporate websites, news, and official releases (e.g., social media content), while backstage English is essentially BELF (seen in regular email in-house exchange). As no research has been done to test this proposition so far in the Global South context, this study would like to contribute to this conceptual paradigm exploration and investigate the email genre only, by focusing on two types of emails: the official ones sent out to the outside public by the company or received as the official letters by others (e.g., email marketing emails and announcements) and the unofficial ones used among the company employees.

Research Methodology

The emails used in this study were collected from a small-sized construction and real estate international company based in B&H with a total of 10 employees. The data covered a filtered selection of a total of 125 emails written in English in the period from 2021 to 2022 that were provided to us by the company's top management. Due to the sensitive nature of ongoing business operations and the issue of confidentiality, the company was not willing to provide emails dated after 2022. Out of this pool, 38 emails were the official one-way emails sent to/received from the outside, while the remaining 87 involved in-house communication (54) and external communication with outside partners (33). The participants involved in the email interaction were two upper management Turkish employees, one middle-management Turkish employee, five Bosnian employees, one entry-level Paraguayan employee, and one Cypriot.

Research questions

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristic lexicogrammatical and stylistic features of backstage BELF email communication?
2. What are the characteristic lexicogrammatical and stylistic features of frontstage BELF email communication?

The approach adopted for the analysis of the study is discourse-analytical, supported by corpus analysis instruments. Thus, the study uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques with the purpose of strengthening the data reliability and enhancing the accuracy of the interpretation. At this juncture, it is important to note that due to confidentiality concerns, all personal names were replaced by pseudonyms, while the names of the company/projects/products etc. were replaced by XXX. However, all linguistic uses, such as grammatical and typographical errors, were retained in their original form, as being critical to the analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

As noted earlier, in the following sections, we will focus on cross-examining possible similarities and differences between frontstage and backstage English measured against several features of BELF, as corroborated by the previous pool of research in order to answer the research questions.

RQ1: Features of Backstage BELF Email Communication

In terms of lexicogrammatical features, earlier research on BELF highlighted a relative insignificance of grammatical accuracy, as long as it does not interfere with overall communication and business goal (e.g., Dedović-Atilla & Dubravac 2022; Kankaanranta, 2007). Investigation of the email corpus in our study at the backstage level seems to confirm this, as different linguistic deviations were found, such as: a missing linking verb or incorrect tense use (see examples 1a, 1b, 1c); wrong or missing prepositions (see examples 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d); misplaced demonstrative pronoun use or omitted objective case personal pronouns (see examples 3a, 3b, 3c); modifier and noun singular/plural incongruence (see examples 4a, 4b) ill-formed degrees of adjective use (see examples 5a,

5b); misplaced or missing articles (see examples 6a, 6b); a generic use of a vocabulary item for all parts of speech with the focus on meaning, and not on lexical category (see examples 7a).

1a. My WhatsApp number XXXXXXXX ; 1b. The link is not opening; 1c. I have to sent letters to the Ministry;

2a. We are waiting your final price; depending of; 2b. It was a pleasure to meet you at last weeks fair; 2c. We present it to your information; 2d. If you agree these terms;

3a. this informations; 3b. We sent you yesterday; 3c. to send us that the detailed documentation what we mentioned above;

4a. boxes design and sizes, 4b. the following document;

5a. send me your number so we can communicate fast; 5b. this is best product;

6a. we provide the range of glues; 6b. make short explanation;

7a. In continue I send you the terms we can offer;

Besides grammar, non-compliance with other parts of writing mechanics was noticed as well. Thus, some spelling mistakes were detected (see examples 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e), as well as wrong capitalization (see examples 9a, 9b, 9c). A number of punctuation errors at a sentence level were spotted as well, thus creating sentence fragments (see example 10a); run-on-sentences (see example 11a) and split comma cases (see example 12a). Other punctuation anomalies included a missing terminating punctuation point (see example 13a) or a redundant punctuation point (see example 14a); missing pausing points, mostly when addressing someone, or with sentence interrupting or introductory elements (see examples 15a, 15b) or misplaced points (see example 16a).

8a. available; 8b. interested; 8c. then (instead of than); 8d. grophics; 8e. nacional;

9a. Dear mr. Smith; 9b. catalog in English; 9c. In addition, Please share the list, I sent You;

10a. Specify your minimum order quantities. and send your price list;

11a. And as we talked we are waiting your final price for us;

12a. I am looking forward to your feedback, best regards;

13a. can you please send me pfd file, we are waiting;

14a. Thank you!!!; I can send it;

15a. Also we are waiting; 15b. Jospeh please send;

16a. list the following.

Finally, when it comes to lexis, some awkward unnatural collocations and sentence structures were used (see examples 17a, 17b, 17c).

17a. we will be more happy to send you design with offer; 17b. As we agreed In line with the future information; 17c. when I paid the account.

Regarding all of the listed inaccuracies, several interesting points need to be made at this juncture. Firstly, the corpus analysis has shown a varying frequency of different kinds of errors. Thus, for example, some types of errors were surprisingly comparatively rare, especially the ones related to grammar, such as: wrong verb use (17), singular/plural incongruence (18), or adjective use (24), while others were much more frequent: punctuation errors were extensive (133), as well as rare or not commonly used collocations and phrases (89). When it comes to the former, it is rather surprising that some of the tendencies noticed in some earlier studies that included email analysis as well (e.g., Dedović-Atilla & Dubravac 2022), seemed not to apply here. As an illustration, no generic present verb was noticed to be used for all verb tenses; moreover, present perfect was used significantly as well, as opposed to the prevalent past simple tense use that was noticed in the previous research. These data seem to point toward a gradual shift in email communication even within in-house communication: it seems that many employees whose language proficiency is not high, based on the overall language assessment of their written production, might be employing different electronic tools such as grammar-spell check apps or translation tools that provide grammatically correct content, but fail to always create the best combination of native-like natural-sounding lexical structures. In addition, punctuation mistakes seem

to be rather high, indicating that interlocutors seem to be less focused on their importance. Although this seems to reflect a gradual and logical change in the way users seem to increasingly employ different, rather fast and user-friendly tools to improve their writing skills, there are still many instances where they clearly do not. This was noticed especially in the short one or two-line emails that seem to confirm, answer or request something (which would be difficult to misinterpret). Here is an illustration: (see examples 18a, 18b).

18a. *Ok. Tell me when you give. 18b. We are also waiting your answer.*

Secondly, in agreement with some previous research (e.g., Kantabutra, 2018; Rogerson-Revell, 2010), no repair strategies, i.e. instances of correcting or pointing towards a mistake were a common thing, but rather Firth's (1996) 'let it pass' strategy was employed, which was also expected considering the examined written mode of communication with no real-time interaction. There were cases, however, when additional clarification was required through repetitive inquiries, but these were always regarding the content that was either incomplete or unclear, and not regarding the language itself. Thus, the significance of the accuracy of content over the accuracy of grammar seems to be corroborated once again in BELF settings (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010), as seen in the examples (see examples 19a, 19b, 19c).

19a. *One, you mentioned a "door lettering" and we don't know what this is. Is the door going to have some sort of a design that we should work on?*

19b. *Dear Mr. Andreas,*

Thank you for your detailed answers and information. However, we could not see the detailed design information we requested from you in your e-mail. Please share them with us so that the detailed dimensions are clear.

19c. *Our demands regarding the design were as follows;*

- *All of the products included in the promotional brochure; box design documents (with clear dimensions to be specified)*

- *Dimensions of Product X (done)*

The same email was followed by another one a few days later (see example 20a).

20a. *Dear Mr. Andreas,*

Are there any developments regarding the information we expect from you?

Finally, in terms of the nature of all types of errors made, it seems that, quite naturally, many of them result from the L1 negative transfer (Scott, 1966). Thus, for example, capitalizing the initial letter in the pronouns such as You/Your by a Bosnian interlocutor seems to be a negative transfer from the Bosnian Language where second singular pronoun is capitalized when addressing somebody with respect; using a semi-colon instead of the colon before a list was noticed to be a recurring pattern used by a Turkish correspondent – a grammatical feature of the Turkish language; omitting or using wrong prepositions reflecting the L1 structure seem to be present among different speakers (i.e. discuss about – used by a Bosnian interlocutor; we will go there together with Rua, to mean: Rua and I will go there together – used by a Turkish professional); finally, articles seem to be a problematic point with speakers of lower competence who do not have the same concept in their L1, thus making it difficult to use it appropriately (e.g., Bosnian).

In terms of the emails' style and tone, it is important to reflect on the email structure first, as it directly reflects the tone of the message. Drawing from Zhu's (2012) adaptation of Blu-Kulka's (1989) conceptualization of email parts, consisting of openings, closings, supporters and speech acts, we can conclude that backstage emails were really diverse: ranging from containing some form of all the elements (79), the ones without the closing (19), and the ones without the supporters and closings (21), to the ones that contained only head acts (6). The openings themselves were eclectic as well, and included forms such as: (see examples 21a, 21b, 21c, 21d, 21e, 21f, 21g, 21h, 21i, 21j, 21k). Closings ranged from: (see examples 22a, 22b, 22c, 22d, 22e, 22f, 22g).

21a. *Dear Mr. Smith; 21b. Dear John; 21c. Hi John; 21d. Hey there; 21e. John; 21f. Warm regards; 21g. Dear; 21h. Hello Miss. Jane; 21i. Good morning/afternoon; 21j. Merhaba (a salutation in Turkish used with a full-time non-Turkish Bosnian employee); 21k. Respected Mr. Smith;*

22a. *Greetings*; 22b. *(Best/Kind) regards*; 22c. *Thank you*; 22d. *Sincerely*; 22e. *İyi calismalar*; 22f. *Lijep pozdrav / Saygılarımla / Best regards* 22g. *Ciaoo*.

What seems conspicuous with the expressions above is that some of these are ENL greeting conventions, while others are less so. Thus, the expression (see example 23a) was used by a Bosnian, which is a direct translation of the introductory greeting normally used in the Bosnian language (see example 24a), while it is considered to be antiquated in English among NSs, but is still used among certain groups (e.g., in parts of Asia). (See example 25a) is also unusual in the opening and was used by an Indian. An opening and closing in their first LI was used by a Turkish speaker in correspondence with a Bosnian, while a multilingual closing (in Turkish, Bosnian, and English) was used by the same Bosnian in the correspondence with the mentioned Turk.

23a. *Respected*

24a. *Poštovani*

25a. *Warm regards*

All these expressions seem to confirm that there is a high level of hybridity in terms of style in the backstage English, and that the inclusion of another language is accepted, especially in openings and closings, reflecting a person's national and cultural background and identity.

RQ2: Features of Frontstage BELF Email Communication

When it comes to the frontstage language and lexicogrammatical features, several trends can be deduced based on the examined corpora. First, frontstage emails surprisingly varied in their accuracy, but overall were considerably more accurate and professional than backstage emails. Thus, out of 38 emails that were sent as announcements, promotional emails offering their services for the first time, or as introduction emails, 23 were adequately proofread and conformed to the ENL immaculate standards and included both native speakers (UK and US), but also non-native speakers (UAE, Poland, Germany, Paraguay). Conversely, a substantial number of emails (11) seemed to attempt to adhere to formality, professionalism and important lexicogrammatical features of NL standards, but still contained grammatical mistakes as the following: a missing comma in a conditional

sentence (7) – (see example 26a); a split comma (13) – (see example 27a); preposition errors (12) – (see examples 28a, 28b), pronoun misplacement (6) – (see example 29a), and other stylistically awkward structures (14), (see examples 30a, 30b, 30c). It is also interesting to note that some of these mistakes were contained in official company catalogues attached to emails (see examples 31a, 31b). Individuals in this group came from Turkey, Cyprus, Poland, Bulgaria, Germany, India, and Italy. Finally, the remaining frontstage emails (4) mirrored the BELF email features, containing both grammatical, lexical, and stylistic anomalies (see examples 32a, 32b) and included interlocutors from Turkey, Spain, and Bulgaria.

26a. *If you have any questions about price and distribution please feel free to contact me*

27a. *Thanks for stopping by our booth at X, it was nice to meet you*

28a. *soon as you advise detailed information what you need*; 28b. *once you informed details,*

29a. *We will pick up you*

30a. *We have certainly a good interest to cooperate with you*; 30b. *Please consider us at your availability*; 30c. *discuss anything further in case of interest*

31a. *graduated of*; 31b. *We focus at our corporate ideals*

32a. *I see Your company staff soon*; 32b. *Look forward meeting you, I send you now*

It is also important to notice at this juncture that it was noticed that the same person (as was in the case of the top Turkish manager) can switch between BELF in-house communication to an ENL communication standards in their outward communications, pointing towards the importance of accommodation and adaptability, which is often emphasized as an inherent feature of BELF interactions.

In terms of email structure, 33 emails contained some form of all the elements, 4 were without the closing, and 1 was without the supporters and closings, with no emails containing only head acts. All of the emails contained openings and closings in at least English, while some (7) also had additional greetings/closings in the native

language of the company the email originates from (see examples 33a, 33b, 33c).

33a. *Merhaba*; 33b. *Hola*; 33c. *Selam aleykum*.

It should be noted here that the attitude towards the importance of adhering to ENL standards seems not to be endemic to countries, but rather individual companies and their perception of the role of English proficiency in the company image and success, as different companies from the same country varied in their stance and practice on this.

Conclusion

Through a detailed analysis of a sample of business emails, the proposition of frontstage and backstage Englishes occupying different roles within companies seems to be corroborated.

The analysis showed that the backstage English, primarily used among employees for internal communication, is indeed characterized by flexibility, adaptability and efficiency rather than strict grammatical correctness. Moreover, the flow in email correspondence seems to indicate that while errors in grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation are common, they do not interfere with understanding. (The only instances of clarification requests were related to misunderstanding of content, critical for business operations.) Instead, communication is shaped by shared business knowledge and pragmatic competence, where getting the message across is more important than adhering to native English norms. Additionally, the study further shows that in these kinds of multilingual international BELF settings, the influence of cultural and professional backgrounds on email conventions, such as greetings and closings is also present, showing that multicultural backgrounds, partial code-switching and inclusion of local languages seems to be a standard BELF feature in email communication as well. Additionally, code-switching between BELF and ENL standards confirmed the significance and presence of accommodation strategies, further solidifying the context-bound and highly situation-specific use of English in BELF settings. Furthermore, the study suggests that even the structure of emails as is often lax, as not all emails adhered strictly to including all the formal email elements. This seems to be aligned with earlier research that highlights patterns of hybrid and flexible language use and genres, as well as localized adaptations.

Conversely, frontstage English, according to Kankaanranta's proposition, is expected to align more closely with native English norms due to its role in corporate branding and external communication. Our research shows that in the majority of cases this seems to be the case and that there are much higher standards for this kind of linguistic English output. However, variability still exists, as some emails were shown to maintain a high level of linguistic, stylistic, and structural accuracy, while signs of non-standard grammar and style crept into others. This suggests that while some multinational companies prioritize polished and fully proofread English in their public image, others still adopt a more relaxed BELF-oriented approach even in outward-facing communication.

Finally, the study also shows that, unlike in some of the earlier research, there seems to be an increasing reliance on digital tools like spell-check and translation software, which can improve grammatical accuracy but sometimes result in unnatural phrasing.

By investigating frontstage and backstage English in corporate email communication within a specific Global South context, this study aimed to provide more insight into understanding nuances of international business communication related to English language use. However, future more in-depth research is required to account for differences in frontstage settings between the companies and to answer the question of whether this is rather a highly individualistic decision depending on the company's management sensitivity to language issues and public image, or it might have something to do with the domains these companies operate in, considering that the examined company and its partner companies they communicated with are involved in construction, design, and real estate. Perhaps a broader range of companies might be examined to see if there might be differences in terms of the companies' fields of work. Additionally, future research could further explore the role of AI tools in shaping business communication and how BELF strategies evolve in response to gigantic shifting workplace trends, as the sample of the emails that were used in this research was written between 2021 and 2022. In this regard, it would be interesting to see how the AI tools transformed email communication in the last couple of years, and whether BELF written email communication now adheres more closely to ENL communication standards in all communication contexts.

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