

Email Correspondence in Russian Academia: Emotional vs Artificial Intelligence

Tatiana Martseva^{1, *}, Svetlana Suchkova²

¹School of Foreign Languages, National Research Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

²Academic Writing Centre, National Research Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

Email address:

tMartseva@hse.ru (Tatiana Martseva), sSuchkova@hse.ru (Svetlana Suchkova)

*Corresponding author

Abstract

The email is traditionally the most widely used genre both in general and academic communication. Researchers use it to cooperate with foreign colleagues working together on joint research projects as well as editors and reviewers of scientific journals while submitting their manuscripts for publication. That is why, the ability to write effective emails is crucial for a scholar. Since 2018, Academic writing center of the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Russia annually holds a diagnostic academic writing and speaking module for aspiring and experienced HSE researchers to assess their English communication skills. An email was chosen to test the participants' writing skills as being the most frequently used type of writing it is familiar to Russian researchers even with limited English language skills. Therefore, they were expected to feel comfortable and relaxed while writing an effective and relevant email reply based on the provided prompt. During these years, about 300 email samples have been collected and analyzed for the current research. The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) in the past few years has transformed the landscape of human activity including email writing. Many people delegate their email correspondence to AI believing it can manage the writing process more efficiently eliminating spelling, grammar, lexical, punctuation, and other mistakes as well as enhancing the general tone of an electronic letter. The objective of this research was to look into the genre of an email, its development and major conventions, as well as the expectations the recipients have when they get an electronic letter. After that the samples written by Russian scholars were compared with those produced, following the same prompt, by the most popular AI agents developed in China and the USA in terms of the content relevance, following the genre conventions, structure, coherence and cohesion, grammar and vocabulary range and accuracy as well as the tone of the electronic letters. As a result, the authors have developed a typology of the strengths and weaknesses of emails written by Russian researchers and AI agents and offered recommendations on how to enhance the process of email writing to make electronic communication effective and pleasant both for the email writer and its reader.

Keywords

Email Ethics, Tone of Email, Academic Correspondence, Russian Academia, Emotional Intelligence, Artificial Intelligence