Nives Lenassi
Faculty of Economics
University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

An Analysis of Italian Business E-mail Produced by Italian Native and Slovene non Native Speakers.

The focus of any foreign language teaching is the successful transmission of messages from an initiator to a recipient. In teaching and acquiring foreign language for special purposes, such as business, the centre of attention is represented by specific genres. These can be described as recognised communicative events with shared public purposes comprising communicative intentions that are mutually understood by the participants, whose contributions can be predicted and anticipated in terms of content and form. Genres are generally highly structured and conventionalised and they display constraints on the contributions allowed in terms of intent, positioning, form and functional value. This means that it is very important for the initiator to respect certain standard practices within the boundaries of a specific genre (Bhatia, 1993). For this reason, in order to produce effective messages it is necessary that the initiator make use of standardised linguistic features specified in a defined socio-cultural context that lead to achievement of the objective.

In order to learn the boundaries and characteristics of a specific genre and to communicate effectively, micro-linguistic competence or specialised language competence in a given sector should be developed, offering students more specialised knowledge (De Marco, 2002). The area of specialised knowledge discussed in this article is the production of business e-mail, which is gaining importance in the world of business especially for its rapidity of transmission and conciseness of ideas. The all-important rapidity and conciseness in real-life situations is undoubtedly reflected in the linguistic features of e-mail, and the question arises: how does this form of business correspondence differ from the prototypical models presented in various textbooks designed as tools for learning foreign business languages?

In order to find out how similar this form of messages in textbooks is to actual business situations, a corpus of e-mail messages produced in the real-life business world has been selected and analysed. The centrepiece of the article is electronic messages produced by Italian speakers working for different Italian firms that have contact with Slovene firms and e-mail written in Italian by their Slovene partners. The study of the selected corpus has been carried out in order to find out what linguistic features appear in the analysed genre in order to prepare materials for teaching and learning the characteristics of business Italian e-mails. Besides presenting the findings of the linguistic analysis of the electronic messages produced by Italian native speakers, the article aims to present the results of the analysed messages produced in Italian by Slovene non-native speakers of Italian. The article presents the Slovene writers' actual deviations from the norms and tendencies seen in the analysed Italian messages. As such, it gives an insight into these deviations on the graphemic, morphosyntactic, lexical and textual levels, arguing that graphemic and morphosyntactic competence should be gained within general study of Italian, while linguistic and textual competence is to be stressed in the course of studying the language for specific purposes. Terminology is one of the fundamentals of any genre, but in order to adequately acquire the typical terminology and the ability to apply words to the world (Marconi, 1999) of business, good knowledge of the general Italian language is necessary. To be effective at the level of the largest linguistic units (texts), general textual competence in both the first and the second

language (Italian) should be acquired before taking part in a Business Italian class, in which this competence will be further developed.

References

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