

A STUDY OF E-MAIL WRITING ABILITY OF THE 4TH YEAR CHIANGRAI RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY TOURISM INDUSTRY STUDENTS

Natthaphon Santhi

Professor Emeritus Kanchana Prapphal, Ph.D.

English as an International Language Program,
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

Abstract

Based on Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Genre Analysis (GA) frameworks, this study aims to achieve three purposes including: 1) to examine the e-mail writing ability needed among personnel in Thai travel agencies; 2) to assess e-mail writing ability of Chiangrai Rajabhat University 4th year tourism industry management students; and 3) to investigate the students' e-mail writing strategies. The research instruments included needs analysis questionnaire, three e-mail writing ability test tasks and rubrics, and e-mail controlled retrospective interview. There were two groups of the population involved in this study. Firstly, ten travel agencies in Bangkok were recruited for the needs assessment with regard to e-mail writing expectations and for collecting e-mail samples. Secondly, twenty nine 4th year Tourism Industry Management students at Chiangrai Rajabhat University involved in the test administration to assess their e-mail writing abilities and strategies. The findings from the questionnaire received from the ten travel agencies revealed three most common tasks including: 1) Book accommodation; 2) Confirm service; and 3) Amend service. Following the two-layer genre analysis of the three e-mail tasks, at the macro level, the results showed the 4-move structure that includes Move 1 Establishing the negotiation chain, Move 2 Providing Information/answers, Move 3 Requesting Information/actions, and Move 4 Ending. At the micro level, the main features included appropriate greeting and ending forms in Move 1 and 4. Declaratives/imperatives were reported as key linguistic features found in Move 2 and Move 3 which determine the core functions defining the nature of business correspondence. The results from the needs and genre analysis

were used to formulate the construct definition of the three e-mail test tasks and the rubrics to assess and evaluate the students' e-mail writing abilities. The test score results indicated that the students' e-mail writing performance was homogeneously low, but the e-mail writing strategies results reported the high frequency use across the three types of strategies including cognitive, metacognitive, and affective among poor and good students. The outcome of strategies report explained the ineffective use of the strategies by most students and the ineffectiveness seems to be affected by factors involving the students' lacks in linguistic and background knowledge. The findings showed that the e-mail writing ability constructs, tasks, and the scoring rubrics could be used as resources for e-mail writing training workshops or courses for tourism industry management students and other areas of Language for Specific Purposes.

การศึกษาความสามารถทางการเขียน E-mail ของนักศึกษาปี 4 ในวิชา อุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว
มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย

บทคัดย่อ

บนพื้นฐานของกรอบการศึกษาระดับภาษาเฉพาะทาง (LSP) และการวิเคราะห์ประเภทของวรรณกรรม (GA) งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อให้บรรลุวัตถุประสงค์สามประการ ได้แก่ : 1) เพื่อศึกษาความสามารถในการเขียน e-mail ที่จำเป็นของบุคลากรในหน่วยงานการท่องเที่ยวไทย 2) เพื่อประเมิน ความสามารถในการเขียนจดหมาย e- mail ของนักศึกษาปี 4 วิชาการจัดการอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว ของมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย และ 3) เพื่อศึกษา กลยุทธ์การเขียน e-mail ของนักเรียน การวิจัยนี้ใช้แบบสอบถามความต้องการ การวิเคราะห์งาน การทดสอบความสามารถในการเขียน e-mail 3 งานและโครงสร้าง และการสัมภาษณ์ย้อนหลัง โดยใช้ e-mail ควบคุม มีประชากรสองกลุ่มในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ ในประการแรกมีหน่วยงานการท่องเที่ยวสิบแห่งในกรุงเทพฯที่ได้รับคัดเลือกสำหรับการประเมินความต้องการในเรื่องเกี่ยวกับความคาดหวังในการเขียน e-mail และการจัดเก็บ e-mail ตัวอย่าง ประการที่สอง มี นักศึกษาปี 4 วิชาการจัดการอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว ยี่สิบเก้า คน ที่มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงรายที่มีส่วนร่วมในการบริหารจัดการการทดสอบเพื่อประเมินความสามารถและกลยุทธ์ ในการเขียน e-mail ของพวกเขา ผลการวิจัยจากแบบสอบถามที่ได้รับจากหน่วยงานการท่องเที่ยวสิบแห่ง แสดงให้เห็นงานที่พบมากที่สุดสามอย่าง ได้แก่ : 1) การจองที่พัก 2) การยืนยันการบริการและ 3) การปรับปรุงการบริการ สืบเนื่องจากการวิเคราะห์ประเภทงาน e-mail - ในระดับมหภาคผลการศึกษาพบโครงสร้าง 4 อย่าง (*4-move structure*) โดยที่ *Move 1* การจัดหัวใจการเจรจาต่อรอง *Move 2* การให้ข้อมูล / คำตอบ *Move 3* การขอข้อมูลการดำเนินงานต่อไป และ *Move 4* การจบจดหมาย ในระดับจุลภาค คุณสมบัติหลักจากรูปแบบการทักทายและการจบจดหมายที่เหมาะสมใน *Move 1* และ *4* *Declaratives/imperatives* ได้รับรายงานว่าเป็นองค์ประกอบหลักที่สำคัญที่พบใน *Move 2* และ

Move 3 ที่กำหนดหน้าที่ของจดหมายธุรกิจ ผลจากความต้องการและการวิเคราะห์ประเภทถูกนำมาใช้ในการกำหนดความหมายของ งานทดสอบและโครงสร้าง e-mail สามฉบับ เพื่อการวัดผลและประเมินผลการเขียน 'e-mail' ของนักเรียน ผลคะแนนการทดสอบแสดงให้เห็นว่าผลการดำเนินงานการเขียน e-mail โดยรวม ของนักเรียน ต่ำ แต่ ผลกลยุทธ์การเขียนราช e-mail มีการใช้ประเภทของกลยุทธ์ 3 อย่าง ด้วยความถี่ของการใช้ที่สูง ซึ่งมีองค์ความรู้ *cognitive, metacognitive, and affective* ในกลุ่มนักเรียนที่อ่อนและเก่ง ผลการรายงานกลยุทธ์ แสดงว่านักเรียนส่วนใหญ่ใช้กลยุทธ์ที่ไม่ได้ผล เนื่องจากยังขาดความรู้ด้านภาษาและความรู้พื้นฐานในงาน ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าโครงสร้างการเขียน e-mail งานและเกณฑ์การให้คะแนนสามารถใช้เป็นแหล่งข้อมูลสำหรับการฝึกอบรมการเขียน e-mail จึงปฏิบัติการหรือหลักสูตรสำหรับนักเรียนการจัดอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวและด้านอื่น ๆ ของภาษาเฉพาะทาง

Background

Tourism industry is one of the key business sectors underpinning Thailand's economy. This segment annually generates high-level of income and employment opportunities to the country (NESDB, 2008). Operating tourism business in the Internet era, players in this intermediary business context must consider taking an advantage of information and communication technology (ICT) advancement (such as the Web and e-mail) to enhance their business comparative and competitive potentiality (Intrapairrot & Srivihok, 2003:215).

However, according to Cosh & Assenov (2007:500), ICTs adoption in Thai tourism industry is still immature. The findings from their quantitative and qualitative study investigating the use of online services and evaluated the effectiveness e-mail use of Thai tourism product providers reported that the e-mail customer service from these providers was found disappointing; and the large skill gap of employees' language capabilities and e-commerce knowledge were also observed. They suggested that better e-mail policies and training should give these Thai travel agents an immediate competitive advantage. The needs of better e-mail policies and training raised by Cosh & Assenov (ibid) may lead to the assumption that the tourism students graduating from the universities in Thailand are not sufficiently equipped with effective e-mail writing ability and the emerging knowledge of the e-tourism prior to their graduation and entering the working environment.

How could this problem be alleviated? One of the possible means is taking the washback approach of testing practice to develop a test examining the e-mail writing ability of the students in the tourism discipline. In any testing situation, washback effect refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning and it holds two influential dimensions, that is, negative and positive. For the negative aspect, Prapphal (2008:129) stated that the negative washback effect has already affected the context of Thai educational system, such as, the large-scale university entrance exam, which uses mainly multiple-choice format to achieve reliability and scoring practicality, and has influenced the way teachers teaching students in many schools (upper-secondary level) by focusing on reviewing the content and format of the university entrance exams. On the other hand, the positive impact of testing towards teaching and learning has also been pointed out by Weigle (2002:147) in the case of TOEFL on the aspects of test usefulness for the TOFEL. In her words as she wrote:

"...it should be noted that potential impact was an important consideration in making writing an obligatory component of the TOEFL, as it was felt that including writing on the test might lead to more writing instruction and practice for potential examinees".

Considering the positive washback approach to develop the test of e-mail writing ability, the test basically encourages two benefits. Firstly, the test results can reflect the students' e-mail writing abilities that illustrate the attributive traits expected by stakeholders such as business owners, institution administrators, teachers, and students. Secondly, if necessary an effective e-mail writing course can be developed to provide the students with effective e-mail writing skills before they graduate and get a job in the tourism industry (intermediary business).

In addition, Douglas (2000:6-8) maintained two reasons with regard to the language for specific purposes abilities that, firstly, the specific purpose language is precise. Precision for Douglas is referred to the technical language that people who work in the specific field must control to communicate effectively and to hold legitimate membership of that discourse community. Secondly, language performances vary with context in that variations in the linguistic elements are linguistically determined and realized by the context where they are used.

However, the complex business of defining language ability or “what language attributes are being measure?” was clearly noted as Schoonen in Hinkel (2011:701) pointed out in his words that:

...the term “language ability” is considered a common practice of language assessment but it seems there is no common practice because the assessment of language ability is too complex to be captured in one common practice. Language ability per se is a complicated, multifaceted construct, consisting of many interdependent or independent sub-skills, and each sub-skill can be operationalised in many different ways. Moreover, language ability is assessed for many different purposes, and these purposes affect decisions about how language tests are designed.

So, to assess the success of second language learners in mastering e-mail writing abilities in this specific purpose language use situation, the frameworks of Assessing Language for Specific Purposes (Douglas, 2000) and Genre Analysis to ESP Assessment (Bhatia, 1993; Santos, 2002) were exploited to arrive at the assumption of important construct definition of e-mail writing abilities. According Douglas (2000:282), for any specific purposes language test to examine how well the individuals can use language in specific contexts of use, the test must address both their language knowledge and their background knowledge, and their use of strategic competence that work in harmony to formulate the successful communication of the specific purpose language abilities in the target language use situation. In line with Douglas (2000), Bhatia (1993:193-200) noted the genre analysis approach to ESP assessment as follows:

- 1. ESP, whatever its objectives may be, will require some forms of assessment to give the learner feedback on his or her achievement and to show accountability to the sponsors.*
- 2. ESP assessment, in order to be effective, must be towards the specific end of the general-specific continuum.*

To sum up, while e-mail is ubiquitous and is an important communication tool for the today's internet-driven travel agents, there seems appeared e-mail writing ability deficiency of the staff working in this emerging e-tourism (Cosh & Assenov, 2007:500). This problem may be fixed by, firstly, analyzing the target language use characteristics and tasks in order to arrive at the assumption of expected abilities that the tourism students should attain to become the effective e-mail writers in this discourse

community; and secondly, taking the washback approach of the testing practice to develop an e-mail test to evaluate the e-mail writing abilities of the students before they graduate. In addition, an effective e-mail writing course may be developed thereafter if necessary to equip the students' immediate needs. As Weigle (2002:1) maintained that *wherever the acquisition of a specific language skill is seen as important, it becomes equally important to test that skill, and [e-mail] writing [ability] is no exception* [parenthesis added]. So, the discussion here leads to the aims of this study that: 1) to investigate the e-mail writing abilities needed among personnel in Thailand travel agents; 2) to assess the e-mail writing abilities of the 4th year tourism industry students of Chiangrai Rajabhat University; and 3) to examine the e-mail writing strategies of the 4th year tourism industry students of Chiangrai Rajabhat University.

Population and samples

There are two groups of the population in this study. Firstly, ten travel agencies in Bangkok participated for the needs assessment with regard to e-mail writing expectations and for collecting e-mail samples. Secondly, twenty-nine 4th year Tourism Industry Management students at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University involved in the test administration to assess their e-mail writing abilities and strategies.

Research instruments

There are three research instruments employed in this study: 1) needs analysis questionnaire to indicate the top three tasks in the Thai travel agencies; 2) three e-mail test tasks and scoring rubrics to evaluate the students' e-mail writing abilities; and 3) controlled retrospective interview to evaluate their writing strategies. These instruments were developed by the researcher.

Methodology, results, and discussions

According to Bhatia (1993:193-200)'s statement which noting that for ESP assessment to be effective, it must be towards the specific end of the general-specific purpose continuum. The specific end of the continuum notion was reaffirmed by Douglas (2000:35) which asserted that the specific purposes language ability determines the insidership of a language user in a specific target language use situation. This insidership knowledge was clearly

evaluated through the specific purpose language ability model which comprises three components including: 1) language knowledge; 2) background knowledge; and 3) strategic competence. The language knowledge includes the knowledge about the linguistic properties such as word, sentence, and discourse structures as well as the appropriate use with the audience and situations. Specifically, the background knowledge which indicates the precise knowledge that grants legitimate membership to a language user in a specific speech community through the use of specific rhetorical patterns, technical terms, and grammatical choices such as the use of legalese or legal language in the lawyer and courtroom community. And, strategic competence or strategies serves as a mediator that facilitates the language and background knowledge to work in harmonious manner to meet the intended purpose of the language use.

In line with the specific purpose language ability model set forth by Douglas (2000), the genre analysis framework provides the precise knowledge of the discourse structure within two dimensions (macro and micro). The macro aspect involves an insight understanding to the cognitive structure (move structures) while the micro aspect includes contextual and linguistic devices to realize the communicative purpose of the genre.

So, the specific purposes language ability model (Douglas, 2000) and genre theory (Bhatia, 1993) serve as the theoretical foundations to define the constructs of the e-mail writing abilities in this study.

Defining e-mail writing abilities

Defining e-mail writing abilities paves the way to formulate the e-mail test constructs. In this study, two approaches within the framework of discourse analysis were involved to define the construct definition of the e-mail test. The two approaches included identifying the characteristics of the target language use situation and tasks, and identifying language components needed to serve the communicative purposes of tasks in that particular context.

The first step was to identify the tasks that are most commonly found in the Thai travel agency operation. As Weigle (2002:3-4) proposed that it is useful to identify the needs of language use and the writing tasks found in the language use situation as a means to define the writing abilities because writing varies within contexts and situations and thus a single definition of language ability cannot cover all situations. So, the needs analysis

questionnaire was employed to serve as a mean to identify the top three most common tasks in ten travel agencies in Bangkok. The questionnaire results indicated that the three main e-mail tasks in the travel agency business were Book Accommodation, Confirm Service, and Amend Service. Table I illustrates the degree of correspondence (keywords identifying the communicative purpose) of the characteristics of the language use situations and tasks and the characteristics of the test tasks.

Table I: The Target Language Use (TLU) situations and tasks used in the test

TLU Situations and tasks	Test tasks
1. The reservation staff write an email to a hotel to request a room reservation for their clients (tour operator overseas which are the travel agency customers)	1. Writing an email requesting a hotel room reservation and ask for a room confirmation right away
2. The reservation staff write an email to a client (tour operator overseas) to provide confirmation result of a hotel room reservation	2. Writing an email providing confirmation result of a hotel room reservation and ask for confirmation and payment
3. The reservation staff write an email to a hotel to request period amendment of a hotel room reservation for the clients (tour operator overseas which are the travel agency customers)	3. Writing an email amending period of a hotel room reservation and ask for amendment result and confirmation of the booking

The second step was the genre analysis of the e-mail samples. Genre analysis involves the two-layer analysis of a discourse pattern that includes macro (move-step) and micro (lexico-grammatical) structures. The macro analysis serves as a means to outline the whole structure of the text in question which highlights the schematic structure that the members of the target language use community must acquire. The micro analysis reveals the specific grammatical patterns and vocabulary that allow legitimate access to the members of that discourse community. The genre analysis framework precisely concurs with the Language for Specific Purposes Model (Douglas, 2000:7-8) which stated that the technical language which has specific characteristics and communicative functions within that field defines the boundary between general and specific purposes of the language use. The results of the two-layer genre analysis serve as a blueprint to determine the pattern of the e-mail discourse (genre) in the Thai travel agencies.

The two-layer genre analysis of the e-mail samples following the Santos (2002)'s modified framework of Business Letter of Negotiation (BLN) revealed that, at the macro level, the three tasks showed the 4-move structure that included Move I Establishing the negotiation chain, Move 2 Providing Information/answers, Move 3 Requesting Information/actions, and Move 4 Ending. At the micro level, the linguistic features for Move I include appropriate greeting forms and clear subject line; Move 2 and Move 3 serve as the core functions, that is, providing and requesting functions which are the defining features of the negotiation discourse in business correspondence; Move 4 serves the ending ritual that remarks the polite ending of the discourse. While Move I and Move 4 serve the common greeting and ending ritual of this type of discourse, Move 2 and Move 3 incorporate two significant linguistic features to realize two defining communicative functions of the moves. That is, declarative was reported as the key linguistic feature of Move 2: Providing Information/answers, while imperative was used as the defining feature of Move 3: Requesting Information/actions. However, the sequence of Move 2 and Move 3 is flexible depending on the needs of the writers. Table 2 summarizes the schematic structure and linguistic features of the three email tasks.

Table 2: The summary of schematic structure and linguistic features of the three email tasks

Structural moves	Functions	Examples of sentences, phrases & expressions
Move I: Establishing the negotiation chain	To set the scene of the communication chain. The writer writes clear subject line as well as greets and addresses the participants using polite forms of language.	1. State clear subject line identifying clearly the purpose of the email message such as "New booking ..." "Confirmation..." "Amendment..." 2. The opening salutation commonly found using is "Dear". 3. Sometimes, greeting patterns such as "Greeting from ..." "Warmest greeting from..." "Once again greeting from..." are also used following the opening salutation. 4. Phrases identify reference information patterns are also used

		to establish link to set the scene for the negotiation such as "From our conversation over the phone..." "Refer to our telephone conversation a few minutes ago..."
Move 2 (Providing information /answers)	To provide information for the hotel reservation/confirmation/amendment procedure such as details about period of stay and room rates, guests' names/surnames, flight details which is important for the hotel to know for transfers arrangement	<u>Declaratives/Imperatives</u> are commonly found in combination with technical vocabulary and abbreviation for travel agency and hotel operation such as "We're pleased to confirm I DBL/ABF 2 NTS for (meaning confirmed hotel booking includes a double-bed room with American Breakfast for 2 nights).
Move 3 (Requesting information /actions)	To make requests for actions/information	<u>Imperatives that identify requesting function</u> in this context is commonly used with "please" such as "please book and confirm...". Other linguistic forms that can fulfill requesting purpose may also be used such as declaratives.
Move 4 (Ending)	To end the correspondence	Closing salutation forms appropriate for business context are used such as best regards or regards. Sign-off patterns including signature and company address are commonly found to give details about the sender and the company such as job position, contact address, email, website, tel, fax, etc.

The results from the genre analysis were used as a blueprint to formulate the construct definition of the three e-mail test tasks and the rubrics to assess and evaluate the students' e-mail writing abilities. Table 3 outlines the components of e-mail writing abilities in this study which is based on the language for specific purpose model proposed by Douglas (2000).

Table 3: The components of e-mail writing abilities based on the Language for Specific Purpose Model (Douglas, 2000)

Language knowledge/language ability

- **Grammatical knowledge** refers to knowledge of formal features of English such as mechanics, morphology, syntax and word choices using appropriate vocabulary, general vocabulary and technical vocabulary, based on the situations provided.
 - **Textual knowledge** is the knowledge of cohesion and knowledge of rhetorical organization: email components (opening salutation, body, and closing salutation) and business e-mail of negotiation genre following the four-move structure that includes establishing the negotiation chain, providing information/answers, requesting information/actions, and ending.
 - **Functional knowledge** means the knowledge of how to state the purpose using accurate forms in business e-mail of negotiation genre based on the writing situation.
 - **Sociolinguistic knowledge** refers to the knowledge of how to control tone which can be natural, positive and polite style in business email writing by using appropriate forms in business e-mail of negotiation genre based on the writing situation.
- (2) **Background knowledge/topical knowledge** is the knowledge of how to write the business email of negotiation using the background knowledge in travel agency operation based on the prompt provided in order to complete the tasks.

In addition, analytic scoring scheme, adapted from the CLB (2000)'s integrated scoring scheme, was employed as the grading criteria model. The criteria cover the details of constructs including: grammatical knowledge, textual and functional knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, and background knowledge. These criteria correspond with the Douglas (2000)'s Language for Specific Purpose Model. Table 4 shows the scoring sheet comprising criteria adapted from CLB (2000:37).

Table 4: The email writing ability scoring sheet
(Adapted from CLB, 2000:37)

Criteria	Scores
1. Effectiveness (functional)	1 2 3 4
2. Grammatical Accuracy (grammar)	1 2 3 4
3. Appropriateness (sociolinguistic)	1 2 3 4
4. Organization (textual)	1 2 3 4
5. Vocabulary (background)	1 2 3 4

Students' e-mail writing ability

To investigate the students' e-mail writing abilities, two main steps in the test development and test administration were involved. The test development stage was reported in the previous section. For the test administration stage, twenty-nine 4th year tourism industry students at Chiangrai Rajabhat University were recruited as the whole population.

Two instruments employed to investigate the students' e-mail writing abilities included three e-mail test tasks and e-mail writing abilities scoring rubrics. The three test tasks were: 1) Book Accommodation, 2) Confirm Service, and 3) Amend Service. The sub-total score for each of the e-mail tasks is twenty which accumulates the total of sixty points for all three tasks. The scoring rubrics was the 4-band scale that comprises five assessment criteria, that is, Effectiveness, Accuracy, Appropriateness, Organization, and Vocabulary. The two-trained raters were recruited to judge each of the students' writing products. The sub-total scores assigned for each of the components was used to calculate the total score in each of the three test

tasks. The total score indicated the student's e-mail writing abilities. Table 5 portrays the descriptive statistics of the students' performance on the three test tasks judged by two raters.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the three e-mail tasks assessed by two raters (N=29)

Raters/Tasks	Mean	%	SD	Max	%	Min	%
Rater 1 (Total)	27.38	45.63	8.45	50	83.33	16	26.67
Task 1	9.48	47.40	3.08	17	85.00	5	25
Task 2	8.38	41.90	3.28	18	90.00	5	25
Task 3	9.52	47.60	3.82	19	95.00	5	25
Rater 2 (Total)	31.72	52.87	6.67	47	78.33	22	36.67
Task 1	11.38	56.90	2.56	16	80.00	6	30.00
Task 2	9.59	47.93	2.28	15	75.00	5	25.00
Task 3	10.76	53.79	3.17	18	90.00	6	30.00

The score results revealed that the scores judged by two raters indicated that the total correlation between the two raters is at .76 ($p \leq .01$) meaning that they agreed in judging the e-mail writing ability of the 4th year tourism industry students. For the 4th year tourism industry students' e-mail writing performance on all three e-mail test tasks, the score results were close to 50% of the total score (twenty points in each task and the total score for 3 tasks is sixty points). That is, the mean scores were 9.48, 8.38, 9.52 from Rater 1; and 11.38, 9.59, 10.76 from Rater 2. Remarkably, some students could obtain high scores from 17 to 19 points in all three tasks; however, the lowest scores from 5 to 6 points were similarly reported in all three tasks by the two raters. The distribution of the scores was interpreted from the Standard Deviation values which were 3.08, 3.28, and 3.82 for the first rater and 2.56, 2.28, and 3.17 for the second rater in rating Task 1, 2, and 3. In summary, it could be concluded that the 4th tourism industry students at Chiangrai Rajabhat University e-mail writing performance was homogeneous. They were low achievers judging from the mean scores in all three e-mail tasks which were around 50% of the total score. The SD values were minimal even though some students could gain high scores.

The results from the students' performance on the three e-mail test tasks can also serve as the diagnostic means to evaluate the students' strengths and weaknesses in the five areas of the scoring components. Table 6 provides the summary of the mean scores from five scoring criteria.

Table 6: Mean scores from five scoring criteria (N=29)

Mean Score of Five Scoring Components (4-scale rubric)		E-mail Test Tasks/Total Mean			
		Task 1 (9.48)	Task 2 (8.38)	Task 3 (9.52)	Total
Effectiveness	Mean	1.93	1.62	2.00	5.55
	SD	0.80	0.73	1.04	2.56
Accuracy	Mean	1.59	1.45	1.52	4.55
	SD	0.73	0.63	0.74	2.10
Appropriateness	Mean	1.48	1.31	1.45	4.24
	SD	0.69	0.76	0.74	2.18
Organization	Mean	2.69	2.59	2.72	8.00
	SD	1.00	0.91	0.92	2.83
Vocabulary	Mean	1.79	1.41	1.83	5.03
	SD	0.90	0.78	0.80	2.49

Revealed from the data set, it can also be inferred that grammatical ability of the students was their most weaknesses among the five language ability components when the sum of mean scores in Appropriateness and Accuracy scales were the lowest scores, that is, 4.24 and 4.55 while students' ability regarding schematic pattern of the e-mail structure was their strength when the sum of mean scores in Organization criterion in all three tasks was the highest among the other four components, that is, 8.00.

The findings somewhat corroborated Cosh & Assenov (2007:500)'s study when they pointed out that e-mail has become the default communication tool for today's infomediary-based travel agents, but the staff's e-mail writing ability in this context was still inefficient. The results could, therefore, lead to the needs to empower the e-mail writing ability of the 4th year tourism industry student at Chiangrai Rajabhat University. Because when this group of the students graduates from the university, they

become the workforce for the Thai tourism industry business circle. The proposal includes, for example, the e-mail writing ability workshop or the training course with an aim to enhance the students' specific ability that equips them to meet the needs of the real-world situations.

Students' e-mail writing strategies

Following the specific purpose language ability model proposed by Douglas (2000) which comprises language knowledge, background knowledge and strategic competence, the issue regarding strategic competence or strategies also needs to be addressed. The controlled retrospective interview was employed to identify "what" and "how" the strategies were used in the email writing process. The scope of the email writing strategies proposed in this study was derived from the synthesis of the learning strategies frameworks set forth by Oxford (1990) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Sun (1998), Petric, B. & Czarl, B. (2003), and Dornyei (2005). Although their strategies classifications are inconsistent, there is a consensus that strategies can basically be classified into four groups, including metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective (Dornyei, 2005:169).

During the course of literature review to synthesize the descriptions of strategies of Oxford (1990) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) as well as other related literature, for example, Sun (1998) and Petric, B. & Czarl, B. (2003), it was found that the descriptions of the strategies categories and the sub-strategies are inconsistent and overlapping. However, the descriptions of strategies proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990:137-139) was chosen as the constructs for the development of interview questions in this study because it corresponds to the four-group strategies classification scheme. In addition, its metacognitive sub-strategies descriptions (planning, monitoring, evaluating) also reflect the stages in the writing process that includes pre-writing, writing and revising (Petric, B. & Czarl, B., 2003:190) as well as the rest of strategies categories reflect the nature of email writing in the real world. However, only three types of strategies were used in this study including metacognitive, cognitive, and affective because the social affective is considered irrelevant for testing situation. The structured interview was conducted with two groups of students, 10 good and 10 poor students, after they finished the e-mail writing tasks. The overview about e-mail writing strategies of the students are portrayed in two dimensions, that is, descriptive

statistics and interview report. Table 7 gives the descriptive information showing frequencies of the strategies used by the two groups of students.

Table 7: The summary of the strategies used in the e-mail writing tasks

Strategies	Good Students (N=10)		Poor Students (N=10)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1. Metacognitive Strategies	29	96.67%	25	83.33%
1.1 Planning	9	90%	10	100%
1.2 Self-monitoring	10	100%	8	80%
1.3 Self-evaluation	10	100%	7	70%
2. Cognitive Strategies	35	87.50%	37	92.50%
2.1 Summarizing	9	90%	10	100%
2.2 Substitution	8	80%	9	90%
2.3 Translation	8	80%	10	100%
2.4 Deduction	10	100%	8	80%
3. Affective Strategies	20	100%	15	75%
3.1 Self-reinforcement	10	100%	8	80%
3.2 Self-talk	10	100%	7	70%
Summary of Strategies	84	93.33%	77	85.55%

The findings indicated that the good students accounted for 93.33% of the frequencies of the strategies used across the three types of the strategies, while the poor students portrayed only 85.55% of the strategies used during the e-mail writing process. This figure, however, revealed minimal difference (7.78%) in the use of e-mail writing strategies among the two groups of students in all three e-mail test tasks.

The results indicated that both groups of the students were active e-mail writing strategies users; however, their score results were pretty low. The

outcome of strategies report could lead to the assumption that the use of e-mail writing strategies was somewhat ineffective. The ineffectiveness seems to be affected from factors involving linguistic and background knowledge. According to Douglas (2000:35), the specific purpose language ability includes three components - language knowledge, background knowledge, and strategies. They work in harmony to drive the specific purposes language ability outcome. Strategies or strategic competence function as a mediating factor fueling the functioning link between the language and background knowledge. If this is the case, when the students lack both of language and background knowledge, the use of strategies was perhaps ineffective. As Hawkins in Hinkel (2005:34) noted Jimenez, Garcia, and Pearson (1996)'s study and reported the results of the study that aimed at examining factors contributing to the reading proficiency (in English) of Latino children. The study also included investigating the learners' strategies, text interactions, and transfer of skills across languages, and attitudes. In their words, the results clearly pointed out the missing link between linguistic and background knowledge and thus resulted in poor performance of successful and less successful readers on the reading test, as they wrote:

"...more successful (Anglo and Latino) readers "could access well-developed networks of relevant prior knowledge" (1996:91) and encountered fewer unfamiliar vocabulary words and concepts, thus enabling them to attend more to comprehension."

"...their test performance was adversely affected by their limited prior knowledge of certain test topics, their poor performance on the scriptally implicit questions (which required use of background knowledge), their unfamiliarity with vocabulary terms used in the test questions and answer choices... (1996:371)"

In this study, the Chiangrai Rajabhat University 4th year tourism industry students' strategies information was derived from a structured interview. The O'Malley and Chamot (1990)'s strategy model was incorporated as a theoretical framework underpinning the development of e-mail writing strategy questions. This framework outlined four groups of strategies including: metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective. However, only three types of strategies were used in this study including metacognitive, cognitive, and affective because the social affective is considered irrelevant for testing situation.

Implications of the findings

In an attempt to find out some practical solutions to serve the needs in the Thai travel agency context concerning the e-mail writing ability, this study has shed some light on practical implications.

Firstly, the study re-proposes the fine blending manner of two main theoretical frameworks including Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) Model and Genre Analysis. The two frameworks underpin the careful consideration to define the e-mail writing ability construct which has been used as a blueprint for developing the three e-mail test tasks and scoring rubrics as the main instruments determining the students' e-mail writing ability in this study. The Language for Specific Purposes Model (Douglas, 2000) allows the researcher access to consider the language ability components that include language knowledge, background knowledge, and strategic competence. However, it is an uneasy task to define the language knowledge both at the macro and micro levels as well as the relationship between language, background and strategic knowledge. The complex business of defining language ability was clearly noted when the researchers in both first- and second language have general consensus in perceiving that writing varies within different people in different situations which make it impossible that a single definition of language ability can cover all situations (Weigle, 2002: 3). For example, the ability to write down business correspondence is quite different from the ability to write an argumentative essay. Weigle (2002:4) states that if it is too broad in defining writing ability in a specific target language use situation, perhaps it is useful to frame the way in which people use second language in general and second-language writing in particular, and the writing types that are found in using that particular target language situation to define writing ability.

The Santos (2002)'s Business Letter of Negotiation Model, the product from the genre analysis studies, is considered practical means for analyzing business e-mail discourse because the genre analysis has led the researcher to examine both language features and patterns needed to perform the tasks effectively in the target language situation. In addition, the two-level (lexico-grammatical and schematic pattern) analysis of the genre framework has paved the way to ease perplex issues regarding "what is being measured?" or the way in which what kinds of language abilities are defined. That is, the genre analysis results of the e-mail in Thai travel agency situation revealed that this kind of genre involves the 4-move structure and the linguistic features such

as declarative and imperative functions which are key elements to serve the communicative purposes of the e-mail tasks in this situation. In addition, the analysis results also indicated some specific vocabulary that reflects precision knowledge or technical terms commonly used by the members in this speech community, for example, the use of specific verb forms such as book, amend, and confirm. So, the 4-move structure, declaratives, imperatives, and specific vocabulary are key linguistic features that the research can use to formulate the construct of the e-mail writing ability and therefore the scoring rubrics of the e-mail test tasks.

Secondly, the e-mail writing ability constructs, tasks, and the scoring rubrics can be used as resource for e-mail writing training workshop or course for tourism industry students. The e-mail writing constructs, tasks, and rubrics showed the authenticity of situation and interaction in that results of the e-mail analysis came from the real e-mail samples that were used in the real e-mail business correspondence in the Thai travel agency context. In addition, the e-mail tasks involves the authenticity of interaction in that the test takers must read the e-mail test prompts and perform the tasks indicated in the prompts. This process resonates with the real working situation of the staff in the travel agency sitting in front of the computer checking their e-mail box for e-mail requesting for services from their clients.

Finally, revealed insignificant difference among good and poor students, the strategies study perhaps implies the effectiveness use of the strategies which is also resulted from the interaction between language knowledge and background knowledge. So, in the case that if language learners lack those knowledge, strategies training alone may not lead to the intended purpose of enhancing the language proficiency.

Recommendations of the study

The main focus of this study places upon the business e-mail negotiation genre and its writing abilities. However, other types of genre are also available for an investigation, for example, hotel contact rates correspondence between the hotel and the travel agency. The hotel contract communication between hotels and travel agencies are considered the landmark that identifies the degree of relationship between the two business partners. This is because it requires several steps to convince the hotels to issue the contract rates for the travel agencies especially the newly established ones. When the hotel contract has been issued, it has validity bounding for expiry in an annual

term. The renewal and follow-up tasks come in to play for the travel agencies to convince the hotels again to renew the following year of the hotel contract rates. This process is an ongoing task for the people in this specific business. The linguistic knowledge found from the genre analysis may shed some light for the SMEs especially the newly established small-size travel agencies in the Thai tourism industry.

In this study, the controlled retrospective interview was selected for the strategies investigation to maximize the validity and reliability purposes, for example, the interview questions were developed with some established concepts that are linked with the strategies model proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). So, the interview questions may only be limited to only the aspects of the strategies use indicated in the proposed strategies model. To get the more in-depth knowledge in the strategies investigation, the unstructured interview is also considered a challenging means to examine the interviewee's real and in-depth knowledge regarding the strategies used during the writing process through the open-ended responses under a more relaxed atmosphere. In addition, apart from the unstructured interview, the think-aloud protocols can also be employed to maximize the rich information about the strategies and cognitive processes as Hurd and Lewis (2008:226) maintained that think-aloud protocols offer the most detailed information of all because the student describes strategies while doing a language task.

Finally, this study was in an attempt to maximize the situations and interactions authenticity of the test by taking several steps to incorporate the authentic properties in the target language use situations and tasks into the test, for example, analyzing the situations and tasks characteristics, analyzing the e-mail discourse structure, and investigating the strategies used during the writing process. However, the context of the study was partially authentic because the e-mail test was administered with the students not the real working people. So, this study can also be replicated within the workplace settings. The test scores can be used to serve several purposes such as placement purpose to recruit new staff or diagnostic purpose to assess the staff e-mail writing ability.

Therefore, replication of this study in the workplace settings can serve as a means to expand and reaffirm the assessment knowledge from the classroom setting to the real world situation, and may lead to the discovery of new and interesting rhetorical patterns.

References

- Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings*. Harlow: Longman.
- Brown, J. D. (2011). Quantitative Research in Second Language Studies. In E. Hinkel. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning Volume II* (pp.199). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2000). *The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000, ESL for Adults and ESL for Literacy Learners*. Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Retrieved May 2, 2008 from www.language.ca/pdfs/esl_literacy.pdf.
- Cosh, K., & Assenov, I. (2007). Reviewing the Use of Online Services by the Tourism Industry in an Emerging Market: The Case of Thailand. *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Information Technology and Travel & Tourism: IFITT's Global Travel & Tourism Technology and eBusiness Forum (ENTER 2007)*. Ljubljana, Slovenia, January 2007. SpringerLink. (pp. 493-502).
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Douglas, D. (2000). *Assessing language for specific purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hawkins, M. R. (2005). ESL in Elementary Education. In E. Hinkel. (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp.34). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hurd, S. & Lewis, T. (2008). Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings. *Second Language Acquisition*. (pp. 218–236). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Intrapairot, A. & Srivihok, A. (2003). The e-Commerce of SMEs in Thailand. In Th. Thanasankit, (Ed), *E-commerce and Cultural Values*. (pp. 199-219). Idea Group Inc (IGI).
- Jimenez, R. T, Garcia, G. E, & Pearson, P. D. (1996). The reading strategies of bilingual Latina/o students who are successful English readers: Opportunities and obstacles. (pp. 90-112). *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(1).

- Lewis, M. (2000). *Teaching Collocation: Further Developments in the Lexical Approach*. London: Language Teaching Publication.
- Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board (NESDB). (2008). *Thailand Tourism Strategic Development Action Plan 10*.
- O'Malley, J. M. & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. New, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York, NY: Newbury House.
- Petrić, B., & Czár, B. (2003). Validating a writing strategies questionnaire. *System*, 31, 187-215.
- Prapphal, K. (2008). Issues and trends in language testing and assessment in Thailand. *Language Testing*, 25(1). (127-143).
- Santos, V. B. M. P. dos. (2002). Genre analysis of business letters of negotiation. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21, 167-199.
- Schoonen, R. (2011). How Language Ability Is Assessed. In E. Hinkel. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning Volume II* (pp.701). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sun, Y. C. (1998). *E-mail writing strategies and Selected Learner and Teacher Variables in the ESL Classroom* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1998). (UMI No. 9909620).
- Weigle, S. C. (2002). *Assessing writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.