



**WHAT WORKS IN ACADEMIC REQUEST EMAIL:
A GENRE ANALYSIS WITH TEACHER AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES**

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Abstract

Writing email requests to teachers is a necessary part of academic life for most students at Western universities, however it is a difficult undertaking as such email is an occluded genre (Swales, 1990). Students are therefore often unfamiliar with the expectations of academic email, particularly new entrants to university and NNSs. This study undertakes a genre analysis of a corpus of student request email sent to teachers in one department at the University of Essex to determine the moves of the genre and create a pedagogically useful move structure.

Fourteen moves were identified that represented the entire corpus; frequency data was then used to modify this into a nine move structure. Further data on appropriate move use was derived by scoring each corpus sample according to how well it fit with institutional norms and integrating the move use of these high-scoring samples into the move structure. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students to get a fuller understanding of move use perception in academic request email and to ensure the move structure served the needs of both parties.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	iii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature Review.....	2
2.1 NNS difficulties with academic request email.....	2
2.2 Cultural influences in academic email.....	7
2.3 Teaching academic email through genre.....	11
3. Methodology.....	14
3.1 Overview of Research Design.....	14
3.2 Corpus Creation.....	15
3.3 Coding the Corpus.....	18
3.3.1 Pilot Study of Email Request Moves.....	18
3.3.2 Adaptation of Ho’s Framework.....	21
3.3.3 Inter-rater Checks and Reliability.....	23
3.4 Ranking the Corpus.....	26
3.4.1 Rubric Pilot.....	27
3.4.2 Final Rubric.....	29
3.5 Interview Methods.....	32
3.5.1 Teacher Interviews.....	32
3.5.2 Student Interviews.....	33
4. Results and Analysis.....	35
4.1 What are the moves and move structures of academic student request email? (RQ1).....	35
4.2 Which moves and move structures fit institutional norms as determined by literature on university email? (RQ2).....	39
4.3 Which moves and move structures do teachers identify as appropriate or inappropriate? (RQ3).....	44
4.4 What are students’ perceptions of these moves? (RQ4)	50
5. Conclusion.....	53
References.....	55

APPENDIX A. Email asking for participants.....	62
APPENDIX B. Nationality and L1 distribution of pilot study participants.....	64
APPENDIX C. Sample of final-coded emails.....	65
APPENDIX D. Emails that resulted in changes to JUS move during 2 nd interrater reliability check.....	68
APPENDIX E. Pilot Scoring Rubric.....	69
APPENDIX F. Email assessed as significantly more positive by teacher-recipient than by scoring rubric.....	70
APPENDIX G. Emails used in teacher interviews.....	71
APPENDIX H. Teacher Interview Guide & Teacher Experience.....	73
APPENDIX I. Teacher interviewee consent form.....	74
APPENDIX J. Student interview prompt card.....	75
APPENDIX K. Student interview guide.....	76
APPENDIX L. Student interviewee consent form.....	77
APPENDIX M. Quantitizing teacher interview data.....	78

List of Tables

Table 1. CCSARP Directness Levels for Email Requests.....	6
Table 2. Moves in status-equal business request emails.....	13
Table 3. Composition of the corpus.....	17
Table 4. Email moves from pilot study.....	19
Table 5. Moves of Student Request Email.....	24-25
Table 6. Final Rubric.....	30
Table 7. Changes in Rubric Weighting.....	31
Table 8. Move structure indicated by frequency and order analysis.....	38
Table 9. Scores for High- and Low-Ranking Emails.....	39
Table 10. Move Frequency in High- and Low-Ranking Emails.....	40
Table 11. Final Move Structure.....	49

Figures

Figure 1. Move Occurrence in the Corpus.....	36
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1. Introduction

Email is a necessary part of students' academic interaction in Western universities, having become more common than the student-teacher office hour meeting (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, p.81). While there is a growing feeling that we do indeed live in a web world (Haythornthwaite & Hagar, 2005) and are perhaps becoming digital natives (Prensky, 2001, 2009), these technological abilities do not seem to translate to academic email. The problem students face when they email a teacher is that they must follow the rules for a "community of practice" which they do not know. Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice as a group of people in a joint enterprise whose social practice includes shared norms and meanings. In the case of university, the community of practice is very complex and difficult to learn, yet there is usually guidance to help students make sense of their chosen community, such as introductory classes, teacher feedback, support services and online resources. Academic email, however, receives no such attention. Though it is only a small part of a student's academic practice, studies have shown that email use impacts academic success (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000, 2002) and that students, particularly NNSs, may be disadvantaged by underuse or incorrect use of email (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2007; Chang & Hsu, 1998; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011) and therefore not gain full access to their academic community.

One of the main functions of student-to-teacher email is requests, asking for help or information (Bloch, 2002; Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 1999). This is a particularly fraught genre as the lower-status interlocutor must impose on the higher-status interlocutor, and they must do so without the kindnesses of conversation, such as visual clues, and usually without models or guidelines on what academic email requests to teachers should look like. It is hardly surprising therefore that many students, NS and NNS alike, struggle with the genre (Bloch, 2002; Chen, 2001, 2006; Epstein, 2006; Glater, 2006; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

In view of this, the present study undertakes a corpus-based genre analysis as a means of creating those missing guidelines. Further reasons for this approach are considered through discussion of the relevant literature in the next section, which culminates in the research questions that guide this study. The methodology for answering those questions is presented in Section 3, and results and analysis are given in Section 4. The conclusion will consider this study's implications and limitations.

2. Literature Review

Email's relative newness in the academic sphere can be seen by the modest number of empirical studies on the subject. This chapter will analyze the main findings of the most relevant studies and consider their methodology, highlighting an important research gap. For the purposes of analysis, the studies are grouped thematically as follows: (1) NNS difficulties with academic request email observed through NS/NNS comparative studies; (2) cultural elements of student emailing; (3) the usefulness of a genre approach in teaching email. The final section will present research questions that stem from the gaps identified in the literature.

2.1 NNS difficulties with academic request email

While anecdotal evidence suggests NS university students commit plenty of academic email gaffes (Epstein, 2006; Glater, 2006), empirical studies have mainly identified problems that NNSs encounter. Although these studies do not always take identifying such issues as their focus – some, for example find surface similarities between NS and NNS emails' pragmatic directness (Biesenbach-lucas, 2006, p. 86)¹ – the differences that do emerge indicate what can make an email request successful, and are therefore emphasized in this section due to their pedagogical applicability.

In their landmark email study 15 years ago, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996), working from the axiomatic understanding that students would do well to be thought of positively by their teachers, compiled a corpus of 99 request emails (34 NS, 65 NNS) selected randomly from what their university students had sent them over a year, and graded each as either positive or negative according to the impression it gave them. With the corpus thus divided into four parts (positive and negative NS emails, positive and negative NNS emails), they then analyzed the linguistic form, level of imposition, and content of the emails. The linguistic forms or “syntactic frame used by the writer to realize the request” (p. 56) (e.g. *I would like, I want*, etc.) did not differ greatly between NSs and NNSs, but the negative

¹ In this article Biesenbach-lucas glosses six of her own studies which found, among other things, some NS/NNS similarities in terms of level of directness. All six were presented as papers at various conferences 2000-2004 and are unavailable online. The author did not respond to an email request for the papers (ironically) so this data is not further discussed.

requests of the NNSs in particular made heavy use of unmitigated want/need statements. Such request realizations are inappropriate to the student's lower-status role as they appear to give the teacher-recipient no choice in answering the request: "*I need your memo saying like my outside minor department does not require an examination [NNS-]*" (p. 57). Framing the request as "I need" rather than, for example, "the department requires" additionally makes the request personal rather than institutional, lessening the teacher's professional obligation to grant the request (p. 57-58).

Besides linguistic realizations, the level of imposition seemed to be a problem for NNSs. The study ranked requests for routine information, appointments that required no preparation on the teacher's part, references, borrowing books, and writing short memos as low imposition; conversely, requests to bend the rules, for example to turn in an assignment late, or for appointments which required preparation from the teacher, or for actions that impinged upon the teacher's free time, were rated as high imposition. These researcher-devised ratings were checked through questionnaires with eight other teachers. While NS emails showed no correlation between positive/negative assessment and imposition level, NNS emails had a higher negative assessment as the request's level of imposition rose (p. 60). The study links this correlation to the content of the email: NNS texts tended to refer to student-imposed or unrealistic deadlines (e.g. ASAP!), did not acknowledge any imposition on the teacher, and gave explanations for the request that were student-oriented not institution-oriented (e.g. "because I will be returning to Japan" p. 66, versus "because the office will be closed" p. 65).

The implication of these findings is clear: students are more likely to make a positive impression on their teachers if they send emails with mitigated linguistic request forms, give institutional explanations, offer options and flexibility that take into account the teacher's needs, and always acknowledge the imposition of the request. Though this study remains one of the clearest and most useful in terms of what students can do to advantage themselves through email, it somewhat ignores the students' perspective. Naturally the teacher is the power holder in this situation, and the student will likely want to make a positive impression on them, however, as discussed in Section 2.2, students may also have other conscious or unconscious cultural or linguistic reasons for crafting emails as they do. It should also be noted that the email samples were assessed as positive or negative by only two teachers, the recipient and the other researcher, an assessment on which they agreed 100% (p. 56). While the intended recipient is of course the best judge of an email's impact, the unproblematized

implication that teachers have a clear-cut, polarized reaction to email requests may need reassessing 15 years on, given the evolving and multifaceted nature of the medium (Baron, 2002, 2003; Crystal, 2001; Gimenez, 2000, 2006).

Research on negotiation strategies has also found NNS email requests to have less positive effects than those of their NS peers. Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000, republished with different title 2002) compared negotiation use in a corpus of 42 emails (28 NNS, 14 NS) sent to one of the researchers by 28 of her university students (19 NNS, 9 NS). The study used seven broad negotiation moves drawn from literature on the subject: context, meaning background information about a request; proposal, a suggestion about academic work; justification, reasons for making the proposal; options, alternate proposals; request for information; request for response; and finally, other requests. The options move in particular aligns with the previously discussed study as a positive email request trait. While not making the explicit positive/negative assessment discussed in the previous study, Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000, 2002) found that NSs displayed more effective negotiation than NNSs by providing more context and justification for their request and by giving options, both of which not only increase the efficiency of the email, allowing the teacher to respond to the full picture of what the student has in mind, but also display the initiative expected of Western graduate students (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993). NNSs seemed to be further disadvantaged by what they chose to negotiate, not just how. Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth state that “NSs may increase their chances of successfully completing course requirements” by using email to negotiate assignment topics and coursework, rather than focusing on negotiating late work submission, as the NNSs did (2000, p. 5). This perhaps is an even more interesting finding than the implied need to teach students to include context, justification, and options for two reasons. First, students may also need to be taught what they can appropriately use email for, and second, student email impacts academic success. This second statement may seem obvious, but email has until quite recently been overlooked as a non-assessed communicative tool, largely untaught (though c.f. Swales & Feak, 2000, and Feak, Reinhart & Rohlck, 2009 for email’s small but burgeoning entrance into EAP texts). Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2000, 2002) finding that good email skills significantly advantage university students, discussed further in Section 2.3, begins to break that barrier.

In addition to negotiation moves and linguistic form and content of email requests, several NS/NNS comparative email studies have focused on analyzing data according to pragmatic frameworks of politeness. As noted by Biesenbach-Lucas, (2007, p. 63) the

framework favored by request research tends to be the CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project), developed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), as it gives greater syntactic focus than the original politeness research developed by Brown and Levinson (1978). In short, the CCSARP framework focuses on how ‘speech acts’, the performing of communicative acts such as questioning, promising, etc. (Searle, 1969, p. 16), make a request polite or impolite, while Brown and Levinson consider the same effect through the idea of ‘face’, proposing that every person is motivated by ‘positive face’, a desire to be approved of and appreciated by others, and ‘negative face’, a desire to be autonomous and not imposed upon (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 61). Even though the latter politeness theory has not been considered much in email research,² the necessity of avoiding threats to negative face can clearly be seen in the above-discussed studies. For example, the negatively assessed emails in Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig's (1996) study made significant threats to negative face through high-imposition requests without acknowledging the time it would take the teacher to comply (e.g. *“I put 2 stamped, addressed envelopes in your box for letters of recommendation. If you could print out 2 extra copies and mail them early next week, I’m sure they’ll arrive on time”* p. 63). It seems likely that such requests also threaten positive face in that the teacher is not being shown the appreciation usually accorded to her role.

The CCSARP framework, on the other hand, looks at requests according to how direct they are, giving nine possible levels grouped into three categories from most direct to least: ‘impositive’ or direct, ‘conventionally indirect’, and hints (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989, p. 123-4). Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) employed this grouping in her study of NS/NNS student politeness strategies in email, although, as she noted in an earlier study (2006), application of the framework is not clear-cut as it is based on elicited Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), which are very different from naturalistic email data. While the 2006 study applied two versions of the CCSARP, giving different results, the 2007 study abandoned this division, instead using Table 1 below, which is the original CCSARP classification with minor adjustments to accommodate email, such as omission of obligation statements (e.g. You must give me feedback), a category that was absent in the data. Request head acts were categorized in a corpus of 533 emails (382 NS, 151 NNS) sent to the researcher by her students over six semesters. The number of students was not indicated, although all the NNS students were of Asian backgrounds.

² Besides Chen (2001), discussed below, only one study (Duthler, 2006) was found to use solely the Brown and Levinson politeness model, however, its finding that elicited email requests can be more polite than elicited voicemail requests is of little relevance to the present study.

Table 1. CCSARP Directness Levels for Email Requests

Level	Request Strategies	Examples
Direct	Imperatives	<i>Please extend the due date.</i>
	Elliptic constructions	<i>Any comments?</i>
	Performatives	<i>I feel I have to ask for an extension for a week.</i>
	Direct questions	<i>When do you have time?</i>
	Want statements	<i>I want to set up a meeting with you. I would like your suggestions.</i>
	Need statements	<i>I will need an extension.</i>
	Expectation statements	<i>I hope you'll give me the weekend to finish typing my work.</i>
Conventionally indirect	Query preparatory (ability, willingness, permission)	<i>Could I meet with you next Tuesday? Would you mind to take a look and give me some suggestion?</i>
Hints	Strong hints/mild hints	<i>Attached is a draft of my grammar lesson plan. I'm having a very difficult time in figuring out how to put these lesson materials together.</i>

(Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, p. 67)

While quantitative analysis of the data showed relatively similar request patterns between NSs and NNSs, such as more direct strategies for lower imposition requests versus conventionally indirect and hints for higher imposition, qualitative analysis showed a different picture. At the linguistic level, the NNSs showed over-reliance on set phrases, such as “could you” for every level of request imposition, and inappropriate lexical choices, such as “please” rather than the NSs “I was wondering” or embedded forms. Some of these infelicitous forms may result from linguistic lack, but, as discussed in the next section, it is likely that a lack of pragmatic understanding is also the problem. As Biesenbach-Lucas puts it, “students can plan, compose, revise, and edit toward an appropriate and polite email message only if they *have* flexible linguistic means at their disposal and *know* which linguistic structures and politeness devices to use” (p. 74, italics in original). The problem is that students don’t know and, as is often the case in academic kinds of writing, no one tells them (e.g Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). Biesenbach-Lucas’s study is notable in that it actually begins to rectify this by outlining steps to teach email, such as having students break samples up into standard elements. While the implication in this and the previous studies is that NNSs need to be taught, NSs who are unfamiliar with academic email may also benefit

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

from instruction, although this is supported anecdotally rather than empirically (Epstein, 2006; Glater, 2006) but was found to be the case in teaching paragraph writing (Stalker & Stalker, 1989).

It is also worth noting that all the Biesenbach-Lucas studies seem to use the same emails, adding to the original corpus every time, meaning that the data reflects only how students write to this one particular teacher. It may be that different email elements come to the fore when students write to a different teacher, gender, age etc., a shortcoming that she does note in her most recent study (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, p. 76). This limitation results from the difficulty of collecting emails not originally sent to the researcher and is common in most of the available studies on the subject. If collection is possible, analysis of emails sent to a range of teachers would be a useful addition to the field, albeit an equally limited one given the difficulties of assessing how positive or negative the emails are without the privilege of being the original recipient.

2.2 Cultural influences in academic email

While the studies in the previous section shed light on the kinds of errors NNSs make in email, they offer little empirical evidence for why these errors are made in the first place. Language ability may certainly play a part, but it would seem that culture is the key player, as many studies looking specifically at Chinese students' English emails have proved. In an analysis of email requests from American and Taiwanese students at an American university, Chen (2001), drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness model (1978), found that the Taiwanese wrote emails that were linguistically English but culturally Chinese. Chen asked students to submit 2-3 email requests they had written to professors, an intriguing collection technique which avoids the single-recipient limitation of the studies in the previous section. However, as no recipient views were included at all, this collection technique seems to simply trade one shortcoming for another.

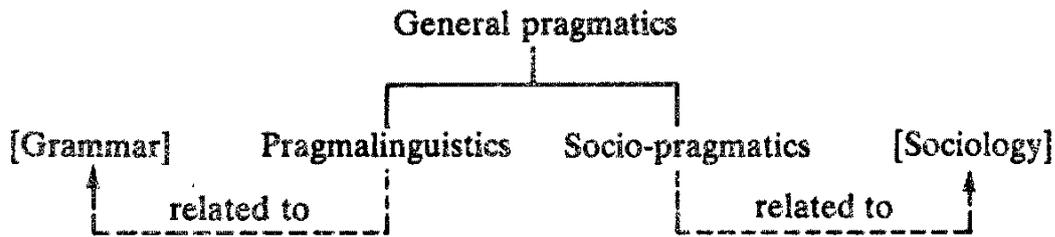
Chen found that the Taiwanese students followed a Chinese maxim of respectfulness by always addressing their teachers by title and last name, unlike their American counterparts. Additionally, they followed a politeness strategy of Chinese indirectness by putting their requests at the very end of the email while the Americans put their requests right at the start. Another culturally influenced difference was the use of compliments, identified as

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

a common Chinese strategy of playing to positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1978). While the Taiwanese used this “gift-giving” technique to make their higher imposition requests polite, the Americans instead expressed politeness by minimizing the imposition. Chen states that the Taiwanese students “transferred their Chinese pragmatic knowledge, probably in an automatic and unconscious way, to their English use” (p. 13). As noted, this study lacks inclusion of recipient views to determine the effects of this transfer, a gap the below study somewhat addresses.

In an earlier study on Chinese and American email requests, Chang and Hsu (1998) looked at 44 emails collected from Taiwanese and American students at American institutions. The researchers created the corpus by asking friends to supply emails they had either sent or received, a technique that would be ethically questionable today as some of the original senders had no say in the use of their writing, and additionally meant the corpus was not all academic. The study found the same message-final request position as Chen (2001) for the Taiwanese students, as well as heavy use of direct CCSARP strategies, such as ‘want’ statements. Notably, in the emails written to friends, the Chinese students used requests at the beginning. In fact, the cultural understanding of emailing requests to superiors seems to be exactly opposite in Chinese and American contexts: “Chinese say more to decrease the degree of imposition, Americans say less” (Chang & Hsu, 1998, p. 131); Chinese use ‘want’ statements which sound “soft and polite” in their L1 (p. 135), Americans use questions about possibility. Unlike the previous study, Chang and Hsu do get reactions to these emails from NSs, finding the Chinese emails were considered less clear and polite than the American emails. However, no explanation is given as to who these NSs are, meaning that the academic requests may not have been assessed by someone used to receiving such emails. Further research making use of Chen’s (2001) multi-recipient collection strategy and extending Chang and Hsu’s (1998) assessment of emails to include valid commentators or original recipients would be a useful addition to the field.

While the NNSs in the above studies were adept enough at English to be accepted for a course of study at an American university, their sociopragmatic knowledge of email within their new ‘community of practice’ was not yet developed. Sociopragmatic knowledge refers to an understanding of the social expectations surrounding communication (Leech, 1983, p. 10), as opposed to pragmalinguistic knowledge which refers to the ways a particular language allows for something to be expressed. Leech’s chart below gives a simple summation:



(Leech, 1983, p. 11)

By and large, NNSs studying degrees abroad in English-speaking countries are likely to have studied English at home only on the left side of the above chart, focusing on grammar and language ability. As Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) note in their study on pragmatic awareness, which was further tested and verified by Schauer (2006), the common EFL setting has a disproportionate focus on testing, with the result that grammar is reified over pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998, p. 254), while the situation is reversed for ESL students and teachers. NNS students coming to English-speaking countries to study are therefore unlikely to have strong pragmatic skills, especially as many will have focused exclusively on passing entrance exams (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002, p. 163) such as IELTS for UK institutions. As a result, students frequently experience “pragmalinguistic failure” in email, wherein the recipient perceives the message differently from how the writer intended (Thomas, 1983, p. 94). Although a longitudinal case study of a Chinese student’s development of email literacy over 2½ years did find sociopragmatic improvement (Chen, 2006), it was a slow and difficult process that required change in the student’s cultural awareness. Clearly, pragmatic knowledge is difficult to acquire, but just as clearly the case study shows appropriate email writing needs to be taught: the student received no feedback on the problematic aspects of her emails, and had no models or rules to follow (p. 50).

Of course, Chinese students are not the only ones to struggle with the pragmatic burden of academic emails, yet thus far they seem to have been the main language group studied in intercultural pragmatic research on academic email. An in-press exception to this, Economidou-Kogetsidis's (2011) study on Cypriot Greek student emails at an English-medium university in Cyprus, provides a different cultural perspective, as well as what seems to be a unique observation of English academic email occurring in the students’ L1 culture. By applying Biesenbach-Lucas’s (2007) adaptation of the CCSARP framework (Table 1), as well as analysing salutations and lexical modification used to soften requests, Economidou-

Kogetsidis finds that Cypriot Greek students write overly direct English emails which NSs perceive to be rude. Her methods in this study are especially salient: the corpus (200 emails from 200 students) was collected from 11 different teachers, avoiding the single-recipient shortcomings of the studies discussed in 2.1; furthermore, 24 NS teachers used a 5-point Likert scale to grade a six-email sample for politeness and abruptness and also gave qualitative feedback on linguistic features, thus avoiding the lack of valid assessment noted in Chen (2001) and Chang and Hsu (1998). It seems that all student emails sent to the 11 teachers were collected (provided the sender consented), although selection for the corpus was not described. Such collection methods, if possible, are ideal; however it is notable that the teacher assessment, conducted online, focused specifically on politeness and abruptness, leaving out other important elements of request emails, such as appropriacy of request. Pedagogically useful data could be gathered from qualitative research in this area.

The studies presented in this section show that a student's cultural identity is likely to interfere with the creation of pragmatically appropriate email requests in a different culture, reflecting extensive pragmatic research that requests are culturally variable (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1987; Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Fukushima, 2002; House, 1989; Holtgraves & Yang, 1992). This may well explain some of the problems of NNS student email discussed in Section 2.1 as clearly "linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for communicative competence" (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, p. 62). While we have seen that appropriate use of email can advantage students, this has only really been indicated for NSs (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000, 2002). NNSs, on the other hand, seem to be actively disadvantaged through their academic email. The solution is clear and has been called for explicitly: we need to teach email (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2006, 2007; Bloch, 2002; Burgess, Jackson, & Edwards, 2005; Chen, 2006). The current academic system has "the burden of pragmatic competence falling on the less powerful interlocutor, the student" (Boxer, 2002, p. 159) yet the only way for students to learn how to correctly email teachers is to guess or infer from other kinds of communication (Chen, 2006). Clearly this is a faulty system; a means to pedagogically redress the balance is considered in the next section.

2.3 Teaching academic email through genre

Though there is a growing belief that email should be taught, it remains the case that “email is a party to which English teachers have not been invited” (Dillon, 2004, para. 4). While online sources of varying repute offer guidelines, few official sources tackle the subject. For example, students in the department that the present study focuses on are only supplied with information on forms of address for emailing; however, the section in their student hand book that explains this does not reference email in the heading (Department of Language & Linguistics, 2010, p. 8-9) so students are unlikely to find it. Additionally, my brief teaching experience at this university has shown that the low level pre-sessional students are taught how to write formal full block letters but not emails. While the tide is starting to turn, with chapters on email in two EAP textbooks (Feak et al., 2009; Swales & Feak, 2000) – though from overlapping authors and both printed by the University of Michigan – neither considers a genre analysis approach to email, discussed below.

Academic request email is a unique form of communication and as such makes for a distinct genre or group of communicative events, in this case electronic texts, which share a communicative purpose (Swales, 1990, p. 58). A vast amount of research and theory supports the idea of analyzing written genres to better teach students (e.g. Hyland, 2003, 2004, 2007; Johns, 2002, 2003; Swales, 1990; Paltridge, 2001) and though different approaches to genre exist (see Gebhard & Harman, 2011 for a current description), the fact remains that “for teachers of writing, a focus on genre, regardless of theoretical orientation, is grounded in the belief that helping students to demystify socially situated writing can facilitate the learning of privileged forms of discourse” (Tardy, 2011, p. 2). Academic email has the dubious privilege of not only being a mystifying genre, to use Tardy’s term, but one that is occluded (Swales, 1996), meaning students are highly unlikely to encounter example texts. While acknowledging Prior’s suggestion that academic genres, as complex systems, can eschew strict taxonomies (1995, p. 76), an exploratory genre analysis of academic request email’s composite parts might both de-mask and demystify this necessary part of student communicative practice.

Yasuda's (2011) study puts into practice this belief that genre can help students learn email, although she approaches genre from the systemic functional linguistics perspective, citing Halliday (1994), and additionally focuses on email as personal rather than academic

genre. Delivering a syllabus of genre-based tasks on email 90 minutes a week for 15 weeks to two classes of Japanese students (n = 70) studying required English at a Japanese university, she found positive improvement both from the students' perspective and from NS assessors. Quantitative analysis revealed students' improved their writing fluency over the course, writing more detailed claims in a shorter time, although their lexical diversity did not greatly improve. The study suggests the increased understanding of email genre the students developed may even help them in their L1, as they had had little or no emailing experience in Japanese. Similar to Flowerdew's findings (2002), the study showed that carefully considered genre pedagogy could provide significant help to low level students.

While the exploration and application of genre Yasuda (2011) describes clearly benefitted the students, it is unlikely that the amount of study hours she taught would be available for the typical university student trying to learn email. Further, as noted earlier, email is not particularly privileged in the EAP environment, and as such, teachers tend to focus on more traditional academic genres, again leaving no space for email. What is needed is a move structure along the lines of the CARS model (Swales 1990, p. 141) that teachers could quickly train their students in or, failing that, that students, whether NS or NNS, could access to get clear guidelines on creating pragmatically appropriate emails. No study has yet provided this, however a recent study has presented a move analysis of email between co-workers. Ho (2011) uses genre analysis, although not his main focus, to observe email requests within three groups in Hong Kong: Chinese teachers at working at one school (CELT), native-English speakers working at different schools (NSE), and Chinese IT professionals at a firm (ITP). As the emails were between work colleagues "occupying the same hierarchical level" (p. 305), the study's move analysis is not directly relevant to teaching students how to write status-unequal requests in university, but nonetheless provides useful information as the only existent move analysis of request emails. The move findings are therefore presented below in Table 2, and will be referenced in the methodology section. The corpus the study used consisted of 89 emails, "31 from the CELT (by seven authors), 15 from the NSE (by 12 authors) and 43 from the ITP (by 13 authors)" (p. 306). No information is given on how these emails were collected, and the methods by which the move structure was deduced are not explained, suggesting the moves should be tested and validated in further research.

Table 2. Moves in status-equal business request emails

Addressing	Expressing Feelings/Ideas/ Emotion/Wishes
Acknowledging	Attending to Recipients' Situation
Responding to Earlier Email	Showing Appreciation
Providing Background Information	Showing Gratitude for Requested Help
Requesting	Closing
Elaborating	Signing Off
Convincing	Leaving Contact Information
Sharing Personal Experience	(Ho, 2011, p. 311-312)

The aim of the present study is to determine a teachable move structure for student request emails, thus giving students a key to unlock this necessary genre of academia's "community of practice". This goal requires a broad inquiry to determine the moves of the genre, and a specific look at which uses of those moves create the most successful 'key'. However, this key must not simplify teachers' views (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011) nor ignore students' perspectives (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996) as both take part in the genre. The following research questions are therefore proposed:

1. What are the moves and move structures of academic student request email?
2. Which moves and move structures fit institutional norms as determined by literature on university email?
3. Which moves and move structures do teachers identify as appropriate or inappropriate?
4. What are students' perceptions of these moves?

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview of Research Design

The purpose of this research is to identify a teachable move structure for academic request email that will advantage students. This research goal necessitates two methods of data collection: first, identifying a move structure requires a genre analysis of a corpus of request emails; second, determining the most advantageous structure requires a qualitative assessment of teachers' views. In addition, students' views on move use should also be considered so as to create a move structure they will be comfortable using. As can be seen from the emphasis on including all viewpoints, which some studies discussed in the literature review neglected, this research attempts to integrate an emic approach, prioritizing how the participants perceive the data (Creswell, 2007, p. 39) and thereby implementing an essentially interpretivist methodology (Harklau & Williams, 2010, p. 95-96), while at the same time pragmatically using a researcher-based genre analysis to create a tool that helps students. The latter view is influenced by a Critical EAP understanding (Benesch, 2001) which both engages students in their academic studies and also encourages them to question, perhaps change, the institutional norms that shape those studies (p. xiv, 61). This dualistic understanding, sometimes referred to as 'critical pragmatic EAP' (Harwood & Hadley, 2004), allows for a straightforward move analysis of email to provide students with the advantages that an understanding of Western academic email can give, as noted in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, but at the same time stresses that students "need to be aware that those forms represent only one set of particular possibilities; [they] also need to be encouraged to find ways of using the language that they feel are expressive of their own needs and desires" (Pennycook, 1994, p. 317). Additionally, I suggest that 'pure' critical EAP (Harwood & Hadley, 2004, p. 358) objections to the "accommodationist" pragmatism (Benesch, 1993, p. 706) of teaching a move structure for email are outweighed by the fact that email, once learned, can be a tool for students to critically engage with teachers and others in power.

The creation of a corpus for the proposed genre analysis and its subsequent coding is detailed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3. The creation of a rubric to rank the coded samples, as per RQ2, is described in Section 3.4, and interview methods for teachers and students are discussed jointly in 3.5.

3.2 Corpus Creation

The corpus was created using a strategy similar to Chen (2001) in that the student writers themselves selected and forwarded request emails they had previously sent to teachers. To initiate this, students in the university's Language and Linguistics department were sent a departmental email describing the study and asking them to participate by forwarding request emails they were comfortable sharing to me. If they elected to do so, they were also required to copy and paste in a paragraph about their ethical rights to show informed consent (see Appendix A for the email). Email was judged to be the best way to solicit data because of the obvious ease with which participants could respond. While a pilot study, discussed in the next section, first solicited hand-signed consent to participate, this seemed to hamper data collection and cause more trouble for the students: they had to keep the piece of paper with my email with them, and many forgot to forward emails when actually at the computer. Collection through this method would have been additionally difficult at the time of this study as many students were abroad conducting their own research; soliciting data through email bypassed all these problems.

Following the above collection method allowed for a broader corpus than studies that used emails sent only to the teacher-researcher (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000, 2002; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996), and was feasible for a mere graduate student to carry out, unlike the top-down collection method in Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011). However, it is not without its downsides: students who participated were self-selecting, thus the corpus may represent the more confident and academically involved as opposed to all the members of a particular course as in the above studies; additionally, the emails that students were comfortable forwarding may not represent their usual requesting strategy, i.e. students may have forwarded only what they deemed to be good emails. While discussions with participants and evaluation of samples strongly suggest that the latter was not the case, the self-selecting aspect in who participated and what they sent threatens the study's validity: the sample may not be representative of the observed group, making it less generalizable (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 101).

On the other hand, representativeness is not the main aim of this study: much other research has focused on determining generalizable ideas on how students use email (e.g. Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Martin, Myers & Mottet, 1999; Myers, 2004), whereas the purpose here is to find the most advantageous move structure to teach students. Thus, a sample that

favors proactive students may be appropriate. While a representative sample is always desirable, non-representativeness seems the necessary tradeoff to counteracting the single-recipient narrowness of previous studies. Further, as Dörnyei notes is often unfortunately the case for postgraduate research, convenience sampling was unavoidable due time and finance limitations (2007, p. 129).

Upon receipt, all emails were checked for the following corpus requirements: sent to a teacher in the department, contained no deeply private information that should not be shared, made at least one request, and were the initial request rather than part of a back-and-forth email chain. The final requirement serves to keep the corpus request-based as back-and-forth computer exchanges accomplish multiple functions (Condon & Cech, 1996). Emails not meeting the first requirement were deleted and no highly personal emails were received. Many students kindly forwarded email chains, including the request, response and student follow-up, which sometimes included additional requests further down the chain. If the secondary requests initiated a new topic, they were included, but if they were a refinement on the initial request, they were not. In this way the corpus was kept as focused as possible to allow for viable data comparison, however, the additional information provided in the email chains was used to get a more holistic picture of email success.

Once checked for corpus requirements, all emails were anonymized with students given a generic code (S1, S2, etc.) and identifying details replaced with capitalized generic nouns such as PLACENAME. The final corpus consisted of 80 emails sent by 23 students to 25 teachers. The participants had 9 different L1s from 13 countries and in the case of NNSs, length of time living in an English-speaking country ranged from the beginning of this academic year (10/2010) to 5 years. Details are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Composition of the corpus

	Level*	Nationality	L1	NS exposure	# of emails
S1	M.A.	German	German	NZ 8 months, UK 10/2010	12
S2	M.A.	Cypriot	Turkish	UK 4 years	3
S4	M.A.	Dutch	Dutch	Ireland 4 months, UK 10/2010	5
S7	M.A.	Polish	Polish	UK 2 years	8
S8	M.A.	Syrian	Arabic	UK 10/2010	1
S9	M.A.	Turkish	Turkish	UK 10/2010	2
S11	M.A.	American	English NS	NS - 29 years	5
S12	M.A.	Cypriot	Turkish	UK 4 years	1
S13	M.A.	Saudi	Arabic	UK 1.5 years (10/2009)	3
S14	M.A.	German	German	NZ 6 months, UK 10/2010	3
S17	M.A.	Russian	Russian	UK 14 months	2
S22	M.A.	Greek	Greek	UK 4 years	7
S16	PhD 2	Sudanese	Arabic	UK 3 years	4
S18	PhD 2	Saudi	Arabic	UK 5 years	3
S20	PhD 2	British	English NS	NS - 30 years	1
S21	PhD 2	Saudi	Arabic	UK 3 years	1
S5	PhD 3	Saudi	Arabic	Australia 1.5 years, UK 3	1
S19	PhD 1	Chinese	Mandarin	UK 2 years	3
S6	UG 1	British	English NS	NS - 29 years	2
S15	UG 1	British	English NS	NS - age not given	1
S10	UG 2	British	English NS	NS - 20 years	4
S23	UG 2	British	English NS	NS - 20 years	5
S3	UG 3	Cypriot	Greek	UK 3 years	3
*number indicates year of study UG=undergraduate TOTAL					80

As can be seen above, M.A. students are the largest group represented, and the most common L1s are Arabic and English (6 participants each). More countries are represented in this dataset than in previous studies, which have at most four NNS groups, usually of Asian background (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Bloch, 2002) though as can be noted from the number of emails per participant, the amount of representation varies. It was hoped this diversity of countries would make for a more general structure that is general rather than linked to a specific culture (although of course the genre itself is a Western and English genre). Though the corpus parameters are quite specific – request emails written by students in the University of Essex Department of Language and Linguistics to teachers in the same during the academic year 2010-11 – the samples proved

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

unsurprisingly to have great variation between and within participants. The corpus size cannot therefore be said to provide “saturation”, wherein additional data is unlikely to provide new or useful information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136), nor could any number of emails provide this for qualitative research on such a distinctly personal genre. However, 80 emails do give a good idea of common moves, and published research analyzing this genre uses a similar number (Ho, 2011). A larger corpus would strengthen the findings and should be pursued in future research.

3.3 Coding the Corpus

As a coding scheme for conducting a move analysis on student request emails is not present in the literature, one had to be created for this study. This section will detail the three sequential phases of the code scheme creation: pilot study, adaptation and integration of Ho’s (2011) move list discussed above in Section 2.3, and interrater reliability checks.

3.3.1 Pilot Study of Email Request Moves

The pilot study assembled a corpus of 42 request emails written by 15 graduate students in the University of Essex’s Language and Linguistics department to teachers in the same department. All identifying information was anonymized and informed consent obtained. Information on the nationality and L1 distribution of the students can be found in Appendix B. At the time of the pilot study, Ho’s move analysis of email requests had yet to be published and no other such move structure was found, so moves were created by analyzing the corpus according to the steps outlined in Biber et al.’s “Introduction to move analysis” (2007, p. 32-3). First, a section of the corpus (n=9) was read through for a ‘big-picture’ overview of rhetorical purpose, then each text was divided into segments according to function to determine moves, and each move was evaluated for semantic strategies to establish steps. Below is an example of this process:

Dear Dr. FULLNAME, **[GREETINGS]**

I am S3 (NICKNAME) in MA ELT. **[SELF IDENTIFICATION]** I'm writing to ask about the module I've changed online for a while since it is still pending.

[DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM] Should I do anything or hand in any forms to the departmental office to change it? **[REQUEST]**

Thanks for your patience of reading this. **[CLOSING THANKS]**

Best Regards, **[SIGN OFF]**

S3

Once the moves were thus identified, the list was applied to the rest of the corpus, which, as Biber suggests is commonly the case, resulted in further edits and additions (2007, p. 33). The seven main moves found in the study are presented in Table 4. Where moves did not have separate steps, the ‘step’ column is blank. All example text is from the corpus, but names have been changed.

Table 4. Email moves from pilot study

Move	Purpose	Step	Example Text
1. Greetings	Start email, address recipient		"Hi Bob", "Dear Professor X"
2. Request Lead-in	Give info leading up to request - increases request clarity, avoids bluntness	1. description of problem	"I'm writing to you as I have a clash on my time table"
		2. self-identification	"My name is Josef. I am MA student studying in Applied Linguistics."
3. Request	Ask for something (main purpose of email)	1. request question	"Could you please tell us what time to come and meet ?"
		2. request statement	"I will be very grateful If you suggest some references regarding how teaching methods teach listening"
4. Request Justification	Give reason for making request - increases request validity		"I know that we will have a training in assignment writing but the answers to the questions above may change from lecturer to lecturer, so I wanted to ask."
5. Relational	Attend to relationship with teacher	1. course related	"I really consider your class fabulous and interesting"
		2. phatic	"I hope you are well"
6. Closing Thanks	Show gratitude, end message		"Thank you in advance"
7. Sign Off	End email		"Best"

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

While these seven moves do give a good idea of the genre, there are several significant shortcomings. First, as a small scale pilot study, it was carried out by only one coder rather than the minimum of two recommended by Biber et al. (p. 33). There is therefore no interrater reliability. However, despite this lack, it is interesting to note that the moves identified greatly overlap with Ho's model (2011) discussed in the next section, a similarity possibly indicating worthwhile analysis.

A more damaging shortcoming is the oversimplification of request structure, seen in the small number of moves and resulting fuzziness of coding. For example, the 'request lead-in' move is predicated on its observed position before the 'request' move. However, this was not always the case in the larger corpus, as seen in this extract of the main body of an email (coding is giving numerically as per the above table):

I just wanted to ask about marks are out of what? [3.1]

I got 72 in the CLASSCODE, [2.1] and would like to know if it's out of 80 or 100? [3.1]

The student's statement of grade (2.1) is not used as a lead-in and in no way avoids bluntness, both of which are proposed purposes of this move. However, it was coded as 2.1 in the pilot because it does give background information about the request. Additionally, the second request of '80 or 100', coded as 3.1, is not actually a new request but more rightly an elaboration of the previous request, giving more information about the specifics of the student's question. Clearly, move definitions need to be refined in the case of the former, and new moves created in the case of the latter. Both these problems could be solved by designing move labels that truly acknowledge the illocutionary force of the speech act (Searle, 1969), rather than considering position in the text or overall purpose.

In addition, the small size of the corpus and the fact that most emails were written at the beginning of the year when students had very similar requests (e.g. help with course registration issues) may have limited the number and type of moves identified. In the main though, the shortcomings stem from my inexperience with coding and request theory at the time. Though limited, the pilot-identified move list provides a way to understand and assess the genre where one did not previously exist, and was used as a reference point in adapting and integrating a later-published framework of a similar genre, discussed in the next section.

3.3.2 Adaptation of Ho's Framework

Ho's (2011) framework, described in Section 2.3, consists of 15 moves (see Table 2) to categorize status-congruent email requests between colleagues. To assess how well these moves fit the somewhat different genre of student request emails, the framework was applied to this study's corpus. Bearing in mind the many revisions and limitations caused by only using a portion of the corpus to generate initial moves in the pilot study, Ho's framework was applied to the entire corpus.

This application highlighted three moves as unnecessary for the student request genre. "Showing Appreciation" and "Expressing Feelings/Ideas/Emotion/Wishes" were both described by Ho, along with two other moves, as allowing writers to manage rapport with recipients (p. 312). The only other information Ho provided about these moves were one or two corpus examples, making it difficult to determine how these moves differed from each other and other similar moves in his framework. In fact, applying the framework to the corpus showed that the move "Acknowledging", which "thank[s] the recipients for what they [have] done for the sender" (p. 312) aptly covers all the appreciation that students show their teacher. It seems that Ho's "Showing Appreciation" may code for occasions when senders acknowledge someone besides the recipient, as in the example "and now Yvonne is so kind to have look [sic] for relevant resources for us" (p. 311).

The second rapport-management move, "Expressing Feelings/Ideas/Emotion/Wishes", seemed to cover a wide swath of textual realizations, from apologizing ["I'm so sorry if I have hurt you that badly" (p. 311)] to statements about a situation ["My contribution had been restricted to one article for NESTA I'm afraid" (p. 309)] and this vagueness, when applied to the current corpus, was problematic. Instead, the move title "Sharing Personal Experience", another rapport-management move without further explanation, best summed up what was happening in the corpus when students used emotion/feeling words. Students were usually explaining a personal situation to the teacher, for example: "I haven't read anything more difficult, which weakens my self-confidence"³ (S19). For occasions where students were sharing not personal but academic information, informing the teacher of what they had done and would do, a new move, "Providing Progress Information", was created. This additional move was felt to be necessary as updating supervisors on academic progress was very common in the corpus, and the distinction between "Providing Progress

³ All quotes from the corpus are verbatim, save for anonymizing features described in Section 3.2.

Information” and “Sharing Personal Experience” may allow for recognizing institutional-based requests versus personal requests as discussed above in Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996).

The third move that was found to be unnecessary when Ho’s framework was applied to the corpus was “Leaving Contact Information”, telephone numbers and email addresses at the end of an email. Based on the usual context of students writing their teacher, contact information appears to be unnecessary: teachers and students already know each other and the ‘reply’ button is all that is needed. It should be noted that one student in did actually put his email at the end at the message, however this was disregarded in the current study due to its singularity and the need to focus on the most salient norms. Further research with a larger corpus may suggest inclusion of this move. The removal of these three moves left 12 for inclusion or integration with the findings of the pilot study. Wherever suitable, Ho’s move names were maintained.

The pilot-identified move of “Greetings” (see Table 4 for this and all subsequent pilot move references) matched the form and function of Ho’s “Addressing” so the latter move name was used. Likewise, the pilot moves “Request Lead-in” and “Request” matched “Providing Background Information” and “Requesting”. The pilot move name “Request Justification” was kept over the very similar move function of “Convincing”. Although quite close, Ho’s “Convincing” seems to rely on a directness that befits status-congruent communication, as for example: “To make calculation easier, please be so kind as to give us no coins” (p. 311). In the present corpus, however, students explained the reasons for their requests by highlighting how their personal situation had made it necessary to ask, as for example: (following request for an obscure article) “I would really like to read the original article so that I would not have to rely only on others' citations”. The result may be convincing, but the way the move is realized is through justification.

Another pilot move that was kept was “Closing Thanks”, which exactly mirrored Ho’s “Showing Gratitude for Requested Help” but with a more succinct name. The phatic realization of the “Relational” move (5.2) from the pilot was also kept; it was found in the corpus and had no match in Ho’s scheme. The only remaining move in the pilot study, “Sign Off”, was amended to follow Ho’s two move structure of “Closing” and “Sign Off” to code for the fact that some samples used only a name sign off unaccompanied by a closing phrase. The three remaining moves in Ho’s framework, “Elaborating”, “Responding to Earlier

Email”, and “Attending to Recipients’ Situation”, all had unambiguous presence in the corpus and were included without adaptation. The resulting framework from this step of the coding process was a set of 14 moves (see Table 5). Following Ho’s example and unlike the pilot study, these moves were not divided into ‘steps’; the subdivision did not prove useful in the pilot analysis and such specificity seemed unlikely to benefit pedagogical application, though could certainly be interesting for a separate linguistic-based study.

3.3.3 Interrater Checks and Reliability

Once the moves were created and defined, the move list was given to two colleagues in the Linguistics department who worked together to code a sample of emails (n = 12, 4 of which used for training). Their discussion resulted in the following modifications to the scheme:

1. “Sharing Personal Experience” was changed to “Sharing Personal Information” to reflect personal nature of this move, as for example,
I would personally feel more comfortable with everything being crystal-clear and wouldn't like to have problems with research ethics (S7).
‘Experience’ on the other hand tended to be academic, coded as “Providing Progress Information”:
Concerning a possible site for data collection, I have had two positive feedbacks (S1).
2. “Attending to Recipients’ Situation” became “Attending to Recipients’ Status”. ‘Status’ better represented the unequal power relationship of students not wanting to infringe on teachers’ time (e.g. *sorry to bother you*), and in some cases praising teachers’ abilities or accomplishments: *you are an expert in this field (S19).*
3. “Responding to Earlier Email” became “Referencing Earlier Communication” to represent that students referred to both earlier emails and face-to-face conversations. Since the emails initiated new communication as outlined in Section 3.2, they were not ‘responding to’ but rather ‘referencing’ previous exchanges: *as per our discussion on Monday (S11).*

As well as these changes, move definitions were sharpened to obviate difficulties the coders encountered, resulting in the final move structure presented below in Table 5.⁴ This table was then used to recode the entire corpus. The initial coding was not consulted until after application of the finalized scheme; in some cases emails received quite different coding, likely due both to the updated structure and my increased familiarity with the genre. See Appendix C for a sample of final-coded emails.

Table 5. Moves of Student Request Email

Move	Code	Purpose	Example Text
Addressing	[ADR]	Start email, address recipient. Realized with greeting + name	"Hello FIRSTNAME" "Dear Dr. LASTNAME"
Acknowledging	[ACK]	Thank teacher for what they have done	"Thank you for the article you gave me."
Referencing Earlier Communication	[REC]	Refer to previous email or conversation	"following our conversation on Monday,..."
Providing Background Info	[PBI]	Give information 'around' the request, allowing student to make request more easily. Can be realized through attached drafts/ outlines, etc.	"I would like to ask the concept of one of the essay topics for CLASSCODE." "I attended FIRSTNAME's class last week and am unable to come in tomorrow."
Requesting	[REQ]	Ask for something (main purpose of email)	"I would be very grateful if you could have a look and let me know what you think." "Could you maybe send it to me?"
Elaborating	[ELA]	Give additional qualifying info about request	"Is it about the word count or do you want us to submit some parts of the dissertation" (following request to define 'draft') "I'd just like to ask you a few questions about my assignment" (following request for meeting)
Justifying	[JUS]	Give reasons for making request	"...since I do not think that I will be able to come up with a good result until next Wednesday."

⁴ Includes a later update to the PBI move resulting from interrater reliability, discussed below.

Providing Progress Info	[PPI]	Keep teacher abreast of student's current and future academic work	"I have been working on my data since last week, checking remaining trials for track loss etc and getting the data into a format that I can analyse."
Phatic Relational	[PHR]	Attend to relationship with teacher. Often realized through enquiring about health, holidays, etc.	"I hope you're feeling better now"
Sharing Personal Info	[SPI]	Explain student's feelings, personal situation	"I'm so happy I'm close to tears in a pc lab- sad but true!"
Attending to Recipient's Status	[ARS]	Acknowledge teacher's issues (often realized through apologizing) , appeal to teacher's status	"I'm sorry to bother you" "Unfortunately not every lecturer does offer this support to their students."
Closing Thanks	[CLT]	Show gratitude, end message	"Thank you in advance"
Closing	[CLO]	End email, show politeness	"Best wishes" "Thanks"
Sign Off	[SOF]	Give student's name	S1 - S23

Once the final scheme and corpus coding was complete, the move structure was taught to a third rater who coded a sample of emails (n = 11, 4 of which used for training)⁵ which was then checked against the corpus for interrater reliability. The agreement between the two was 80%, however, 'standard' moves like Addressing, Closing, and Sign Off, which are very easy to code, are partially responsible for this high percentage. Excluding these three moves, interrater reliability drops to 67%, necessitating another look. On reviewing the sample with the coder, we found that in one case he had simply mistook the code, assessing it correctly but writing down the wrong letters, and, embarrassingly, in one case I had done the same. In three emails with differences in coding agreement, going through them a second time resulted in the coder independently coding in agreement with the corpus, suggesting increased time and familiarity with coding upheld my original coding decisions. In two emails, however, a move I had originally coded as PBI the coder identified as JUS, upholding his original assessment (see Appendix D for both emails). My emphasis on PBI coming before a request and JUS usually after was at fault; the definition of PBI was adjusted from "Give info leading up to request" to the more background appropriate definition in Table 4, and the entire corpus was recoded for this refinement of meaning and to check for careless mistakes. In terms of interrater reliability, taking into account the two mistakes and move

⁵ At the time, 7 emails represented 10% of the corpus. Later additions meant 8 emails would be needed to get 10%.

refinement, agreement between the coded sample and corpus main moves was 85%, 90% for all moves, and changes in the second coding produced 99% agreement.

3.4 Ranking the Corpus

By and large, the empirical studies discussed thus far do not explicitly state what makes a request email good; they are more interested in observing phenomena of use. While use of negotiation moves (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000) and lexical modifiers (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007) has been found to make request email more effective and appropriate respectively, many studies simply equate effectiveness with seemingly impressionistic NS approval (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Chang & Hsu, 1998), and then base analysis on this. This section outlines methods which attempt to heighten validity of email assessment by determining which moves structures fit institutional norms, as per RQ2.

First, a literature survey to identify the norms was conducted, giving a checklist of features. However, determining how well each email fit with these norms, a highly subjective judgment, required a valid means of ranking each sample. Literature supports the use of rubrics to get reliable rankings of performance (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007), showing better results compared to other means (Marzano, 2002), so a rubric approach was chosen. Jonsson and Svingby's extensive literature survey found that topic-specific rather than general rubrics give more dependable scores (2007, p. 135), and since no topic-specific rubrics were found on the genre of email requests,⁶ one was created for the study. The literature survey and pilot rubric are described in 3.4.1; the finalized rubric is discussed in 3.4.2.

3.4.1 Rubric Pilot

Information on necessary components of a successful student request email was gathered from as many trustworthy sources as possible to create a valid rubric. While online sources on how to write successful email abound, only webpages with a clear, named link to university emailing culture, a publication date, and specific how-to points were used; wikis

⁶ While some interesting online rubrics for assessing email are available, they tend to either assess actual emailing/computer skills (e.g. "Grading Rubric for the Email Exam", 2011) or are directed at business letter/emailing formats that are usually taught in the American public school curriculum (e.g. Marquardt, 2006) and hence are not specific enough for the purposes of this study.

and other pages without fully-named authors, pages not associated with a university, undated pages, and articles reporting on email rather than explaining how to write it were not considered. The search produced eight seemingly trustworthy online sources, from self-study activities, like Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s “How to Write Email” (2005), to articles and blogs published by teachers at universities (Blattman, 2010; Glasby, 2010; Hargittai, 2006; Jerz, 2011; Leddy, 2005; Pawley, 2009), to one professor’s Youtube video (McMillan, 2009). Interestingly, with the exception of the first, all these sources were from American universities; no UK university sites were found. While more online sources could be located (though few fit the above listed credibility requirements), these eight seemed to provide “saturation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136) since no new points emerged after analysis of the fourth source. The earlier mentioned textbook chapters on academic email (Swales & Feak, 2000; Feak, Reinhart & Rohlck, 2009) are not relevant here as they focus on discovery tasks to build students’ awareness (e.g. discussion of Grice’s Maxims).

In addition to these sources, robust studies on business email were used (Burgess, Jackson, & Edwards, 2005; Kankaanranta, 2006). The University of Essex Department of Language and Linguistics handbook (2010) was also used, although as noted in the Section 2.3, this information only covers the greeting aspect of emails.

The main points from these 11 sources were summarized into nine items, with each item independent from the others to create an analytical rather than holistic rubric (Brookhart, 1999) in attempt to heighten scoring reliability (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007, p. 135-6). The 9 items were:

1. **Subject heading** – a clear, specific, and short indication of the email’s contents that does not look like spam (Hargittai, 2006; “How to Write Email”, 2005; Glasby, 2010; Jerz, 2011; Pawley, 2009)
2. **Addressing** – an appropriate greeting and recipient’s name, with correct title if necessary (Blattman, 2010; Glasby, 2010; Hargittai, 2006; “How to Write Email”, 2005; Leddy, 2005; McMillan, 2009; Pawley, 2009; U. Essex, 2010)
3. **Request Appropriacy** – the request is something the student should be asking. As Hargittai notes, “you want to make sure that the recipient does not feel like you are simply outsourcing your own research responsibilities” (2006, para. 13).

Similarly, Glasby (2010, Question 6) says students shouldn't ask for information that is already on the syllabus.

4. **Request is Actionable** – the request is clear and explicit (“How to Write Email”, 2005; Kankaanranta, 2006, p. 222) such that the teacher doesn't have to work (or email back) to find out what is wanted (Hargittai, 2006; Pawley, 2009).
Additionally the request should be something that can be answered by email. According to Burgess et al. (2005, p. 73), email is best used for “low ambiguity” situations; high ambiguity requests, such as how to approach a difficult assignment, may be better suited to a different medium, such as office hour meetings. Items 3 and 4 may overlap in very poor emails: Blattman's experience of a student email requesting an explanation of the Cold War (2010, part 9) is both inappropriate, as the student should do their own research, and non-actionable, as the professor cannot possibly email an answer.
5. **Succinctness** – the main point is made early (Kankaanranta, 2006, p. 222), the message is short and clear (Blattman, 2010, part 8), and different points are numbered if necessary (Jerz, 2011, part 2).
6. **Tone** – polite language (Blattman, 2010; “How to Write Email”, 2005; Leddy, 2005; Pawley, 2009), no flaming (Jerz, 2011), and respectful or non-demanding words to acknowledge that “professors are human beings” (McMillan, 2009, 1:15).
7. **Language** – correct spelling and punctuation, no texting abbreviations or emoticons (Blattman, 2010; Glasby, 2010; Jerz, 2011; McMillan, 2009; Pawley, 2009)
8. **Closing phrase** – “Best wishes” or similar is used (Hargittai, 2006; “How to Write Email”, 2005; Glasby, 2010)
9. **Name** – sender's name is given (Hargittai, 2006; “How to Write Email”, 2005; Glasby, 2010; Leddy, 2005; McMillan, 2009; Pawley, 2009)

Most of the sources also mentioned the necessity of emailing from a university address, but as all the samples in the corpus did this, it was taken as a given and not included in the rubric.

Following Moskal's (2000) description of scoring rubric development, 3 score levels (1, .5, 0) were given to each item to allow top, mid, and bottom scoring and the categories were weighted. More elaborate scoring was not considered necessary as the purpose was to create only a basic ranking of the emails – a more involved ranking could be a study unto itself – and also such simplification reduced the possibility of judgment error by requiring only a 'yes/ somewhat/ no' judgment. To further simplify, the less important categories of 'closing phrase' and 'name' were given only two score levels (1, 0) to indicate present or absent. Descriptions for each level of scoring within each item were developed to form an initial rubric (see Appendix E) with each of the 9 items assigned a weight out of 100 based on importance deduced from the above-mentioned information sources. The resulting rubric was used to score all 80 emails

3.4.2 Final Rubric

Two important alterations were found to be necessary to the pilot rubric. First, application of the pilot to the corpus revealed problems with the score descriptions in the 'action' and 'tone' categories. For example, the highest score of '1' for the action category initially meant "desired action is clear" which disregards whether or not it is an action the teacher can actually take (e.g. the request "can you recommend any books for the assignment" has a clear desired action, yet the teacher will be hard-pressed to act on such an unfocused question). The highest score in the 'tone' category was initially described simply as polite, yet for students with a long-standing relationship with their teacher, casual emails can be perfectly appropriate. Hence, score definitions for both categories were rewritten (see Table 6. Where categories overlap with this study's coding scheme, the 3-letter codes are used.)

Table 6. Final Rubric

Scoring Rubric		SCORE
Subject		
	Clear	1
	Vague/ too long	0.5
	Absent	0
ADR		
	Correct and appropriate name form, greeting	1
	Incorrect name form/ inappropriate greeting	0.5
	Absent	0
REQ Appropriacy		
	Appropriate to student role	1
	Somewhat appropriate	0.5
	Inappropriate	0
Action		
	Recipient can directly act on request	1
	Recipient can act on some of request/ answer somewhat	0.5
	Recipient cannot act on request - needs clarification	0
Succinctness		
	Succinct	1
	Slightly wordy/repetitive	0.5
	Needlessly wordy/repetitive	0
Tone		
	Politeness, level of formality appropriate to S/T relationship	1
	Somewhat appropriate to S/T relationship	0.5
	Inappropriate to S/T relationship	0
Language		
	Very minor or no mistakes	1
	A few mistakes or unclear phrasings	0.5
	Many mistakes or unclear phrasings	0
CLO		
	Present	1
	Absent	0
SOF		
	Present	1
	Absent	0

The second alteration was that the 100-point weighting was reworked to reflect a teacher interview specifically conducted on the weighting to get both a second opinion and an

“insider” viewpoint. While only one interview was conducted due to limitations of time and teacher availability, the literature-influenced weightings of the initial rubric fit closely with the interview data, suggesting good validity. The interview used an open-ended question about each category (e.g. “How important is X in a student request email?”) to allow the teacher depth and breadth of response (Dornyei, 2007, p. 136) and to discourage any sort of sequential ranking, lest categories be of equal importance. The data confirmed ‘request appropriacy’ and ‘request is actionable’ as the two most important categories, being “central” and “vital”, respectively (teacher interview, 25/7/11). Otherwise, a few minor changes were made, as can be seen below in Table 7, with the only larger change being the addition of a 4-point weight to ‘tone’ to reflect the interviewee’s response that this category could become one of the most important elements if done wrong.

Table 7. Changes in Rubric Weighting

Rubric Weighting (out of 100)									
	Subject	ADR	REQ appro	Action	Succinctness	Tone	Language	CLO	SOF
Pilot	13	10	18	18	13	10	10	2	6
Final	11	9	18	18	13	14	9	2	6

The final rubric was used to re-score the whole corpus. As an additional check on the email ratings, teachers in the below described interviews (Section 3.4.1) were also asked for a general reaction to any emails in the corpus that had been originally sent to them (17 emails, 5 teachers). Teachers were not told the email’s score. Comments and scores were assessed for match afterward; that is, a high-scoring email should receive positive comments from its actual teacher-recipient and vice versa. Interview data agreed with email ranking numbers for 12 samples, and in the remaining 5, teacher feedback indicated more positivity than the scoring number. In each case, without prompting, teachers provided the back-story of the email to show how the request made sense within its context. Those few exceptions were re-scored accordingly, resulting in a score increase of 7-10% for 4 emails, and 16% for one quite unique sample, shown in Appendix F. Ideally all the emails would have been assessed by their original recipient, but with 25 recipients, many of them unavailable during the summer, this was not possible. It is notable that the only fault of the scoring rubric was to occasionally give results slightly lower than real-life assessment indicated. As the purpose of this study is to determine a general, teachable move structure for the genre, scoring data that errs on the side of caution seems preferable to the reverse. While a ranking of such qualitative data

samples can never have one answer, it was hoped that the careful use of relevant literature, clear scoring definitions, and integration of specific professional feedback on both the instrument and the samples gave validity to the email ranking.

3.5 Interview Methods

While the above coding and ranking should clarify the moves of student request email, “to understand writing, we need to explore the practices that people engage in to produce texts as well as the ways that writing practices gain their meanings and functions as dynamic elements of specific cultural settings (Bazerman & Prior, 2004, p.2). To this end, interviews were conducted with the text-producers and the text-receivers. Both interviews employed open-ended questions using an interview guide, which allowed me to decide the wording and order of the questions during the interview (Patton, 1980, p. 206). While the intention had been to ask standardized questions every time, it immediately became apparent that the flexibility afforded by the guide approach improved rapport, making for a better and more informative interview. Given this study’s emic, qualitative approach, the guide’s advantages were deemed preferable to the increased comparability of a strictly standardized approach.

3.5.1 Teacher Interviews

Nine teachers in the Language and Linguistics department were interviewed about the same four emails, located in Appendix G, which were selected based on scoring and content to give a wide range of requests. This use of the same sample-set with multiple teachers who were not the original recipients mirrors Economidou-Kogetsidis's (2011) previously discussed method of researching teacher perception of email. This method was felt to best fit with this study’s focus on determining email norms rather than collecting sociological data on a particular student/teacher email interaction event. However, the original recipient is of course the one best able to judge an email’s appropriateness, and to this end all the teachers were also interviewed about any samples in the corpus that had been originally sent to them. In the case of one teacher, this included the first email of the sample-set. The shortcoming to using this approach is that three of the samples lack original recipient data. It was hoped that the nine interviewee data points for each email would make up for this, providing general

rather than teacher-specific appropriacy guidelines. This approach also circumvented the problem that many teacher-recipients in the corpus declined to participate or were unavailable during the summer months.

The first email (score=100) made an institutionally appropriate request to a supervisor for a meeting; the second email (score=53) asked about an assignment topic by giving a long list of possible focuses with no context moves to explain; the third email (score=62) asked for information from a teacher who had not met the student; the final email (score=91) made a fluent but institutionally inappropriate request for a meeting to change the grade of an assignment.

All nine teachers had experience teaching in a UK university context, ranging from just under three years to 45 years. The interview guide and details of teacher experience in the field can be found in Appendix H. All teachers gave informed consent through the form in Appendix I.

3.5.2 Student Interviews

Students who had submitted emails to the study were contacted for an interview. Unfortunately and predictably, as the interviews were not conducted until after mid-summer to allow for coding, many students had returned to their home countries or declined to participate due to their own research responsibilities. In particular, three of the four writers of the emails used in the teacher interviews were unable to participate or did not respond. While this is a significant shortcoming of the current research, the purpose of these interviews was to explore student perception of move use rather than get the specific story surrounding any one email, and therefore useful data was still gathered. Five students were interviewed, a number that should be increased in future studies but which nonetheless begins to explore the under-researched view of the student in email.

The interviews were conducted in two parts. First, to both break the ice and also determine students' general understanding of what makes a good email request, students were asked open-ended questions about the topic, followed up with a prompt card to encourage further consideration without using leading questions. The prompt card and how it was devised are given in Appendix J. In the second part of the interview, students were presented with their original emails one at a time and asked general questions to determine how

appropriate and useful the email was to them and how it was written. The idea was to generate a mini retrospective account (Greene & Higgins, 1994) for each email to get both the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of the composing process (p. 117-8), linking to this study’s purpose of identifying what moves students view as appropriate. However, the many shortcomings of retrospective accounts (p. 119-121) especially in student interviews (Tomlinson, 1984), such as participants giving answers to fit with leading questions, make this a far from perfect approach. It is hoped that the use of clear interview questions, triangulation with text analysis, and my non-threatening role as a fellow student heightens the student data validity, while recognizing Scheurich’s (1995) postmodern perspective that no interview (nor any method of data collection or that matter) can give a straightforward picture of “reality”. Finally, to look at the reasons for moves and move realizations more closely, Odell et al.’s (1983) discourse-based interview tactic of creating “cognitive dissonance” was used by asking the student to consider alternatives (e.g. using ‘Dear’ instead of ‘Hi’). The interview guide (Appendix K) gives both parts of the interview. All students gave informed consent to be interviewed (Appendix L).

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

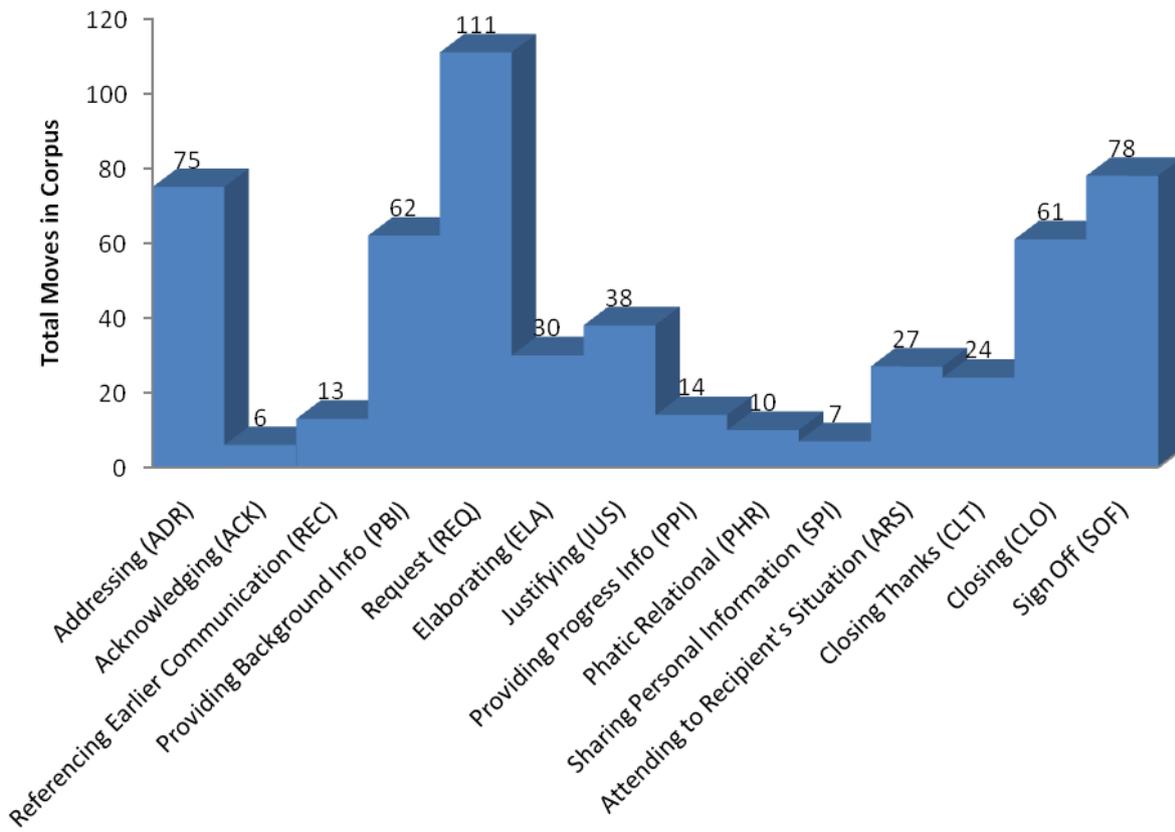
4. Results and Analysis

Results are presented sequentially by RQ, following also the sequence of the methods described in Chapter 3. The first section will focus only on numerical data, while the second will consider the relationship between these numbers and email ranking as determined by the scoring rubric discussed above in Section 3.4. Further analysis on these phenomena will be presented from the teachers' viewpoint in Section 4.3, and the students' viewpoint in Section 4.4.

4.1 What are the moves and move structures of academic student request email? (RQ1)

This first part of this question has to some extent already been answered by the pilot study and development of a 14 move coding scheme, described above and presented in Table 5: the moves of academic email are suggested to be those 14 moves. To answer the second part concerning move structure, it is necessary to calculate the frequency with which those 14 moves occurred in the corpus, and also determine the order in which they usually occurred. Figure 1 therefore presents the move occurrence frequency listed in order according to the moves' most common placement in the samples (e.g. ADR always came first).

Figure 1. Move Occurrence in the Corpus



That the request move (REQ) was the highest is hardly surprising: for emails to be included in the corpus they had to make a request and this was usually done in an explicit move, either directly or indirectly as per the CCSARP framework (Table 1). It is notable though that the REQ move is the only category to exceed the number of samples in the corpus (n=80). 56 samples (70%) contained only one REQ, one sample did not use REQ at all and instead relied entirely on hints, the most indirect CCSARP strategy (Table 1), and the remaining 23 samples contained 55 requests between them. Possible relationships between email success and move use will be discussed in the next section, however it seems clear that the general norm, at least in this corpus, is to make one request per email and for that request to be realized through direct or indirect strategies rather than hints. Other seemingly mandatory moves are the sign off (SOF), used in all but two samples, and addressing (ADR), used in all but five. Using a closing phrase (CLO) such as “Best wishes” was slightly less common (76%), perhaps reflecting email’s evolving, speech-like nature (Baron, 2003). Nonetheless, these three moves, common also to formal letters, are only somewhat less necessary to request emails than the request itself.

Outside of these moves, the most common was providing background information (PBI), more frequent even than the closing (CLO) move. The high occurrence of this move shows it to be an important part of request email. This may be because, much like the ‘context’ negotiation move discussed in Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000, 2002) above, PBI allows the student to increase the efficiency of the email by providing a fuller picture of the request, as in the following extract:

[ADR Dear FIRSTNAME,]

[PBI I would like to ask about LG### assignment. I am doing the listening topic so,] **[REQ I will be very grateful If you suggest some references regarding how teaching methods teach listening and some EFL materials as well.]**

Without the PBI move, the recipient of the above email might not know which class and certainly would not know which assignment topic the student wanted information about. While the broadness of the request is still difficult to answer, (as discussed below, this was a low-scoring email) it would be even more difficult without the PBI move.

As Figure 1 indicates, the remaining moves are not nearly so prevalent, though both justifying (JUS) and elaborating (ELA), two moves that again serve to give more information about the REQ move, have a noticeable presence. In terms of politeness strategies, the most common move was attending to recipients’ status (ARS), most often realized through appeals to negative face (e.g. I am sorry to bother you). Acknowledging (ACK) was the least frequent move as the emails were usually initiating communication, meaning there was no prior help to acknowledge. The two most personal moves, phatic relational (PHR) and sharing personal information (SPI), also had a very low presence, showing the academic rather than social focus of the genre.

As already noted, Figure 1 displays not only the frequency of each move within the corpus, but also shows the most common move ordering, albeit a generalized one that does not exactly represent any one email. For example, both acknowledging (ACK) and referencing earlier communication (REC) tended to come directly after the first move (ADR), but REC also occurred later in some samples so is put third in Figure 1. This general understanding of what move order the emails employed combined with the frequency information described above suggests that the following is the most common move structure for academic request emails:

1. Addressing (ADR)
2. Providing Background Info (PBI)
3. Request (REQ)
4. Closing (CLO)
5. Sign Off (SOF)

While these five moves all had unambiguous presence in the corpus, occurring in 60-98% of the total emails, a more detailed move structure could include optional moves, indicated in italics below, that are less common but still seem to play an important role in the genre. The below table is therefore proposed as a fuller answer to RQ1; percentages indicate total emails that used each move.

Table 8. Move structure indicated by frequency and order analysis

1. Addressing (ADR) – 94%
2. Providing Background Info (PBI) – 60%
3. Request (REQ) – 99%
4. *Elaborating (ELA)* – 29%
5. *Justification (JUS)* – 38%
6. *Attending to Recipient's Status (ARS)* – 29%
7. *Closing Thanks (CLT)* – 30%
8. Closing (CLO) – 76%
9. Sign Off (SOF) – 98%

Analysis thus far shows the above move structure best represents the genre, albeit according to the corpus collected for this study, and that the five other moves [Acknowledging (ACK), Referencing Earlier Communication (REC), Providing Progress Info (PPI), Phatic Relational (PHR), and Sharing Personal Information (SPI)] are too rare for inclusion. However, frequency data may not provide the whole story. Possible modifications to Table 8 will be presented in the next three sections.

4.2 Which moves and move structures fit institutional norms as determined by literature on university email? (RQ2)

The rubric described in Section 3.4 allowed for a way to score emails according to how well they fit with institutional norms. Half the corpus (n=40) scored from 90-100% (henceforth referred to as high-ranking), meaning these emails were highly or completely appropriate according to institutional norms, while the other half scored mainly between 71-89% (henceforth referred to as low-ranking), although as can be seen in Table 9 below, some scored significantly lower.

Table 9. Scores for High- and Low-Ranking Emails

High-ranking		Low-ranking			
Score	# of emails	Score	# of emails	(continued)	
100.0%	15	88.5%	1	73.5%	2
95.5%	2	88%	2	73%	1
94.5%	5	86.5%	5	72.5%	1
93.5%	5	86%	1	72%	3
93.0%	4	85.5%	2	71.5%	1
91.0%	7	84.5%	2	71%	1
90.0%	2	84%	2	62%	1
	Total = 40	83%	1	59.5%	1
		82%	1	58.5%	1
		77.5%	1	56%	1
		76.5%	2	53%	2
		76%	1	49.5%	1
		75.5%	2	31%	1
				Total = 40	

Frequency difference in move use between the high- and low-ranking emails, presented in Table 10, indicates certain move uses correlate with a higher score.

Table 10. Move Frequency in High- and Low-Ranking Emails

Move	Number of Occurrences	
	High-ranking emails	Low-ranking emails
Addressing (ADR)	40	35
Acknowledging (ACK)	3	3
Referencing Earlier Communication (REC)	7	6
Providing Background Info (PBI)	25	37
Request (REQ)	52	59
Elaborating (ELA)	13	17
Justifying (JUS)	19	19
Providing Progress Info (PPI)	5	9
Phatic Relational (PHR)	2	8
Sharing Personal Info (SPI)	1	6
Attending to Recipient’s Status (ARS)	15	12
Closing Thanks (CLT)	12	12
Closing (CLO)	34	27
Sign Off (SOF)	40	38

Although the frequencies are often quite close, the differences are revealing. First, the samples that omitted the addressing (ADR) move were all low-ranking. This may not be surprising as including an appropriate address was part of the scoring rubric, however it only had a 9 point weight, meaning that emails that didn’t include ADR all had other faults as well. It appears that lack of ADR correlates with inappropriate casualness, as seen in the following email:

[REQ Can I come to your office and pick up my oral grade today?]
[ELA Between 3 and 4 maybe?]
[SOF S10]

Not only does this sample neglect to use PBI, potentially leaving the receiver unaware of which class’s grades are needed, but the actual recipient of this email felt there was “something missing” resulting in it feeling rude. However, it is not suggested that simply including ADR would make the email better, as the recipient, a studier of pragmatics herself, felt asking for a same day appointment outside of office hours made the “level of imposition too high.”⁷ It seems instead that students who do not use ADR also tend to make institutionally inappropriate requests, such as those found in negatively assessed NNS emails

⁷ All recipient quotes and paraphrases are from the teacher interviews described in Section 3.4.1

in Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996). Unlike that study, however, the less appropriate, non-ADR-using students in this study were all undergraduate NSs, suggesting that sociopragmatic university norms need to be taught to all new entrants to this community of practice, whether NS or NNS. Similarly, the emails that did not include a sign-off (SOF) or a closing move (either CLT or CLO), were all low-ranking and also tended to come from NSs.

Although Section 4.1 noted that providing background info (PBI) is a useful move that can improve message efficiency, Table 10 above shows that PBI had higher frequency in low-ranking emails. One reason for this is that the low-ranking emails made slightly more requests than the high-ranking; since the most standard move structure, as discussed above, is PBI followed by REQ, more requests mean more PBIs. Making more than one request per email has already been shown not to be the norm; additionally, the scoring data suggests such heightened use of PBI/REQ negatively impacts the email, an understandable finding as multi-request emails may ask for too much. The higher PBI frequency in low-ranking emails also results from some emails using multiple PBIs, unlinked to requests. This increased move use appears to be negative.

Naturally, the way the moves are realized can have far more impact than simply their presence or absence. The below email follows the frequency-ratified move structure in Table 8 (with no optional moves), yet the amount of information in the PBI move hampers the clarity and succinctness of the request, while the need for the teacher to assess multiple attachments raises the request imposition, such that this standard structure email did not quite score as high-ranking (84.5%).

[ADR Hi FIRSTNAME,]

[PBI Please find attached my slides for the coming RESEARCH GROUP meeting! I also attached you some other documents which I put them as hyperlinks in my presentation. They are Word documents in my M.Drive and I'll refer and display them for the audience. The documents are put according to the sequence of the presentation. You'll see that I made many slides but I tried to put less text and I'll do more talk. Concerning the results, I have many but you know because I'm still working on the analysis, I just chose to report some on only one aspect(MBA tasks).]

[REQ Looking forward to seeing you comments!]

[CLO Best,]

[SOF Student]

Indeed, if the request is not actionable, as in the already-discussed sample below,

[REQ I will be very grateful If you suggest some references regarding how teaching methods teach listening and some EFL materials as well.]

use of appropriate structure makes no difference. The email in which the above request occurred used ADR and PBI, and also used a full closing structure (CLT, CLO, SOF), yet it scored 53% and was identified by the recipient as leaving a somewhat negative impression.

To return to the frequency data, the justification (JUS) move had equal occurrence in the high- and low-ranking emails, yet the number of emails using it was greater in the high-ranking set as the lower-ranking had repeated use within single emails. This broader use of JUS in the high-ranking data shows these emails may be displaying more NS negotiation ability (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000, 2002) than their low-ranking counterparts. On the other hand, too much justification seems to correlate with a lower ranking. A closer look at the realization of these frequent low-ranking JUS moves reflects Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig's (1996) finding that negatively assessed emails often framed requests within a personal rather than university context. For example, in the below extract the student tries to obligate the teacher to help him because he has been working hard and wants a high grade, a personal context, and ignores the fact that the teacher cannot change departmental rules on assignment length:

[JUS Please FIRSTNAME, I've been working very hard and would like to score high in this module.] [REQ Give me some advice.
Do you think the analysis is enough or should I write more?] **REITERATED**
[ELA Many interesting things are there in the dialogue, but no space.]**REITERATED**⁸

Additionally, as the reiteration of the moves makes clear, this was a very lengthy email, imposing on the recipient's negative face. Use of the attending to recipient's status (ARS) move, frequently realized through appeals to negative face through apologizing, was more common in the high-ranking emails.

A similar case of move use correlating with lower ranking is shown with the providing progress info (PPI) move (5 high-ranking, 9 low-ranking). While providing progress information would seem a good thing to do, the low-ranking emails tended to use lengthy or doubled PPI moves, which hampered the clarity of the request. This appears to

⁸ REITERATED indicates repetition of a move with the same purpose, e.g. two separate request moves asking for the same thing. See Appendix C, sample 5 for the complete email.

also be the case for the elaborating move (ELA), which had a slightly higher occurrence in the low-ranking emails. Even more strikingly, the more personal moves, phatic relational (PHR) and sharing personal information (SPI), occurred almost exclusively in the low-ranking data; only three occurred in the high-ranking emails. The most probable explanation is not that the moves themselves are negative but, similar to the above-discussed ADR move, students who use them may also use an overly casual tone, as seen in the below email, which starts abruptly without ADR and makes use of informal features such as non-capitalization and emoticons:

[PBI Tuesdays class
I have an interview in PLACENAME on tuesday for a job in COMPANY so I
can't make the class.]
[REQ Can I have a copy of the work so that I can do it on the train?]
[ARS I'm sorry I really didn't want to miss the revision class but I don't have
much choice :(]
[PHR Have a nice bank holiday weekend]
[SOF FIRSTNAME]

As well as the casual tone, the recipient of the above email found offensive the ‘casualness’ in the expectation that discussion-based class work could be somehow sent and also that it was the teacher’s duty to do so rather than get class-notes from a fellow student.

Overall, the findings from the high- and low-ranking data corroborate the move structure presented in Table 8. The data shows that both ADR and SOF are indeed necessary, as is a closing move of either CLT or CLO, and that SPI and PHR are to be avoided. Additionally, JUS appears to be a positive move provided it does not focus on personal context, and ARS likewise seems positive. Besides move inclusion, the data has shown that multiple use of the same move and lengthy realizations of moves make for a less appropriate request. Given these findings, it would seem the move structure in Table 8 should be kept, but needs an additional note that moves should not be repeated and should be kept brief. It was also noted that for an email to be successful, the move realization must be appropriate; for example, a request must be actionable. Such appropriacy is harder to categorize, being outside the constructs of a move analysis and highly dependent on context. The next two sections therefore attempt to probe what both parties involved in academic email, teachers and students, feel to be appropriate.

4.3 Which moves and move structures do teachers identify as appropriate or inappropriate? (RQ3)

As with any qualitative data, the nine teacher interviewees can be said to have nine different views on each of the four emails that were discussed (Appendix G). However, general norms did emerge and will be presented here organized by email sample. All data is taken verbatim from interviews, however data was also quantitized (Dornyei, 2007, p. 269-70) to enable an overall understanding (see Appendix M). It should also be noted that despite the interview questions' design to evoke some sort of judgment (e.g. "Do you feel the request is appropriate?", Appendix H), almost all interviewees emphasized that they tried to ignore negative impressions created by student email, as it was generally understood to be a difficult and unfamiliar genre, and any offense caused was likely unintentional. Such withholding of judgment may have to be exercised often: Byron (2008) found that people tend to misread as negative emails that were intended to be positive or neutral. While this professed non-judgment is highly beneficial for students, it would be even better if students could make email requests that create a positive impression rather than a withholding of judgment.

4.3.1 Email 1 – Request for meeting with PhD supervisor (Score: 100%)

This sample was chosen to gauge reaction to a straightforward and high-ranking request. All teachers felt it was clear, with the exception of Teacher 5 who, as can be seen in Appendix H, has not yet supervised any PhD students and therefore has less experience with this kind of request. Additionally, all teachers felt they could answer it easily and quickly, and that it was fine or "completely appropriate" for the student to make this request. When asked about appropriacy within the whole email rather than just the request, most teachers noted linguistic issues, particularly with the level of formality. Several pointed to the use of "Hi" instead of "Dear" and the phrasal verb "pop into [your office]" as being rather casual. It being the Language and Linguistics department, one teacher had even written a paper on the use of the word "actually" and therefore couldn't help noticing that the student had used it wrongly. However, all except one teacher felt this casualness was either fine for them, or fine given a PhD student/supervisor relationship, and expressed little issue with linguistic errors. All teachers reported a neutral or positive impression from reading the email, one noting in particular that the email was "clear about when and what" and therefore he felt favorable towards it.

These results suggest that students should not worry unduly about linguistic errors when writing academic email requests, but they should be aware of what level of formality is required. Preference for “Hi” versus “Dear” or other greetings is likely to vary from teacher to teacher and is currently in flux (for an amusing debate on this issue, see Searcey, 2011), but for greetings and other move realizations alike, casualness should be used only once a relationship has been established. While this finding counters the theory that the globalization of English has produced communication norms of directness and egalitarianism (Cameron, 2003), it is in line with Murphy and Levy's (2006) research which shows that informality can create problems between emailers of different cultural backgrounds, and this should be obviated by using politeness strategies and a ‘prudent’ degree of formality. It would appear the most pedagogically valid approach is to teach students both polite and casual move realizations (e.g if it would be possible to see you/ if I could pop in) but stipulate the casual should only be employed after the student feels on friendly terms with the teacher. Naturally, as discussed in the student data in the next section, students may feel this quickly or not at all; such elements of interaction depend entirely on the student and teacher involved. The interview data on this email suggest that if students cannot be taught both casual and formal styles, for example due to time constraints, only formal should be taught.

4.3.2 Email 2 – Request for help with assignment (Score: 53%)

This email displayed a very long request (REQ) move essentially giving a list of six general topics for possible inclusion in an assignment, but did not make use of any other moves in the body of the email to explain this list save for briefly providing background info (PBI). Because it is about a specific assignment and area of study, some teachers were unfamiliar with the topic. As a result, five teachers identified the request as clear, while the actual recipient did not. However, all but two indicated it would be difficult to reply to this request, with most saying they would have to ask the student to come in and talk to them, while the original recipient said he would need to spend a lot of time responding, so as to properly think it through and not inadvertently misguide the student. One teacher noted that answering the student with a yes/no email would be “pedagogically useless” and another stated he would use the email as a teaching opportunity for the student, perhaps for the whole class. As for the overall impression the email gave, one teacher summed it up best by saying “I’m not unhappy that the student asked this – I get such requests often – but it’s not

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appropriate to pedagogical culture, which of course the student doesn't know." Most teachers presented similar impressions, noting that the student had not explained enough and seemed to want the teacher to do the work for them.

It seems this email, which was written by a NNS Master's student, displays two major shortcomings. First, it was unclear what the student wanted and therefore difficult to answer, reflecting Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2000) finding that NNS emails are often less successful than NS emails due to their lack of detailed information and justification, which hampers both response and response time. Second and particularly noted by the teacher-interviewees, including the original recipient, the nature of the request itself was not appropriate for a graduate student at this university, as the student is asking the teacher to formulate the assignment rather than provide guidance on the student's own ideas. This shows the same pragmatic failure noted in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's (1990) study of advising sessions wherein NNSs "encountered negative reactions from the advisors because they were not fulfilling their role as graduate students to have independent opinions" (p. 485-6). As discussed in Section 2.2, this kind of sociopragmatic failure is common because students are rarely taught pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Schauer, 2006), a situation some of the teacher-interviewees were well aware of, and sought to actively address by using the email as a chance for pedagogic instruction.

In terms of move structure, the interview data suggests that students asking for coursework assistance must be taught that the request move (REQ) should be clear, answerable, and ideally include their own view. For example, several high-ranking emails in the corpus used some version of "I was thinking of using X because Y" as opposed to this email's "Shall I include XYZ?" Use of elaboration (ELA) and justification (JUS), which were given as optional moves in Table 8 above, appears to be necessary when making complex information requests, suggesting a further point for inclusion in the final move structure.

4.3.3 Email 3 – Request for information from unknown student (Score: 62%)

This email was from a student who had never met the teacher but wanted information about the subject the teacher specialized in. This common academic request situation wherein the teacher does not know the student heightens imposition to negative face as the teacher may feel less required to respond. Most of the teacher-interviewees thought this request was

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clear but too general; they were not sure what information the student really wanted. Most also felt they would need to email the student back for more information, some, however, said they would just email general information or webpages and “let the student do the work.” The request itself was viewed as fine if a bit vague, and several teachers emphasized that they felt it was their job to provide information to these kinds of requests. Despite this appropriacy, the move realizations evoked several negative reactions, with teachers citing the apparent naivety of the student in the unfocused request (REQ) move, the casualness of getting a handout from a friend in the providing background info (PBI) move, and the unnecessary attending to recipient’s status (ARS) move of “you are an expert in this field.” This last move in particular shows the student’s inappropriate transfer of politeness strategies from her L1, displaying the “gift-giving” technique Chen (2001) observes in Chinese students’ English emails.

Similar to the previous sample, this data shows that clarity in the request (REQ) move is key to creating a positive impression. Additionally, while it is reassuring that for the previous sample some teachers suggested pedagogic intervention, none said they would let the writer of this email know they found it naïve or the ARS move inappropriate, reflecting Chen's (2006) case-study finding that teachers do not provide feedback on emails. It seems that the serious lack of understanding displayed in Email 2 motivates teachers to help, but the still disadvantageous though less severe lack of pragmatic awareness in Email 3 will never be addressed. In other words, to fully advantage students, this genre and its accompanying pragmatics need to be explicitly taught (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2006, 2007; Bloch, 2002; Chen, 2006).

4.3.4 Email 4 – Request for meeting to change grade (Score: 91%)

This email made a request most teachers found somewhat inappropriate yet used a sophisticated move structure that resulted in positive judgment. Most teachers felt the email was making two requests: an appropriate and explicit request for a meeting, and an inappropriate indirect hint for a higher grade. As one teacher put it, the student wants to “moan about results and hopefully argue up.” The indirect hint is inappropriate as it is against university guidelines for a teacher to change a grade; however, all interviewees said they would advise the student of second-marking procedures. Despite this hinted inappropriacy, all teachers felt it was easy to answer the request by simply setting up a meeting time, and

indeed the student (interviewed below) revealed this is what the recipient did. Although many teachers took exception to the inflated and slightly imposing tone, what is notable in this data is that despite both linguistic gaffes and a request that is impossible to act on within university guidelines, all felt the request to be appropriate. Responses ranged from it being the student's right to ask about grades to it being "well worth trying it on" in regards to attempting to get a better grade. One reason for this assessment is that first and foremost, the request for a meeting is clear and easily answerable, unlike some grade-related emails teachers-interviewees had received that just vented emotion about a low mark. Asking for a meeting with a view to asking for something else appears to be a worthwhile strategy that should be included in the move structure for high-imposition emails.

In addition to this request-within-a-request strategy, the email also made use of a justification (JUS) move, two moves each of providing background information (PBI) and elaborating (ELA), and acknowledging (ACK) help the teacher had already given. This elaborate move structure appears to be directly related to the teachers' positive impression of the request as it allows the student to be quite indirect, a trait one teacher noted gave the email a NS feel. The analysis of Email 2 suggested that ELA and JUS moves are necessary for complex requests, such as negotiating assignment topics; the analysis here suggests these moves are also necessary if making a high-imposition request. While the findings presented at the end of Section 4.2 emphasized single use of each move, this email actually makes double use PBI and ELA. However, several teachers felt the email could be cut down to be more appropriate, and one teacher particularly noted that the second PBI move, which was about the student's upcoming job interview, was unnecessary and added to the email's heavy focus on the student's side of things. Double move uses appear to evoke negative assessment, even in this highly proficient email, so single move use should still be emphasized in the final move structure.

To sum up, the teacher data has shown that two points need to be added to the move structure in Table 8. First, the optional moves should be used if the request is complex, i.e. not asking something that can be answered yes or no. It is not necessary to use all the optional moves (although it may help), but at least elaboration (ELA) and justification (JUS) should be used. Second, these optional moves should also be used if the email makes a high-imposition request. Additionally, if the request is very high imposition, it may be best to ask for a meeting to ask the request. In terms of move realization, the teacher data suggests students should err on the side of formality if they unsure what tone is appropriate to use in

emailing their teacher, that the request move must be clear and actionable to avoid making a negative impression, and that, given teachers' general tolerance of all the email requests no matter what their personal feeling may have been, it is better to ask than not to ask. Considering these findings and those noted in Section 4.2, the move structure originally proposed in Table 8 could include additional information on move usage, shown below.

Table 11. Final Move Structure

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Addressing (ADR) 2. Providing Background Info (PBI) 3. Request (REQ) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Always include these moves</p> <p>-make the request as clear as possible</p> <p>-if the request is for something very big, ask for an appointment to talk about it</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Optional Moves</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. <i>Elaborating (ELA)</i> 5. <i>Justification (JUS)</i> 6. <i>Attending to Recipient's Status (ARS)</i> 7. <i>Closing Thanks (CLT)</i> 	<p><i>Use these moves (at least 4 and 5) for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>complex requests that can't be answered with a simple yes/no</i> • <i>high-imposition requests that ask the teacher to do something difficult or time consuming</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Closing (CLO) 9. Sign Off (SOF) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Always include these moves</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use each move only once ➤ Keep each move short 	

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The idea of using a more formal tone at first is not included in the above table as this requirement changes over time and is highly dependent on student preference, as discussed below. It is hoped that Table 11, which presents a summary answer to RQs 1-3, makes for a valid and pedagogically useful move structure that ‘demystifies’ the genre.

4.4 What are students’ perceptions of these moves? (RQ4)

While data from the scoring rubric and teacher interviews are hoped to enhance the appropriacy of this study’s move structure, the structure runs the risk of being prescriptive and non-representational if it does not include or acknowledge the views of the actual email writers. As noted in Section 3.5.2, the student data is compromised by the small number of interviewees, only one of whom was represented in the samples used for teacher interviews; due to this and space limitations, only the most pertinent findings will be discussed.

The first interviewee was also the writer of Email 4 above, which he emphasized had been a difficult email to write. Move-specific questioning revealed that the acknowledgment (ACK) of feedback was deliberately used to make the email sound more positive. When asked if the ACK move could be removed, the student noted it could be, agreeing with this study’s finding of ACK as non-essential, but stated “it’s nicer with it”. No other moves were identified as possible for omission, showing a disconnect between the student’s view and that of some of the teachers, noted above, who felt moves such as the second PBI about the student’s job interview were unnecessary. Additionally, the inflated tone with which all the moves were realized, an element that received much criticism in the teacher interviews, was consciously chosen to appear polite and show compliance, even if that was not the end result. Further questioning suggested this email was influenced by the student’s understanding of and familiarity with business etiquette, which he fell back on due to the difficulty of the request. An understanding of academic email norms would have been advantageous, although ultimately this email was still successful as the student was granted the desired meeting, and even got a higher grade when his assignment was sent to a second marker.

Another email the student provided for this study made a much more succinct request for the source of an article the teacher had given him, excerpted below (see Appendix C, 2 for full email):

[ACK Thank you for the article you gave me.] [PBI While trying to cite it I realised that neither Essex Library, the British Library nor Google could identify the source.] [REQ Could you give me a hint where it was published?]

The student identified the PBI move as carrying out an additional function to the one proposed in Table 5: here the move was employed because the student “didn’t want to appear lazy” and therefore emphasized the work he had done. Part of PBI’s importance in this study’s move structure may therefore be due to its usefulness in letting students manage their positive face.

This use of PBI was also found in a different interview. This interviewee had sent her teacher an email asking for help accessing a video clip (Appendix C, 4) using the following lead-in to the request:

[ARS I'm sorry to bother you, but] [PBI the *Pasta eating clip.wmv* file is giving me trouble: I cannot access it at home, and on campus it's playing but not very fluently.]

The student explained this email had been sent the day before an assignment about the mentioned video clip was due. The “giving me trouble” realization of the PBI move was deliberately non-specific to “hedge the fact that [she] hadn’t done anything yet” and thus made the student look more engaged. The student also specified that this move realization was out of respect, and that she did not want to imply the teacher’s job was to “troubleshoot students all the time.” In this case, the PBI move not only helped the student maintain positive face, but was also perceived to minimize threats to the teacher-recipient’s positive face. The student also noted that the ELA move, showing she did try to solve the problem, served a similar face maintaining function.

ELA move use in an email (Appendix C, 6) written by a third interviewee instead made a play to negative face. The student identified the below move, which followed a request to join sessions the teacher conducted for her MA students, as a chance for the teacher to say no.

[ELA I assume that they are aimed at the students whose dissertations you supervise]

While this is a very indirect way of allowing refusal, the student’s perception shows ELA can address negative face, as well as the positive noted above.

The fourth interviewee revealed that the phatic (PHR) move, emphasized as unnecessary and possibly even negative in this study, was important to her. She used PHR (“I would like to wish you all the best for 2011”) in two of the seven emails she submitted, and when asked whether the move could be omitted, in both cases she said it would make the email too abrupt. PHR was a politeness strategy for this student; if she were forced to remove it as per the move structure in Table 11, the appropriateness of her emails would not change but her satisfaction with what she had written might decrease. This seems an unnecessary trade-off. Conversely, the final interviewee may be advantaged by learning the move structure. She used and then reiterated the same REQ move (see Appendix C, 7) because she “really needed” a positive reply, a use which the recipient identified as unnecessary. While in the case of this email, this strategy was not a problem because the request was simply for an appointment, if the student needs to make other urgent request that are more complex, this study suggests she will make a better impression by using JUS and ELA moves instead of repeating the REQ move.

In addition to this move specific data, three of the five students noted that they consciously chose a formal tone when writing to teachers initially and then became more casual over the year, corresponding with this study’s suggested finding of appropriate tone use. However, one of the students who proposed this added that she was only able to become more casual in emails to her supervisor; she did not feel comfortable enough to be casual with her other teachers, for example by using first names.

Overall it seems that student perceptions of move use may go beyond the functional purpose of a move to include facework, such as performing the role of a good student, as with the PBI move for the first two interviewees, or minimizing face threatening acts to the teacher, as with the ELA move for the third interviewee. Additionally students may have specific personal reasons for writing as they do that are not necessary to challenge.

5. Conclusion

This study has performed a move analysis on a corpus of 80 student request emails, proposing a nine-move structure that students can follow to create emails that are appropriate according to institutional norms, determined through a literature-based scoring rubric, and according to teachers' opinions, determined through nine teacher interviews. Four of the eight moves were deemed optional, however they should be used for complex or high imposition requests. Move realization is an important factor which this study considers only generally, finding that the request (REQ) move must be clear and answerable to avoid making a negative impression and that the tone should be formal at the beginning of a student/teacher relationship. More detailed move realizations, such as linguistic features, are not considered in this study, however such features are researched in other studies (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000, 2002; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). The idea of appropriate move use was expanded by interviewing five students about their reasons for move use in emails they had submitted to the corpus. It was found that students may use moves to accomplish more than one function, such as giving background information about a request while also performing the role of motivated student.

Information from the student interviews is one of the main limitations of this study. Ideally, the student data would have come from the students who wrote the samples that were assessed in the teacher interviews, however this was not possible, with the exception of one student. Additionally, due to my and other students' severe time constraints, only five student interviews were carried out, a number which does not give generalizable findings. The method of the student interviews could also have been more focused: the emphasis on open-ended questions made for more natural data collection but also created such wide-ranging qualitative data that only the smallest amount could be discussed here within the dissertation word limit. Further research could focus specifically on student perception of email, following on from this study's predominant text and teacher focus.

The teacher interviews also had a limitation, as only one original recipient was represented in the four-email set used in interviews. It was hoped that the teachers, the four emails, and the students would all line up, but these three variables proved incompatible. The need to use emails with different scores and kinds of requests to get a useful variety of data meant that emails could not be selected by sender or recipient alone, and selecting by which

students were available often lined up with an unavailable teacher or vice versa. Future work could incorporate more complete writer/recipient data.

As the purpose of this research was to create a teachable move structure, the findings in Table 11 will be used in conjunction with genre-based teaching theory by the researcher in future classrooms of academic and pre-academic students. Classroom use may introduce changes to the table for pedagogic purposes, but it is comforting to know the data within the table will assuredly give students an advantage within their community of practice.

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(Rubric must be downloaded)

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APPENDIX A. Email asking for participants



PARTICIPANT REQUEST EMAIL

Department of
Language and Linguistics



Calling Language & Linguistics students

Hello! It's dissertation time and I need your help. My name is Joy and I'm planning to analyze how students request things from their teachers via email. To do that I need your emails!

Later I will interview teachers about the emails and I may request to interview you (don't worry, you can say no). All emails will be anonymized and only you or some teachers in Language & Linguistics will be interviewed about them.

To help me out, just find any request emails you've written to your teachers, forward them to me (jabaug@essex.ac.uk) and put the below information into one of your emails. Easy to do and you will have my undying gratitude for taking part.

Please include:

- 1) your nationality + L1**
- 2) year of study (ex: 2nd year undergrad, masters, etc)**
- 3) English-speaking countries you've lived in + how long**

Also, please paste this paragraph into your email:

I agree for the data I provide to be used in this study. I will only send emails I am comfortable sharing. I understand that my personal details will not be used, that my

emails may be discussed with me (if I agree to an interview) and with teachers. I am aware that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Please note:

*all information will be anonymised and stored on a password-protected PC.

*emails should be (1) sent to a teacher in the Language and Linguistics Department (2) make a request (3) be something you're comfortable sharing

*if you already participated in my previous email study, thank you so much and please participate again if you can! If you don't remember whether or not you previously forwarded a particular email, just send it again.

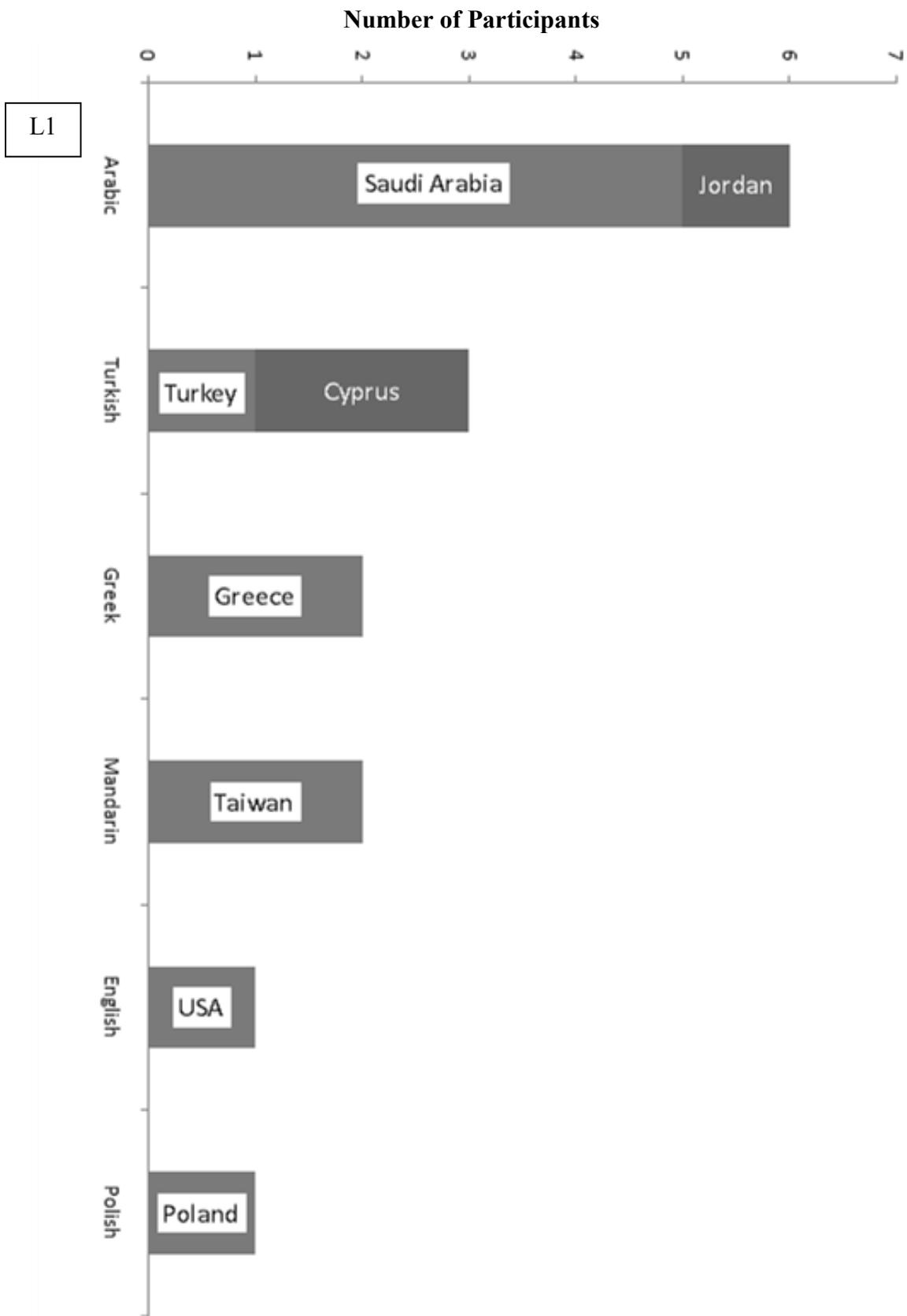
I know it's a busy time for all of us and I will be very grateful for your help.

THANK YOU!

Joy

jabaug@essex.ac.uk

APPENDIX B. Nationality and L1 distribution of pilot study participants



APPENDIX C. Sample of final-coded emails

1

Subject: Letter to company for MA research

[ADR Hi FIRSTNAME,]

[PBI attached you will find a draft of the letter to COMPANY for my MA research.] [REQ I would be very grateful if you could have a look and let me know what you think.]

[CLO Best]
[SOF S1]

Attachment = 1 pg./ 338 words

2

Subject: Article on Multilingualism in the EU

[ADR Dear FIRSTNAME,]

[ACK Thank you for the article you gave me.] [PBI While trying to cite it I realised that neither Essex Library, the British Library nor Google could identify the source.] [REQ Could you give me a hint where it was published?]

[ELA So far I know the author: Anastasios-Fivos Christidis, and the title "Policies for Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in the European Union"] [JUS but I am unable to get other info to cite it properly.]

[CLT Thank you!]

[SOF S14]

3

Subject: FW: Paris Accomodation - Question about my COMPANY job

[ADR Bonjour]

[PHR Tout va bien, je crois que l'examen de la157 c'était fantastique et j'espère que tu trouves la mienne d'être excellent !]⁹

⁹ Approximately: "All is well, I think the exam for 157 was fantastic and I hope you find mine to be excellent!"

[PBI More importantly.... I have had a further confirmation of my COMPANY job and I just wanted to verify a bit with you:

Tu auras 2 métiers sur ton contrat, -] [REQ what exactly does this bit mean ?] [ELA I'm working in two places or?]

[PPI Also, she said in a separate email that my French is impeccable and I will have no problems in Paris.]

[SPI I'm so happy I'm close to tears in a pc lab- sad but true!]

[CLO Thanks,]

[SOF S10

4

Subject: Video clips for transcription and analysis

[ADR Hi FIRSTNAME,]

[ARS I'm sorry to bother you, but] [PBI the *Pasta eating clip.wmv* file is giving me trouble: I cannot access it at home, and on campus it's playing but not very fluently.]

[REC I'm using the links you emailed us (see below),] [REQ is there any other way of accessing the files? Could you maybe send it to me?] [ELA I've tried looking on 4od but since I don't know which episode the Pasta Eating Clip is in (seems to me, they're eating pasta in every episode!) this is a bit of a hassle.]

[REQ I hope you can help me out,] **REITERATED**

[CLO Best wishes,]

[SOF S4 Fullname]

5

Subject: Student's name

[ADR Dear Dr. LASTNAME,]

[ACK Thanks a million for the effort you make to the difficult concept of SCT easy to grasp. Last exercise was really helpful.]

[PBI I have a question about the assignment. I'm almost done and it turns out that the word numbers in each sections is as follows:

Literature review: 550

Analysis: 700

Criticism and Suggestions: 400]

[SPI I am really concerned about the word limit which limits the ideas we write about.] [PBI In the literature review, I talked only about: mediation, internalization and scaffolding in the ZPD.] [REQ Do you think this is enough?] [ELA I wanted to write about Private Speech

and Microgenesis but there is no space.] [ELA – 2 Of course, this also means that in the analysis I wrote only about the concepts referred to in the literature.]

[JUS Please FIRSTNAME, I've been working very hard and would like to score high in this module.] [REQ Give me some advice.

Do you think the analysis is enough or should I write more?][REITERATED [ELA Many interesting things are there in the dialogue, but no space.][REITERATED

[ARS Sorry to trouble] [CLT and grateful for you help and patience.]

[CLO Yours,]

[SOF S8 Fullname]

6

Subject: Group sessions on Thursdays

[ADR Hi FIRSTNAME,]

[REQ I was wondering whether it would be ok for you if I also attended the group sessions you organise for your MA-students.] [ELA I assume that they are aimed at the students whose dissertations you supervise] [JUS but I find it to be a very valuable resource in preparing the dissertation so thought I might just ask you.] [ARS Unfortunately not every lecturer does offer this support to their students.]

[CLO Best]

[SOF S1]

7

Subject: Appointment on Thursday

[ADR Dear FIRSTNAME,]

[REQ I would like to know if it is possible to have an appointment with you next Thursday (10th March) at 1pm.]

[REQ Please let me know.][REITERATED

[CLT Thank you.]

[CLO Kind regards,]

[SOF S17]

APPENDIX D. Emails that resulted in changes to JUS move during 2nd interrater reliability check

The JUS move in these samples had originally been coded as PBI.

Subject: Drama notes

[ADR Dear Mr LASTNAME,]

[JUS I cannot find the email with the Drama notes on the LG### module!] [REQ Could it be possible to send them to me?]

[CLT Thank you in advance]

[SOF S3 Fullname]

[ADR Hi FIRSTNAME]

[PPI I have been working on my data since last week, checking remaining trials for track loss etc and getting the data into a format that I can analyse. Hopefully today I can get R to spit out tables of means for each of the regions and measures.] [JUS I am on campus today,] [REQ and I wondered if you had any time this afternoon to look at these with me] [ELA (so long as I can get R to behave this morning!)] [ARS If not, don't worry, I can send them to you and we can discuss by email.]

[CLO Thanks]

[SOF S15]

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

APPENDIX E. Pilot Scoring Rubric

Scoring Rubric (Pilot)		SCORE
Subject		
	Clear	1
	Vague/ too long	0.5
	Absent	0
ADR		
	Correct and appropriate name form, greeting	1
	Incorrect name form/ inappropriate greeting	0.5
	Absent	0
REQ Appropriacy		
	Appropriate to student role	1
	Somewhat appropriate	0.5
	Inappropriate	0
Action		
	Desired action clear	1
	Desired action somewhat clear	0.5
	Desired action unclear	0
Succinctness		
	Succinct	1
	Slightly wordy/repetitive	0.5
	Needlessly wordy/repetitive	0
Tone/ ARS		
	Polite	1
	neither polite nor demanding	0.5
	Demanding	0
Language		
	Very minor or no mistakes	1
	A few mistakes or unclear phrasings	0.5
	Many mistakes or unclear phrasings	0
CLO		
	Present	1
	Absent	0
SOF		
	Present	1
	Absent	0

APPENDIX F. Email assessed as significantly more positive by teacher-recipient than by scoring rubric

[ADR Good morning FIRSTNAME,]

[ARS If you don't mind,] [REQ I want to abandon the idea of exploring under/overuse of high frequency verbs.]

[JUS First of all, they are not so interesting, as was proved by my MA research.]

[JUS – 2 Moreover, I am afraid the investigation of under/overuse can hardly stand on its own in my PHD project. I was reading Schmitt's research manual and was impressed by the observation that " there is no accepted methodology of how to identify and count formulaic items, which has led to a range of size estimates". This might account for the different results I got from Gui's study: I found overuse while his conclusion is underuse. Be it overuse or underuse, I don't want to pursue the argument anymore and don't want to base my study on massive counting of corpus data.]

[PBI What I am really interested in is collocation, the interface where lexis and grammar meet, how is it acquired, how good are L2 learners' intuitions of this language, how can different inputs facilitate learning, etc.,] [REQ – 2 Maybe we can focus on some more interesting verb classes like communication verbs and change of state verbs and their collocations.]

[PBI I am reading Schmitt's manual and I need another study by Durrant and Schmitt cited in Yousul's first chapter. He cited it as 2008 but your correction is 2010.] [REQ - 3 Can you please give me full reference to this study so that I can find it in the library?]

[ARS Please forgive me for any trouble caused you and FIRSTNAME by this change of mind.] [PPI I wasn't able to think it through earlier simply because I wasn't reading much.]

[SOF S19]

The teacher-recipient explained this student attended Essex under a special arrangement with a Chinese university that sent their teachers here for further training, so it was quite appropriate in that context for students to not have a clear PhD topic decided. The teacher described this request as “in fact very good, because it shows the student has been thinking quite a lot about the PhD.”

APPENDIX G. Emails used in teacher interviews

1

Subject: June board meeting form

Hi Firstname,

I'm actually in the process of filling in the June 2011 supervisory board meeting form and would like to discuss some issues before I send you the form to fill in you section. I wonder what time will you be free this week so that I can pop into your office?

Best,

Student

2

Subject:

Dear Firstname,

I would like to ask about LG#### assignment. I am doing the listening topic so, I will be very grateful If you suggest some references regarding how teaching methods teach listening and some EFL materials as well.

Thanks in advance

kind regards,
Student Fullname

3

Subject:

Dear Dr. Lastname,

I am interested in the role of argument structure in first and second language acquisition. A friend of mine gave me a handout of LG####-G-SP the other day, telling me that you are an expert in this field. I was trying to locate more material on your website just now but couldn't find any. I am wondering if you could help me with any material relevant to the topic and the course please? Many thanks for your help!

best regards,

student

4

Subject: LG ###: Assignment

Dear Firstname,

Thank you for the elaborate feedback on my assignment.

Having received your comments and reflected on them as well as the assignment I was hoping to get the opportunity to discuss my work with you.

I am aware that your professional assessment bases on established departmental critiera. However I am confident that the opportunity to defend my work might provide a fruitful contribution to your assessment.

A job interview requires me to be in Germany until Wednesday next week. I'd be at you disposition from Thursday afternoon on and hope you can find the time for a brief meeting.

Kind Regards

Student

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

APPENDIX H. Teacher Interview Guide & Teacher Experience

[Request]

1. Do you think the request is clear? (Do you know what is being asked?)
2. Imagining you were the recipient, how quickly might you answer it?
3. Do you feel the request is appropriate? Why or why not?

[Email as a whole]

4. Do you feel the email is appropriate? Why or why not?
5. What kind of impression (of the student) does the email give you? (positive/ neutral/ negative)

Anything you'd like to add?

Teacher Interviewees – Experience in the field

Teacher	Years at Essex	Years at UK Universities	Years at all Universities	# of PhD students
1	13	13	38	8
2	9 months	2 yrs 9 mo	2 yrs 9 mo	None to completion. Currently 3
3	8	12	12	1
4	16	45	45	58 (approx)
5	4	4	5	0
6	12	12	19	10
7	16	22	22	12 (approx)
8	22	34	34	60
9	26	27	27	8 (approx)

APPENDIX I. Teacher interviewee consent form



LECTURER CONSENT FORM

Department of
Language and Linguistics

Request emails in EAP: What works

Researcher: Joy Baugh, jabaug@essex.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Nigel Harwood, nharwood@essex.ac.uk

The Study:

I am analyzing the genre of academic request emails from student to teacher using samples from our department. The aim is to identify moves and additional lexical features of this genre, and to determine what makes a successful request email. To find out the latter, I will be interviewing both students and lecturers. All emails and interview information will be anonymized.

Your Participation:

I would like the opportunity to interview you about your impression of selected emails. This is anticipated to take about 20 minutes. Emails discussed will be (1) forwarded to me by consenting students with full understanding of the study, (2) provided to you during the interview in anonymized form. The views expressed in the interview may be anonymously quoted in the study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and consent may be withdrawn at any time.

I agree to be interviewed about student emails as specified above. The information I provide in the interview will be anonymized and may be used in the study. I may withdraw my consent at any time.

(Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX J. Student interview prompt card

The purpose of this prompt card was to elicit ideas of what could make an email request successful. It was formed in part from simplified findings in the literature (e.g. ‘asked an appropriate question’ comes from Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996) and in part by asking students from outside the study what they thought made an email request to a teacher successful, following to some degree the email category formation method of Martin, Myers, and Mottet’s study (1999, p. 158). Later evaluation revealed that succinctness, a possible element of email success as noted in the scoring rubric (3.4.2) had inadvertently been omitted.

What makes a successful email request?

The email:

Asked what I wanted to ask	Was polite
Asked an appropriated question	Was respectful
Asked the right person (someone who can answer my question)	Was friendly
Got a response	Used correct grammar/spelling
Got a detailed response	Showed who I am as a student
Got a quick response	Showed who I am as a person
Got the response I wanted	Showed my sense of humor/ cultural background/ other
Got a response that was useful	Made me look good
Was easy to write	

APPENDIX K. Student interview guide

(Part 1)

When you have a question for your teachers out of class, do you prefer asking via email or face-to-face?

Do you write email requests differently for different teachers?

What do you consider a successful email request?

(prompt card answers):

(Part 2 – Questions on specific emails)

How happy are you with this email? / was this email successful?

(Did it get a response?) Where you happy with that response?

How easy/hard was it to write this email?

Is there anything you would change looking at it now?

Move specific: why this? Ok to remove/ change?

APPENDIX L. Student interviewee consent form

STUDENT CONSENT FORM



University of Essex

Department of
Language and Linguistics

Request emails in EAP: What works

Researcher: Joy Baugh, jabaug@essex.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Nigel Harwood, nharwood@essex.ac.uk

The study:

I would like to interview you about the emails you provided for this study. Some questions will be about specifics parts of your emails, some will be about your emailing in general. All your information will be anonymised, known only to me, and your words may be used in my dissertation.

Consent:

Please tick the box if you agree:

I agree to be interviewed about the emails I provided.

I agree to allow my words to be quoted in the dissertation.

I understand that my personal details will not be used.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without giving a reason.

(Name)

(Date)

15/09/2011-03:59:46 <LG981-7-FY_10a1_1000930_5B2F38CA8816FFAD6EECBDE28F847D54A272DA0B>

APPENDIX M. Quantitizing Teacher Interview Data

Data from the nine teacher interviews were rendered into numbers to allow for an overview understanding of this large amount of information, following a quantization process described by Dornyei (2007, p. 269-70) who cites Miles and Huberman (1994). However, as this data reduction was not central to this study's analysis, which focuses on unreduced interview data, no statistical tests on the quantizing process or results were carried out.

In attempt to get clear, straightforward results, a three-point scale was initially used (0, .5, 1) to code for negative/neutral/positive responses, however, this proved to be too simplistic when applied to the data and a five-point scale was used instead. The basic definitions for each point value were:

1	fine/good
0.75	"good but ..."/ small issues raised due to my questions rather than interviewee's initiative
0.5	neutral/ good and bad points
0.25	ok but strong negatives
0	negative

Naturally, the data for each interview question varies in how well it lines up with this generalized scoring. For example, when asked about overall impression of an email, very few teachers said 'negative', preferring instead to hedge their answer with 'slightly' so as not to give too harsh a judgment. 'Slightly negative' was still scored as zero, as there was no mention of the email being ok in some respects.