

EMPLOYMENT REJECTION EMAILS: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND PROFESSORS' PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract. *The nature of the current academic job market engages many PhD holders in continuous search for employment. The competitive job market created by this causes recruitment committees to review an overwhelming number of materials submitted by each candidate. It is often the case that applicants are not alerted if their applications are not successful, which likely creates frustration. Although receiving a rejection letter may be considered an act of kindness, rejection can be a face-threatening act for both the addressor and the addressee. Therefore, special care needs to be given to writing an employment rejection letter. Despite this, the advanced electronic communication often utilized when communicating to applicants seems to create formidable challenges. With this in mind, this research aimed to identify how the rejection speech act is performed in emails addressed to PhD holders, and what professors thought about different types of rejection emails. Data for the former collected using fifty-eight authentic employment rejection emails and data for the latter were collected using a survey comprised of three emails, to which twenty professors responded. Results revealed that a variety of moves were employed in the emails. These included 'subject-line', 'salutation', 'thank-you note', 'notification of process completion', 'compliment', 'justification', 'rejection', 'remedy', 'appreciation and/or thank-you note', 'good luck wish', 'valediction', and 'addressor's name and/or affiliation'. Although these moves did not seem to have a fixed order, an overall structure was detected. On the other hand, data on professors' opinions about different rejection emails showed that the content and how rejection is expressed impacted their perception of the self and the institution. Results are discussed and recommendations are offered to mitigate the effects of employment rejection emails which are highly face-threatening.*

Key words: *rejection, speech acts, email, employment, job, business English, ESP*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the National Science Foundation (2015), American universities awarded over 54,000 doctorate degrees in 2014, most of which were earned in science and engineering. The trend in the data from 2004 to 2014 also showed an increase in PhDs awarded across disciplines, with the only exception being education doctorates. At the same time, the job market for recent PhD graduates appears to be getting tighter across

the board with post-graduation job appointments on the decline. Given that education and social science graduates tend to have the highest levels of student debt, the lack of employment opportunities may be particularly debilitating for graduates of these disciplines (Jaschik, 2016).

Although doctoral programs have traditionally catered to developing academic faculty, the trend in U.S. higher education shows that institutions are increasingly relying on contingent faculty appointments, including part-time adjuncts and non-tenure-track positions (Hurlburt & McGarrah, 2016a). This has been promoted as a cost-saving measure for educational institutions as salaries of contingent faculty are significantly less than their tenured and tenure-track peers. Part-time adjunct faculty tend to earn the least as they are compensated either per course or per semester with no additional benefits (Hurlburt & McGarrah, 2016b).

Given the nature of the current academic job market, PhDs may be searching for employment on a continual basis. The route to a possible position in academia often involves lengthy online employment applications through applicant tracking systems that require candidates to manually input information from their CV and identify references who are then contacted immediately for recommendation letters, even though the applicant may not be screened through to the next step, much less given an interview. Although institutions note that the use of these systems helps simplify the hiring process, they may be a deterrent to PhDs in a job market where multiple applications for different positions are increasingly the norm. On the other hand, the competitive job market means that there are more candidates than there are jobs. Thus, the hiring process is also fraught with issues on the institutional end as recruitment committees must consider the materials provided by each candidate in order to narrow down the search. As a result, applicants often find that they may not be alerted if their application for an academic position was unsuccessful (Perlmutter, 2014). As such, receiving a rejection letter from an academic institution may itself be considered an act of kindness.

Writing a rejection letter can also be a difficult task. Brown's (1993) analysis of academic job rejection letters provides some clues to the complex nature of the task and speaks to the variety of patterns that emerge. The wording of the message may have certain effects on job seekers' well-being as well as their perceptions of the institutions to which they applied (Feinberg, Stanton, & Gable, 1996). Based on our own experiences and anecdotal evidence from scholars around us, employment rejection letters within the Humanities and Social Sciences do not seem to have a fixed pattern. This often makes it difficult for selection committees to decide how to communicate candidates. Therefore, the face-threatening nature of rejection letters, together with the sheer number of applications that need to be processed, therefore lead many not to inform candidates about the negative decision reached. However, when candidates receive a rejection letter, the effects may be undesirable. Despite this, very limited research has been conducted into the challenging nature of the rejection speech act in employment letters/emails. This, in turn, limits ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students' preparation for more comprehensive real-life situations. This current study is an attempt to better fill this gap in the literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Rejection as a Speech Act*

In his seminal work, "How to Do Things with Words", Austin (1962) proposes the notion of "performative utterances" as an illocutionary act. He notes that the name for the notion is derived from the verb "perform", and states that uttering a sentence is not describing what is being done, but rather, doing it. This concept is central to Searle's (1975) theory of speech acts, where an utterance is defined as a functional unit in communication (Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985). An example of a speech act is refusal, in other words rejection, whereby the performer declines something, be it an invitation, request, etc. (Moody, 2011). When speech acts are combined and produced together, they create a speech act set, or a complete speech act. (Murphy and Neu, as cited in Tanck, 2004). When performing a refusal, for example, three distinct speech acts can be produced. First there may be an expression of remorse ("I apologize" or "I'm sorry") followed by a direct refusal ("I can't attend your dinner party"), and finally, an excuse ("I will be out of town") (Chen as cited in Tanck, 2004).

2.2 **Employment Rejection Letters**

An employment rejection letter may fall under the auspices of a refusal as it is a basically a letter from an organization to notify the applicant that he or she will not be receiving a job offer (Aamodt, 2016). Barešová (2008) notes that the speech act of rejection is normally embedded in a set of acts, through use of a head act, defined as "that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements", and supportive moves which are "units which precede or follow the head, modifying its impact" (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper as cited in Barešová, 2008, p. 71). In the case of rejection, the head act is the statement of rejection. The supportive moves involve positive and negative politeness strategies. An example of the former may be an expression of gratitude, while an example of the latter is an apology. These may be followed by other speech acts such as promise, which is another instance of a politeness strategy.

Heathfield (2017) sees rejection letters as a positive step for an organization as they help promote goodwill to ensure that the organization establishes itself as an employer of choice for future opportunities. This is crucial to an organization's reputation to attract highly qualified candidates. Pratt (2015) similarly believes that rejection letters build a relationship between the organization and the candidate who is encouraged to think positively of the organization and thus promote it as such. A candidate may be a potential customer or a potential applicant for future openings in the organization (Aamodt, 2016). Thus, positive treatment at this juncture can provide organizations with a greater pool of possibilities for future interactions. However, organizations stand to lose these opportunities if they fail to communicate with applicants through the use of rejection letters.

While technology allows organizations to receive hundreds of applications for job openings, it also creates impersonal recruitment processes (Synegal, 2016). Empirical evidence shows that the organization's failure to send a rejection letter is perceived by the applicant as less courteous and less respectful (Waung & Brice, 2000). Applicants with such feelings of mistreatment may resort to black propaganda, impacting on their friends' and family members' perception of the organization, the results of which easily translate

into a negative image of the company (Feinberg, Stanton & Gable, 1996), which in turn can reduce profitability (Brice & Waung, 1995). Given the large numbers of applicants for a single position, it is not reasonable to expect organizations to write personalized letters to each rejected candidate. However, maximum care needs to be taken to develop communication processes that are able to convey bad news to large numbers of people while maintaining their dignity (Brown, 1993). The speech act of rejection should be performed using words that avoid harming a person's self-image or self-esteem (Feinberg et al., 1996). Using Fairness Theory, proposed by Folger & Cropanzano in 1998, to study explanation within employment rejection letters, Gilliland, et al (2001) note that explanations detailing the qualifications of the person who received the job offer ("Would Reducing" explanations) and explanations of external conditions such as a hiring freeze that led to the applicant not being chosen ("Could Reducing" explanations) were associated with reduced perceptions of unfairness among rejected job applicants. In fact, applicants who received a "Could Reducing" explanation within their rejection letter were twice as likely to reapply for a position within the organization at a later date. The study also looked at the interaction between "Would Reducing", "Could Reducing", and "Should Reducing" (explanations that detailed the fairness of the selection process) and found that a combination of two explanations is needed to generate positive effects among rejected job applicants.

The extent to which a rejection letter is successful can be evaluated considering Grice's cooperative principle that helps determine effectiveness of communication. Grice (1989) argues that those engaged in conversation need to "make [their] conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [they] are engaged" (p. 26). His four maxims support the cooperative principle. The first one of these is quantity, which requires the speaker to be mindful of the amount informative given; it is supposed to be the right amount, not lacking or too much. The second maxim is quality, which is related to the truthfulness of the speaker who is supposed to communicate information that is true and supported by evidence. The third one is the maxim of relation, which concerns the relevance of the information provided by the speaker to the topic at hand. The last one is manner, which is about how the information is conveyed by the speaker. It needs to be expressed briefly, and clearly so that the message is not ambiguous. This is also supported by Aristotle's position on clarity in rhetoric: "A good style is, first of all, clear. The proof is that language which does not convey a clear meaning fails to perform the very function of language" (as cited in Brown, 1993, p. 770).

These maxims can often support each other in direct and indirect ways. Though Grice explicitly referred to the spoken communication and speakers in his arguments, we believe that the cooperative principle together with the four supporting maxims are relevant to written discourse at large, and employment rejection letters in particular. The last maxim (manner) has a particular relevance to the speech act of rejection in letters. As is discussed above, such letters need to be composed with special care not to offend the applicants nor disturb the relationship between the organization and the applicants. It is also essential that the message be clear to the applicant. If need be, relevant, brief information can be provided to the applicant regarding the rationale for the decision, which is related to the maxim of quantity. Also, automated letters that are rather short and lack the required moves would violate both the maxim of manner and the maxim of quantity. This may reduce the applicant's self-esteem and perception of the organization.

2.3. Types of Rejection

One approach to classifying rejection letters is considering directedness; whether rejection is direct or indirect. According to Blum-Kulka (as cited in Barešová, 2008), in direct rejection, a formulaic expression of regret, in the form of a performative such as “I regret” or an adverbial such as “regretfully”, precedes the statement of rejection. To reduce the effect of the face-threatening nature of the act, a variety of mitigators may be used. These could include syntactic and lexical means such as hedges. In the case of negative rejection, on the other hand, the target speech act is performed indirectly by performing another one (Searle, 1975), and can be expressed through hints, association, and other clues (Barešová, 2008).

A second approach to classification of employment rejection letters is by Fielden and Dulek (as cited in Feinberg et al., 1996) who identified two types of rejection letters: negative and positive. They noted that negative letters refer to other applicants being more qualified and provide specific reasons for their decision of rejection. They may also make references to the candidate’s strong desire to work for the company, employing “you” messages in comparison to “we” messages. Although they may acknowledge the applicant’s positive qualities, they fail to wish them success in the future. They also lack a thank-you note at the end. Negative rejection letters may also be significantly short, lacking justification for the decision.

Aamodt and Peggans (as cited in Aamont, 2016) note that employment rejection letters vary to a great extent affected by a combination of the following types of responses: a) a personally addressed and signed letter, b) the company’s appreciation to the applicant for applying for a position with the company, c) a compliment about the applicant’s qualifications, d) a comment about the high qualifications possessed by the other applicants, e) information about the individual who was actually hired, f) a wish of good luck in future endeavors, and g) a promise to keep the applicant’s resume on file.

2.4. Organization in Employment Rejection Letters

Carmicheal (2016), the senior editor of Harvard Business Review, states that a successful rejection letter has the following order: a) expression of gratitude, b) deliverance of the message, c) explanation of the main reason, and d) offer of hope. However, Doss, Glover, Goza and Wigginton (2015) believe that employment rejection letters may or may not provide an explanation of the reason for denying employment. Noting that many candidates may be rejected not because they do not qualify but because the organization favors someone else with skills, education, and credentials deemed superior, they suggest that rejection letters not be offensive or patronizing. A sample rejection letter can be seen in Figure 1 below.

The sample letter in Figure 1 is written in a positive way and encourages the applicant to watch for future possibilities with the organization; however, Carmicheal (2016) recommends not to offer hope if there is not any. This may be particularly the case for applicants who have not been interviewed.

<p>[Date]</p> <p>[Candidate's address]</p> <p>Dear [Candidate's name],</p> <p>Thank you for interviewing for the position of ... with [name of the organization]. We enjoyed the interview, and hope your visit was both interesting and informative. Unfortunately, we are only able to select one candidate from among the many candidates that applied for the position. Therefore, we regret to inform you that you were not selected as the leading candidate for the position of We are currently unable to offer you employment with [name of the organization].</p> <p>We wish you the best of successes with your future endeavors. Please be mindful of any future opportunities that may exist with our department. We encourage you to apply for future jobs with our department.</p> <p>Thank you for your interest in [name of the organization].</p> <p>Regards,</p> <p>[Signature]</p> <p>[Addressor's name]</p> <p>[Addressor's affiliation]</p>

Fig. 1 Sample job rejection letter (Adapted from Doss, Glover & Goza, 2015)

Barešová's (2008) approaches to organization of employment rejection letters from a slightly different perspective, and follows the structure below.

a) *Preparation for the rejection*, which functions as a supportive move softening the impact, has two parts. The first one is an opening in the form of gratitude or acknowledgement of receiving application. The second is a transition, which is usually in the same sentence as the rejection or immediately precedes it.

b) *Actual rejection* can be performed in direct and indirect ways. The former includes "a statement explicitly mentioning the addressee, as in the example of "We cannot accept you." (p. 80). The latter, on the other hand, includes "a statement not explicitly mentioning the addressee, as in the example of "We accepted someone else" or "The position has been filled." (p. 80). Rejection also includes the supporting move of explanation, which could be performed in direct or indirect ways. A direct explanation explicitly mentions the application's qualifications (e.g. "Your qualifications do not match our current needs"), rather than focusing on the candidate himself/herself. On the other hand, an indirect explanation shifts the focus from the candidate or his/her qualifications to someone or something else, as in the example of "Qualifications of another candidate more closely meet our current needs".

c) *Remedy*, which takes a variety of forms including apology and compensation, as in the example of "Your resume will be kept on file and you will be contacted should other appropriate positions become available". Remedy helps end the letter on a positive note, reducing the impact of the face-threatening act on both the applicant's and the addressor's parts.

3. THE RATIONALE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The tight job market for PhDs along with the increasing reliance on contingent faculty appointments makes job-hunting the norm for many candidates. This combined with the shared governance norms at institutes of higher learning that focus on the use of hiring committees along with human resource personnel and technology applications often result in an extremely slow hiring process. Rejection letters, if provided, tend to arrive via email and are often computer-generated form letters. Given the importance of employment search for university professors' own well-being and the effects it may have on their students and research, employment rejection letters seem to be of great significance. Although there have been pockets of interest in other speech acts in spoken discourse in particular, there seems to be a lack of research conducted into rejection in employment letters. Barešová (2008) is among the few who have investigated this act from a sociolinguistic perspective. Additionally, few studies have investigated the effects of these letters on job seekers (Feinberg, Stanton & Gable, 1996), and a limited number of papers have been written on mitigating their effects (Brown, 1993). It is also important to note that the research in this genre is relatively old. When the fast pace of electronic communication is considered, it seems useful to study recent trends in business writing through email correspondence.

We, therefore, hope that this current study will enhance the amount of evidence available on employment rejection letters. The results of this study will also provide ESP (English for Specific Purposes) educators with at least some insight into how to better cater for their students. To our knowledge, there is no study to date exploring the lexis used in employment rejection letters. Considering the nature of this genre, use of formal lexis may be taken for granted without a need analysis. However, identifying most commonly occurring lexical items in this particular genre will give lexical curriculum designers research-generated data.

Despite the letter content and lengths suggested by Business English textbooks, it appears that the length of employment rejection letters varies to a great extent, with some comprised of only a few sentences. We believe it is important to check textbooks' recommendations against what is happening in practice. Considering the argument that sentence length in business writing should be limited to between 15 and 20 words (Rossiter, 2013), we also find it useful to identify average sentence length in the genre focused on in this study.

Finally, exploring professors' feelings and thoughts on different types of employment rejection letters can provide valuable insight into potential effects and merits of different approaches to writing in this genre. This, in turn, can provide ESP curriculum designers with ideas on types of input materials they could devise, rather than limiting themselves to "perfect" emails composed on intuition. It is our belief that ESP teaching materials should be based on authentic situations as much as possible so that candidates in ESP classes may be prepared for real life situations, even if this may go against the intuition of curriculum designers. Taken together, these reasons will increase our understanding of a highly face-threatening act and help relevant English language professionals better address their learners' future needs effectively.

The present study, therefore, aims to answer the following questions.

1. What are the frequently appearing moves of employment rejection emails sent to academic applicants? What is the order of moves in these emails? What are the components and linguistic features of each of these moves?
2. What is the lexical profile of the employment rejection emails?
3. How long is an average employment rejection email in terms of total number of sentences and the number of words used?
4. What are university professors' perceptions of different types of email rejection letters?

4 METHOD

4.1. Corpus

The data for this study came from a corpus of 4,534 running words from fifty-eight employment rejection emails addressed to university professors holding a PhD degree. Of this number, forty-nine (84%) were addressed to professors of English, while nine (16%) were addressed to a professor of Physics. Although the size of the corpus in this study might be considered relatively small and therefore problematic in terms of representativeness and generalizability of the results, "the size of the sample is less important than the preparation and tailoring of the language product and its subsequent corpus application to draw attention to an individual or group profile of ... language use" (Ragan as cited in Granger, 2008, p. 263). It is also important to note that data collected in this research were authentic, defined by Sinclair (1996) as data "gathered from the genuine communications of people going about their normal business". It is considered the best data collection although it may not always be possible or practical for pragmatic research (Kasper, 2000).

4.2 Analyses

The approach adopted to identify the moves in the data set was based on Barešová's (2008) taxonomy. The identification of the order in which the moves were normally taken was based on the emergent patterns. Directedness of the emails was investigated considering Blum-Kulka's classification as used by Barešová (2008). On the other hand, the nature of the rejection emails in terms of positivity and negativity was investigated considering Fielden and Dulek's classification (as cited in Feinberg, Stanton & Gable, 1996). Also, the components and the linguistic features of the moves were identified using qualitative methods. All the analyses were first conducted by the principle authors of this paper. The results of the initial analyses were then checked by the second author. In cases of discrepancies, discussions were held and agreements were reached.

The lexical profile of the data set was investigated using an online software available at <http://www4.caes.hku.hk/vocabulary/profile.htm>. On the other hand, the number of sentences and average sentence length were identified using another online software available at <https://wordcounttools.com>. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the number of sentences and sentence lengths. A p value of 0.05 was considered significant. For both lexical and sentence length analyses, the addresses of the universities were discarded.

University professors' perceptions of different types of email rejections letters were investigated using a survey comprised of three authentic emails (See Appendix A). For anonymity, pseudo names were used for addressors and their affiliations. Twenty university

professors holding PhD degrees were asked to indicate how much they liked or disliked them, using a Likert-type scale with options varying between 5 (I really like it) and 1 (I really dislike it). They were also asked to provide justification for their responses. The data gathered were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify factors that contributed to the chosen emails' popularity or lack thereof.

5. RESULTS

The first research question aimed to identify the number of moves in the employment rejection emails and the order in which they frequently occurred. The results showed that the number of moves ranged from 3 to 12, with the most frequent number of moves being 7 and the average number of moves being 8. This did not include the subject line. Taken together, these data indicate that not all the moves were employed in the emails. When the frequency of the moves were considered in relation to the order in which they usually occurred, the order in Table 1 appeared.

Table 1. Order of moves and sample employment rejection email

	Order of Moves*	Sample Statements
	1. Subject line	Your Application for Employment
	2. Salutation	Dear [Applicant's Name],
Inter-changeable	3. Thank-you	Thank you for applying for the position of English lecturer in the Never-Never University's College of Arts & Sciences Communication Program.
	4. Notification of completion of process	We have completed our initial review of applications.
Inter-changeable	5. Compliment	Our committee found your credentials impressive, but
	6. Justification	we also received a very large number of applications and have had to make a difficult decision.
	7. Rejection	Unfortunately, we will not be pursuing your candidacy further.
Inter-changeable	8. Remedy	However, other openings may become available in the future for which you are qualified. Please continue to check our website at http:[web address of the university] for available positions.
	9. Appreciation and/or Thank-you	On behalf of the Never-Never University, I would like to thank you for your interest in this position and for the time and effort you took in submitting your application.
	10. Good luck	We wish you the very best as you pursue future career opportunities.
	11. Valediction	Sincerely,
	12. Name	[Name of Addressor]
	13. Address/affiliation	[Address of the University]

* There may be slight differences in the order of moves, and the table indicates most frequently occurring order with sample statements from the data set.

The first research question also concerned the components of each move and their linguistic features. For this purpose, we first identified the frequency of each component in our data set, as is seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Frequency of moves

Moves		f	%
Subject line		58	100
Salutation	Personal	41	71
	Impersonal	9	15
	N/A	8	14
The letter opening	Thank-you note	43	74
	Notification of process completion	15	26
	Compliment	9	16
Rejection	Direct	33	57
	Indirect	24	41
	Both direct and Indirect	5	9
	Positive	38	66
	Negative	20	34
Justification		36	62
Remedy	Encouragement	28	48
	Promise	2	3
	Both encouragement and promise	2	3
Closing	Thank-you note	35	60
	Wish of good luck	38	66
	Compliment	1	2
	Discouragement	2	3
	Valedictions	54	93
	Addressor's name	52	90
	Addressor's affiliation	28	48

Subject line

A subject line was present in all the emails composed to inform the applicants about the decision made. Majority of the subject lines were composed of noun phrases, which often included the position applied for (e.g. 'Lecturer of English', 'Director of ESL Position'). Others included noun phrases like 'Your application for Employment'. It was also interesting to see a few instances of a short sentence thanking the candidate (e.g. "Thank you for your interest").

Salutation

The first move in the actual email was salutation. 71% salutations were personal including the participant's and family name. On the other hand, 9 of the emails (15%) used impersonal salutations addressing the applicants as 'applicant', as in 'Dear Applicant', and 'Dear Sir/Madam'. The percentage of the emails (14%) that made no use of a salutation is also important to note.

Letter Opening

The next move, which initiated the letter opening, was often a thank-you note. Forty-three (74%) of the emails employed this at the beginning of the emails. Of this number, 25 (58%) started their note with the phrase ‘Thank you for’ followed by a noun (‘your interest in + the position applied for’, ‘your application for + the position applied for’ or ‘the position applied for’).

There were also instances of a gerund following the “thank you for” phrase, as in the following example.

(1) Thank you for applying for the lecturer position.

Four emails were opened in a more formal way by thanking the applicant on behalf of the search committee or the university. See the example below.

(2) On behalf of the Never-never University, please accept our thanks for considering employment with us.

Another move in the letter openings was that of the notification of completion of the search process. Although employed in 15 of the emails (26%), this move is another indication of the applicants’ misfortune of not being selected by the review board, and therefore it can be considered as an indirect expression of rejection. It further prepares the addressee for the upcoming negative news of rejection. Note the example below:

(3) The search committee has now selected applications for further review. Unfortunately,
...

As is seen in the sample above, the notifications are followed by words and phrases with negative connotations (‘Unfortunately’, ‘I regret that’, ‘Although’). In two instances, a compliment is inserted between the notification and rejection statements, as a strategy to reduce the impact of the negative news (e.g. “We have completed our initial review of applications. + compliment”, “Our committee found your credentials impressive, but...”).

There were also nine cases of a compliment on the candidates’ qualification in the letter openings (16%). Almost all of these compliments, except for one, placed the compliment before the rejection with the statement of the rejection introduced with coherence markers such ‘but’, ‘however’, and ‘although’ as is seen in the examples below. One of the emails placed the compliment in the closing. These uses helped to save face of the addressor and reduce the effect of the face-threatening act on the addressee. In some instances, these were further supported by the justification provided right after compliment as in the examples below.

(4) You were one of many impressive candidates who responded to our advertisement. *However*, after careful consideration, we have narrowed the pool to applicants whose background and experience best match the requirements of the position.

(5) *Although* you have an impressive background, you were not chosen to move forward in the interview process.

Rejection

It is seen in Table 2 that the direct rejections outnumbered the indirect rejections (57% vs. 41%). Also, in five of the e-mails (9%) both types of rejections were employed. In the case of the former, there were explicit references to the applicants themselves. The statements very often used the second person singular pronoun in the passive voice as the subjects of the main sentences. Examples include the following:

- (6) We regret to inform you that *you* were not selected.
- (7) After careful consideration, *you* have not been selected to move forward in the process

Other examples used the second person object pronoun with the addressors being the subjects of the sentences. See below:

- (8) Unfortunately, we have filled all our vacancies so we are unable to offer *you* a position at this time

The topic of seven rejection statements focused on the job seekers' candidacy, application or materials, rather than themselves:

- (9) Unfortunately, we will not be pursuing *your candidacy* further

The addressors often used certain linguistic device to introduce and reduce the impact of the face-threatening act. The most common was the use of the phrases "I regret" and "We regret". Also, the linker "although" was used to mention the candidate's strengths as a way of preparation for the negative outcome. In addition, the adverb "unfortunately" was used just before the statement of the rejection. The use of adjective "unable" was also detected in two of the rejections (e.g. "We are *unable* to offer *you* a position at this time."). Among the other devices employed word phrases like "at this time" and "after careful consideration", both of which served in redressing the impact of the face-threatening act of rejection.

On the other hand, the performative "offer" was used in only three of the direct rejection, as is seen in the extract below. Two of these employed the adjective "unable" to indicate a lack of ability, while the other one stated the lack of a suitable vacancy. Both of these served in redressing the impact of the speech act.

- (10) Unfortunately, we have filled all our vacancies so we are *unable to offer* you a position at this time.

On the other hand, indirect rejections explicitly referred to other applications deemed more suitable in comparison to the addressees (e.g. "However, we have selected an applicant whose qualifications more closely match our needs."). In other cases, they were informed that the position had been filled (e.g. "This position has been filled."). In comparison to the passive voice, the active voice was more commonly used to express rejection. In these sentences, the first person plural pronoun was usually used as the subject of the sentences. However, two of the rejections referred to the search committee or the hiring department as the active agents of the sentences. Similar to the direct rejections, the indirect rejections also employed linguistic devices like "regrettably" and "however" after compliments to reduce the impact created by the face-threatening act.

Another noteworthy finding is that none of the addressors employed a performative in their indirect rejections to express the intended speech act.

It is also important to note that five of the emails (9%) used both a direct and indirect rejection as in the example of "We ... have chosen to meet with a small group whose qualifications most closely match our current needs. Although you have an impressive background, you were not chosen to move forward in the interview process." It is likely that the addressors of these emails felt that employing both types might further strengthen their position and reduce the effect created by a negative speech act.

We also analyzed the rejections considering their positive and negative natures. Although 66% of the rejections were positive, a significant number of them (34%) were of a negative nature with a focus on other applicants being more suitable for the job. Some of these also failed to thank the addressee, finishing the emails rather abruptly.

Together, these made the emails shorter, which likely gave the recipients a sense of unworthiness for the university they applied for.

Justification

Another move in the rejection emails was justification provided in 62% of the emails. The justifications often explained the reason for the applicants' failure to be selected for the interview. The topics of the justifications often centered on the high number of applications received making the choice a difficult one for the selection committee. In this way, the addressors tried to save their face for the negative news they were to deliver. They also compared the addressee to other applicants indirectly by stating their candidacy was not as strong as others. (See sample extract below). This likely increased the impact of the face-threatening act on the addressee in particular. To reduce the impact, however, some emails praised the addressees' qualifications making it difficult for the committee to turn down their applications.

- (11) We have had an exceptionally large number of applications from highly qualified people. In many instances an application while otherwise impressive did not fit our immediate needs here.

The linguistic analysis of the emails revealed that the sentences in which the justifications were introduced were written in the active voice using the first person plural pronoun as the subject. On the other hand, the strength of the application pool was expressed using quantifiers (e.g. "a very large number", "an exceptionally large number", "many"), and adjectival phrases (e.g. "an impressive applicant pool" and "strong pool of applicants).

Remedy

A remedy was detected in 51% of the emails only. A significant number of these (22) were in the form of future job possibilities, while only two of them were in the form of a promise to keep the applicants' files active for a certain period time. It was also interesting to see that two emails employed both strategies (See extract 12). In providing a remedy, the addressors aimed to finish the emails on a positive note employed to reduce the impact of the rejection speech act on both the applicants and themselves.

- (12) We will continue to keep your resume and application on file for the next year. If a position opens that it is suitable for your qualifications, we will consider you as a candidate for the job. Though you were not selected for this position, we encourage you to apply again in the future for openings that match your qualifications.

Closing

Several moves were employed in the closing. One of these was a thank-you note in 60% of the emails, which thanked the applicant for their interest and the time they took to apply for the position. In this way, they aimed to finish the letter on a positive note. The thank-you note was sometimes expressed using the verb "appreciate" (e.g. "We appreciate your interest..."). It is important to note that 18 out of 35 emails (51%) employed a thank-you note both at the beginning and at the end further. This appears to have reinforced their attempt to reduce the impact of the rejection speech act. The second time they were introduced they were often accompanied with the adverb "again" (e.g. "Once again, thank you for your interest").

Another move detected was a wish of good luck (66%), which was often preceded by a thank-you note. Normally the wishes concerned the candidates' search for employment. However, four of the emails included a good wish with both personal and professional goals, while another email wished the candidate success with "all" endeavors. 66% of these emails performed the wish using the first person plural pronoun (e.g. "We wish you all the best with your career."), while 11% of them used the first person singular pronoun (e.g. "I wish you the best in all your endeavors.") The other statements generally had the institution as the subject.

It was also interesting to see a rather flattery compliment on a candidate's capabilities in the closing, which was another attempt to face save. (See the extract 13 below). Having had no invitation for an interview at all, this likely caused the applicant to question its sincerity, creating the opposite effect of what might have been intended by the addressee.

- (13) Having reviewed each of the more than 200 applications for our position, I can say confidently that the study and pedagogy of composition, rhetoric, and literacy (and English studies more broadly) continue to be vibrant and are in good hands. Your work is evidence of that. Thank you for the research, teaching, and service that you have done and will continue to do. It was a privilege to read your materials.

It is also important to note that two of emails in fact did the opposite of providing a remedy by preventing the applicants from taking future actions. (See extracts below). Although both of these emails thanked the applicants for their applications, provided an explanation, and wished them luck in their search for a job, these notes at the end are highly likely to produce a negative tone.

- (14) We would like to remind you that further communication regarding your application to join us will *not* be possible.
- (15) The managers felt that they weren't able to find the right person for the role and their team from those who applied, and therefore decided that they will readvertise the position. Unfortunately, because your application has been considered by the managers already, they will *not* be able to consider a further application from you for this particular role.

Another move, valediction, was employed in majority of the emails (93%). The most common one was "(Yours) sincerely", followed by "(Best) regards", "(Yours) cordially", and "Best wishes". These were followed by the addressors' names (90%), and affiliations (48%). The absence of a valediction and addressors' names in 7% of the mails, and their affiliations in 52% of the emails could be regarded as an abrupt closing. Taken together, these likely reduce any attempt by the addressors to save their own and addressees' face, thus violating rules of politeness.

The second research question aimed to describe the vocabulary profile of the 4,534-word corpus derived from the employment rejection letters analyzed in this study. The results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Vocabulary frequency profile

	f	%
1-1000 words	3722	82.09
1001-2000 words	363	8.01
AWL words	240	5.29
Off-list words	209	4.61

As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of the words in the corpus belong to the first 2000 General Word List. It is also seen that 5.29% of the words used belong to the Academic Word List. Considering the nature of the job application for an academic position, the addressors would be expected to use certain number academic words despite with a low-frequency. Sample words in the corpus included ‘academic’, ‘anticipate’, ‘appreciate’, ‘colleague’, ‘communication’, ‘considerable’, ‘identify’, ‘maintain’, ‘research’, ‘respond’, ‘select’ and ‘submit’. On the other hand, a similar number of words specific to this genre were detected. These included words that were employed to compliment on the candidates’ qualifications (e.g. ‘accomplishment’, ‘calibre’, ‘credentials’, ‘impressed’, ‘resume’, and ‘CV’), to provide an explanation for the rejection (e.g. ‘competitive’, ‘candidate’, ‘exceptionally’, ‘vibrant’, ‘impressive’ and ‘tremendous’), and to provide the candidates with hope for future and encouragement for continuous efforts to seek employment (e.g. ‘reapply’, ‘database’, ‘endeavour’, ‘discourage’, ‘career’, and ‘vacancy’).

Since it is practically impossible to comment on all the words frequently used in the corpus, we will here comment on those we find significant in terms of their use in moves supporting the rejection speech act. Most commonly occurring content words included the nouns ‘application’ (f=88), ‘position’ (f=84), and ‘interest’ (f=65), which were mainly used to set the context at the beginning of the letters (e.g. “Thank you for your *interest* in the English lecturer *position* at [the name of the institution]”). Among other frequently used words were the words ‘wish’ (f=42), ‘future’ (f=33), ‘best’ (f=31), and ‘success’ (f=14). These words mainly appeared in the closing where the addressors wished the candidates luck in their future endeavors. In addition, the word ‘appreciate’ (f=22) and its noun form ‘appreciation’ (f=1) were also used to start or end the letter on positive note. On the other hand, the verb “encourage” was used eleven times to give the candidates hope with their quest for employment. Taken together, these lexical items are used as linguistic features helping the addressors reduce the impact of the rejection speech act set and therefore save both their own and applicants’ face.

The verb ‘regret’ (f=15) and its adverb form ‘regrettably’ (f=1) was used to express direct rejections. The adjective ‘(un)successful’ (f=4) was often used in these very sentences of direct rejections (e.g. “I regret to advise that your application was unsuccessful on this occasion.”). In these four sentence, the impact was reduced with the use of the phrase ‘on this occasion’ (f=9), and ‘at this time’ (f=11).

The third research question aimed to describe the number of sentences and the average sentence length in the emails. A summary of the data results for this question can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 Sentence counts and sentence lengths

	Min	Max	Mode	Average	(r)	p
Number of sentences	3	21	9	9.8		
Length of sentences (in words)	5	18.6	11	9.9	-0.4208	0.001

According to Table 4, the number of sentences in the emails varied between 3 and 21, with an average of 9.8. The most frequent number of sentence was 9, and the sentence lengths varied between 5 and 18.6 in words. Although the average sentence length was

9.9, the most frequently appearing sentence length was 11 words. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient computed to assess the relationship between the number of sentences and sentence lengths showed that there was a weak, negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.4208$, $n = 58$) at a statistically significant level ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). That is, the lower the number of sentences in the email, the longer they were. Taken together, these data indicate that the addressors of employment rejection emails tended to vary their sentence lengths by varying the number of words they used in their sentences. Many addressors' tendency to attempt to save both their own and the recipients' face by paying them a compliment, providing justification for the decision made, and encouragement in particular increased the number of words and therefore the sentence lengths. On many occasions, the sentence length was increased as a result of relative clause uses and coherence markers (e.g. "*However, after careful consideration, we have narrowed the pool to applicants whose background and experiences best match the qualifications of the position.*"), or conjunctions used to combine two independent clauses (e.g. "*Although your credentials and professional accomplishments are to be applauded, your application for this position has not been selected as a finalist for further consideration.*"). There were also instance of participle use in combining justification and compliment, which increased sentence lengths significantly (e.g. "*Having reviewed each of the more than 200 applications for our position, I can say confidently that the study and pedagogy of composition, rhetoric, and literacy (and English studies more broadly) continue to be vibrant and are in good hands.*"). On the other hand, the two significantly shorter emails of three sentences, despite employing slightly lengthier sentences than average (11 vs. 9.9), lacked many moves and components of employment rejection letter; namely salutation, justification, a thank-you note at the end, valediction, name and affiliation of the addressor. It is important to note that both of these emails were auto-generated by the same institution.

The last research question concerned university professors' opinions on different types of employment rejection emails. The results can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5 Professors' ratings on emails

	5		4		3		2		1		Average
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Email A	5	25	7	35	7	35	1	5	0	0	3.8
Email B	0	0	1	5	4	20	12	60	3	15	2.15
Email C	0	0	0	0	3	15	10	50	7	35	1.8

As is seen in Table 5, the most popular email was the first one with an average of 3.8. A total of 12 respondents (60%) either liked this email very much or just liked it. It is important to note that none of the professors had a strong dislike for it. When asked for their reasons why they liked it, they often stated that the letter was cordial and considerate, making it polite. Another frequently mentioned factor was related to the compliment on the candidate's qualifications. One professor said "It gives me the impression that if there had been fewer candidates I might have gotten in. While I know this might not be true, it still makes me feel good as a candidate who didn't get the job." This shows that praise can have positive effect even when giving negative news. Other professors mentioned the institution's encouragement to consider them as a future recruiter as a positive attitude. This gave them hope, and made them feel optimistic. One of the professors

indicated the fact that it was written by the person leading the recruitment committee rather than the HR made the email more sincere. Overall, the professors felt that the email made them valued. Some responses included “The tone is polite and the wordiness makes it seem like they care about their image even with regard to people whom they are not currently employing.”, “Even if they did find your work to be not very impressive, they are taking a positive stand and it doesn’t make you feel bad about yourself.”, and “It makes me think that the university values its people.” Taken together, these helped the addressor save face when performing a face-threatening act.

On the other hand, those who had concerns about this email referred to the mere fact that this is a rejection letter. One professor said, “I was rejected after being praised for having such wonderful credentials, I find their reason “but we also received a very large number of applications and have had to make a difficult decision” feeble at best because it isn’t really a reason.” Similarly, another professor said, “The note about the credentials being impressive doesn’t seem genuine.”

Table 5 also shows that the average for the second rejection letter was 2.15, indicating that the professors in general did not like it much. 75% of the respondents either disliked or extremely disliked the email. One of the factors causing this was the length of the email. The majority of the professors noted that the email was rather short without enough information and feedback on the candidate’s application, or the reason for the decision taken. This made the email abrupt. In the words of one of the professors, “The letter is just like a note on a post-it.”, which indicates that the letter violated the business etiquettes. The same professor said, “They don’t treat you as a person. You are just a resource for them. No usual greetings and best wishes, etc.” This shows that the email lacked many of the politeness strategies expected in business communication. This was also apparent in a professor’s response regarding the punctuation used in the email: “I dislike it because of the chatty tone supplied by the exclamation mark.” Others found it unprofessional (35%), impersonal (25%), abrupt (20%), and too generic (10%). On the other hand, some (30%) noted that it could have shown at least some appreciation of the time the candidate spent preparing for the application. Overall, this email seems not to have saved the candidate’s or the institution’s face.

Despite this, some professors (25%) liked the email since it was short and to the point. One professor noted, “It doesn’t try to sugar-coat anything”, while another one said, “It doesn’t beat around the bush.” Two other professors (10%), on the other hand, had at least some positive feeling about it since the institution was “polite enough to inform [the candidate] that the job search was over”, or “they bothered to reply.” Another professor pointed out the thank-you note as a positive feature.

It is seen in Table 5 that the third email was the least popular, with an average rating of 1.8. This indicates that the respondents tended to have a strong dislike for it. Considering the overall structure and moves employed in this email, this finding is particularly interesting. However, an overwhelming number of the professors (85%) noted the statement in the letter preventing the candidate from reapplying as a factor. These professors also noted that the remark about the institution’s not being able to find the right person for the role from those who applied made the institution rather arrogant. Some of the adjectives used to describe this email included ‘idiotic’, ‘insulting’, ‘disconcerting’, and ‘rude’. It was often stated that there was no need to ask the candidate not to reapply since one would not apply for a position he/she has been rejected for. One of the professors has such a negative feeling that he said, “I would have preferred to not be notified at all.”

Although the third email was not regarded effective, there were at least some positive comments about it. One of these was related to the thank-you note employed (10%). Also, addressing the applicant by name was considered a positive feature (5%). Three other professors (15%) thought the email was honest. However, these were not sufficient to increase the professors' ratings for the email in general.

6. DISCUSSION

The aim of the first research question was twofold: first, to investigate the number of moves in employment rejection letters and the order in which they occurred, and second to investigate the components and the linguistic features employed in these moves. We identified between three and twelve moves in the data set. The wide variation in the move numbers indicate a lack of general style adopted in the field. There could be several reasons for this. First, many institutions' tendency to use automated responses may result in smaller number of moves employed. The generic structure in these automated emails seems to prevent consideration of individual job seekers' profiles. We noticed that emails composed by a real person rather than an automated machine varied the introduction to the email, made references to the addressees' qualifications, and employed a variety of strategies to end the message. All of these impacted the number of moves employed. The variation in the move numbers in the data set may also have been caused by the number of applications the institutions had received. In cases of too many applications, the institutions may have opted for a brief, automated message without being able to consider each addressee's credentials.

Despite the great variation in the number of moves in the emails, the average number of moves was eight. This suggests that there is still a tendency to include certain moves in employment rejection letters. The presence of these moves also required a series of other speech acts embedded in the speech act of rejection, which supports Barešová's (2008) observation that rejection in an email is realized through use of a head act. This finding is corollary to our finding for the second part of the first research question concerning the order in which the moves were used. We considered the subject line as the first move with the belief that an empty subject line would violate the politeness rules. No subject line in our data set was left blank, which indicates the addressors' motive to use at least one politeness strategy. However, the choice of wording in some of the subject-lines was unexpected. They included phrases such as 'Thank you for your application' and 'regret letter'. While the former has a positive tone, the addressee likely interpret it as bad news since positive employment letters do not normally start with a thank-you note (Barešová, 2008). The latter, on the other hand, can be very harsh and discouraging.

Many emails started with a salutation addressing the job seekers with their names or more often using the word 'applicant'. However, some e-mails failed to salute the addressees, which we believe was caused by the automated nature of these emails. More often, a thank-you note or a notification of process completion followed the salutation. As is mentioned above, the positive note at the beginning of an email was likely perceived as the signal for the forthcoming negative news in an employment letter (Barešová, 2008), especially if there was a big time lap between application and arrival of the email.

Subsequent moves often involved a compliment, a justification, and a rejection, the order of which varied. The finding related to justification is very similar to the results of

Barešová's (2008) study showing presence of justification in 61% of the rejection emails produced by American institutions. The use of justification as the main politeness strategy was also detected in other languages (Kok, 1993).

We found that indirect rejections were slightly more common than direct rejections, and 9% used both indirect and direct rejections. Both of these findings are in line with Barešová's (2008) research on American rejection letters. It is likely that some addressors may have chosen to employ both types to further strengthen their position and reduce the effect created by a negative speech act. The presence of a compliment and/or a justification can be regarded as a politeness strategy, reducing the impact of the forthcoming face-threatening act of rejection both on the addressee and addressor. Another move likely used with this purpose was remedy in some emails, which often included the addressor's promise to keep the applicant's file active for a possible future opening. When used with a thank-you note at the end of the email, this move likely reduced the negative effect of the rejection just expressed. Taken together, these seem to help the addressors establish themselves as employers of choice for future opportunities (Heathfield, 2017), and build a relationship with the candidates (Pratt, 2015). However, to our surprise some emails issued a warning to the candidates stating that they should not reapply or contact the institute for further information. Both of these acts are highly likely to invalidate the attempts to save face using other moves in the same emails. Although these moves may be considered as attempts to avoid offering help if there is not any (Carmicheal, 2016), it may be unnecessary to warn a candidate not to reapply, since it is very unlikely that a person would reapply for a position he/she has been rejected for. Such an approach likely increases the negative impact of the face-threatening act on the institution, too. It could easily cause the candidate to lose respect for the institution and even resort to black-propaganda reducing the institution's reputation (Feinberg, Stanton & Gable, 1996).

The move of wishing the candidates good luck in some emails helped finish on a positive note, the effect of which was further enhanced when the addressors used a valediction and their names. The use of a person's name instead of the affiliation per se created a more courteous attitude. The use of '(Yours) sincerely,' in most of the emails indicated that the addressors tended to be less formal, but still not informal (Barešová, 2008). However, it was also surprising to see the omission of both or one of these moves in some emails, creating an abrupt closing.

Collectively, these data show that there were notable differences in the way employment rejection emails were composed in English. The extent to which these emails varied depended on a combination of factors as also identified by Aamodt and Peggans (as cited in Aamont, 2016). Among these factors were presence of a thank-you note, justification, and a promise. We believe another reason for the differences was automation of the emails, which also impacted on the number of moves and the order in which they were employed. Therefore, it may justifiably be argued that while electronic communication eases business life, it may also result in some confusion about how to approach face-threatening acts such as an employment rejection letter.

The second research question aimed to describe the lexical profile of the employment rejection emails in our data set. It appeared that the big majority of the words (90.1%) belonged to the list of the first 2000 general words, while 5.29% of the words belonged to the academic word list, and another 4.61% were specific to the data set including words that would normally be in the domain of this particular genre. This vocabulary profile of the employment rejection letters seems to be somewhat in line with the vocabulary coverage of

a typical academic text proposed by Coady and Huckin (1997). They suggest that 87% of such a text would come from the top high-frequency words, while 8% would be comprised of academic words and 5% would be technical and low-frequency words. This approximate similarity may indicate that employment rejection letters tend to conform to academic conventions in terms of lexical coverage. We believe this may mainly be due to the academic nature of the positions advertised.

The analysis of the data in response to the third question revealed that the number of sentences employed in the rejection emails varied considerably. Despite this, the average number of sentences was 9.8. The length of the emails was greatly affected by the politeness strategies employed. Therefore, the length of a rejection email may give some indication of the addressor's attempt to reduce the impact of the target face-threatening act on both the recipient and the addressor. That is, a noticeably short email may disappoint the recipient from the very beginning leading him/her to feel the consequences more severely.

We also found that the length of a sentence was negatively correlated with the number of sentences used in the emails. That is, the addressors' tendency to write longer sentences resulted in fewer sentences. This may be interpreted as the addressors' motive to express multiple ideas using a reduced number of words. When accompanied by a lack of politeness moves, this may increase the negative impact of the face-threatening act. Such an approach may also result in lengthy sentences, causing distress in addressees. On the other hand, the average sentence length of the emails in this study was 9.9. This is considerably lower than Rossiter's (2013) observation of the expected sentence length in business writing (between 15 and 20 words). The average sentence length in our data set may have been influenced by the variety of approaches adopted by the addressors. Considering the negative correlation between the number and length of sentences in this study, relatively more frequent instances of longer sentences may have affected the average sentence length. This, however, is not to disregard some of the emails exceeding the recommended number of words in sentences in business writing. We noticed that although small in number, these emails generally came from rhetoric departments. They may have paid extra attention to expressing ideas in sophisticated ways, increasing the sentence length.

The fourth research question aimed to identify university professors' opinions on different types of employment rejection emails. As expected, no average rating for any of the emails was above 3.8. This can be interpreted as employment rejection letters by nature are ill-favored. In fact, when asked to explain their ratings, some professors stated that it was disturbing to read any rejection letter, no matter how courteously the message was expressed. This lends credence to the observation that "No candidate wants to hear that they didn't get a job after they've spent hours applying" (Dhillon, 2015, para. 1).

It was also interesting to see that the length of an email did not necessarily make it more (un)favorable. Although the shortest email received an average of 2.5 indicating a clear dislike for it, the third email received the lowest average rating of 1.8 despite its length allowing potential use of various politeness strategies. This was mainly because of the addressor's note forbidding the applicant from reapplying. This created intense negative feelings in the professors, who often remarked that it was extremely arrogant. This email, therefore, failed to "avoid an egocentric "I-perspective in favor of a shared "we-" or "you-perspective" (Brown, 1993, 772). This shows that the effort to exercise courtesy and sound rhetorical strategy may still be missing in academic rejection letters after 24 years Brown (1993) first pointed it out. Some professors also made the remark that they would avoid this institution in the future even if they qualified. This supports the view that the wording of the

message impacts on candidates' perception of the institution ((Feinberg, Stanton, & Gable, 1996), affecting the likelihood of a positive relationship built between the organization and the candidate (Pratt, 2105). Taken together, the professors' opinions on the three different emails indicated that they tended to violate Grice's maxims of manner in particular requiring the message be conveyed to the recipient in socio-linguistically correct ways (Grice, 1989). On the other hand, the second email appears to violate the first maxim (quantity) by limiting the amount of information available to the candidate.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this current study, several recommendations can be made. One of these is related to ESP teaching. In terms of employment, it appears that many Business English course books focus on resume building, job application and other in-service skills. There seems to be a lack of interest in writing effective rejection emails. However, it seem necessary to raise ESP students' awareness of a wide variety of employment rejection emails with a particular attention to positive and negative tones. Since it is also impossible to avoid rejection emails violating politeness rules, it would be important to prepare students to tackle unfavorable rejection emails. This would help them maintain their well-being, and plan for professional development opportunities.

Regarding the finding on the lexical profile of the emails, it is particularly important for ESP instructors to highlight the frequently occurring lexical items used in support of the rejection speech act. It may be useful to raise students' awareness in terms of how these are used to reduce the impact of the face-threatening act in emails. To this end, concordance lines could be used to identify and highlight how each of these words are used in the given genre. On the other hand, in terms of language structures, the variation in sentence types, and lengths can be studied, too. Different ways of varying sentence length could be an area of focus as well.

Native-speakers of English engaging in business communication also need to increase their awareness. To this end, organizations could organize in-service training for their Human Resources staff to familiarize themselves with efficient ways of writing employment (rejection) letters. This will help maintain the organization's reputation and attract highly qualified candidates.

Information Technology departments in organizations can also consider improving automated message. They could investigate different ways of generating automated emails considering individual applicants' information such as names and titles. A system allowing justification for rejection would also increase the efficiency of automated emails.

Recommendations can also be made for future researchers. This research included employment rejection letters from academic institutions. Other researchers could investigate employment rejection letters from different disciplines to identify similarities and differences. This research was also limited to employment rejection letters sent to candidates upon initial screening. Analysis of such letters after the interview phase may also reveal interesting results. In addition, this research only included job seekers' opinions on different kinds of emails. A similar study can be conducted with addressors to describe the process in which they go through, and how they feel about employing the face-threatening rejection speech act. In terms of linguistic features, on the other hand, future researchers could aim to make a list of lexical items used for employment purposes in general, and employment rejection letters in

particular. This can be accompanied by a similar study on a list of commonly used collocations embedding the most frequent words.

8. CONCLUSION

The highly competitive nature of the academic job market is well-known. Given the large number of applicants for the small number of available positions, the likelihood of being a part of an employment rejection act, either as the addressee or the addressor (or perhaps both over the course of a career) are great. Although employment rejection is not expected to be a pleasant activity, there are several face-saving strategies that can limit the negative impact of the interaction while preserving the well-being of the applicant as well as the image of the organization. The present study addresses some of these factors within the context of employment rejection emails. Analysis of the linguistic features of the emails as well as the perceptions of university professors reveal the importance of word usage and phrasing in the design of academic employment rejection letters. Even if rejection emails are computer-generated, key features such as personalizing the email and providing justification for the rejection may help improve the product and the overall experience of everyone involved.

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APPENDIX A - SURVEY ON EMPLOYMENT REJECTION LETTERS
EMPLOYMENT REJECTION LETTERS

This questionnaire aims to collect the opinions of job seekers on various kinds of employment rejection emails. Imagine that you applied for a teaching position at Never-Never University (a fictitious university), and received the following emails after eight weeks. Please read the different rejection emails below and indicate how much you (dis)like them using the scale below. Then briefly explain why you (dis)like each email.

I really like it.	I like it.	Neutral	I dislike it.	I really dislike it.
5	4	3	2	1

Email 1				
Subject Line: Your Application for Employment				
Dear [Your Name],				
Thank you for applying for the position of English lecturer in the Never-Never University's College of Arts & Sciences English Program.				
We have completed our initial review of applications. Our committee found your credentials impressive, but we also received a very large number of applications and have had to make a difficult decision.				
Unfortunately, we will not be pursuing your candidacy further. However, other openings may become available in the future for which you are qualified. Please continue to check our website at www.Never-Never_University.com for available positions.				
On behalf of the Never-Never University, I would like to thank you for your interest in this position and for the time and effort you took in submitting your application.				
We wish you the very best as you pursue future career opportunities.				
Sincerely,				
John Doe, PhD.				
The Never-Never University				
The Great Union				
How much I (dis)like this email (please circle): 5 4 3 2 1				
<i>Please complete the sentences below as applicable.</i>				
I like it because				
I dislike it because				

Email 2				
Subject Line: Your Application				
Thank you for your interest in this position at the Never-Never University! We have currently pursued another candidate for this position. If you submitted multiple applications, you may still be under consideration for another position.				
How much I (dis)like this email (please circle): 5 4 3 2 1				
<i>Please complete the sentences below as applicable.</i>				
I like it because				
I dislike it because				

Email 3

Subject Line: Application for Professional Teaching Fellow

Dear [Your Name],

Thank you for your application for the above position at the Never-Never University.

Your application has been considered and I regret to advise that your application was unsuccessful on this occasion.

The managers felt that they weren't able to find the right person for the role and their team from those who applied, and have therefore decided that they will readvertise the position.

Unfortunately, because your application has been considered by the managers already, they will not be able to consider a further application from you for this particular role.

On behalf of the Never-Never University, I would like to thank you for your interest in this position and for the time and effort you took in submitting your application.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

John Doe

How much I (dis)like this email (please circle): 5 4 3 2 1

Please complete the sentences below as applicable.

I like it because

I dislike it because