Trends and Features of Russian Business Email: 
Contrastive Analysis Based on Materials from Business 
Communication Textbooks

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Abstract

Until recently, business email was viewed as a particular use case of common written business correspondence. However, during recent decades, email has received recognition as a new and separate genre of business communication with its own discourse. The evolution of business email in Russia has, as yet, attracted little attention from researchers, although there is sufficient evidence of significant changes. The composition of email, which was regarded historically as a simplified business letter transferred by the Internet, has grown into a field of communication. The style and language of modern email can be considered inappropriate in business letters. The main goal of this research is to examine the current features and recent trends in business email writing in Russia and describe deterents and factors influencing the further development of modern Russian business etiquette. This article will focus both on the content and linguistic features of business email and will discuss recent advances in email writing. Issues such as the “formal vs. informal” approach and “orality vs. literacy” will be reviewed based on an analysis of modern Russian business communication textbooks. This research should be of interest for academics in the field of Russian studies as well as business people involved in business transactions with Russia.

1. Introduction

Communication is commonly understood as an exchange of facts, ideas, opinions, or emotions by two or more persons. In this meaning, business communication can be defined as “the sharing of information between people within an organization that is performed for the commercial benefit of the organization.”
Business communication can also refer to how a company shares information with stakeholders. Therefore, business communication encompasses a variety of topics, including: consumer behavior, advertising, public relations, corporate communication, research and measurement, reputation management, and event management. Research in the business communication domain can utilize linguistic approaches and methods; however, the scope of business communication as a field of study also includes economics, business administration, communication studies, and also practitioners’ voices. From this perspective, the current study attempts to approach email not just as a lexical phenomenon, but as an act of communication. While email as a means of communication can be utilized in different settings, this study is particularly focused on the usage of email in the business domain.

Russia has an extensive history of business communication, which can be traced by the use of standards and cliché in business writings (Kiselev, 2020). During the 20th century, Russia experienced two paradigm shifts in business, which resulted in a dramatic change in attitude toward business. Such paradigm shifts are reflected in communication. Russia’s October Revolution of 1917, together with other economic and social changes, brought a new model of communication in business that drastically changed the linguistic landscape from greetings and salutation formulas to a model business letter structure. During the later period of the USSR, business communication was dominated by standardization in line with the needs of the planned economic system. GOSTs (Государственный Standard, lit. “National standard”), which appeared in the late periods of the USSR, are still in force and frequently updated. The standardization of business documents is one of the basic elements of business administration in Russia. Therefore, it should not be surprising that a recent edition of the GOST standards (e.g., GOST R ISO/MEK 17799-2005) also includes regulations for email communication. According to GOST, email “is used to exchange business information, replacing traditional forms of communication such as telex and mail. Email differs from traditional forms of business communication in speed, message structure, certain simplicity, as well as vulnerability to unauthorized actions” (GOST R ISO/MEK 17799-2005). From GOST’s perspective, email is not a type of document but a method of delivery. Therefore, documents received by email should be processed by organizations according to the same principles as documents received through other channels.
After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian business communication experienced changes in language and style, particularly in regard to ideologically affected salutations and minor changes in wording. Yet, the rest of written business communication remained rather formal and bureaucratic. Russian researchers (Курьянович, 2008) use term *epistolary style* to describe the language of written communication. However, during the last two decades, as a result of advances in information technology and the spread of new business communication media such as email, the difference between written formal language and speech has begun to diminish.

A proper literature review will be given in the following section, yet it is important to point out theoretical premises of the present study. The place of email in business communication is an actively discussed theoretical question in modern literature. Most studies on email communication fall into a field of applied linguistics and, in particular, stylistics (Mackevic and Mamin, 2010; Koester, 2010; Ong, 2012; Карабань, 2005; Курьянович, 2008; Кронгауз, 2012; Кожеко, 2015). However, a growing number of corpus-based studies are also observed (Peterson, Hohensee, and Mia, 2011; Стеблецова, 2010; Евтушенко, 2020). Apart from these areas, business email is studied by marketing researchers (Molenaar, 2013) and in business communication studies (Kiddie, 2014; Beer, 2018). At first, researchers viewed email communication as a complementary method for the speedy exchange of information, which otherwise would be sent by mail. While email was frequently regarded as simply a use case of written communication done by means of computer technology instead of paper, modern research tends to be more inclusive about whether email communication should be considered a genre in its own right (Beer, 2018).

Since email as a means of communication in business continues to attract the attention of researchers across the globe, the evolution of email communication should be further investigated to evaluate changes and define tendencies of this new genre. While there are some studies in English on this topic of business communication, there is a research gap on business communication using email in Russia. Therefore, it is important to verify whether recent advances in email communication are just a limited linguistic phenomenon, when existing norms and traditions are overruled by speakers, or whether it is possible to say that business email has evolved as a new step in Russian business culture, not based on Soviet-era *clichés*, but rather on new values.
In particular, the present study addresses the following questions:

(1) how does research in Russia deal with theoretical aspects of email communication; and

(2) what are the tendencies and patterns of email communication in business?

The current study attempts to answer these questions by analyzing the norms and rules of email communication in modern business textbooks. Several business communication textbooks published between 2000 and 2020, which contain norms and rules regarding the use of emails in business, were chosen as the primary sources of information for this analysis.

This article has the following structure: after this introduction, the literature review will be given, with a focus on theoretical aspects of the development of email communication and how it is regarded in literature in Russia and abroad. Then a contrastive analysis of changes in email communication is given, with the focus on how various elements of email and their usage evolved over time. In the final sections, advances in style will be highlighted and conclusions will be drawn with practical implications for email business communication in Russia.

2. Business email as an object of study

Electronic mail (or email) appeared as a new medium of communication in the 1960s, but its mass implementation started with the widespread use of personal computers and the Internet. However, as Beer (2018) argued, “even though email has become part and parcel of communication on all levels, any consensus on whether it constitutes a genre in its own right remains surprisingly elusive” (p. 157). It is generally accepted that email is a variety of asynchronous communication to help people communicate quickly and cheaply (Yus, 2011); however, there is an ongoing discussion in literature whether email is a genre, a medium, or a hybrid form of communication. This difficulty is attributed to the fact that, while email can communicate most of the same topics as a traditional written message, it is growing increasingly different from traditional mail in various linguistic (in particular, syntax and pragmatics) and nonverbal aspects (through the use of text formatting, explicit punctuation, and emoticons). Recent studies tend to indicate that email itself should most likely not be considered a separate genre, but we should actually “speak of genres of email” (Koestler, 2010, p. 36).
First, a “genre” here is understood as a socially agreed upon and recognized form of communication developed over time by a group of people to communicate more effectively and efficiently. There are different genres of communication, including speech genres and genres of writing. A phone call would be an example of a speech genre. A typical phone conversation consists of generic beginning, mode of development, and ending. From this perspective, an email message would be an example of a genre of writing. In business, written communication can include several different formats, such as email messages, reports, memos, resumes, letters, proposals, advertisements, and contracts.

Individuals usually do not create new genres of writing. Instead, after becoming a member of a certain group or organization, they learn the habits and rules that their group has developed. Therefore, these norms precede and survive any individual’s participation in the group. In the business domain, knowing the recognizable genres of writing used by members of a profession becomes a sign of membership in that workplace. Business communication as a field of education also includes business writing, which aims to teach students the genres of business writing that will enable them to become members of an organization.

Literature on email communication in Russia can be generally divided into two categories: research articles (primarily in the field of linguistics), which focus on pragmatic and stylistic aspects of emails (Макаров, 2005; Евтушенко, 2020); and various textbooks on business correspondence, including those specifically focused on email communication (Ильяхов, Сарычева, 2018; Воротынцева, 2012). Research on email communication in Russia began in the late 1990s; eventually, the first studies that discuss email communication in business domain appear in the early 2000s (Карабань, 2005; Макаров, 2005). Literature on business correspondence in Russia in the early 2000s viewed email messages as media of electronic communication, typically grouping emails together with telegrams and faxes (Чуковенков, Янкова, 2004; Галахов, Корнеев, 2006). While most textbooks on business communication have mentioned email communication since the early period of the 2000s, they would generally cite and introduce foreign rules borrowed from English guides (Кирсанова, Анодина, Аксенов, 2006). Starting around 2010, literature also became more detailed on the norms and rules of email communication, not only focusing on general guidelines and principles, but introducing actual linguistic strategies on how to use email communication effectively. Therefore, it is possible to divide text-
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books on business email communication into two periods — the earlier (from the 2000s to 2010) and later (from the 2010s) periods. Such a division might be considered nominal, but it should fit the purpose of a contrastive analysis of features and trends in modern communication.

When it comes to the question of whether email should be considered a separate genre of business writing, Russian research appears to follow foreign research trends. After comparing a corpus of actual business emails in Russian and English, earlier studies, e.g., Стеблецова (2010), concluded that Russian email communication in business, while showing some specific characteristics (interactivity, laconic expressions, informalities, neglect of spelling and punctuation), does not yet reveal features of a genre of communication. A more recent study (Евтушенко, 2020) applied methods of semantic and pragmatic interpretation to linguistic material and argued for the acceptance of email as a different kind of communication, rather than as a sub-genre of traditional written mail. Евтушенко (2020) also noticed that email communication in organizations tends to incorporate elements of written and spoken language as well as nonverbal aspects of communication. In her comparative analysis of emails with traditional writing in structural, substantive, and linguistic parameters, Ivanova (2020) also called email “some new textual form genetically related to the epistolary genre” (p. 156). Therefore, it is possible to argue that Russian research on email communication in business is drifting in the same direction as foreign studies, when considering that email not only is a technical media for existing written communication genres but also reveals features of a different specific genre of communication.

There has been an increase in literature (particularly business communication textbooks) that not only mentions email communication (Чуковенков, Янкова, 2004; Кирсанова, Андина, Аксенов, 2006) but is specifically dedicated to various aspects of writing emails (Ильяхов, Сарычева, 2018; Воротынцева, 2012). Textbooks on business communication function both as reference books for students and managers and as facilitators of the norms and practices that they describe. These types of textbooks are used in the following analysis as a source of norms and rules on email communication in the business domain. Another aspect of textbooks should be considered when teaching business writing to a non-native speaker. In the past two decades in Japan, at least three textbooks were published that cover the writing of emails in the Russian
language in a business setting (Sato, 2007; Abe and Kase, 2007; Omori, 2016). Among the literature reviewed, Omori (2016) was the only textbook on Russian business language after the 2010s that did not make stylistic distinction between mail and email in terms of language usage. The remaining two books, having been published in an earlier period, mirror their Russian analogues in principle.

### 3. Format of an email message

Before approaching the compositional structure of a business email, it is also important to review the format of an email message. The format of email is universal; therefore, it is unlikely to reveal features unique to Russia. In principle, rules of email formatting in Russia were greatly influenced (or even borrowed) from English sources. However, it is still important to discuss the tendencies of email format in the context of usage in the business domain. The term *format* here refers to the visual design of a document. For example, the visual design of a traditional business letter — with the address of the sender, the address of the receiver, the date, salutation, message, and closing — arranged conventionally on the page, is typically called the format of a business letter. The format of a traditional business letter can be reproduced easily as a template in software, yet it is of little or no value to a business person in creating the document’s content. In email communication, the format of the email message is partly affected by the service or software used. The subject line, “from” and “to” fields have a predefined design and arrangement, while body text can be adjusted easily in terms of visual design and structure.

Due to the advance of information technology during the past several decades, the hardware and software used for email communication are very different today from the tools available in the early period of email communication. Yet, from a business person’s perspective, the key elements of an email message remain the same. Regardless of a particular program or service used to create an email message, it would typically consist of “from,” “to,” “CC,” and “BCC” fields, “subject” line, body content, and a field for attachments, accompanied by a set of dedicated technical terms, which are left out of the scope of this study. This section reviews how these key elements of an email message are described in Russian business communication textbooks.
(1) “Subject” line

The subject line is one of the most important elements of an email because it creates the context of the communication and affects the perception of the email. Failing to provide a proper subject line to the message can imply a negative attitude toward the author of the message and constrain further communication. While textbooks of both earlier and later periods underline the importance of the subject line in email, the literature is especially attentive to two aspects: the dynamic nature of the subject (e.g., the subject of the email should evolve together with the conversation); and the length of the subject line (it should be short but informative). Surprisingly, the only difference between modern and older textbooks in regard to the email subject is a trend in newer textbooks to constantly remind readers that the subject line should not be left empty.

Examples of subject lines from textbooks do not reveal any particular change in the linguistic style of the subject line (Table 1); however, the short but informative nature of the wording is noticeable. While traditional written communication in Russia and the USSR almost always required a cliché in the subject field of a business letter (Kiselev, 2020), email communication does not show a similar tendency.

| Item                                      | Translation                          | Source |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|
| Приглашение на семинар по делопроизводству | Invitation to a seminar on office work | *      |
| Оформление сертификатов                  | Registration of certificates         | *      |
| По поводу рекламы                         | About advertising                    | *      |
| Касательно договора                       | Regarding the contract               | *      |
| Коммерческое предложение                 | Commercial offer                     | *      |
| Обучение в Испании                        | Study in Spain                       | **     |
| Прислать контакты новых сотрудников       | Send contacts of new employees       | ***    |
Sources: (here and later)

* Чуковенков, Яковая (2004);
** Кирсанова, Анодина, Аксенов (2006);
*** Воротынцева (2012);
**** Ильяхов, Сарычева (2018);

(2) “From” field

Russian business communication textbooks in the 2000s left the “from” field without proper attention, apparently because of clearness and the simplicity of its role. However, modern literature constantly reminds readers that the “from” field, as the sender’s email address, is also a part of the communication process, even though it might not be so obvious at first sight. For example, using a private email address in corporate communication or using nicknames, adjectives, numbers, or other unrelated characters as a sender’s email address is not advised. This norm reveals a modern trend in the wider perception of email communication, when the email address itself can contain an unintentional message to a recipient (i.e., emails sent from personal accounts or accounts with misleading names can confuse the reader or might even affect the attitude and credibility of such a sender). Such a situation would not be possible in traditional mail communication, because the sender’s address is linked with the actual address of the communicator. Therefore, it is possible to consider this aspect to be unique to email communication. The usage of patronymic (or middle name), which is a characteristic of Russian written business communication, is uncommon in “from” or “to” fields. This, in turn, might create the basis for more unformal communication between recipients.

(3) “To,” “CC,” and “BCC” fields

According to the literature and textbooks, there is a trend toward unification in the usage of “to,” “CC,” and “BCC” fields in modern business communica-
tion in all countries. Typically, the difference between these elements is that the “to” field is designated for a person (or people), who is expected to reply to the initial message, while “CC” and “BCC” are utilized when more actors should be informed but should not necessarily take part in the conversation. Earlier Russian textbooks mentioned the role of “CC” and “BCC” fields but typically would not provide specific instructions regarding their usage. Some textbooks (i.e., Чуковенков, Янковая, 2004) would rather cite foreign guides on email communication, again without further analysis. Recent textbooks, apart from discussing the basics of the usage, also cover communication strategies in more complicated cases, such as the participation of new actors (e.g., how to introduce a third person to an existing conversation) or separating different issues between participants in the same email conversation.

(4) Email body

While the composition and a detailed analysis of email body content will be given in the following sections, it is possible to discuss the email body from the perspective of email format. One of the biggest differences between traditional mail and email is the formatting of the text. While traditional mail has a commonly accepted format based on GOST, including block style font, paper margins, and font size, the look of email messages might vary greatly, depending on the size of the monitor or the screen on which the recipient reads the communication and the software or application used. The application of various formatting styles in the email body is technically possible; however, textbooks and business communication style guides recommend avoiding graphics and unusual fonts in non-marketing business email. In earlier periods, an email message was expected to be formatted similarly to written mail (Чуковенков, Янковая, 2004); however, this norm is no longer appearing in modern textbook. The sparing use of bold text and italics is currently accepted and advised as a means of nonverbal communication in emails.

(5) Attachments

An email attachment is a file that is sent together with the email message and is supposed to be regarded as an essential part of the email message. Tradi-
tionally, textbooks — regardless of the period — cover the main features of the attachments section: acceptable file size, file type, and security measures. As was mentioned in the “from” section, the attachment name should also be considered to be a part of communication, and inappropriate file names should be avoided. Among common aspects of attachment use in email communication is the norm of mentioning the attachment in the email body, explicitly providing the recipient with the context (Воротынцева, 2012). Another feature of email that is different from traditional mail is the usage of Internet links inside the email body. While links are not strictly attachments, they are commonly used for the same purpose. Recent textbooks discuss the effective use of links inside email, including formatting and text (Ильяхов, Сарычева, 2018). The use of links inside email messages makes it easier not only to share files but to provide more detailed information without overloading the email content with excessive details.

4. The structure and content of business email

The term structure typically refers to the set of topics that readers of a particular genre of writing expect to find in a document. For example, an outline or a table of contents for a book represents the structure of the book. Structure helps writers create the content part of documents but is less useful as a template for arranging information on a page. A document’s structure is sometimes called superstructure not only to describe the set of topics typically included in a specific genre (an inquiry or claim, for example), but also to provide a logical order for arranging those topics inside the document.

One important thing for business people to remember is the distinction between the format and the structure of a particular genre of communication. The set of topics commonly included as a content part in one kind of document may be visually arranged according to the norms and rules of another kind of document. In other words, the recognizable superstructure of a business plan can be represented in several different formats — as an internal memorandum, a presentation, or an email, for example. A business person has to make decision about the structure and format of the document according to the purpose for writing and the needs and expectations of the reader.

Therefore, the structure of each particular email would vary greatly depending on the specific genre and content of the communication; however, any
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typical email would probably follow the traditional superstructure of a mailed letter, e.g., having a greeting and salutation part, followed by the body of the email, and concluding with another greeting or etiquette closure phrase. This section discusses each of these common compositional elements of the email message in further detail.

(1) Greetings and salutations

Greetings and salutations are probably the most noticeable elements of written communication, because the change of language and style here is the most pronounced. In common business letters, the tradition of an etiquette greeting has a centuries-long history. In business communication in Russia, the form of addressing business partners has changed three times during the past century. First, after the October Revolution of 1917, the common greeting Sudar (lit. “sir”) was quickly replaced by Tovarish (lit. “comrade”), and then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was instantly transformed into Uvazhaemiy (lit. “respected”). All of the earliest textbooks on business communication in Russia utilized traditional greetings and salutations in email borrowed from formal business letters (*Table 2*). It was particularly underscored that the use of informal everyday greetings like “Hello” should be avoided, and the salutation formula of email was supposed to replicate those used in traditional business letters (Чуковенков, Янковая, 2004).

| Text                          | Translation              | Source |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| Уважаемые дамы и господа!      | Ladies and gentlemen!    | *      |
| Уважаемые господа!            | Dear Sirs!               | *      |
| Уважаемая Людмила Юльевна!     | Dear Lyudmila Yulievna!  | *      |

However, the deterioration of formal greeting began immediately. As early as 2005, Карабань noticed that “in email business communication there are noticeable attempts to replace cold formal greetings with warmer and more vivid expressions” (p. 76). It took almost a decade, but eventually this trend was codified in newer textbooks (*Table 3*).
Some researchers have argued that the language of business communication of modern Russia should not resemble the language of the Politburo (Ильяхов, Сарычева, 2018) but should rather fulfill the goals of business communication: to allow both parties to feel respected and engaged in their work and to provide a tool for the sender and reader to work together. This approach is supported by modern textbooks, which provide many variants of appropriate greetings. As shown in Table 3, acceptable greetings vary from the very informal first name in diminutive form (Anya instead of Anna, Masha instead of Maria), followed by spoken greetings (“Здравствуйте,” “Добрый день,” or without salutation at all), to “Dear colleagues” — a phrase similar to the greeting of a formal business letter. Although modern textbooks do not directly prohibit the use of formal greetings, it is nearly impossible to find an example where such a greeting would be used.

(2) Email introduction

An introduction is part of an email composition, which comes after the greeting and salutation, in which the sender typically discloses his or her intentions and the purpose of the email. In textbooks of the earlier period, the role of the introduction section is omitted, since the general rules of formal business letters were to be applied (Чуковенков, Янковая, 2004). While showing gratitude and
interest in the conversation, formal letters use this part of email as an etiquette feature rather than a functional element.

Modern textbooks require the introduction of an email to have the following elements:

1. Greeting;
2. Self-introduction (if the email is the first contact); and
3. Brief summary of the email (the main topic of the message).

Therefore, an introduction should answer “who is writing,” “how does he/she know me,” and “why is he/she writing to me?” (Воротынцева, 2012, p. 37). As part of a communication strategy designed to increase the effectiveness of email, Воротынцева suggests using three “attention points” in the email: “subject line,” “introduction line,” and “final phrase.” While the subject line attracts the first attention, the introduction line provides details on the topic without bringing up too much information to the reader right away. After the introduction line, a reader will be provided with the details and arguments in the main part. Therefore, the main purpose of the introduction is to keep the reader’s attention, while providing more context to the conversation. Eventually, the “final phrase” will summarize the conversation and present a call for action. All textbooks agree that the introduction should consist of one or two sentences and should become as long as a paragraph only when it cannot be avoided (e.g., first contact). Ильяхов, Сарычева (2018) also followed a similar functional approach — the introduction can follow the greeting and even remain on the same line:

Витя, мы планируем организовать встречу с сотрудниками, которые выходят с августа (p. 31).

As mentioned earlier, email communication also created a landscape for new contingencies of communication, such as adding a new participant to an existing conversation. Modern textbooks provide extensive examples as to how to lay the groundwork for a brief introduction and the active participation of new correspondent in ongoing communication (Table 4). As shown in the sample email, the introduction is conducted in the same manner as it would be done in face-to-face communication. Such a conversation would be impossible during the exchange of traditional business letters.
Table 4. Sample phrases for adding a new participant to an existing email conversation

| Text                                                                 | Translation                                                                                                      | Source       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Ольга! Подключаю в переписку Елену Николаевну, директора кафе при клинике. Она в курсе всего, что мы с вами проговорили. Ей можно задавать вопросы по всему, что связано с процессами в работе кафе. | Olga! I am adding Elena Nikolaevna, director of the clinic’s cafe, to this conversation. She is aware of everything that we talked about. You can ask her questions about everything related to the business processes in the cafe. | ****, p. 85 |
| Елена Николаевна! Знакомлю вас с дизайнером Ольгой. Она будет задавать вопросы по организации кафе. Вы можете задавать свои вопросы и делиться соображениями о перепланировке. | Elena Nikolaevna! Let me introduce you to the designer, Olga. She will ask you questions about the workflow of the cafe. Feel free to ask your questions and share your thoughts on redevelopment. |              |

(3) Email main part

As mentioned in the introduction, in the early period of email communication, email was commonly treated as a speedy and, in some ways, less formal way of delivering a message. Yet, in those times, a letter still would be the preferred method for official notices and formal events (Чуковенков, Янковая, 2004). Recent advances in email communication show that there are no distinguishable differences between a written letter and email in terms of genres to be covered — both strictly official and less formal messages can be communicated via email. Therefore, in either case, email is considered to be an acceptable and even preferable type of communication (Ильяхов, Сарычева, 2018).

Due to the reasons discussed above, in the early period of email communication, textbooks did not distinguish between different topics and situations of communication when an email message would be used. Email could be considered to be a business letter with all of its attributes or just a short reply. Still, particular genres of email communication were never discussed in detail. Modern textbooks not only deal with standard scenarios (sales email, short reply,
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offer, claim), but also create new communication situations: a reply to an “aggressive” email, delivering bad news, sending a cover letter with a resume, etc.

While the wording of the main body depends on the particular genre and the context, all textbooks focus on the aspect of the final line or question. Воротынцева’s (2017) three-focus-point strategy was already explained in the previous section; however, Ильяхов and Сарычева (2018) also support the view that email communication should provoke further discussion; therefore, by the end of the email, the reader must see a particular call for action or question (Table 5).

| Text                                          | Translation                                                                 | Source   |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Антон, это мои предложения. Я не знаю, подходят ли они, давайте обсудим? | Anton, these are my suggestions. I don’t know if they are suitable; let’s discuss? | *, p. 57 |
| Договоренности мы записали в плане. Пожалуйста, проверьте, все ли там верно. | We wrote down the agreements in the plan. Please check whether everything is correct. | *, p. 57 |
| Не знаю, как решить эту проблему, посоветуй. | I do not know how to solve this problem, please advise.                     | *, p. 57 |
| Пожалуйста, сообщите о Вашем решении до 21.10.12 | Please inform us about your decision by 21.10.12.                           | **, p. 45|
| Пожалуйста, подтвердите получение документов и их читаемость. | Please confirm receipt of the documents and their legibility.               | **, p. 42|

Another striking feature of modern email communication in Russia is a shift from the formal “we” to less formal “I” in daily situations. It was not uncommon for traditional business writing to utilize “I” as a pronoun for personal business emails; however, this has become the norm in modern email communication. It reflects the drift of communication from depersonalized (through the use of plural pronouns, авторское «мы») to a more direct personal style. The same trend is related to another feature of formality in the business domain: T-V distinction (a difference between various forms of addressing one’s conversa-
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tion partner or partners specialized for varying levels of politeness) in business communication, which will be discussed in the following section.

(4) Email closure and signature

The closing etiquette phrase and a handwritten signature are the key features of a traditional business letter. However, their importance in business email has changed. While earlier textbooks (Чуковенков, Янкова, 2004) required an email closure to include “уважением,” etiquette formula in the same manner as in traditional mail, newer works, such as that of Ильяхов, Сарычева (2018), leave this aspect as an arbitrary attribute. Воротынцева (2012) argued that closure should create the atmosphere for the following communication, and the closure phrase should express warmth and prospects for the next conversation.

Another feature of the signature that has become a new norm in email communication is the usage of the information block (also referred to as the professional signature). The information block is added after sender’s name and includes the full name, title, company name, and address or phone number. Businesses also might require managers to add links to their social media accounts or professional social media. While older textbooks did not consider the information block or professional signature at all, modern literature tends to focus on the efficiency of the email; therefore, it tries not to overload the reader with unnecessary information, especially if such communication occurs on a daily basis. In such a case, a detailed information block should be used in new conversations, while in follow-up messages, a short information block should be considered. The same norm applies to confidentiality notices, which are required for communication in some business domains.

5. Advances in email communication

In previous sections, features and trends of email communication were explained based on the contrastive analysis of the format and structure of business emails in different periods. The current section discusses the issues raised in previous sections and compares them with findings in recent business communication research.
(1) Degree of formality in email

While most observers would agree that business letters are still — and should continue to be — governed by traditional rules regarding such features as the salutation and complimentary close, opinions on electronic email are far more divided. The fact that it is not necessarily considered a form of written communication has a bearing on the style employed by its users. It can be also argued that the circumstances under which communication takes place dictate the degree of formality to a larger extent than the choice of medium (e.g., a conversation dealing with serious matters would tend to be rather formal irrespective of whether it is conducted by letter, email, or orally). The point was underscored by Peterson, Hohensee, and Mia (2011), who found in their study of a massive corpus of emails sent by Enron employees over the course of several years that “an email tends to be more formal if it is about a business matter, it is sent to someone with a higher rank, or it contains a request” (Peterson, Hohensee, and Mia, 2011, p. 93).

However, the general feeling is undoubtedly that business emails are becoming, or have become, less formal than their physical counterparts, regardless of whether this is seen as a welcome development. A limited study conducted by Mackevic and Mamin (2010), for example, suggested that the specific features of business emails “include absence of the traditional elements of a formal letter, decreasing formality throughout the messages from greeting to closing phrases, and increasing similarity to speech” (Mackevic and Mamin, 2010, p. 75). Another study found “that one-to-one emails incorporate more informal, conversational features. This relative informality is expressed most clearly in the tone set by the greetings and sign-off and in the inclusion of more topics related to phatic rather than merely ideational, communication. This informalization is not generally reflected in the formal features of the texts (contractions, misspellings, emoticons, etc.)” (Sabate et al. 2008, p. 85).

As examples from Russian business communication textbooks show, the modern business email is less formal than one from the early 2000s. It is also obvious that, while the first textbooks on email in business regarded emails as a different medium than written letters, the current trend toward the formalization of emails is as pronounced as in foreign studies of business emails. The trend toward the informalization of email communication is reflected in all structural elements of the email message, from the greeting and salutation to the
| Email content | Explicit email formality | Proper email formality |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| **Greeting**  | 1. Уважаемая Людмила Сергеевна! (Dear Lyudmila Sergeevna!) | 1. Здравствуйте, Люда! (Hello Luda!) |
|               | 2. Уважаемые господа! (Dear Sirs!) | 2. Уважаемые коллеги, добрый вечер! (Dear colleagues, good evening!) |
| **Introduction** | 1. Благодарим Вас за Ваше письмо. (Thank you for your email.) | 1. Спасибо за быстрый ответ. (Thanks for the quick response.) |
|               | 2. Доводим до Вашего сведения необходимость продления договора. (We would like to inform you about the need to extend the contract.) | 2. 10 января заканчивается ваш договор. Чтобы мы смогли продолжить выплачивать комиссию, необходимо заключить новый договор. (Your contract ends on January 10th. In order for us to continue paying the commission, a new agreement must be entered into.) |
| **Main part** | 1. Принимая во внимание временные финансовые затруднения на стороне компаний-поставщиков, просим Вас предоставить отсрочку... (Taking into account the temporary financial difficulties on the side of the supplier companies, we ask you to grant an extension...) | 1. Из-за новых таможенных пошлин производитель задержал поставку, и мы не можем привезти товар к 1 мая. Мы можем предложить вам... (Due to new customs duties, the manufacturer delayed delivery, and we cannot deliver the goods by May 1. We can offer you...) |
|               | 2. Убедительная просьба предоставить материалы в вышеуказанные сроки. (We kindly ask you to provide materials within the above terms.) | 2. Пожалуйста, пришлите документы до четверга. (Please send your documents by Thursday.) |
signature and information block. Yet one important observation should be made: while informalization can be considered in strictly linguistic terms, it also can be viewed as a wider, cultural phenomenon. As modern textbooks suggest, the importance of proper email communication lies not in the field of words (formal or informal), but rather the attitude toward the reader. While formal email delivers all of the features of traditional email, it is missing on the emotional part, which is an important aspect of human communication. While clichés and formal language create a communicational landscape that is designed to support a predictably clear exchange of information, it also creates an additional distance between actors, which does not seem to fit the nature of speedy and modern email communication. This observation brings us to another aspect of modern email communication: the orality and literacy of email.

(2) Orality and literacy

Written and spoken communications have a distinctive gap between them, when considering face-to-face conversations or business letters. Face-to-face communication would be an example of oral synchronic communication, where business letters are considered both literal and asynchronous. Therefore, literacy would generally assume a spatial and/or temporal distance between
the sender and the recipient, with communication taking on some tangible
form (such as a letter). Orality, in contrast, would imply closer proximity (at
least in time, if not in space) and, usually, that the message communicated be
of an ephemeral nature. According to Ong (2012), oral messages are “evanes-
cent,” in the sense that no sooner is something uttered than it essentially vanishes
into thin air again.

With the advances of information technology and computer-mediated forms
of communication, however, this distinction has become less pronounced, to the
point where there may be different views on the nature of such communication.
Jacobsen (1999) proposed a new type of communication: “Like orality and
literacy, cyberdiscursivity exhibits peculiar textual characteristics which force
us to rethink how we produce rhetorical products and develop rhetorical prac-
tices” (Jacobsen, 1999). Russian examples also support this view and reveal the
tendency to mix oral and written features of communication in email messages,
which is particularly noticeable in greetings (Table 6). New norms of email
composition (e.g., strategy of three focus points) create a communicational
framework that is designed to support existing conversation and engage in new
conversations in the way business people do during face-to-face communication
(e.g., the way to introduce new participants to existing conversation via email
is a good example of such similarity with face-to-face communication). Greeting
formulas have become “less formal” or “more informal,” but they also reveal
features of spoken communication, having a tendency to mix T-V pronouns and
diminutive forms of names, while keeping T-V formality distinctions. How-
ever, it does not diminish the role of etiquette formulas (for example, closure
phrases have become less common but still follow the written language format).
Therefore, it is possible to conclude that, rather being exclusively written or oral
in nature, modern email business communication should be seen as having some
features of both types.

(3) Aspect of linguistic accuracy

The problem of deteriorating language correctness with the advent of elec-
tronic mail is one issue to be addressed in further studies. However, foreign
studies actually raise the question of whether the use of “proper” language is still
as relevant as it once was in business communication (Beer, 2018). Literature
on business communication, such as “netiquette” style guides and different textbooks, continues to urge email users to adhere to acceptable linguistic standards.

As this study showed, a similar tendency is noticeable in Russian email communication, even though the trend toward the spoken language has tended to become increasingly more pronounced. Email communication is based on the concept of speedy message exchange, yet speedy does not imply hasty communication. Business email should still consist of complete sentences with proper punctuation and grammar. The lack of linguistic accuracy is seen as a demonstration of negligence toward the reader. This problem apparently grows over the scope of the current study and email communication in general. Modern computer-mediated communication is not limited to email communication but includes chats, forums, and social networks. More and more participants enter this field of communication, and, as a result of this growth, linguistic changes are imminent.

If language is a reflection of culture, then business language is a reflection of business culture, which includes norms and traditions as well as values. The recent trends of email business communication in Russia show that the vector of such change is set in the same direction as that of the rest of the globe, suggesting that Russia is not becoming culturally more distant as it may seem, at least in the business domain.

6. Conclusion

The current study focused on features and trends in email-mediated business communication in modern Russia. In particular, the role of email in modern business communication was discussed, and then a contrastive analysis of various elements of email, such as format and structure, was conducted, using examples, norms, and rules found in textbooks on Russian business communication from the 2000s and 2010s. Based on the provided analysis, the study’s research questions were answered:

1. How does recent research in Russia deal with theoretical aspects of email communication?

It was confirmed that Russian studies on email communication in the business domain follow the general trends of business communication studies, while considering email communication not only a new medium for existing
business communication, but also that email reveals features of the genre in its own right. However, the question as to whether it is acceptable to consider email communication a truly conventionalized genre remains open.

(2) What are the tendencies and patterns in email communication in Russia in the business domain?

The study confirmed the ongoing drift from written to a more oral style of communication. Modern email communication in the business domain tends to reveal features of both extremes. The study confirmed the increasingly informal style of email communication and a growing focus on the reader and the quality of communication rather than the formal elements of the message. This raises further questions about whether the changes in language and attitude toward communicators are also a reflection of changes in cultural values. The observed informalization, simplification, and convergence between communicators at the linguistic level indicate a complex cultural process.

Among limitations for the current study, the limited availability of actual samples of business emails should be noted, due to the confidential nature of business communication. The use of textbooks and guides can help to overcome this difficulty; however, textbooks only reflect the predominating norms and rules, and there is always a gap between the development of new practices and the moment when such practices become codified in business communication textbooks.
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