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STYLE AND REGISTER

IN ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the level of awareness in English as a Lingua Franca users when it comes to the style and register choices in situations of different formality. The study participants are presented with three real-life situations and are asked to write three electronic messages accordingly. The interview with the participants in which their linguistic choices are discussed is another part of the research. To describe the situational characteristics, I used the Biber and Conrad's framework for register analysis. The study shows in which ways the participants' representations of themselves change in different situations. To understand this better, the research covers the topic of identity and its nature, which poststructuralists define as multiple, fluid, and ever-changing. Also, the study offers insights into the ways in which electronic communication is evolving, and considers the reasons behind this.

1. *Introduction*

The aim of this paper is to explore the variation in register and style of English as Lingua Franca users (ELF), and the level of awareness of their own variation. More specifically, I claim that, when faced with situations of different formality, the study participants will use different levels of register and will adapt their style according to the recipient of the message. Secondly, I claim that they will be only partially aware of all the circumstances that affect their choice of register. My hypothesis is that, considering the participants are asked to imagine three situations and produce three texts accordingly, this will result in different levels of formality. Although all of the texts will be written in the form of an electronic message (be it e-mail or instant message), it will be interesting to find out if any of the aforementioned messages would be evaluated as more or less difficult in terms of composition.

Furthermore, my study includes a conversation with the participants, discussing the emotional aspects of producing the three texts. The objective in this part of the study is to find out how the participants perceived each situation and if this perception is in any way visible in their linguistic choices. Here I will mention the topic of identity, with the idea of rethinking variations in register and style, and seeing how my participants' variable language use affects the way in which they perceive themselves in relation to others.

Since my goal in this research is to analyze the use of registers in common situations of ELF users, I chose to do a case study and carefully examine the collected data from both the linguistic and anthropological perspective.

The paper starts with a theoretical overview of Language variation (section 2), in which I focus on defining Register and style. In this section I also include some insights about the relation of language variation and identity. Materials and methods used in the research are presented in section 3, followed by Results and analysis in the section 4. The Discussion and conclusion are presented in section 5. The Appendix contains the description of the three situations and all of the participants' answers.

2. *Language variation*

Variation is a characteristic of language. Every change in language can be considered a variation, be it in register, style, genre, dialect, or slang. As language users, we often modify pronunciation and word choice, depending on the circumstances of a speech event and the motivation behind the utterance.

Take two university students, S and T, conversing in an informal setting of a cafe. S asks: "When does your class end?" The motivation behind this question could be as simple as curiosity about the T's plans after the class; it could be asked for the sake of being polite or simply by reason of comparing between their schedules. The student might use any of the following questions in order to get the same information: at what time does your class end / your class ends when / when do you finish classes today / etc.

It is very interesting to study language variation because it seems that each language choice a speaker makes has different consequences, just as each utterance they use has different connotations. The subfield of linguistics that takes this kind of approach to language is called *pragmatics*. One of the first definitions of pragmatics was given by Crystal and Kasper, who defined it as the study of language in its sociocultural context (1986, 1997; 1997). To better understand this concept, let me present the notion of *pragmatic competence* in language production. According to Laughlin et al., "pragmatic competence is a crucial aspect of communicative language ability" (2015: 6). To be pragmatically successful, language users should be aware of both grammar and sociocultural context of the utterance (Laughlin et al., 2015: 6). Since pragmatic failure often creates negative impressions of the speaker, it is especially important for ESL users to develop their pragmatic competence. As Biber and Conrad argue (2006: 16), receptive mastery of different language varieties grants language users access to information, while productive mastery allows them to participate in varying communities. These two seem equally important, because if the language learners' goal is to become a part of another group or society, they should be able to both receive and provide information.

2.1. Register and style

Out of all perspectives to language variation, the emphasis in this study will be placed on the following two: register and style.

To begin with, let us consider the term *register* from the point of view of semantics, in which case it stands for a metaphorical borrowing from the domain of music. According to Biber and Conrad (2006: 8), register refers to "a particular part of the range of a voice or instrument". British-Australian linguist Halliday was the one to introduce the term register to linguistics. He defined register as a semantic concept, since "it represents different ways of saying different things" (Lewandowski 2010: 66).

According to 'Oxford Dictionaries'[1], register is:

> a variety of language or a level of usage, as determined by the degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, according to the communicative purpose, social context, and standing of the user.

Register is therefore defined in terms of the formality of language usage, but other important factors are certainly vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation (in case of spoken language). As the definition states, language users vary their utterances according to the communicative purpose, social context, and standing of the user. In other words, language users usually take into consideration at least three *situational characteristics* before deciding on an appropriate utterance.

Moreover, when it comes to the object of study, the term register has been associated with general language of domains (e.g. legal, scientific, bureaucratic register), or with language of occupations and different social groups (e. g. surgeons, airline pilots, bank managers, sales clerks, jazz fans). Douglas Biber uses the term register to refer to situationally defined varieties described for their characteristic lexico-grammatical features (Biber & Condrad 2006: 11). According to Biber and Conrad, we can distinguish four main registers: conversation, fiction, newspaper language, academic prose (2006: 8).

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[1] Oxford Dictionaries, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/register (accessed Jan 10, 2018)

Many authors have defined register in relation to other concepts. One of them is Halliday, who contrasted the terms *register* and *dialect*, defining the former as a variety according to use, and the latter a variety according to the user. In this sense, register is seen as "a variety of language that can be used on different occasions according to the purpose of the conversation, as opposed to dialect which is a variety people employ depending on the person they are speaking to" (Lewandowski, 2010: 67). Therefore, when contrasted with dialect, which is defined as a variety based on the respective user, register is seen as a functional variety.

Another important point for this research is register analysis. Halliday proposed the following controlling variables as a framework for register analysis: field, mode and tenor (Lewandowski, 2010: 66). He defined these variables as mutually dependent. In other words, the field of discourse (setting) can determine the mode (channel), and the tenor (degree of formality) of a register.

Nevertheless, Biber and Conrad have developed the most elaborate frameworks for register and genre analysis, in which they propose seven situational characteristics that should be described, analyzed and afterwards functionally interpreted (Lewandowski, 2010: 71). Below is a list of situational characteristics as presented in the book 'Register, Genre and Style' (2009: 40).

List 2.1.1. Situational characteristics of registers and genres

I. Participants

    A. Addressor(s)

    B. Addressees

    C. Are there on-lookers?

II. Relations among participants

    A. Interactiveness

    B. Social roles

    C. Personal relationship

    D. Shared knowledge

III. Channel

    A. Mode: speech / writing / singing

    B. Specific medium

IV. Production circumstances: real-time / planned / scripted / edited or revised

V. Setting

    A. Is the time and space of communication shared by participants?

    B. Place of communication

    C. Time: contemporary, historical time period

VI. Communicative purposes

    A. General purposes

    B. Specific purposes

    C. Factuality

    D. Expression of stance

VII. Topic

    A. General topic domain

    B. Specific topic

    C. Social status of person being referred to

As it is visible from the table, this is a very detailed framework, and I will use it in the Results and analysis section to determine the situational characteristics of the three situations.

To continue the practice of contrasting the terms in order to understand them more clearly, I will include a quote by Biber and Conrad in which they compare *style* and *register*:

> "both register and style have linguistic focus and analyze the use of core linguistic features, with the key difference in that style features reflect aesthetic preferences and register features are functionally motivated by the situational context; rather, style features reflect aesthetic preferences, associated with particular authors or historical periods" (2009: 2).

This being said, the focus in the analysis part of this research will be more on the functionally motivated language choices than on the aesthetic preferences of the participants. I find this approach more important because, as Biber and Conrad explain, "any text sample of any type can be analyzed from a register perspective" (2009: 2).

Coupland defines *style* as a "wide range of strategic actions and performances that speakers engage in, to construct themselves and their social lives" (2009: 3). This is very interesting as it points out that linguistic features are closely linked with social behaviour. In his book 'Style: Language Variation and Identity', Coupland explains that "speakers project different social identities and create different social relationships through their style choices" (2009: 1).

According to Virkkula and Nikula (2010: 253), identity can be conceptualised in two fundamentally different ways: essentially and non-essentially. As Woodward argues, it is clear that "more traditional, essentialised notions of identity as constant and single entity have given way to poststructuralist notions of identities, as multiple, fluid, and negotiable" (1996: 252). From the non-essentialist viewpoint, identity is constantly changing and transforming, and is constructed across times, places, and practices. Moreover, as Virkkula and Nikula mention, language and people's identities make a full circle of transformation:

> Language and discourses shape people but people also constantly shape discourses, constructing and negotiating their sense of themselves and their identities in interaction with others (2010: 253).

The subject of discourse and identity is especially interesting in respect to ELF users. This is because ELF users begin to reconstruct their identities as soon as they switch to the English language. In order to become a part of a different community, they have to be able to understand and produce the varieties of the other language as well. According to Jenkins (2007: 1), "ELF is a contact language used among people who do not share a common native language, and it is commonly understood to mean a second language of its speakers" (Virkkula and Nikula, 2010: 255). This type of language use in interaction was defined as *native-culture-free-code* (Pölzl, 2003: 4-5). By this concept Pölzl understood "the freedom ELF users have to either create their own shared, temporary culture, to partly 'export' their own individual primary culture into ELF, or to reinvent their cultural identities by blending into other lingua-cultural groups" (Virkkula and Nikula, 2010: 256). What I find very interesting about this concept is that it links the freedom of linguistic expression with the freedom of reinventing one's cultural identities.

Taking all this into consideration, we can say that individual speakers vary their language both in terms of style and register, in accordance with how they perceive the situation and in accordance with their interlocutor. From this it is reasonable to assume that even within a specific register (e. g. e-mail to a friend) there are possibilities for further variation (e. g. style, dialect, choice of words). The question that remains is to what extent ELF users are aware of this variation, and whether this awareness is related to their emotional response to the situation. I expect that the study participants will reinvent their identities more frequently in communication with strangers than in communication with friends. Also, I expect that expressing opinions and emotions as well as freedom in style variation will be most present in less formal situations.

In this section I have presented two different perspectives to language analysis: register and style － the former is situationally defined, whereas the latter is aesthetically motivated. Both of these perspectives are used to vary one's linguistic expression, which ultimately serves to construct one's identity. Since identity is not fixed, language users are allowed to vary and reconstruct their identities across times and places. This is a non-essentialist viewpoint.

3. *Materials and methods*

The research was composed of two parts – a questionnaire (written part) and a semi-structured interview (spoken part). Five participants, native speakers of Croatian who speak English as a lingua franca, took part in the study. In the first part, the participants were given a questionnaire in which they were asked to imagine different situations and, accordingly, produce three texts to the following recipients: an institution, a partner/close friend, a parent. All three situations revolved around a participant's opportunity to become an apprentice in their field of choice (see Appendix, section 6). This should have allowed us to track the changes in the level of formality more easily. The participants did not have time limits for production of the text messages.

For the second part of the study I recorded the interview in which we discussed the participants' impressions of the texts they have produced. Only parts that prove to be relevant to the study will be included in the paper, in the Results and analysis section. The aim of the interview was to rethink the language choices made while writing the three messages, and consider the reasons behind them. The focus in this part of the research was on understanding the participants' perception of formal vs. informal circumstances and, as well, the emotional aspect of their relationship with the recipient. Moreover, I mentioned and discussed about the consequences of mistaking the recipient of the e-mail in this section. The resulting data was analyzed qualitatively.

Since I chose to research non-native production of English language, the study participants were all native Croatian speakers. They were 24-29 years of age and share similar educational backgrounds, with at least 9 years of English in elementary and high school. Two out of five have a Master's degree in the field of English language, and three out of five use English very often, be it for work or for leisure.

Finally, all participants have been informed beforehand that their contribution to the research will remain anonymous and they provided informed consent for the study.

4. Results and analysis

All of the texts composed by the study participants belong to the register of electronic communication. According to Biber (2009: 178), this would be their classification:

S1) e-mail to a stranger,
S2) instant message to a friend,
S3) e-mail to a family member.

The numbers are given in the same order as the situations (S1, S2, S3) are presented to the participants. If the general register of all texts is electronic communication, e-mail to a stranger, instant message to a friend, and e-mail to a family member would be their subregisters.

To start off, I will describe all three situations based on the framework for situational analysis as Biber and Condrad proposed. The first task (S1) was to write a motivation letter which would serve as an application for an internship significant for the participant. The motivation letter is supposed to be sent as an e-mail. As Biber and Conrad define it, e-mail is a general register, distinctive by the fact that it is sent via computer, from one mail account to another" (2009: 176). In this research we focus on individual e-mail messages, written to a specific person from another person. Also, it's communicative purpose can vary from mass advertising, general institutional information-sharing, social communication among friends (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 176).

To define the situational characteristics in S1, I'll start by noting that the addressor is a well-educated person in his/her twenties (single author), whereas the addressee is an unidentified person of higher rank (single recipient). To define the relations among the participants, it is clear that they have distant social roles, which makes their communication very impersonal. Even though the addressor and addressee are not familiar with one another, they probably have some shared knowledge in the professional field. The third situational characteristic, as Biber and Conrad suggested, is channel. The channel is described through mode, which for all of the tasks (S1-3) is writing. Also, the specific medium is e-mail in both S1 and S3.

When it comes to production circumstances, the motivational letters produced by the participants are planned and edited, at least to a certain extent. Moreover, the addressors and the addressees do not share time and place of communication, which makes the level of interactiveness of this mode of communication moderately low. Nevertheless, the sender of an e-mail usually expects the recipient to respond in a few hours, days, or even weeks (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 178). General purposes of the motivational letter are to inform and persuade, whereas the specific purposes are to make an introduction, to present one's work experience and education, and report on one's career goals. The information gathered must be factual and there is usually no overt expression of stance in impersonal e-mails (motivational letters). The general topical domain of S1 is business/academic, whereas the specific topic is internship.

As for the S2 and S3, the addressors are the same (single author, well-educated person in their twenties), whereas the addressees change from a close friend to a parent (single recipient). Generally, it can be said that the relations between the study participants in both these situations are respectful and friendly since they are familiar with one another. For S2, the message is composed as if it was written in a mobile application for instant messaging (IM), which is an online version of texting. "Texting is highly interactive form of communication, closer to conversation than e-mail in being more immediately and directly interactive (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 201). In IM, participants are online in the same time, typing messages sent directly to each other. This makes the level of interactiveness in S2 the very high, more so than in S1 and S3. The general purpose of text messages is usually one of the following: social organizing, staying connected while on the move, information sharing, relationship maintenance, business reminders (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 203). For S2, the general purpose is sharing information and staying in touch, whereas the specific purpose varies from participant to participant. This applies to S3 as well. When it comes to the expression of stance, as will be exemplified, it is usually overt in messages written to family members and close friends. As Biber and Conrad mention, e-mails between friends are very similar to conversation, whereas e-mails between strangers tend to look more like standard written documents, in a way similar to academic prose (2009: 186). The general topic in S2 is daily activities and application for an internship, whereas in S3 it is sharing news and excitement about the internship.

Overall, what all of the situations have in common is that they are written to be sent electronically (either on a computer or a phone). Communication via e-mail is usually slower than instant messaging, and therefore less interactive (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 201). Also, the production circumstances stay the same throughout the tasks. The participants composed the messages in real-time, but there was some time left for their planning or editing, similarly as it would in everyday life. The communicative purposes change from informing and persuading (S1) to sharing information and social organizing (S2, S3). Moreover, the relations between the participants are very impersonal in S1, where there is no overt expression of stance, as opposed to S2 and S3. Lastly, general topic stays the same, as all situations revolve around the internship.

After the detailed description of each of the three situations and their situational characteristics, I will now proceed to identify and analyze the most common linguistic features of each group of texts my participants produced, and comment on the most interesting answers given.

S1) E-mail to a stranger

Writing an e-mail to an institution demands understanding of its composition. Firstly, its structure is very specific. Whereas in face-to-face address, we can usually avoid the use of any name or title, since this "is not the option in written correspondence, where choices concerning features like form of address and complimentary close will reflect how the correspondents see their relationship" (Brown and Gilman, 1970: 322). The motivational letter therefore usually begins with the title and name of the recipient, and at the end is signed by the author. In this respect, most of the study participants begin their letters with a formal greeting to an unidentified person. They predominantly use expressions "dear Sir or Madam" and "to whom it may concern." Almost all texts end with the form of greeting "(yours) sincerely." Only participant V dismissed the usual structure of the formal greeting and simply started with an introduction. Participant A, on the other hand, had a particular person in mind, so his e-mail started with "dear Mrs. Martinec".

The motivational letter is characterized by the use of longer sentences and specific linking adverbials. This is excellently visible in the answer of participants N and R:

> "Since I have gained teaching skills throughout my studies, as well as my work, this internship would be an excellent opportunity to apply my knowledge in a different environment, one where I don't speak the native language, and to acquire new skills that will help me pursue my career goals."

> "However, what I find most appealing is the quality standard and the professionality of your company, and my biggest desire would be to learn as much as I can."

More complex sentence structure allows the author to develop the syntax and illustrate their good command of the English language. Another important function this type of language serves is demonstrating the participant's logical reasoning skills.

Moreover, as participant M shows in the following example, definite articles are quite common in formal writing:

> "I apply for the internship in your agency for the working place: tourist guide. I'm interested for this working place in the beautiful town of yours because I'm fascinated with the rich history of Florence."

This is especially the case in the introduction part of the motivational letter, in which most of the information mentioned is defined and specific, "the working place", "the internship", "the town", "the history". Another similar example is that of participant N: "The main reason I am applying for the internship you offer is my love for teaching languages". The authors' opting for definite nouns keeps the text straightforward and clear ― which is a quality of a well-written motivational letter. All of the above serve the general purpose of the motivational letter, which is to persuade the person reading it to accept the applicant's proposition.

For the most part, contracted verb forms are avoided in this type of texts, to keep the text simple and clear. Therefore, the majority of the study participants choose full verb forms: "my name is", "I am a student", "I am applying", "I am looking forward to", etc. Participant M, on the other hand, uses less and more formal structures alike, making his motivational letter somewhat neutral. Therefore, he uses contracted forms such as "I'm interested" and "I've been studying", intertwined with: "I am a bachelor", "I hope that you will reply."

In motivational letters, there is a general tendency to keep the vocabulary very formal. The authors should therefore carefully choose the words in order to present themselves as very good applicants. To achieve this, participants A and R used nominalizations:

> "My personal preferences and ideologyes are close, if not the same, with your ideas, and feald of interests." A

> "However, what I find most appealing is the quality standard and the professionality of your company,and my biggest desire would be to learn as much as I can." R

Having very formal vocabulary in mind while writing an important text can facilitate making mistakes in spelling or in syntax. This can be prevented by detailed revision of the motivational letter and rereading of the written text. If participant A had more time to revise the letter, he would have probably noticed that the words "ideologyes" and "feald" are misspelled.

When it comes to the style of writing in S1, this is where the results start to vary. This could be because each participant is trying to find the right balance between professional content and personal style of the text, or because each of them has a different institution in mind. In that sense, a motivational letter for an internship in the field of anthropology in Cuba might differ in content and style from a motivational letter for an internship in a translation agency in Zagreb. Therefore, we will take a look at some different stylistic choices the participants made:

> "The main reason I am applying for the internship you offer is my love for teaching languages. (...) this internship would be an excellent opportunity to apply my knowledge in a different environment, one where I don't speak the native language, and to acquire new skills that will help me pursue my career goals. I look forward to your reply." N

> "On your website I came across your internship offer and I would like to apply as a translator for the language combination you mentioned. Moreover, on your website I learned that your company specializes in medicine and legal translations, both of which I find immensely interesting." R

Both participants are applying for language-related internships, although N's desired position is that of a teacher, and R's is that of a translator. Their texts are very native-like, and it can be said that both N and R have a very good command of English and are well-trained in writing motivational letters.

The remaining three participants wrote:

> "I am very happy to write to You about my motives to join your team. (...) It would be great honor to work and cooperate with You and, to be honist, it would make me very happy. Thank You for this opportunity." A

> "I've been studying about this town for years and it would be an absolute pleasure to share my knowledge and inspiration with other people.
> I hope that you will reply promptly." M

> "I feel grateful that I have this opportunity to express my motivation for this position at your enterprise. (...) This enterprise would help a lot for my career and I can guarantee that I will be dedicated to this job as long as I can." V

Although these examples are well-written, the language usage is perhaps more basic and their style is less varied. This kind of difference in English as a lingua franca users is very common because, as Knapp (2002: 220-1) suggests, the level of proficiency in ELF can vary from basic to near-native competence (Bjørge, 2007: 62). From what A, M and V have written, we can infer that they are slightly less proficient in English language, or that they are simply inexperienced in writing motivational letters in general. Also, this corresponds with the fact that they are not university students of English, as opposed to N and R.

As Biber and Conrad present it in 'Register, Genre, Style', the motivational letter falls in the register category of academic prose — in that the mode of register is writing, the addressor is usually singular or plural (sometimes institutional) and there is no direct interaction between the participants (2009: 119). For both, there should be enough time for planning, revising and editing the text, and time and place are not shared. The only difference between the two types of texts is that the place of communication of motivational letter is private, whereas that of academic prose is usually public (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 119). When it comes to the communicative purpose, general purpose in both cases is informational, but specific purpose is not the

same. Academic prose is mostly explanatory, as opposed to motivational letters which are persuasive. For both, the presented information is factual (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 119).

To round up the analysis of the S1, I would like to add some of the participants' comments from the interview part of the study, which I find relevant for the understanding of their choices. To begin with, participant A was the only one to have a specific person in mind as the recipient. In a sense, this allowed him to be less stressed than others because he did not have the burden of making an outstanding first impression. Participant A did however state: "I'm not so careful when I write to close friends, as opposed to some official person", admitting that his linguistic choices in the first text were however made with caution. Although he did not address anyone in particular, participant M admitted that he was trying to be as professional as possible in his letter, because, he added "there cannot be any emotions in the business." In order to appeal to the manager of the agency, he focused on presenting himself in the best possible way, because in the register of motivational letter, M added, the focus should be only on one's best characteristics. As McCay and Wong mention, ELF speakers "negotiate different identities in different contexts (such as educational or non-educational) and are situated in a number of discourses, often because of their different histories as learners of English, their backgrounds and discourses of power" (Virkkula and Nikula, 254).

Furthermore, participants R and V admitted that they were quite anxious while writing the e-mail to a stranger because they felt that the person they were writing to was deciding on their future. As for participant N, he remarked that he consciously used more formal vocabulary, as well as made decisions about the content and more developed syntax. He stated that the language he used in the motivational letter was at the same time conscious and subconscious: "it's conscious, but maybe in the same time it's also subconscious because I don't really have to think that hard when I write a formal letter, I mean, the expressions kind of come naturally." All of the participants agreed that the first text was the most demanding to write, in a sense that it was stressful and their focus had to be both on details and on the text as a whole. This could be supported by the following argument from 'Power distance in ELF e-mail communication': "writing status-unequal e-mails is demanding not only in terms of linguistic ability, but also when it comes to understanding the target culture's norms

and values" (Chen 2006: 36). Therefore, when N mentions that his language use was both conscious and subconscious, this could be because he was intentionally using "smarter words" and at the same time he was rethinking the norms and values of the company he was applying for.

S2), S3) Instant message to a friend, e-mail to a family member

As it was mentioned, S2 focuses on the production of an instant message. The instruction in this task was to write a message to a good friend (or a life partner). The participants were advised to write spontaneously about their day and internship application, as well as mention anything that comes naturally. Moreover, in S3 they were asked to write an e-mail to their parent to confirm that they received a positive response from the employer and were going to start the internship soon. The register in S2 (instant message to a friend) and S3 (e-mail to a family member) turned out to be similar, even though the specific medium is different. This is possibly because both messages are very personal in style and content. For this reason, I will analyze these two tasks together.

When it comes to sentence structure of S2 and S3, it can be observed that the sentences are generally simple and sometimes fragmented, which makes it similar to face-to-face conversation. Here are a few examples:

"Have no social life whatsoever." N

"Hope to see you soon!" M

"But fingers crossed xD" R

"Can't wait for it to start!" N

"It is the internship in Cuba for 6 months, and I got it! Yeeeejjjj...." A

Another point is that features such as abbreviations, nonstandard punctuation, emoticons, and capitalization are very common in personal text messages. These are defined as *paralinguistic features* (Biber & Conrad: 2009: 205). Some of the participants are more prone to these than others. For example, M and N do not use any of the paralinguistic features in any of their texts, while others use them moderately, especially when it comes to emoticons.

"I'm glad you're well :D" R

"I can't wait to see you my love. <3<3<3" V

"☺ write soon!" A

As the examples show, when it comes to the meaning of the emoticon, it is usually already expressed or suggested in the message, so the emoticon serves only to emphasize this meaning (Biber & Conrad: 2009: 205).This relatively modern characteristic of conveying meaning with paralinguistic features in writing could be interpreted as an attempt to simulate non-verbal communication in speech. As Biber claims in 'University language' (2014: 88-9), when speaking, people tend to rely on many non-linguistic features such as body position, facial expressions, and gestures. These are defined as non-linguistic indicators of stance, and are used in combination with other paralinguistic devices (such as pitch, intensity, and duration). In addition, stance can also be expressed through grammar and value-laden word choice. For example:

"I'm always afraid that I'll come across as too informal and that I'll be rejected from the start." R

"I hope that everything goes well." M

"I hate writing that stuff, but I hope it turned out ok." N

"I just sent a motivation letter and I'm really excited." V

In R's example, she used two propositions "I'll come across as too informal" and "I'll be rejected from the start" towards which she expressed her stance (fear). This is a grammatical expression of stance which M and N used as well. In their case, complement clauses were used to express the hope for the positive outcome. N combined grammatical expression of stance with a value-laden verb "hate". Apart from verbs, adjectives are also used as a value-laden words (excited).

When it comes to the general purpose of the conversational e-mail or instant messages to friends or family, propositions for different activities such as going out and suggestions such as applying for an internship are very common.

"If you want we can grab a beer these days." N

"So when do you think we can meet so that I can tell you all about it!" A

"I didn't give that much of a thought to this internship thing before but I think that you should try it too. It can be a great experience and it will mean a lot for your CV." M

By proposing to have a drink, to meet and to apply for an internship as well, participants N, A and M are suggesting the turn-taking of a normal conversation. In a face-to-face conversation, speakers use *adjacency pairs* while taking turns (Crystal, 2010: 33). This means that after a question comes an answer and that after a proposition usually comes a comment (which can be approving or disapproving). These are the elementary strategies that "provide a normal conversation with its skeleton" (Crystal, 2010: 34), and that are lacking in any type of electronic communication.

Even though the electronic communication can be very speech-like, the lack of simultaneous feedback is its major difference from a face-to-face conversation (Crystal, 2010: 31). "There is no way for a participant to get a sense of how successful a message is, while it is being written - whether it has been understood, or whether it needs repair (...) Messages cannot overlap" (Crystal, 2010: 30). Electronic communication does not allow the author of the message to have any feedback while he is composing the message, because his interlocutor cannot nod in approval as it would be possible in face-to-face conversation. In e-mail and IM, a person writes a message as a whole, then he sends it and the message arrives at the recipient's screen at once. Therefore, in this type of communication, the interaction is not as direct and immediate as in normal conversation.

In addition to propositions, in order to suggest interactiveness of a face-to-face communication, participants sometimes ask questions:

"What's new with you? Is it hot outside?" (N)

"How's Dad? How's the cat?" (R)

"Yay, guess what, I have some terrific news..." (R)

What can be said about personal messages, is that their vocabulary is generally informal. The study participants often choose simple words such as "ciao", "hey" to greet the recipient of the message, and they refer to their mother and father with "mom" and "dad", which are informal.

As opposed to S1 in which the participants commonly used adverbs such as "however" and "since", in S2 and S3 they used the following:

"So, they asked me to write them a motivation letter for the job, and I did just that." A

"Hey, so I just sent my motivation letter a while ago." N

"Have no social life whatsoever." N

"Anyway, how have you been?" R

Phrases such as "do you want to drink something" are often written in their shorter form "do u wanna drink sth", in function of being economical with time of writing, and space which it occupies in a message. This is how A and M saved space in S3:

"Hey mam, how are u?" A

"I just wanna let you know that I'm going to Florence this summer (...)" M

On the other hand, participant R used the filler word "like", as well as the emphasizing "super" as a replacement for "very", and combined it with "sth", perhaps in order to achieve balance:

"I spent like 3 hours writing a short motivational letter, I'm always super nervous when I have to write sth like that." R

From this I can infer that the participants adopt different approaches to make their personal e-mail and IM as interactive and as casual as possible.

All in all, sentence structure in S2 and S3 is kept simple and the participants sometimes omit words in order to imitate a face-to-face conversation. Tools such as emoticons and other paralinguistic features are used to emphasize friendliness and as a substitute for non-verbal communication. Moreover, shortened word forms are used to save space (and time) while writing a message, which makes it very economical.

On the other hand, to make the electronic message more similar to conversation, one will sometimes use filler words as well. Vocabulary is similar to that of a casual face-to-face conversation, for this register is usually very informal. Content of IM to a friend and e-mail to a family member is personal and related to everyday situations.

To add a few interesting insights from the interview part of the study, I will start by noting that the participants claimed to have been much less stressed in producing messages 2 and 3. As A commented in the interview: "It was a bit difficult to write the first text because I needed to try hard, because my English is not very good and it's not my first language, but when I was writing the second and the third, it was pretty easy." Taking into consideration that my study participants were ELF speakers, it was interesting to see to which extent they were aware of their language use. In psychology, the cognitive process in which a person monitors and controls their language as they are speaking is called *metalinguistic awareness.* According to 'Psychology glossary'[2], it is defined as "the ability to see language as a code and separate it from its symbolic meaning." An example of metalinguistic awareness is found in S2, in which participant A straightforwardly admitted that he was aware of his language by apologizing for the mistakes in spelling and adding that he was "tired of using the dictionary."

The participants tried hard to focus on writing the texts as they would in real-life, but some circumstances, such as writing to their parents in their second language, possibly made this task a little strange. When asked about the situation in which they have mistakenly sent the e-mail intended for their parent to the potential employer, they were unanimous in informing me that it would be embarrassing and inappropriate. However, some of them would try to write back and explain an honest mistake in hope for the company's understanding or good humor. Perhaps the most inconvenient part of sending a private e-mail to an unknown person is that it disrespects the non-overt stance pattern. If I take for example participant N, who openly expressed his hatred towards writing motivational letters in S2, this would hardly be regarded with good humour from the perspective of a potential employer. Moreover, participant A added that, if this was not the first contact with this person, perhaps they would not dismiss the application immediately; and participant M

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[2] Alleydog.com, https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition.php?term=Metalinguistic+Awareness (accessed Nov 20, 2017)

commented that, if it were a smaller agency (and not a big corporation), they might reconsider the application after all. This is very interesting because it implies that A and M regard this person of a higher rank as an individual who could perhaps understand their point of view, more so than as a stranger on a function in an institution.

5. *Discussion and conclusion*

After the analysis of all three situations I was able to differentiate two main registers: professional messages to a stranger and personal messages to friends and family. Although the medium of S1 and S3 was the same (e-mail), the language and linguistic features of S2 and S3 were the most similar (IM and e-mail). The study showed that family members and close friends share the same register.

Both instant messages and e-mail fall under the register category of electronic communication. This register is relatively modern. Electronic communication is generally interactive and interpersonal in nature which makes it similar to conversation. Nevertheless, e-mail lacks physical context, which makes it more like prototypical written registers (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 181). The study showed that the main difference between electronic communication and conversation is that e-mail and IM are simply not as direct and immediately interactive. Participants in electronic communication cannot take turns as naturally as they would in a face-to-face conversation, nor they can offer minimal responses such as nodding or saying 'mhm' in order to suggest their approval of that which is being communicated (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 181).

It can be said that my hypothesis that choice of register depends primarily on the people who are involved proved to be wrong. As it is found in the research, this is only one of the characteristics that a person takes into account when deciding on register usage.

Moreover, when it comes to the distinction of style and register, it seems that style is much more person- or group-specific than register. In fact, the study confirmed that register is situationally defined, whereas style can be differed within a specific register. It was noted that neither language nor identity are fixed, but they are both constantly changing through communication.

An interesting point that the study participants suggested, is that writing an e-mail to a stranger demands more conscious effort, and is more energy-consuming than writing a personal text message. There is a simple reason for this difference, in that informal register of everyday conversations (which, as it was mentioned, are very similar to

personal e-mail and IM) is more frequently used than formal register of academic prose (or e-mails to strangers). It can be said that the amount of effort put into writing a message to someone usually corresponds to how high-stake the situation is. The importance of a successful application for an internship makes the first situation very stressful and high-stakes, whereas exchanging messages with a friend or a family member is generally not as high-stakes a situation.

Furthermore, the research has shown that the distinction between registers is not always predictable, and as well, that the norms and values of language variation are constantly changing. In present times, when people are using electronic communication very often and in so many different contexts, paralinguistic features are possibly allowing the authors of virtual messages to express themselves more precisely. In a way, these features act as a fair replacement for non-verbal communication.

Finally, I would like to offer my insights on the study, from a slightly broader perspective. As it was shown, variations in language facilitate taking on different identities, and this is where the connection between language and identity lays. I found that all of the linguistic strategies that people employ serve the purpose to better their chances of communicating their ideas as clearly as possible, which led me to the following conclusion: the reason behind all forms of language variation is the constant human search for establishing the common ground with each other, in order to rediscover our feeling of inter-connectedness.

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Appendix

Situation 1

You have just received a letter of recommendation from your university professor for the long-awaited internship you plan to apply for. Everything else is prepared; you have all the notes and university certificates ready. It seems that the only thing left for you to do at this moment is to write the motivation letter!
I will ask you to use your imagination and write one as though this internship means a lot to you. Be creative! You can explain why is it that you want to work for this company and move to this place, describe what makes you so motivated to work in that position and have this experience all together. Also, have in mind that this does not have to be as long as the regular letter you would write and you can cut its length in half.

Participant	Answer 1
A	Dear Mrs. Martinec, I am very happy to write to You about my motives to join your team. My opinion of what you do is the best that I can have about a job that someone is doing. My personal preferences and ideologies are close, if not the same, with jour ideas, and feald of interests. It would be a great honor to work and cooperate with You and, to be honist, it would make me very happy. Thank You for this opportunity. Sincerely, XY
M	Dear sir or madam, My name is XY, I am 26 years old and I am a Bachelor of Italian language and literature and philosophy. I apply for the internship in your agency for the working place: tourist guide. I'm interested for this working place in the beautiful town of yours because I'm fascinated with the rich history of Florence. I've been studying about this town for years and it would be an absolute pleasure to share my knowledge and inspiration with other people. I hope that you will reply promptly. Best regards, XY

R	To whom it may concern, On your website I came across your internship offer and I would like to apply as a translator for the language combination you mentioned. Moreover, on your website I learned that your company specializes in medicine and legal translations, both of which I find immensely interesting. However, what I find most appealing is the quality standard and the professinality of your company, and my biggest desire would be to learn as much as I can. I sincerely believe that learning from you would allow mw to improve and start my career. Thank you for your time and I am looking forward to hearing from you. I have also enclosed a recommendation from one of my professors and my CV. Sincerely, XY
N	Dear Sir or Madam, my name is XY and I am a student of English and French language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. The main reason I am applying for the internship you offer is my love for teaching languages. Since I have gained teaching skills throughout my studies, as well as my work, this internship would be an excellent opportunity to apply my knowledge in a different environment, one where I don't speak the native language, and to acquire new skills that will help me pursue my career goals. I look forward to your reply. Yours sincerely, XY
V	I feel grateful that I have this opportunity to express my motivation for this position at you enterprise. During my education I was building myself as a person and now I feel prepared for building my professional life. This enterprise would help a lot for my career and I can guarantee that I will be dedicated to this job as long as I can.

Situation 2

After you send the motivation letter, you receive an instant message from your close friend or life partner in which they describe their day and ask you to do the same. What will you write them back? Perhaps you will talk about your internship application and about how this situation makes you feel. You can refer to your current situation that I might be unfamiliar with and mention anything else that comes to mind when you think about this person. Try to write spontaneously.

Participant	Answer 2
A	Heeeeyyyyy,,, I need to tell you about today and this thing that I told you for the job opertunity. (sorry for my english and speling, you know that it is not so good, and i am very tired of using the dictionary, lol) So, they asked me to write them a motivation letter for the job, and I did just that. I can sand you the letter so that you can tell me if it is ok. I am so exited about this.
M	Ciao, Lea! I've finally sent a motivation letter to the agency that I've told you about. I hope that everything goes well. I didn't give that much of a thought to this internship thing before but I think that you should try it too. It can be a great experience and it will mean a lot for your CV. Hope to see you soon! M
R	Hi! I'm glad you're well :D I'm okay too, a bit nervous actually. I just found this awesome internship offer for XY company. I spent like 3 hours writing a short motivation letter, I'm always super nervous whenI have to write sth like that. I'm always afraid that I'll come across as too informal and that I'll be rejected from the start. But fingers crossed xD
N	Hey, so I just sent my motivation letter a while ago. I hate writing that stuff, but I hope it turned out ok. Now I just have to wait for their answer. Other than that,

	nothing new is going on, I'm writing my master thesis and working in that school. Have no social life whatsoever. If you want we can grab a beer these days.
V	I'm so happy for a few things that happened to me today. I have to tell you everything, and I'm glad that your day was good and succesful as well. I have an oppotzunity to do an internship and I just sent a motivation letter and I'm really excited. I can't wait to see you my love. <3 <3 <3

Situation 3

A couple of days later, you receive an email confirmation for your participation in the program you applied for. Congrats, your application has been approved! As you usually write an email to your parent once a week, you decide that now would be a good moment to let them know what is happening soon. You can also ask questions unrelated to this topic or talk about something else if discussing your upcoming internship does not come naturally.

Participant	Answer 3
A	Hey mam, how are u? I need to tell you about this job that I applyed for. It is the internship in Cuba for 6 months, and I got it! Yeeeejjjj.... So when do you think we can meet so that I can tell you all about it! ☺ write soon!!!
M	Hi dad! I just wanna let you know that I'm going to Florence this summer after I finish my work in Zagreb. I won't be home for a while but I promise that I will contact you every day via Skype. One of the best vines of Florence is already on the way to our house! Say hello to everybody for me!
R	Yay, guess what, I have some terrific news: I applied for an internship at XY

	company, and I actually got it! :D I didn't want to tell you before in case they rejected me. Either way, I am so happy, this will finally allow me to gain some experience and launch my career. Anyway, how have you been? How's Dad? How's the cat? Looking forward to coming home for the weekend :D Bye
N	Hey mom, I have some good news! I got accepted for that internship I applied for. This means I'll have to start preparing soon. I have to find and buy plane tickets, think of where I'll stay, there's so much to do. Cant wait for it to start! What's new with you? Is it hot outside? I'm dying of heat here. Hope you can at least go to the beach a little bit.
V	My dearest!! I have to tell you about one very interesting thing!! I just got an internship that I applied for and I'm very excited. I'm starting in June so I hope I will have enough time to spend with you at home. I will tell you more details when we talk on the phone. I love you a lot and see you next month! Kisseeeees.