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## **Error Analysis: A Case Study on Non-Native English Speaking College Applicants' Electronic Mail Communications**

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Error Analysis: A Case Study on Non-Native English Speaking College Applicants' Electronic  
Mail Communications

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by

Casey Kraichoke  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Science in Human Environmental Sciences, 2014

May 2017  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to discover major writing problems international college applicants make when composing electronic communications by analyzing the nature and distribution of their writing errors. Additionally, the researcher seeks to discover if there is a relationship between non-native English speakers' (NNS) writing errors and demographics, which include: gender, country of origin, country of origin's official language, program level, and program of study. The researcher hypothesizes that countries with English as an official language and the language of instruction in higher education are the most significant predictor of non-native English speakers' writing errors in terms of count and type. Errors were analyzed according to taxonomy: grammatical, lexical, semantic, mechanics, and syntax writing errors to determine if there is a recurring type of error that can be targeted by EFL and ESL educators to increase English language learners' writing abilities. Due to the nature of email writing, this study also examines the elements of an email: email address, subject line, body paragraph(s), closing, and signature, with a special emphasis on the body paragraph(s). The researcher evaluated errors and determined cultural appropriateness of emails. Using this method, the researcher identifies and provides the means of remediation for some of the most commonly recurring and detrimental communicative missteps experienced by NNS within the usage of the ubiquitous system of electronic mail.

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## **I. Introduction**

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

In the digital age, relative geographic distance is no longer a factor in communication. However, the issue of disparity in communication between culturally and linguistically diverse communicators can remain a barrier to the true and clear proliferation of ideas. As American universities are continuously increasing their respective international student populations, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become a popular method of digital exchange. Instead of face-to-face, on-campus communication, international students and university staff communicate online. This change in communication has caused email to become a crucial aspect of admissions in higher education. Email is widely accepted as a technological means of communication in educational and workforce environments (Brunner, Yates, & Adams, 2008). As online and web-assisted education continually grows, more educational interaction is taking place asynchronously, which refers to communication that is not real-time.

The University of Arkansas International Admissions Office receives approximately 150 emails each week from prospective students with questions about the application process, admission requirements, and status of their applications. Emails allow senders and recipients to clarify procedures, seek assistance, update information, and exchange ideas. Email is an effective method of communication because it allows students, faculty, and staff to communicate promptly with a paper trail. Additionally, communication through email allows the advantages of convenience and the ability to communicate between just two people, or among a large group (Brown, 2005).

Therefore, the ability for prospective students to write clear, effective, and efficient emails is proving to be a vital step in seeking admissions to institutions of higher education. A

poorly written email, which encompasses formatting, wording, grammar, and style, can reflect poorly on the sender and result in an unprofessional impression (Granberry 2007). In the context of college admissions, an email containing numerous errors and/or errors which lead to miscommunication can ultimately result in an incomplete application or denied admission decision. Due to the fact that international applicants must write in a second or foreign language, it is imperative for ESL and EFL teachers to adequately prepare college seeking students to be able to converse professionally through digital exchanges, particularly email. While emails provide a fast, free, and convenient mode of communication, if not written properly, the understanding of the email message's content can be inhibited. Cross cultural communication is difficult, even when conducted face-to-face where gestures and tonality can be used to aid in communication. Therefore, written communication, in the form of electronic mail, can be especially challenging. Through this analysis, ESL and EFL educators will be able to teach college bound English language learners how to communicate clearly and effectively through the increasingly critical medium of electronic mail.

### *1.2 Significance of the Study*

Nearly 1,044,000 international students enrolled in public and private institutions in the United States during the 2015 - 2016 academic school year (IIE). Higher education institutions strive to recruit international students, who bring a “wealth of talent, knowledge, and awareness that institutions want their students to prosper from...in addition to providing an increased source of tuition revenue, as well as considerable economic benefits to those communities where they enroll” (Kunin, 2012). The University of Arkansas is proud to host nearly 1,500 international students from 112 countries. Through a collaborative process involving faculty, staff, academic deans, students and the chancellor, eight guiding priority areas for the university



have emerged, including: Enriching Campus Diversity and Inclusion. With this guiding priority, the University of Arkansas aims to “diversify along many dimensions [their] faculty, staff and students and at the same time create an environment and atmosphere that is welcoming and inclusive for all.”

The University of Arkansas, like all accredited American institutions of higher education, requires applicants whose native language is not English to submit evidence of English proficiency. The University defines native language as “the language the applicant grew up speaking in their family, community, and nation.” Students must attain minimum required scores on the TOEFL, IELTS or another approved English language proficiency test to be eligible for regular admissions. Although this requirement can be waived if applicants meet certain criteria, such as obtain a satisfactory SAT verbal score or ACT English score, complete English Composition I and II with grades of C or above, or complete a Master’s degree from a recognized university in a country where English is the native language, all NNS’s are mandated to provide evidence of English proficiency in order to be considered for regular admissions into an accredited college or university in the United States. Additionally, upon admission, nonnative English speakers must submit a satisfactory writing score on an accepted test. “Students who meet the minimum writing score will not be required to take additional language instruction,” but “students with lower scores will be required to successfully complete one or more writing support courses” (University of Arkansas).

According to Brown (2000), to become proficient in the English language, learners must acquire an adequate understanding and ability for the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among those language skills, writing is the most difficult because it requires a higher level of productive language control (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

According to Abu Shawish, (2009) writing requires more effort to master than other language skills because writers must compose sentences and be knowledgeable of appropriate vocabulary to convey his/her intended meaning in an organized and coherent format. Writing is a complex process that requires advanced linguistic skills, and is often considered to be the most difficult skill in English, producing many types and numbers of errors (Boroomand and Rostami, 2013). Due to the nature of writing, which requires a range of vocabulary, syntax and morphology, EFL learners often make errors in writing (Cumming, 2001). Students' writing errors stem from their inability to generate ideas, organize discourse, control sentence structures, choose appropriate vocabulary, and use effective styles (Madkour, 2016). An error is an "identifiable alteration of the grammatical elements of a native speaker," which is simply an utterance that differs from a native speaker (Brown, 2007). Teachers often view errors negatively, working to correct every error, usually viewing these errors as a sign that their teaching is ineffective. However, EFL teachers can use error correction as an essential element in their teaching process (Xie and Jiang, 2007). Errors show the students' current proficiency of the target language, notifying teachers which areas to focus on (James, 1998).

Regardless of the challenging aspects of writing, L2 writing is widely considered in international EFL/ESL testing systems such as TOEFL and IELTS (Askarzadeh Torghabeh & Yazdanmehr, 2010). Writing is a necessary skill for all prospective higher education applicants. The GRE and GMAT, which requires test takers to write, is a necessary test graduate school applicants must take. Before an applicant is admitted as a degree-seeking student, colleges and universities ensure applicants can write proficiently, and specifically be able to construct proper sentences and convey ideas. The ability of international students to write in L2 is crucial to

converse with faculty, staff, and peers. Additionally, written business communication skills are important for students to succeed in their future career (Tiensawangchai, 2014).

### *1.3 Objectives of the Study*

To evaluate NNS college applicants' writing, this study will examine the emails prospective students sent the international admissions office during 2016 to determine what kind of errors participants make, and determine which linguistic skills EFL and ESL educators should focus on in L2 writing classes. The researcher analyzed each participant's email, word by word, and line by line. Because the nature of writing an email differs from other forms of writing, such as the presence of an email address and the use of a subject line, the unique structuring of emails will be examined for correctness in terms of linguistic and cultural appropriacy.

Researchers in the field of EFL and ESL have conducted a variety of studies to determine if gender impacts writing proficiency. Generally, female EFL and ESL students tend to make fewer writing mistakes (Saeed, Ghani, Van & Abraham 1990, Nyikos 1990, Oxford 1993, Kann 2001). The researcher performed a statistical test to determine if the female participants in this study committed fewer writing errors than the male participants.

NNS applicants from countries where English is an official language commonly question if they qualify for an English language proficiency test waiver. Among determining the most frequent types of errors committed by NNS, the study aims to determine if writers from countries where English is an official language produce fewer writing errors than participants whose countries of origins have official languages that do not English.

Additionally, the researcher determined if the college level (i.e. undergraduate or graduate degree seeking students) and program of study (i.e. major) influences writing

compositions. It can reasonably be assumed that students with more years of study, and subsequently, more years of writing, will be more proficient writers. This study aims to determine if graduate degree seeking students, particularly Ph.D. students, make fewer writing errors. Furthermore, the program of study one decides relates to his/her interests, and perhaps, strengths. Therefore, the researcher intends to discover if there is a correlation between the applicants' programs of study and writing errors.

Lastly, the study intends to learn if geographic location, and specifically country of origin has an impact on writing errors. Although this study was unable to determine each applicants' native language, the categorization of errors by country and geographic region can help EFL teachers in specific areas of the world cater to their students' unique L2 writing struggles. Also, by knowing what errors certain students are prone to producing, ESL teachers will be better equipped to anticipate each students' writing predicaments.

For educators and administrators in the digital age, email has become a popular method of written communication with students. It is common for a student to send an email with a salutation such as: 'dear any person who read this' or 'Best Greetings!!!!' Through the analysis of emails international college applicants sent the admissions office, teachers can understand common mistakes ELLs make, and create lesson plans and curriculum to teach students how to properly write and construct emails.

#### *1.4 Time and Place of the Study*

This study was conducted in the Office of International Admissions within the Graduate School and International Education at the University of Arkansas. Emails submitted to the International Admissions Office (iao@uark.edu) from prospective non-native English speaking

international applicants from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016 were analyzed to determine type and count of writing errors. The researcher selected emails sent in 2016 which contained complete information about each applicant's gender, geographic location, country of origin, official language, program of study, and program level.

The first eight qualified emails starting from the first day of the even months were selected, and the first eight qualified emails starting from the last day of the odd months were selected, except the months of January and December. To gather 100 total participants' emails, the first 10 qualified emails starting from the last day of January were selected, and the first 10 qualified emails starting from the first day of December were selected. Only participants' first email sent to the admissions office was analyzed for errors.

All names and email addresses remain anonymous. The gathered data was assigned a random number and the research raw data is only be available to the researcher. Participants are protected to the extent required by University policies and federal regulations. Written approval from the Director of Graduate and International Recruitment and Admissions, Lynn Mossesso, Dean for the Graduate School and International Education, Kim LaScola Needy, and Associate Dean for the Graduate School and International Education, Patricia Koski, was obtained for the researcher to analyze emails sent to the University of Arkansas International Admissions Office.

### *1.5. Scope and Limitation*

The results of the present study, which is perhaps best categorized as a case study, may not reflect trends in general. Data and subsequent findings are specific to the emails sent to the International Admissions Office at the University of Arkansas between January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016. Results represent only University of Arkansas international applicants'

errors. The university's strategic recruiting efforts and international partnerships impact the countries of origin from which applicants applied. Additionally, the college programs and degree levels offered by the university impacts the type of participants who are able to apply.

This study analyzed only emails which contained identifying information about the participant's gender, country of origin, program of study, program level. Therefore, only highly informative emails whose writers felt the need to disclose this information were included in the study. If an applicant failed to include all four categories, he/she was disqualified from the data collection.

The emails in this study only included the first email sent from the applicant. The University of Arkansas uses the software: Pardot and Salesforce, to reach out to prospective applicants. Therefore, some participants' emails are replies to these automated communication plans. This impacts the subject line, as a reply email does not require the sender to compose a new subject.

### *1.6. Definition of Terms*

ETS – Educational Testing Service

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ESL – English as a Second Language

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

GRE – Graduate Record Examination

IELTS – International English Language Testing System

L1 – First Language

L2 – Second Language

NNS – Non-native Speaker

NS – Native Speaker

TOEFL – Test of English as Foreign Language

## **II. Review of the Literature**

Locker (2006) suggested better writing allows communicators to: 1) save time, 2) make their efforts more effective, 3) communicate their points more clearly, and 4) build goodwill. However, before a writer can begin, he/she must have the fundamental linguistic knowledge and understanding of a language system to compose expositions and pedagogical grammar. A pedagogical grammar is defined as “a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints” (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, pg. 124). Therefore, language teachers should focus on three dimensions: form, meaning, and use (Reishaan, 2013).

A variety of research in the field of writing, particularly EFL and ESL writers’ errors, was conducted. First, the researcher examined the prevalence of English. Then, the researcher reviewed the cause of NNS’ writing errors and discussed the field of error analysis. Ultimately, the researcher expanded on the results found through error analysis in relation to both gender and L1.

### *2.1. World Englishes*

English is the language of globalization, and according to Qiong (2004), by 2050 approximately half the world will be proficient in English. Because of the large quantities of people speaking English, varieties of the English language are emerging. World Englishes (WE) is a term used to acknowledge the diversity found in the language. “Global Englishes,” “international Englishes” and “new Englishes,” are also used to explain the ‘distinct, localized or indigenized varieties of the English language’ that have emerged throughout the world (Bolton,

2005). English does not have one single base of authority, prestige, and normativity' (Mesthrie & Bhatt 2008). Seargeant (2012) finds that English is 'not as a single, monolithic entity, but as something that has multiple varieties and forms. English is a worldwide, international, intercultural, linguistic phenomenon (Young and Walsh, 2010).

Because today's globalized society relies increasingly on English as a means for speakers of different languages to communicate, higher education has become internationalized (Crystal 1997, 2003). By default, there has been an increase in online communication, including emails from prospective students to admissions staff. One reason for this increase in English prominence is the use of English as the language of academic publications, conferences and international organizations (Eisenberg, 1996). The United States and United Kingdom are attracting an increasing number of students to study abroad for a portion or the entirety of their degree (The Economist, 2005). The internationalization of higher education relies predominately on English as a means of communication between peers, professors, and staff.

## *2.2. EFL/ESL Writing Errors*

Written communication allows the writer to express his/her idea to a reader. If written clearly and exactly, a bridge of communication can take place between the writer and reader. Writing is a conscious, deliberate and planned activity (Chidambaram, 2005). Writing can help English language learners by allowing students to adventure with language (Reimes, 1993). Writing can also help students practice what they have learned through authentic application of the newly learned structures and vocabulary (Alfaki, 2015). However, NNS writing errors differ from the ones that appear in NS writing (Harris and Silva, 1993).



Corder (1971) stated that errors are the result of some failure of performance. Norrish (1983) defined an error as a systematic deviation that happens when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong. Lenin (1991) classified an error as a linguistic form or forms that a NS would not produce in the same context. Errors can be global or local errors.

Learners' errors are classified as either global or local, with global errors causing a hindrance in comprehension, and local errors being more trivial, affecting only a single element of a sentence. Teachers are in disagreement as to when the most appropriate time is to correct errors: immediately or delayed (Xie and Jiang, 2015). But, generally, pronunciation and grammatical errors should be corrected immediately. In order to avoid students from feeling singled out and impact their affective filter, correction should not be face-threatening. Indirect correction or self-correction where the correct form is presented can help achieve this. Error correction is important in preventing fossilization, but should not be the sole focus of study, where teachers are preoccupied with identifying and correcting errors, even at the local error level, and damaging students' affective filters. Rather, error analysis can help determine students' ongoing, and constantly evolving language proficiency, and provide teachers with an awareness of their students' errors and ability to correct them in an appropriate way.

Global errors include content and organization errors, which can be attributed to an ELL's inability to properly write what they want to say, prevent the writers' message (Bates, Lane, and Lange, 1993). The reason for ESL and EFL errors can be a result of their non-native English background (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). Another type of error, contextual issues, can be caused by the writer's individual differences and predispositions, educational background, cultural background, linguistic background, English writing proficiency, and motivation for writing (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). Grammar issues, which are caused by a lack of English

graphemic and orthographic knowledge, can result in global errors or local errors (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). These grammar errors include spelling, nouns, verbs, articles, prepositions, and word choice. For verbs, ESL writers may make mistakes with inflectional morphology, verb formation, verb deviation, verb completion (Harris and Silva, 1993), verb tense (Woodward, 2013), passive construction, modal construction, and subject-verb agreement (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). Noun errors ESL writers make can be with inflection, derivation (Harris and Silva, 1993), noun-adjective-adverb confusion (Woodward, 2013), count nouns, abstract nouns, collective nouns, plural endings, and progressive endings (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). Articles may be used in the wrong context, used in the wrong place, used when they are not needed, and missing when they are needed (Harris and Silva, 1993). With prepositions, ESL writers struggle to know which one goes with which specific nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (Harris and Silva, 1993). Word choice errors may be caused by uncommon or mistranslated words (Woodward, 2013). Because of the widespread ESL writing errors, educators must help with error identification and correction in their writing (Harris and Silva, 1993).

These errors can be interlingual or intralingual, with the former caused by the interference of the native language, and the latter occurring because of wrong application of rules and unawareness of exceptions to said rules (Richards, 1971). Interlingual errors can occur when EFL learners are unable to comprehend rules of the target language, and then erroneously apply the rules of their native language (Krashen, 1981). Intralingual errors can occur when learners overgeneralize and overextend rules due to limited or incomplete knowledge of the target language (Richards, 1971). The process of learning English involves making and correcting errors. Error analysis attempts to analyze these errors through a systematic procedure, which involves collecting, identifying, describing, explaining, and evaluating errors (Corder, 1971).

Through the error analysis of EFL learners' writing, teachers can determine students' current level in the language learning process, and researchers can determine how language is learned and structured. According to Wu, one major kind of error is an intralingual error, which are caused by overgeneralizations. The second major kind of error is an interlingual error, which is caused by transferring rules from the learner's native language to the target language.

Silva (1993) evaluated the differences between L1 and L2, finding the differences range from the mechanical to sociolinguistic knowledge of writing. Silva found L2 writing tends to be more constrained and less effective than writing in a first language. L2 students are reluctant to write, and faced with challenges while writing, including social and cognitive issues. Second language proficiency in L2 writing is usually defined as control over the mechanical elements and grammatical aspects of the Target Language (TL).

### *2.3. Error Analysis*

The identification and correction of errors is necessary for a writer to understand their errors and improve their writing. This type of feedback should be accurate, consistent, and tailored. Tiensawangchai (2014) conducted a study classifying grammar errors found in business writing. While written business communication skills are important for students to succeed in their future career, many EFL and ESL students do not have the skills to satisfactorily perform their writing tasks at their workplace, which may be due to a lack of grammar knowledge, practice and appropriate corrective feedback from the teachers.

The understanding of learners' errors is necessary for language teachers, researchers, and learners (Corder, 1967). Learner corpora can provide information on learners' common errors and pedagogical purposes. Learner corpora constitute a new method of teaching for SLA and

foreign language teaching specialists. Through a standardized system of error tags, students can receive an annotated corpus which can aid in students' language development (Granger, 2003).

Connell (2000) analyzed the errors of Japanese students' writing, and found the use of subject in a sentence, the parts of speech and word order caused the most problems in terms of understanding student writing. Olsen (1999) studied Norwegian EFL learners, finding less proficient learners had a higher number of grammatical, orthographic and syntactic errors. Thananart (2000) examined Thai university students' writing errors, and found that nearly 75% of the errors were related to grammatical structure. Khansir and Shahhoseiny (2013) evaluated the writing errors of Iranian pre-university students, finding 38% of the errors being article related and 33% tense related. Khansir (2013) conducted an independent study, and found the maximum errors made were related to punctuation, followed by spelling. Cheng (1994) examined Chinese university students writing errors, dividing the error categories into morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic. Cheng concluded that syntactic errors were the most common, followed by semantic and morphological errors.

Another email study was conducted by Wu to determine what types of grammatical errors are frequently found in the compositions written by Mandarin-Chinese EFL students, and what factors caused these errors. Five 6th grader EFL students between the ages of 11 and 12 in Taiwan were required to write about one topic for 12 weeks. Certified ESL teachers in Texas read the one page emails, conducting error analysis. After the teachers underlined and labeled the errors, they were quantified and analyzed. The teachers categorized the errors into 22 groups, and found the greatest problem involved subject and verb agreement. The study suggests this is because in Chinese, their first language, verbs do not change form with different subjects. Sentence fragment and sentence structure were the second and third most frequent errors. Of the

780 total errors, 469 were interlingual errors. The study's results suggest errors are normal for students during the language learning process. Additionally, the error analysis indicated the most common error type, encouraging instructional activities involving subject-verb agreement to be utilized in the future, and real-life practice with authentic materials can help motivate and excite students.

#### *2.4. Writing Apprehension*

Ren, Xing, Rittmann, Zhao, Xie & Zhao (2007) urge higher education institutions to avoid the use of language-based measures, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), as sole indicators of international students' ability write. Ren et al. encourage the use of student interviews to be a determining factor in the admissions process. They find that one-on-one communication serves as a better indicator of a student's potential for academic success. One reason a standardized test will not adequately show a students' writing level is because of writing apprehension. Pimsarn (2013) examined EFL learners' writing apprehension at a public university in Thailand. The findings from Pimsarn's study indicate overall apprehension scores are at a high level, suggesting many EFL learners have high writing apprehension.

Email can help students practice and improve their writing because it is a face-saving and constant communication. Because writers are not face-to-face with the reader, when they inevitably make a mistake, they will not feel as embarrassed (Wu, 2014). In addition, Wu found that emails provide more authentic content and allow writers to choose their topic. Email can also change students' bad writing habits. For example, student writers, especially ESL beginning writers, tend to edit their writing prematurely in their writing process (Wang, 1996). A study by Wang found that this problem persisted even when the students were doing dialogue journaling, which is a type of "free-writing practice." Email encourages a writing environment where

students can put down their thinking as fast as possible. This allows new EFL learners to avoid agonizing over words, phrases, and grammar, and simply practice fluency (Wang, 1996).

Another study explored how asynchronous email exchange can improve the linguistic characteristics of syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy (Shang, 2007). Many participants of Shang's study reported that they enjoyed learning from their peers in a low-anxiety environment, which created a fun and authentic learning experience. Integrating electronic media into the EFL classroom can bring innovation to the traditional language classroom, and serve as an addition rather than a substitution. Participants of this study made fewer grammatical errors in the final text than in the original text. These findings show students made improvements on syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy, with a significant difference found in sentence complexity (Shang, 2007). Shang believes these changes were caused by the communicative and corrective nature of email exchange. Though a low-pressured exchange between peers, students were able to write freely and practice.

### *2.5. Gender and Writing Errors*

Researchers have been studying whether there is a proficiency difference in Second Language Learning between genders. Most research findings indicate female language learners to be more proficient than their male counterparts. However, most studies have concentrated on describing the differences on students' conversational speech (Aukrust, 2008; Huang, 1999; Li, 2004; Yan, 2000). Studies based on gender differences in writing performance are less prevalent. Saeed, Ghani, and Ramzan explored the idea of gender difference in learning Second Language through a composition test of Pakistani students, and discovered female students made fewer L2 writing errors in comparison to male students. Thus, females can be said to be better language learners than males.

Chu-yao aimed to find gender differences in Taiwanese students' English writing in terms of their writing performance and amount of writing. The researcher found female students to be better writers than male students. Chen conducted a study, which aimed to determine the impact of computer generated error feedback on Taiwanese EFL writing students, and especially the differences between male and female writing feedback. Chen used QBL (Quick Business Letters) software, which guides students through the correct formatting of a business letter, and then prints the errors for each student with teacher's comments and corrections. The software found 46 errors in students' letters. Overall, the study found male students scored higher error rates than females. And, on the most common errors, females consistently scored lower rates. Seven specific error types were significantly different, in the females favor. Chen's study was able to determine a very detailed error pattern for students, and could conclude that female students score lower error rates than their male counterparts. In the future, male EFL students could receive increased training or specialized classes. Researchers have found gender is an influential variable in language, and impacts language learning. Previous studies of Taiwanese EFL students have found gender influences language learning (Saeed, Ghani, Van & Abraham, 1990). Females score higher averages in Japanese class (Oxford, 1993). Females tend to score higher because they utilize learning strategies more effectively (Nyikos, 1990). By determining what kinds of students make certain errors, teachers can better target the learners' needs. Research by Lee (1996) supports these findings that students' gender impacts their academic performance. Every female in the study wrote more and wrote better than all the male participants; he found that while boys talk, girls write. These findings support GRE Analytical Writing scores based on gender. Of all the GRE General Test takers who took the exam between

July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016, the average score out of 6 points was 3.3 for males, and 3.6 for females (ETS).

Dingwall (1998) was under the impression brain functions differ between men and women, and found language function may be more organized in women. Kann (2001) also found the existence of gender differences in English writing when comparing participants' computer literacy, attitudes toward writing instruction, and online writing performance. Although the results showed that the difference was not statistically significant, female students scored higher on English writing tests. Through these gender difference findings, EFL teachers can use the results as diagnostic information to understand students' weaknesses and modify teaching to facilitate learning.

#### *2.6. Country of Origin's Official Language and Writing Errors*

According to an analysis of TOEFL iBT scores conducted by ETS, countries with the lowest TOEFL iBT writing score are: Guinea (15), followed by Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, and Mali (16). The average lowest TOEFL iBT writing score were from test takers from Africa. The highest TOEFL iBT writing score average was from test takers from Austria, Belgium, Germany, India, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore, and Switzerland. Test takers from those countries averaged a score of 24. With these findings, the researcher aims to discover if applicants from Africa tend to make more errors.

ETS also analyzed GRE scores in 2016, and found the countries with the lowest GRE Analytical Writing Scores were Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iraq. Their respective writing scores were 2.0, 2.2, and 2.4. ETS found the countries with the highest GRE Analytical Writing Scores were New Zealand (4.4), followed by Australia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom (4.3). With



these findings, the researcher analyzed if graduate applicants from Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iraq make more errors on their writing than the other participants.

### *2.7. Program of Study and Writing Errors*

According to ETS, test takers in 2016 indicating an undergraduate major in the field of Humanities and Arts had higher mean scores on the Verbal Reasoning and Analytical Writing measures than test takers in other major fields. Education majors had the second highest mean, 3.7. While men and women indicating an undergraduate major in Engineering had a higher mean score on the Quantitative Reasoning measure than men and women in other major fields, engineering and physical science majors had the lowest GRE Analytical Writing mean, 3.2.

## **III. Methodology**

The four purposes of this chapter are to (1) describe the research methodology of this study, (2) explain the sample selection, (3) describe the procedure used in designing the instrument and collecting the data, and (4) provide an explanation of the statistical procedures used to analyze the data.

### *3.1. Research Design*

This paper aimed to determine prospective international applicants' L2 writing error types when communicating electronically with the University of Arkansas international admissions office. The researcher examined one hundred emails non-native English speakers sent to the International Admissions Office ([iao@uark.edu](mailto:iao@uark.edu)). These writing errors were counted, analyzed, and categorized. This study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher hypothesized that there is a significant difference between the applicants' A) gender and error frequency in writing, B) country of origin's official language and error

frequency in writing C) college level and error frequency in writing, and, D) program of study and error frequency in writing.

### *3.2. Sources of Data*

The participants are undergraduate or graduate (Master's and Doctoral) degree seeking applicants. Of the 100 participants, 43 are undergraduate degree applicants, 40 are master's degree applicants, and 17 are doctoral degree applicants. Sixty-nine of the participants in this study were male. Participants come from 29 different countries, with India being the country of origin to the most participants. Adhering to the categorization of geographic regions by the United Nations, the most common region of origin was South Asia, followed by South America and West Africa. All colleges and schools of the University of Arkansas are represented in this study, except the School of Law. The College of Engineering was the most commonly sought after department, followed by the J. William College of Arts & Sciences, Walton College of Business, Bumpers College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, College of Education and Health Profession, and lastly, the Fay Jones School of Architecture. Table 1 shows the frequency of the participants' demographic information. See Appendix A and B to see an explanation of participants' demographic labels and each participants' demographic data. The data from the applicants are labeled as Participants 1-100.

Table 1

*Participants' Demographic Information.*

| Category            | Subcategory     | Frequency |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Gender              |                 |           |
|                     | Female          | 31        |
|                     | Male            | 69        |
| Geographic Location |                 |           |
| Africa              | East Africa     | 5         |
|                     | Middle Africa   | 3         |
|                     | North Africa    | 1         |
|                     | West Africa     | 10        |
| Americas            | North America   | 1         |
|                     | Caribbean       | 5         |
|                     | Central America | 5         |
|                     | South America   | 16        |
| Asia                | Central Asia    | 1         |
|                     | East Asia       | 1         |
|                     | South Asia      | 42        |
|                     | Southeast Asia  | 1         |
|                     | West Asia       | 6         |
| Europe              | South Europe    | 3         |
| Official Language   |                 |           |
|                     | English         | 19        |
|                     | Other           | 81        |
| College Level       |                 |           |
|                     | Undergraduate   | 43        |
|                     | Master's        | 40        |

Table 1. (Cont.)

| Category      | Subcategory  | Frequency |
|---------------|--|-----------|
| College Level |  |           |
|               | Doctoral   | 17        |
| College       |  |           |
|               | College of Education and Health Professions                  | 7         |
|               | College of Engineering                                       | 39        |
|               | Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences | 14        |
|               | Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design                  | 4         |
|               | J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences              | 21        |
|               | Walton College of Business                                   | 15        |

### 3.3 Data Gathering Procedure

Data was gathered from the Office of International Admissions within the Graduate School and International Education at the University of Arkansas. Emails submitted to the International Admissions Office (iao@uark.edu) from prospective non-native English speaking international applicants from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016 were analyzed by the researcher to determine type and count of writing errors.

The researcher systematically selected emails sent in 2016 which contained complete information about each applicant's gender, country of origin, program of study, and program level. Through systematic sampling, the first eight qualified emails starting from the first day of the even months were selected, and the first eight qualified emails starting from the last day of the odd months were selected, except the months of January and December. To gather 100 participants, the first 10 qualified emails starting from the last day of January were selected, and the first 10 qualified emails starting from the first day of December were selected. Only

participants' first email sent to the admissions office was analyzed for errors. The emails ranged in length from 11 words to over a page in length (600+ words).

All names and email addresses remain anonymous. The gathered data was assigned a random number and the research raw data is only be available to the researcher. Participants are protected to the extent required by University policies and federal regulations. Written approval from the Director of Graduate and International Recruitment and Admissions, Lynn Mossesso, Dean for the Graduate School and International Education, Kim LaScola Needy, and Associate Dean for the Graduate School and International Education, Patricia Koski, was obtained for the researcher to analyze emails sent to the University of Arkansas International Admissions Office.

#### *3.4. Data Analysis*

For this study, emails are divided into six parts: an email address, subject line, greeting, body, closing, and signature. Arguably the most important part of the message is the body. The researcher identified the top errors prospective international undergraduate and graduate students make when exchanging digitally written communication via email with college recruiters. First, 5 elements of an email were analyzed for errors. The main analysis of errors was conducted on the body of the email.

The researcher analyzed, classified, counted, and then compared error types. The value '0' indicates no errors, '1' indicates one error, '2' indicates two errors, etc. After the data was collected, the researcher followed Corder's approach to error analysis, which has been used in many previous studies (Chastian, 1990, Frantzen, 1995, Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992, Kroll, 1990, Wu and Garza, 2014). Refer to Table 2 below to see Corder's steps to error analysis, and how the researcher applied Corder's steps to this study. First, each email was examined word by word, and then sentence by sentence to determine and categorize errors as grammatical, lexical,

semantic, mechanics and syntax. Next, the researcher counted the type of errors and total errors committed by each participant. All errors were underlined and labeled.

Table 2

*Steps to Analyze Errors*

| <i>Corder's Steps</i> | <i>Researcher's Steps</i>  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. Collect data       | Collect 100 writing samples from emails  |
| 2. Identify errors    | A. Verb tense, sentence structure, relative clause, singular/plural, verb omission, subject omission, subject-verb agreement, fragment<br>B. Pronoun, article, preposition, word form<br>C. Word choice<br>D. Capitalization, punctuation, spelling<br>E. Word Order |
| 3. Classify errors    | A. Grammatical type error<br>B. Lexical type error<br>C. Semantic type error<br>D. Mechanics type error<br>E. Syntax type error  |
| 4. Quantify errors    | How many types of each error occur?  |
| 5. Analyze source     | Intralingual<br>Interlingual<br>Intelligible error   |

**IV. Findings**

This study has analyzed the main errors made by a selected group of NNS applicants of a university. First, the study analyzed formatting issues and inclusion of all required elements of an email, which include email address, subject line, greeting, closing, and signature. Then, the study focused on the linguistic errors made in the body paragraph(s) of the emails. Through this

analysis, ESL and EFL educators will be able to teach college bound English language learners how to communicate clearly and effectively through the increasingly critical medium of electronic mail.

#### *4.1. Email Elements*

##### *4.1.1. Email Address Errors*

All except five participants in this study had appropriate email addresses. The researcher classified an appropriate email as one that only included the participant's name. Extraneous words such as 'win,' 'me' and 'impact' decrease the professionalism of an email address. Additionally, an email address that includes 'lambofgod' and 'somebody,' are not appropriate for business or educational related emails. Appendix C lists email address errors.

##### *4.1.2. Subject Line Errors*

Of the 100 participants, 26 made errors on the subject line. A total of 31 subject line errors were found. Capitalization errors were the most common type of error, followed by spelling errors. Table 3 identifies the type of errors participants made in their subject line. Appendix D further identifies the participants' incorrect subject line.

Table 3

*Number of Subject Line Errors*

| <b>Error</b>   | <b>N</b>  | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Example</b>   |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|--|
| Capitalization | 20        | 1           | <u>i</u> nternational Student <u>s</u> cholarship / <b><u>TOEFL WAIVER</u></b>   |
| No Subject     | 3         | 3           |  |
| Plurality      | 1         | 6           | requesting information <u>s</u>  |
| Punctuation    | 2         | 4           | Submission of documents <u>.</u>   |
| Spelling       | 4         | 2           | Doctorate <b><u>Degee Aplicant</u></b> / <b><u>transept</u></b>                  |
| Word Choice    | 2         | 4           | Admission <b><u>enquirers</u></b> / I need to links to my <b><u>referees</u></b> |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>31</b> |             |  |

*Note.* 26 participants. 31 errors.

*4.1.3. Greeting Errors*

70 of the 100 participants had greeting errors. Table 4 identifies the frequency of errors participants made in their email greetings. While the most common type of error included the omission of a greeting, punctuation, capitalization and the inappropriate use of the masculine identifier, sir, were also problematic.



Table 4

*Number of Greeting Errors*

| <b>Error</b>   | <b>N</b>  | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Example</b>                             |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|--|
| Capitalization | 33        | 3           | hello, dear respected sir/mam, dear UARK,  |
| Identifier     | 8         | 5           | dear any person who read this, hello dears |
| No Greeting    | 16        | 1           |  |
| Punctuation    | 9         | 2           | Hello , Best Greetings!!!! Dear IAO.       |
| Sir            | 3         | 4           | Hello sir, Dear Sir, Dear sirs, Sir,       |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>76</b> |             |  |

*Note.* 70 participants. 76 errors.

*4.1.4. Closing Errors*

In this study, 79 participants' emails had closing errors. The most common type of closing error involved punctuation. 32 participants did not punctuate their closing, typed a period mark instead of a comma, or informally punctuated their closing with exclamation marks (!!!) or ellipses (...). 25 participants failed to include a closing, abruptly ending their email. Table 5 quantifies each type of error.

Table 5

*Number of Closing Errors*

| <b>Error</b>   | <b>N</b>  | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Examples</b>                                 |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|---|
| Capitalization | 23        | 3           | regards, thank you, respectfully, BEST REGARDS, |
| Insertion      | 3         | 5           | Regards Sincerely,                              |
| No Closing     | 25        | 2           |   |
| Punctuation    | 32        | 1           | Sincerely / Regards. / Thanks... / Thanks!!!!   |
| Word Choice    | 2         | 6           | God Bless you and Bless America.                |
| Word Form      | 4         | 4           | Thanking you,                                   |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>79</b> |             |   |

*Note.* 79 errors. 71 participants

#### 4.1.5. Signature Errors

The study found a total of 64 emails with signature errors. Table 6 identifies all signature errors made by participants in this study. 52 participants ended their emails without signatures. Five participants only included their first name in their signature (i.e. John or Jane). While informal emails can conclude with a first name, a professional email sent to a recipient for the first time must have a first and last name (i.e. John Doe).

Six participants' signatures had capitalization errors. Three participants typed their signature in all caps (i.e. JOHN DOE), and one participant typed just their last name in all caps (i.e. John DOE). One participant failed to capitalize his last name (i.e. John doe), and one participant failed to capitalize her first and last name (i.e. jane doe). Three participants' signatures had punctuation errors. Those three participants incorrectly placed a period after their signature.

Table 6

#### *Number of Signature Errors*

| <b>Error</b>    | <b>N</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Examples</b>                        |
|-----------------|----------|-------------|--|
| Capitalization  | 6        | 2           | john doe, John doe, john DOE, JOHN DOE |
| No Signature    | 51       | 1           |  |
| Only First Name | 5        | 3           | John                                   |
| Punctuation     | 3        | 4           | John Doe.                              |
| <b>Total</b>    | 65       |             |  |

*Note.* 64 participants. 65 total errors.

#### 4.2. Body Paragraph Errors

The researcher found a total of 719 errors in the body of participants' emails. Mechanical errors were the most common type of error, with 294 errors. Grammatical errors were the second

most frequent type of error, with 205 errors, followed by lexical errors (155 errors), semantic errors (43 errors), and syntax errors (24 errors).

After analyzing, categorizing, and quantifying error types, the researcher expanded on the most common types and categories of errors the applicants made in the body paragraph of the participants' written communications. Table 7 indicates the type of errors, error category, frequency, and rank order.

Table 7

*Type of Errors*

| <b>Type of Errors</b> | <b>Error Category</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Rank Order</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Grammatical</b>    | Verb Tense            | 25               | 9                 |
|                       | Sentence Structure    | 92               | 3                 |
|                       | Relative Clause       | 3                | 18                |
|                       | Conjunction           | 28               | 8                 |
|                       | Singular/plural       | 19               | 12                |
|                       | Verb Omission         | 9                | 14                |
|                       | Subject Omission      | 22               | 11                |
|                       | S-V Agreement         | 7                | 15                |
|                       | <b>Total</b>          | 205              |                   |
| <b>Lexical</b>        | Pronoun               | 12               | 13                |
|                       | Article               | 75               | 4                 |
|                       | Preposition           | 42               | 6                 |
|                       | Word Form             | 26               | 9                 |
|                       | <b>Total</b>          | 155              |                   |
| <b>Mechanical</b>     | Capitalization        | 152              | 1                 |
|                       | Punctuation           | 102              | 2                 |
|                       | Spelling              | 40               | 7                 |
| <b>Total</b>          | 294                   |                  |                   |
| <b>Semantic</b>       | Word Choice           | 43               | 5                 |
|                       | <b>Total</b>          | 43               |                   |
| <b>Syntax</b>         | Word Order            | 24               | 10                |
|                       | <b>Total</b>          | 24               |                   |
| <b>Total</b>          |                       | 719              |                   |

The total number of errors each participant made in their body paragraph(s) ranged from 0 to 25 errors. Four participants made zero errors, while two participants made 25 errors. The average number of errors per body paragraph for the participants was 7.66 errors per email. Figure 1 graphically depicts the error count range of all participants.

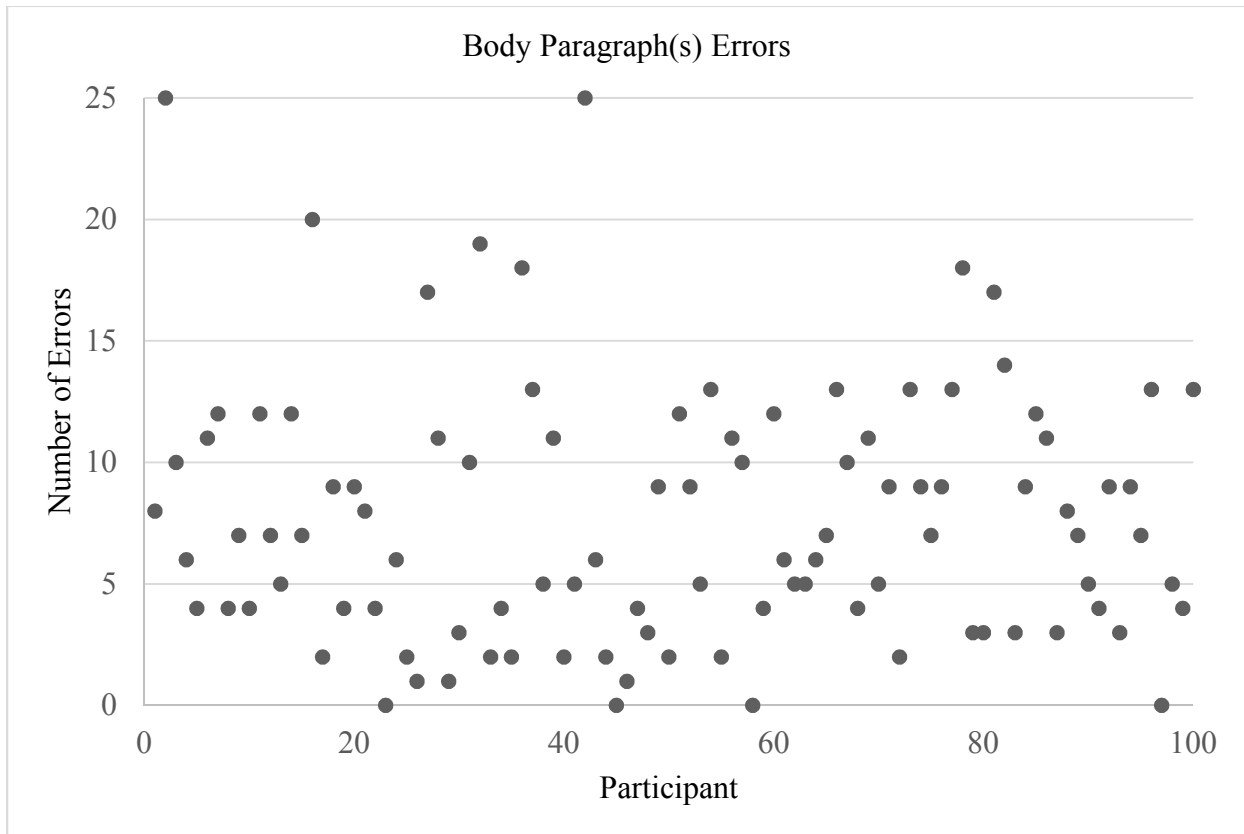


Figure 1. Total number of errors in the body paragraph(s) of each participant.

#### 4.2.1. Mechanical Errors

Mechanical errors involve orthography errors, which include spelling and punctuation, and capitalization errors. In this study, there are a total of 294 mechanical errors in the body paragraph of the participants' emails, accounting for more than 40% of all errors committed in the emails used in this study. Capitalization errors are the most common type of error found in the study. Of the 100 emails, there was a total number of 152 punctuation errors, 102 punctuation errors, and 40 spelling errors.

#### 4.2.1.1. Capitalization

Capitalization refers to upper-case letters. 152 capitalization errors were found in the participants' body paragraph(s). Participants ignored the capital letters 1) in the first word of sentences, and 2) in the first letter of proper nouns. Participants also incorrectly capitalized words in the middle of sentences, and entire sentences. Table 8 lists examples of a few capitalization errors participants made in their body paragraph(s).

Table 8

#### Capitalization Errors

| <i><b>Error Identification</b></i>                                  | <i><b>Error Correction</b></i> |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. I was wondering <i><b>If</b></i> it will be possible to          | 1. if                          |
| 2. ...your deadline is in <i><b>october</b></i>                     | 2. October                     |
| 3. uark   | 3. UARK                        |
| 4. <i><b>i</b></i> am <i><b>john</b></i> from <i><b>india</b></i> . | 4. I, John                     |
| 5. I am <i><b>Interested</b></i> in studying                        | 5. interested                  |
| 6. Bangalore <i><b>university</b></i>                               | 6. University                  |
| 7. <i><b>university</b></i> of <i><b>arkansas</b></i>               | 7. University, Arkansas        |
| 8. <i><b>latin american</b></i>                                     | 8. Latin American              |
| 9. your <i><b>Institution</b></i>                                   | 9. institution                 |
| 10. <i><b>panamenian</b></i> student                                | 10. Panamanian                 |
| 11. ...to <i><b>The</b></i> University of Arkansas                  | 11. the                        |
| 12. <i><b>september</b></i> 2016                                    | 12. September                  |
| 13. ... <i><b>AND I WANT TO BE PART</b></i>                         | 13. ...and I want to be part   |
| 14. <i><b>how</b></i> can I pursue my masters                       | 14. How                        |
| 15. the <i><b>Gre</b></i> scores have not reached                   | 15. GRE                        |
| 16. United <i><b>states</b></i> of America                          | 16. States                     |
| 17. <i><b>HOW MUCH IS YOUR PROGRAM</b></i>                          | 17. How much is your program   |
| 18. ...available <i><b>Scholarships</b></i>                         | 18. scholarships               |
| 19. ...an <i><b>International Student</b></i>                       | 19. international student      |
| 20. ...the <i><b>ielts</b></i> exam.                                | 20. IELTS                      |

#### 4.2.1.2. Punctuation

A total of 102 punctuation errors were found in the body paragraph(s). There are three types of terminal point punctuation marks. Generally, a sentence should end with one of the following options: a period, a question mark, or an exclamation mark. Participants in this study had difficulty with terminal points. Additionally, participants in this study had problems with apostrophes. An apostrophe has three uses: for contractions, plurals, and possessives. Table 9 lists examples of punctuation errors.

Table 9

#### *Punctuation Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. My IELTS score is <u>6</u>  | 1. 6.                          |
| 2. Please let me know <b><i>quickly...</i></b>   | 2. quickly.                    |
| 3. <b><i>masters</i></b> degree  | 3. master's                    |
| 4. I have most of the documents for <b><i>admission but</i></b> I need                   | 4. admission, but              |
| 5. I will not need a full scholarship <b><i>but a partial one</i></b> as I intend to pay | 5. , but a partial one,        |
| 6. How much is your program_   | 6. ?                           |
| 7. Have an amazing new year <b><i>!!!</i></b>  | 7. !                           |
| 8. <b><i>Im</i></b> very interested in business pre law                                  | 8. I'm                         |

#### 4.2.1.3. Spelling

Spelling refers to the act or process of writing words in a conventional, accepted formation. 40 spelling errors were found in this study on body paragraph(s). Table 10 identifies examples of the spelling errors.

Table 10

*Spelling Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. I have <b><i>nit</i></b> taken  | 1. not                         |
| 2. ...for <b><i>full</i></b> 2016.   | 2. fall                        |
| 3. application <b><i>from</i></b>  | 3. form                        |
| 4. How <b><i>r u</i></b> ?   | 4. are you                     |
| 5. an undergraduate <b><i>cause pls</i></b>  | 5. course, please              |
| 6. I saw your email now I am <b><i>assembleing</i></b> documents <b><i>necessary</i></b> | 6. assembling, necessary       |
| 7. I am <b><i>interesred</i></b>   | 7. interested                  |
| 8. I <b><i>wanna</i></b> Ph.D.   | 8. want a                      |
| 9. And <b><i>pls</i></b> tell me how much the cost will be.                              | 9. please                      |
| 10. I will <b><i>apreciate</i></b> to know more.   | 10. appreciate                 |
| 11. Is it possible for me to <b><i>exempt</i></b> some course                            | 11. exempt                     |

4.2.2. *Grammatical*

4.2.2.1. *Sentence Fragment*

A sentence fragment is a group of words that do not form a complete sentence, nor express a complete thought. Sentence fragments typically are portions of sentences, disconnected from the main clause, and often lack a subject or a verb. Table 11 further identifies these errors.



Table 11

*Sentence Fragment Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>                           | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b>               |
|--|--|
| 1. Mr. John Smith a student from University of Agriculture.  | 1. Insert ‘I am’                             |
| 2. From Quito, Ecuador.                                      | 2. Insert ‘I am’                             |
| 3. As my TOEFL score is 73 which is far below your standard. | 3. Insert second clause to complete thought. |
| 4. <u>Myself</u> Mr. John Smith.                             | 4. Insert ‘I am’                             |

4.2.2.2. *Subject-Verb Agreement*

Subjects and verbs must agree with each other. If a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular. If a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural. Seven subject-verb agreement errors were found in this study. Table 12 lists examples of this type of error found.

Table 12

*Subject-Verb Agreement Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. ...there <u>are</u> my school address and email if you have any <u>question</u> . | 1. is, questions               |
| 2. ... <u>is</u> there any more documents  | 2. are                         |

4.2.2.3. *Verb Tense*

Errors consisting of wrong tense in this study occur when a writer applies an inappropriate tense. Tense relates to aspect, mood, time and modality (Reishaan, 2013). The term ‘tense’ originates from the Latin translation of the Greek word for ‘time.’ Reishaan describes tense as a method of locating “an event or action at the scale of time by virtue of a specific verb-form.” There are two tenses in English: present and past, which can be in the perfect or progressive aspect. Present tense can also be subjunctive. Tense is usually expressed through the verb-form in a sentence, which can be past, present, or future time. Present and past tense have morphologically distinct verb-forms. Verbs representing future dates do not have specific verb

forms, but rather, can be expressed in simple or progressive present verb-forms, modal verbs like will and shall, and past verb-forms.

English language learners must be aware of the differences between verb-forms, and be able to apply the proper form to construct grammatically accurate texts. Different situations require varying tense, so ELLs should be taught how to form a specific tense, its meaning, and properly apply it. 25 verb tense errors were found in this study, and Table 13 lists examples.

Table 13

*Verb Tense Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. I look forward to <b><i>get</i></b> positive response   | 1. getting a <sup>1</sup>      |
| 2. I would like to receive information about your available scholarships for students <b><i>transferred</i></b> from | 2. transferring                |
| 3. Transcript will be <b><i>send</i></b> through   | 3. sent                        |
| 4. What are the chances of getting <b><i>the admissions</i></b> at your university                                   | 4. admitted                    |
| 5. I am looking forward to <b><i>hear</i></b> from you.  | 5. hearing                     |

<sup>1</sup> Insert article

*4.2.2.4. Sentence Structure*

Errors involving sentence structure occur when writing includes run-ons, comma splices, and fused sentences. Simply, sentence structure involves compound sentences that are not punctuated correctly. The best way to avoid these errors is to punctuate compound sentences correctly by using one or the other of these rules. 1) Join the two independent clauses with one of the coordinating conjunctions (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet), and 2) use a comma before the connecting word. 92 sentence structure errors were found in this study, and Table 14 further identifies example errors found in participants' body paragraph(s).

Table 14

*Sentence Structure Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b>  |
|--|---|
| 1. Whenever I try to sign in ,it shows the following error : Your User ID and/or Password are invalid I resent the password but still couldn't access the account. | 1. Whenever I try to sign in, it shows the following error: Your User ID and/or Password are invalid. I resent the password, but still couldn't access the account. |
| 2. I am Currently in Arkansas wil be leaving on January 8th i will like to speak before then   | 2. I am currently in Arkansas and will be leaving on January 8 <sup>th</sup> . I would like to speak before then.   |
| 3. I have most of the documents for <b><u>admission but</u></b> I need   | 3. admission, but   |
| 4. I will not need a full scholarship <b><u>but a partial one</u></b> as I intend to pay   | 4. , but a partial one,   |

4.2.2.5. *Singular/Plural*

To make regular nouns plural, the ending -s is added. However, singular nouns ending in *s, x, z, ch, sh* are made plural by adding -es. Singular nouns ending in a consonant and then *y* are made plural by dropping the *y* and adding -ies. However, there are a variety of irregular nouns, which do not follow these rules. The researcher found 19 errors, and Table 15 lists example errors.

Table 15

*Singular/Plural Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>              | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. ...if you have any <b>question.</b>          | 1. questions                   |
| 2. I'd like to make a few <b><u>inquire</u></b> | 2. inquiries                   |
| 3. I have 6 <b><u>years</u></b> old GRE score.  | 3. a 6 year old                |

4.2.2.6. *Verb Insertion/Omission*

The researcher found nine errors relating to the omission of verbs. Table 16 shows an omission and insertion error relating to verbs.

Table 16

*Verb Errors*

| <b>Error Category</b> | <b>Error Identification</b>   | <b>Error Correction</b> |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------|
| <b>Omission</b>       | 1. <u>Also, any</u> scholarships available                              | 1. Also, <u>are</u> any |
| <b>Insertion</b>      | 1. The reason I am writing this email is to <u>make</u> ask you whether | 1. Delete <u>make</u>   |

4.2.2.7. *Subject Insertion/Omission*

There were 22 errors relating to the insertion or omission of a subject. Table 17 further identifies the subject errors.

Table 17

*Subject Errors*

| <b>Error Category</b> | <b>Error Identification</b>                                | <b>Error Correction</b> |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------------|
| <b>Omission</b>       | 1. <u>And want</u> to do my further study                  | 1. I                    |
|                       | 2. <u>want</u> to know something.                          | 2. I                    |
|                       | 3. Before <u>to</u> apply, what should                     | 3. I                    |
|                       | 4. <u>...was</u> delivered to you                          | 4. it                   |
| <b>Insertion</b>      | 1. ...any more documents that I must send <u>it</u> to you | 1. on                   |

4.2.3. *Lexical*

4.2.3.1. *Prepositions*

A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. A preposition generally indicates the temporal, spatial or logical relationship of its object to the overall sentence. A total of 42 preposition errors were found.

Table 18 further identifies the error.

Table 18

*Preposition Errors*

| <b><i>Error Category</i></b> | <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>                                | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>Omission</b>              | 1. I will complete <b><i>both the</i></b> diplomas                | 1. both of the                 |
|                              | 2. I <b><i>want study</i></b> at your university.                 | 2. want to study               |
|                              | 3. <b><i>Respond me</i></b> on email.                             | 3. Respond to me               |
| <b>Usage</b>                 | 1. I finished the first semester <b><i>in</i></b> the honor roll. | 1. on                          |
|                              | 2. I look forward <b><i>for</i></b> your reply.                   | 2. to                          |
|                              | 3. My goal is to be admitted <b><i>at</i></b> your University.    | 3. to                          |
|                              | 4. Soon I will fill <b><i>up</i></b> all requirements.            | 4. out                         |
|                              | 5. Where do I have to go <b><i>for</i></b> take them?             | 5. to                          |

*4.2.3.2. Articles*

An article is a word used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. English has two articles: the definite article (the) and indefinite article (a/an). The refers to a specific/particular noun, while a/an is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. 75 errors relating to articles were found in this study. Table 19 further identifies the omission, insertion, and wrong use of articles.

Table 19

*Article Errors*

| <b><i>Error Category</i></b> | <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| <b>Omission</b>              | 1. <u>Is IELTS</u> required?   | 1. Is the IELTS                |
|                              | 2. I look forward to <u>get positive</u> response.                           | 2. getting a positive          |
|                              | 3. How much do I have to pay <u>for application</u> form?                    | 3. for the application         |
|                              | 4. ...send <u>through courier</u>  | 4. through a courier           |
|                              | 5. I have not <u>taken TOEFL</u>   | 5. the                         |
|                              | 6. I have submitted my application <u>for master's</u> degree in TESOL.      | 6. the                         |
|                              | 7. ...admitted to the Plant Path MS Program <u>at University</u> of Arkansas | 7. the                         |
|                              | 8. Does this university accept 3-year B.A. <u>for M.A.</u> program?          | 8. an                          |
|                              | 9. I <u>am undergraduate</u> student <u>from south</u> Asian country, Nepal. | 9. an, the                     |
|                              | 10. I do not <u>have English</u> test score                                  | 10. an                         |
|                              | 11. I <u>am permanent</u> resident in USA                                    | 11. the                        |
|                              | 12. I will appreciate to know more <u>about application</u> process          | 12. the                        |
| <b>Insertion</b>             | 1. ...that is <u>a</u> 15 years of education.                                | 1. Delete a                    |
|                              | 2. In <u>the</u> light of my above mentioned grades                          | 2. Delete the                  |
| <b>Usage</b>                 | 1. Can <u>a</u> international student get financial support?                 | 1. an                          |
|                              | 2. I would not want to submit <u>a</u> incomplete application.               | 2. an                          |

*4.2.3.3. Pronouns*

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. Pronouns make sentences less repetitive. Subtypes include personal pronouns, reflexive and reciprocal pronouns, possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns and indefinite pronouns. Personal pronouns are associated primarily with a particular grammatical person – first person (as *I*), second person (as *you*), or third person (as *he, she, it, they*). A participant failed to correctly write *your*, and instead wrote *you*. Demonstrative pronouns include this and

that, and their plurals these and those, and distinguish position, usually by pointing. Two participants erroneously used *these* instead of *this*. An honorific such as *sir* or *ma'am* conveys esteem, and can act as complete replacements for a name. Although honorifics are a respectful form of address, writers should not assume the gender of the recipient when composing a message. A total of 12 pronoun errors were found, and Table 20 further identifies the errors.

Table 20

*Pronoun Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>                         | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b>      |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Soon I will fill out all the requirements, <b>sir</b> . | 1. Delete sir                       |
| 2. <b>These</b> all information I will send...             | 2. I will send all this information |
| 3. I am interested in <b>you</b> graduate program          | 3. your                             |

4.2.3.4. *Word Form*

Many words in English need to change their form when they are used as verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or nouns. 26 errors relating to word form were found in the study. Table 21 identifies examples of word form errors.

Table 21

*Word Form Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>                             | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. I have <b><u>in the recent past</u></b> completed..         | 1. recently                    |
| 2. I request information on <b><u>getting enrolled</u></b>     | 2. applying                    |
| 3. thanking you  | 3. thank                       |
| 4. And please give a <b><u>prospectus</u></b>                  | 4. prospective student         |
| 5. I received your very <b><u>informed</u></b> email           | 5. informative                 |
| 6. How do I obtain a <b><u>scholar</u></b> ?                   | 6. scholarship                 |
| 7. I am hoping to work with him <b><u>at the soonest</u></b> . | 7. soon                        |
| 8. I don't have the <b><u>sources</u></b>                      | 8. resources                   |

#### 4.2.4. Semantic

##### 4.2.4.1 Word Choice

A usage mistake occurs when a word or a series of words in a sentence are technically grammatically correct, but not usual in standard English. While this is an uncommon error among native speakers, ESL students often translate words from their own language and select the wrong English equivalent for the meaning they wish to express. Word-for-word translations often cause faulty usage, which can in turn result in writing that is difficult to understand.

Although through extensive reading in English these mistakes will dwindle, language learners should be aware of their mistakes. A total number of 43 word choice errors were found. Table 22 identifies a few examples of these errors.

Table 22

##### *Word Choice Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b>         |
|--|--|
| 1. ...date to <b><i>sit for</i></b> the IELTS exam.                                | 1. take                                |
| 2. I will <b><i>do</i></b> my TOEFL test   | 2. take                                |
| 3. I am currently <b><i>coursing</i></b> the second semester                       | 3. taking                              |
| 4. <b><i>I hereby make a request to</i></b> know what exams are required.          | 4. Please let me                       |
| 5. <b><i>Good</i></b> Christmas  | 5. Merry                               |
| 6. ...thank you <b><i>too</i></b> much   | 6. very                                |
| 7. I have <b><i>passed</i></b> Bachelor of Arts                                    | 7. my                                  |
| 8. Please <b><i>allow me information for facilities</i></b> for doctorate          | 8. Please give me information to apply |
| 9. I graduated 5 years ago <b><i>from now</i></b>                                  | 9. Delete: from now                    |
| 10. I want to know the requirements to get admitted in music <b><i>faculty</i></b> | 10. department                         |
| 11. I want to know <b><i>how</i></b> to do to obtain a scholarship                 | 11. what                               |
| 12. The U of A is my first <b><i>option</i></b> .                                  | 12. choice                             |
| 13. I am <b><i>strongly</i></b> interested in pursuing a career in engineering.    | 13. very                               |



Table 22 (Cont.)

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>   | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 14. Can I <b><i>join</i></b> PhD directly with bachelor's degree?          | 14. apply for the              |
| 15. I <b><i>am not holding</i></b> TOEFL.                                  | 15. do not have a              |
| 16. I am attaching it for your <b><i>ready</i></b> reference.              | 16. Delete: ready              |
| 17. <b><i>I hereby make a request to</i></b> know what exams are required. | 17. Please let me              |

#### 4.2.5. Syntactic

##### 4.2.5.1 Word Order

Word order refers to the syntactic arrangement of words in a sentence, clause or phrase.

There were a total of 24 word order errors. Table 23 further identifies these errors, and their corrections.

Table 23

##### *Word Order Errors*

| <b><i>Error Identification</i></b>                           | <b><i>Error Correction</i></b>          |
|--|---|
| 1. 08th October  | 1. October 8th                          |
| 2. How <b><i>long I must</i></b> wait                        | 2. long must I                          |
| 3. <b><i>These all information I will send you</i></b> soon. | 3. I will send you all this information |
| 4. I am a <b><i>student of software engineering</i></b>      | 4. software engineering student         |
| 5. ...paid <b><i>50\$</i></b>                                | 5. \$50                                 |
| 6. I have <b><i>constantly been in touch</i></b>             | 6. been in constant touch               |
| 7. ...in your <b><i>department with poultry</i></b> .        | 7. poultry department                   |
| 8. ...two <b><i>years and half</i></b>                       | 8. and a half years                     |
| 9. <b><i>test of English</i></b>                             | 9. English test                         |

#### 4.3. Statistical Treatment

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that males make more writing errors than females. The test was not significant,  $t(98)=.207$ ,  $p=.84$ , and we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistical difference. While males in the study

( $M=13.57$ ,  $SD=8.93$ ) on average made more errors than females ( $M=13.16$ ,  $SD=9.21$ ), there is not a significant difference.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that writers from countries where English is not an official language make more writing errors than writers from countries where English is an official language. The test was significant,  $t(99)=-.813$ ,  $p=.418$ , but the results were counter to the research hypothesis. We reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistical difference. Participants from countries where English is not an official language ( $M=12.976$ ,  $SD=8.653$ ) on average made fewer errors than participants from countries where English is an official language ( $M=13.16$ ,  $SD=8.885$ ).

As the researcher expected, on average, the higher the educational level, the fewer the errors. The mean error count for undergraduate applicants was 13.977, master's applicants was 13.268, and Ph.D. applicants was 12.438. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between education level and the number of writing errors in the sample emails. The P value (.834) was greater than the significance level (.05), so we failed to reject the null hypothesis that the means are equivalent. And F (.181) is less than F crit (3.090) so we cannot reject the null hypothesis.

The mean error count was different across departments. Walton College of Business applicants made the most errors, averaging 16.938 errors per email. Applicants of the Dale Bumpers College of Agriculture and Life Sciences made the second highest number of errors, averaging 14 errors per email, followed by the Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences, averaging 13.368 errors per email. Applicants of the College of Education and Health Professions made the fewest averaged errors, accounting for 10 errors per email. The College of Engineering made the second fewest average errors, with 12.333 errors per email. A one-way analysis of variance was

conducted to evaluate the relationship between department and the number of writing errors in the sample emails. The P value (.612) was greater than the significance level (.05), so we failed to reject the null hypothesis that the means are equivalent. And F (.718) is less than F crit (2.31) so we cannot reject the null hypothesis.

## **V. Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that international applicants have several problems in email writing. A major source of errors in this research could be lack of knowledge in grammar, vocabulary, interference of mother tongue, and lack of sufficient practice in writing, particularly email writing. Teachers should employ effective methodology for teaching writing, with a special focus on known areas of trouble, including the top 5 most common type of errors: capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, article use, and word choice.

The results of the present study, which is perhaps best categorized as a case study, may not reflect trends in general. However, data gained from this study can serve as invaluable feedback that will help teachers develop their teaching materials and syllabi to better suit learners' abilities and to overcome their weaknesses in writing. The statistical analyses revealed that a) there were statistically significant differences among \_ on overall error types they made in their email compositions, and b) frequency of occurrence of error types in each student demographic were different.

### *5.1. Email Formatting*

Students write emails, or computer-mediated communication (CMC), to professors to ask questions about the curriculum, writing assignments, deadlines, exam dates and complain about their grades. Emails have taken the place of face to face contact during office hours and in between lectures, as well as over the phone correspondences. It is necessary for international

students, unfamiliar with the target culture's norms and values, to be able to appropriately and successfully communicate with professors and academic staff. Amant (2002) acknowledges how the immediacy and directness of emails "may amplify cultural rhetorical differences," complicating exchanges by participants whose English proficiency has not yet developed subtle nuances embedded in cultural identity of the target language. However, if ELLs are taught the fundamental elements of email and colloquial, cross cultural digital communication can be improved.

#### *5.1.1. Email address*

Credibility is an important factor in post-secondary education (Livermore, 2013). When exchanging emails, the recipient subconsciously and consciously evaluate the sender's credibility through the sender's email address. Email addresses appear to have an impact on the perception of others (Livermore, Scafe, Wiechowski, 2011). Livermore (2013) conducted a study to determine what email addresses students perceived to be the most credible. Livermore found Mr.Baseball@AOL.com was least credible, and Ethan.Brown@HFCC.edu was the most credible of all the address options available in the study. The study concluded that students find professional or regular surnames (Ethan.Brown), not nicknames (Mr. Baseball), more credible. Additionally, college email addresses (HFCC.edu), not common (AOL.com) or professional (EDS.com) email addresses, appear to hold more credibility. Newman, Hebein and Drost conducted surveyed college students' perceptions of faculty credibility based on email addresses. The researchers found that a standard business email address is more credible than using a nickname in an email address (Newman, Hebein, & Drost 2008). It is important to note this credibility factor is especially strong if there is no personal contact with email recipients.

Because international applicants are conversing electronically with admissions staff, never engaging face-to-face until after they have been admitted and arrive on campus, email

users must be particularly aware of their email address choice. An email address is the first item the viewer receives. The address must be appropriate, professional, and identifiable. Normally, an email address will include the writer's first and/or last name or initials, with punctuation and numbers. A majority of the participants in this study had professional email addresses; however, 5 participants had inappropriate email addresses. Appendix C lists email address errors.

### *5.1.2. Subject Line*

The subject is the hook. It should be short, concise, and a representation of the content of the email message. A relevant, descriptive subject line should always be included in an email (Labuschagne, 2007). Spinellis (2009) claims every email should tackle one topic and that topic should be the subject line. Granberry (2007) encourages all writers to include a subject line, which should summarize the message or request action. Email senders should include informative, meaningful, and concise email subject lines that may or may not include the sender's name and main topic (Aguilar-Roca, et al., 2009; Hassini, 2006). Blake (2002) encourages senders to use the subject line to capture attention in a positive way, and motivate the reader to open the email. The subject line should summarize the email's content using specifics. A well written subject line helps the recipient prioritize the message and determine necessary action. Phrases such as "Important message" or "Immediate attention" should not be used excessively (Granberry, 2007). Using "URGENT" or "ASAP" shows disregard for the recipient. Even when an email is urgent, labeling it as such in the subject line tends to send a negative tone (Bradberry, 2015).

Skogs (2013) conducted a study to investigate how the subject line content affects overall coherence in an asynchronous online communication exchange in a learning environment. Skogs found subject lines maintain social relationships and contribute to whether students will open a message. Graham (2007) found email writers who do not use a subject line that accurately reflects

message content are seen as impolite. Table 3 identifies the number of emails with subject line errors. Appendix D further identifies the participants' incorrect subject line.

### 5.1.3. Greeting

Electronic communications are often claimed to be informal (e.g. Crystal 2001). However, depending on who the email exchange is between, the level of formality differs. Although email can be a quick, informal exchange between friends, it can also be used as a formal communication between a prospective employer and employee, as well as a professor and student. Labuschagne (2007) believes all emails should always start with a salutation. Previous research has shown that salutations and closings in e-mail interaction play an important role in establishing social relations (Rintel et al. 2001; Waldvogel 2007). According to Waldvogel (2007), the absence or presence of a greeting and the type of the greeting set the tone for the e-mail conversation that follows.

In e-mails, salutations usually consist of a greeting and a first name or last name. Dickey (1997) believes social distance determines whether writers address the email to the reader's first name or title and last name. The combination of both first name and last name can sometimes be used as a compromise between the informality of just a first name, and the 'awkwardness' of title + last name (Dickey, 1997). Gaines (2006) classifies Hi as informal and Dear as formal. Chen (2006) Hi informal, Dear + Title + Surname is formal. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005)* recommends using Dear + Honorific/Title + Surname, or Dear Sir/Madam for formal emails, and Hi (+ First Name), First Name only, and no greeting to be informal. Dear + First Name is considered neutral.

Greetings play an important role in establishing social relations in email. Stommel (2012) conducted a study and found informal salutations, closings and/or the informal second person pronoun reduced the social distance between writer and recipient. Bjorge (2007) conducted a

study on 344 emails to investigate the level of formality in international students' emails sent to academic staff. Different cultures have varying traditions when it comes to student-professor relationships. Hofstede's cultural dimension of power distance (PD) is used to differentiate between relatively high and low PD cultures. Hofstede defines PD as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (2001). High PD is associated with societal views where "subordinates consider superiors as being of a different kind" with privileges. The study found students from relatively high PD cultures are more likely to be formal.

#### *5.1.4. Closing*

A closing can help consolidate the relationship and establish relational basis for future encounters (Stommel, 2012). Altom (2013), a technology consultant, has been studying closings on emails. He defines closings as the 'long, often-flowery prose' before the actual signature, which often indicates the writer's current mood and regard for the recipient. Permutations range in formality: "Regards," "Yours Truly," "Very Truly Yours," "Cordially," "Sincerely," etc. While Thomas Jefferson's closing in a letter to George Washington ended with, "Your most obedient and most humble servant," nowadays a simple "Thanks" will do (Altom). Altom believes closings in everyday business emails are unnecessary, as senders are usually in a rush and don't give a lot of thought to them. However, Altom still favors closings in formal emails such as one to a prospective employer. Because emails sent to the college admissions staff should be formal in tone, closings should always be included.

#### *5.1.5. Signature*

In following a business letter format, a signature should always be used to end an email. While a first and last name are the basic format of a signature, Granberry (2007) defines a

signature block to be composed not only of the sender's name, but also degrees/credentials and contact information. A signature block allows the recipient to be easily identifiable.

### *5.2. Mechanical Errors*

Mechanical errors can usually be attributed to careless typos which could have been prevented through proofreading and spellcheck. Although the content of a written message is arguably the most important, so too, are the mechanics.

The most common punctuation mistakes arise when the student does not correctly end a sentence (producing either a fragment or a run-on.) These are typical of low proficiency writers who do not understand the concept of a sentence, and are neither more nor less likely to be found in an ESL student's work. Mechanical errors seldom interfere with comprehension, but can reflect negatively on the writer, particularly in formal/academic settings.

A capitalized word has a capital first letter with the remaining letters in small (lower-case) letters. The first letter of the first word in a sentence must be capitalized. Proper nouns are capitalized, while common nouns are not. Races, nationalities, and languages are proper nouns. Some students did not capitalize proper nouns, while others erroneously capitalized common nouns.

### *5.3. Grammatical Errors*

Grammar mistakes rarely occur in native speakers' writing but very commonly do in the work of less proficient ESL students, whose mother-tongue "interferes" with the production of correct English. ESL students make numerous mistakes in the use of verbs (for example, incorrect tense choice, incorrect tense form), the articles (*a/an, the* - particularly Asian students in whose languages these words do not exist), and word order.

### *5.4. Future Studies*



The researcher recommends future studies with modifications. Although 100 participants and their respective emails were used in this study, future studies should be conducted on a larger scale, with more participants. More participants will allow the data collection to be a better representation of the EFL/ESL student populations. Additionally, with a larger data set, the researcher can better determine if country of origin impacts the number and type of errors. Because only one participant represented certain geographic regions, the researcher cannot generalize findings based on one representative of an entire region.

The male-female ratio in higher education since the 1970s has been steadily moving in favor of females (Bhandari, 2017). Across all types of schools – private and public – females outnumber males in terms of enrollment. According to the Institute of Education Sciences, on a national scale, public universities - like the university in this study - have the most even division between male and female students (2010). As of 2008, the male-female ratio of public university attendance was 43.6 to 56.4 (IIE).

While national industry trends in higher education indicate a female prevalence, global academic mobility for females is lower than males. During the 2014-2015 academic year, 44% of students pursuing higher education in the U.S. were female (IIE). Bhandari (2017) attributes this gender gap in international students to the fact that many international students apply to the STEM fields, which typically tend to be dominated by male students. Also, international students who come from India and Saudi Arabia, which have become the most common country of origin for international students studying in the U.S., tend to be male. Therefore, the participants in this study should properly reflect these numbers. While future studies should include a fewer number of females than males, females should represent approximately 44% of the participants.

The researcher also recommends future studies to analyze not just errors, but also what participants are doing correctly. Although error analysis is a good first step in identifying error type to assist students, it can overlook critical language learning features. First, when focusing solely on errors, researchers and teachers ignore cases where the learner correctly uses the form. Additionally, error analysis fails to identify avoidance. Schachter (1976) discovered that learners can avoid using certain features of an L2 that they know are particularly difficult, and that they have difficulty with. While avoidance can lead to the absence of errors, it fails to show a learner's mastery of a language skill. Therefore, the scope of error analysis is limited, focusing only on accuracy. Teachers should not exclusively evaluate learner language in terms of accuracy, as accuracy is only one of three ways of describing learner language. Learner language includes accuracy, complexity and fluency. As a result, teachers must include varied approaches to foster the learners' development of complexity and fluency in writing. The researcher suggests future studies to not only focus on errors, but also what the writers do correctly.

Additionally, the emails analyzed in this study ranged in length. The shortest email was a few words, while the longest email was longer than a page of text. To ensure a standardized method of determining error count, emails should be the same approximate length. It can reasonably be inferred that longer emails would have more errors than shorter emails. Although the email with the most errors in this study was not the longest, future studies should analyze writing compositions within a range of a certain amount of words. Or, the researcher should collect the word count of each email as part of the data collection to determine if error count and word count have a positive correlation.

The final adjustment the researcher suggests is having more than one reader. Because errors such as word choice can be subjective, multiple readers should evaluate participants' writing to ensure an accurate assessment of errors.

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## Appendix A

### Explanation of Participants' Demographic Labels

|      |                            |   |    |
|------|----------------------------|---|----|
| Q1   | <b>Gender</b>              | Male  | 1  |
|      |                            | Female                                      | 2  |
| Q2   | <b>Geographic Location</b> | South Asia                                  | 1  |
|      |                            | West Asia                                   | 2  |
|      |                            | Middle Africa                               | 3  |
|      |                            | West Africa                                 | 4  |
|      |                            | Caribbean                                   | 5  |
|      |                            | South America                               | 6  |
|      |                            | South Europe                                | 7  |
|      |                            | North America                               | 8  |
|      |                            | Central America                             | 9  |
|      |                            | Southeast Asia                              | 10 |
|      |                            | East Asia                                   | 11 |
|      |                            | East Africa                                 | 12 |
|      |                            | Central Asia                                | 13 |
|      |                            | North Africa                                | 14 |
| Q2.1 | <b>Country of Origin</b>   |   |    |
| Q3   | <b>Official Language</b>   | English                                     | 1  |
|      |                            | Other                                       | 2  |
| Q4   | <b>College Level</b>       | Undergraduate                               | 1  |
|      |                            | Master's                                    | 2  |
|      |                            | Doctoral                                    | 3  |
| Q5   | <b>College</b>             | Engineering                                 | 1  |
|      |                            | College of Education and Health Professions | 2  |
| Q5   | <b>College</b>             |   |    |



|      |                |   |   |
|------|----------------|---|---|
|      |                | Walton College of Business                            | 3 |
|      |                | Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food, & Life Sciences | 4 |
|      |                | Fay Jones School of Architecture                      | 5 |
|      |                | Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences                  | 6 |
| Q5.1 | <b>Program</b> |   |   |

## Appendix B

### Demographic of Participants

| Participant | Q1 | Q2 | Q2.1         | Q3 | Q4 | Q5 | Q5.1                   |
|-------------|----|----|--------------|----|----|----|------------------------|
| 1           | 1  | 1  | Pakistan     | 2  | 2  | 1  | Computer Science       |
| 2           | 1  | 1  | India        | 2  | 2  | 3  | Business               |
| 3           | 1  | 1  | Bangladesh   | 1  | 1  | 3  | Finance                |
| 4           | 2  | 2  | Iraq         | 3  | 2  | 2  | TESOL                  |
| 5           | 1  | 1  | India        | 2  | 1  | 1  | Industrial Engineering |
| 6           | 1  | 1  | India        | 2  | 1  | 4  | Hotel Management       |
| 7           | 1  | 1  | India        | 2  | 2  | 1  | Biomedical Engineering |
| 8           | 1  | 6  | Brazil       | 3  | 2  | 4  | Plant Pathology        |
| 9           | 1  | 1  | Pakistan     | 2  | 3  | 4  | Poultry Science        |
| 10          | 1  | 1  | Nepal        | 3  | 2  | 6  | Social Work            |
| 11          | 1  | 1  | Bangladesh   | 1  | 1  | 5  | Architecture           |
| 12          | 1  | 6  | Ecuador      | 3  | 3  | 4  | Environmental Science  |
| 13          | 2  | 7  | Greece       | 3  | 2  | 5  | Landscape Architecture |
| 14          | 1  | 1  | Nepal        | 3  | 1  | 6  | Music                  |
| 15          | 1  | 6  | Ecuador      | 3  | 1  | 3  | Business               |
| 16          | 2  | 3  | Cameroon     | 2  | 2  | 4  | Agriculture            |
| 17          | 1  | 8  | Canada       | 2  | 1  | 2  | Pre-Physical Therapy   |
| 18          | 1  | 6  | Ecuador      | 3  | 2  | 3  | Entrepreneurship       |
| 19          | 1  | 4  | Nigeria      | 2  | 1  | 1  | Electrical Engineering |
| 20          | 1  | 1  | Bangladesh   | 1  | 3  | 1  | Computer Engineering   |
| 21          | 1  | 2  | Saudi Arabia | 3  | 2  | 3  | Information Systems    |
| 22          | 1  | 1  | India        | 2  | 2  | 1  | Industrial Engineering |
| 23          | 1  | 5  | Bahamas      | 2  | 1  | 1  | Civil Engineering      |
| 24          | 1  | 1  | Nepal        | 3  | 3  | 6  | Chemistry              |

|    |   |    |             |   |   |   |                        |
|----|---|----|-------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 25 | 1 | 6  | Bolivia     | 3 | 1 | 1 | Computer Science       |
| 26 | 2 | 6  | Brazil      | 3 | 1 | 1 | Chemical Engineering   |
| 27 | 1 | 7  | Greece      | 3 | 3 | 4 | Poultry Science        |
| 28 | 2 | 9  | Panama      | 3 | 1 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 29 | 1 | 9  | Mexico      | 3 | 1 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 30 | 2 | 7  | Kosovo      | 3 | 2 | 1 | Computer Engineering   |
| 31 | 1 | 6  | Ecuador     | 3 | 1 | 1 | Engineering            |
| 32 | 1 | 2  | Turkey      | 3 | 2 | 2 | Special Education      |
| 33 | 1 | 6  | Ecuador     | 3 | 3 | 6 | Journalism             |
| 34 | 1 | 10 | Philippines | 3 | 3 | 2 | Special Education      |
| 35 | 1 | 1  | Iran        | 3 | 3 | 1 | Civil Engineering      |
| 36 | 2 | 9  | Mexico      | 3 | 1 | 6 | Pre-Law                |
| 37 | 2 | 4  | Nigeria     | 2 | 2 | 6 | Biology                |
| 38 | 1 | 9  | Mexico      | 3 | 1 | 1 | Computer Engineering   |
| 39 | 2 | 1  | India       | 2 | 2 | 1 | Electrical Engineering |
| 40 | 1 | 1  | Nepal       | 3 | 2 | 1 | Civil Engineering      |
| 41 | 1 | 1  | India       | 2 | 2 | 1 | Electrical Engineering |
| 42 | 1 | 13 | Uzbekistan  | 3 | 3 | 3 | Business               |
| 43 | 2 | 3  | Cameroon    | 2 | 1 | 6 | Chemistry              |
| 44 | 1 | 1  | Iran        | 3 | 2 | 6 | Graphic Design         |
| 45 | 2 | 1  | Iran        | 3 | 3 | 4 | Food Science           |
| 46 | 1 | 12 | Kenya       | 2 | 3 | 6 | Biology                |
| 47 | 1 | 1  | Nepal       | 3 | 2 | 1 | Civil Engineering      |
| 48 | 1 | 4  | Ghana       | 2 | 2 | 3 | Business               |
| 49 | 2 | 6  | Bolivia     | 3 | 1 | 6 | Biology                |
| 50 | 1 | 9  | Honduras    | 3 | 2 | 3 | Marketing              |
| 51 | 1 | 12 | Rwanda      | 2 | 1 | 3 | Information Technology |

|    |   |    |              |   |   |   |                        |
|----|---|----|--------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 52 | 1 | 1  | Iran         | 3 | 3 | 1 | Chemical Engineering   |
| 53 | 1 | 6  | Bolivia      | 3 | 1 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 54 | 1 | 4  | Ghana        | 2 | 1 | 6 | Art                    |
| 55 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 3 | 1 | Electrical Engineering |
| 56 | 1 | 11 | China        | 3 | 1 | 1 | Computer Science       |
| 57 | 1 | 12 | Rwanda       | 2 | 2 | 1 | Mechanical Engineering |
| 58 | 2 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 4 | Food Science           |
| 59 | 1 | 6  | Bolivia      | 3 | 1 | 3 | Business               |
| 60 | 2 | 4  | Nigeria      | 2 | 2 | 3 | Business               |
| 61 | 2 | 6  | Brazil       | 3 | 1 | 2 | Kinesiology            |
| 62 | 2 | 2  | Saudi Arabia | 3 | 1 | 6 | Pre-Med                |
| 63 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 64 | 2 | 1  | Iran         | 3 | 3 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 65 | 1 | 1  | Nepal        | 3 | 3 | 6 | Organic Chemistry      |
| 66 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 67 | 1 | 6  | Bolivia      | 3 | 1 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 68 | 2 | 1  | Iran         | 3 | 3 | 4 | Food Science           |
| 69 | 1 | 4  | Nigeria      | 2 | 1 | 1 | Electrical Engineering |
| 70 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Mechanical Engineering |
| 71 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Computer Science       |
| 72 | 1 | 4  | Nigeria      | 2 | 2 | 1 | Computer Science       |
| 73 | 1 | 4  | Nigeria      | 2 | 1 | 3 | Business Economics     |
| 74 | 2 | 1  | Pakistan     | 2 | 2 | 4 | Food Science           |
| 75 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Computer Science       |
| 76 | 2 | 6  | Bolivia      | 3 | 1 | 5 | Architecture           |
| 77 | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 1 | 2 | Sports Management      |
| 78 | 1 | 14 | Algeria      | 3 | 2 | 1 | Mechanical Engineering |

|     |   |    |              |   |   |   |                        |
|-----|---|----|--------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 79  | 2 | 6  | Bolivia      | 3 | 1 | 5 | Architecture           |
| 80  | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Mechanical Engineering |
| 81  | 2 | 1  | Nepal        | 3 | 1 | 1 | Computer Science       |
| 82  | 1 | 2  | Iraq         | 3 | 1 | 6 | Music                  |
| 83  | 2 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Electrical Engineering |
| 84  | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 1 | 3 | Business               |
| 85  | 1 | 12 | Kenya        | 2 | 1 | 3 | Business Economics     |
| 86  | 2 | 12 | Rwanda       | 3 | 2 | 6 | Public Administration  |
| 87  | 1 | 1  | Sri Lanka    | 1 | 1 | 4 | Food Science           |
| 88  | 2 | 6  | Bolivia      | 3 | 1 | 6 | Chemistry              |
| 89  | 1 | 1  | Nepal        | 3 | 3 | 6 | Physics                |
| 90  | 2 | 4  | Nigeria      | 2 | 2 | 6 | Geology                |
| 91  | 1 | 4  | Nigeria      | 2 | 1 | 3 | Economics              |
| 92  | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 1 | 1 | Mechanical Engineering |
| 93  | 2 | 1  | Iran         | 3 | 2 | 4 | Agricultural Economics |
| 94  | 1 | 1  | India        | 2 | 2 | 1 | Industrial Engineering |
| 95  | 1 | 2  | Saudi Arabia | 3 | 2 | 2 | Special Education      |
| 96  | 2 | 5  | Belize       | 2 | 2 | 4 | Tourism                |
| 97  | 2 | 5  | Belize       | 2 | 1 | 6 | Music                  |
| 98  | 2 | 5  | Belize       | 2 | 1 | 6 | Tourism                |
| 99  | 2 | 5  | Belize       | 2 | 1 | 6 | Pre-Pharmacy           |
| 100 | 1 | 3  | Cameroon     | 2 | 1 | 4 | Agriculture            |

## Appendix C

### Email Address Errors

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Email Address Error</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 14                 | lambofgodxsw@              |
| 18                 | win.lopezt@                |
| 20                 | me.reeshad@                |
| 60                 | mima.impact@               |
| 97                 | somebody_92@               |

*Note.* 5 participants had email address errors.

## Appendix D

### Subject Errors

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Subject Error</b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| 4                  | request  |
| 19                 | TOEFL WAIVER   |
| 20                 | Perspective Future Student - Query about admission               |
| 27                 | ALWAELI  |
| 28                 | Prospect student   |
| 39                 | TOEFL SCORE  |
| 41                 | Query regarding application process for Graduation               |
| 42                 | Doctorate Degee Aplicant   |
| 52                 | Urgent: MY new CV and SOP - Add to my PhD application please     |
| 56                 | a request about international transfer application               |
| 57                 | requesting informations  |
| 66                 | Submission Of Documents for MS Admissions in Spring 17 Semester. |
| 69                 | requirements for international students                          |
| 73                 | ADMISSION REQUIREMENT  |
| 75                 | Undergraduate transept   |
| 76                 | Undergraduate admission (Giselle Taja)                           |
| 79                 | Contact, information request                                     |
| 81                 | X  |
| 82                 | SMITH, JOHN / International Student                              |
| 83                 | unable to access application cetre                               |
| 87                 | BSC in Food Science.   |
| 92                 | Scholarship information  |
| 93                 | application  |
| 95                 | my application   |
| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Subject Error</b>   |
| 97                 | deferral of admission  |
| 99                 | Prospective Student of University of Arkansas                    |

*Note.* ‘X’ indicates the participant did not include a subject in his/her email. 26 participants had subject errors, and there was a total of 31 errors.

Appendix E  
Greeting Errors

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Greeting Error</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1                  | X                     |
| 3                  | X                     |
| 5                  | Dear Sir,             |
| 6                  | Hello sir,            |
| 7                  | Hi                    |
| 9                  | X                     |
| 11                 | Sir,                  |
| 12                 | X                     |
| 15                 | Hi                    |
| 16                 | Hello!!               |
| 17                 | X                     |
| 20                 | Dear Murphy,          |
| 21                 | Good evening          |
| 23                 | X                     |
| 24                 | X                     |
| 25                 | X                     |
| 26                 | X                     |
| 27                 | Dear vicky.           |
| 30                 | X                     |
| 31                 | X                     |
| 36                 | X                     |
| 37                 | Goodafternoon Sir/Ma, |
| 38                 | X                     |
| 40                 | X                     |



|    |   |
|----|---|
| 41 | X   |
| 42 | Dear University of ARKANSAS                                 |
| 43 | Hi  |
| 44 | X   |
| 46 | X   |
| 47 | X   |
| 48 | X   |
| 50 | X   |
| 51 | X   |
| 52 | Hello ,   |
| 53 | Good morning U of A admission office,                       |
| 54 | X   |
| 55 | X   |
| 57 | Dear recruitment team at Arkansas university,               |
| 58 | Dear Sir/Mam,   |
| 60 | Hello.  |
| 62 | X   |
| 63 | Dear sir/madam,   |
| 64 | X   |
| 65 | X   |
| 67 | Dear Suzanne McCray:  |
| 68 | Dear Graduate Office Coordinator,                           |
| 69 | X   |
| 70 | To, The International Admission Office. UARK. Good Morning. |
| 71 | X   |
| 72 | X   |
| 73 | Good day Ma   |

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 74  | hello sir,  |
| 75  | Hello sir Good morning .                                    |
| 76  | Dear Sirs,  |
| 77  | Hello Sir/Madam   |
| 78  | hello dears   |
| 79  | University of Arkansas, Dear Sirs Good morning,             |
| 80  | Dear Sir,   |
| 83  | X   |
| 84  | Dear Manager, Undergraduate Degree Completion Program, BSBA |
| 87  | Dear sirs,  |
| 88  | X   |
| 89  | X   |
| 95  | X   |
| 96  | Hi  |
| 99  | Hi good evening,  |
| 100 | please sir good christmass ,                                |

*Note.* 'X' indicates the participant did not include a greeting in his/her email. 70 participants had greeting errors.

Appendix F  
Closing Errors

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Closing Error</b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| 1                  | regards: Usman Ghani   |
| 2                  | X  |
| 3                  | Please let me know quickly...  |
| 5                  | Thanking you,  |
| 6                  | X  |
| 7                  | Thanks and Regards   |
| 9                  | X  |
| 11                 | Thankfully   |
| 12                 | Respectfully   |
| 14                 | Thank you  |
| 15                 | X  |
| 17                 | X  |
| 18                 | thanks inadvance for your reply.                                     |
| 19                 | I would like to hear from you soon.                                  |
| 21                 | X  |
| 22                 | Thanks and Regards   |
| 23                 | X  |
| 24                 | Thank you  |
| 25                 | X  |
| 26                 | Thank you  |
| 27                 | God Bless you and Bless America I am looking forward to hear fro you |
| 30                 | X  |
| 31                 | thanks   |
| 32                 | Sincerely  |

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Closing Error</b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| 33                 | X  |
| 35                 | Yours Sincerely,   |
| 36                 | Have an amazing new year!!!  |
| 37                 | Yours faithfully,  |
| 38                 | X  |
| 39                 | I am eagerly waiting for a positive response for admission for MS in UAR |
| 40                 | X  |
| 42                 | Best Regards   |
| 43                 | Thank you for you help. Have a great day                                 |
| 44                 | thanks   |
| 45                 | Best Regards,  |
| 46                 | X  |
| 47                 | X  |
| 50                 | Thanks   |
| 51                 | X  |
| 52                 | Yours Sincerely,   |
| 54                 | ,thank you   |
| 55                 | X  |
| 56                 | Waiting for your reply! Best wishes                                      |
| 57                 | waiting for your answer  |
| 59                 | , thank you very much,   |
| 60                 | Thanks.  |
| 62                 | Thanks   |
| 63                 | X  |
| 66                 | Thanks & Regards,  |
| 68                 | Best Regards,  |

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Closing Error</b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| 69                 | YOURS TRULY  |
| 71                 | Thanking you, Yours sincerely,                               |
| 72                 | X  |
| 73                 | THANKS.  |
| 74                 | X  |
| 75                 | X  |
| 77                 | Thanking You   |
| 78                 | , peace  |
| 80                 | X  |
| 81                 | Sincerely  |
| 82                 | Kind Regards,  |
| 84                 | Kind Regards,  |
| 85                 | Thanks   |
| 86                 | X  |
| 87                 | Awaiting to hear from you soon. Thank you, Yours faithfully, |
| 88                 | X  |
| 89                 | X  |
| 94                 | Thanks & Regards.  |
| 95                 | Thank you  |
| 96                 | X  |
| 100                | thank you too much .   |

*Note.* ‘X’ indicates the participant did not include a closing in his/her email. 71 participants had closing errors.

Appendix G  
Signature Errors

| <b>Participant</b>  | <b>Signature Error</b> |
|---|------------------------|
| 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14-18, 21, 23-26, 30-31, 33, 36, 38, 40-41, 43-44, 46-48, 50, 54-55, 57, 59, 61-65, 72-75, 78, 80, 83, 85-86, 88-89, 93, 95-96, 100 | X                      |
| 7, 92, 99   | John                   |
| 20  | John smith             |
| 27  | JOHN                   |
| 81  | john smith             |
| 51  | John SMITH             |
| 60  | John.                  |
| 39, 69  | JOHN SMITH             |
| 67, 70  | John Smith.            |

*Note.* ‘X’ indicates the participant did not include a signature in his/her email. Names were changed to protect the identity of participants. 64 participants had signature errors.



March 3, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Casey Kraichoke  
Felicia Lincoln

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 17-02-493

Protocol Title: *A Case Study on Non-Native English Speaking College Applicants' Electronic Mail Communications*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 03/03/2017 Expiration Date: 03/02/2018

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 300 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).