

THE NEGATIVE TRANSFER OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE IN FORMAL EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS

Abstract: Social media discourse is speech or text communication involving a social element conducted via social media. Despite endless communication possibilities deemed impossible about a decade ago and obvious pedagogically applicable implications, social media discourse brings about side effects resulting in the negative transfer of informality and familiarity in academic correspondence otherwise expected to be formal. This transfer is very prominent in the email correspondence students conduct with their lecturers where informality and familiarity sometimes exceed the most basic conventions. This research is based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a corpus of 253 emails the author of this research received from her students from October 2009 to June 2010. The analysis of the corpus was conducted in two steps: 1. a general assessment of the emails was performed based on rubrics and 2. the more detailed method of corpus-based content analysis was applied to the content of the emails collected. The primary rubrics assessment was performed with respect to three criteria: a) the level of respect; b) the level of formality and c) the level of proper language. The corpus-based content analysis was based on several predefined characteristics of each criterion.

Key words: social media discourse, negative transfer, formal correspondence, informality, lack of academic respect

1. Introduction

Many apparent advantages have been attributed to the use of social media both in theory and practice (Corbett and Durfee, 2004; Dube et al., 2006; Carvalho, 2007; Yang et al., 2007; Zappavigna, 2011; Marques et al., 2013; Tannen and Trester, 2013). Among the many authors supporting social media, Zappavigna (2011, 2012) argues in favour of the positive social functions of social media discourse stating that Twitter is a form of microblogging enabling certain dimensions of social affiliation or „online discourse where the primary function appears to be affiliation via 'findability'“. This means that „search is beginning to function as a community-building linguistic activity“ based on „'hashtags' [which] function as linguistic markers enacting the following social relation: 'Search for me and affiliate with my value!'“ (Zappavigna, 2011: 789).

Another positive aspect of social media is that they are an endless pool of information and knowledge. Though potentially misleading and even superficial, social media shape awareness as social interaction via online networks provokes exchange of ideas, likes and dislikes (Corbett and Durfee, 2004; Carvalho, 2007). In other words, „besides providing information about the users through their profiles, there is the articulation of the users throughout their connections“ (Marques et al., 2013: 395).

A third advantage is that social media can be implemented effectively in education through the possibility of online discussion forums, online collaboration and sharing. Facebook, Hangouts, Twitter, Skype, etc. may be deployed for the purpose of meaningful learning and as such complement traditional teaching and learning techniques. In other words, social media may be used as platforms for lectures, tutorials, discussions, and as a common place where collaboration and sharing are realised in an effective way (Dube et al., 2006; Yang et al., 2007; Montero et al., 2007; Saadé & Huang, 2009).

Unfortunately, more open computer mediated communication via social media in general has side-effects resulting in the negative transfer of informality and familiarity to environments which should use a more formal level of correspondence, such as the academic interaction between lecturers and students in tertiary education.

1.1. Aims and hypothesis

Despite thorough explorations, no relevant research of the negative transfer of social media discourse in the communication between academics and students via social networks could be found in the available literature. A rare example of some exploration of networked interaction between academics and students is the research conducted by Rambe (2009) as part of a critical discourse analysis of Facebook postings. Among other things, the analysis indicated that the collaborative engagement on Facebook may potentially democratise perceived asymmetrical relations of power resulting in students

- 1) becoming more critically engaging online participants;
- 2) being less dependent on the lecturer for academic support;
- 3) feeling more empowered to generate their theoretical and personal knowledge and widen their meaningful participation in online discourses and
- 4) having more courage to contest power through criticism of unpopular administrative practices and departments.

(Rambe, 2009: 295).

That is exactly the reason the research presented in this article is aimed at determining the potential causes of the informalities detected in the academic correspondence between students and their lecturers. A possible outcome of the relevant analysis might help determine the reasons behind the suspected negative transfer, thus opening a door to more elaborate research in the area of written correspondence between academics and their students deemed important at tertiary education.

Therefore, the research questions that the analysis presented here will be based on are as follows:

- a) Do students tend to transfer the conventions of more lenient and permissive social media discourse to the correspondence with their lecturers?
- b) Do students seem to believe that otherwise respected conventions of academic correspondence are not necessarily applicable to social media discourse?
- c) Does this negative transfer result in poor language performance?

A preliminary research conducted on a corpus of 50 emails¹ prior to the main research presented in this article indicated a strong tendency of negative transfer of social media discourse. The analysis of the final corpus consisting of a total of 253 emails written by second-year English language students should confirm the hypothesis that the rather informal conventions, a noticeable characteristic of social media discourse, are more and more prominent in formal academic correspondence, a form of discourse otherwise expected to be formal and show a certain level of respect.

2. Research

For the purpose of this article, an empirical research study was conducted with the aim to support the hypothesis that students tend to transfer more lenient and permissive social media discourse to correspondence with their teachers. Students seem to take it for granted that they can apply the conventions of social media correspondence to the formal correspondence they conduct with their lecturers. The result of this negative transfer is that it not only reduces the level of respect students should otherwise show to their lecturers but it also contributes considerably to deterring their language performance as they pay less attention to possible mistakes.

2.1. Corpus

The corpus compiled and subsequently analysed for the purpose of this research study consists of 253 emails (EM), a total of 5904 words (W), written by second-year English language students at the Faculty of Law and Business Studies Dr Lazar Vrkatic in Novi Sad to their professor during the winter and summer semester of the school year 2009/ 2010 (see Table 1). All 253 EM were initiated by the students for one of the following three purposes: (a) asking for general information (lectures, tests and meetings); (b) submitting completed homework assignments (HW) (including explanations and/ or expectations) and (c) asking for clarification regarding their HW (prior to submitting it or after receiving some feedback from their professor).

¹ The preliminary research was presented at the conference *Language, literature, discourse* at the Faculty of Nis, 25 and 26 April, 2014.

		Serbian		English	
		EM	W	EM	W
# EM and W		125 (49.40%)	4301 (72.84%)	47 (18.57%)	1603 (27.15%)
Total		253 EM/ 5904 W			
With Content		172 EM (67.98%)			
Attachment only		81 EM (32.01 %)			
Average W		34.41		34.10	
Shortest < longest EM		1 < 193 W		4 < 104 W	
# EM	(a) General information	42 (16.60%)		8 (3.16%)	
	(b) Submitting HW	69 (27.27%)		36 (14.22%)	
	(c) Asking for clarification regarding HW	27 (10.67%)		10 (3.95%)	
	a + b + c	2 (0.79%)		0 (0.00)	
	a + c	2 (0.79%)		1 (0.39%)	
	b + c	10 (3.95%)		5 (1.97%)	

Table 1. Overview of corpus used in the research

In Section 3 below, a detailed discussion of all the results obtained in this research shall be presented. At this point, it should be mentioned that all EM were coded with respect to the language they were written in (EMEng for EM in English and EMSrb for EM in Serbian). A total of 172 EM have some content included, whereas 81 EM have only an attachment added². A total of 125 EM (4301 W) were written in Serbian and 47 EM (1603 W) in English yielding thus a subcorpus ranging from EMSrb001-EMSrb125 and a second subcorpus ranging from EMEng01-EMEng47. Out of the 172 EM with content, in 42 EMSrb and 8 EMEng, students asked for general information (a); in 69 EMSrb and 36 EMEng, students submitted completed HW and added explanations (b); and in 27 EMSrb and 10 EMEng, students asked for clarification regarding their HW either prior to submitting their HW or after receiving some feedback from their professor (c). Furthermore, some of the EM represent a combination of all three indicated groups of content, i.e. 14 EMEng and 6 EMSrb. On average, each of the analysed EMSrb consists of 34.41 W and EMEng of 34.10 W. The shortest EMSrb consists of only 1 word and the longest one of 193 W, whereas the shortest EMEng consists of 4 W and the longest one of 104 W.

² The 81 EM without content have not been coded.

2.2. Methodology

In line with the general conventions applied in discourse analysis (Herring, 2004, 2010; Tannen and Trester, 2013), several aspects had to be analysed in the compiled corpus. Furthermore, the criteria clearly indicating the negative transfer of social media discourse in the formal email correspondence with lecturers had to be determined. The analysis of the preliminary corpus of 50 emails written both in Serbian and in English immediately indicated several noticeable characteristics: the quite frequent lack of introductory or ending greeting lines in the EM, the use of emoticons, informal language, and excessive punctuation, as well as poor language and use of loan shifts.

Therefore, it was impossible to resort to only one technique of analysis, which is why it was decided to apply a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis based on rubrics and content analysis. Rubrics are assessment tools usually applied for the evaluation and assessment of students' written language production. The assessment is based on a predefined set of clearly and precisely articulated expectations for writing assignments by listing criteria and describing levels of quality (Stephens & Randall, 2011). For the purpose of this research, three criteria (C) were defined: C1. the level of respect, C2. the level of formality and C3. the level of correct language use. In the final corpus compiled for this research, the criteria could either be identified as present to a certain extent or absent, which is why the levels of quality, normally applied during assessment based on rubrics, would not yield data relevant to this research. Instead, the method of corpus-based content analysis (Kutter & Kanter, 2012) has been applied. This form of analysis is a „standardised hermeneutic procedure of text interpretation in the course of which the individual analyst assigns abstract categories to propositional contents“ (p. 7). An important aspect of this approach is that the „categories do not correspond to the 'observable' (linguistic) characteristics of the text, but to hypotheses derived from social theory... [whereby]... the necessary validity and reliability of assignment (coding) is assured by a classification system“ (p. 7). Therefore, the final analysis performed for the purpose of this research enabled the combining of the predefined criteria and the former mentioned characteristics identified in the corpus.

Section 3 below will provide a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data obtained in this research. At this point, it should be mentioned that each EM from among the 172 EM with content was analysed with respect to opening and closing greetings as characteristics of C1, the use of emoticons, excessive punctuation and informal language as characteristics of C2, and language errors as characteristics of C3.

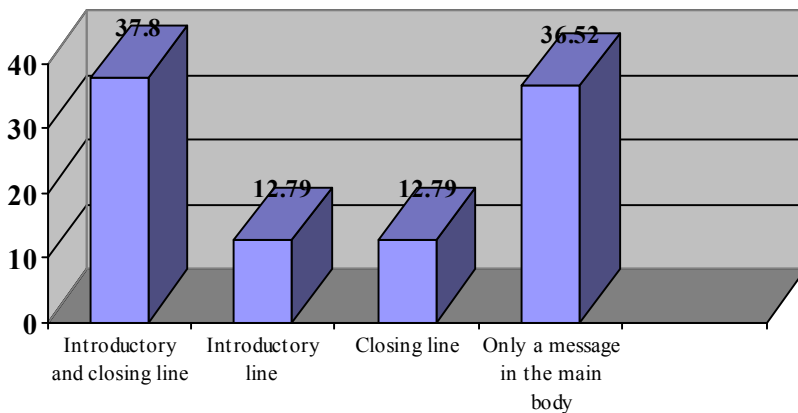
3. Results and discussion

As has been indicated in section 2, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the three established criteria has been performed based on the compiled corpus. In the sections to follow, each criterion will be presented separately with respect to the determined characteristics.

3.1. Level of respect

In order to be able to determine the level of respect the students showed in their correspondence, it was decided to adopt a very simple strategy for all emails with content in the main body: that of identifying either the presence or lack of an introductory or closing greeting line. Upon examining the corpus compiled in the preliminary research, the first reading indicated that a total of 23 out of 50 (46%) collected EM had been written without a greeting line at the beginning, at the end, or both at the beginning and the end. Assuming that the meaning of a conventional introductory line, such as 'dear', or a closing greeting line, such as 'kind regards' or 'sincerely yours' are accepted forms showing respect to the recipient of the email by addressing and greeting them appropriately, it seemed justifiable to pursue this strategy in the entire corpus.

Therefore, the analysis of the entire corpus, showed that a total of 65 (37.80%) EM out of the 172 EM with any content at all, contain both an introductory and a closing greeting line, a total of 22 EM (12.79%) only an introductory line and 22 EM (12.79%) only a closing line, which leaves a total of 63 EM (36.62%) with only a message in the main body of the email (see Graph 1).



Graph 1. Distribution of greeting lines in EM with content

The type of introductory and closing lines varies. As shall be shown, those students who used a greeting line at all mainly followed the most general conventions. However, several examples of inappropriate greeting lines could be identified. Yet, it should not be assumed that the students had the intention to insult their professor, but it may be said that the choice of some form of inappropriate introductory or closing greeting line is an indication of a general tendency of not being aware of the fact that respect should be shown by using a conventional greeting line.

3.1.1. Emails with both introductory and closing greeting lines

As can be seen from the examples in Table 2³, most students used the conventional introductory greeting line starting with 'Dear' in English and *Draga* in Serbian. There are some other forms of greetings, such as 'professor' and *profesorka/profesorice*⁴, but they may all be regarded as respectful.

	Serbian	No.	English	No.
Introductory	Draga profesrice/ profesorka	15	Dear professor/ teacher	8
	Profesorice/ profesorka	7	Professor	1
	Draga prof. Djordjevic/ Profesorice Djordjevic	3	Dear professor Jasmina Djordjevic	3
	Postovana prof. Jasmina [Honourable prof. Jasmina] ⁵	3	/	
Closing	Hvala	15	Thank you	2
	Pozdrav	12	Best regards/ Regards	3
	S postovanjem/ Srdacan pozdrav/ Pozdravljam vas i hvala	7	Sincerely/ Respectfully/ Yours sincerely	4

Table 2. Examples of introductory and closing lines in emails with content⁵

Unfortunately, among the 65 EM with introductory and closing greeting lines, quite a few fall into the category of showing a low level of respect. For example, four (4) EMSrb end with the very informal abbreviated form *pozz*, which is commonly used at the end of text messages in mobile phone communication or in instant messages (IM), such as Viber, Hangouts, and similar IM applications. It is an abbreviation of *pozdrav* (eng. good-bye), an equivalent to the English 'bye'.

Furthermore, a total of 15 EMSrb/Eng could be identified as showing a slightly lower level of respect. The following list provides examples of introductory and closing lines falling into the category of showing a lower level of respect.⁶

³ The greeting lines are displayed as equivalents in the respective languages so as to avoid translations since equivalents could be identified in the corpus. If a certain greeting line was used only in Serbian, a translation into English has been supplied. Furthermore, the examples displayed in Serbian have been written without the use of the diacritics *š, č, ć, ž* and *đ* because most of the students had not switched their keyboards to the Serbian language preference when writing their emails in Serbian. Therefore, all examples presented in Serbian have been presented without the special diacritics.

⁴ In Serbian, the inflections, *-ka* and *-ica*, are used to derive nouns denoting profession in the female gender. Both forms used in the EM are common nouns used for female professors. The use mainly depends on the region so that *profesorka* is more common in the south of Serbia and *profesorice* in the north.

⁵ The convention of using *postovana* (eng. honourable) is nowadays considered obsolete. Although it has become common to start emails and letters with the Serbian equivalent of 'Dear', some people seem to feel uncomfortable when using it as it used to convey only the meaning of affection.

⁶ Each set of presented introductory and closing greeting lines has been extracted from one and the same email. If either introductory or closing greeting have been assumed to show a slightly lower level of respect, additional explanations have been supplied. Translations into English have been provided

- [1] Profesorka Jasmina > Hvala
[Professor Jasmina > Thank you]
- [2] Draga Jasmina/ Postovana Jasmina > Srdacan pozdrav/ Hvala unapred/
Pozdrav
[Dear Jasmina/ Honourable Jasmina > Sincerely/ Thank you in advance/
Greetings]
- [3] Dear Jasmina/ Dear Ms Djordjevic > Yours/ Your student

Examples [1], [2] and [3] fall into the category of being inappropriate due to the use of the first name of the teacher. As can be seen, the closing greeting line may not be considered inappropriate so that the use of the first name might be an indication of the students' wish to establish some level of familiarity rather than lack of respect. However, since the convention of a first-name basis between students and professors is not considered common in the Serbian university setting, this form of greeting may be assumed to fall into the category of lower respect.

A few very unusual greeting lines could be discovered and they are as follows:

- [4] Draga ProfesorKA > Love (EMSrb43, EMEng03)
[Dear professor+inflection for female profession > Closing line in English]
- [5] Prof. > Hvala (EMSrb97)
[Abbreviated from professor or the Serbian *profesorka/ profesorica* > Thank you]

Example [4] occurred twice. Both emails containing this same introductory and closing greeting line were written by one and the same male student. Though the attempt at showing some humour in the introductory greeting line has been considered less inappropriate, the closing line 'love' falls into the category of inappropriate as well as the abbreviated form in example [5].

3.1.2. Emails with only an introductory greeting line

In comparison to the previous analysis, only 22 EM out of the 172 EM with content were written with only an introductory greeting line. Accordingly, the examples are less striking but still worth mentioning:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| [6] Profesrice/ Profesorka | 13 EM |
| [See note 4] | |
| [7] Draga profesorka/ Dobar dan, profesrice/ Postovana profesrice | 3 EM |
| [Dear professor/ Good day, professor/ Honourable professor] | |
| [8] Dear professor | 2 EM |

Examples [6], [7] and [8] are considered conventional and appropriate. However, the fact that students used only the introductory greeting line and did not

for the examples in Serbian.

end the email with some closing line has been deemed an indication of a certain lack of respect.

A few number of emails, four (4) in total, may be regarded as unconventional as they are either informal or simply odd:

- [9] Dobar Vam dan profesore (EMSrb65)
[Good day professor (male form of the noun for the profession)]
- [10] Draga nasa profesorka (EMSrb112)
[Our dear professor+inflection for female profession]
- [11] Hello teacher (EMEng02)

Example [9] may be considered very odd as the student did not use either of the inflections commonly used to denote female profession (*-ica/ -ka*) but addressed a female professor as if being a man. Nowadays, such form of address is considered inappropriate. Examples [10] and [11] simply fall into the category of inappropriate address due to the choice of informal language.

3.1.3. Emails with only a closing greeting line

A total of 22 EM out of 172 EM with content in the main body were written with only a closing greeting line.

The following examples fall into the category of acceptable closing greeting lines as they seem to be neutral, i.e. conventional:

- [12] Pozdrav 7 EM
[Regards]
- [13] Hvala 2 EM
[Thank you]
- [14] Pozdrav i prijatan dan 1 EM
[Regards and have a nice day]
- [15] Your student 1 EM

Unlike that, the following examples of closing greeting lines have been considered inappropriate:

- [16] Pozz 7 EM
[Informal abbreviated form of *pozdrav* used in text messages]
- [17] Pozzz 1 EM
- [18] Love 1 EM
- [19] Namaste 1 EM
- [20] Help 1 EM

The use of *pozz* [16] and its variation with the letter ‘z’ added at the end [17] have already been explained. Suffice it to say that neither is appropriate in academic correspondence. As far as examples [18], [19] and [20] are concerned, they seem to be self-explanatory.



3.1.4. Empty emails with only attachments added

Out of 253 EM, a set of 81 did not contain any content in the body of the email. In other words, the students only attached their homework either in the form of a Microsoft Office Word document or PowerPoint presentation. Though a significant indicator of a certain level of disrespect, the empty emails may also be seen as indicators of a considerable lack of experience as far as the conventions in electronic mail correspondence in general are concerned. However, it may also be inferred that they simply transfer the correspondence pattern practised on Facebook, Twitter, Skype and their smart phones to all their electronic correspondence, that with their professors included. As already mentioned, this does not necessarily mean students are disrespectful on purpose. It rather indicates that models of social behaviour are changing, probably under the influence of the more dynamic and economical pattern of correspondence evident on social networks.

The fact that the students did not consider including any content in their email is only one aspect contributing to the hypothesis of this research. Curiously enough, most students (96%) would not identify themselves in any way whatsoever (4% of the students put their names in the subject line of the EM). In other words, if their email addresses were not clearly referring to their name and surname, or the attachments did not have their name or surname included, the recipient could not know who had sent the email. Such lack of awareness that they are anonymous to their recipient if they do not clearly identify themselves to some extent seems to point to their lack of experience but also to a certain lack of interest in the result of the correspondence they themselves initiated.

Another notable feature observed in the sample of emails without content is that all the students followed more or less the same behavioural pattern. First, they sent the email with the attachment. Second, they received their professor's response, which elaborated either briefly or in more detail on the mistakes, suggested improvements, and returned the corrected homework. It is the last step in the correspondence that indicates lack of respect as none of the students bothered to send a thank-you reply or any other reply to confirm the receipt of the homework or to acknowledge that they had understood the comments and suggestions. If any of them had to resubmit their homework, they would do it in the same manner: attaching only the homework.⁷

To conclude the discussion on the level of respect, the analysis presented here obviously indicates that the students never had the intention to be disrespectful or offensive. However, the general tendency to choose forms of inappropriate and unconventional greeting lines in their correspondence with their professor does show that they tend to identify the lecturer with an ordinary acquaintance they usually write to when using some social media. The fact that they lack the awareness of the necessity to regard their professor as a recipient who they should show a little bit more respect leads to the conclusion that the already thin line between the category of professors and students with respect to status is slowly being erased. Whether this should be regarded as a social phenomenon or social problem exceeds the scope and the aims of this research and might certainly be pursued in another research.

⁷ The emails which contained resubmitted homeworks were not included in this research.

3.2. Level of formality

Regarding the aspect of formality, it should be stated that this is the most direct indication of the students' tendency to develop poor academic communication skills and language knowledge. As has been pointed out, the rather strong inclination to use the language conventions characteristic of social media discourse in the formal email correspondence with their lecturers makes the students deviate from acceptable communication and language norms.

In order to investigate the level of formality, two criteria were adopted in the analysis of the corpus: 1. the insertion of various emoticons and excessive punctuation and 2. the use of informal language.

3.2.1. The use of emoticons and excessive punctuation

As far as emoticons are concerned, the total number of occurrences is 58, of which 46 belong to the group of emoticons based on punctuation marks and 12 were real emoticons. Only two types of emotions have been expressed, happiness (32 instances) and sadness (16 instances), each by means of the respective emoticon, i.e. a happy face or a sad face.

The use of emoticons is a convention in social media discourse. It is probably the result of the necessity to economise as far as the number of characters is concerned, a necessity of great importance in text messages via short message services in telephone communication. Obviously, the pattern has been transferred to other forms of social media discourse and eventually it entered even formal academic correspondence. In general the use of emoticons is not an indication of disrespect but rather of disposition and current emotional state. However, if added to all the elements discovered in this analysis, the use of happy and sad faces in the formal correspondence with university professors may be deemed slightly inappropriate.

A common characteristic that could also be discovered is the excessive use of punctuation marks in instances when the students were asking questions (???), making their point (!!!) or being unclear about some issue (...). Therefore, a total of 3 instances of '???'', 4 instances of '!!!' and 21 instances of '...' could be identified in the 172 emails with content.

3.2.2. The use of informal language

Informal language could be identified in both EMEng and EMSrb. The use of informal language was analysed qualitatively from the aspect of lexicon. In other words, the occurrences have been analysed as instances of rather informal, even inappropriate words and phrases identified in the content of the body of the email. Since a quantitative approach and an in-depth analysis from various linguistic aspects and discursive markers would exceed the scope of this article, a follow-up to this research might be conducted with the purpose of analysing the various characteristics of the examples found in the corpus.

In line with the aim of this research, the most prominent examples showing the use of informal language have been identified in the entire corpus and are presented in this analysis starting with the most striking examples found in the EMEng⁸:

- [21] ... because some of us want to go home... (EMEng08)
- [22] ... so that you can finally give him a mark... (EMEng02)
- [23] Here you go teacher... (EMEng05)
- [24] We have pulled an allnighter to get this done... (EMEng05)
- [25] Please reply (EMEng06)
- [26] ... please, please, please accept my essay... (EMEng44)
- [27] Uuuups! Here comes the attmnt. (EMEng08)
- [28] I don't hate you (EMEng23)
- [29] ... But how come?... (EMEng30)
- [30] Hope it works this time. (EMEng46)
- [31] Here... I sincerely hope it is not so bad. (EMEng38)
- [32] Three times a lady, third time is the charm, etc. (EMEng47)

The most prominent examples showing the use of informal language in the EMSrb are as follows⁹:

- [33] ... please don't be cruel... (EMSrb18)
[The EM was all in Serbian with only the last line in English]
- [34] ...salimo se ... (EMSrb66)
[We are joking]
- [35] Evo PONOVO saljem (EMSrb34)
[Here, I'm sending it AGAIN]
- [36] Posaljite mi greske (EMSrb48)
[Send me the mistakes]
- [37] Odgovorite ako nije problem (EMSrb51)
[Answer if it is not a problem]
- [38] ... Joj profesoricceeee, bas sam se pomucila... (EMSrb79)
[Oh professoooooor, I have really had troubles with this]
- [39] ... Videcu da do sutra ispravim rad... (EMSrb21)
[I'll try to correct the homework by tomorrow]
- [40] ... jednostavno nemam inspiraciju da pisem o ovim temama, stvarno mi je zao... (EMSrb13)
[I simply lack the inspiration to write about topics like these, I'm really sorry]

As can be seen from the examples in both languages, students seem to take the matter of writing to their professor rather lightly. The choice of words and phrases ranges from mild humour to frustration. In the former, no serious disrespect can be

⁸ Examples presented with three punctuation marks are parts of larger content. Examples without them represent the entire email the student sent.

⁹ A translation has been provided for each respective example. The explanation provided in note 7 regarding the punctuation marks applies here as well.

identified. The only criticism to be uttered regards their feeling of comfort and lack of shame to write such emails. To some extent this may be considered positive as it is an indication of a normal and rather positive relationship they seem to have with their professor. The sense of frustration that can be identified in some of the emails is a more serious matter as it shows the inclination students have to blame their teachers for their own failures and mistakes. Unfortunately, this article would not permit any further discussion of this matter but it should be pointed out that the frustration is a sign of disrespect of teachers in general as the students do not see the teachers' effort and contribution in the process of correcting mistakes, providing feedback and additional instruction. What the students seem to see is a demanding professor constantly criticising them.

3.3. Level of language errors

The third and final criterion analysed in the compiled corpus was directed at language errors. Since an elaborate analysis of this criterion would also exceed the purpose of this article, only the most important conclusions will be provided for this criterion whereas a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis might be provided in a subsequent research paper.

Regarding this characteristic, it has to be pointed out that the total instances of errors identified in the EMSrb should not be disregarded although far more mistakes could be identified in the EMEng. Only a total of 5 EMEng (2.35%) and 28 EMSrb (35%) could be identified having not a single language error. In other words, a total of 139 EM (62.65%) contained various types of language errors.

An obvious and even disturbing realisation is that the students did not even bother to make use of the spelling and language check tool integrated in every webmail service, which they could have applied to their emails written in English. Again, this may be an indicator of a certain lack of concern among the students in regard to what their lecturers might think of them, which in turn may be seen as a lack of respect. However, it should be stressed that the students most certainly do not make mistakes on purpose. Other reasons, such as insufficient knowledge of English, lack of time, emotional stress or their general lack of experience in writing more formal letters can be listed. It should also be pointed out, however, that many mistakes could have been avoided if the students had taken the time to read the email before sending it, checking spelling mistakes or taking into consideration that the level of informality and familiarity in their email might be crossing some line.

As the number of errors is rather abundant, all the issues discovered in the corpus had to be categorised in some way. The following list of common mistakes is an attempt at summarising all the errors identified in the collected and analysed emails written in either Serbian or English or both:

1. Typing extra or no space after punctuation marks in both languages.
2. Missing sentence elements so that the context is illogical in both languages.
3. Missing punctuation marks in both languages.



4. Capital letters in Serbian emails where they should not be used because the webmail service provides automatic correction ('I' instead of *i* = Serbian 'and', 'Sam' instead of *sam* = Serbian form of Present Simple 'to be').
5. No capital letters in English emails where they should be used (thursday, monday, 'i' instead of 'I' for the first person singular).
6. No capital letters at the beginning of sentences in both languages.
7. Irregular verbs in English spelt incorrectly.
8. Regular Past Simple inflection added to irregular verbs in English.
9. Hyphen+Serbian inflection for declinations added to English words in Serbian emails (case-*ove*, Inbox-*u*, case-study-*ja*).
10. Irregular spelling of words that should be spelt as one word and of words that should be spelt as more than one word in Serbian (**u napred* instead of *unapred*, **uredu* instead of *u redu*, **izacicu* instead of *izaci cu*, **jos jedan put* instead of *jos jedanput*, etc.).
11. Inocorrect spelling of ordinal numbers in both languages.
12. Wrong word order, especially in embedded questions in English emails.
13. Incorrect use of non-finite phrases in English sentences.
14. Excessive use of loan shifts in Serbian emails (*otpakujte* from 'unpack', *forvardovao* from 'forward', *anderlajnovani* from 'underlined', etc.).

Each of the mentioned types of common mistakes might be elaborated in more detail in a subsequent article. A general conclusion to be drawn at this point is that if the students were concerned about what their professor might think of them based on their email correspondence, they would probably pay more attention to what they have put into their email. It may be said that their obvious lack of concern is bordering on low respect because if they had felt the need to show some respect, they would have done so. Obviously, the low level of respect is not harmful to the students and it should never be, but their rather poor language performance might prove harmful.

4. Conclusion

Numerous advantages can be attributed to social media, a few important ones obviously being that they encourage individuals to socialise in a much less complicated way, that they are an overwhelming resource of information, and that they contribute to a more modern approach to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, social media cannot be denied their disadvantages. One that motivated the research presented in this article was aimed at confirming the hypothesis that the rather lenient and informal conventions characteristic of social media discourse are more and more prominent in academic correspondence, a form of discourse otherwise expected to be formal and show a certain level of respect.

The corpus compiled for the purpose of this research consists of 253 emails sent by second-year English language students to their professor during the academic

year 2009/ 2010. Emails written both in English and Serbian were analysed following a two-step procedure, the first of which was based on rubrics, an assessment tool used for the assessment of students' written performance and the second followed the principles of corpus-based content analysis.

The final analysis yielded the following conclusions:

1. Students tend to transfer the conventions of more lenient and permissive social media discourse to the correspondence with their lecturers to a rather large extent. This conclusion could be drawn based on the fact that 65 EM, out of 172 EM with any content at all, contained both an introductory and a closing greeting line, a total of 22 EM only an introductory line and 22 EM only a closing line, which leaves a total of 63 EM with only a message in the main body of the email. Furthermore, a total of 81 EM contained only an attachment, i.e. no message at all. Assuming that the meaning of a conventional introductory line, such as 'Dear', or a closing greeting line, such as 'Kind regards' or 'Sincerely yours' are accepted forms showing respect to the recipient of the email by addressing and greeting them appropriately, it may be concluded that the lack of either greeting line, or both of them, does indicate lack of respect.
2. Students seem to believe that other respected conventions of academic correspondence are not necessarily applicable to social media discourse. This conclusion can be based on the fact that a total of 58 occurrences of the use of emoticons could be identified in the 172 EM with content. Furthermore a total of 28 occurrences of excessive use of punctuation marks could be identified. In addition, the extremely high frequency of informal language discovered in the compiled corpus clearly supports the negative transfer of social media discourse. However, the most protruding argument supporting the initial hypothesis is that there is not one single email in the entire corpus without any of the characteristics predetermined as indicators of the negative transfer of social media discourse to the formal academic correspondence analysed here.
3. The final conclusion indicates that the negative transfer of social media discourse results in poor language performance, which could be determined based on the fact that 139 EM (62.65%) out of all EM with content contained some type of a language error.

As has been pointed out many times, it cannot be said that students are disrespectful or offensive on purpose. Their general lack of experience in writing formal letters, the insufficient skill of academic writing in general, the poor language performance, not enough practice, emotional stress, clumsy and awkward expressions, even their latent wish to establish a closer relationship with their professor and many other reasons could be deemed responsible for the results presented in this research. However, it cannot be denied that the negative transfer of social media discourse to the formal correspondence students conduct with their lecturers is rather obvious and should be the topic of more elaborate research in the future.

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NEGATIVNI TRANSFER DISKURSA DRUŠTVENIH MEDIJA U FORMALNOJ I-MEJL PREPISCI IZMEĐU STUDENATA I NASTAVNIKA

Rezime

Diskurs društvenih medija predstavlja usmenu ili pisanu komunikaciju koja uključuje društveni element, a izvodi se putem društvenih medija. Uprkos brojnim mogućnostima komunikacije koje su pre samo deset godina bile nezamislive, kao i pedagoških implikacija diskursa društvenih medija, nesporni su efekti koji se ogledaju u negativnom transferu neformalnosti i prisnosti u akademskoj korespondenciji koja bi inače trebalo da bude formalna. Ovakav transfer je naročito očigledan u korespondenciji studenata sa svojim predavačima putem i-mejla gde neformalnosti i prisnost ponekad prelaze granice osnovnih konvencija. Ovo istraživanje zasnovano je na kvalitativnoj i kvantitativnoj analizi korpusa od 253 imejlava koje je autorka ovog istraživanja primila od svojih studenata u periodu od oktobra 2009. do juna 2010. godine. Analiza prikupljenog korpusa obavljena je u dva koraka: 1. i-mejlavi su ocenjeni na osnovu rubrika i 2. obavljena je analiza sadržaja prikupljenih imejlava koji čine deo korpusa istraživanja. Primarna ocena na osnovu rubrika obavljena je na osnovu tri kriterijuma koji su definisani za ocenu: a) nivo poštovanja, b) nivo formalnosti i c) nivo primene jezika. Analiza sadržaja i-mejlava je potom analizirana u okviru svakog kriterijuma na osnovu uočenih zajedničkih karakteristika.

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