

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**CMC FEATURES IN LINGUA FRANCA E-MAIL
MESSAGES**

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by

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Englannin kieltä käytetään maailmanlaajuisesti lingua francana eli yhteisenä kielenä silloin, kun puhujilla ei ole yhteistä äidinkieltä. Englannin asema lingua francana (English as a lingua franca, ELF) on erityisen vahva yliopistomaailmassa. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, missä määrin sähköiselle viestinnälle (computer-mediated communication, CMC) aiemmissa tutkimuksissa määriteltyjä piirteitä esiintyy englanninkielisessä lingua franca – viestinnässä. Materiaali koostuu 151 englanninkielisestä sähköpostiviestistä, jotka kerättiin kuudelta Jyväskylän yliopiston Erasmus-yhdyshenkilöltä. Tutkielmassa pyritään vastaamaan seuraaviin kysymyksiin: 1) Missä määrin aineistossa esiintyy CMC-piirteitä? 2) Vaikuttaako sähköpostiviestin kirjoittajan rooli yhdyshenkilönä, opiskelijana tai muuhun henkilökuntaan kuuluvana CMC-piirteiden määrään? 3) Minkälaisia lingua franca –piirteitä aineistossa esiintyy?

CMC-piirteiden esiintymistä sähköpostiviesteissä kuvataan seitsemällä eri osa-alueella: otsikot, aloitukset, lopetukset, puhekielisyyden piirteet, syntaksi, välimerkit ja sähköpostin tuntemus. Tutkimus on luonteeltaan sekä määrällinen että laadullinen. Siinä selvitetään CMC-piirteiden määrää ja luonnetta sekä erityisesti niiden yhtymäkohtia englannin kieleen lingua francana.

Sähköiselle viestinnälle ominaista kieltä käytettiin aineistossa vain rajoitetusti. Yleisimpiä sähköiselle viestinnälle ominaisia piirteitä viesteissä olivat viestien lopettaminen kiitokseen, pelkän etunimen käyttö allekirjoituksena ja automaattiset allekirjoitukset. Aineistosta löytyi myös joitain puhutulle kielelle ominaisia piirteitä, kuten epämuodollisia sanoja ja diskurssipartikkeleita (esimerkiksi “so”, “then”, “I mean”). Monet viesteistä muistuttivat kuitenkin paljon perinteisiä kirjeitä aloituksineen (esimerkiksi dear Mary) ja lopetuksineen (kind regards, David Smith).

Sähköiselle viestinnälle ominaista kieltä löytyi eniten opiskelijoiden viesteistä. Myös koordinaattorit käyttivät sähköiselle viestinnälle ominaisia piirteitä, mutta pääasiassa vain toisille koordinaattoreille lähettämissään viesteissä. Monia aineistossa esiintyneitä piirteitä, kuten kirjoitusvirheitä, heittomerkkimuotoja ja pienten alkukirjainten käyttöä, voidaan pitää joko merkinä sähköiselle viestinnälle ominaisesta kielestä tai siitä, että viesteissä käytetään englantia lingua francana. Voidaan myös yhtäältä olettaa, että lingua franca –viestijöiden kulttuuritaustalla on vaikutusta siihen, millaista kieltä he pitivät sopivana kuhunkin viestiin. Toisaalta kirjoittajien vaihteleva koulutustausta englannin kielessä heijastuu viesteissä käytettyyn kieleen.

Asiasanat: computer-mediated communication (CMC), e-mail, English as a lingua franca (ELF)

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1 INTRODUCTION

English can undoubtedly be called a genuine and global lingua franca used as a contact language between people who do not share a native language. Its spread around the world was already seen in the 18th century by John Adams (as quoted by Kachru and Nelson 2001:9) who predicted that “English will be the most respectable language in the world and the most universally read and spoken in the next century, if not before the close of this one”. It has been estimated that English is spoken by as many as one to two billion people (see e.g. Graddol 1997:10, Kachru 1997:69, Pennycook 2001:78-79) of whom perhaps only one third or fourth speak it as a native language. The rest consist of 375 million second and 750 million foreign language speakers (Graddol 1997: 10-11).

Those using English as a contact language in situations where speakers do not share a native language, i.e. the lingua franca speakers of English, comprise the biggest group of English speakers in the world today (Seidlhofer 2001:141). English has become a useful language in various domains. It is the dominant language of, for example, international organizations, science, higher education, business, audio-visual cultural products, tourism, technology, and the Internet (Graddol 1997:8). The Internet has often been regarded as the main promoter of the spread of English because the majority of the websites and the Internet traffic are in English. Thus, English skills are essential to be able to take full advantage of the Internet. (Graddol 1997:50-51.)

English has also become the lingua franca of science and higher education. It is the dominant language of academic journals and scientific databanks (Crystal 1997:79-80). It has also been adopted as a language of instruction for a number of international Master's programmes and individual courses in many countries including Finland. Most Finnish universities today have degree programmes which are entirely run in English (Mauranen 2003a:118). Student exchange programmes such as Erasmus have had a considerable influence on the spread of English (Graddol 1999:66). English also serves as a lingua franca to administer

student exchange and international Master's programmes and is therefore used extensively outside classrooms as well.

The fact that English has been adopted as a lingua franca by people from a number of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, has led a number of scholars to argue that the correct norms of usage are shifting away from native speakers of English (see e.g. Bangbose 1998, Kachru 1985, Kachru and Nelson 2001, Modiano 1999, Seidlhofer 2001, Yano 2001). Instead of looking for British or American English for the correct norms and holding a native-like language as a goal, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is likely to reflect the local cultures and languages. One can thus claim that the lingua franca varieties are going through a nativization process. The lingua franca varieties are expected to vary from one another but at the same time have enough in common to be understood by speakers of ELF (Seidlhofer 2001:138). This development has been said to take place in Europe as well, in particular in Northern Europe, including Finland (e.g. Berns 1995:6-7, House 2001, Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001, Yano 2001:123-124).

Although the status of English as a lingua franca is widely acknowledged, very little empirical research has been conducted to investigate the characteristics of it. The present study attempts to look at the European lingua franca context by examining e-mail messages as they are written in an academic context, i.e. in one of the environments where English has been most widely adopted as a lingua franca. Due to the considerable influence the Erasmus programme has had on the English language use in higher education, e-mail messages written by and to Erasmus coordinators were chosen as data for the analysis. The e-mail messages were analysed with respect to features that are typically associated with computer-mediated communication (CMC). Both the frequency and the nature of the CMC features were examined as well as the differences in the use of them among different groups of writers. The study also attempted to find out if the messages contained qualities that could be described as lingua franca features.

Altogether, the data consists of 151 English language e-mail messages collected from six Erasmus coordinators of the University of Jyväskylä. The data includes messages written by the coordinators themselves as well as messages received

from their European colleagues and Erasmus students. All the messages were written by non-native speakers of English. In other words, the writers of the messages used English as a lingua franca.

In order to get an overview of the field examined in this study, the next chapter focuses on English as a lingua franca by giving a definition of the term and by introducing previous ELF studies. In addition, chapter 2 presents an account on ELF in Europe as well as in science and higher education. The question about the correct norms of usage is also looked into in this chapter. Chapter 3 examines computer-mediated communication and presents the features typically associated with CMC as well as previous studies conducted in the field. The present analysis as well as its research questions, data, and methods are outlined in more detail in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the results of the study. Finally, Chapter 6 takes a look at the findings and the study as a whole.

2 LINGUA FRANCA ENGLISH

2.1 Definition

Lingua franca has been defined as a contact language used between persons who do not share each other's mother tongues and who instead turn to a third language which is not the native language of either of the speakers (Firth 1996:240, Mauranen 2003b:514, Meierkord 2000:1, Oxford Companion to the English Language 1992:605-606). Hence, lingua franca has no native speakers (Seidlhofer 2001:146). Any natural or artificial language may acquire a status as a lingua franca and become used either *intranationally*, i.e. as a common language of a country, or *internationally* between speakers of different nationalities. English serves as a lingua franca for both international and intranational purposes and has obtained a strong status as such all over the world. (Meierkord 2000:1.) It is in fact the lingua franca speakers who make up the largest group of English speakers in the world today. For them English is a useful tool to be used when native languages fall short, e.g. in politics or on the Internet. (Seidlhofer 2001:141.)

The fact that speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF) come from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds is bound to have its effects on the language as well. However, at the same time as the speaker's mother tongue and his/her own communicative norms influence the language, the ELF speakers have also learned the norms of British or American English at least to a certain extent. As a result, the ELF communication can involve three or more cultures, i.e. the culture of the speaker, the recipient and for example Britain, requiring the speakers to handle unexpected communicative events. It has been claimed that this creates insecurity which, in turn, encourages speakers to establish specific lingua franca rules. As a sign of this, ELF has its own linguistic characteristics influenced partly by the linguistic norms of the individual speakers as well as the competence of each speaker in the foreign language. (Meierkord 2000:1-2.)

2.2 Previous studies on lingua franca English

Seidlhofer (2001:139-141) notes that the study of the use of language has concentrated on English spoken by the native speakers. Only a few studies have been conducted to investigate English as it is used between speakers of English as a lingua franca. This should, in Seidlhofer's opinion, be subject to systematic research. Jenkins and Seidlhofer (2001) also call for empirical research to describe the nature of ELF because until then, one can only speculate on the characteristics of it. Graddol (1997:13) points out that non-native speaker English is an under-researched area regardless of the fact that the number of non-native speakers may have already exceeded those who use it as a first or a second language. The following account on previous studies on English as a lingua franca will aim at presenting what is known about ELF so far. As most of the ELF studies have concentrated on spoken discourse, the studies presented below also involve spoken language.

As ELF interactions are highly common in the world but have not been thoroughly examined by conversation analysts, Firth (1996:240-246) set out to examine a corpus of telephone calls made by Danish export managers and their foreign clients in English. Most of the telephone calls were made between non-native speakers of English, i.e. they can be considered as lingua franca interactions. Firth's results indicate that lingua franca communication aims at being "normal" and "ordinary" even in situations where out of the ordinary linguistic behaviour takes place. This is achieved by various strategies. For example, unclear words or utterances may be ignored in the hope that the matter will be understood in the course of the later interaction. Abnormal or marked words or phrases may also be made "normal" by indicating that one has understood them despite their peculiarity. The strategies, which are used to achieve "normality" and to cope with what is often perceived as incompetence in the foreign language, differ from person to person.

Bearing in mind the diversity of the speakers, it is not surprising that ELF has been characterized as a highly heterogeneous language. Meierkord (2000:8-11)

examined lingua franca face-to-face group conversations among students in a hall of residence in Britain and found out that the ELF speech differed from the native variant at least in four respects. First, there were long and frequent pauses in between and within turns, which may result from the ELF speakers' difficulties in producing speech. The speakers may also be incapable of creating other turn-taking signals apart from pauses. Second, simultaneous speech was not common except among advanced learners of English. This can be explained by the influence of the language-learning environment. The classroom setting does not encourage simultaneous talk and this is reflected in the conversations out of the classroom. Third, the participants favoured 'safe' topics perhaps due to limited vocabulary. In addition, topics were dealt with only briefly which can be explained by problems in producing desired vocabulary. Fourth, ritual speech acts were kept to minimum and mainly only such typical phrases as "How are you?" and "Good morning" occurred. Reasons for this may lie in the classroom or textbook examples or the tendency of language learners to learn only as much as is necessary to succeed in conversation. On the whole, the speakers aimed at using a language which guarantees intelligibility to all parties involved. Above all, however, Meierkord notes that the speakers strived at saving face by avoiding insulting and embarrassing behaviour and situations. To make up for the uncertainty created by differing cultural norms and standards, the speakers wanted to assure the other participants of their good intentions by using for example many supportive back channels (e.g. right, yeah) and cajolers (expressions of sympathy, e.g. you know, you see).

Jenkins and Seidlhofer (2001) investigated the nature of ELF as it is used in Europe concentrating on pronunciation and lexicogrammar (vocabulary and grammar). Jenkins (as quoted by Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001) examined non-native speaker interactions and aimed at finding out which aspects of pronunciation led to problems in understanding. Based on her study, Jenkins was able to gather a "Lingua Franca Core", i.e. features that are essential for intelligibility. The core, in turn, can assist in predicting how the pronunciation of English as a lingua franca in Europe (ELFE) will develop. The Lingua Franca Core includes consonant sounds apart from "th", vowel length contrasts, and nuclear (tonic) stress. Jenkins found many other aspects of pronunciation to be

non-core, although some of these are generally considered to be typical and innate qualities of English. Based on the Lingua Franca Core, Jenkins and Seidlhofer expect the pronunciation of ELFE to develop into a form which will, for example, lack the “th” and dark “l” sounds as many Europeans have difficulties in producing them. However, Jenkins and Seidlhofer expect the distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants to remain because the lack of them would lead to intelligibility problems. Seidlhofer (as quoted by Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001) examined ELFE lexicogrammar with the help of a corpus of lingua franca interactions. Her findings indicate that “grammatical sins” such as failing to put a definite or indefinite article in front of a noun or using “who” and “which” interchangeably do not lead to serious problems in communication.

Based on their research, Jenkins and Seidlhofer (2001) point out that the effort put into learning difficult pronunciation or grammatical constructions is often put to waste as successful communication does not depend on it. Hence, Jenkins and Seidlhofer suggest that the English language teaching in Europe should be based on ELFE or other non-native contexts because these are the contexts which are relevant to European speakers of English and in which the learners are expected to use the language. In order to find out more about the European context, a presentation about ELFE and its role in Europe will be given in the next chapter.

2.3 English as a lingua franca in Europe (ELFE)

It is generally acknowledged that English has acquired a role as a lingua franca in Europe (Field 1998, Labrie and Quell 1997:5). Its position as the primary language of the Europeans used across all social groups is likely to strengthen even more in the future (Berns 1995:9). Bowers (1997:5), for example, predicts that

(...) by the year 2010 (...) most young people will have the opportunity to learn English to a certain plateau of proficiency in their standard curriculum and will be ready to use English as a relatively culture free lingua franca, without the emotional resistance there has been in the past.

English is already spoken widely today. Graddol (1999:64-65) estimates that there are 95 million speakers of English in the EU countries, Norway and Switzerland. He also claims that one third of the citizens of the non-English-speaking EU member states can speak English well enough to take part in a conversation. The EU estimates that English is spoken by 47% of the EU citizens, 16% of whom speak it as a mother tongue and 31% as a foreign or a second language. With these figures, English is the most widely spoken language in Europe, although a great deal of variation in the English competence does exist between the member states of the EU. The highest number of people speaking it can be found in Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark where about three out of four people are able to speak English. Spain, Portugal, and Italy represent the other end of the scale with only about 20-30% of people having English skills. Citizens of Finland and Austria are the second most fluent speakers of English with about half the population being able to speak it. On the whole, the number of people with English skills has increased in almost all the EU member states. (Eurobarometer 2002.)

Haarmann and Holman (2001:231-232) looked at the impact of English in Finland and observed that the importance of English has increased in a number of public and private domains. The influence of English is strong in the world of business and entertainment, and it can be considered as a promoter of globalization and network society. These areas in turn influence life styles and vocabulary. Haarmann and Holman point out that English is not only used for practical reasons in Finland but that it also has symbolic value. This can be seen for example in the use of English for Finnish company names and in advertising, where English is often used for key words or slogans. Young people often tend to regard English as a sign of modernity, which is evident from such English elements in Finnish as *jees* 'yes', *pliiis* 'please', *about* 'about', and *okei* 'okay'. Haarmann and Holman (2001:232-234) further note that several changes have taken place in Finland in the recent years which have encouraged both the passive and the active use of English. These changes are summarized below.

1. Trade with the West. After the collapse of the Russian economy in 1998, the Finnish-Russian trade relations have not recovered

to their previous level. At the moment, business partners are located elsewhere. This encourages the further strengthening of English as a language of commerce.

2. EU membership. Although the EU has eleven official languages, English is the main vehicle of communication in the EU.
3. Economic boom. Finnish electronic industry with Nokia as its flagship has experienced a steep upturn in the 1990s. The main language for fostering business relations is English.
4. Financial markets. Finland takes part in the global financial markets by buying and selling stocks. Many foreign investors are also interested in Finland. These affairs are mainly run in English.
5. Density of global communication. Depending on the year, Finland has hold a world record on mobile phone density and Internet access, or been one of the very top in the use of these devices.
6. Music. Finland is known in particular for its classical music. The most neutral language to be used among people in this field is English.
7. Sports. Due to the success of Finns in sports and the Finnish fans who want to see the sporting events abroad, a common language (usually English) is needed to get by in everyday situations.
8. Tourism. Both the number of foreigners coming to Finland and the number of Finns travelling abroad has increased. English is the dominant contact language in both the cases.

Several reasons have been given to explain the popularity of English in Europe. One of the most important reasons, if not the most important, is the language curricula in European schools which are to a large extent in favour of English (Graddol 1999:66). English is taught to 26% of non-English speaking primary pupils. In secondary schools, English is the most popular foreign language and, all together, 89% of the pupils in the EU learn English. In Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Austria, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands more than 90% of all secondary pupils learn English. (Eurobarometer 2002.) The expansion of the

student exchange programmes such as Erasmus and exposure to English language cultural products and media have also had a considerable influence on the spread of English in Europe (Graddol 1999:66).

At the same time as English is becoming increasingly common, it is also turning into a second rather than a foreign language in many of the European countries (Graddol 1999:65, Phillipson 1992:25). This means that English is in the process of becoming acquired for domestic purposes in domains where native languages have been previously used. It has been claimed that this is particularly the case in the Nordic countries (Scandinavia and Finland) where English skills are often expected in educational and professional life. One's competence in English may thus be a determining factor as regards success at school or at work. It is not however only in these restricted domains where English is taking over the native languages. English comes up even in such day-to-day domains as television (English language programmes with subtitles) and newspapers (words borrowed from English). (Phillipson 1992:25.)

Berg et al. (2001:308-315) examined the use of English in certain elite domains in Sweden and found out that English is used extensively in the academia and at the workplace. For example, out of all the courses arranged at the Stockholm School of Economics, 43% were offered in English. English skills were also needed in the courses offered in Swedish because textbooks were often in English. As to the use of English in the workplace, the majority of the respondents regarded Swedish as the main language but, more importantly, they also considered English as a significant part of their everyday communication. Whether English was spoken or not depended largely on the presence of non-Swedish speakers or on the recipient's knowledge of Swedish. The presence of English was in particular notable when international issues, e.g. trade and currency exchange, were discussed. Code-switching and code-mixing was reported in all the contexts under analysis. One could use Swedish in one conversation and English in the other. However, mixing the two languages in one conversation occurred only in Swedish language conversations, not vice versa. In other words, English words were often mixed into the otherwise Swedish speech. To conclude, Berg et al. point out that although one can get by in the Swedish society without English skills, the

presence of English is notable. Berg et al. do not think Sweden is at the moment going through a language shift but they do note that

(...) the high status of English as both the language of international communication and an important code of communication in many elite domains, might be important in shaping the climate for language shift and hence in influencing language use patterns of the coming decades.

As English is gaining ground in many of the European countries, there are growing concerns about diglossia with English as the dominant language. In diglossia, a state language is replaced by another in certain domains, e.g. in higher education. This may eventually lead to a marginalizing of the state language. (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1996:446.) Berg et al. (2001:313-314) note that Sweden may be in a state of "pre-diglossia". At the moment, Swedish has not been replaced by English but, rather, English is used alongside Swedish. However, if English comes to be used more extensively, a clearer differentiation in the functions of the two languages may occur. Nevertheless, Phillipson (2001) notes that several countries have adopted strategies to strengthen their state languages. For example, the Swedish government has taken measures to ensure that Swedish remains a "complete" language.

2.4 English as a lingua franca of science and higher education

English has unquestionably become the lingua franca of science and higher education or, as Graddol (1997:9) puts, it "the international currency" of science. This progress can be illustrated by the number of scientific journals published in the world today. Namely, 80% out of the 4000 scientific journals published in the world are owned by Americans or the British. Most of these journals are also published in English. Another important factor is that the most influential and widely used scientific databanks are located in the United States. Ninety percent of the information in these databanks is in English. If one looks at the European databanks, the situation is almost the same. Even in the French databank, PASCAL, 85% of the citations were in English in 1994. (Truchot 1997:66.) There are also many scientific organizations that report English as their only official language (Crystal 1997:80).

A number of scholars have expressed their concern about the hegemony of English in science. Not only does this have an effect on the native languages, but it also influences the knowledge itself and exposes readers to the values of the English-speaking world (Pennycook 2001:82). Brock-Utne (2001:224-230) argues that adopting English as a language of science threatens the native languages as academic languages. As an example, she draws attention to the Nordic countries where Norwegian, Swedish and Danish are mutually understandable. This combined with the fact that Swedish is a compulsory subject in Finnish schools, Nordic scholars have previously been able to communicate through a Scandinavian common tongue. This has changed however because young Finnish academics are now more fluent in English and therefore insist on using it. Brock-Utne thus fears that instead of remaining an “additive” language acquired alongside a native language, English could become a “subtractive” language replacing the mother tongues in science. Should this development take place, the scientists would not have sufficient vocabulary to discuss academic matters in their native languages. Brock-Utne believes Norway is already headed for that direction and names several factors that support this development. First, the new academic, bureaucratic and technological terminology often adopts an English word without Norwegian substitutes. Second, more academic literature in English than in Norwegian is sold in Norway. Third, it is common to recruit teaching staff without Norwegian skills. Fourth, there are growing numbers of Master’s degree programmes in English in Norway. Fifth, publishing in English is encouraged for example by a bonus system that favours publications written in English.

Similar concerns have been expressed by Haarmann and Holman (2001:236-238) who examined the role of English in science in Finland. The points made by them are similar to those made of Norway by Brock-Utne (2001). Haarmann and Holman discovered that the influence of English in Finland can in particular be perceived in four areas. 1) Students are required to read a growing number of texts in English. This is often due to pure commercial reasons as it is often unprofitable to translate and print books for such small linguistic areas as Finland. 2) Scientists are also dependent on the literature in English. Haarmann and Holman suspect English language sources are used even if information in other foreign languages

were available. 3) There are a number of courses offered in English in the Finnish universities and there is pressure to organize even more of them because of the need to attract foreign students. As a result, teaching staff with high-level English skills are needed. 4) Finnish scholars are not only consumers of scientific knowledge in English but also contribute to it by publishing scientific texts in English themselves. When looking at all scientific texts in Finland, however, Finnish still ranks first and English second. Haarmann and Holman also consider the impact of the use of English in science to the Finnish language and state that “some degree of linguistic interference” has already taken place or is expected to occur. For example, there are a number of scientific terminology usually of Greek or Latin origin but acquired through English, e.g. *analyysi* ‘analysis’, *energia* ‘energy’, *materiaali* ‘material’, and *orgaaninen* ‘organic’ (Haarmann and Holman 2001:254).

Due to the increasing number of courses in English at the University of Helsinki, Lehtonen et al (2002:16) set out to outline the new situation and to investigate how students and teachers coped with it. The study was conducted between 1997-2000. According to Lehtonen et al, English was used almost solely as the lingua franca of the international study programmes as courses were not offered regularly in other foreign languages apart from English. This is because English was often the only common language of the students and because acquiring good English skills for the later working life was considered to be essential. Lehtonen et al further note that the courses in English mainly consisted of separate courses and there were only few complete programmes in English. It is important to note here, however, that the situation may have changed considerably since 1997-2000 when the investigation was made. For example, the University of Jyväskylä has plans to start three new master’s programmes in English in the academic year 2004-2005. At the moment (academic year 2003-2004), there are eight non-degree and five degree programmes in English.

Lehtonen et al (2002:16-17) found out that both students and teachers coped with teaching and learning in English at least satisfactorily but that there were also certain problems. For example, teaching a multicultural group was considered challenging. Using both written and spoken academic English was also regarded

difficult. As a result of the investigation carried out by Lehtonen et al, a number of support services were created for the teachers and students of the English-language programmes. These included seminars in academic reading and writing as well as an on-line guide into academic writing.

The role of English as a lingua franca in Finnish higher education can be further illustrated by the three surveys conducted by the Centre for International Mobility CIMO of the experiences of international exchange students and trainees in Finland. According to the three surveys, *Why Finland* (2001), *My Finland* (2001) and *Try Finland* (2002), the possibility to study in English and the number of courses conducted in English were considered as important reasons for choosing Finland as a destination. Once students had arrived, two out of three of them took courses in English and only about one fourth studied in Finnish or Swedish. (Garam 2003:24-25.) Regardless of the fact that exchange students choose courses in English in Finland, their academic English competence may not be at a level required in higher education. Räsänen (2002:7) notes that most incoming exchange students have not taken part in English language courses at university level or read any books or written anything in English in their field prior to the exchange period. Exchange students also often have a limited vocabulary in their field and are not competent in scientific discourse in English.

Alarmed by the lack of research in the area of academic ELF, Tampere University has started to gather a corpus of spoken academic lingua franca English (the ELFA corpus). The material is collected from English language degree programmes and other activities where English is used. The goal is to gather 0.5 million words. The ELFA corpus is remarkable in the sense that it is the first ELF corpus of academic discourse which has been collected. (Mauranen 2003a:124-125,129; Mauranen 2003b:519-520.) The University of Vienna is also compiling an ELF corpus (the Vienna-Oxford ELF Corpus). The difference to the corpus gathered in Tampere is that the Vienna corpus is more general in nature. (Seidlhofer 2001:146.) Mauranen (2003:130) reports that the preliminary findings indicate that academic ELF has its own profile although it resembles native speaker English as well.

2.5 Correct norms of usage

Despite the growing numbers of non-native speakers of English, the question of the correct norms of usage remains a somewhat ambiguous and unresolved topic. Although it is no longer common to claim that the non-native varieties of English are anything less than the native varieties, there are still a number of issues that are open to debate. For example, should non-native norms be recognized and accepted or even applied to the teaching of English? Or what is the position of the non-native innovations to English? Should they be accepted too? Often these issues are judged against the norms of the native speakers instead of looking at them in their own contexts. Thus, it is evident that there is still a “constant pull between native and non-native English norms”. (Bamgbose 1998:1.)

The traditional end of the native – non-native speaker discussion considers the native speaker as the provider of the correct norm and insists on maintaining a standard variety based on British and American English as a basis of teaching English as an international lingua franca and as a means of cross-cultural communication (see e.g. Quirk 1985:5-6, Preisler 1995:342). A somewhat milder view holds that both the standard and local varieties are equally important. The supporters of this view argue that, on the one hand, a standard variety based on educated varieties of English such as British English, American English, and Indian English is necessary for maintaining international intelligibility and, on the other, local identity can be supported with the recognition of local varieties (see e.g. Crystal 1999:15-16, McCrum 1992:373).

A number of scholars have adopted a different view on the status of non-native Englishes. They point out that English is to a large extent learned and used to communicate with other non-native speakers of English (Alptekin 2002:61, Graddol 1999:65, Seidlhofer 2001:133-134). This is not surprising given that the non-native speakers have already outnumbered the natives by 4:1 or even 3:1. As a result, it is no longer possible to claim that English represents only the native speakers but, instead has “a diversity of different voices”. (House 2001.) In other words, many linguists argue that the ideas about the correct norms of usage are

shifting away from the native speakers towards the non-natives (see e.g. Bangbose 1998, Kachru 1985, Kachru and Nelson 2001, Modiano 1999, Seidlhofer 2001). Thus, English cannot be said to be “owned” solely by its native speakers (House 2001). Kachru (1985:30) is along similar lines and argues that

the global diffusion of English has taken an interesting turn: the native speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization; in fact, if current statistics are any indication, they have become a minority. This sociolinguistic fact must be accepted and its implications recognized. What we need now are new paradigms and perspectives for linguistic and pedagogical research and for understanding the linguistic creativity in multilingual situations across cultures.

As a result of this view, there are now linguists who would like to see the ELT enterprise adopt non-native varieties as a basis of language learning (e.g. Bangbose 1998:5-6, Davies 2001:274-275, Kachru and Nelson 2001:17). For example, Kachru and Nelson (2001:17) argue that as long as there are already two varieties of standard English, British and American, there could just as well be more of them. Nevertheless, it has been claimed that these ideas have remained on the theoretical level only with the actual day-to-day teaching of English having stayed largely unaffected by this development. English is still mainly taught according to the norms of the native varieties. (Seidlhofer 2001:135.)

It has been argued that the nativization process of English is also taking place in Europe (e.g. Berns 1995:6-7, House 2001, Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001). As English continues to be used extensively by the Europeans, adaptations and innovations are likely to be introduced into the language. These innovations will often stem from Europe and decrease the influence of Britain and the United States. (Berns 1995:6, Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001.) Although it is still largely unclear what this “Europeanized” English will be like, Berns (1995:6-7) gives a limited preview on it and argues that the European variety of English will be different from the native variants in a number of ways. For example, there may be lexical borrowings from the European languages into English. Also, English language texts may consist of English syntax and vocabulary but, at the same time, will mirror the languages and cultures of the speakers. Berns also claims that as English is used extensively as an intra-European language, Europe should be considered as an English-using community of its own. The variety of English used

by this community has been labelled as European English or “Euro-English”. This variety has not however been welcomed with open arms only. Instead, there are linguists who maintain that the diversity can lead to the abandoning of standard English. They fear that this could in turn put international intelligibility into danger. (Crystal 1999:15.)

The “Europeanized” English is of interest to the present study as well as it examines the European variety of English and how it is used by university staff and students. As there is only little evidence on the existence of such a variety, the present study sets forth to examine whether such European innovations and adaptations as reported above by for example Berns (1995), House (2001), and Jenkins and Seidlhofer (2001) exist in the present data as well. The data used for this analysis provides a good tool for finding out more about European English as it includes e-mail messages from 18 European countries.

3 COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC)

3.1 E-mail

E-mail has grown into a means of global communication used by more and more people. It has been estimated that 827 million people in the world used e-mail in the year 2000. (Lan 2000:23.) Although e-mail was originally developed for governmental purposes, it has evolved in three decades into a system used by people from various backgrounds. Today, it is common to send e-mail instead of using the telephone, writing a letter or a memo, or meeting people in person. This applies to people both at work and home. (Baron 1998:134.) Burton (1994:103) summarizes the advantages of e-mail as the following:

- a) directed or broadcast distribution of information (both short messages and lengthy document;
- b) information may be sent across large distances;
- c) time differences become irrelevant
- d) there is no need to rely on the recipient(s) being at workplace, as would be the case with the telephone;
- e) messages can be sent at any time convenient to the sender;
- f) messages can be read as the recipient requires.

An example of the increase in the use of e-mail is given by Louhiala-Salminen (1999b:11-12) who carried out a survey in 1998 to outline the different shares of communication media used by Finnish business people. The results showed that 30 percent of the international message exchange was conducted via e-mail as compared to 1992 when the number was only 9 percent. Despite the increase in the use of e-mail in Louhiala-Salminen's study, fax still remained the most popular form of communication. Louhiala-Salminen (1999b:19) states, however, that e-mail is becoming used more and more in the business world with the increasing use of the Internet. She further argues that e-mail is much more common in the academic world than in business. Referring to the same study, Louhiala-Salminen (1999a:180) predicts that

[o]rganizations will soon become dependent on the electronic network, where gradually all information will be delivered and received. Email systems develop and are becoming the 'highway' along which messages travel; other methods will be complementary.

3.2 Features of CMC

When referring to e-mail, a broader term, computer-mediated communication (CMC), is often used to describe all the communication that takes place with the help of computers (Herring 1996:1), for example, newsgroups, mailing lists, and message boards. It should be noted, however, that there is variation in the field of electronic language depending on the purpose for which it is used (Alatalo 2002:7). The present study concentrates on text-based CMC and, more precisely, on its most popular form, e-mail. Only a little is known about the special features of CMC English. The topic has not been widely dealt in the academic journals or in the textbooks for English language learners. Gimenez (2000:237-238) reports that out of eleven ELT textbooks only two deal with the topic of e-mail. Differences to standard English have been reported but only few studies have been conducted to back up these claims (e.g. Gains 1999, Gimenez 2000, Lan 2000). It is also still unclear whether e-mail or other forms of CMC can change standard English itself (Lewin and Donner 2002:29-30).

The characteristics of CMC are due to both the medium and the particular situation in which communication takes place (Lewin and Donner 2002:29). Consequently, the Internet hosts different varieties of CMC, ranging from the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) to scientific magazines published on the Internet (Alatalo 2002:7). The language of CMC is obviously typed and thus resembles written communication in general. It does, however, contain features of spoken conversation as well in that it is often informal and takes place rapidly. (Herring 1996:3.) Nevertheless, CMC cannot be regarded solely as spoken communication because CMC lacks a major characteristic of conversational discourse, namely that the participants can see and hear each other (Collot and Belmore 1996:14). Also, unlike speech, CMC is often asynchronous (Boone 2001). Identifying CMC strictly as written communication is also not possible because CMC messages are often written without a possibility to plan and edit the language as is done in

typical written communication. (Collot and Belmore 1996:14.) In CMC it is more important to send a message quickly than to write it as accurately as possible (Lewin and Donner 2002:29). Thus, CMC cannot be identified as spoken or written language in the traditional sense of the terms (Collot and Belmore 1996:14).

CMC also has characteristics of its own, for example, special lexis (such as “spamming”) and acronyms (such as “ASAP” for as soon as possible) (Herring 1996:3). Since it is not possible to see the person with whom one is communicating and the participants thus lack nonverbal cues that are crucial to face-to-face encounters, alternative ways to express emotions have been developed in CMC. The most obvious of them are “emoticons” which include smiley faces (e.g. :(), verbalizations of emotions (e.g. hehehe”), descriptions of physical actions (e.g. *hug*), and emphasis (e.g. no, I *won’t* go). (Ma 1996:176.) It has been further suggested that because CMC lacks extra-linguistic cues to give information on the person with whom one is communicating, this anonymity will free people from, for example, class and race prejudices. In other words, it is not important who one is but what one says. (Herring 1996:3-4.) It has been widely speculated that this could eventually lead to a breakdown of national, racial, linguistic, and ideological boundaries (Postmes et al. 1998:690). CMC has also been claimed to encourage people to express their feelings more openly. When negative, the term “flaming” refers to the phenomenon. (Herring 1996:3-4.)

As far as e-mail communication in particular is concerned, it also contains unique features. For example, an e-mail message may or may not have an opening (e.g. Dear Chris) but almost always contains a closing. The lack of the opening can be partly explained by the fact that the e-mail system already generates an automatic memo style opening with the address of the sender and the receiver, the date, and the subject of the message. (Hatch 1992:13.) Text-copying and text-quoting, i.e. including extracts from earlier messages in the response, are also typical to e-mail communication (Tanskanen 2001:231).

It is important to note, however, that studies on CMC and e-mail have been somewhat controversial and that it is still unclear to what extent it resembles

spoken discourse and hosts special CMC features such as emoticons or acronyms. Also, there are differing views on the consequences of the lack of extra-linguistic cues. For example, not all agree that the lack of them will lay a foundation for a society without boundaries as has been suggested by some scholars. The following account on previous studies on CMC as well as the present study on the whole will aim at throwing light on these questions.

3.3 Previous studies on CMC

The studies on CMC have mostly concentrated on mailing lists and bulletin boards because it is easier to gather data from these two sources. Mailing lists and bulletin boards are usually open forums for anyone to join and thus already public or semi-public information. With e-mail, the question of privacy comes up since e-mail is mostly sent from an individual to an individual. To gather a corpus of e-mail messages requires a person to send or print out the messages he/she wishes to release. Also, permission is needed from a number of people. As a result, a great deal of what is known about CMC derives from one-to-many dialogues. (e.g. Baron 1998:146, Yates 1996:30.) Even if one has succeeded in gathering one-to-one e-mail data, further challenges are expected to arise, at least in the long run. Baron (1998:144) notes that e-mail is “a moving linguistic target” which makes it difficult to put together a uniform grammar of e-mail. The development of technology, the growing number of users, and the maturation of e-mail as a genre all complicate the process.

In her study of the business communication, Louhiala-Salminen (1999a:96-97) discovered that when comparing the letter, fax and e-mail message, e-mail was perceived as a “conversational” medium by the respondents. The letter was seen as the most formal means of communication and the fax as something in between the two. E-mail was further characterized by the respondents as brief and “disposable”. It has taken over many of the tasks formerly performed by making a phone call. In other words, e-mail is used to discuss and exchange opinions as well as to circulate information quickly to a large audience. The respondents considered its role as a discussion forum as the most important task of e-mail.

Louhiala-Salminen (1999a:109-111) also looked at the salutations and closings of the e-mail messages and reports that all but five of the 40 messages contained a salutation. The most typical salutations were “Hello [first name]”, “Hi [first name]”, and “Hello all” when the message was sent to more than one person. Last names were not used in the messages which can be explained by the fact that the companies under investigation had a “first-names-only-within-the-house” policy and the majority of the messages were sent inside the two companies. Further, the messages mainly contained a complimentary closing “(best) regards” + name although this would not be necessary since the sender information can already be seen from the top of the message. Thus, although both the memo-style opening and the information needed for a basic closing are provided automatically by the e-mail system, the writers chose to follow traditional letter writing conventions. Louhiala-Salminen (1999a:113) also notes that a common feature of e-mail is that it is often composed of a sequence of messages, i.e. it consists of an earlier message or messages and a reply. Louhiala-Salminen (1999a:164) further points out that the writers in her study were uncertain about the discourse conventions of e-mail.

To find out how common special CMC features are, Lewin and Donner (2002:30-35) analysed a corpus of 200 messages collected from five bulletin boards on the Internet. The data included three Usenet newsgroups, a mailing list, and a web-based Java message board. The results show that although there were special CMC features in the data, they appeared in only fewer than half the messages. Typical CMC punctuation, e.g. run-on sentences and more than one punctuation mark at the end of a sentence, was the most common feature and appeared in 46 percent of the messages. Special CMC usages, such as spelling, acronyms, emoticons, and emphasis, were the second common feature and were used in 36 percent of the messages. Surprisingly, less than 20 percent of the messages contained features of oral register or typical CMC syntactic structures (e.g. lack of subjects and verbs). Out of the special CMC usages, spellings were found in 14 percent of the messages, acronyms in 5 percent, emoticons in 8 percent, and emphasis in 19 percent of the messages. The small number of each item may indicate, on the one hand, that these features have only influenced CMC a little or, on the other, that the process has only just begun. It was also discovered that the

frequency of CMC features depends on the topic of the message board. Further, Lewin and Donner looked at the social conventions of letter writing and discovered that 87 percent of the messages in the entire data did not have an opening greeting and 48 percent lacked a sign-off.

Gains (1999:82) examined a corpus of 116 e-mail messages, 62 of which were collected from an insurance company and 54 from a university in the United Kingdom. Gains' study suggests that the language in the commercial e-mail messages is compatible with standard written business English and its conventions. The stylistic register of the messages was found to be semiformal and similar to the tone generally used among co-operative business colleagues. (Gains 1999:86.) Features of spoken discourse, which are regularly given as a characteristic of CMC in the literature, were not found in the commercial data (Gains 1999:88). The academic messages, however, showed that some writers use e-mail as a pseudo-conversational type of communication. In other words, they employ features of conversation into the messages. These features in Gains' data included one-sided conversation (e.g. "yup it got through, fine and dandy. M"), echo questions (e.g. "...of the ELTU (yes, he got a PhD for that), "how are you?" questions (e.g. "Hi there, how are you?"), informal words (e.g. "no sweat man!"), and unplanned talk often connected with the conjunction "and" (e.g. "And Leeds won last night – and they're on the TV on Sunday (...) and for the first time I have no work to do (...) and can go to the pub at lunchtime"). These messages further suggest that the writers perceive e-mail as non-permanent communication, despite the fact that the messages can be saved and kept as a record. Opposite to the academic e-mail, the commercial messages are perceived as having a legal and permanent status. (Gains 199:93-95.)

Lan (2000: 24-26) conducted a similar study to Gains but instead of examining e-mail messages sent by native speakers only, she also included data from non-native speakers of English in her study. Messages were collected from Lan's personal e-mail files from a university in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. The data included both official and personal messages. Lan compared her results from the Hong Kong data to Gains' study and found out that the degree of formality differs a great deal depending on whether the message is conducted by a

native or a non-native speaker. The messages sent by the Chinese show a tendency to follow the rules of conventional letter writing, for example, using an opening at the beginning of the message which is often omitted in the messages written by native speakers of English. Also, conversational style is used more cautiously in Hong Kong than in the United Kingdom. Lan (2000:29,55) points out that the degree of formality depends on the “writer’s origin, personality, and language proficiency”. Although especially young native speakers of English are likely to be creative in their e-mail messages, non-native speakers tend to stick to more formal style. Thus, it may be concluded that the characteristics associated with CMC communication may not fully apply to non-native or lingua franca speakers of English.

Gimenez (2000:237-238) compared commercial e-mail messages to business letters and aimed at finding out whether the spoken nature of e-mail has begun to alter business written communication, and whether the e-mail messages had a sufficient number of features of their own to be considered as its own genre. Gimenez’ (2000:241-246) findings were opposite to Gains (1999) in that the e-mail messages in his study contained a greater deal of features typical to conversational discourse, for example, simple and straightforward syntactic structures, short sentences, abbreviations (such as tks for thanks), contracted forms (we’re, doesn’t), and informal lexical items. Also, punctuation, capitalization and spelling did not follow standard conventions. Gimenez points out, however, that the informal structures and flexible style are generally more common in personal messages and, also, depend on an already established relationship between the sender and the recipient. Gimenez (2000:247-250) further notes that the data in the study was too small to generalize that e-mail communication is a genre of its own. The comparison of e-mail messages and business letters revealed that there were twice as many elaborate syntactic structures and complete sentences in the business letters than in e-mail messages. Also, the business letters contained no elliptical or contracted forms. Gimenez draws attention to the fact, however, that most of the business letters were written by customers who contacted the company for the first time, which is likely to affect the style of the letters. The nature of the business relationship appears to

establish the style of both e-mail messages and business letters. It also determines which medium (e-mail, letter, phone) is used to convey a message.

To sum up, although the above studies indicate that CMC has characteristics of its own, the frequency of the special CMC features depend on the particular users of CMC and the people at whom the messages are targeted. Therefore, messages written by native and non-native speakers of English or business and academic people may differ. It must not be forgotten however that CMC is a relatively new medium and therefore its style may not have taken its final form. Only a few CMC studies have been conducted so far which makes it difficult to make generalizations about the characteristics of native or non-native CMC English. Further studies on CMC are thus necessary.

3.3 E-mail guides

In spite of the popularity of e-mail, academic guides for effective e-mail English are rare. Swales and Feak (1995:239-246) make an exception by dealing briefly with the subject in their book *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*, which is targeted at non-native speakers of English. The guidelines given in the book are meant for writing messages to people with whom one is not well acquainted or who are of higher social status. Personal messages are, as Swales and Feak point out, everyone's "own personal business". In general, Swales and Feak advise non-native speakers to avoid typical CMC features, such as informal language, typing errors and imperfect sentences, in the formal messages. This is in accordance with the findings of Lan (2000) in that non-native speakers are cautious about the use conversational style in their messages. Swales and Feak also warn non-native speakers of English of the use conversational tone in the openings and closing of the messages (e.g. "Hi Chris! How are you? (...) Have a good day. Got to run. Bye, bye. Fatima.") because messages like this often seem unprofessional and naive. If one is not sure of how to address the recipient, e-mail allows to avoid the use of an opening altogether. Further, contrary to what has been said about the spontaneity of e-mail, Swales and Feak recommend all messages to be reread before sending them. Furthermore, the authors do not favour capitalization,

decapitalization, or emoticons. Leaving out articles, pronouns or other parts of speech is also not encouraged. Thus, the advice given by Swales and Feak is almost completely contrary to what CMC is generally believed to be like. The only typical CMC feature Swales and Feak suggest non-native speakers to adopt and learn are the abbreviations such as ASAP. Interestingly, the target group of Swales and Feak's guidelines is similar to the e-mail senders of the present study. Although it can be assumed that the writers of the present study are not acquainted with this guide, it is of particular interest to find out if the real-life messages resemble the ideal given by Swales and Feak or if they rather resemble CMC as it is described in the literature.

The various e-mail guides found on the Internet give somewhat more liberal and different advice on how to write e-mail messages. For example, a *Beginner's Guide to Effective Email* by Sherwood (2001) advises to use emoticons, asterisks, capital letters, lower-case letters, and creative punctuation to express gestures and intonation. Sherwood also recommends the writers to keep an eye on page layout issues such as the length of the message (no more than twenty-five lines long) and paragraphs (should be short). Much emphasis is also put to meaningful subject lines because they often determine whether the receiver will read or delete the message. According to Sherwood, grammar, punctuation, and spelling as well as the degree of formality depend on the receiver. As an example, she states that the language one would use with the Queen of England or a person with a different status is different from the language used in intimate discussions. Houten-Kemp's (1999) *Everything E-mail* touches mainly upon the same issues. In addition, she advises against the overuse of acronyms such as BTW (by the way) because the receiver may not know what they mean. With that she is along different lines from Swales and Feak (1995) who recommend the writers to learn and use acronyms. However, Houten-Kemp's advice matches with those given by Swales and Feak in that she also stresses the importance of reading over the e-message before sending it. To conclude, the advice given by the e-mail guides on the Internet emphasize the typical CMC features but also note that one should be cautious of their use depending on the recipient.

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS AND DATA

4.1 Research questions

While it is acknowledged that e-mail has become a global phenomenon and is used for every-day communication by individuals and large organizations, only little is known about the characteristics of CMC English. Gains (1999:82) points out that the academic research has not yet defined the norms and stylistic conventions behind e-mail. Nevertheless, it is agreed that e-mail and its influence on language call for further investigation (e.g. Gains 1999, Gimenez 2000, Lan 2000, Lewin and Donner 2002, Louhiala-Salminen 1999b). More specifically, as evident from the previous studies on CMC, it is necessary to examine CMC English in terms of the special CMC features present in e-mail messages.

It is evident from Lan's (2000) analysis of e-mail in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong that e-mail conventions of native and non-native speakers are different. Lan's study is rare in that it looks at e-mail English from the non-native point of view in contrast to most of the CMC studies which have concentrated on English as used by native speakers. The non-native perspective is important as English has become the preferred lingua franca for Internet users from all over the world (Graddol 1997:50). Further, having the native speaker as a starting point is inappropriate because a great deal of communication in English involves non-native – non-native interactions without a native party (Alptekin 2002:61). Thus, when used as a lingua franca between non-native speakers, English should not be examined against native speaker norms but instead should be considered as a variety in its own right. However, English as it is actually used as a lingua franca has not yet been systematically recorded and described although there is a pressing need for extensive research in that area (Seidlhofer 2001:141).

The present study aims at taking into account both the CMC and the lingua franca perspective as it looks at e-mail messages written by European non-native speakers of English who use the language as a lingua franca. In other words, the study focuses on CMC and its realization in e-mail messages in the European

lingua franca context. In more detail, the study examines e-mail messages as they are written in an academic setting, i.e. in one of the environments where English has been most widely adopted as a lingua franca. Bearing in mind the effect the Erasmus student exchange has had on the spread of English in Europe, the data was collected from university Erasmus coordinators. The analysis begins by examining the features ascribed to CMC and their frequency in the data. Are there such features in the messages or do the writers opt for more traditional ways of writing?

Secondly, the study considers whether the relationship and the role of the e-mail writers have an influence on the language and in particular the frequency of CMC features used in the messages. This is to test the commonly held assumption that CMC is a forum where writers can interact on an equal basis and where status differences are not visible (e.g. Herring 1996:4, Postmes et al. 1998:698). Is this really the case? For example, can one find differences as far as CMC features are concerned in the e-mail messages written by students as compared to the staff members? Or are there more typical CMC features in the messages written to people of equal professional status, e.g. from a coordinator to a coordinator, than in the messages written by, for example, a student to a coordinator?

Thirdly, the study examines the messages with respect to the lingua franca use of English in them. It has been claimed that English as a lingua franca is likely to reflect the local languages and cultures of the speakers instead of holding the native varieties as a norm (see e.g. Bangbose 1998, Kachru 1985, Kachru and Nelson 2001, Modiano 1999, Seidlhofer 2001, Yano 2001:120). This is of particular interest to the present study as it has been suggested that such development is taking place in Europe and in particular Northern Europe (e.g. Berns 1995:6-7, House 2001, Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001, Yano 2001:123-124). Are there signs of this in the present data which has been collected from the very same geographical (Europe) and professional (academic setting) area where the lingua franca process has been said to be particularly accelerated? Does the language used in the e-mail messages show signs of the “nativization” process and does it appear to have qualities that could be described as lingua franca features? Examples of such features given in the literature include for example the

ignorance of grammatical sins because they do not seem to lead to serious problems in communication (Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001). ELF thus aims at being “normal” even in situations where the language is out of the ordinary (Firth 1996:240-246).

To sum up, the research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. How frequently do the features associated with CMC in the literature appear in the data?
2. Do the relationship and the role of the writers as coordinators, students, or other members of staff influence the frequency of the CMC features?
3. What kinds of lingua franca features can be detected in the data?

4.2 Data

The data in this study consists of 151 English language e-mail messages collected from six Erasmus coordinators at five departments/faculties of the University of Jyväskylä in the autumn 2002. The coordinators were asked to forward or print out at least 10-20 messages depending on what was available in their inboxes and files. The messages are not from a particular period although most of them are from the year 2002. The following criteria were given to the coordinators concerning the nature of the messages needed for the present study: 1) All messages should be in English; 2) They should be messages sent or received while attending to the duties of the coordinator. For example, the messages could be sent to or received from incoming or outgoing Erasmus students or to or from Erasmus coordinators in the partner universities; 3) The coordinators were asked to send a wide variety of messages ranging from single messages to sequences of messages and replies.

Most of the messages received from the coordinators were written by non-native speakers of English although this was not set as a criterion when messages were requested. Out of the total of 158 messages only seven were sent to coordinators from an English-speaking country. The reason for this probably lies in the fact

that the majority of the Erasmus exchange partners of the University of Jyväskylä are located in countries other than the United Kingdom or Ireland. The messages from the native speakers of English were not included in the analysis, on the one hand, because the purpose of this study was to concentrate on English when used as a lingua franca among non-native speakers of English and, on the other, because the small number of them prevented their use for comparison with the messages written by non-native speakers.

A little less than one third of the messages (44) consisted of one message only. The rest (107) were sequences of two or more messages. It was decided that both single messages and sequences of messages were to be analysed to find out how common the CMC features were in the data. Furthermore, special emphasis was given to the sequences of messages to follow the complete e-mail exchange and find out how the relationship and the status of the writers affected the language and the special CMC features.

The Erasmus coordinators of the University of Jyväskylä were identified as F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, and F6 throughout the study. “S” was used to refer to students, “C” to coordinators, and “O” to other members of staff (e.g. teachers). To guarantee the anonymity of the senders and receivers, personal names were replaced by: [first name] and/or [last name] in all the messages. A similar method was used to remove all references to institutions, departments, locations etc. Where e-mail addresses were given in the examples, only the last two letters indicating the country of origin of the writer were retained. All other personal information such as addresses, telephone numbers and fax numbers were also removed from the messages.

All messages were analysed in a similar fashion, except for the messages of the coordinator F1 who had already removed the names before providing them for the study. Because of this, F1’s messages had to be left out when analysing sign-offs. A further hindrance were the subject lines. The e-mail system used by coordinators F1, F2, and also partly by F4 did not give the subject line when messages were forwarded unless the same subject had been kept as a subject of the new message. The coordinator F1 had replaced the subject heading with a new

one when forwarding the messages to the present study and therefore the subject headings of her messages could not be included in the analysis. Although the e-mail system used by the coordinator F2 and partly by F3 (two systems in use) did not include the subject heading in the body of the messages when it was forwarded, the subject headings were retained when messages were sent to the present writer. Thus, these messages did not have to be left out of the study when subject headings were analysed.

A list of the nationalities of the senders as well as the number of messages per country are given in Table 1. The table shows that the data included messages from 18 European countries, including Finland. The coordinators F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, and F6 wrote altogether 62 messages, i.e. about 40% of all the 151 messages under analysis. The highest number of messages in the study was from the Netherlands (21). The second biggest group was France (14), followed by Lithuania (9), Poland (9), and Spain (7).

Table 1. Geographic origin of the messages.

	Country of origin	FI	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total
1	Belgium	2			2		1	5
2	The Czech Republic	1						1
3	Finland (self written)	22	8	16	12	2	2	62
4	France	6		3	2		2	13
5	Germany			3			1	4
6	Hungary	1						1
7	Iceland						1	1
8	Italy	1		2			2	5
9	Latvia		1					1
10	Lithuania		2				7	9
11	The Netherlands	3	3	1		5	9	21
13	Norway				2			2
14	Poland	1	3	4			3	11
15	Portugal	1		2			1	4
16	Slovakia		2					2
17	Spain			3	4	1		8
18	Switzerland	1						1
	TOTAL	39	19	34	22	8	29	151

Table 2 shows the relationship between the sender and the recipient of the messages. There were no difficulties in determining the role of the writers as either coordinators, students, or other members of staff. Many writers (especially coordinators) stated this in their signature or at the beginning of the message or it was apparent from the content. As seen from the table, 19 (13%) messages were sent by the Finnish coordinators to students, 36 (24%) from students to the Finnish coordinators, and 90 (60%) from a coordinator to another. E-mails to or from other people, e.g. teaching staff, were rare (only six messages). While the majority of the messages provided by the coordinators F1, F2, F3, and F4 were sent to or from other coordinators, the majority of messages from the coordinator F6 were sent to him by students. The messages of the coordinator F5 consisted of e-mails to or from other coordinators only.

Table 2. Relationship between the sender and the recipient.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
Coordinator – student	8	1	7	2	-	1	19	13
Student – coordinator	9	2	7	-	-	18	36	24
Coordinator – coordinator	22	16	15	19	8	10	90	60
Coordinator – other member of staff	-	-	3	1	-	-	4	3
Other member of staff – coordinator	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	1
TOTAL	39	19	34	22	8	29	151	100%

4.3 Methods

Seven features were chosen to be examined in the messages in order to find answers to the first two research questions, i.e. how frequently do the features associated with CMC in the literature appear in the data? and do the relationship and the role of the writers as coordinators or students influence the frequency of the CMC features? The seven features under analysis also serve as a basis for

examining the third research question, that is to find out if there were lingua franca features in the messages. The seven CMC features include the subjects, openings, closings, conversational features, syntax, punctuation, and the awareness of the medium. The chosen selection of CMC features and their classification is based on the study of academic and business e-mail messages by Gains (1999) and the study of newsgroups and mailing lists by Lewin and Donner (2002). Gains also analysed nine features in his study: subjects, openings, closings, stylistic register, conversational features, compression, abbreviation and word omission, topic reference, and the awareness of the medium.

For the present study, the classification by Gains was modified by introducing two new CMC feature groups from Lewin and Donner's analysis: syntax and punctuation. This was done in order to clarify the grouping of the features and to include essential syntactic and punctuation features of CMC. These features were also of interest from the lingua franca point of view. As noted earlier, lingua franca communication strives for being "normal" even if it is different from the native speaker communication (Firth 1996:240-246). "Grammatical sins" may therefore not be relevant to understanding (Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001). Thus, in addition to indicating CMC characteristics, punctuation and syntactic choices and the response to them by the receiver, may in fact also serve as a feature of ELF.

Further, "stylistic register" was excluded from the study because, as Gains (1999:86) points out, the topic is ambiguous. "Topic reference" was also left out as a feature of its own because the matter will be dealt with in the "subject" section. Moreover, to get a clearer view on the conversational features of the messages, the category was extended by features from the studies conducted by Gimenez (2000), Lan (2000), and Lewin and Donner (2002). Lan (2000:24-26) discovered that conversational style is used somewhat cautiously in e-mail messages by non-native speakers of English. Also, Lan (2000:29,55) reports that the degree of formality depends on the writer's language skills, personality, and origins. This makes the occurrence of conversational features of interest to the present study and its lingua franca perspective.

Both quantitative and qualitative aspects were taken into account when analysing the messages. In other words, the frequency of the CMC features was examined together with a qualitative analysis of the features present in the data. When examining the nature of the CMC features, the role of the writers as either students, coordinators or other members of staff was taken into consideration. It was examined whether this had an influence on the use of CMC features. Finally, it was considered throughout the analysis whether the messages contained lingua franca features. Hence, all CMC features were also examined from the lingua franca point of view. The analysed CMC features are outlined below in more detail.

1. Content of the messages

The e-mail messages were described on the basis of their informational content in order to get an overview of the messages under analysis. It was examined which topics coordinators, students and other members of staff dealt with in their messages.

2. Subjects

Although the layout of the messages depends on the e-mail system, they always include a memo-style opening with separate lines for the sender (From), the receiver (To), the time the message was sent (Date or Sent), and the subject (Hatch 1992:13). Usually, the automatic opening looks like the following:

From: sender@sender.fi
To: recipient@recipient.fi
Cc: second.recipient@recipient.fi
Date: Thu, 20 Nov 2003 12.05 +0200
Subject: Automatic opening

The address of the sender and the date are automatically filled in by the computer, whereas it is up to the writer to decide on the subject depending on the content of the message (Lan 2000:25). In the present study, the subject lines, if they were

used, were examined in terms of their general nature and how well they corresponded to the content of the messages.

3. Openings

As noted above, the e-mail system generates an automatic memo-style opening. Hatch (1992:13) claims that a writer “may or may not provide an additional opening”. The present study examined whether additional openings, i.e. salutations, were used and what they were like. For example, such salutations as “dear Mary”, “dear Mr Jones”, and “hi” were expected to appear in the data as well as messages containing no opening greetings at all. In addition, the names used in the opening lines were examined with the expectation that at least the following kinds of names would exist in the salutations if they were used at all:

1. First name
2. First name + last name
3. Ms/ Miss/Mrs/Mr + last name

With regard to the third research question of the study, it was examined whether the relationship and the role of the writers as either coordinators, students, or other members of staff influenced the salutations and the names used at the beginning of the messages. The use of names was also considered from the lingua franca point of view by examining if the language and culture of the writer had an effect on the use of names and salutations.

4. Closings

The e-mail messages were further analysed in terms of the methods of closing. Three aspects of the closing were examined:

1. Complimentary closing
2. Name
3. Automatic signature

The complimentary closing refers to such phrases as “kind regards”, “best wishes”, and “yours sincerely” before the name of the writer. As to the name of the sender, at least four possibilities were expected to appear in the data:

1. No name
2. First name
3. First name + last name
4. Automatic signature

Finally, attention was paid to the automatic signatures often found at the end of the message usually including the name of the sender, title, organization, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address. For example,

Ms Mary Example
 Erasmus Coordinator
 University of Example
 P.O. Box 00
 000000 Example City
 Finland
 Tel: +000 00 0000000
 Fax: +000 00 0000000
 E-mail: mary.example@exu.fi

The frequency of the automatic signatures as well as their use with or without a complimentary closing and/or a name was looked at from the data. The second research question, i.e. the existence of the lingua franca features, is relevant in closings as well. Some differences in the use of them were expected to appear depending on the origins of the writer.

5. Conversational features

CMC has been claimed to contain features of spoken discourse (e.g. Collot and Belmore 1996:14, Herring 1996:3). To test this view, four features of conversational nature, which are presented below, were chosen to be included in the present analysis. In addition to analysing the conversational features and their frequency, it was examined whether the role of the writer (as a coordinator, student, or other member of staff) and the receiver of the message had an influence on the occurrence of these features. With regard to ELF, it was

examined whether Lan's (2000:24-26) suggestion of the non-native speakers' cautious use of conversational style was evident in the present data as well, or whether the writers made use of conversational features more freely.

a) Discourse particles

Chafe (1982:47) discovered that discourse particles such as "well", "I mean", and "you know" are present in oral discourse but do not come up in the written data at all. With these particles, the speaker can for example demonstrate his or her involvement with the listener. Discourse particles such as these have been found to exist in CMC as well. Gains (1999:93) came across the following examples in his corpus of e-mail messages.

Well, is it a good time to catch you, Sir?
So, on to more (...)
 (...) Yes, the PhD. Well, if I'm going to (...)

In order to find out whether discourse particles exist in the present lingua franca data and what kinds of functions they serve in e-mail discourse, six discourse particles listed by Schiffrin (1987:31) were chosen to be included in the analysis: "oh", "well", "so", "then", "I mean", and "you know".

b) Echo questions

Echo questions can be used for self-repair in spoken discourse (Levinson 1983:341 as quoted by Gains 1999) as well as in CMC. For example, "Did I give you my FTP number? I think I did." (Lan 2000:20) and "Islamic Mortmain (yes, that's right!)" (Gains 1999:93).

c) 'How are you?' questions

Telephone conversations have been found often to include a "how are you?" question (Hatch 1992:9). The same phenomenon has been detected in CMC as demonstrated by an example from Gains' (1999:94) analysis: "Dear [****], How are you today?" It is interesting to compare this with Meierkord's (2000:8-11)

claim that ritual speech acts are kept to minimum in ELF communication. Is this reflected in lingua franca e-mail communication as well?

d) Informal words and phrases

Certain words and phrases have an oral quality to them and make a text sound more like spoken discourse (Hatch 1992:246). This can be seen from the following examples from Gains (1999:94):

Ta for the match report – what a cock up. (...) what ever you can get but not those crappy sort they sell in Garages. Hope this is no hassle – (...) Main thing is no sweat man!

Having a whale of a time at the LSE, (...)

The present study aims at finding out if such colloquial language also occurs in the texts written by lingua franca speakers of English, or if the writers rather opt for less informal words and phrases.

6. Syntax

Six CMC features of syntactic nature were included in the analysis: omission of a subject or a verb in sentences, special spelling, abbreviations and special acronyms, contracted forms, emoticons, and typing errors. The aim of the study was not only to examine their frequency in the data but also to find out whether the relationship and the professional role of the writers had an influence on the frequency of these features. An additional interest to this topic is created by the lingua franca perspective. As noted earlier, syntactic choices especially in their grammatically “incorrect” form may not necessarily be relevant to understanding in ELF communication.

a) Omission of a subject or a verb in sentences

Leaving out a subject or a verb in a sentence is a characteristic associated with CMC (eg. Lan 2000, Lewin and Donner 2002). For example, “Not sure whether you’ll get this now before you leave” (Lan 2000:27).

b) Special spelling

Out of the ordinary spelling is often associated with CMC (Lewin and Donner 2002). For example,

How r u?
F2f (Face to face)
 Some handouts 4 u.

c) Abbreviations and special acronyms

Abbreviations that do not follow established norm have been said to be found in CMC. Gimenez (2000:243) found the following examples in his data:

tk_s (thanks)
 rgds (regards)
 plse (please)
 pls (please)
 (...) for your fax dt. 21 st. 98.

As for the special acronyms, Herring (1996:3) gives three examples: FAQ (frequently-asked question), IMHO (in my humble opinion), and RTFM (read the f***ing manual).

d) Contracted forms

Contracted forms, eg. “don’t” for “do not”, are usually preferred in spoken unplanned discourse. It has also been argued that they are a typical feature of CMC. (Gimenez 2000:243-244.)

e) Emoticons

Smiley faces made up from ascii characters are called emoticons, e.g. ☺ or ☹, and are commonly regarded as a typical feature of CMC

d) Typing errors

As it is more important in CMC to send a message quickly than to write it as accurately as possible, typing errors can occur (Lewin and Donner 2002:29). However, since this study concentrates on non-native lingua franca speakers of English, labelling non-standard spelling as typing errors may be problematic. What seems like a typing error may in fact be how the writer believes the word should be written. Yet, that may not be relevant in lingua franca communication which often disregards abnormalities as the matter is often understood despite its peculiarity.

7. Punctuation

A further special characteristic given to CMC in the literature is out of the ordinary punctuation. As CMC cannot convey meaning with the use of non-verbal cues present in oral discourse and as in CMC the text itself acts as the only data from which to draw conclusions, additional tools are needed to convey meaning (Korenman and Wyatt 1996:227). Capitalization, decapitalization and innovative use of punctuation marks together with the features outlined above are used in CMC to do this. Unorthodox punctuation can also be employed because of other reasons such as lack of time. As scholars have found lingua franca users of English to use a somewhat conventional language, it will be interesting to find out whether innovative use of punctuation exists in the present data.

a) Capitalization or decapitalization

In CMC, it is more important to write the message quickly than to write it accurately. This can be achieved in part by writing a message entirely in lower or upper case letters. Usually, decapitalization, i.e. using the lower case letters, is used to save time, whereas the capitalization is often taken as a sign of emphasis. An example of decapitalization is given by Lan (2000:27): “will let u know when i am back in HK, and how are things going in HK?? Do you still like it??

b) Carefree use of punctuation marks

Lan (2000:27) points out that punctuation marks as well as emoticons can be used to express irony or intimacy. She gives the following examples: “Happy birthday!!!!!!!!!!” “Another dinner party?????” As an alternative to using more than one punctuation mark at the end of a sentence as in these two examples, a sentence may lack a punctuation mark altogether.

8. Awareness of the medium

Gains (1999:96) discovered that in the academic environment “the users of the standard e-mail system appear to have a high degree of awareness of the medium which they are using to transmit their messages”. This study aims to find out if this is the case in the present data as well. The messages will be examined in terms of explicit references to the medium, such as these examples given by Gains:

(...) – I need a 5 minute tutorial on mailing back articles – (messed up this morning).
Let me have land mail address and (...) Physical address is:
This is really just to establish the e-mail link

5 RESULTS

To get an overall picture of the topics dealt with in the e-mail messages, the informational content of the messages will be presented first, followed by a description of the subject headings and how they relate to the topic of the message. Moving on to the features assigned to CMC in the literature, the following aspects will be examined: openings, closings, conversational features, syntax, punctuation, and the awareness of the medium.

5.1 Content of the messages

The data consisted of messages written by Erasmus coordinators to other coordinators, coordinators to students, and coordinators to other members of staff, e.g. teachers. In addition, there were messages written by students to coordinators and by other members of staff to coordinators. The content of the messages included students or their coordinators asking questions about, for example, the application procedure, accommodation, or courses before their arrival at the host university. Coordinators also gave guidelines for incoming students beforehand on how to apply and informed the host university of the outgoing Erasmus students selected for the next academic year. During their stay, students made further inquiries about courses and practical matters. Some students contacted the coordinator again after their departure with questions or requests concerning, for example, courses or the transcript of records. Socrates/Erasmus agreements were also dealt with in the messages exchanged between coordinators.

5.2 Subjects

Out of the total of 151 messages, 110 could be included in the analysis of the subject headings. The rest consisted of messages provided for the study by the coordinator F1 (39 messages) who had removed the subject headings before providing the messages for the study. In addition to this, there were two messages

where subject lines had not been included. Eighty-nine subject lines (81%) gave exact and straightforward information on the content of the message as demonstrated by the following examples.

Subject: Learning agreement
 Subject: Letter of acceptance
 Subject: Incoming 2002-2003
 Subject: Application forms 2002-2003
 Subject: socrates student from [name of the university]
 Subject: Applications to the University of Jyväskylä for 2002

Similar to the above examples of subject headings, 122 (81%) of the messages dealt with issues relating to incoming or outgoing Erasmus students or with Socrates/Erasmus or other agreements. Where Socrates/Erasmus agreements were discussed, for example the following kinds of precise headings were used.

Subject: Renewal of Erasmus exchange agreement
 Subject: Agreement
 Subject: Socrates Cooperation Proposal, [name of the university]
 Subject: Socrates/Erasmus agreement

There were also inquiries and informative messages about various topics in the data which similarly included clear subject headings such as the following. Subject headings indicating the name of a course were particularly common.

Subject: Transcript problem
 Subject: Computer utilities
 Subject: [name of a course]
 Subject: Lecture course at the university of Jyväskylä
 Subject: About the report of your practice

There were also exceptions to the otherwise precise subject lines. Somewhat loose headings with no indication of the actual content occurred in six e-mails. For example,

Subject: information
 Subject: Questions
 Subject: Need an information
 Subject: informations

Slightly less vague subject headings but nevertheless with no exact information on the content of the messages were used in seven messages. For example,

Subject: Socrates/Erasmus
 Subject: Erasmus
 Subject: Erasmus-Program
 Subject: Student exchange
 Subject: Erasmus exchange

There were also three messages where the salutation was used as a subject heading, e.g. “Dear [first name]”. Only five messages in the entire data lacked the subject heading altogether.

Because the e-mail system used by the coordinator F2 and partly by F4 did not include the entire memo-style opening when original messages were included in the reply or when messages were forwarded, some subject headings could not be examined. With the available information however it seems apparent that almost all writers retained the original subject heading in their reply or replies. Usually this did not create problems because the initial messages and the reply dealt with the same subject or because the subject heading was broad enough to include further inquiries or new information. Some subjects were even kept for long e-mail sequences as evident from the following headings.

Subject: Réf. : Re: Réf. : Re: [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME’S]
 APPLICATION FORM
 Subject: Re: Vs: Re: About your Erasmus-student
 Subject: Re: Vs: Socrates- [first name] [last name]
 Subject: re: Vs: staff visit: [initial] [last name]

The above results are similar to Lan (2000:25) who found out that 91% of the administrative messages collected from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University included a subject heading. In the present study, as many as 95% of the messages had a subject heading. The subject headings used in the present data are also comparable with Gains’s (1999:90) findings in that all the messages in his corpus of academic e-mail messages contained a subject heading. The results of the present study are however different from Gains with respect to the creative use of subjects. Such attention grabbing examples as “Subject: poor excuses” or “Subject: bloody brilliant”, which appeared in Gains’ analysis, did not occur in the present data. Instead, the topics were rather mild and to the point following the overall tone of the message body. This is not surprising considering that there

were no personal messages in the data. Also, the relationship of the writers did not seem informal enough for such headings. The lingua franca status of the writers may also serve as an explanation for the rather matter-of-fact headings. Meierkord (2000:8-10) discovered in her study of lingua franca face-to-face conversations that the ELF speakers avoid insulting and embarrassing behaviour. This appears to be the case in the use of subject headings as well.

5.2 Openings

As seen from Table 4, almost all messages in the data, 95 percent, started with a salutation. The most popular of them, found in 71% of the messages, were those starting with “dear”, e.g. “dear [first name]”, “dear Ms [last name]”, and “dear Professor [last name]”. Other salutations were much less frequent. “Hello” with or without a name was used in 11% and “hi” in 8% of the messages. Other kinds of openings were less frequent and appeared in only 5% of the messages. These included salutations such as “Good morning”, “To whom it may concern” and “Moi”. Only 5% of the messages went straight to the topic and did not employ an opening greeting at all.

Table 4. Salutations in the e-mail messages.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
Dear	27	15	27	19	7	12	107	71
Hi	5	-	3	1	-	3	12	8
Hello	4	1	1	1	-	9	16	11
Others	2	1	1	1	-	3	8	5
No salutation	1	2	2	-	1	2	8	5
TOTAL	39	19	34	22	8	29	151	100%

These results are surprising in that they do not follow the conventions assigned to CMC, namely that e-mail senders do not necessarily provide an opening (Hatch

1992:13). Nevertheless, the findings do lend support to Louhiala-Salminen (1999a:109-111) who discovered in her analysis of salutations that almost all messages in her data contained a salutation. Similarly, the ELF speakers of the present study seem to trust the traditional style of letter writing and almost always start the message with a separate salutation. This may be due to the fact that most of the writers do not seem to know each other very well. The coordinators have probably not met their foreign colleagues and may thus be uncertain about the appropriate level of formality. The same applies to students who contact the coordinator. On this account, it is easier to play it safe and start the message with a salutation. Meierkord (2000:10) discovered that because most speakers in lingua franca conversations are not sure what kind of greeting behaviour is appropriate, they decide to use those expressions only that they know to be correct in British or American English. This may be the case with the present lingua franca data as well and its persistent use of e-mail salutations.

There is also a notable difference in the use of salutations in the present study as compared to the recent studies by Gains (1999), Lan (2000), and, above all, Lewin and Donner (2002). Gains (1999:85,91) found out that 63% of the academic e-mail messages in his corpus contained an opening greeting, whereas 92% of the business messages lacked such a device. The non-native speakers of English in Lan's (2000:25-26) corpus of official academic e-mails also used opening greetings relatively infrequently, in 46.1% of the messages. The results from Lewin and Donner's (2002:34) study are not directly comparable to the present study because they examined mailing lists and messages boards. Their analysis does, however, provide an interesting comparison as only 13% of the messages in their study contained an opening greeting. Compared to the result of Lewin and Donner, the e-mail senders of the present study employed almost the opposite opening strategies with as many as 95% of the messages containing a salutation.

The number of salutations apart from "dear", "hi", and "hello" was not significant. The Finnish expression "moi" was used by an Italian student who had already finished his exchange period in Finland and was thus familiar with the Finnish greeting. Another expression, "Good morning", which appeared in two messages, is also of some interest. The first example was written at 10:46 am and

the other one, surprisingly, at 9:44 pm, i.e. at a time when it is not customary to use such an expression. It seems that the first writer was thinking about the time he wrote the message himself, whereas the second writer assumed that the receiver of the message would read it in the morning when “Good morning” would be an appropriate salutation. Some e-mail guides (e.g. Sherwood 1998) advice against the use of opening greetings that refer to a particular time of the day because the receiver may read the message at another time. As evident from the above example, however, the role of e-mail as an asynchronous device enabling people to send and read messages at any time of the day, is not as straightforward as one might think. The sender may expect the message to be read and replied immediately even if that is not the case. Thus, this indicates that e-mail conventions vary from person to person.

As to those messages which lacked an opening greeting, it is important to note that all of them were replies in a sequence of two or three messages. In other words, no initiating messages were sent without an opening greeting. A sequence of three messages such as the following with the first two messages containing a salutation and the third one lacking it is a typical example. Both the parties had already sent three messages to each other (the first one not included in the data) and acted upon both of their requests. Thus, the coordinator from Lithuania only sends a short “Thanks!” message to the Finnish coordinator and, at the same time, ends the dialogue between the two.

From: [First name] [Last name] [xxxxxx@xxxxx.xxxxxx.lt]
 Date: March 30 2001 15:48
 To: [First name] [Last name]
 Subject: Re: information

Thanks!

----- Original Message -----

From: [First name] [Last name] [xxxxxxxx@xxxx.jyu.fi]
 To: [First name] [Last name] [xxxxxx@xxxxx.xxxxxx.lt]
 Sent: Friday, March 30, 2001 2:28 PM
 Subject: VS: information

> Dear [First name],
 >
 > Our programme is not yet ready, but in the web-pages of our
 > international office
 > <http://www.jyu.fi/intl/eng/index.html>
 > you can find some information.
 >

> Some courses are already mentioned in web-page:
 > [http:// www.jyu.fi/intl/eng/courses/index.html](http://www.jyu.fi/intl/eng/courses/index.html)
 >
 > Yours
 > [First name] [Initial of last name]
 >
 > *****
 > [Signature]
 > *****
 >
 > ----- Original Message -----
 > From: [First name] [Last name] [xxxxxx@xxxxx.xxxxxx.lt]
 > Date: March 30 2001 14:12
 > To: [First name] [Last name]
 > Subject: information
 >
 > Dear [First name],
 >
 > thanks for your e-mail. I will try to arrange some informational
 > materials to be sent to you. Could you send me, if possible, some
 > information on undergraduate and graduate courses in [name of
 > field] and [name of field] available at your university during the
 > next academic year.
 >
 > Looking forward to hearing from you.
 >
 > Best regards,
 >
 > [First name] [Last name]
 >
 > *****
 > [Signature]

There was a lot more variation in the use of names in the opening greetings than in the first part of the salutation. Table 5 shows that the writers used the first name of the recipient in 34% of the messages that contained a salutation. It was also rather common to use a combination of Ms, Mrs, or Mr and the last name of the receiver. About one fifth (22%) of the writers used this form. The third biggest group of names were the first name and last name combinations which occurred in 13% of the messages. Where names were used, they were most often combined with “dear” (72% of the messages). “Hi” or “hello” with a name only appeared in about one tenth of the messages (9%). An opening greeting with a name only was rare (2% of the messages). Table 5 further shows that 13% of the e-mails contained no name in the salutation. When no name was used, “hello” was clearly the most popular salutation followed by “hi”. It is noteworthy that almost all the messages of this kind were written by students. An impersonal “colleague” (7%) between the coordinators as well as titles with last names or full names (e.g. Professor [last name]) (4%) occurred in the data as well. Other ways of referring

to the receiver were used in 8% of the messages. These included such examples as “Sir”, “Mrs [first name]”, “recipients”, “partners”, and “students”.

Table 5. Use of names in the salutations.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
First name	17	2	14	13	-	3	49	34
Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name	9	2	9	-	-	11	31	22
First name + last name	-	9	3	-	4	2	18	13
Title + name	3	1	-	1	-	-	5	4
Colleague	3	-	1	4	2	-	10	7
Others	4	2	1	3	1	-	11	8
No name	2	1	4	1	-	11	19	13
TOTAL	38	17	32	22	7	27	143	100%

There is also interesting variation if one looks at which forms are used and by whom to address a particular group of people. As evident from Table 6, the most popular way for coordinators to address students (C to S) was by their first names. This was found in 12 (44%) out of 27 messages. In five salutations (19%), coordinators used the full name of students. The use of Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name as well as other forms was rare. As to the manner students addressed coordinators (S to C), two methods were equally common: Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name and using no name at all. These appeared in 16 (41%) messages each. The use of a first name or a full name (first name + last name) in students' messages to coordinators only came up in the data altogether three times. The most popular manner for coordinators to address other coordinators (C to C) was clearly by using first names only. Thirty-three opening greetings (46%) out of 72 were of this kind. As compared to the first two groups (C to S and S to C), the C to C salutations contained more variation in the use of names. Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name (11), first name + last name (12), colleague (10), and other forms (19) appeared almost equally many times in the data, i.e. in 14-17% of the messages. Further, the three messages sent by coordinators to other members of staff used the first name of the

recipient (1), Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name (1), and no name at all (1). The two messages from other members of staff to coordinators used either the first name or addressed the recipient as Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name.

Table 6. Use of names in the salutations among the different senders and receivers of the messages.

	C to S	S to C	C to C	C to O	O to C	Total Number	Total %
First name	12	2	33	1	1	49	34.27
Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name	2	16	11	1	1	31	21.7
First name + last name	5	1	12	-	-	18	12.6
Title + name	-	-	5	-	-	5	3.5
Colleague	-	-	10	-	-	10	7
Others	1	-	10	-	-	11	7.7
No name	-	16	2	1	-	19	13.3
TOTAL	27	39	72	3	2	143	100%

C to S = from a coordinator to a student

S to C = from a student to a coordinator

C to C = from a coordinator to a coordinator

C to O = from a coordinator to other member of staff

O to C = from other member of staff to a coordinator

These results suggest that the role of the writers as either coordinators, students, or other members of staff as well as the professional relationship of the writers have an effect on the names used and thus also on the style of CMC. This can be demonstrated by the coordinators' tendency to address the students by their first names and by the students' tendency not to. Instead, the students play it safe and address the coordinators rather formally (Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name) or avoid the use of names altogether. One of the two students who addressed the coordinator by his/her first name in fact asked the coordinator whether it was appropriate for her to do so, which indicates that she was uncertain about the proper level of formality. The coordinator assured the student that using first names in Finland is appropriate in most of the cases but, at the same time, warned that there are also

people with whom a higher level of formality is in order. The initiating message sent by the student and the reply by the coordinator can be found below.

>>> [Name of the coordinator] 11/18 1:36 >>>
Dear [First name],

certainly you can call me [First name], that is how it is usually in Finland, just to use first names. Of course, there are some but very few old-fashioned professors who want to be called Professor this and that.

(...)

Kind regards,
[First name]

>>> xxxxx00@xxxxx.cz 11/14 2:05 >>>
Dear [First name]*,

(...)

With a wish for a good day
Sending greetings to you
[First name]

*if I may call you like that?

The use of first names is most common in the messages from a coordinator to another. This is not surprising given that the coordinators can be taken as equals in terms of their professional status. There were also cases where first names became to be used in the course of the message exchange. For example, a French coordinator addressed the coordinator F3 with a neutral salutation “dear partner” in the initiating message. F3 replied by using the full name of the coordinator (first + last name). The following message written by the French coordinator as well as F3’s reply began with “dear + first name”. Further, it is likely that many of the coordinators have already previously been in contact with each other and felt therefore comfortable to address the receiver by the first name. However, the frequent use of other, more formal names seems to indicate that the coordinators do not feel completely at ease with using first names with all the coordinators.

Some of the writers appear to avoid the question of informality versus formality by using neutral expressions such as “recipient”, “partner”, and “coordinator”. These expressions were used even when the name of the receiver was known (e.g. based on the e-mail address) or when the coordinators had already been in contact

before. This may be due to the ELF speaker's insecurity about the recipient's cultural norms. Because of this, the lingua franca speakers of English tend to avoid the possibly insulting behaviour and use a form that can be regarded as neutral. Several salutations of this kind were also used when announcing new Erasmus students selected for the partner university. Thus, the coordinators may use the same message with some alteration to save time. In a few cases, salutations such as these were employed when the message was addressed to a group of people. The use of both the first and the last name can also be taken as a rather neutral choice of words. Overall, the use of opening greetings in the present study is consistent with Gimenez' (2000:245) analysis of business e-mail messages in that there are a variety of ways the recipients are addressed indicating a more relaxed style than in formal letters. However, with as many as 71% of the openings starting with a traditional letter opening "dear", the lingua franca e-mail messages of the present study cannot be considered as remarkably informal.

5.3 Closings

Table 7 shows that the present data contained a variety of complimentary closings three of which seem to dominate. The most common of them was clearly "(with) best regards" (with or without "with") which appeared in 49% of the messages. "(With) kind regards" (28%) and "(with) best wishes" (22%) also came up often in the messages. "(Yours) sincerely" was relatively common as well (14%). However, the writers did not only resort to these four methods of closing but used a variety of other phrases as well. For example,

Warm regards
 Yours
 See you soon
 Yours faithfully
 All the best
 Greetings
 Moi moi
 Have a nice summer!
 Kindly

There were personal differences in the use of complimentary closings contrary to the opening greetings where "dear" was preferred by all the coordinators. For

example, the coordinator F1 favoured mainly “kind regards” to close the message whereas the coordinator F4 used both “best wishes” and “best regards”. Meierkord (1998:9) has found lingua franca speakers to employ well-known phrases only in order to avoid misunderstandings. The use of mainly one complementary closing could be due to this. It should be noted, however, that it can also be simply a matter of personal preference.

Table 7. Complimentary closings in the e-mail messages.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
(With) kind regards	18	4	2	1	2	1	28	19
(With) best regards	6	10	14	7	2	10	49	32
(With) best wishes	3	1	5	11	1	1	22	15
(Yours) sincerely	3	1	2	-	3	5	14	9
Looking forward to... alone (together)*	1 (3)	(5)	(9)	(5)	-	2 (3)	3 (25)	2 (17)
Thank you alone (together)*	4 (3)	(5)	(5)	(1)	(2)	6 (2)	10 (18)	7 (12)
Others alone (together)*	3	3 (2)	8	3 (3)	-	3 (1)	20 (6)	13 (4)
No additional closing	1	-	3	-	-	1	5	3
TOTAL	39 (45)	19 (30)	34 (47)	22 (31)	8 (10)	29 (35)	151 (200)	100%

* “Looking forward to”, “thank you” and other complimentary closings appeared both alone and with an additional closing such as “kind regards”.

As seen from Table 7, the complimentary closings did not always appear on their own but were instead often built of two components. The first number in the table refers to the number of complimentary closings that were used alone and the number in parenthesis to the complimentary closings that occurred together with another element. Altogether 31% of the messages ended with two complimentary closings:

- 1) Looking forward to... / Thank you / others

and

2) (with) kind regards / (with) best regards / (with) best wishes / (yours) sincerely /others.

“Looking forward to...” came forth in 17% of the messages together with an additional closing but was rarely used alone (in 2% of the messages). “Looking forward to...” was usually continued with a wish to be contacted soon or the matter in question to be dealt with. For example,

Looking forward to cooperating with you
I look forward to hearing from you
Looking forward to your answer
We look forward to the applications

Phrases similar in meaning, such as “I wait for your answer” or “I m waiting for your notice”, were also included in this category because the writers clearly aimed at conveying the same message as in the “standard” expressions such as “I look forward to hearing from you” but perhaps did not possess the English skills to produce these expressions. Regardless of the restricted language skills, the writers accomplish to communicate successfully. This can thus be considered as a feature of lingua franca communication.

Different variations of “thank you” were used together with other elements in 12% of the messages. For example,

Thank you very much for your help and best regards
Many thanks in advance for your attention and co-operation
Thank you very much for consideration and for answer, Yours faithfully
Thank you a lot! Best regards

However, “thank you” was not only used together with other complimentary closing elements but also appeared alone in 7% of the messages. Interestingly, all messages but one ending in “thank you” alone were written by students. Where “thank you” was used together with other elements, it occurred equally many times in the messages written by the students (9 messages) and by the coordinators (9 messages).

As to the other phrases used as a second element in the complimentary closings, only six instances were found. For example,

Welcome already now to Jyvaskyla! With best wishes
Have a good weekend and kind regards
Have a nice summer. Kindly

The complimentary closings such as “kind regards”, “best regards”, “best wishes”, and “greetings” were made more personal in 9 messages by including an extra element in the phrase. References to the location or to the weather were particularly common. For example,

Kind regards from cold Jyvaskyla, the autumn is really here now.
Best wishes from a very hot and sunny Jyvaskyla
Kind regards from Jyvaskyla

An important part in the closing section of the message was the name of the writer as only 3% of the senders of e-mail in the present data failed to include it in the end. As seen from Table 8, the whole name (first name + last name) was by far the most typical way to sign off with 29% of the writers using this method to close the message. In addition to that, another 21% of the messages ended in the whole name of the writer together with an automatic signature. Thus, altogether 50% of the writers signed the letter with their first and last names. The use of first names was also not uncommon. Twenty-six percent of the writers closed the messages with their first name, half of whom included an automatic signature in the message as well. Signing the message with an automatic signature alone appeared in 18% of the e-mail messages. Altogether, as many as 53% of the messages included an automatic signature.

Table 8. Use of names in the closings.

	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
First name	2	6	3	-	4	15	13
First name + signature	-	6	9	-	-	15	13
First name + last name	6	5	4	1	16	32	29
First name + last name + signature	8	6	4	3	3	24	21
Signature only	3	9	1	4	3	20	18
Other	-	1	-	-	-	1	1
Other + signature	-	-	-	-	2	2	2
No name	-	1	1	-	1	3	3
TOTAL	19	34	22	8	29	112	100%

In addition to providing the name of the sender, the automatic signature usually also included the address, telephone number, fax number, e-mail address, and web site. Some of the signatures were separated from the other text by different kinds of figures and could also contain advertisements for upcoming events such as in the following example:

```
*****
[First name] [LAST NAME]
International Mobility Office
[Name of the university]
XX 000 00000 [Town] xx 00 France
xxxxxx.xxxxxx@xxx-xxxx.fr
Tél. : (00) 0 00 00 00 00
Fax . (00) 0 00 00 00 00
*****
```

We hope you will join us for the [name of the conference], October 12-15, 2002, in [town].

Hope to have you with us ! Register at : www.xxxx.xxx

Whereas it was common for the coordinators to include an automatic signature in the message, it appeared in only one of the students' messages in the entire data. This signature also differed significantly from the coordinators' signatures

because it did not contain contact information. Instead, the signature consisted of the following funny figure:

(@ @)
-----o00- () -00o-----

Other ways to close a message were extremely uncommon with only three messages of this kind in the entire data, e.g. “Erasmus Coordinator’s Assi[s]tant”.

An interesting feature in the messages sent by the students to the coordinators was that in addition to signing them, the students often also introduced themselves at the beginning of the message. This was the case in only a few messages written by the coordinators. In all but one of these cases a new coordinator introduced herself. The introduction usually included at least one of the following elements: the name of the student, the country of origin, the home university, and the major subject. For example:

S to F2: My name is [first name] [last name] and I’m Polish student from the [name of university] in [town] in Poland. (...)

S to F3: I am an italian student, my name is [first name] [last name]. I have studied in your university in first term with Project Erasmus (...)

S to F3: i’m [first name] [last name], and i was erasmus there until june. (...)

S to F6: I’m [first name] [last name] from Lithuania. (...)

S to F6: I’m a student at the [name of the university] and I’m thinking of studying in Finland from January onwards. (...)

The name of the sender was thus available from as many as three or four sources in these messages: 1) in the automatic opening that provides the name and the e-mail address of the sender, 2) in the introduction, 3) in the signature, and 4) in the automatic signature.

These results seem to be in accordance with Hatch (1992:13), who notes that the sender of an e-mail message “may or may not provide an additional opening but will have to generate a closing” in that only 3% of the messages in the present data failed to include a complimentary closing and another 3% the name of the

sender. Gains's (1999:85-86,91-92) analysis of academic e-mail messages had similar results with 9% of the messages lacking a complimentary closing or the name of the sender. Different to the present study however was that 24% of the academic and 42% of the business messages in Gains's data contained the sender's name only without a complimentary closing. Lan's (2000:25-26) results in her analysis of academic e-mail messages in Hong Kong were along similar lines as well. About a third (32.9%) of the closings in her data included the name of the sender only. Lan's results differed from Gains and the present study in that as many as 25% of the messages did not provide a closing at all. Lewin and Donner (2002:34-35) found out that the sign-offs were even more rare in the corpus of newsgroup and mailing list messages, appearing in only 52% of the messages. It should not be forgotten however that the nature of personal e-mail messages is rather different from newsgroup and mailing list messages and therefore they are not directly comparable to each other.

Thus, the messages in the present data appeared to follow the conventions of traditional letter writing when it comes to closing the e-mail message, at least if one looks at the existence of complimentary closings and the name of the sender. Nevertheless, the closings also contained many elements that differ from the traditional letter and can instead be associated with CMC. For example, "thank you" or "thanks" was sometimes used alone instead of a more formal complimentary closing. The closing section was also often made more friendly and personal by various methods, such as signing off the message with one's first name. This as well as closing off the message with "thanks" only are present in the following example.

Hi,

I'm a student at the [name of a university] and I'm thinking of studying in Finland from January onwards. While visiting your website the following problem raised. The courses on the social science page, are that the only courses offered in English or are there also others? And if there are others, where can I find them?

Thanks, (first name)

Also, more than half the messages included an automatic signature which is considered a typical feature of CMC.

5.4 Conversational features

Although the number of conversational features was not great, some evidence of spoken-like discourse was found in the data. As seen from Table 9, informal words and phrases and discourse particles appeared in the data. Altogether, there were 26 instances of words and phrases which can be regarded as informal or colloquial. The most common of them were clearly “OK” and “thanks” but also a few other ones were detected. For example,

S to F1: Are there absolutely no way to some ? (...)

S to F1: (...) cause there is a connection with this of [name of town] by Erasmus. (...)

F1 to S: (...) who want to be called Professor this and that. (...)

S to F1: (...) That s the point! (...)

F2 to C: (...) I hope it is OK for you to continue (...)

C to F2: (...) the mails seem to have piled up a bit (...)

Table 9. Conversational features in the e-mail messages.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
a) Discourse particles	1	3	6	2	-	1	13	32
b) Echo questions	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
c) ‘How are you?’ questions	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
d) Informal words and phrases	10	6	1	3	-	6	26	63
TOTAL	13	9	10	6	0	9	41	100%

As to the differences between the students and the coordinators in the use of informal words and phrases as well as other conversational features, there were no significant differences in the number of times they occurred among the different groups of writers as seen from Table 10.

Table 10. Conversational features among the different senders and receivers of the messages.

	C to S	S to C	C to C	C to O	O to C	Total Number	Total %
a) Discourse particles	1	6	3	1	2	13	32
b) Echo questions	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
c) 'How are you?' questions	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
e) Informal words and phrases	2	12	10	2	-	26	63
TOTAL	4	23	14	3	3	41	100%

Students used informal words or phrases 12 times and coordinators 14 times. However, because the messages written by students constitute only 24% of all the messages in the data as compared to the 75% written by coordinators, it is clear that students incorporated colloquial language into their messages far more often than coordinators. Interestingly, coordinators appeared to be more at ease with using informal words and phrases in the messages written to other coordinators (14 messages) than to students (only 4 messages). Nevertheless, most of the messages written by coordinators kept “on the safe side” and used fairly moderate language which was not particularly formal or informal. The following two extracts are by no means typical examples of the kind of language used in the e-mails, but they serve as an example of the few messages which employed rather formal words and phrases.

C to F3: (...) We send you herewith the name and address of the student who have been selected to come to your institution next academic year. (...)

C to F2: (...) This is an exploratory e-mail in matter of prospective conclusion of the Bilateral Agreement SOCRATES/ERASMUS between your and our university. Your university is renowned not only in Finland and the European Union but also in other parts of Europe. (...)

Discourse particles such as “oh”, “well”, “so”, “then”, “I mean”, and “you know”, which are associated with spoken discourse, came up 12 times in the data and were thus not very common. For example,

F2 to C: (...) So, you don't need to worry, everything will be taken care of. (...)

S to F3: (...) I mean, I have already fullfilled the “Student Application Form” (...)

O to F3: (...) Then, regarding the description of the course, I have seen that it is already in the net. (...)

Echo questions and ‘how are you?’ questions only occurred once each. The echo question was made by a student who contacted the coordinator F6:

(...) and it said that students can get 1 finnish credit but that means 2 ECTS, right?

The clause classified here as a ‘how are you?’ question is in fact not a question at all. Nevertheless, it was counted as such because of the similar function at the beginning of the message.

F4 to S: Dear students, I hope you are all fine and that your practice is going well.
(...)

As compared to previous studies, the e-mail senders of the present study seem to have used conversational features rather moderately. Gains (1999:93-95) discovered in his analysis of academic e-mail messages that “[a] number of writers” had adopted conversational features in their writing. In contrast to the academic messages, however, Gains (1999:88) found no evidence of conversational features in the business e-mail messages. Although Gains does not state the exact numbers of conversational features, one may assume that the results of the present study lie somewhere in between Gains’s academic and business messages. Similar to the results of the present study, Lan (2000:26-27) found out in her study of academic messages in Hong Kong that the Chinese non-native speakers of English were more cautious of using conversational style than the academic native speaker informants in Gains’s study. Cautious use of conversational style thus seems to be a feature of lingua franca e-mail communication at least in the present study.

Despite their moderate use, conversational features were not without any significance. Students appeared to be more at ease with including such features in their writing than coordinators but, nevertheless, coordinators used them as well in messages where informal tone was appropriate. Gains (1999:95) notes that the lack of conversational features in his data of commercial e-mail messages could be explained by the fact that e-mail messages can have “a permanent and sometimes legal status” in the business world. The same applies to a number of messages in the present data as well, especially those that deal with Socrates or other agreements. Moderate use of conversational features may also account for the tendency of lingua franca communication to favour “safe” language in order to avoid insulting or embarrassing behaviour.

5.5 Syntax

Table 11 presents the syntactic CMC features found in the data (contracted forms are presented below separately). As seen from the table, syntactic CMC features were scarce apart from typing errors and abbreviations. No special spellings and only five cases of subject or verb omission and two emoticons were found.

Table 11. Syntactic CMC features in the messages.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
a) Subject or a verb omission	3	1	-	1	-	-	5	4
b) Special spelling	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
c) Abbreviations and special acronyms	19	9	5	11	1	5	50	45
d) Emoticons	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	2
e) Typing errors	15	6	14	12	3	5	55	49
TOTAL	37	17	20	24	4	10	112	100%

Typing errors were the most common type of syntactic CMC feature and occurred 55 times in the messages. It is important to note however that typing errors in the present study cannot necessarily be taken as a sign of hasty and careless style of CMC as the language used in them is lingua franca English. Instead, at least part of the errors can be explained by the varying competence of the writers in English. For example, the irregularities in the following extract written by a Spanish coordinator to the coordinator F4 are clearly due to the English skills of the writer: “(...) Yes, our Student whant to practise in Jyväskylä. He need 32 credicts of Practicum (...)”. Nevertheless, there were also several typing errors which can be regarded as true typing errors, i.e. those that have been made accidentally. For example,

C to F3: (...) Thank you in advanccce for hekping us. (...)

S to F3: (...) I have proble concerning computer usage. (...) Is there any posibility hat we obtain tha electronic keys you were talking about. (...)

C to F5: Bets regards,

S to F1: (...) now it isn t going through [name] anymoore, but through the foriegner office (...)

The typing errors detected in the data can be taken at least partly to support Lewin and Donner’s (2002:29) remark on the importance of speed and efficiency in CMC: “The purpose of CMC is to relay a message quickly; accuracy is secondary”. However, one should bear in mind that typing errors were not common in formal messages. For example, messages that involved making new Socrates agreements appeared to be very carefully written and rarely had major typing errors. There were also exceptions to this as demonstrated by the following extract from a coordinator in Slovakia. The overall style and the choice of words show a high degree of formality but, at the same time, there are two typing errors in the message (underlined).

To whom it may concern

This is an exploratory e-mail in matter of prospective conclusion of the Bilateral Agreement SOCRATES/ERASMUS between your and our university. Your university is renowned not only in Finland and the European Union but also in other parts of Europe. We have heard just the best comments on the academic environment, research and not the last – great opportunities for the foreign

students. (...) In the case of both-side satisfaction we woul be glad to continue cooperation between our universities and widen it to other fields as well. (...)

Yours faithfully

PhDr. [first name] [last name]

An interesting sub-group of the typing errors were the various ways “Jyväskylä” was written in the messages. These included versions such as Jyvalskya, jyvaskyla, juvaskyla, Jyuvaskyla, Javaskyla, and Jyuväskylä.

As to the differences among students and coordinators in making typing errors (Table 12), the number of errors was higher among coordinators (34 errors) than students (20 errors). However, if one takes into account the total number of messages written by coordinators (90) and students (19) it is evident that there were proportionately more typing errors in the messages written by students. There are grounds for holding this as a characteristic of both CMC and lingua franca. On the one hand, one could assume that younger people are more familiar with the informal nature of CMC resulting in more careless typing. On the other, typing errors can be taken as a sign of students’ varying educational background in English.

Table 12. Use of syntactic CMC features among the different senders and receivers of the messages.

	C to S	S to C	C to C	C to O	O to C	Total Number	Total %
a) Omission of a subject or a verb	-	2	3	-	-	5	4
b) Special spelling	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
c) Abbreviations and special acronyms	1	5	42	1	1	50	45
e) Emoticons	-	-	1	1	-	2	2
e) Typing errors	1	20	34	-	-	55	49
TOTAL	2	27	80	2	1	112	100%

Abbreviations appeared 50 times in the messages and were thus rather common in contrast to special acronyms such as “ASAP” or “IMHO” which we not found in the data at all (Tables 11 and 12). Abbreviations were particularly frequent in the messages written by coordinators and often involved terms which were closely related to the universities and the Erasmus programme. They were thus professional jargon, which coordinators could safely expect the other coordinators to understand. Table 12 shows that 44 abbreviations occurred in the coordinators’ messages (C to S, C to C, and C to O together) whereas there were only five of them in the messages sent by students. Below are a few examples of the abbreviations found in the data.

F1 to C: (...) your int’1 office (...)
 S to F1: (...) “Java” (familiar shortname for Javaskyla .-) (...)
 F1 to C: (...) IT-FI, one student, 4 months (...)
 C to F2: (...) Finland-Poland 1 pers./6 months each (...)
 F2 to C: (...) the Dept. of (...)
 C to F2: (...) our central Int. Office in [town] (...)
 C to F4: (...) usually EFL teachers or other teachers (...)
 C to F6: (...) second semester of ac. year 2001/2002 (...)
 S to F6: (...) 2-4 ECTS cr. (...)

The lack of acronyms in the data is in accordance with the results of Lewin and Donner (2002:32-33), who found special spellings in 14% and acronyms in 5% of their data of newsgroup and mailing list messages. The results of the present analysis and Lewin and Donner’s study are thus opposite to what CMC is generally perceived to be at least with respect to acronyms. In fact, even some Internet e-mail guides warn against the overuse of acronyms such as BTW (by the way) or IMHO (in my humble opinion) because the receiver may not be familiar with the terms (e.g. Houten Kemp 1998). Meierkord (2000:8-11) discovered that lingua franca speakers aim at using language which all participants can understand. This may also explain the scarceness of acronyms. As the sender of the message cannot be certain that the receiver understands them, it is safer to avoid the use of them altogether.

Table 13 shows the number of messages which contained contracted forms. As seen from the table, 18% of all the messages included contracted forms such as “I’m” or “can’t” and the same percentage (18%) both contracted and basic forms.

The majority (64%) of the messages did not include contracted forms at all. An interesting detail detected in six messages was the lack of apostrophes in the contracted forms as in the following example sent by a French student to the coordinator F1.

I receive your email and my university didn t tell me that it s wasn t possible to follow the courses in jyvaskyla after [town]. (...) It doesn t matter if it s a different place. (...) I would like to meet you if it s possible. (...)

Table 13. Number of messages with or without contracted forms.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
With	12	4	3	2	-	6	27	18
Without	17	11	25	18	8	18	97	64
Both	10	4	6	2	-	5	27	18
TOTAL	39	19	34	22	8	29	151	100%

Contracted forms were particularly rare in the messages sent from one coordinator to another, as seen from Table 14. As many as 67 of the total of 90 C to C messages did not contain these. Coordinators were slightly more relaxed when writing messages to students, as a little less than half (8) of the 19 C to S messages used either contracted forms only or both the forms. Students appeared to be much more comfortable with using contracted forms than their coordinators. About 60% of their messages included contracted forms (15 messages with contracted forms only and 6 messages with both kinds of forms).

Table 14. Use of contracted forms among the different senders and receivers of the messages.

	C to S	S to C	C to C	C to O	O to C	Total Number	Total %
Yes	1	15	11	-	-	27	18
No	11	15	67	2	2	97	64
Both	7	6	12	2	-	27	18
TOTAL	19	36	90	4	2	151	100%

Although contracted forms did not appear in the data as often as complete subject-verb structures, their use in more than one third of the messages is not without significance as far as ELF and CMC are concerned. Gimenez (2000:243) notes that contracted forms “indicate the informality in the e-mail style and provide evidence of the stylistic similarities between electronic mail and spoken unplanned discourse”. When comparing business e-mail messages to letters, Gimenez (2000:247) discovered that the e-mail messages contained twice the number of contracted forms than the business letters. As most messages under analysis in the present study were rather official and non-personal, coordinators may have consciously made a choice to prefer basic forms. At the same time, students may not have even been aware of the fact that contracted forms are not favoured in formal communication, depending of course on their English skills.

5.6 Punctuation

Table 15 shows that capitalization (use of lower case letters) and decapitalization (use of upper case letters) appeared in 18% of the messages. Carefree use of punctuation marks was detected in 10% of the messages.

Table 15. The number of messages including capitalization or decapitalization and carefree use of punctuation marks.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Total Number	Total %
a) Capitalization or decapitalization	12	4	2	1	2	6	27	18
b) Carefree use of punctuation marks	3	1	2	3	3	3	15	10
c) No a) or b)	24	14	30	18	3	20	109	72
TOTAL	39	19	34	22	8	29	151	100%

Only three messages were written entirely or almost entirely in lower case, and in fact they were written by the same person, the coordinator F1. The rest of the 27 messages included some decapitalized elements, such as decapitalized names, countries, and towns. For example, a Dutch coordinator signed her name in one letter as “vera dutchman” (name changed) and in the other as “Vera Dutchman”. In a few messages, some sentences started with a capital letter and some did not as in these extracts:

C to F4:

(...) Our autumn term lasts from 25 August to about 18th December and spring term from beginning of January till May the 9th, when the exams start.

agreement for 2003-2006 is good. I am contacting you for the renewal of the Socrates/Erasmus agreement. (...)

S to F6:

(...) I'm very interested in taking a course about methods and techniques in [name]. before coming here to Jyväskylä I found in a guide of your University the following course: “[name]”. Will be arrange in the current accademic year? (...)

The names of months and days were decapitalized in five messages. It appears however that the writers were not necessarily aware of the correct spelling of these words. In other words, it is not likely that the decapitalized months and days can be taken as a sign of CMC but, instead, they strongly point towards the writers' lingua franca status.

Three messages were written entirely or almost entirely in capitals. One of the messages was written by the same coordinator (F1) who wrote two decapitalized letters. The other two were written by a Polish student. The coordinator's message was a reply with the original message included. Capitals were used to separate the original message from the reply as seen from the following extract.

Hi [first name],

please find my answers after your respective question.
Kind regards, [first name]

>>> 09/23 6:23 >>>

Dear [first name] [last name],

I have two questions about the term paper and two about my studying here.

Term paper:

1. I want to write a paper about [name of field], but I heard (...). Is this true?

[FIRST NAME] IS PREGNANT AND WILL NOT WORK DURING THE
SPRING TERM 2003. DURING THIS AUTUMN IT IS STILL POSSIBLE TO
WRITE SOME PAPER FOR HER.

2. (...) Is there a possibility to write about this subject?

I WILL CHECK THIS ONE. I WILL GET BACK TO YOU SOON
REGARDING THIS ISSUE.

(...)

In a few messages, capitals were used in order to emphasize a point such as in this example from a Dutch coordinator to the coordinator F5: “(...) the student has to COMPLETELY fill out the form on the computer, print it out, sign it and sent it to the address mentioned on top of the application form. (...)”. The same method was used in a message sent by a Lithuanian coordinator to the coordinator F2:

(...) We would also like to switch emphasis from our undergraduates to master's and doctoral students going to Jyväskylä. Thus, from our side, we would like to propose a structure as follows:

[town] – Jyväskylä : 2 GRADUATE students * 6 months/student
2 staff members*3 weeks per member (...)

Carefree use of punctuation marks was slightly less common than capitalization or decapitalization and was found in 15 (10%) messages. Mostly unconventional use

of punctuation marks involved sentences with more than one punctuation mark (used either on purpose or accidentally) or with none. For example,

F1 to C: Our department of [name] has agreed to be a partner in the IP [name]....

S to F3: Is it possible that when i will ask you, you can send me again the official transcript with all the marks, the exam.. and all will be still valid..

C to F4: Will you please tell if that is possible?.

S to F6: Or do we have to write an essay?...

There were also several writers who used punctuation marks unconventionally throughout the message. Some writers, for example, used a space before a punctuation mark such as in this message written by a French student:

(...) The only problem is that my italian exams finish end of february whereas the second semester in the university of Jyvalska starts beginning of january . I told about it to my french coordinator who invited me to make you take part in this problem . I would like to know how to deal with this problem to come studying in your university .

Capitalization, decapitalization, and carefree use of punctuation marks appeared in 24 messages written by coordinators and 18 written by students (Table 16). If one takes into account the total number of messages written by each group, it is evident that students used such elements more than coordinators. As many as 50% of the students' messages and 21% of the coordinators' messages contained these features. Capitalized or decapitalized elements were in particular common in the messages written by students and appeared in 15 out of the total of 36 students' messages.

Table 16. The number of messages including capitalization or decapitalization and carefree use of punctuation marks among the different senders and receivers of the messages.

	C to S	S to C	C to C	C to O	O to C	Total Number	Total %
a) Capitalization or decapitalization	3	15	9	-	-	27	18
b) Carefree use of punctuation marks	1	3	11	-	-	15	10
No a) or b)	15	18	70	4	2	109	72
TOTAL	19	36	90	4	2	151	100%

Lewin and Donner (2002:32) found unorthodox punctuation in as many as 46% of the newsgroup and mailing list messages they studied. When compared to this figure, the percentage of unconventional punctuation in the present data (28%) does not seem very high. However, as Lewin and Donner's study concentrated on a more informal mode of communication than the present analysis, the higher number is not surprising. When one talks about the TV show "Seinfeld", the computer game "Unreal", or even "Windows 95" in one's free time, as was done in Lewin and Donner's data, it is natural to employ a more informal tone. Thus, given the more formal nature of the messages in the present data, it is in fact surprising that as many as 28% of the messages included capitalized and decapitalized elements or carefree use of punctuation.

5.7 Awareness of the medium

References to e-mail as a medium were not common apart from various apologies for not replying to a message earlier. It appears that the writers felt obliged to apologize if messages were not replied to in a day or two, as shown by the following three examples.

F1 to C: "For some reason I found your email from July in my mailbox, and obviously I have not replied to you. I'm truly sorry for that. (...)"

C to F2: First of all my apologies for not responding earlier to the mail you sent to [first name] [last name], the mails seem to have piled up a bit... (...)

C to F3: I am sorry for the delay but we had some problems with Internet (...)

If the Erasmus agreements are made for a longer period of time, a yearly e-mail confirmation of the continuation of the agreement is sufficient. Some coordinators even agreed on slight changes to the agreements by e-mail without signing a new paper document. Thus, in these cases, an e-mail message was considered as an official agreement. However, some writers did not seem to be entirely comfortable with this but insisted on drawing up paper documents as well. This is evident from the following messages.

C to F2: (...) For formal reasons I will send also the written copy of the agreement by mail (our Socrates National Agency prefers signed paper document, not e-mails). (...)

F1 to C: (...) To my understanding – if we keep the flows the same – an email confirming the agreement continuation is enough. If [name of the university] wish to have a new signed agreement it can be done, of course. (...)

In general, the e-mail users of the present study appear to be at ease with e-mail as a medium at least if references to it are taken as evidence. Such remarks as “I need a 5 minute tutorial on mailing back articles” or “I haven’t experimented yet with sending files by email. It’s well beyond my current “competence”!” as found in Gains’ (1999:96-97) corpus, did not occur in the present data.

5.8 Summary of the results

The messages under analysis dealt with various topics associated with the Erasmus student exchange programme. Most of the subject headings (81%) gave precise information on the content of the message. The opening and closing greetings seemed to follow the conventions of traditional letter writing as they opened typically with the salutation “dear + name” (95% of the messages) and closed with a complimentary closing such as “(with) best regards” and the name of the writer. In the salutations, the use of first names (34%) was most common followed by a combination of Ms, Mrs or Mr and the last name of the recipient

(22%). Using the whole name of the writer (first name + last name) with or without an automatic signature was the most typical way to sign off the message (50%). About one quarter (26%) of the messages closed with the writer's first name with or without an automatic signature.

The number of conversational features in the messages was not great but, nevertheless, some evidence of spoken-like discourse was discovered in the data. For example, informal words and phrases were found. Students appeared to be more at ease with incorporating conversational features into their messages than coordinators. Further, apart from typing errors and abbreviations, syntactic CMC features were scarce. With regard to typing errors, it must be noted that in this study they cannot necessarily be regarded as a sign of the careless style of CMC but instead as an indication of the lingua franca status of the writers. Some capitalized or decapitalized elements (18% of the messages) as well as unconventional punctuation (10%) were found in the data.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to find out how frequently the features associated with CMC in the literature appeared in the e-mail messages collected from six Erasmus coordinators of the University of Jyväskylä. The study also considered whether the relationship and the role of the writers as either coordinators, students, or other members of staff had an influence on the frequency of the CMC features. In addition, it was examined whether the messages contained properties that could be considered as lingua franca features. The study thus aimed at taking into account both the CMC and ELF perspective as it looked at e-mail messages exchanged between European lingua franca speakers of English in an academic context.

The results of the present study may be summarized by stating that features typical to CMC were found in the messages. At the same time, however, some CMC features described in the literature were not detected at all or not to a significant extent. As to the CMC features that were discovered, it should be noted that apart from the subject headings and the closing section, only a moderate number of them were found. In accordance with what is believed to be characteristic of CMC, almost all the messages included a subject heading. Similarly, there was also a closing section in almost all the messages. Moreover, the use of “thank you” at the end and signing off the message with one’s first name only as well as automatic signatures were discovered in the messages. Nevertheless, as many as three out of four writers also used such complimentary closings as “kind regards” and “best regards” which are rather associated with letter writing. Further, the opening conventions of the present data differed from most of the earlier CMC studies in that as many as 95% of the openings contained a salutation, many of which started with “dear”. Thus, the writers in the present data seemed to count on traditional standards of letter writing at least in the opening and, to some extent, the closing section. Some evidence of conversational style was also detected in the data. Informal words and phrases as well as discourse particles such as “so”, “then”, and “I mean” were discovered. The messages also revealed typing errors and abbreviations which are generally regarded as a sign of e-mail’s speed and efficiency. What is noteworthy, however,

is that acronyms such as “ASAP”, which are also thought to serve as a time saving tool in CMC, were absent in the present data. Thus, put in a nutshell, the ELF speakers of the present study were not as inventive in their use of CMC features as the native speakers of earlier studies (e.g. Gains 1999, Ginenez 2000).

As to the second research question, it was discovered that the role of the writers as either coordinators, students or other members of staff had an effect on the use of typical CMC features. Students were more inclined to include them into their messages than coordinators. For example, almost all the messages starting with an informal “hi” or “hello” and appearing without the name of the receiver were written by students. Students also used more informal words and phrases, although coordinators incorporated these elements into their messages as well, especially when writing to other coordinators. In addition, the professional role of the writers had an effect on the use of names. For example, coordinators addressed students by their first names but not vice versa. Instead, students rather used the forms “Ms/Mrs/Mr + last name” or avoided the use of names altogether. Further, typing errors, contracted forms, and decapitalized elements were more common in the messages written by students.

The third research question attempted to examine the lingua franca features in the messages. What stands out in the study is the fact that many of the features found in the data cannot not be taken automatically as a sign of the careless style of CMC but instead as an indication that the writers used English as a lingua franca and had thus varying competence in it due to, for example, the varying educational background. Although not examined in this study, it is also likely that the diverse cultural background of the writers had some effect on the kind of English each individual used and what each writer thought of as the appropriate kind of English for the message at hand. Further, previous research on ELF has shown that lingua franca communication is successful despite the fact that the discourse may contain abnormalities which would be regarded as errors if compared to English as a native language (Seidlhofer 2001:148-149). The same appears to apply to ELF of the present study. Thus, regardless of the grammatical “mistakes” such as typing errors, the senders and recipients of the e-mail

messages seemed to understand each other, at least if one looks at the replies to the original messages.

The results also lend support to Meierkord's (2000:10-11) assumption that ELF speakers avoid insulting and embarrassing behaviour. This can be demonstrated for example by the use of such neutral expressions as "partner" and "coordinator" in the openings as well as the moderate use of conversational features. The lack of attention grabbing subject lines, which have been found in earlier studies (e.g. Gains 1999), can also be taken as a means of avoiding offensive behaviour towards the recipient. Furthermore, when looking at the openings and closings of the messages, it was discovered the writers made use of such typical phrases as "dear Mary" and "kind regards". Meierkord (2000:10) offers an explanation to why the writers did not choose more informal ways to open or close a message: when lingua franca speakers are not sure which kind of greeting is appropriate, they prefer to use expressions they know to be correct in British or American English.

It is difficult to say whether the findings of this study, such as the use of neutral and formal expressions in the messages, is caused by the lingua franca or CMC situation or, instead, by some other factors. For example, the professional context in which the messages were written, i.e. Erasmus coordinators exchanging e-mail messages with other coordinators or students in an academic environment, is likely to have influenced the language and perhaps directed it to a somewhat formal direction. In this context, the kind of informal and inventive language one may use in personal messages is often inappropriate. The characteristics which may appear as CMC or lingua franca features may also derive from the fact that informal e-mail style depends on an already established relationship between the sender and recipient (Gimenez 2000:241-246). In the present study, this was seen in the sequences of messages which often started in a conventional and traditional business letter manner but, in the course of the e-mail exchange, became more and more informal.

Previous research has stressed the importance of teaching ELF in the classrooms (e.g. Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001). Having examined the lingua franca English of

the Erasmus coordinators and students in the present study, it is easy to support this view. However, before one can properly teach English as a lingua franca in schools, it is necessary to find out more about the nature of it. Thus, further research is needed. Meanwhile, it is important to raise the ELF learners' and users' awareness of the differences in the use of English and prepare them with tools to succeed in lingua franca situations. In addition, intercultural skills and knowledge about different cultures are needed. Bearing in mind the growing number of international students in the Finnish higher education and in the whole of Europe, lingua franca skills should be taught to everyone, including those students who are not intending to study abroad themselves. One does not have to travel abroad to speak English any more: English is often needed as a contact language in one's own country as well.

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