

The Types of Grammatical Metaphors Used in Native and Nonnative Request Emails

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Abstract

The present study investigates the frequency of grammatical metaphor (GM) use by native speakers of English in request emails compared to non-native speakers of English. A total of 50 request emails written by native and non-native speakers were analyzed in terms of different types of GM to identify the possible similarities and differences in native and nonnative request emails in terms of different types of GM were assessed. Applying Halliday and Matthiessen's (1999) conceptual framework, it was found that GM was used in 72% of the native request emails (18 out of the 25 request emails) and in 46% of the non-native request emails (11 out of 25 request emails). It was also found that GM was utilized in 117 out of 600 clauses, giving rise to a GM to the number of clauses (GMC) ratio of 0.19 in native request emails. As for non-native request emails, GM was used in 63 out of 500 clauses, giving rise to a GMC ratio of 0.12. Moreover, the results revealed that there were thirteen types of GM in native and non-native request emails and the e-mail writers used mostly type 2 (nominalizing a verbal process) and type 13 (expanding the noun resulting from nominalizing a verb) compared to the other types of GM. The findings of the study can be beneficial for researchers, EFL teachers, and even businessmen working in international companies where they use can opt for different types of GM in their everyday request emails.

Keywords: Grammatical metaphor, native speakers, non-native speakers, request emails

Introduction

Language, as a well-organized instrument, is used to express meaning in different contexts. It's been a long time since grammarians aimed at understanding the nature of language and also how human language is structured. Recently, there has been a growing interest in the form and function of academic language, especially among teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Young & Harrison, 2004).

As a feature of crafted literary language, metaphors changes the focus from cognitive linguistics to functional trends, resulting in Halliday's proposal of the notion of grammatical metaphor within Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG). SFG highlights the difference between social and linguistic structure in a careful manner. According to Wang (2011) and Cehan (2004), it starts at social context, and looks at how language both acts upon and is constrained by this social context. The basic assumption behind this theory is that form and function of grammar are fundamental in discourse formation (Aronoff & Miller, 2003). As a result, SFG refers to a new trend to the study of grammar that is fundamentally different from the traditional view in which language is a set of rules for identifying grammatical structures.

In SFG, the link between the grammatical form of language and the situation is made possible by a metafunctional hypothesis, which is about those functions of language that are built into the very structure and organization of language itself. The types of meaning recognized by

Halliday (1985, 1994) are interpersonal, ideational and textual. He offers comprehensive and practical methods to define and interpret various linguistic structures in the discourse. Moreover, the systemic-functional theory of grammar shows that language is a socially regulated practice of communication.

Languages have their most natural ways of encoding the meanings they express which are called 'congruent' ways. The 'non-congruent' ways of encoding language are referred to as 'grammatical metaphor'. Halliday (1985) proposed the notion of grammatical metaphors, henceforth GMs, within Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG). According to SFG, GMs are divided into two broad areas, i.e. the ideational and the interpersonal. The ideational metaphor includes the process and the nominalization, and the interpersonal metaphor includes modal metaphor and mood metaphor. According to Halliday (1985) and Knowles and Moon (2006), GMs are processes naturally expressed by verbs, become things, and changed into nouns.

Knowing how to use GMs in academic registers is an indispensable part of developing academic language (Halliday, 1985). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) believe that writers who can make best use of GMs write in a more complex and attractive way than those who do not. In the framework of SFL, grammatical metaphor (GM) is one of the most important concepts since it made it possible to enhance the understanding of nature of language, the semogenic process of language, and the relationship between language and context. Halliday (2004) believes that language is a systematic resource for expressing meaning in context. This view of language implies that language must be studied in a different context.

During the last decade, email has become an accepted means of communication in which linguistic competence is not solely sufficient for communicative competence, but socio-pragmatic and sociolinguistic norms are also needed to accomplish communicative purposes properly. E-mail, as a means of fast and effective communication tool, has removed the barriers of distance and time and become very commonplace and important in institutional environments (Biesenbach, 2007). Speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL) across different disciplines need to enhance their awareness of the generic and formal features of the e-mail genre in order to maximize the efficiency of their correspondence. The present study was, therefore, an attempt to find out how often native speakers of English use GMs in their request emails compared to non-native speakers of the language. The current study also focused on the possible similarities and differences of native and nonnative request emails in terms of different types of GMs. Besides, the frequencies of these metaphors were to be investigated in sample request emails.

Review of the Related Literature

Halliday (1985) was the first scholar to define the term GM. He defined it as a substitution of one grammatical class or structure by another one. There is a real need for GM in discourse and text as it opens up a new dimension of a semantic space. Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) assert that GM is a means of having things both ways. A transcribed word loses its originality due to the nature of the semantic features with which it combines. For instance, 'like ...' is a quality; that is, when a person says "like a mouse", it is only a quality. However, a metaphorized element does not lose its originality since its construction does not change due to its being associated with any new semantic feature. In other words, its new semantic feature is due to the metaphorizing process. Therefore, failure is both a process and a thing. It is a process formed as a thing; that is, its initial status remains as a process. However, since it has been nominalized and the prototypical meaning of a noun is a thing, it acquires a semantic status as something that participates in processes.

Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) also explored the nature of GM more deeply by locating it in a broader theoretical environment of the meaning base in languages. According to Halliday and

Matthiessen (ibid), the emergence of GM is related to the natural development of the content plane in a language. Therefore, Halliday and Matthiessen (ibid, p. 7) defined GM as “the phenomenon whereby a set of agnate forms is present in the language having different mappings between the semantic and the grammatical categories”.

GM is conceived as incongruent realization of a given semantic configuration in the lexico-grammar (Hadidi & Raghmi, 2012). As a result, some researchers sought to explore the relationships between uses of GM and complexity of writings. They believed that those who can make best use of GM, their writings are more complex and attractive than those who do not use metaphors. In other words, GM, as a feature of written language, makes the writing more expressive, more complex, and more attractive (Hadidi & Raghmi, 2012).

The study of the uses of GM is particularly useful in revealing how processes are changed into objects. GM, in this case, changes not only the grammar of the texts but also the reader’s reaction to texts. In this spirit, political and business texts have always been an interesting area for analysis and discussion, especially in terms of GM. Discourse analysis of political and business texts has had a long history, but most of the analysis has concerned itself with lexical features, and there are few studies that have analyzed texts and compared them regarding GM (Hadidi & Raghmi, 2012).

Focusing on SFG (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, 2004), Victor Ho (2010) described the following aspects of the use of GM in request e-mails: (1) frequency of use- number of request e-mails containing GM and the number of instances of GM to clauses ratio; (2) types of GM; (3) rhetorical moves in which GM is used; and (4) the information status assigned to the elements realized using GM. He, first, observed that the request e-mail writers, on the one hand, used GM in a large proportion of their e-mails. On the other hand, they restricted its use to a relatively smaller number of clauses in each of the e-mails. Such a behavior could be attributable to the writers’ desire to reach a balance between message conciseness and interpretability. Second, the e-mail writers used mostly nominalizing a verbal process and expanding the noun resulting from nominalizing a verb GM. Such a choice was largely in line with the use of GM in other contexts. Third, the e-mail writers used GM most frequently in three moves, namely *Providing Background Information*, *Convincing*, and *Requesting*. The presence of metaphorical expressions in the Requesting move, together with the New information status assigned to those expressions, have been argued to be attributable to the writer’s desire to reduce the threat to the recipient’s face. Such a combination would then be able to help the writers to manage rapport with the recipients. Contrary to the previous findings which suggest that e-mail discourse tended to be simple and direct, the findings of Victor Ho seemed to indicate that request e-mail discourse constructed by professional English language teachers could be less simple and direct than expected.

Romero and Soria (2005) investigated the notion of GM in Halliday. They claimed that the use of ‘metaphor’ in the Hallidayan use of the expression ‘grammatical metaphor’ was metaphorical and has a metaphorical meaning. In addition, they defended that the notion of GM was metaphorically constructed from an outdated notion of metaphor. In this respect, they argued that calling it GM created some expectations on the part of the reader, to wit, that it was about a kind of metaphor and that there were metaphors that depended exclusively on the grammatical structure of an expression. Nevertheless, the notion of GM referred to certain non-natural grammatical variations of natural grammatical structures and, thus, the expectations were not fulfilled. They also defended that the name chosen for this theory was metaphorical because Halliday described certain grammatical variations from his ideas about metaphor. Finally, they evaluated the metaphorical notion to show that it would have been more illuminating to take a more adequate description of metaphor as the starting point for the metaphorical production of the notion. This way, the

conventional side of the relation between reality and grammatical form would have been transparent. Furthermore, the metaphorical origin of the Hallidayan notion of incongruity and the extra-effects that the grammatical variation entailed would have been noted.

Tabrizi and Nabifar (2013) focused on the application of Hallidayan metafunctional framework in both political and health texts of English newspapers. The analysis of data was conducted through a description of English newspaper texts based on ideational GM. To this end, they conducted some statistics to this strand of meaning, including frequency and percentage of nominalization type of ideational GM in both genres. Finally, two genres of English newspapers were compared statistically to show in what respect they were significantly different or similar. The obtained results indicated that both genres of each English newspapers beared more similarities than differences in terms of using the nominalization of ideational GM. In other words, while indicating genre differences between English newspapers, the study proved their functional similarities in using the material process types more than other process types to convey meaning.

In another study, Kazemian, Behnam and Ghafoori (2013) focused on the first type, i.e. Ideational GM, which included process types and nominalization. They adopted Hallidayan SFG to pinpoint and analyze nominalization and the role played by it. With a corpus of 10 authentic scientific texts drawn from very influential magazines, the analysis was conducted based on nominalization, its frequency, and process types. The analysis displayed that Ideational GM had permeated scientific texts and the prevailing process types were material and relational types. Consequently, the tone of the writing was more abstract, technical and formal.

A number of cross-cultural studies have centered on how requests are realized in terms of politeness and indirectness in different languages by native or nonnative speakers. The available investigations on email requests have been founded on actual email messages and, as a result, authentic speech act production. Nuria and Patricia (2013) examined the email discursive practices of particular speakers of two different languages, namely Peninsular Spanish and British English. More specifically, their study focused on (in)formality and (in)directness therein, for these lied at the heart of considerable scholarly debate regarding, respectively (i) the general stylistic drift towards orality and informality in technology-mediated communication, and (ii) the degree of communicative (in)directness – within broader politeness orientations – of speakers of different languages, specifically an orientation towards directness in Peninsular Spanish vis-à-vis indirectness in British English. They investigated the role of (in) formality and (in) directness in email messages sent by members of two groups of undergraduate students to their university lecturers. To this end, a corpus of 100 impromptu emails was compiled and analyzed. Results revealed complex, fluctuating patterns regarding levels of (in) formality and (in) directness that underlined cross-cultural variation in the way that different socio-pragmatic principles found expression in a specific computer-mediated communicative situation.

Rasouli Khorshidi and Subbakrishna (2014) claim that request, as the most frequent speech act in communication, has been investigated enough in interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural studies. However, most of these investigations were cross-sectional studies. Their longitudinal study aimed at focusing on the Iranian learners' use of internal and external modifiers. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) on request was administered to a group of 72 Iranian English language learners who enrolled in a study abroad program in language institutes in Mysore, India. This questionnaire was given to these participants at three phases over time as a pre-test (at the beginning), post-test 1 (after three months), and post-test 2 (after six months). A group of 60 native speakers also filled the questionnaire to provide the researcher with criteria for a comparison. The elicited data revealed that the number of employed internal and external modifiers increased in each phase compared with the previous one. The results further indicated that a sustained sojourn in the

L2 context provided a positive impact on the study abroad learners' development in the use of internal and external modifiers. Furthermore, findings from this study showed that longer length of stay helped the learners to modify their request utterances more skillfully with internal and external modifiers to make them appropriate according to the context.

As it was demonstrated, there have been a plethora research studies comparing request emails by native and non-native speakers. Moreover, there have been some studies conducted on the notion and the types of GM. However, only one research by Victor Ho (2010) has been conducted on GM in request email discourse, to the best of researchers' knowledge. Victor Ho (2010), however, did not study the types of GMs used by native and non-native speakers in their request email. Therefore, the present study was an attempt to find out what types of GMs were used by native and non-native speakers in request emails, and how often non-native speakers of English, i.e. Asian EFL background community, used GMs in their request emails compared to native speakers of the language. As a result, the following research questions are posed:

1. Are grammatical metaphors in native and nonnative request emails different in terms of types?
2. Are grammatical metaphors in native and nonnative request emails different in terms of frequency?
3. Are there any similarities in native and nonnative request emails in terms of different types of grammatical metaphors?
4. Are there any possible differences in native and nonnative request emails in terms of different types of grammatical metaphor.

Methodology

This study tried to reveal the variation on the use of GMs in native and nonnative request emails. To reach this aim, a descriptive analytic method was used to identify expressions (clauses) in native and non-native request emails, using GM with reference to the types of GM, introduced by Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) (Table 1). Then, the types and the frequency of GMs in both texts were compared and contrasted.

To answer the research questions, the researchers opted for a total of 100 emails written by native and non-native applicants to the head of college in order to get acceptance to attend TESOL courses. Then, 50 emails which had the purpose of 'requesting' (25 native and 25 non-native) were chosen as the final sample. Every one of the clauses making up the 50 request emails was carefully studied to identify expressions – clauses or participants – realized using GM. The researchers were aware of the fact that the metaphorical expression could be rewritten into its congruent form in more than one possible way as for each metaphorical expression. In other words, as put by Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), "there will be a number of different agnate expressions corresponding to it" (p. 230). To analyze the corpus the suggested the conceptual framework of Halliday (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) were applied. To decide on the most probable congruent expression that the metaphorical one should be rewritten into, two other applied linguists, who were professional English language teachers, were invited to study the data and rewrite the clauses with metaphorical expressions into their congruent forms. One of the writers and the two linguists then compared and discussed their congruent forms. A consensus was reached among the three for each of the congruent forms, and, therefore, for each type of GM the e-mail writers had used. The writers were then able to determine, first, the types of grammatical metaphor used, and, second, the frequency of the use of grammatical metaphor. Finally, the similarities and differences among native and non-native request emails in the types and frequency of use of grammatical metaphor were examined.

Table 1. Types of grammatical metaphor

| Type | Grammatical shift | | Semantic shift | |
|------|---------------------------------------|--|----------------|-----------------------|
| | Congruent | Metaphorical | Congruent | Metaphor |
| 1 | Adjective | Noun | Quality | Thing |
| 2 | Verb | Noun | Process | Thing |
| 3 | preposition / prepositional phrase | Noun | Circumstance | Thing |
| 4 | Conjunction | Noun | Relator | Thing |
| 5 | Verb | Adjective | Process | Quality |
| 6 | preposition / prepositional phrase | Adjective | Circumstance | Quality |
| 7 | Conjunction | Adjective | Relator | Quality |
| 8 | preposition / prepositional phrase | Verb | Circumstance | Process |
| 9 | Conjunction | Verb | Relator | Process |
| 10 | Conjunction | preposition / prepositional phrase | Relator | Circumstance |
| 11 | -- | +noun | -- | Thing |
| 12 | -- | +verb | -- | Process |
| 13i | Noun | Various | Thing | Expansion of thing |
| 13ii | adverb / prepositional phrase | Adjective/ various | Circumstance | |

Results

The types of grammatical metaphors used

To answer the first research question, i.e. are grammatical metaphors in native and nonnative request emails different in terms of types?, the instances of GM appeared in the clauses of the request e-mails were compared with those listed in Table 1 and classified accordingly. Table 2 summarizes this classification. The first row shows the types of GMs employed by the e-mail writers using the same numbering as in Table 1. The second and third rows show the number of native and non-native emails, respectively.

Table 2. Types of grammar metaphor used in native and non-native request emails

| Type | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|--------------------------|---|----|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|
| No. of native emails | 7 | 15 | - | - | 8 | 10 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 3 | 12 |
| No. of non-native emails | 3 | 7 | - | 1 | 4 | 5 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 1 | 6 |

As the figures in the second row in Table 2 show, the native writers preferred to use the same few types of GMs most frequently. In descending order, these types are 2, 13, 6 and 5. That is, they

nominalized a verb (type 2) most frequently, followed by expanding the noun (type 13), then changing a prepositional phrase into an adjective (type 6), and changing a verb into an adjective (type 5). As the third row show, it seems that the non-native writers, like the native writers, prefer to use the grammatical metaphors of type 2, 13, 6 and 5 most frequently in their request emails. Below, some extracts for some of the types of GMs gathered for this study are given:

Extract 1 (Types 2 and 13) (native email)

Metaphorical: Their responses give me hope.

Congruent: The ways the students responded give me hope.

Grammatical/semantic shifts:

(Type 2) verb/process (responded) → noun/thing (responses)

(Type 13) noun/thing (the students) → possessive deictic (Their)

Extract 2 (Type 5) (non-native e-mail)

Metaphorical: ... hand them to your 'target' kids ...

Congruent: ... hand them to the kids that you target at ...

Grammatical/semantic shifts:

Verb/process (target in that you target at) → adjective/quality (target in your 'target' kids)

Extract 3 (Type 6) (native e-mail)

Metaphorical: We need to submit the exam result analysis to school ...

Congruent: We need to submit the analysis of the result of the exam to school ...

Grammatical/semantic shifts:

Prepositional phrase/circumstance (analysis of the result of the exam) → adjective/quality (exam result analysis)

Extract 4 (Type 12) (non-native email)

Metaphorical: Also, please express my gratitude to the boys and girls ...

Congruent: Also, please tell the boys and girls that we are grateful to them for ...

Grammatical/semantic shifts:

(Type 12) --/-- (tell the boys and girls that we are grateful to them) → + verb/+ process (express my gratitude to the boys and girls)

It can be argued that, first, there are different types of GMs in native and non-native request emails. Second, GMs of type 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 12 and 13 turn to be more frequent more frequently in native emails, and grammatical metaphors of type 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13 are used in non-native emails. Finally, the same few types of grammatical metaphor are used by both native and non-native writers in their emails most frequently. In descending order, these types are 2, 13, 6 and 5.

The frequency of different types of grammatical metaphor

To answer the second research question, i.e. are grammatical metaphors in native and nonnative request emails different in terms of frequency?, each clause of the request e-mails in the three groups was read closely and instances of GMs were identified with reference to Table 1. The frequency of use of GMs in the request e-mails is shown in terms of, first, the percentage of e-mails containing GM, and, second, the ratio of the number of instances of GM to the number of clauses (GMC ratio hereafter). The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of use of grammatical metaphor in native and non-native request e-mails

| Frequency | Figures |
|---|------------------------|
| Percentage of native emails with grammatical metaphor | 72% (18/25 emails) |
| GMC ratio | 0.19 (117/600 clauses) |
| Percentage of native emails with grammatical metaphor | 46% (11/25 emails) |
| GMC ratio | 0.12 (63/500 clauses) |

Table 3 shows that GM was used in 72% of the native request emails (18 out of the 25 request emails) and in 46% of the non-native request emails (11 out of 25 request emails). GM was utilized in 117 out of 600 clauses, giving rise to a GMC ratio of 0.19 in native emails. It was also used in 63 out of 500 clauses, giving rise to a GMC ratio of 0.12 in non-native request emails. It follows that while GM appeared in the majority of request e-mails, it was only used in a small number of clauses.

Similarities in native and nonnative request emails

To answer the third research question, i.e. are there any similarities in native and nonnative request emails in terms of different types of grammatical metaphors?, the results of Table 2 are utilized. As it can be seen, some of the GMs are preferred to be used by both native and non-native writers in their emails. These types of GMs are number 1, 2, 5, 6, 12, and 13. Also, four types of GMs are most frequently used by both native and non-native writers which are type 2, 13, 6 and 5 in descending order.

Possible differences in native and nonnative request emails

Regarding the last research question, i.e. are there possible differences in native and nonnative request emails in terms of different types of grammatical metaphors?, it can be seen in Table 2 that, first, there are two types of GM (type 4 and 8) that were only used in non-native request emails. Second, there is only one type of GM (type 11) that is only used in native request emails. However, the number of occurrence of those types of GMs is low in native and non-native emails. Type 4 and 8 were used in 1 and 2 non-native emails, respectively, and type 11 was used only in 1 native email.

Conclusion and Discussion

As a means of creating and maintaining interpersonal relations, language helps the human make meanings about the world around and inside them (Halliday, 1985). Containing some lexical and grammatical components, a written text will turn into a meaningful context. This meaningful context contains grammatical shifts or GMs, especially in the ideational metaphor where these meaningful changes are obvious. Knowing how to use GM in academic registers is a crucial part of developing academic language. Some researchers believe that the writings of those who can make best use of GMs are more complex and attractive than those who do not.

From the above results, one can see that a large percentage of native request emails (72%) and less than a half of non-native request emails (46%) contained GM. However, when the GMC ratio is taken into consideration, it can be revealed that the proportion of clauses containing metaphorical elements was comparatively smaller in both native and non-native emails- 0.19 and 0.12- respectively. These figures suggest that while the email writers showed a strong tendency to use GM in constructing their request e-mail discourse, such a tendency was limited to a small number of clauses of each email. This seems to indicate that the email writers were aware of the

pros and cons of using GM; that is, it could make the message concise, but at the same time, making the message more complicated and cognitively demanding and, thus, less interpretable than when the same message was realized by clauses written in their congruent form. The writers could, therefore, be trying to strike a balance between conciseness and interpretability of their messages.

Contrary to the previous findings which suggest that e-mail discourse tends to be simple and direct, the findings of the present paper seemed to indicate that request e-mail discourse constructed by both native and non-native writers could be less simple and direct than expected.

Pedagogical Implications

It is predicted that this investigation can improve the usage of GMs in request emails by the participants of the study. In addition, the study might suggest a better form of instruction regarding this delicate part of the grammar, both in the language schools and universities. The results of the study can be beneficial for researchers, EFL teachers, and even people around the world working in international companies where they use can choose from different types of GM in their everyday request emails.

Recommendation for Further Research

The writers of the present study are aware of the limitations of this study, especially in terms of its corpus size. The corpus could be made more representative by including more request e-mails written by the same or different groups of native and non-native writers. As a result, stronger claims concerning the reliability and validity of the findings obtained and the explanations given in this paper could be made.

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