Effects of Grammatical and Mechanical Errors on E-mail Readers' Perceptions toward E-mail Writers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how native speakers of English perceive the non-native writers who made grammatical and mechanical errors in their business e-mails. Convenience and snowball samplings were used to recruit five native speakers of English: two American teachers of English, one British teacher of English, one Canadian executive, and one American executive. All the participants worked and lived in Bangkok, Thailand. In-depth interviews were conducted to elicit data. The data was transcribed and coded to create the main themes. The results indicated that some participants perceived the e-mail writers negatively while others still had positive perceptions toward the writers, regardless of the errors. Moreover, the results revealed that some characteristics of the e-mails such as the tone, wordiness, and word choices bothered the participants and negatively affected the participants' perceptions toward the e-mail writers. The effects of errors in the e-mails on the perceptions toward the writers varied depending on factors such as the participants' age and familiarity with non-native speakers of English. Since the results show that errors and some e-mail characteristics can cause readers to perceive writers negatively, businesspeople should focus on grammar and mechanics as well as other characteristics when composing business e-mails in order to create and maintain goodwill and good impressions in business communications.

Keywords: Business e-mails, errors, grammar, mechanics, perception.

ผลกระทบของข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์และหลักการเขียน ที่มีต่อความคิดที่ผู้อ่านมีต่อผู้เขียนอีเมล

พชร อยู่สวัสดิ์ และ สุพงศ์ ตั้งเคียงศิริสิน
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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจแนวคิดของเจ้าของภาษาว่าคิดเห็นอย่างไรต่อผู้ที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษาและเขียนอีเมลเชิงธุรกิจผิดหลักไวยากรณ์และหลักการเขียน การเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบสะดวกสบาย (Convenience Sampling) และแบบลูกโซ่ (Snowball Sampling) ถูกนำมาใช้ในการเลือกเจ้าของภาษาจำนวนห้าคนที่ทำงานและอาศัยอยู่ในกรุงเทพฯ ประกอบด้วย อาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวอเมริกันสองคน อาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวอังกฤษหนึ่งคน ผู้บริหารชาวแคนาดาหนึ่งคน และผู้บริหารชาวอเมริกันหนึ่งคน งานวิจัยนี้ใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกเป็นเครื่องมือในการหาข้อมูล โดยผู้วิจัยได้บันทึกการสัมภาษณ์ทั้งหมดและถอดเทปบันทึกเสียงเพื่อนำข้อมูลมาจัดกลุ่มและสร้างใจความหลักของผลงานวิจัย และผลวิจัยบ่งชี้ว่าผู้ให้สัมภาษณ์บางคนมีความคิดเชิงลบต่อผู้เขียนอีเมลขณะที่บางคนยังคงมีความคิดเชิงบวกต่อผู้เขียน แม้ว่าอีเมลเหล่านั้นมีข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์และหลักการเขียนก็ตาม ผลงานวิจัยยังเผยให้เห็นอีกว่าลักษณะอื่นๆของอีเมล เช่น น้ำเสียง การใช้คำฟุ่มเฟือย และการเลือกใช้คำ อาจมีผลต่อความคิดของผู้อ่านให้เป็นไปในเชิงลบ อย่างไรก็ตามผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นจากข้อผิดพลาดทั้งทางไวยากรณ์และหลักการเขียนนั้นขึ้นอยู่กับปัจจัยอื่นๆด้วย เช่น อายุของผู้อ่านและความคุ้นเคยกับผู้ที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษ ดังนั้นผู้เขียนอีเมลทางธุรกิจจึงควรให้ความสนใจและระมัดระวังเกี่ยวกับไวยากรณ์และหลักการเขียน และนอกจากนี้ยังต้องใส่ใจลักษณะอื่นๆของอีเมลด้วย เพื่อสร้างความประทับใจและเสริมสร้างไมตรีกับผู้อ่านซึ่งเป็นจุดประสงค์หลักในการติดต่อสื่อสารทางธุรกิจ

คำสำคัญ: อีเมลเชิงธุรกิจ, ข้อผิดพลาด, ไวยากรณ์, หลักการ เขียน, แนวความคิด

Introduction

E-mail is a prevalent communication channel in business. More than 50% of the Internet users in Thailand send and receive e-mails (National Statistical Office [NSO], 2012, p. 11). Creating and maintaining goodwill is one of the objectives of business communication (Means, 2001, pp. 2-3; Satterwhite & Olson-Sutton, 2007, pp. 4-5); therefore, people who regularly use e-mails for business purposes should consider factors that can damage goodwill and create a bad impression. Since errors in written business communication can damage writers' image and credibility (Guffey, 2006, p. 88; Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002, p. 165; Kolin, 2001, pp. 136-137; Krizan, Merrier, Logan, & Williams, 2008, p. 17; Lesikar, Flatley, & Rentz, 2008, p. 101; Locker, 2006, p. 12; Means, 2001, p. 159), they might also cause the same effects in business communication via e-mails. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate how native speakers of English perceive the non-native writers who produce errors in business e-mails.

Business Writing Process:

The business writing process consists of planning, drafting, and revising (Heintz & Parry, 2011, p. 14). At the planning stage, writers analyze the objectives of the message and the audience, gather information for the message, and organize the information for later use. Writers should analyze the audience's demographic information since people in the same groups are likely to behave and think similarly (Marsen, 2007, p. 4). Then writers compose the message according to audience analysis (Guffey, 2006, p. 145; Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, p. 34; Marsen, 2007, p. 3; Means, 2001, p. 108). After that, they gather the information and organize it according to the sequence or importance of the information for drafting (Guffey, 2006, pp. 167-168; Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, p. 157; Kolin, 2001, p. 40). Next, at the drafting stage, writers begin to draft the message using the organized information from the previous stage. At the final stage, they revise, edit, and proofread the message. Writers should revise to improve the content, organization, and tone (Locker, 2006, p. 120). The use of numeric and bulleted items are promoted for a well-organized message (Guffey, 2006, p. 198). Finally, writers edit and proofread the message so that the message is error-free (Ober, 2009, pp. 121-122).

Business E-mails:

E-mail is a speedy communication channel. According to Sproull and Kiesler (1986), e-mails are non-simultaneous, fast, and text-based. E-mails consist of the opening, body, and closing. The opening or salutation is important for business e-mails, especially when the messages are sent to an outsider, since it can create a warm and friendly tone (Ober, 2009, p. 60; Wong, Connor, & Murfett, 2004, p. 81). In the body section of an e-mail message, when the subject matter is neutral or good news, the message starts with the main idea. This approach is called the direct approach and is normally applied in most e-mails. However, if the e-mail contains bad news, the indirect approach is used instead, i.e. the message states the reasons first to delay the bad news. When writing e-mails, writers should analyze the audience to create the message that is appropriate for the audience (Kolin, 2001, p. 136).

In addition, a good e-mail message should be short and concise to save readers' time (Lesikar et al., 2008, p. 100). Further, since errors can hinder readers' comprehension and create a bad impression, writers should proofread their e-mails (Kolin, 2001, pp. 136-137; Means, 2001, p. 159; Krizan et al., 2008, p. 17; Ober, 2009, p. 120). Correct choices of words are also important for creating a good impression (Wong et al., 2004, p. 77). One of the netiquette rules that e-mail senders should follow is avoiding flaming – sending angry messages – which can cause a negative perception (Kolin, 2001, p. 139; Krizan et al., 2008, p. 127; Means, 2001 p. 167). Finally, the closing is stated at the end of the e-mail to show gratitude and promote goodwill.

Error and Perception:

Grammatical errors occur when the rules of grammar are infringed (Olsson, 1972, p.7). Grammatical errors include incorrect tenses, subject-verb agreement errors, and pronoun errors. Errors that occur in the process of writing including misspelling, punctuation, and capitalization are mechanical errors (Means, 2001, p.128). Both types of error can cause negative perceptions in written business communication (Ober, 2009, p.120).

Ludwig's Theory of Judgment on Non-natives' Errors:

Errors can cause irritation and a negative perception toward writers; however, how much readers feel irritated or how negative the perception is can be subjective.

Factors that may vary the interlocutor's judgment on errors include age, sex, education, profession, social class, and familiarity with non-native speakers of English (Ludwig, 1982, p. 275). In addition, native-speakers of English, especially non-teachers, are more likely to accept non-native speakers' errors while non-native teachers tend to focus on grammatical accuracy and have less tolerance toward errors (Ludwig, 1982, p. 279-80).

Relevant Research:

Over the past twenty years, many research studies have found that grammatical errors in different writing genres can cause a negative perception toward writers (Beason, 2001; Charney, Rayman, & Ferreira-Buckley, 1992; Jessmer & Anderson, 2001; Stephens, Houser, & Cowan, 2009). Similarly, mechanical errors can also negatively affect how readers perceive writers' English writing ability (Figueredo & Varnhagen, 2005; Kreiner, Schankenberg, Green, Costello, & McClin, 2002; Lea & Spears 1992; Varnhagen, 2000). However, how seriously different readers rate errors in writing can vary. Nationalities are one of the characteristics that might indicate how much the raters are tolerant of errors. Unlike native English speaking teachers and non-teachers who tend to rate errors leniently, non-native speakers of English are likely to judge writers who make errors more harshly (Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982; Hyland & Anan, 2006; Schmitt, 1993). Janopoulos's study (1992) reveals that native speakers of English do not perceive non-native students negatively because of their errors. In contrast, when native English students make errors, they are judged more harshly. A person's characteristics such as age can also play an important role in terms of perception toward errors. Some studies show that older people are not as intolerant of errors as people of younger age (Santos, 1988; Vann, Meyer, & Lorenz, 1984).

Although e-mail has become a prevalent communication channel in today's business, little research has been conducted on how errors in e-mails might create a bad impression. Beason (2001) conducted a qualitative study on how readers react to errors in business documents; however, more research on errors, especially those committed by non-native speakers of English, in business e-mails was needed. The aim of the present study, therefore, was to explore how native English readers perceive the non-native speaking writers who commit errors in business e-mails.

Methodology

Research Design:

The method employed in this study was the in-depth interview since it can elicit rich data such as perceptions and attitude (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Participants:

Five native speakers of English: one Canadian executive, two American teachers of English, one British teacher of English, and one American executive were recruited by convenience and snowball samplings.

Instruments:

The instruments used in the study were four business e-mails written by students as assignments in CR 610 Written Business Communication in the English for Careers program at Thammasat University. The assignments are from the exercises in Essentials of Business Communication (Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010). The four e-mails are of different types: an information request, a persuasive claim, a claim request, and a request refusal, respectively.

The first e-mail is an information request (see appendix). The direct pattern should be used since this is a straightforward message. The content of information request e-mails should be presented in an organized way so that readers can understand the message quickly. In this study, the writer sent this e-mail to obtain information about a coffee brewing system. Persuasive requests, on the other hand, require the indirect approach since resistance is expected. Writers should start with an agreement or compliment and precisely explain the reasons for their request. Evidence such as invoice or orders should also be attached. It is advised that angry messages must be avoided (Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, pp. 174-176).

The second e-mail was sent in order to correct a charge from a hotel. The third e-mail is a claim request. Simple claim request messages are generally straight forward and do not require persuasion (Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, pp. 136-138). A copy of relevant documents should also be attached. The writer wrote this e-mail to claim reimbursement from a supplier. The direct approach was used in this e-mail since a

mistake was clearly made by the receiver's company. This e-mail did not require persuasion because reimbursement was expected to be authorized without resistance.

The fourth e-mail is a request refusal. The purpose of this type of e-mail is to announce bad news. Bad news should be delayed to prevent negative reactions, so the indirect approach should be used; the e-mail should start with a buffer – a statement of agreement, compliment, or appreciation. Writers should explain the reasons and then deliver the bad news afterward. In the fourth e-mail, the writer announced a new policy which affected the reader's business.

The number and types of the errors in the first three e-mails were controlled in order to find out whether the e-mail that contains more errors would be perceived more negatively, and whether types of errors would affect readers' perception toward writers. Grammatical errors are structures that do not follow the rules of grammar (Olsson, 1972, p.7) such as incorrect tense and subject-verb agreement. Mechanical errors are writing errors such as misspelling, punctuation, and capitalization (Means, 2001, p.128). The first e-mail contained ten errors; five grammatical errors and five mechanical errors. The second e-mail contained ten grammatical errors, and the third e-mail contained ten mechanical errors. The fourth e-mail was originally from the key of the textbook, and was replaced with an assignment written by a student in the same class due to the results of the pilot study. However, the number of the errors in the fourth e-mail was not manipulated because it was supposed to be the best e-mail, in terms of grammar and mechanics. The fourth e-mail, therefore, contained nine errors. All the errors and the sentences in which the errors occur can be seen in the tables 1-4.

Procedure:

Individual interviews were conducted and each lasted 45-60 minutes. The participants were given one e-mail to read and then were asked what their perception toward the writer was. The process was repeated until all the e-mails were read, and the questions were asked and answered. All the interviews were recorded.

Data Analysis:

All the interviews were recorded digitally using an MP3 recorder. The recorded files were manually transcribed into content-based texts with the help of InqScribe transcription software. The data was analyzed by coding the similar data into the same group. Finally, the codes were reduced to the main themes. The coding process model was adapted from Creswell (2002, p. 251)'s model.

Table 1 Errors in the First E-mail (Information Request)

Grammatical Errors	**Sentences Containing Errors**
Sentence fragment	Because I saw your flavia beverage system in an office.
Dangling modifier	I thought that serving them freshly brewed coffee, our staffs' productivity and morale can be improved.
Missing auxiliary	How much the system cost?
Tense and missing auxiliary	What kind of warranty you offered?
Incorrect auxiliary verb and sentence form	Is your brewing system requires plumbing?
Mechanical Errors	**Sentences Containing Errors**
Number	Can Flavia Brewing System provide beverage systems for twenty staff of Thai Books Co., Ltd.?
Capitalization	Because I saw your flavia beverage system in an office.
Missing comma after a transition	Therefore I am collecting information for our committee.
Misspelling	Answers to these questions and any other information you can provide will help us decide whether your systems are suiltable for our company.
Missing period	Your response before January 25 would be appreciated since the committee meeting is on January 31

Table 2 Errors in the Second E-mail (Persuasive Claim)

Grammatical Error	Sentences Containing Errors
Incorrect preposition	The Merry Hotel is famous at good service.
Incorrect tense	We always appreciated your accommodations, and your service has been excellent.
Sentence fragment	When our department's assistant made the reservations.
Incorrect auxiliary verb for a negative sentence	However, we weren't have buffet breakfast and no champagne since we got there early, and no buffet had been set up.
Double negative	However, we weren't have buffet breakfast and no champagne since we got there early, and no buffet had been set up.
Incorrect pronoun	We ordered pancakes and sausages, and for this, we were billed $25 each.
Dangling modifier	Exceeding the expected rates, our company may charge us personally.
Missing relative pronoun	Since our assistant made the reservations told we that we could order breakfast at the hotel restaurant, we expected that it would be included in the room rates.
Incorrect word form	Since our assistant made the reservations told we that we could order breakfast at the hotel restaurant, we expected that it would be included in the room rates.
Subject - verb agreement	We believe that your hotel are famous and hope that you will solve this problem quickly.

Table 3 Errors in the Third E-mail (Claim Request)

Mechanical Errors	Sentences Containing Errors
Misspelling	Please reimburse us for $655.50 to Swiss Bank accuont no. 793-529-0418 due to the wrong size of double-glazed teak French doors
	It was impossible to send them back because my client needed the door instillation completed immediately.
Missing period	Please reimburse us for $655.50 to Swiss Bank accuont no. 793-529-0418 due to the wrong size of double-glazed teak French doors
	Attached is a copy of the carpenter's bill. Please call me at my Office when the reimbursement is authorized
Number	We have already received twenty double-glazed teak French doors from pacific timber.
	However, we found that the actual size of the doors was 9 feet instead of ten feet that we required.
Capitalization	We have already received twenty double-glazed teak French doors from pacific timber.
	Attached is a copy of the carpenter's bill. Please call me at my Office when the reimbursement is authorized
Missing comma after a transition word	Therefore our carpenter had to rebuild the opening instead.
Comma splice	We understand that mistakes sometimes occur, we are still interested in using your products and will continue to buy your hardware products as usual.

Table 4 Errors in the Fourth E-mail (Request Refusal)

Grammatical Errors	**Sentences Containing Errors**
Wrong uses of expressions	Your support to Carnival is always in our mind.
Inconsistency in voice	Recently, the partying of high school and colleges students has been reported to us “drunken, loud behavior” and we consider this might negatively affect other travelers on cruises.
Wrong preposition	Your support to Carnival is always in our mind.
Missing preposition	Recently, the partying of high school and colleges students has been reported to us “drunken, loud behavior” and we consider this might negatively affect other travelers on cruises.
Wrong word forms	Recently, the partying of high school and colleges students has been reported to us “drunken, loud behavior” and we consider this might negatively affect other travelers on cruises.
	Family would love to spend time together on the fun-filled, carefree cruises destined for sunny, exotic ports of call that remove each member from the stresses of everyday life.
	I will call you on January 5 to help you plan special family tour package since it is the real market of Carnival.
Wrong article	Family would love to spend time together on the fun-filled, carefree cruises destined for sunny, exotic ports of call that remove each member from the stresses of everyday life.
Mechanical Errors	**Sentences Containing Errors**
Missing comma	Recently, the partying of high school and colleges students has been reported to us “drunken, loud behavior” and we consider this might negatively affect other travelers on cruises.

Findings

The present study yielded both positive and negative results. The findings are reported from the first e-mail to the fourth e-mail as follows:

The First E-mail:

The first e-mail is an information request and contains five grammatical errors and five mechanical errors. The participants who had a positive perception toward the writer thought that the writer had good English and writing ability because of how the e-mail was organized. The information in the first e-mail was presented in bulleted items which can facilitate the organization of the message (Guffey, 2006, p. 198). All the five participants noticed the errors in this e-mail, but they could still comprehend the message well. Three participants reported that they had a positive impression because they could understand the message well. All of the verbatim quotes in this section are taken from the interviews. A participant stated,

> "I think I understand what they're asking, what they want. The errors are noticeable, but they're not impactful."
>
> (Participant 5)

Many research studies also found that native English speakers are likely to focus on intelligibility when they rate errors and do not judge the writer harshly if the message is understandable (Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982; Hyland & Anan, 2006; Schmitt, 1993). However, two participants perceived the writer as a person who had poor English writing ability due to the grammatical errors. The writer was also viewed as a careless person because of the mechanical errors in the e-mail. One of the participants stated that he understood that grammatical errors can occur if writers are not good at English grammar, but he thought that mechanical errors such as misspelling and capitalization can be corrected easily.

The Second E-mail:

The second e-mail is a persuasive claim and contains ten grammatical errors. Only one participant had a positive perception toward the writer; however, he reported that the second e-mail was worse than the first e-mail because the second e-mail was more difficult to read. The rest of the participants perceived the writer negatively. The errors in the e-mail were one of the reasons for the negative perception, and only one participant reported that he perceived the writer negatively solely because of the errors. Two participants viewed the writer negatively because of the tone and wordiness of the email, and one participant had negative perception toward the writer partly because of the errors and partly because of the aforementioned characteristics. It was reported that the tone sounded demanding and the e-mail was wordy because it contained too many unnecessary details. For example, one of the participants who thought that this e-mail was demanding noted,

> "I think they could have explained the problem a little bit more calmly. You know, I don't like this: 'Attached is a copy of the credit statement. Please credit our account…,' give me the number to correct. I'd rather it be a little bit more gentle and say that, 'We'd appreciate it very much if you *could* credit our account.' But 'please credit our account' is an order. And then to finish an order and say, 'We believe that your hotel are famous...' It came on very strong with the demand and then you try to flatter me at the end, try to make me do what you want me to do. No, I don't really like this person very much."
>
> (Participant 2)

The tone in this e-mail could be considered demanding, and it is suggested that writers should avoid sending flaming messages which can be a cause of negative perception (Kolin, 2001, p. 139; Krizan et al., 2008, p. 127; Means, 2001 p. 167). Moreover, writers should write a short and concise message since it can save readers' time (Lesikar et al., 2008, p. 100). Therefore, wordy messages are not recommended. The information in the second e-mail was not well-organized since it was not based on any sequence or importance of ideas (Guffey, 2006, pp. 167-168; Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, p. 157; Kolin, 2001, p. 40).

The Third E-mail:

The third e-mail is a claim request, and contains ten mechanical errors. Two participants had a positive perception toward the writer, and one of them reported that the writer was professional and favored the straightforward approach. Since the e-mail contains only mechanical errors, the two participants considered that the errors were minor. They perceived that the writer was proficient in English. In the words of one of the participants,

> "This is somebody who's very proficient in English. The level of the English is about the other two. It could even be a native speaker with a few careless errors, or an advanced non-native speaker. It's somebody who works in an international company for quite a while, used to write this kind of letters, lives abroad. It's a step up from the other two, the English."
>
> (Participant 2)

However, three participants had negative perception toward the writer. Two participants thought that the tone was demanding. Furthermore, two participants thought that the writer was careless because the mechanical errors in the e-mail were obvious, and the writer seemed to know proper English but did not proofread. One participant reported,

> "They know how to do it. They don't check. They don't even care. There are quite a few of full-stops missing in places."
>
> (Participant 4)

The Fourth E-mail:

The fourth e-mail is a request refusal and contains nine errors. Three of the participants perceived the writer positively while the other two perceived the writer negatively. It is very interesting that one of the participants reported a very negative impression of the writer because of the word choices for the context of the e-mail. In his view, the writer used inappropriate wording. He explained,

> "However, I'm happy to tell you. You're not happy to tell me. I'm not a happy person right now. You probably hurt my business, so you should not tell me how you're happy because I'm not happy. You should not promise a solution when obviously you don't have one. You have

an alternative business proposition: Maybe you should sell the families. But it's not a solution to the spring break problem. So, I guess you could say it's word choice or inappropriate messaging. The terms happy to tell you and solution are inappropriate words because they're incorrect."

(Participant 5)

The result is in line with Wong et al. (2004, p.77)'s statement that the writer should carefully choose words when composing a business e-mail to create a good impression.

Discussion

Since e-mail is one of the main communication channels in business today, understanding of what might cause negative impressions can be useful for business people as well as business teachers and students. This study was conducted to examine how errors, both grammatical and mechanical, in business e-mails can affect the readers' perception toward the e-mail writers. The results revealed both positive and negative responses from the participants. Participants reacted to the errors and the writers differently. That is, the participants' degrees of negative feelings toward the writers varied. Some of the participants found the errors deeply irritating while some did not find them bothersome at all.

Ludwig (1982, pp. 275-297) suggests that readers' expectations and characteristics might influence how much they feel irritated by errors, that many factors such as familiarity with non-native speakers of English might also affect their judgement, and that readers sometimes may not judge writers' personality by the texts they write. Since all the participants in this study were long-term residents who had been living in Thailand for more than five years and were familiar with English written by Thais, some of them were not bothered by the errors. In addition, the participants who were older were more likely to be more forgiving of errors and perceived the writers more positively than those who were younger. This is supported by previous studies suggesting that older interlocutors may be less critical of errors (Santos, 1988; Vann et al., 1984). Moreover, the participants realized that the writers of the e-mails in this study were Thais because they were familiar with the writing style. Therefore, some of the participants did not judge the writers harshly. Janopoulos (1992) indicates that native

speakers of English may not perceive non-native speakers of English negatively when they commit errors because errors are expected.

Although not all the participants had negative perception toward the writers, business communicators should still be careful when composing e-mails since this study suggests that some of the participants view the writers who commit errors in their e-mails very negatively. The results are consistent with Ober (2009, p. 120)'s theory that errors can create a bad impression in written business communication. The e-mail writers committing mechanical errors in the present study were also viewed as careless writers. The participants thought that the writers were careless because they did not proofread their e-mail messages. The findings are in line with the previous studies showing that readers' perception toward writers can be negatively affected by grammatical errors (Beason, 2001; Charney et al., 1992; Jessmer & Anderson, 2001; Stephens et al., 2009) and mechanical errors (Figueredo & Varnhagen, 2005; Kreiner et al., 2002; Lea & Spears 1999; Varnhagen, 2000).

Other characteristics of business e-mails such as tone and organization should also be recognized as important factors since they affect how the participants perceive the e-mail writers in the present study. The participants formed their opinions about the writers based on the errors as well as other characteristics of the e-mails. For example, some of the participants did not like the tone of the second e-mail because it sounded angry and demanding. Many scholars advise that writers should avoid flaming which can create negative impression (Kolin, 2001, p. 139; Krizan et al., 2008, p. 127; Means, 2001 p. 167). Further, the organization of e-mails can also play an important role. For instance, the participants mentioned that the second e-mail was not well-organized; therefore, it was difficult to follow.

Consequently, the writer of this e-mail was viewed negatively. It is suggested that business messages should be organized according to the time sequence or importance so that the messages are easy to read (Guffey, 2006, pp. 167-168; Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, p. 157; Kolin, 2001, p. 40). According to these results, writers should consider grammar and mechanics as well as other elements of their messages in order to create positive impression in business e-mails.

Implications

As the results of this study reveal that errors and other factors, such as organization and tone, might cause a negative perception toward writers, they should follow the writing process – planning, drafting, and revising. It is worthwhile to encourage audience analysis in the planning stage since different readers can prefer different styles of writing. Writers, therefore, should analyze the audience and compose according to the audience's needs (Guffey, 2006, p. 145; Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, p. 34; Marsen, 2007, p. 3; Means, 2001, p. 108). After that, writers should gather needed information and organize it for drafting (Guffey, 2006, pp. 167-168; Guffey & Du-Babcock, 2010, p. 157; Kolin, 2001, p. 40). Finally, they should proofread their e-mails to ensure that they contain as few errors as possible (Ober, 2006, pp. 121-122).

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore how errors in business e-mails can negatively affect readers' perception toward the e-mail writers. The results reveal that errors can cause a bad impression. Other characteristics of e-mails such as the organization, tone, and wordiness are also confirmed to strongly influence readers' judgement. While errors in business e-mails should be of concern, other characteristics mentioned are also not to be overlooked. Further research is needed to investigate these factors which might cause a negative perception toward writers and damage goodwill in business communication.

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Appendix

The First E-mail (Information Request)

Subject: Brewing "Coffee Shop" Beverages in the Office

Dear Mr. Stone:
Can Flavia Brewing System provide beverage systems for twenty staff of Thai Books Co., Ltd.?
Because I saw your flavia beverage system in an office. I thought that serving them freshly brewed coffee, our staffs' productivity and morale can be improved. Therefore I am collecting information for our committee. Please answer these questions regarding Flavia Brewing System:

- How much the system cost?
- What kind of warranty you offered?
- Is your brewing system requires plumbing because our company has cold water available but does not have plumbing?
- Are other drinks such as tea and hot chocolate available?
- Is a coin operation available?

Answers to these questions and any other information you can provide will help us decide whether your systems are suiltable for our company. Your response before January 25 would be appreciated since the committee meeting is on January 31
Sincerely yours,

Human Resources, Manager

The Second E-mail (Persuasive Claim)

Subject: Outrageous Charge for Breakfast

Dear Mr. Jones:
The Merry Hotel is famous at good service. We always appreciated your accommodations, and your service has been excellent.
When our department's assistant made the reservations. She was sure that we would receive the weekend rates which include hot breakfast in the hotel restaurant.
After we received the credit statement, we saw a charge of $79 for buffet breakfast and champagne in the Atrium. However, we weren't have buffet breakfast and no champagne since

we got there early, and no buffet had been set up. We ordered pancakes and sausages, and for this, we were billed $25 each. Exceeding the expected rates, our company may charge us personally.
Since our assistant made the reservations told we that we could order breakfast at the hotel restaurant, we expected that it would be included in the room rates.
Attached is a copy of the credit statement. Please credit our account, No. 000-0099-3555-7593, to correct an error charge of $154. We believe that your hotel are famous and hope that you will solve this problem quickly.
Sincerely,

Sales Manager

The Third E-mail (Claim Request)

Subject: Reimbursement for Wrong Size of Double-Glazed Teak French Doors

Dear Mr. Rupe:
Please reimburse us for $655.50 to Swiss Bank accuont no. 793-529-0418 due to the wrong size of double-glazed teak French doors
We have already received twenty double-glazed teak French doors from pacific timber. However, we found that the actual size of the doors was 9 feet instead of ten feet that we required. It was impossible to send them back because my client needed the door instillation completed immediately. Therefore our carpenter had to rebuild the opening instead. He charged us $655.50, and I feel that you should take this responsibility.
Attached is a copy of the carpenter's bill. Please call me at my Office when the reimbursement is authorized
We understand that mistakes sometimes occur, we are still interested in using your products and will continue to buy your hardware products as usual.
Sincerely,

DesignSpectrum

The Fourth E-mail (Request Refusal)

Subject: Carnival New Policy Announcement

Dear Ms. Corcoran,
Counselor Travel has been one of our best customers and we have been working with each other well. Your support to Carnival is always in our mind.

Recently, the partying of high school and colleges students has been reported to us "drunken, loud behavior" and we consider this might negatively affect other travelers on cruises. Therefore, we decided to create a new policy to avoid that situation, effective immediately. No one under 21 may travel unless accompanied by an adult over 25.

We understand that our new policy directly affects your special spring-and-summer-break packages you sell for college and high school students. However, I'm happy to tell you that I have a solution for you. I will call you on January 5 to help you plan special family tour package since it is the real market of Carnival.

Family would love to spend time together on the fun-filled, carefree cruises destined for sunny, exotic ports of call that remove each member from the stresses of everyday life.

I hope to talk to you in detail soon.

Cordially,

Marketing Manager

Biodata

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