COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IN THE BUSINESS TERRITORY:

a joint expedition through e-mail messages
and
reflections upon job activities

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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University of Toronto

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a joint exploration through e-mail messages and reflections upon job activities

Doctor of Philosophy - 1998
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ABSTRACT
This dissertation is an account of my exploration through the business territory which aimed at understanding what it was like to interact in English through computers from the Brazilian professionals' point of view. More specifically, it aimed at investigating what was involved in experiencing e-mail for professional communication, in interacting in English through computers, and in reflecting upon computerized activities performed in the workplace. To achieve these goals, I adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research which, by focusing on descriptions and shared interpretations, enabled me to identify some of the genres conveyed in professional contexts and to understand the meaning of using computers for professionals purposes.

Data were collected in six meetings with five Brazilian professionals from three corporations in which we discussed 152 e-mail messages. By using these samples both as object of inquiry and as input for reflection, we addressed the types of texts and communicative purposes usually conveyed through the electronic medium, and reflected upon the social actions that customarily associated co-workers together in online interactions. In addition, our conversations involved the recollection of the experiences the participants lived in and out of their workplaces, eliciting a process of reflection upon practice (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1992) that revealed their interpretation of some features of their professional landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

E-mail messages were analyzed from the perspective of their structural and
rhetorical recurrences. This procedure enabled me to identify that the samples collected conformed to a set/repertoire and to a system of genres, as well as perceiving that some genres performed overlapping functions. This characterization not only revealed the relationships among the genres investigated, but also provided insights about the communication practices enacted within each corporation.

In considering the outcomes of the reflective process, the participants and I made significant discoveries. I realized the impact of practice on foreign language learning and came to perceive workplaces as inherent educational sites. The participants, in their various ways, developed new insights in instrumental, linguistic, and professional terms. Reflecting upon tacit routines led them to think about their practices from an unfamiliar point of view and, in some cases, to reframe certain habitual procedures.
To my parents

Angelina Bianco Freire and Danilo Freire
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Não é no silêncio que os homens se fazem, mas na palavra, no trabalho, na ação-reflexão.

Paulo Freire, 1970/96

(Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.)
INTRODUCTION

AN INVITATION TO A JOINT EXPLORATION OF THE TERRITORY

Travelling together makes the journey more enjoyable and meaningful.
Hunt, 1994

This dissertation is an account of an expedition I undertook through the business territory, which involved an investigation into the electronic correspondence conducted in English between Brazilian and international professionals. It describes the various phases of the personal, methodological and theoretical inquiry which led me from the initial discovery of my research interest all the way through to the completion of my project. In a way, this dissertation can be considered as a sort of travel ticket that readers may use to vicariously go along the same pathways five professionals and I have travelled within a region which was then unknown to me, but extremely familiar to them.

My lack of familiarity with business contexts and with professional communication made me feel like an outsider in the research field and led me to conceive of my inquiry as a metaphorical expedition through an unexplored land. This journey, however, was not a solitary adventure. I could count on the help of five professionals -- five native travel guides -- who, by sharing both their experiences and their interpretations of computer-mediated communication (CMC), walked me through the several paths that crossed the territory. Escorted by them, I entered the region I was curious about exploring by passing through three entrance gates, that is, by visiting the three corporations they worked for. Once within the entrance gates, I found that at first I could envision only a limited part of the whole scenery. However, by collecting partial impressions and gradually piecing together the various bits of information that emerged from my conversations with the five professionals, I was able to perceive similarities and differences between the various sites of the terrain and to come to a more inclusive understanding of its geography.

Describing a specific region and some of its inhabitants represented a way of finding out where a particular communicative practice was taking place and of discovering
who was involved in it and under what circumstances. Designing this picture was essential for me to obtain a better understanding of CMC processes within a specific professional context. In this regard, the participants not only guided me through the territory itself. By sharing their reflections upon the routines performed at work and their interpretations of electronic messages, they also led me to recognize the genres habitually employed in professional situations, the relationships among them, and what they could reveal about the community that used them as a semiotic tool.

In addition to venturing into the business territory itself and discovering certain features of CMC practices, I found that I could also envision aspects of the participants' professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). By discussing samples of their e-mail correspondence, recalling their professional and personal experiences, and sharing their interpretations with me, these participants were engaged in a process of reflection upon practice (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1992) that mediated their encounter with tacit aspects of their work-related routines and led them to conceive of them from a new and unfamiliar perspective. My expedition through the business territory, therefore, resulted in a richer understanding of what it was like to interact in English through computers within business settings from the Brazilian professionals' point of view. It was a rewarding adventure that opened my eyes to potential routes for further exploration and that led me to consider the implications of experience, reflection and interpretation for the development of courses in English for business purposes.

In order to summarize my trip through the business territory, I provide the following outline of my report:

In Chapter 1, I describe the heuristic movement of self-discovery that led me to reflect upon my own story, to link together some personal, professional, and academic experiences, to recall the origins of my inquiry, and to realize its inner significance. In this initial chapter, by presenting a synopsis of significant autobiographical events, I identify teaching, business settings, challenges, and computers as the four tokens that influence who I am and that, consequently, have helped to determine my current research interest.

In Chapter 2, I develop the theoretical and methodological foundations for my inquiry. In this chapter, I establish experience, reflection, and interpretation as the bases
on which I ground the investigation of electronic correspondence in English within business settings, as well as of the written genres which emerge from it. By adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research, I discuss the starting point of my exploration, the three questions that motivated it, and the research design itself.

In Chapter 3, I introduce my five travel guides and present them as professionals, foreign language learners and speakers, and computer users. In drawing their individual portraits, I describe them as inhabitants of the business territory, show how they position themselves within their professional landscapes, and provide the reader with my initial assessment of their personalities. Furthermore, by designing a composite portrait, I identify the impact of practice on learning as the most significant phenomenological theme that emerged from our conversations.

In Chapter 4, I enlarge my view of the business territory and contemplate various features of its geography. I describe the three companies or the three metaphorical gates through which I entered the region to be explored, and provide the reader with information regarding their field of activities, their policies, and their internal culture, together with a survey of their CMC practices.

In Chapter 5, I account for the computerized communication processes that characterize the corporations focused on in the study and that link Brazilian and international professionals together through their interactions in English. In this chapter, I describe a number of genres of internal communication and discuss what they reveal about themselves and their interrelationships, as well as about the companies that enact and manipulate them.

In Chapter 6, I present the participants' interpretation of their own CMC practices and their perceptions of the research process. In this chapter, I revisit and expand the individual portraits presented in Chapter 3, emphasizing the contemplative aspect of these professionals' personalities. Furthermore, I present my own interpretations of both the reflective process and the research process.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarize the participants' interpretations in the light of the research questions, providing my understanding of what is involved in using the electronic medium for professional communication, interacting in English through e-mail, and
reflecting upon the CMC activities performed in the workplace. In addition, I address the implications of this study for ESP programs for business purposes and suggest some possible routes for further exploration.
CHAPTER 1

CROSSING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES:
A PORTRAIT OF A TEACHER-EXPLORER

What the self is answerable to is the social environment; what the self is answerable for is the authorship of its responses.
Clark & Holquist, 1984

I have often been asked about the reasons that led me to the exploration of computerized communication in the business territory. The recurrence of such questions -- which initially intimidated me -- have gradually intrigued me to the point of leading me to speculate in depth about the forces that compelled me to investigate that particular tool in that specific land. Queries of that sort have challenged my curiosity, and made me launch a process of inquiry that, involving introspection, meditation and reflection, has sparked off an inner movement of self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery. By immersing myself in a process of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990:9-14) that persuaded me to rely on my own observations, thoughts, feelings, and intuitions, I could then realize the personal genesis of my research interest and its inner significance.

This chapter presents a synopsis of significant autobiographical events that inspired me to begin my doctoral thesis project, and led me to gradually refine its objectives. It synthesizes, therefore, the heuristic journey that made me evoke, confront, interpret, and value my own lived experiences, while attempting to understand their meanings and essential qualities. In this first chapter, by recalling pivotal past events, and by considering their chronological sequence and implications, I revisit some of my life experiences and contemplate their echoes in my present story. Based on the narrative inquiry mode (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990, 1994), I report a process which was constructed, co-constructed, and re-constructed by some external influences that provoked fruitful inner transformations. I identify the cycles of my life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991: 262; Connelly and associates, 1995:20), and reflect upon four symbolic tokens (teaching, business settings, challenges, and computers) whose qualitative features I try to
"recognize" and "perceive" (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1991:17). These tokens caused meaningful tensions that I attempt to reconcile by interpreting the self-experience of amalgamating them.

However, while engaged in the narrative of some lived events and their personal and professional repercussions, I realize that besides being the author, I am also the very first reader of my own story. Throughout this narrative process, author and reader get, then, involved in a dialogue that discloses a "transaction between the teller and the told" (Bruner, 1990:124). While collecting and organizing memories and facts in order to retell them, I catch myself self-negotiating entries and images (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:3), attempting to make sense of them through factual interconnections. Throughout the writing of my own story, I perceive myself as a qualitative researcher who, as suggested by Glesne & Peshkin (1992:1), is seeking to make meaning through considering the intersections in my own life.

The decision of beginning my doctoral dissertation by presenting my individual portrait (Moustakas, 1990), and positioning my research within the context of my life story reveals, therefore, my intention to firstly give the reader a more tangible idea of the person and professional I am: where I came from, which territories I have already explored, which ones I have been venturing into, as well as how I have been searching for, dealing with, and overcoming either inner or outward challenges.

1.1. Contemplating my self, my inner identity

Reflections upon the origins of my current research interest led me back to my childhood. The memories of that time made me picture myself, again, playing in the back yard of the house where I used to live, doodling with white chalk on an old wooden board, placed in front of the basement door and facing the garden. I could recollect the enjoyment of spending hours and hours in that make-believe activity, pretending I was teaching my grandmother's roses, plants and bushes -- my imaginary pupils. I could also recall the

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1 According to Eisner (1991:17), Dewey (1934) distinguishes between two modes of attention: categorization or recognition, and visual exploration or perception.
excitement I used to experience when, due to extraordinary staff meetings, my kindergarten class had to be dismissed earlier, and I could go to my aunt's class -- she was a fourth grade teacher -- and attend part of her lessons, while waiting for her to go back home. I could clearly remember myself repeating all of those lessons to my diligent fictitious students, and even my mother's curious look and her broad smile when I could perceive her peeking at me through the kitchen window.

At that time, although fascinated by the prospect of teaching, I had not detected yet which would be my area of specialization. Such a definition came later, in the middle of the elementary school years, when, exposed to various contents and disciplines, I could define languages as the target subject to be learned and possibly taught in the future.

Since my childhood days, therefore, I have intuitively known that, in order to achieve personal and professional fulfilment, I should pursue a teaching career. Such a determination has compelled me to invest a great deal of effort in conducting my education towards the accomplishment of this intent. The more I have progressed in this direction, the more I could strengthen a passion manifested quite early in my life. Teaching is, undoubtedly, my first and unequivocal token.

1.2. Despite dreams and nightmares, keeping my feet on the ground

In the beginning of the second year of my undergraduate course in languages (Portuguese and English), at the age of nineteen, I had to face the practical necessity of getting a steady job -- steadier than the tutorial classes I used to teach at home. At that time, it was crucial to me to have a regular monthly income to afford my own studies.

I thought I had reached that immediate objective by getting a part-time position as a teacher of English in a small private language school. I was given three groups of interested students: a group of teenagers, and two groups of adults. In spite of my lack of concrete teaching experience, I felt that these students enjoyed my classes for they always reinforced this perception by their comments either during the lessons or even in informal chats during the breaks. My contact with them was quite rewarding: on the one hand, I could relate to the teenagers' plans of travelling, and to their pleasure in singing trendy American songs; on the other hand, I could be in touch with the adults' different needs and
interests, as well as with their dreams of a better professional future achieved by speaking a foreign language.

Nevertheless, if my professional aspirations had found an echo in my students and their development, my financial needs were not fulfilled by the continuous delay in receiving my pay cheque. Every month I heard a different excuse, invariably followed by the guarantee that it would be the last time. Actually, the last time came in the middle of that year when, having fulfilled my professional commitments for that term, I quit that job and started to look for new teaching opportunities.

Coincidentally, by that time of the school year, and due to an increasing demand for teachers, various Boards of Education in the city of São Paulo were offering temporary positions to experienced professionals, as well as to university students in various disciplines. The applicants, after providing the necessary documents, were classified according to specific criteria that, among other requisites, give credit for the length of time and the level of expertise in effectively performing teaching activities in public educational institutions. Stimulated by this apparent opportunity, I could not perceive my unrealistic optimism about the concrete possibilities of getting any of these available jobs. Actually, my lack of experience in working for regular schools not only forced me to be listed almost at the end of the Board of Education files, but also prevented me from getting a position in a private school. In these institutions, the demand for teaching experience used to be an essential condition for any candidate to be hired. In addition, the ability to teach English as a foreign language, or having lived or travelled abroad, were regarded as relevant selection criteria.

Looking back over the years and reflecting upon this context, I recognize an impassioned tendency to interpret the facts as an indication that, perhaps, it was not the right moment for me to start a teaching career. With the benefit of hindsight, I can understand that, whatever the circumstances, I was not actually prepared to teach yet. However, at that time, I could neither realize it nor wait: faced by a door that was waiting to be opened, I felt that I should try to go through it somehow.

I was completely insecure when I entered the Board of Education office on that gray and cold winter morning in July. Unemployed teachers and teachers-to-be shared a
quite small hallway and, attempting to keep something that might resemble a line, they were anxiously waiting for their turn, for their possible classes. Some of them were commenting on their financial difficulties or discussing their educational viewpoints. Others were sitting on the floor silently. I was entirely frightened by the idea of competing with so many people, and kind of ashamed to be part of a line of beggar-teachers. I started wondering to what extent dreams and nightmares might have a subtle proximity and similarity.

After three interminable hours, and the placement of only a few of those candidates, an officer of the board opened the last hallway door, stepped on a chair from which he could be seen by his anxious audience, and announced that there were no remaining positions. His words reached us as an electric shock, and immediately sparked off reactions of all sorts: some people started crying, some mumbled, others swallowed their own complaints, many -- like me -- just left the old building speechless. While going down the stairs, I was chewing on my own frustration, doubting the relevance of having studied hard for so many years, and condemning the necessity of undergoing a situation like that in order to get a job. Motivated by the anger and humiliation I was tasting, I decided to go to the nearest news-stand, buy a newspaper, and start looking for a job straightaway: anything other than teaching. On my way back home, sitting on a bus and scanning the job advertisements, I began wondering why that news-stand was strategically located in front of the Board of Education office. Perhaps, it was there to aid hopeless dreamer-teachers in finding other goals and in redefining their own objectives. Maybe it was there to help me cure my own disappointment by encouraging me to go impulsively in a very different direction.

1.3. Venturing into a business setting for the first time

My first steady job was at the Subscription Department in the São Paulo branch of a large Brazilian publishing company. I worked there for about two years, while I was finishing my undergraduate course in languages. During that time, my desire to teach was deliberately silenced, although it remained alive below the surface. It was about time to start a new cycle of my life. It was time to face and to grapple with my second token: the
business setting.

Within the Subscription Department -- initially as a correspondent, and six months later, as one of the coordinators in Customer Service -- I was responsible for answering letters regarding subscription procedures and prices, as well as dealing with customer complaints. As the subscription system covered all the states in Brazil and many foreign countries, I was expected to communicate effectively not only in Portuguese, but also in English. Nevertheless, my job activities included a number of routine situations, to which I might respond by using one of the twenty-four ready-made letters, especially prepared by previous coordinators. The correspondence I had to deal with, however, also involved a creative component which required me to write original letters to reply to the subscribers' unpredictable queries.

Almost in the middle of my second year at that publishing corporation, the department I was working in was subdivided. The original Subscription Department was partly maintained but a new one, the Marketing Department, was created. As a result of this, a number of staff changes occurred: the manager was transferred, the supervisor got promoted to the managerial position, and one of the coordinators should have become the new supervisor. This would be the natural flow of promotions if the department did not have two female coordinators. According to the narrow-minded orientation of the company -- at least, at that time -- the profile of this job was not considered suitable for a female employee, due to possible business trips that the performance of this function required.

Such a situation made me realize that, in this specific functional context, other than being part of the non-qualified work force, a woman would have to struggle mightily to succeed in her career plans. In my case, for instance, without having a journalism diploma, my only choice was to remain in the same position or to become a secretary. Within that organization, there was no room for me to have higher expectations.

The promotion issue, however, was not an impasse for those who retained the power of decision-making: without any explanation, a male employee was transferred from the Accounting Department and, even though he had no experience of dealing with subscription issues, he became the new supervisor. The female coordinators taught him the work-related routine and its implications. He got the position and the better salary, while
my colleague and I were maintained in our same occupations. Interestingly enough, this new supervisor, just like the former one, was never involved in a single business trip -- at least, during the time I worked for that organization.

By contemplating this event now, I realize that there is a correlation between two paramount concerns which are centred in equity and gender issues, respectively. Rethinking the circumstances, I still believe that the promotion criteria should have been based on the employees' ability to do the job and on the degree to which they were familiar with the work of the department. In my opinion, the implications of selecting a male or a female professional should have received a lesser focus. The lack of justice involved in such an episode has primarily hurt me as a human being and, consequently, as a woman. At that time, the unfairness that characterized the decision of the corporation affected me more than the gender connotation that this incident surely has. Nowadays, the only regret I still feel is the one of not having demanded a more convincing explanation. Along with my female colleagues, I felt that I was silenced. At that time, almost twenty-two years ago, we were not used to contesting a superior's decision. As a result of being brought up and living in a male-dominated social environment, we women were not used to voicing our opinions and struggling for our rights.

The end of my second year at that publishing company coincided with the completion of my undergraduate course. Disappointed by the overt policy and the hidden agenda that characterized the workplace I was immersed in, and experiencing conflicting feelings that confused equity and gender issues, I decided to search for other job possibilities -- either in the business or in the educational field. While looking for new work opportunities, however, I was surprised by an invitation to teach English in a private school -- in the same institution where I had taken part of my elementary education. This would be my first formal teaching experience in the regular educational system, whose challenge I was determined to meet. Conscious of being much more prepared this time, I accepted the invitation and changed the direction of my professional life.

Reflecting upon this decision, I consider that the act of changing my job -- regardless of the prejudice I had experienced in the business setting -- was primarily motivated by what van Manen terms "a vocation call" (1982:286) or "sense of vocation"
(1991:8). In other words, it was motivated by the possibility of accomplishing something that I have always dreamed of, and of moving in a direction on which I had focused all my academic efforts. The business practitioner had given way to the teacher practitioner who had been kept temporarily silent. Nevertheless, this first professional activity was never entirely forgotten; it remained latent, underneath. It had to patiently wait for its time to be released. I still had to live other experiences before rescuing this unfinished one, before retrieving it someday, somehow, and resuming it intensely.

1.4. Making meaning of challenges

This initial experience as a teacher was followed by two quite enriching ones lived, almost simultaneously, at another private institution, and at a public school in the city of São Paulo. While teaching English and Portuguese, I could concretely sense the specifics that depicted each of these two educational environments and realize, in practical terms, that continuous development is an essential component of an educator's life. This concern motivated me to take some short-term courses of specialization in English as a foreign language (EFL), as well as leading me back to the university, to an undergraduate course in pedagogy. In fact, such a concern has always encouraged me to search for growth in various directions.

My teaching career was filled with excellent feedback not only from my students and their parents, but also from my colleagues and the school staff. I can recall a sequence of rewarding events which gave me substantial reasons to perceive myself as a successful professional. However, after about ten years of teaching at the same institutions, I had the sensation that nothing new or challenging could ever happen to surprise me: everything seemed predictable, stable, absolutely under control. My feeling was more likely the one described by Zeller:

> Sometimes someone will say that they've had twenty-five years of experience at something when the truth is they've had one year of experience repeated twenty-four times. (quoted in Cell, 1984:3)

I was definitely not attracted to the prospect of repeating the same routine nine hours a day, five days a week, month after month, year after year. As pointed out by
Diamond (1991), "mastering and pursuing the craft of teaching goes far beyond repetitions and routines" (p.10). And I did not want to be a teaching machine as I felt I was. I needed to rediscover the passion for teaching I knew I had always had before. I needed to explore and venture into other possibilities. I needed to overcome new obstacles, to transform my personal life, to spice up my professional perspectives, and to find out my next meaningful turning point. In other words, I needed challenges! Challenges became, therefore, my explicit third token.

My search for new horizons and motivations led me to come across a newspaper announcement regarding scholarships in Japan. It was the in-service teachers training program supported by the Ministry of Education of the Japanese government: a program that comprised the intensive learning of the Japanese language for six months, and the development of the candidate's own research project, for one year.

Extremely attracted by the possibility of living in and learning from another cultural environment, I had no doubt about applying for the scholarship. I wrote up a project about the methodology of teaching English as a foreign language, and went through all the required steps included in the selection process. I got the scholarship and felt certain, at that moment, that I had a challenge to overcome on the other side of the world.

1.5. Flying to the unknown

Living in Japan can be an incredible and enigmatic experience, especially for those who neither speak the language nor have an eastern cultural background. In Osaka for six months, and in Tokyo for twelve, I experienced various sorts of deep emotions and sensations. Every feeling I lived in these two cities still remains sharply engraved on my mind, especially the one of being an illiterate adult, and the one of feeling the ground literally shaking under my feet on exactly seventeen occasions. In that country, I unquestionably learned through living that earthquakes are not only a physical but also a linguistic and, especially, an emotional phenomenon.

My first contact with my supervisor in Tokyo provided a good example of one of those metaphorical earthquakes: with an academic background other than languages, he did not know how to accommodate our special research interests. Realizing that the
supervisor was appointed by the Ministry of Education, and that such bureaucratic decisions are unchangeable in the Japanese society, the only solution he could think of was to suggest that I should take part in his project on implementing computers in schools. As a research fellow, then, I could visit some Japanese educational institutions and observe their tutorial mode of applying computers to the teaching of English. Grounded on the impressions collected from these on-site investigations and, especially, on various theoretical sources, I could write a report where I would discuss the viability of adopting Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to foster the development of receptive and productive language skills (Freire, 1988).

I was reluctant at the beginning, but I soon became completely fascinated. It was my first and definite contact with computers. It was not love at first sight, though. Nevertheless, it was the origin of a long and faithful love affair that started timidly, by chance; but that, by choice, has gradually changed my professional and academic life. It's strange that I had to travel to Japan to be introduced to my fourth token -- computers -- the one that has been remarkably intriguing from that very first moment.

1.6. Re-discovering myself in my own country

As Dewey (1938a) suggests, emotionally engaging experiences should be followed by reflective analyses upon the emerging qualitative changes that may cause growth and development. Reflecting on my stay abroad, I realized that Japan was not only an academic, but also a personal and cultural experience which represented the turning point that provoked the beginning of a new phase in my life.

Being back home was not as nice and warm as I had dreamed of. Everything seemed to remain the same or almost: my family, my friends, my house, my car, my city, my positions in the same schools. I could not identify any significant environmental transformation -- perhaps not as meaningful as the inner ones I, then, started to realize I had gone through. To me, it seemed to be the day after the one on which I had left Brazil eighteen months before. It seemed that someone preserved everything exactly the way it was when I had left -- just like some people do when a beloved person passes away. If, on the one hand, it was marvellous to get rid of the terrible feeling of being physically different
from everyone else; on the other hand, it was hard to live with the sensation of being a foreigner in my own country. In Japan, I had learned a lot about life and especially about myself: a hard lesson not to be easily forgotten, a lesson that gave me the determination to challenge the sameness I had experienced before living abroad. I returned to Brazil with a much more acute consciousness of my possibilities, as well as of my limitations: I felt that I should do everything I could to explore other alternatives, to open up new opportunities, to transcend personal and professional boundaries, to re-discover my own country, and my own roots.

This personal revolution became more conspicuous when I began searching for other professional perspectives, for chances of applying the knowledge I had recently acquired. The desire to introduce and use computers for educational purposes persuaded me to dare higher flights which led me to new teaching experiences in regular and language schools, and also to my Master's course. At the Catholic University of São Paulo, in the Postgraduate Department of Applied Linguistics, I found a rich educational and human environment to develop my MA dissertation topic. In this research (Freire, 1992), by working with high school students and dealing with English as a foreign language, I studied the interaction among teacher, students, and computer when a computerized simulation is used as the structure of a communicative task.

At the university, and with my supervisor's enthusiastic encouragement, I could also teach English to adults and offer courses for teacher development within the Department of Continuing Education. Working with students and teachers simultaneously provided me, then, with a quite unique opportunity to reflect and to learn. When teaching English to adults, I dealt with heterogeneous groups in terms of age, occupation, educational and experiential background, expectations, and needs. In these courses -- like in the ones I had previously taught in a language school -- I had the opportunity to restore and maintain a closer contact with business people, and to be more sensitive to their complaints regarding the general lack of adequacy between the contents of language courses and their actual work-related needs. On the other hand, by working with teachers of English, I could approach more specific areas such as methodology, preparation and evaluation of pedagogical materials and, naturally, computers in language teaching and
learning. In both cases, I had an enriching experience that made me develop personally and professionally.

My MA supervisor -- Dr. Heloisa Collins -- performed a quite distinctive role in my life by providing me with opportunities to grow through living educational experiences (Dewey, 1938a:37). Under her supervision, I received continuous encouragement, as well as positive critiques to the theoretical and methodological aspects of my research. Through thought-provoking discussions, she not only helped me conclude my thesis project, but also supported me in enlarging my academic and professional horizons. Due to her initiative, at the end of my first year within the MA program, I was also invited to take part in the DIRECT\textsuperscript{2} team.

Through the activities performed with the DIRECT team, I was introduced to the realm of discourse and genre analysis. By looking at language from a more functional perspective, I could detect that meaning and use are not disconnected entities. Although at first sight we seemed to be participating in a tricky word game (the use of meaning vs. the meaning of use), I came to realize that these different aspects of language are involved in an interactive relationship that generates a theory of action, as presented by Souza Filho (1986). Decisive were also the reading and discussions upon Swales (1986, 1990), Halliday (1978/92, 1985, 1989), and Halliday & Hasan (1985/89), whose ideas I applied in the investigation of giving instructions as a genre -- my very first research work in the field (Freire, 1991). The involvement with the DIRECT group, therefore, had a profound intellectual impact on me, especially after getting my master's degree and being invited to work as a researcher in the Postgraduate Department of Applied Linguistics where I had previously been a student.

1.7. Envisioning initial connections

My activities at the university also involved me in the organization of the DIRECT

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\textsuperscript{2} DIRECT -- or Development of International Research in English for Commerce and Technology -- is an ongoing research project jointly developed by the Catholic University of São Paulo (São Paulo, Brazil), and the University of Liverpool (Liverpool, United Kingdom). Broadly speaking, it aims at investigating oral and written functional communications performed in English and Portuguese within business contexts.
data base, and in the introduction of the research assistants to computer skills. By dealing with computers as a working tool on a daily basis and witnessing the distinct individual reactions they might generate, I started feeling an increasing concern about the impact that these machines could engender on interpersonal interactions. Interestingly enough, my curiosity about electronic communication systems coincided with a need to introduce e-mail within my department. Because of the nature of my activities there, I found myself in charge of this enterprise. As a result of my involvement in the process of installing the system and training people for its use, I was able to learn many technical and operational details of this kind of communication, as well as starting to manipulate it in practical terms. I could also perceived that the more I used e-mail for communicative purposes, the more it challenged my interest in investigating how interactions could be enacted through this medium.

On the other hand, my activities within DIRECT also led me back to the business setting -- an environment which, to a certain extent, I had some previous familiarity with. Nevertheless, I was then able to look at it from a quite different perspective: sixteen years after our first encounter, the context had changed and so had I. The offices were equipped with other tools, such as computers; and communication had become much more sophisticated than the handwritten letters I used to give to the secretary to type and send to the company's customers. Regardless of these innovations, however, I still found people who needed to communicate in a foreign language -- just like I did before -- and whose foreign language needs were not fulfilled by the courses they had taken. By returning to the business site, and by bringing with me my previous experiences as a correspondent and my background as a language teacher and researcher, I felt that I had something to contribute.

The perception of computers as a communication tool and of business people's foreign language needs had a tangible effect on me. Grounded on them, I could frame my doctoral research project which has computer-mediated communication as its field, interactions performed in English within business settings as its topic, and Brazil as its practical setting. The conception of this research direction made me, then, intuitively establish a symbiotic relationship among the four previously mentioned tokens -- teaching, business settings, challenges, and computers. I can now perceive them as powerful
motivational forces that have been steering my life sometimes consciously, many times unconsciously.

1.8. Once more, flirting with the unknown

The definition of my research topic, due to its novelty, compelled me to look for an institution that could offer me access to and availability of equipment and technical resources to undertake my project. In this case, my option should not be only based on my academic background (linguistics and education), and on the field of my thesis (computer-mediated communication), but also on the material and pedagogical infrastructure of the intended university. These were the reasons that led me to apply for the doctoral program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) -- now part of the University of Toronto -- and, simultaneously, for a scholarship from the Brazilian National Council for Research (CNPq). I succeeded in both objectives and, once again, flew to another unknown destination: Canada. This time, I was visiting a country that is not geographically far from Brazil, and not very distinct from my linguistic background and cultural roots, as well.

At OISE, I received several fruitful influences. A positive influence was the new academic motivation resulting from the courses I took, from the readings I was exposed to, and from the references I could search for. Stimulating was the formal and informal feedback I gathered from professors, classmates and friends. Riveting and motivating were the thought-provoking discussions I had with my supervisor -- always present and encouraging, as well as sensitive and responsive to my work and its development. Regarding access to technical apparatus, I also had the opportunity to become an effective CMC user, exploring the potential of electronic mail, group-discussion lists, computer conferences, and the Internet tools and resources. By directly experiencing these virtual media of interpersonal communication, I was able to be in closer contact with the phenomenon I was interested in investigating, and to observe my own reactions and performance, before interpreting the responses and behaviors of other people. Under such supportive technical and academic conditions, I was able to improve and develop my research project, as well as to shorten the distance between my initial intention and its
fulfillment.

1.9. Defining my self: the portrait of a teacher who is also an explorer

The distance between an initial research interest and the final doctoral dissertation cannot be expressed in terms of a journey involving continuous progress along a single spatial dimension. Such an experience can be thought of, however, as a two-way track that goes back and forth from feelings to thoughts, from interrelationships to introspection, from perceptions to connections, from facts to meanings, from isolation to joint action/reflection. I assume that such a distance can only be measured in bits of life, in accounts of lived experiences.

This assumption was the one that led me to begin the report of my journey by revisiting my original intention, and by recollecting and presenting its very remote personal genesis. I adopted such a format firstly because I do agree with van Manen's claim (1990) that "one does not pursue research [simply] for the sake of research" (p.1); and secondly, because I do believe that inner life choices, professional paths, and research interests are dialogically associated. In my opinion, such an association may be captured or better understood if investigated from a heuristic perspective (Moustakas, 1990). In other words, through reflection, the search for internal frames of reference may foster self-interpretation of experienced phenomena. In my specific case, the heuristic journey was achieved through an autobiographical immersion that revealed meaningful connections among a number of lived experiences: experiences that have resulted in a unique professional destination.

The elaboration of my autobiography involved me in a reflective and introspective

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3 The notion of autobiography addressed in this dissertation is the one presented by Bruner & Weiser (1991), who have summarized it as follows: "The act of autobiography, rather than "life" as stored in the darkness of memory, is what constructs the account of life. Autobiography, in a word, turns life into text, however implicit or explicit the text may be. It is only by textualization that one can "know" one's life. The process of life textualization is a complex one, a never-ending interpretation and reinterpretation. Its textual status is not in the strict sense determined exclusively by acts of speaking and writing, but depends instead upon acts of conceptualization: creating schemata of interpretation by which semantic memory gives coherence to elements of episodic memory. Schematization is guided by rules of genre and cultural convention, which in turn impose rules of linguistic usage and narrative construction. Finally, by virtue of its function as a "locational device", autobiography creates needs for identification and individuation and, at the same time, satisfies these needs if the autobiography can achieve
process that, intuitively, led me to contrast interpretations with reinterpretations of the same events and that, consequently, made me become "acutely aware of my own subjectivity" (Peshkin, 1988:17). To me, composing a "textual representation" of some past and more recent lived experiences constituted an exploration of voice and subjectivity. On the one hand, such an exercise was evidenced by the selection of episodes to be told or silenced, whose negotiation impacted on the way I structured and/or restructured my interpretation of the facts. On the other hand, it was deeply reinforced through the interpretative exposition of interconnections and repercussions that immediately engaged me in "living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:4). Under such an inner movement, I found myself engrossed in self-negotiating representations; in struggling with facts, memories, and senses; in identifying pivotal tokens and life-turning points; in articulating arguments and explanations; and in re-writing and editing the emerging text in order to reach a comprehensive version of my own story.

In addition to being an exploration of voice and subjectivity, the composition of my autobiography revealed an empowering relationship I could develop with my own self, as well as an intense feeling of connectedness which emerged from the association of some professional experiences with my current research interest. Empowering and connectedness are feelings that Hogan (1988), and Connelly & Clandinin (1990) have pointed out as the ones resulting from the interaction between researchers and participants when the former, by voicing themselves, share their own stories. Nevertheless, during the development of my doctoral research, I could also experience such feelings on a more individual and subjective basis: by learning how to listen to my inner voice, and by making meaning from the relationships among the various personal and professional situations I went through.

As a result of such an autobiographical immersion, I could, then, experience self-discovery, self-understanding, self-connectedness, and self-empowering. In other words, I could deepen my relationship with my own self, as well as recognize and interpretatively

*rightness of representation* (p.137)

Denzin (1992) claims that "lived experience can only be given indirectly, through textual representations" (p.27).
untangle my own moments of powerlessness and vulnerability. I was able, then, to foster the process of "becoming a self", described by Cell (1984) as follows:

The process of becoming a self, then, involves two basic tasks. On the one hand, we must learn behaviors and interpretations that enable us to be a significant person in each of our situations and, through them, in our life situation as a whole. On the other hand, we must learn ways not only to cope with our times of powerlessness but also to come to terms with our ongoing vulnerability to being rendered powerless, to being separated from all that we find meaningful, to having to die. We are the only animals who carry a sense of our vulnerability around us. We know that our days are numbered, our relationships are fragile, our situations are ambiguous, and all our days are lived against this backdrop of transcience and limitation. (p.5)

Throughout the preparation of the written "text of my own life" (Bruner & Weisser, 1991:129,136), I could recognize the four powerful tokens that propelled my professional destination in specific directions. Through introspection, reflection and meditation, I was able to distinguish and interpret teaching, business settings, challenges, and computers as the interweaving and overlapping of forces that remarkably depicted some life moments, and influenced unique life decisions. In addition to that, I was able to identify my going to Japan as the unequivocal turning point in my personal story.

The unexpected experiences I underwent in that country undoubtedly generated meaningful inner transformations that affected my way of facing life and of dealing with its circumstances. Before going to Japan, my life was characterized by a kind of disorganized search that, on the one hand, led me to superficially venture into the business territory and, to a certain extent, to explore the educational one. On the other hand, such a search provided me with the definite conviction that only through teaching would I reach personal and professional fulfillment. By staying abroad, in such a peculiar environment, I could concretely discover the challenge of the unknown, and perceive that its taste, although not always exactly sweet, was profoundly attractive to me.

Living in Japan was also an enriching experience in academic, social and cultural terms. Once I had overcome the initial conflicting feelings of association-estrangement, as well as the ones of fascination-repulsion, the result was a profound admiration for both
countries and, particularly, the rewarding recognition and awareness of my Italian heritage and my own Brazilian background. The confrontation between the tacit meanings spontaneously acquired in my home country, with the foreign meanings found in the new environment brought to me an innovative dimension that made me conceive of life from a quite distinct perspective. Nevertheless, I was not able to immediately grasp the significance of the cross-cultural encounter I had just lived. Such an understanding occurred some years later when I found in Bakhtin's comments (transcribed below), an echo of and an explanation for my personal experience:

In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closeness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths. Without one's own questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign (but, of course, the questions must be serious and sincere). Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched. (Bakhtin, 1988:7)

The dialogic encounter of the Brazilian and the Japanese cultures provoked the beginning of another phase in my life: a phase depicted by a more focused search that conducted me and my passion for teaching along new paths that, from that moment on, also included the technological field with its characteristic tools and techniques. This new stage was also spiced with the challenge of the unknown that induced me to experience new professional situations and to start, with profound determination, my academic career.

Nowadays, the image I have is that the monochromatic passivity that used to depict my life gave place to a vividly colored energy that involved me completely and, through a passionate movement, directed me towards personal growth and intellectual development. Such an image made me decode my staying abroad as a decisive turning point that
originated an unquestionable "awakening"5.

The recollection and narrative representation of my life trajectory also constituted an exercise in self-perception and sensitivity. This exercise was manifested through a heuristic process that enabled me to revisit my own past experiences, recover their emerging feelings and thoughts, and interpret their underlying qualities, relationships, significance, repercussions, and implications. By striving for a continuous exploration of my own self, and for establishing links between certain lived episodes and my professional or academic choices, I could experience "moments of meaning" whose connections "will remain forever unbroken" and "will serve as a reminder of a lifelong process of knowing and being" (Moustakas, 1990:55-56). In other words, I could explore my own "capacity to experience qualities" (Eisner, 1991:17), and to perceive and recognize them for what they are.

In addition to that, I could also perceive myself as a curious learner -- an explorer -- extremely attracted by the challenge of venturing into inward and outward unknown territories. Such an exercise in self-perception and sensitivity also led me to find out that, throughout my life, I have been developing -- sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly --- a keen sense of exploration which I have attempted to capture in the autobiographical accounts presented in this chapter. This sense of exploration is, undoubtedly, the guiding impulse that distinguishes my doctoral research, and individualizes this dissertation which also constitutes the report of an inner exploration extended into the business territory.

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5 The term "awakening" -- used in this dissertation with a metaphorical connotation -- is, originally, the title of the 1973 Oliver Sacks's book. In this work, the author narrates the experiences lived in Mount Carmel Hospital (New York, USA), with few survivors of the great sleeping-sickness epidemic (encephalitis lethargica), and their reactions to an awakening drug (L-DOPA).
CHAPTER 2

CHOOSING THE PATHS, PACKING UP AND LEAVING

Observation alone is not enough. We have to understand the 'significance' of what we see, hear, and touch. This significance consists of the consequences that will result when what is seen is acted upon.

Dewey, 1938a

Explorations of unknown regions require careful plans and preparation. Knowing where to go and when, without defining how and particularly why, does not seem to be a reliable starting point. An expedition of this sort entails setting objectives, getting maps and information, contacting travel guides, detailing strategies, considering alternative routes and feasible transportation, selecting adequate equipment, and getting prepared to cope with the unpredictable or unexpected. In my opinion, these pre-arrangements keep the adventure away neither from its purposes nor from its challenge; they contribute, however, to make it more focused, enjoyable, and fruitful. By conceiving of my expedition from this perspective, these were the aspects I took into account and the arrangements I made before actually venturing into the business territory.

The journey I undertook was, therefore, more comprehensive than just arriving at the target land and exploring it. In fact, it started by a heuristic investigation of the forces that had intuitively led me to define CMC practices in business settings as my area of inquiry. In reflecting on my own story, and attempting to link some personal, professional, and academic experiences and choices together, I could realize the genesis of my research interest and its inner significance. Furthermore, by designing such associations, I could live moments of meaning (Moustakas,1990:55-56), and understand the relevance of teaching, business settings, challenges, and computers -- the four tokens that had subconsciously created cycles in my life (Clandinin & Connelly,1991:262; Connelly and associates, 1995:20), and influenced who I am as an individual, a teacher, and an explorer. Through the recollection and interpretation of some life episodes, I perceived myself "acutely aware of my own subjectivity" (Peshkin,1988:17) and able to compose a textual representation
(Denzin, 1992:27) of these experiences -- which constituted the focus of the first chapter of this dissertation. Thus, this autobiographical account represented the very initial step of preparation for my trip, and part of the metaphorical luggage I had packed before my departure.

Nevertheless, while selecting what to take with me on my journey, I perceived that I needed to narrow down the wide area initially selected for exploration, to define my objectives more clearly, to collect informative material to keep me attuned to my purposes, to delineate the intended route, and to schematize the overall procedures. Decisions of this kind represented, therefore, the concluding phase of preparation for my excursion to the business territory and the subject addressed in this present chapter.

My aim here is to discuss the theoretical and methodological foundation that led me to establish experience, reflection, and interpretation as the pivotal bases on which I grounded the investigation of electronic correspondence in English within professional settings, as well as of the written genres which emerged from it. This chapter presents a survey of the various readings which preceded my going to the target territory and which form the background of my research. However, throughout the narrative of my adventure, other voices and sources will be mentioned. These references, associated with the ones presented here, constitute the overall theoretical apparatus that supported my study and the exploration of intertextuality which I got involved in throughout its realization. By adopting this approach, my intention is to make explicit where I started off and why, among several possible routes, I decided to focus my exploration on a specific direction and on particular procedures. To accomplish my goal in this chapter, I first present the research questions that guide my investigation and reflect upon the personal, contextual, and methodological context that make them relevant. Secondly, I introduce the intertwined components on which my inquiry is grounded -- technological, linguistic, and interpretive. Finally, I outline the sequence of steps that supported data collection, interpretation, and presentation.

2.1. A phenomenon and its interpretation: an approach to methodology

Computer-mediated communication for business purposes was only recently
introduced to the Brazilian professional context. As an innovative communication and working tool, it undoubtedly created new professional opportunities by offering unique ways of dealing and interacting with information and with co-workers either in the same office or more distant locations. Moreover, the utilization of electronic communication networks enlarged the connections among national and international organizations, providing greater possibilities for commercial activities with foreign trade markets.

However, the conditions resulting from this computerized environment created new demands which required practitioners to develop not only their level of professional and/or technological expertise but also their communicative competence in English. Therefore, due to the new characteristics of the workplace, a higher degree of specialization -- particularly in the foreign language -- became crucial to speed up the flow of information and the rhythm of commercial transactions. This linguistic priority affected many professionals who started to look for private tutors or for language classes in special institutes.

Their search for foreign language instruction, however, drew attention to a serious problem: the inadequacy of most language courses and their failure to attend to the peculiarities of business settings and to provide programs for specific professional needs. By attending classes invariably focused on general purpose syllabuses, and ready-made pedagogical material, professionals have been exposed to learning situations which do not correspond to their real demands and expectations. Rather than getting the support they needed, therefore, they got actually involved in quite frustrating experiences.

This situation was particularly significant for me. On the one hand, as a teacher of English, I was sensitive to the complaints of some business students who were enrolled in non-specific language programs, and who realized the gap between the content of the lessons and their real work-related needs. However, although I recognized the reasons for their dissatisfaction, my hands were tied: first of all, I had to develop the course plan and try to account for these students' expectations without knowing anything about the companies they worked for or about the exact nature of the communicative processes in which they were engaged. Like the students, I found myself becoming increasingly frustrated. On the other hand, as a researcher who was engaged in a project focused on
business environments, and in exploring Internet resources, I became curious about the implications of interacting in a foreign language through e-mail in the workplace. As a teacher of English and as a researcher, I felt compelled to build on my disappointment and curiosity and design a research project whose results could in some way impact on the ESP context that prevails in Brazil. Hence, by tacitly connecting teaching, business settings, and computers, I decided to face the challenge of attempting to reduce the gap between pedagogic practice and students needs.

My research interest was, therefore, based on some of my lived experiences. As I described in Chapter 1, such a perception was achieved through a heuristic process that enabled me not only to relive some past events and recover the feelings, thoughts, and images that were associated with them, but also to interpret their underlying relationships and personal significance. By experiencing a feeling of realization and self-connectedness with my own story, I could understand the association between past and more recent episodes, as well as their influence on subsequent life events and choices. This self-discovery made me realize that interaction with and reflection upon lived experiences constituted a major source of enlightenment which could also be explored as an approach to investigate the meaning professionals made of their own CMC practices.

The heuristic perspective from which I recollected and interpreted the confluence of lived experiences in my own life story made me acknowledge that "the world is not fundamentally what one thinks about it, but what one lives through it" (McCoy, 1993:4). Moreover, it also made me realize clearly that, as Dilthey (1985) suggests and van Manen (1990:36) concludes, lived experiences have qualities that we recognize in retrospect, for "the world is first in the realm of participation and later in the realm of reflection" (McCoy, 1993:4). My identification with those philosophical concepts led me to consider a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach to research which was primarily focused on retrospective descriptions and on interpretations of lived experiences.

As Heidegger (1994) points out, phenomenology attempts to accomplish the essential nature of a phenomenon by offering accounts of certain ways of experiencing it and of "being-in-the-world" (p.215). According to this orientation, a phenomenological inquiry is basically grounded on human experience, and aims at grasping and describing
the essence, the very nature, the essential meaning of a phenomenon (Husserl, 1913/62; Merleau-Pointy, 1962; van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). It suggests a research topic that has both social and personal significance, and that seeks to uncover "qualitative factors in behavior and experience" (Moustakas, 1994: 104-105), without involving any kind of prejudgments or presuppositions. From a phenomenological perspective, van Manen (1990) claims that to do research is "always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p.5), and "to be addressed by the question of what something is `really' like" (p.42). For him, a phenomenological inquiry involves a meaning question (p.23), which searches for the significance of a phenomenon, for what it is like to have a particular experience:

From a phenomenological point of view, we are less interested in the factual status of particular instances: whether something actually happened, how often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related to the prevalence of other conditions or events. For example, phenomenology does not ask, "How do these children learn this particular material?" but it asks, "What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning (so that I can now better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children)?" The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner. (p.10)

The theoretical sources mentioned above made me perceive that phenomenology accounts for lived experiences from a descriptive standpoint, attempting to discover the essence and qualities a phenomenon has, according to the way individuals live, perceive and portray it. In this sense, phenomenology seeks a deeper understanding of everyday experiences, as they are immediately realized, rather than as they are conceptualized, categorized, or reflected upon (Husserl, 1970; Schultz & Luckmann, 1973, van Manen, 1990). In the view of the above, it seemed to me that a phenomenological approach to research could help me to capture the meaning of interacting in English through computers within business settings from the Brazilian professionals' point of view.

By contrast, the essence of a hermeneutic inquiry is to be found in descriptions and interpretations of experiences through texts (Gadamer, 1975; Ricouer, 1976; Dilthey, 1985;
van Manen, 1990). It involves the "art of reading a text so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood" (Moustakas, 1994:9). Hermeneutics, as it is conceived by Dilthey (1985, 1994), involves interpretation made explicit through texts which not only represent the expression of lived experiences, but also lead to a deeper understanding of them. From a more inclusive viewpoint, Gadamer (1975) considers that comprehending these texts includes an interpretive dialogue which shows that the reader is engaged in and animated by the text s/he is reading. By presenting his perception of conversation, he explains:

We say we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was ill fated. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within in - i.e., that it allows something to "emerge" which henceforth exists. (...) Understanding is not based on transposing oneself into another person, on one person's immediate participation with another. To understand what a person says is to come to an understanding about the subject matter, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences. (...) Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. Thus we do not relate the other's opinion to him but to our own opinions and views. Where a person is concerned with the other as individuality - e.g., a therapeutic conversation or the interrogation of a man accused of a crime - this is not really a situation in which two people are trying to come to an understanding. Everything we have said characterizing the situation of two people coming to an understanding in conversation has a genuine application to hermeneutics, which is concerned with understanding texts. (...) To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but
being transformed into a communication in which we do not remain what we were. (p.383-385,379)

In reflecting upon the role performed by texts within a hermeneutic approach to research and, particularly, upon Gadamer's notion of conversation, I realized that talking with practitioners about their work-related routines and about the electronic messages they customarily exchanged would provide me with the texts of their professional experiences.

Looked at from a hermeneutic point of view, therefore, my investigation would comprise two text-based sources which, by emerging from my contact with the participants, could be regarded both as the object and as the product of inquiry. The first textual source -- the one that contemplated texts as an object of inquiry -- came from the investigation of the correspondence exchanged in customary job activities. These e-mail messages, by representing the way professionals conveyed and dealt with information in English, would reveal the nature of their social actions (Miller, 1994) and of their communicative purposes (Swales, 1990). I hoped that the interpretation of these texts would allow me to describe the structural organization of the correspondence, as well as identifying the genres enacted and manipulated by members of the corporate community.

The second text-based source -- the one which focused on texts as product of inquiry -- would consist of reflections upon practice (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1992) shared by the practitioners throughout our conversations. Such reflections would emerge through conversations about the context that surrounded message generation and/or reception, and through the recollection of the experiences lived by the participants as professionals, computer users, and foreign language learners/speakers. This interpretive dialogue would, therefore, generate another kind of text (i.e., text as a product of inquiry) which would unveil the texture of the experiences lived in the workplace. Furthermore, these conversations might potentially impact on the interpretation of the linguistic and professional skills involved in CMC practices at work. In addition, they might nurture the relationship between previous and subsequent experiences. As stated by Putman & Roloff (1992:7-8), an interpersonal approach focused on the joint constructing of meaning through shared interpretations allows the assessment of systems of meaning. For this reason, joint reflections upon
practice might possibly uncover other aspects of the nature of the target phenomenon, and provide more details about its qualitative features in terms of behavior and experience.

It seemed for me, then, that hermeneutic methodology would contribute to my investigation of the target phenomenon (i.e., interacting in English through computers for business purposes within a Brazilian context) by emphasizing the meaning practitioners made of the professional and communicative experiences they lived when engaged in e-mail activities. In this sense, phenomenology and hermeneutics could be taken as complementary methodological paths, giving rise to an innovative approach to research, as suggested by van Manen (1990).

In contrasting these orientations to human science research, van Manen (1990) concludes that while phenomenology entails discovery and refers to "how one orients to lived experience," hermeneutics is concerned with understanding and accounts for "how one interprets the 'texts' of life" (p.4). For him, however, this distinction indicates that these methodologies are not conflicting, and that the connection between them goes beyond their common emphasis on human experience. As he claims, they share a deeper relationship that results in a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research which he explains as follows:

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) "facts" of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the "facts" of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process. (p.180-181)

Van Manen's comments led me to perceive more clearly that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research represented an attempt to elaborate a detailed description of a phenomenon without missing the point that the phenomenon itself was more complex than any emerging textual interpretation could hope to be (van Manen, 1990:18). This assumption, associated with the fact that hermeneutic phenomenology is
interested in the world "as we find it" (ibid), provided my inquiry with unequivocal support and, for this reason, constituted the methodological rationale that guided me in its accomplishment.

From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, therefore, my investigation would aim at studying what it is like to interact in English through computers within business settings from the Brazilian professionals' point of view. Understanding the significance of such a phenomenon required, in my opinion, an investigation in two essential directions. Firstly, I needed to investigate the flow of interpersonal interactions, through an analysis of the electronic texts produced and/or received, as constituting types of discourse. Secondly, understanding CMC practices also involved the practitioners' interpretations of their e-mail activities and reflections upon their experiences lived in the workplace through this medium. Considering this second direction, I realized that the act of recalling and interpreting experiences lived through e-mail at work might also lead the participants to refer to other experiences, including ones lived outside their current workplaces or, perhaps, at different moments of their lives. In other words, the reflective process I was suggesting would reveal the participants and their CMC practices within the scope of their own professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). These directions of inquiry guided me to the formulation of three questions:

1. What meaning do Brazilian professionals make of CMC practices at work?

2. What is the nature of interacting through computers in a foreign language for professional purposes?

3. What are the repercussions of the reflective process on the participants' perception of their CMC practices?

My hermeneutic phenomenological commitment led me to deliberately frame the questions in such a way that they would open up possibilities and keep them open (Gadamer, 1975:299). Therefore, my aim in designing open questions was to approach the target phenomenon without being constrained by presuppositions or personal biases that might emerge, for instance, from my previous experience in business settings, or from my
background as a language teacher, researcher, and/or e-mail user. By perceiving myself as an outsider in the field, I took into account that phenomenological questions would allow me to be more attuned to the phenomenon itself and sensitive to the possibility of discovering what CMC practices were like. I realized that, by keeping an open mind, and by performing the role of a participant researcher, engaged in an interpretive dialogue with practitioners, I could then use my experiential and theoretical background to mediate their encounter with their own practices, and their reflections upon their own experiential continuum (Dewey, 1938a). For this reason, I decided to widen the research questions in order to avoid narrowing the focus of the research. I hoped that this procedure, which seemed to be coherent with the methodology adopted, would enable me to better describe the CMC phenomenon the way it was, and the way Brazilian professionals experienced and interpreted it.

2.2. The intersection of the three inquiry components

The considerations presented in the previous section illustrate one step in the reflective process I went through while preparing my expedition to the business territory. However, while involved in narrowing down the wide area initially selected for exploration, defining the direction of my expedition, and schematizing my approach to the business territory, I realized that my investigation was situated at the point of intersection of three inquiry components. The first of these -- which I referred to as technological -- was focused on perceptions of e-mail as a working and communication tool, as well as on the impact of its utilization in business settings. The second inquiry component -- which I labelled linguistic -- concerned the nature of the electronic texts produced in English, including the communication process that connected Brazilian to international professionals. The third inquiry component -- which I identified as interpretive -- referred to the reflective process undertaken by the participants, which involved their interpretations of the e-mail messages exchanged and of the experiences lived in the workplace through the electronic medium.

These three inquiry elements helped me to organize my journey through the business territory and, by reminding me of its theoretical and methodological origins, kept me attuned to the investigation and to my interpretation of the target phenomenon.
Although the three elements are closely intertwined, I deal with them separately in the following sections.

2.2.1. The technological component

E-mail, as the most prevalent type of CMC (Garton & Wellman, 1995:448), has been conceptualized as a communication tool which combines asynchrony,\(^1\) locational flexibility, rapid transmission across time and space, dyadic and multiple connections, textual nature, free-format natural language,\(^2\) and ability to store and process information (Rice and associates, 1984; Culnan & Markus, 1987; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991/92; Garton & Wellman, 1995). Considering these features, e-mail constitutes "an attractive tool" (Garton & Wellman, 1995:448) for organizations that work collaboratively and are involved in an intensive information exchange process. This characterization led me to consider whether treating e-mail as a mediator of communication would also include considerations about how individuals perceived and interacted with the tool itself and, based on that, about how they performed their communicative tasks.

My belief that mediated activities might also comprise a sort of personal link between the tool and its users was actually confirmed by an argument presented by Illich (1973). Although his discussion deals with tools in a more comprehensive sense, he claims that they are intrinsic to social relationships, and comments on possibilities through which individuals may relate to the instruments they manipulate. He states:

As individual relates himself in action to his society through the use of tools that he actively masters, or by which he is passively acted upon. To the degree that he masters his tools, he can invest the world with his meaning; to the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tool determines his own self-image. Convival tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision. Industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to

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\(^{1}\) Although e-mail systems can also support synchronous conversations, it seems that non-real time interactions have been explored more frequently.

\(^{2}\) Sproull & Kiesler (1991/92) assert that "electronic mail lets people use free-format natural language in their messages to one another" (p.11). However, they do not clarify the meaning attributed to natural language. I assume that they refer to a more spontaneous and informal written expression, as opposed to the formality conventionally displayed in business letters.
Illich's comments emphasize that a tool does not necessarily constitute a neutral mediator used to perform certain activities for, as he states, it can be manipulated by its users as a form of self-expression or it can impose itself and, to some extent, depersonalize them. According to my interpretation, some tools can be mechanically reproduced with the result that the associated problems become impersonal and predictable. On the other hand, some tools might give rise to more creative and individual modes of expression.

The distinction proposed by Illich allowed me to consider e-mail in a new light, since it consists of a communicative tool to facilitate the exchange of texts -- which constitute another sort of tool. Considering e-mail from the operational point of view (hardware) and of the various communicative devices available (software), I was inclined at first to interpret it as a set of standardized commands which would be manipulated in a similar fashion by any individual. Insofar as e-mail involves the recurrent use of the same procedures, we might say that the tool imposes itself and acts upon its users. However, when we convey messages through the computerized medium, we are not confined to a specific set of commands. Rather, we are able to draw upon all the resources of language, which is an open system with an unlimited number of options. It follows from this that an electronic text invariably reveals the writer's linguistic choices and, therefore, his/her own identity.\(^3\) In the light of Illich's arguments, my tendency is to conceive of e-mail as both an industrial and a convival tool. I suggest that the characterization of e-mail as an industrial tool would refer exclusively to the relationship between individuals and the computer or the communication software. On the other hand, my conception of e-mail as a convival tool would consider its impact on social relations (Illich, 1992:202), thus emphasizing the connection among various individuals through the exchange of electronic texts. In

\(^3\) Sproull & Kiesler (1991/92) assert that: *"ordinarily when people communicate, they are not just exchanging information; they are projecting an image of themselves"* (p. 42). And Ivanic (1994) claims that: *"writing does not just convey information, it also conveys something about the writer"* (p. 3).
Considering e-mail as both an industrial and a convival tool, I started to wonder about the transformations that might occur in the workplace after its introduction.

As suggested by Sproull & Kiesler (1991/92:35), introducing a technological tool to the office environment, and doing new things with it, implies more than adding new activities to an unchanging base. According to them, doing new things leads to thinking in new ways which in turn leads to fundamental changes in how people work and interact. The authors claim that communication technology produces effects on two levels: effects on efficiency at the first level, and effects on the social system at the second level (ibid, p.5-17).

The first-level effect refers to the planned efficiency and/or productivity gains that justify an investment in new technology. It includes a series of technical considerations which are not restricted to the conventional cost-displacement or value-added analysis. As Sproull & Kiesler point out, the most important effects of a new technology are to lead people to do things that were not possible before, rather than letting them do old things more efficiently. The authors remark that analyses of efficiency gains tend to underestimate factors such as cost of training and conversion to new ways of working, as well as costs regarding job reduction and/or replacement. According to Sproull & Kiesler, therefore, efficiency gains constitute a troublesome area for evaluation since the initial cost calculations are not sufficiently comprehensive, and figures are hardly ever kept on the real cost or cost savings over an extended period.

The second-level effect regards the changes that occur in the social system due to the new patterns of attention, new possibilities for personal contacts, and new forms of interdependence which are brought to the work environment by new technologies. By commenting on how these effects come about, Sproull & Kiesler explain:

Change in attention means change in how people spend their time and in what they think is important. Change in social contact patterns means change in who people know and how they feel about them. Change in interdependence means change in what people do with and for each other and how these people coupled functions are organized in norms, rules, procedures, jobs, and departments. Social roles, which codify patterns of attention and social interaction, change. Consider the auto mechanic, hot rodder, and Sunday driver, roles created by the
automobile. Hacker, user consultant, and MIS specialist are roles created by the computer. Changes in attention, social contact, and interdependencies do not alter human nature or fundamental processes of society. People still fall in love, care about their boss's evaluations, and work for money. Organizations still are differentiated along lines of status and responsibility; they still respond to market forces. Yet changes in attention, social contact, and system interdependencies do affect people's choices and how they behave with others. (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991/92:4-5)

These two-level effects suggested by Sproull & Kiesler enriched my perception of e-mail in work-related environments by calling my attention to the operational and social repercussions that its introduction might engender. Their approach to e-mail in the workplace actually covered a range of considerations about installation expenses and transformations at the level of social and professional behaviors and perceptions, and at the level of the corporations' organizational structure.

In spite of the fact that it is clearly over-simplified, Sproull & Kiesler's two-level perspective led me to realize that the ability of e-mail to accelerate information flow provided efficiency gains over and above its obvious superiority to telephone communication and "snail mail". As an "information accelerator" (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991/92:23), e-mail encourage practitioners to work more efficiently in a more general sense. The flexibility that it brought to message delivery, the potential to connect multiple recipients simultaneously and to provide them with the same piece of information, as well as the possibility of accessing messages at each professional's convenience constituted the main attributes of e-mail which impacted on work organization and performance. Moreover, by avoiding the need to have everyone in the same room at the same time, but by providing them with the ability to share information rapidly and efficiently, the utilization of e-mail facilitated the establishment of work groups. In situations like that, regardless of the cost reduction involved, the computerized medium simplified scheduling meetings, announcing and discussing assignments, and reporting accomplishments. As a result, it increased the team members' intercommunication, general awareness and productivity.

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4 Bikson & Eveland (1990) emphasize that work groups focused on e-mail utilization reveal a higher level of communication if compared to the ones that do not use this medium. Based on their study, they assert that "the electronic super-structure is not a simple substitute for in-person contact, telephone calls, print correspondence, or any other conventional medium" (p.286).
Apart from mediating work group activities, e-mail might also provide peripheral employees -- those who were hierarchically (and sometimes geographically) distant from the decision-making center -- with an opportunity to enlarge connections within the organization and to have more access to information. For them, the electronic medium performed the role of a "window on the corporation" (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991/92:81), through which they could either passively visualize the company and monitor other people's interactions, or actively participate in what was going on. From this point of view, e-mail constituted "a voice for the voiceless" (ibid., p. 84), and a means of increasing professional knowledge and interaction among co-workers. As Zuboff (1988) points out:

Information technology not only produces action but also produces a voice that symbolically renders events, objects, and processes so that they become visible, knowable, and sharable in a new way. (p. 9)

Nevertheless, as Sproull & Kiesler (1991/92) explain, the inclusion of peripheral employees into the electronic network had some repercussions at the managerial level:

Managers face three kinds of problems in giving people a voice. One is straightforward logistics problems. By definition, peripheral people are far from the center. Physically collecting their opinions can be time-consuming and expensive. This is one reason that conventional participation mechanisms usually rely on representation rather than direct participation; collecting information from employee representatives is easier than listening to all employees. A second problem is motivational. Although peripheral employees may have a lot to say, they may be reticent, distrustful, or fear retribution. A third problem is also motivational - but on the receiving end rather than the sending end. Central management may not want to hear what peripheral employees have to say. Given the cultural value we put on being good listeners, this reluctance is not likely to be expressed publicly. Instead it is more likely to be expressed as confidence in the existing ways of hearing from employees and a need to avoid information overload. Management reluctance may actually stem from confusing a commitment to listen to employees with a commitment to act on what they say.

Electronic communication offers the possibility of increasing the amount of communication from lower to higher levels of the hierarchy and solving the logistic problems of collecting information from distant employees. Workers can send messages at their convenience, without having to wait for an appointment or to catch the manager in the hall. It also alleviate employee reluctance to talk. Workers feel less intimidated about talking to the boss electronically than they do about talking to him or her face-to-face, particularly if what the worker wants to say is in any way negative.
Because there are few reminders of status differences, the fear of evaluation or criticism declines. (p.87-88)

The arguments above illustrate the impact of e-mail on the internal communication process, by contrasting the perspective of managers and of workers. Zuboff (1988) also addresses the relationship among these two hierarchical levels, and emphasizes the implications for authority within the new work-related environment. She states that:

As the new technology integrates information across time and space, managers and workers each overcome their narrow functional perspectives and create new roles that are better suited to enhancing value-adding activities in a data-rich environment. As the quality of skills at each organizational level becomes similar, hierarchical distinctions begin to blur. Authority comes to depend more upon an appropriate fit between knowledge and responsibility than upon the ranking rules of the traditional organizational pyramid. (p.6)

Considering Sproull & Kiesler's and Zuboff's comments above, I realized that having an open channel to provide all employees with a similar opportunity to interact and express themselves was certainly beneficial. I concluded that the use of e-mail might not only shorten the distance between hierarchical levels and engender a new approach to authority; it might also encourage the development of specific social practices: on the one hand, the practice of talking to superiors and being heard by them; on the other hand, the practice of listening to subordinates and being aware of their opinions. Actually, by mentioning talking and listening, I am referring to writing and reading, since computerized interactions represented the textualization of work-related processes (Zuboff, 1988:180). This suggests that e-mail constitutes a new form of communication in which talking and listening are incorporated into written texts. In other words, the textualization of work-related processes gives rise to new meanings which are not focused on action skills and oral culture (Zuboff, 1988:180).

In commenting on textuality as a communication tool, Sproull & Kiesler (1991/92: 39-42) claim that e-mail messages display particular attributes that emerge respectively from the plain texts conveyed and from the nature of the medium through which they are transmitted. These messages, as a form of textual representation, lack the paralinguistic
features and immediate feedback that characterize face-to-face or telephone interactions. On the other hand, as an electronic form of communication, they tend to be seen as ephemeral. These features combine to create a relatively unstructured communication situation:

First, computer-based communication relies almost entirely on plain text for conveying messages. Second, the text is ephemeral, appearing and disappearing from screen without any necessary tangible artifacts. In combination, these two features make it easy for a sender to forget or ignore his or her audience. Without reminders of an audience, people become less constrained by conventional norms and rules for behavior.

(p.40)

In other words, because they lack non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions and/or gestures, e-mail messages tend to be primarily focused on content rather than on the interactants' individuality. This argument brings about three results: first, by relying on words exclusively, professionals feel less empathy, less guilt, less concern about comparison with others, and are less influenced by social conventions (Short and associates, 1976; Kiesler and associates, 1984). Second, by perceiving messages as ephemeral, they also feel less committed to what they say, and less worried about the social reception they are likely to get (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991/92). Third, by removing reminders of a possible critical audience, e-mail encourages people to be more open (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Considering these effects, I realized that the generation of e-mail messages would lead to a kind of detachment

5 (Chafe, 1982:45-49; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987:105-110) from the audience and from normal social conventions. As a result of this detachment, I thought it possible that new patterns for interpersonal communication would emerge, as well as new forms of experiencing and dealing with work-related situations.

These considerations led me to reflect upon the nature of the transactional distance

6 (Moore, 1980, 1983) between senders and receivers, and upon features of the

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5 Detachment is more frequently defined as a quality of written discourse which characterizes the writer's distance from his/her audience, from himself/herself, and/or from the concrete reality of what is being written.

6 According to Moore (1980), "transactional distance" constitutes a function of two variables, "dialogue" and "structure." Dialogue represents "the extent to which, in any educational program, learner and educator are able to respond to each other." Structure constitutes "a measure of an educational programme's responsiveness to..."
electronic texts used to convey professional information. For instance, in reflecting upon the detachment implicit in Sproull & Kiesler’s arguments, I started to wonder whether the process of composing and interpreting messages would be influenced by the fact of knowing recipients in person or interacting with specific co-workers on either a regular or an intermittent basis. Furthermore, I wondered to what extent different professional situations would generate different text types and different levels of involvement⁷ (Chafe, 1982:45-49; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987:105-110) between senders and their audience, or between senders and the contents of their messages. Questions of this sort suggested that the investigation of texts would constitute an interesting research topic since they represent the communication tool which documents the interactions undertaken by professionals at work. In addition to revealing the lexical choices senders make, texts reveal the social actions (Miller, 1994) and communicative purposes (Swales, 1990) that link practitioners together through the computerized medium. These reflections led me to start establishing initial connections between the technological and linguistic components of my inquiry.

2.2.2. The linguistic component

The technological component of my research showed that e-mail represented a textualization of work-related processes which emerged from the various professional situations that involved practitioners at work. This argument led me to perceive that electronic texts performed certain roles whose meaning could be recovered through the investigation of the contextual conditions that generated them. This apparent relationship between messages, their functions, and their context reminded me of the concept of text presented by Halliday & Hasan (1985/89).

From a socio-semiotic perspective, Halliday & Hasan define text as “language that

learner’s individual needs” (Moore, 1983:171). Although this concept has emerged from and referred to the field of distance education, I understand that its bases could be applied to CMC in the workplace. Considering the specifics of this particular environment, I interpret “dialogue” as the interactants’ skill to respond to each other in any work-related circumstance; and “structure” as their ability to select and convey the piece of information that is useful for a particular receiver, and appropriate for each situation.

⁷ Involvement is more frequently identified as a quality of spoken language. It defines the close relationship between the speaker and his/her audience, between the speaker and himself/herself, and/or between the speaker and the concrete reality of what is being talked about.
is functional, that is doing some job in some context of situation (p.10, 52). This concept emphasizes the semiotic nature of texts, including their relationship with the immediate environment in which they are functioning -- that is, with the context of situation (Malinowski, 1923/59). However, Halliday & Hasan point out that the meaning of a text is not confined to the boundaries of the immediate situation; it also emerges from the whole cultural background that permeates text generation and reception -- that is, from the context of culture (Malinowski, 1923/59). Halliday & Hasan's concept, therefore, treats text and context as semiotic phenomena, as "modes of meaning" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89: 12), suggesting an association between the plane of situation and that of culture. It also indicates that it is possible to go from one to the other in a revealing way.

By conceiving of text from the perspective presented above, but primarily attuned to the situational plane that surrounds its production and manipulation, Halliday (1978/92, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89) proposes a conceptual framework of situation which includes three environmental variables: field, tenor, and mode. As summarized by Eggins (1994:52), these three semiotic components of situation account for "what the language is being used to talk about" (field), "the role relationships between interactants" (tenor), and "the role language is playing in the interaction" (mode). According to Halliday, these situational components are reflected in texts through the operation of three linguistic metafunctions -- ideational, interpersonal, and textual -- which focus on meaning as content, participation and texture, respectively. Halliday (1978/92) defines these metafunctions as follows:

The ideational function represents the speaker's meaning potential as an observer. It is content function of language, language as 'about something'. This is the component through which the language encodes the cultural experience, and the speaker encodes his own individual experience as a member of the culture. It expresses the phenomena of the environment, the things - creatures, objects, actions, events, qualities, states and relations - of the world and of our own consciousness, including the phenomenon of language itself; and also the 'metaphenomena', the things that are already encoded as facts and as reports. All these are part of the ideational meaning of language.

The interpersonal component represents the speaker's meaning potential as an intruder. It is the participatory function of language, language as doing something. This is the component through which the speaker intrudes himself into the context of situation, both expressing his own
attitudes and judgments and seeking to influence the attitudes and
timehaviour of others. It expresses the role relationships associated with
the situation, including those that are defined by language itself,
relationships of questioner-respondent, informer-doubter and the like.
These constitute the interpersonal meaning of language.

The textual component represents the speaker's text-forming potential; it
is that which makes language relevant. This is the component which
provides the texture; that which makes the difference between language
that is suspended in vacuo and language that is operational in a context
of situation. It expresses the relation of the language to its environment,
including both the verbal environment - what has been said or written
before - and the nonverbal, situational environment. Hence the textual
component has an enabling function with respect to the other two; it is
only in combination with textual meanings that ideational and
interpersonal meanings are actualized. (p.112-113)

According to Halliday's approach to linguistic description, the environmental
variables of situation (field, tenor, mode) are encoded by three components of the
lexicogrammar (ideational, interpersonal, textual), thus ensuring that relevant aspects of
the situation are incorporated into texts. This, in turn, suggests that it is possible to
reconstruct from the text certain aspects of the situation, certain features of field, tenor and
mode. Furthermore, it is possible to perceive that variation in language use corresponds
to variation in the context of situation. This relationship is the basis for Halliday's concept
of register:

A register can be defined as the configuration of semantic resources that
the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type. It is the
meaning potential that is accessible in a given social context. Both the
situation and the register associated with it can be described to varying
degrees of specificity; but the existence of registers is a fact of everyday
experience - speakers have no difficulty in recognizing the semantic
options and combinations of options that are 'at risk' under particular
environmental conditions. Since these options are realized in the form of
grammar and vocabulary, the register is recognizable as a particular
selection of words and structures. But it is defined in terms of meanings;
it is not an aggregate of conventional forms of expression superposed on
some underlying content by 'social factors' of one kind or another. It is the
selection of meanings that constitutes the variety to which a text belongs.
(Halliday,1978/92:111)

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8 The term register was originally proposed by Reid (1956) to refer to a variety of language appropriate for a
particular situation. As noted by Halliday (1978/92:110), since then, this concept has been taken up and developed
by Jean Ure (Ure & Ellis,1974), and interpreted within Hill's (1958) 'institutional linguistic' framework by Halliday
& associates (1964).
In reflecting upon the definition above, I noted that, through its variables (field, tenor, mode) and their embedded meanings (ideational, interpersonal, textual), register basically establishes a semantic connection between the language used and the features of the situation that generated it. This connection is emphasized by Halliday’s assumption that variations at the linguistic level indicate variations at the situational level. However, as Eggins (1994) points out, register describes "the immediate context in which the text was produced" (p.26), without accounting for explicit associations with the broader context of culture. It is true that the context of culture -- or the "institutional and ideological background that gives value to the text and constrains its interpretation" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89:49) -- may help us to make predictions about language use and about the kinds of meaning that might be exchanged in a particular situation, but for Halliday there is no "separate linguistic model of the context of culture" (Halliday & Hasan,1985/ 89:47).

By contrast, Hasan (Halliday & Hasan,1985/89:52-65) attempts to go a little further in contextual terms, when she analyzes service encounters from the register point of view, and also from the perspective of a concept that she terms "contextual configuration". By asserting that shopping, for example, constitutes "a culturally recognizable type of situation" (p.55), which has been constructed over the years by the use of a particular kind of language, she investigates instances of buy-and-sell situations, searches for their characteristic discourse structure, and concludes that the recurrence of certain obligatory elements (sales initiation, sale request, sale compliance, etc.) defines the genre to which a text belongs. Furthermore, she asserts that the appearance of all of these elements in a specific order reveals whether the text is complete or not.

In reflecting upon Hasan's analysis, I realized that, by exploring the notion of contextual configuration as an instrument for detailed textual investigation, and by claiming that texts produced in a culturally recognizable situation displayed a "generic structure potential" (p.63), she suggested a possible framework for genre identification. In her (1985/89) discussion, she neither elaborates the concept of genre itself nor clearly locates

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9 Hasan (Halliday & Hasan,1985/89:55) defines contextual configuration as a specific set of values that realizes field, tenor, and mode.
it within an overall model of language. However, by establishing a relationship between recurrent structural features and genre, and therefore, between text and context, she provides insight into the way the notion of genre might relate to the situational and cultural context.

The notions of register and genre both help to indicate how texts, or instances of language in use, can be related to the situations in which they occur. However, whereas register is often used to account for the specific features of texts that are produced on particular occasions, genre is concerned with the sequential organization of what participants write or say in order to achieve their communicative objectives. Martin (1984: 25), for instance, characterizes oral and written genres as "staged, goal-oriented" social processes, reflecting the fact that genres have evolved as ways of getting things done in society, and that it usually takes more than one step for the participants in an interaction to achieve their goals. The concept of genre, originally a rhetorical term used to categorize various types of literary composition, is currently used to refer to a wide variety of staged, purposeful social processes, expressed through the medium of oral or written text, ranging from the activity of making a purchase in a fruit and vegetable store (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89), to interviews, boardroom discussions, and the writing of academic research articles (cf. Swales, 1990; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Lemke, 1995).

When I began to investigate genre, I quickly realized that this was a complex and multi-faceted topic. Among the sources I consulted, a good starting point was provided by Swales (1990), who introduced me to the concept of genre analysis. According to this author, genre refers to a class of communicative events in which members of a discourse community take part and express their communicative purposes in a characteristic way. As a framework for his investigation of the introductions to academic research articles, Ib

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10 Swales (1990) draw attention to the discourse community that manipulates genres and to the purposes that associate its members together. For him, however, belonging to a "sociorhetorical network that forms in order to work towards sets of common goals" (p.9), has primarily an instrumental nature which includes neither "assimilation of world-view" nor "a threshold level of personal involvement" (p.31). According to him, membership in discourse communities is established in terms of apprenticeship and performance. For this reason, an individual may belong to various discourse communities at the same time and masters the genres enacted by each one of them.
Swales elaborates a *move-step* framework of analysis (Swales, 1990:137-166), which accounts for the rhetorical movements displayed in texts of this kind. Swales's approach seems to be primarily focused on locating genre within a specific social environment, and on identifying the instrumental use of various textual features which come to be recognized as conventional ways of doing things in accordance with the nature of the communicative event and of the purposes shared by participants.

In commenting on Swales's approach, Bhatia (1993:16) points out that, although it represents a good fusion of linguistic and sociological factors, it neglects the psychological and tactical aspects of genre construction, which also play a significant role in the dynamic process. By attempting to expand Swales's notion, and to account for the individual strategies employed by the members of a discourse community to achieve their goals, Bhatia presents his concept of genre as "an instance of successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discoursal resources" (p.16). Based on this perception but contemplating Swales's move orientation, he describes the structure of promotional genres in professional settings (i.e., sales promotion letters and job application letters). Considering the framework of analysis suggested by Swales and Bhatia, it is relevant to mention that both authors, as applied linguists and ESP researchers, are primarily concerned with identifying conventional textual aspects of genre, as well as pedagogical form-function relationships.

Having being introduced to genre by the concepts presented above, I decided to extend my search for clarification to other theoretical sources. As a result, I found a number of references which enabled me to establish additional conceptual links. In order to make these links explicit, I will first present the concepts and then comment on them:

*Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and, consequently, also to particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances.* (Bakhtin, 1986:87)

A genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture. (Martin, 1984:25)

*Genre is a sociopsychological category which we use to recognize and construct typified actions within typified situations. It is a way of creating order in the ever-fluid symbolic world.* (Bazerman, 1988:319)
Genre is a category that describes the relation of the social purpose of text to language structure. (...) Genres are social processes. Texts are pattemed in reasonably predictable ways according to patterns of social interaction in a particular culture. Social patterning and textual patterning meet genres. Genres are textual interventions in society; and society itself would be noting without language in all its patterned predictability. (Cope & Kalantziz, 1993:2,7)

A key insight of genre theory is that language occurs in a social context and that it is structured according the purposes it serves in a particular context and according to the social relations entailed by that activity. (Callaghan and associates, 1993:181)

The definitions above display certain common threads -- *typical, purpose, and social* -- which I would describe as generic keywords. Although varying in emphasis, the meaning expressed by these keywords seems to be repeated in the excerpts above (as well as in the quotations from Swales and Bhatia), suggesting that they constitute part of the foundation on which genre definition is build up. Bakhtin and Bazerman, for instance, draw special attention to *typical/typified situations/circumstances, typical themes and typified actions*. Martin and Cope & Kalantziz, by respectively mentioning *staged* and *textual patterning* and *patterned predictability*, also express a view of genre as having a typical, schematic structure. Callaghan and associates address this feature in a subtler way, making it clear that typical features of genres would be revealed by the features of texts through which social purposes are conveyed. As for the realization of socially relevant goals, it seems to me that all the definitions presented above regard genre as a category that accounts for culturally recognized meaning in a typical or predictable way.

The connection between genres and their social functions is articulated by Miller (1994). From her perspective, genres are seen as recognizable rhetorical responses to the recurrent social exigencies of particular situations. Perceived as responses, genres correspond to contextualized actions which involve form, motive, and the shared social interpretations which result in the working out of the situation. Miller’s perception of genres as social actions in which participants are engaged goes beyond the consideration of textual regularities and emphasizes the rhetorical and socio-cultural dimensions of genres. This foundation, as well as her belief that genres "change, evolve and decay" (p.36)
distinguish them as dynamic entities which seek to "explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (p.27).

Orlikowski & Yates (1994) reinforce Miller's perception of genres as evolving strategies. They assert that when changes to established genres occur and become widely adopted within the community, "genre variants or even new genres may emerge, either alongside existing genres or to replace those that have lost currency" (p.545). According to them, although constituting highly influential organizing structures, genres do not impose themselves on the ways in which community members engage in everyday communicative actions. Since they are enacted through a process of structuring, members of the community are constantly negotiating, interpreting, and improvising in ways that allow for changes to take place (p.571). This indicates that genres are dynamic because the actions that connect participants and the relationships among them are equally dynamic.

The dynamic nature of genres is a characteristic also pointed out by Smart (1993). He interprets genre as "a broad rhetorical strategy enacted, collectively, by members of a community in order to create knowledge essential to their aims" (p.124). From his perspective, therefore, nonliterary genres, as knowledge-building strategies, are "local inventions" of particular discourse communities (p.127). This conclusion is based on a study undertaken in a professional setting in which he examined the chain of rhetorical events through which specialized written knowledge (Bazerman, 1988) was developed by research staff and executives in discussing corporate issues and making decisions. He found that certain regularities in the research staff's composing processes and in the executives' reading practices occurred across all genres, while other regularities were genre-specific, and were developed to meet the needs of the occasion (i.e., they accounted for the "invention" of these genres). One of the main contributions of Smart's study is that he not only observed the development of specialized written genres, but also the impact of these genres on the reading/interpretation process of the professionals involved. In other words, he reinforced the assumption made by Bruner & Weisser (1991) that "genres exist not only as modes of writing or speaking but as modes of reading and listening" (p.131).

The consideration of genres as dynamic rather than static entities is also an idea advocated by Schryer (1993,1994). From a jointly rhetorical, dialectical, and dialogical
perspective, she redefines genre as a stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough site of social and ideological action, as a "frequently travelled path or way of getting symbolic action done either by an individual social actor or group of actors" (1993:207). In commenting on her definition, as well as on the interrelationship between social actions, genres, and participants, she explains:

This definition attempts to build in a sense of a particular genre as a simultaneously diachronic and synchronic structure. All genres have a complex set of relations with past texts and with other texts: genres come from somewhere and are transforming into something else. They are heavily conventionalized and yet contain inherent contradictions so that their users have internal options and thus some freedom of expression, depending on the genre. Genres, because they exist before their users, shape their operators; yet their users and their discourse communities constantly remake and reshape them. Genres are inherently ideological; they embody the unexamined or tacit way of performing some social action. Hence they can represent the ways dominant elite do things. (1993:208-109; 1994:108)

Dynamism -- along with situatedness, form and content, duality of structure, and community ownership -- constitute the five essential principles of the generic framework presented by Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995:1-25). They perceive genres as inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to the conditions of use (p.3). From their perspective, genres are contextualized and represent a form of situated cognition (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) embedded in disciplinary activities. Under such a characterization, genres "change over time in response to their users' sociocognitive needs" (dynamism, p.4); "genres are derived from and embedded in our participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life" (situatedness, p.7); "genres embrace both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time" (form and content, p.13); "genres signal a discourse community's norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology" (community ownership, p.21); and, finally, genres indicate that "we constitute social structures (in professional, institutional, and organizational contexts) and simultaneously reproduce these structures" (duality of structure, p.17).

In reflecting upon the viewpoints presented by Miller, Orlikowski & Yates, Smart and Berkenkotter & Huckin, I realized that dynamism constitutes another generic keyword
-- perhaps the one that most explicitly reflects the connection between genres and the social actions they represent. The significance of this keyword, together with the others previously mentioned (typical, purpose, social), enriched my view of genres and led me to conceive of them as linguistically oriented social actions which emerge from the needs of situations, convey culturally recognizable communicative purposes, and tend to display regularities at the formal and structural levels. Moreover, as contextualized responses to situations, genres are part of a continuously evolving system whose changes are determined by the communicative and/or sociocognitive needs of the community that customarily enacts and manipulates them.

This conceptualization showed me that investigating the genres conveyed within a corporation through the electronic medium not only represented being in touch with the texts through which work-related activities were performed and communicative purposes were exchanged among professionals. It also involved being in contact with the practices performed within that corporation, with its organizing processes, and ultimately, with its essential identity (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994:546). However, as an outsider in the business territory, I felt that being exclusively attuned to genres would provide me with a limited view of the computerized communication phenomenon, i.e., a view of the product of interpersonal interactions, seen from the analyst's point of view. As Fairclough (1992) states, genres also imply "particular processes of producing, distributing and consuming texts" (p.126). This statement made it clear to me that I should transcend the descriptive level and attempt to establish deeper connections between the genres themselves and their determinants and effects (Clark and associates, 1991:42-43). This realization led me to conclude that in order to understand CMC practices both as process and product, I should consider the way practitioners perceived, dealt with, and interpreted the electronic messages and the experiences they were exposed to at work. This made me realize that in order to approach the target phenomenon in a more comprehensive way, my inquiry should also include an interpretive component.

2.2.3. The interpretive component

As mentioned in the previous section, investigating CMC practices from a
A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective required more than the generic analysis of the electronic correspondence conveyed. In order to describe this phenomenon and its implications, it was necessary to go beyond genre identification and to consider the way genre was perceived by those who were actually involved in e-mail activities at work. I hoped that, by including an interpretive component in my research, I would be able to grasp not only the contextual conditions that surround message production and reception, but also the meaning users made of interacting through computers for professional purposes. This inquiry component, therefore, by accounting for the recollection of lived experiences and for professionals' reflections upon their CMC practices, would establish a stronger connection between the methodological and theoretical features of my investigation, rendering them more homogenous. Moreover, it would help me to understand the target phenomenon the way it was, and the way it was experienced and interpreted by Brazilian professionals.

In considering this interpretive component, my attention was initially directed to examining the meaning of experience and, particularly, the notion of lived experience. This questioning was actually motivated by the arguments presented by van Manen (1990:36-37), who emphasizes its relevance to studies founded on hermeneutic phenomenology. According to him, knowing what lived experience is becomes an important question since phenomenology aims at transforming lived experience into a textual expression of its essence which acquires hermeneutic significance as we, through recollection, meditation, conversations, or other kinds of interpretive acts, assign significance to the phenomena of lived life. For van Manen, lived experience constitutes the starting point and the end point of an investigation following such a methodological path. Dilthey also emphasizes that life-expression has its source in lived experience, whose meaning is understood and expressed again in the form of lived experience (cf. Mueller-Vollmer,1994:25-26). These arguments, therefore, supported my search for conceptual clarification and led me to reflect upon two particular considerations:

(1) Experience is a temporal flow in which every state changes before it is clearly objectified because the subsequent moment always builds on the previous one and each is past before it is grasped. It then appears as a memory which is free to expand. (Dilthey,1994:150)
(2) A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have a reflective awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective. (Dilthey, 1985:223)

The accounts above made me conceive of the flow of experience as a time-related sequence -- a sort of historical chain (cf. Carr, 1986) -- in which previous experiences provide a framework for subsequent experiences. This relationship between past and more recent experiences provides a chain of connection and continuity which, as Dilthey suggests, is objectively captured through reflection. Similarly association between continuity and experience is addressed by Dewey (1938a). From his perspective, however, this connection is more comprehensive than just perceiving that experiences are sequenced and interrelated. He refers to continuity as also being a criterion that, articulated with the principle of interaction, serves to discriminate between educative and mis-educative experiences. For him, interaction assigns "equal rights to both factors in experience -- objective and internal conditions" (Dewey, 1938a:42) which, taken together, form what he terms situation. By considering that continuity, interaction and situation constitute inseparable principles for the interpretation of experiences in their "educational function and force," Dewey formulates the theory of experiential continuum (1938a:25-50).

Dewey's theory of experiential continuum is focused on the interconnected flow of various experiences, and presupposes a situated process of continuity and interaction. From his viewpoint, knowing is not simply an internal phenomenon for it displays a close relationship with a set of lived experiences while involving an active manipulation of the environment. Nevertheless, if Dewey understands that learning comes about through a continuous process of interaction between previous and subsequent experiences, he does not claim that all experiences are "genuinely or equally educative" (Dewey, 1938a:25). As he points out, such an interpretation primarily depends on the quality that emerges from each interaction as an immediate reaction of agreement-disagreement or acceptance-rejection, as well as on the ways these reactions impact on future experiences. According to Dewey, as experiences "neither occur nor remain in a vacuum" (p.40), their meaning and
their ensuing implications should be interpreted as the result of a continuous process of communication and interaction between internal and external factors. Each experience becomes, then, a moving force whose value is understood retrospectively (since new experiences are grounded on the previous ones), as well as prospectively (since past experiences impact on the subsequent ones). From this perspective, therefore, reflecting upon lived experiences -- retrospectively and prospectively -- requires a process of investigation that includes reflective thought and that involves the inquirer in transaction with the situation. These are the premises suggested by Dewey (1938b) in his theory of inquiry, which emphasizes the "transactional, open-ended, and inherently social" (cf. Schön, 1992:122). These are also the assumptions on which Schön (1983, 1987, 1991, 1992) formulates his epistemology of practice, which represents his interpretation of Dewey's theory of inquiry, substituting the notion of reflective practice for Dewey's reflective thought (Schön, 1992:123).

The arguments presented by Schön (1983:60-63) emphasize that practice has an ambiguous connotation: it not only refers to "performance in a range of professional situations;" it also means "preparation for performance," which is characterized by repetitive or experimental activities that lead to increasing proficiency. Such an ambiguity implies that, in professional terms, the more stable the practice is, the less subject the practitioner will be to surprise. In other words, it means that the more repetitive and routinized the activities become -- and, therefore, the more spontaneously the practitioner behaves -- the more she/he will miss "important opportunities" (p.61) to think about or assess his/her own actions. In considering this explanation, I perceived that reflecting upon practice assumed a special significance in terms of potentially leading the professional to realize the mechanisms that tacitly guided him/her in the performance of certain tasks.

Schön's notion of reflection upon practice has evolved from the concept of tacit knowledge presented by Polanyi (1966/67). By sharing with him the assumption that we invariably know more than we are able to tell (Polanyi, 1966/67:5; Schön, 1983:49), Schön claims that competent practitioners tacitly master the activities they perform. However, because they are not aware of having acquired this sort of knowledge, they can neither verbalize it promptly nor describe it in detail. For this reason, Schön (1983, 1987, 1991, 1992)
1992) advocates an epistemology of practice constructed upon reflection and revealed through *reflective turns* which he defines as follows:

> When we attend to what we know already, appreciating the artistry and wisdom implicit in competent practice, believing that by reflection on that practice we can make some of our tacit knowledge explicit, we take a "reflective turn" that leads us to (...) a kind of reflective practice, a communicative and self-reflective practice of reciprocal inquiry (Dewey, 1992:123).

In considering Schön's definition above, a reflective turn, by leading practitioners to realize tacit features of their work-related routines, represents a moment of meaning through which they encounter their practice, become aware of its peculiarities and their behaviors, and perhaps become more conscious of its potential and/or limitations.

Schön (1992) describes the notions embedded in his epistemology of practice through an examination of the following increasingly complex components: *knowing-in-action*, *reflection-in-action*, and *reflection on knowing-in action and reflection-in-action*. He identifies knowing-in-action as the tacit "*knowing built into and revealed by our performance of everyday routines of action*" (p.124). Although sometimes associated with intuition, instinct, or motor skills, he perceives that this component of practice is a form of intelligence that -- grounded on prestructures which guide our involvement in familiar situations (e.g., our seeing, thinking, and doing) -- corresponds to a tacit adaptation to changing conditions.

The second component, reflection-in-action, refers to our ability of think while performing an action, either through a verbal or nonverbal mode. As defined by Schön (1992), it constitutes "*an ephemeral episode of inquiry that arises momentarily in the midst of a flow of action, and then disappears, giving way to some new event, leaving in its wake, perhaps, a more stable view of the situation*" (p.125). Reflection-in-action can also occur when, in transaction with the materials of a situation, we face a surprise that temporarily evokes uncertainty, making us interrupt the action and talk with the situation. These episodes represent a particular manifestation of *reflection-in-action* which Schön terms "*conversation with the situation*" (p.125).
The third component of Schön's epistemology of practice, reflection on knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action, refers to a "process of being in touch with the understandings we form spontaneously in the midst of action" (Schön, 1992:126). It corresponds, therefore, to the act of recalling previous thoughts either manifested through knowing-in-action or reflection-in-action. As a possible version of this component, Schön distinguishes "reflective conversation with the situation" (ibid), which evokes a conscious reflection on the situation and, simultaneously, on one's way of thinking and acting on it.

In reflecting upon Dewey's experiential continuum and upon Schön's reflective categories, I realized that the act of recalling and interacting with the flow of experiences lived at work, and of distinguishing the tacit features involved in routinized work-related activities could lead practitioners to perceive the nature and the frames that characterized their professional practice. The resulting awareness could potentially help them to identify their most frequent actions and spontaneous responses; to analyze their individual or group performance; to assess and, if necessary, to redesign general work-related procedures; and to create and/or develop strategies to cope with either predictable or unexpected situations. In other words, by conceiving of their practice from a reflective perspective, practitioners could interact with their experiences, get involved in making new (hermeneutic) meaning, and possibly transform these experiences into educational ones (Dewey, 1938a, 1960; Kolb, 1984). Moreover, by associating experience and understanding, they would be able to act on possibilities, participate in their routines in an innovative way, and develop themselves in professional terms. From this perspective, therefore, a reflective attitude towards routinized practices could lead professionals to acquire and/or enhance their "experience-knowledge" (Greene, 1991:37).

Nevertheless, I noticed that Schön’s epistemology of practice emphasized the experiences lived within the boundaries of one specific work-related environment, drawing attention to the reflective behavior possibly performed by members of that particular

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11 The meaning I attribute to participation regards the one suggested by Lave & Wenger (1991). According to them, "participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction - indeed, are mutually constitutive" (p.51-52).
community of practice\(^{12}\) (Lave & Wenger, 1991), at that particular point in time. It seemed to me that Schön disregarded the fact that individuals might belong to various communities (either simultaneously or over time) and, therefore, that the experiences lived inside as well as outside the workplace were equally influential in determining who those individuals were, and the way they dealt with their professional activities. Considering this constraint, I wondered whether the ideas embedded in the metaphor of the professional knowledge landscape, presented by Clandinin & Connelly (1995), could bridge the gap I perceived in Schön’s notion of reflection upon practice, enriching its principles and enlarging its scope.

The metaphor of the professional knowledge landscape, although having arisen out of the realm of teaching, and having been originally designed for teachers as practitioners, seemed to be open to reinterpretations applied to other professional environments. As described by its authors:

> It [the landscape metaphor] allows us to talk about space, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships. Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and a moral landscape. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995a:4-5)

It seemed to me that the landscape metaphor provided an excellent way of dealing with the temporal and spatial aspects of professional life. It accounted for the work-related environment where practitioners performed their professional activities, as well as for the surrounding areas in which they related to other people and took part in other events. In other words, Clandinin & Connelly’s metaphor conceived of professionals in a more

\(^{12}\) According to Lave & Wenger (1991), a community of practice corresponds to "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p.98). As they remark, this concept involves a largely intuitive notion which requires a more rigorous treatment (p.42). Although lacking detailed explanation, I interpret their notion as referring to the community that shares common purposes and activities, and whose membership is determined by means of specific modes of participation in typical practices, as happens in business settings, for instance.
comprehensive way, referring to them as individuals who were exposed to various sorts of experiences inside and outside their workplaces. The metaphor transcended, therefore, the concept of practice ("broadly conceived to include intellectual acts and self-exploration," Connelly & Clandinin, 1995a:7) and provided a way in which I could contextualize the practitioners' personal practical knowledge.13

The landscape metaphor seemed to be particularly relevant to the purpose of investigating the meaning professionals made of their activities undertaken through the electronic medium. It made me realize that, by motivating professionals to recollect their lived experiences and to envision them as part of their landscape, we would go beyond the generic characterization of the messages exchanged, and provide them with the means to recognize and reflect upon aspects of their tacit practice. Furthermore, by considering Connelly & Clandinin's landscape metaphor in association with Dewey's experiential continuum and Schon's epistemology of practice as the rationale for the interpretive inquiry component, my investigation would not only reveal the essence of CMC activities as a phenomenon but, particularly, the way professionals lived and understood them. In this regard, using samples of e-mail messages as input for interpretive conversations would place professionals as inquirers into their own practice, and as interpreters of their own experience. As a result of recovering and reflecting upon their work-related routines and procedures, both the practitioners and I would be in touch with a network of lived experiences and able to understand the position occupied by CMC practices within the dimensions of the professional landscape.

2.3. Describing the approach to the territory: the research design

The methodological reflections and the three inquiry components presented above constituted the rationale that guided my expedition to the business territory. They represent, therefore, the metaphorical luggage I packed up and took with me on my journey, an outline of which I present in the remaining sections of this chapter.

13 According to Clandinin (1985), personal practical knowledge is "knowledge which is imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of, a person's experiential history, both professional and personal" (p.362).
2.3.1. The participants and the research context

This research involved five Brazilian professionals from three corporations who, due to the nature of their jobs, were expected to communicate in English with their international counterparts via e-mail. Since a detailed profile of each participant, as well as a complete description of their corporations are provided in Chapters 3 and 4, I will only briefly introduce them here: José Luiz and Luciano were partners in their own business which represented a Finnish corporation and dealt with industrial automation systems concerned with cellulose and paper processes. Paulo César and Juciane held managerial positions in the same department of a Brazilian organization that dealt with outsourcing services and electronic commerce products. Among its other activities, their department was also responsible for distributing in Brazil the computerized communication system produced by an American company. Finally, Basílio was a manager within the Auditing Department of a multinational organization that dealt with chemical products.

2.3.2. Nature and source of the data

Three types of text constituted the fundamental source of data in this investigation. The first type emerged from the transcriptions of the initial interviews (see Section 2.3.3), which generated the material that enabled me to describe the corporations focused on in this study, particularly their fields of activities, their policies and procedures, and their internal culture. This textual source of data also allowed me to identify the participants as professionals, foreign language learners, and computer users. The information gathered from these initial interviews, associated with the data that emerged from the other five meetings we had, enabled me to design the practitioners' individual and composite profiles (Moustakas, 1990).14

The second type of text consisted of samples of e-mail messages, defined as an asynchronous form of internal written communication conveyed in English and exchanged

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14 Moustakas (1990) perceives the design of an individual portrait as consisting of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. These phases of a heuristic investigation leads the researcher to comprehend the themes and qualities that characterize the experiences lived by an individual. By associating qualities, core themes, and essences that permeate the experiences lived by a group of individuals, it is possible to construct their composite portrait which reveals the similarities displayed at their experiential level.
between the offices of the same corporation or between the head office and its representatives worldwide. By demonstrating the way professionals interacted with one another, these messages provided a textualization of work-related processes (Zuboff, 1988:180). My investigation into these electronic texts, associated with the contextualization provided by the participants throughout our conversations, enabled me to describe the structural organization of the messages, and also to identify a number of genres enacted and manipulated within the three corporations.

The third source of textual data emerged from the transcriptions of the reflective meetings and of the final meeting (see Section 2.3.3), and illustrated the reflective process undertaken by the participants. By using samples of e-mail messages as input for reflection, our conversations not only revealed the context that surrounded message generation and reception (i.e., the story of each message). They also included the participants' recollection of some experiences lived either in or out of their respective workplaces (i.e., the participants' accounts of their life stories). Thus, the interpretive dialogue participants and I shared provided me with relevant information about the genres conveyed through the electronic medium. It also revealed, through the professionals' reflective turns (Schön, 1991, 1992), their interpretations of various aspects of their own routines at work. This source of data allowed me to perceive what it was like to interact through computers for professional purposes, as well as helping me to understand how practitioners experienced and interpreted this phenomenon.

An additional source of textual data was provided by the field notes I composed during the research process. They included reminder notes about the topics discussed, as well as the impressions and personal reflections that guided me throughout the research process and helped me to interpret the data collected.

2.3.3. Data collection procedures

The data collection phase involved six meetings with each participant. Considering that their purpose, rather than assessing foreign language proficiency, was to discuss samples of electronic correspondence and to lead professionals to recall and reflect upon their experiences, these conversations were conducted in Portuguese. Although initially
designed to be developed in consecutive weeks and to include a sequence of two-hour interviews, this schedule had to be revised in order to accommodate the other commitments of the five professionals involved. Nevertheless, in spite of having irregular intervals between the meetings, and in spite of the need to adjust the length of the interviews to the participants' convenience or availability, the progression of our discussions was not affected in any essential way.

The first meeting with each participant -- the *initial interview* -- occurred in the first week of the research period and essentially aimed at identifying the professionals and their companies. Rather than being organized in a series of *structural questions* (Spradley, 1979:60) based on a standardized questionnaire restricted to a *stimulus-response* pattern (Brenner, 1986:131-132), this introductory meeting was developed through the presentation of six themes which, to some extent, evoked the traditional interviewer-respondent mode of interaction. Considering that the purpose of this interview was to get general information about the participants and their workplaces, the themes I proposed were focused on: (1) the company and its field of activities; (2) the professional and his/her occupation and job description; (3) the professional as a foreign language learner and speaker; (4) the professional and his/her involvement with computers in general, and with electronic communication systems in particular; (5) the communication process enacted by the corporation, its features and the tools available; and (6) the computerized communication process enacted by the company and its characterization.

From this initial contact and for a period of four weeks, the participants and I were involved in a series of *reflective meetings*. This phase of data collection consisted of collaborative *hermeneutic interviews*\(^\text{15}\) (van Manen, 1990:98), seen as *speech events* (Mishler, 1986:52-65), predominantly expressed in a narrative format (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990, 1994). As a result of this interview strategy, the participants and I found ourselves engaged in a joint process of negotiation and meaning-making.

Each reflective meeting was based on samples of the electronic correspondence

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\(^{15}\) As pointed out by van Manen (1990:98), in an hermeneutic interview, the researcher attempts to keep the meaning of the phenomenon open, as well as himself/herself and the interviewee(s) focused on the substance of the inquiry. Researcher and interviewee(s) become, therefore, co-investigators of the target phenomenon.
provided by the professionals and selected according to their own criteria. These e-mail messages were used as input for conversation and reflection, with the aim of encouraging the participants to recall the specific circumstances under which they were produced and/or received. Once the context was established, the participants were invited to discuss the types of texts conveyed, their content, and their structure. The purpose of using these samples to prompt conversation was to engage professionals in reflections directed to the interpretation of instrumental, linguistic, and professional aspects of their practice. The first aspect -- instrumental reflection -- concerned the role of computers as mediators of business communication, including their use, advantages, and limitations. The second aspect -- critical linguistic reflection -- was based on discussions about communicating through the medium of a foreign language. The third aspect -- professional critical reflection -- was focused on the participants' interpretation of their experiential continuum (Dewey, 1938a), and on the reflections upon aspects of their tacit routines at work (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1992). Their engagement in considerations of this sort provided the professionals, and myself, with an opportunity to envision their practices within the scope of their professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

After five weeks, we had a final meeting which brought the reflective process to a close. At this meeting, I provided each participant with a written summary of the various themes raised throughout the previous interviews, and we recalled and examined the meanings we had made and the interpretations we had shared together. To conclude the data collection phase, each participant was asked to reflect on the personal implications of jointly discussing and interpreting e-mail messages and CMC routinized activities.

With the agreement of the participants, all of these interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. The professionals also provided me with a hard copy of the e-mail messages discussed in the reflective meetings which, with their permission, were transcribed for further analysis and for inclusion in the dissertation text where appropriate.

2.4. Searching for meaning: the approach to data interpretation

As pointed out by van Manen (1990), a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research attempts to be descriptive and interpretive at the same time, observing "how
things appear," and letting these things "speak for themselves" (p.180) in order to be interpreted. This was the methodological assumption that led me to collect data without having a pre-established framework of analysis. My primary intention was to let the data speak and to be attentive to what they said, rather than submitting my interpretation to any previous checklist of categories. In my opinion, this procedure was consistent with the exploratory nature of my investigation, and also with the methodological orientation adopted. I hoped that, by not having a previous framework of analysis, I would be able to capture the target phenomenon in its complexity the way it was actually manifested and, particularly, the way it was experienced and construed by the professionals I was interviewing. My approach to interpretation emerged essentially from my interaction with the electronic messages provided by the participants, from their accounts of lived experiences, and from the reflections upon practice they shared with me. However, I was aware that my perceptions were to some extent influenced, but not exclusively determined, by my theoretical background.

2.4.1. Interpreting the e-mail messages

My exploration of the electronic correspondence that took place within the corporations focused on in this study was undertaken through what I would term a routine of analysis. By seeking for patterns rather than imposing them on the data (Hart, 1986: 280), and by considering that purpose and/or form constitutes the basis on which genre identification is usually built (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994:544), I approached the e-mail messages provided by the participants by reflecting on similarities of purpose and on regularities of form. My first step was to examine each sample from the point of view of its structural pattern (Paré & Smart, 1994:147), its rhetorical moves (Swales, 1990:137-166; Bhatia, 1993:45-75), and its contextual configuration (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89:55-65). However, I realized that an investigation of these systematic aspects only revealed the structural organization of the electronic correspondence. I therefore started to look at the samples from the perspective of the social actions (Miller, 1994) in which the participants were involved and of the communicative purposes (Swales, 1990) they shared when they interacted through the electronic medium. This second step of the analysis led me to
consider genres from a rhetorical and sociocultural standpoint which revealed their significance within the communication process developed by each corporation.

The above procedures enabled me to group the messages in accordance with an emerging correlation between text and context, and not simply in terms of their formal structure. In order to accomplish this, the professionals' voices and their personal insights were taken into account, for as Swales (1992) asserts, "we need more socio-cognitive input than the text itself provides" (p.8). Their experience and perceptions constituted, therefore, a major source of clarification which, associated with the analytic procedure adopted, enabled me to recognize the genres, identify their specific features, and explore how each corporate community achieved its rhetorical objectives through the utilization of the genres its members enacted and manipulated on a regular basis.

2.4.2. Interpreting the interviews

The task of interpreting the participants' accounts of lived experience and their reflections upon their own practice was undertaken through the thematization\(^\text{16}\) of the descriptions and narratives they provided me with throughout our conversations. Such an analytical procedure is in fact recommended by van Manen (1990), who asserts that "reflecting on lived experiences becomes reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of that experience" (p.78). This argument led me to perceive that, by observing the professionals' experiences from the perspective of the themes that emerged from the texts produced in the interviews, I would be able to grasp the meaning of the target phenomenon in its "multi-dimensional and multi-layered essence (van Manen, 1990:78).

The thematic investigation of the interviews was undertaken with the help of a

\(^{16}\) My understanding of thematization is not related to the notion of coding. As stated by Mishler (1986), coding implies "to determine meaning of an isolated response to an isolated question, that is, to code a response that has been stripped of its natural social context" (p.3). Thematization, on the contrary, is focused on contextualized meaning, recognizable according to the relationship each theme establishes with the question or subject addressed. Furthermore, I presume that codes tend to be defined by researchers and constitute categories created and, to some extent, imposed to data for the purpose of analysis. In opposition to them, themes emerge from experience and constitute "a form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" (van Manen, 1990:87).
"thought-out" computer program for qualitative data analysis -- NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing). By using this instrument, I was able to identify the emerging themes (see Appendix 2), group their representative segments (see Appendix 3), make notes and write memos, search for specific interviews or segments using the index system, search for actual words or phrases, and construct a tree diagram showing the relationship between themes and sub-themes (see Appendix 1). In other words, this computer program not only allowed me to thematize the interviews, but also helped me to organize and interact with the emerging themes according to the meaning relationships involved. Apart from having access to the descriptions and to the excerpts that illustrated each theme, such a meaning relationship was more easily visualized through the graphic representation provided by the tree diagram which gradually developed throughout the thematization process, and which was always available on the screen for consultation.

By dealing with NUD*IST and by conceiving of the interviews from a thematic perspective, I realized that the topics addressed came under three main headings -- workplace, professionals, and messages -- which I identified as macro-themes, i.e., as general indicators of the types of conversation that I had with the participants. Moreover, I noted that each macro-theme had a number of divisions and subdivisions that constituted a network through which various thematic relationships were interwoven in such a way that they could be seen as characteristic of the data as a whole. To illustrate the result of this thematization process, I present below the summary of the macro-themes, themes, and their subdivisions:

Q.S.R. NUD.IST Power version, revision 3.0.4d GUI.
Licensee: MAXIMINA M. FREIRE.

(1) /Workplace
(1 1) /Workplace/Features

17 The identification of NUD*IST as a "thought-out" computer program emphasizes its ability not only to do code-and-retrieve operations effectively, but also to provide structure and functions to assist the researcher in building and testing theory. In other words, the program helps the researcher to prepare the data fully and to work on them in many ways (cf. Weitzman & Miles, 1990:204,238).
The process of thematic investigation outlined above enabled me to undertake a more detailed analysis of the interviews and their content than would otherwise have been the case, as well as helping me to establish more connections between the participants' reports and reflections. Furthermore, the fact of using a computer program and of being able to retrieve, interrelate, and overlap segments of the professionals' accounts also helped me to perceive, as suggested by Mishler (1986:138), how meanings emerged, developed, were shaped by, and in turn shaped the discourse. By contrasting these moments of meaning (Moustakas, 1990:55), I could perceive interrelationships and establish a validating circle of inquiry (van Manen, 1990:27), through which lived experience validated and was validated by lived experience. In pursuing this interpretive approach and in focusing my attention first on the participants, and then on their workplaces and on their electronic correspondence, I was able to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

2.5. Shaping the travel report: the approach to data presentation

The process of interpretation described in the previous section not only illustrates the steps I took during the data analysis, it also represents my approach to the business territory and the metaphorical way I construed my expedition to that unknown region. It represents my attempt first to identify who the inhabitants of the territory were, and then to investigate its geography and the specifics of the electronic communication process through which they established their international business relationships. To give the reader a precise idea of the routes I explored and of the reflective process that led me to
specific interpretations, I have imposed a similar sequence on my presentation of data. The chapters that follow constitute, therefore, a report of my exploration and of the meanings I made from my contact with the participants, based on our joint visit to their workplaces and on our shared reflections upon their electronic messages written in English.

The presentation of data involves three types of typographic convention. The first type results from my intention to make my participants' voices explicit, both by quoting their actual opinions, and by indicating the interview where that particular comment was made. In this regard, II indicates the initial interview, RM indicates the reflective meetings, and FM indicates the final meeting. Secondly, in providing excerpts from the transcripts, I have presented the electronic messages exactly in the original form, reproducing the occasional grammar mistakes or typographical errors, as well as the capitalization and punctuation originally used. Thirdly, issues of confidentiality have been observed by removing any information that could lead to specific identification, and substituting labels such as [name], [customer], [company], [department], [branch], [country], [state], [city], [application], [number], and [letter]. Following the same purpose, amounts of money and telephone numbers were replaced by $00.00 and 000-0000, respectively.
CHAPTER 3

TRAVEL GUIDES:
THEIR EXPERIENCES AND MY INITIAL PERCEPTIONS

*Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.*
Blumer, 1969

Solitary explorations through unknown lands may be an ambiguous experience for travellers who, focusing on the unpredictable and on the unexpected, are not alert or sensitive enough to recognize the ordinary and to interpret the tacit. Voyages of exploration, therefore, require travel guides. These should preferably be native guides: inhabitants of the target territory who are familiar with the environment and can either accompany explorers through safe landscapes or lead them through hidden short-cuts.

My expedition to the business territory was not a solitary adventure. I could count on five native travel guides -- José Luiz, Luciano, Paulo César, Juciane and Basílio -- who skillfully walked me through several paths. By telling me some of their stories, providing me with relevant work-related cultural references, and positioning themselves within their *professional landscapes* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), they have enabled me to look across the horizon and better visualize the land I was curious about exploring.

This chapter is, therefore, about these travel guides and their experiences as professionals, as foreign language learners and speakers, and as computer users. My aim here is to present them as inhabitants of the business territory and to unveil my initial interpretation of their characters, the job activities they performed, and some peculiarities of their workplaces and their computerized practices. To reach this goal, I firstly explore the notion of *individual portrait* (Moustakas, 1990) and, by intentionally mingling my voice with theirs, I introduce the guides, comment on how they individually picture themselves and some of their work-related experiences, and offer my preliminary perceptions of each one of them. To conclude this chapter, I draw the guides' *composite depiction* (Moustakas, 1990) and, by immersing myself in the information they shared with me, I examine and reflect upon the core theme that permeates the experiences they live at work.
3.1. Meeting José Luiz

I was introduced to José Luiz by a Brazilian friend who worked with him in Toronto some time ago, during the period he spent at the Canadian branch of the company he represents in Brazil. In the initial contacts, our dialogue was restricted to exchanging faxes regarding the goals of my investigation, as well as the schedule and procedures for data collection. Once we had started to engage in the research, our conversations were enlivened by José Luiz's constant sense of humor, regardless of the day and time he settled for our meetings. For six weeks, always on Monday mornings, and before being absorbed by other activities, he used to share his electronic correspondence with me, without doing any sort of previous selection. The reading of such messages and the contents we were both involved in discussing generated intriguing reflections upon CMC in his work-related context, upon the utilization of English for functional purposes, and upon his perception of the Brazilian business environment and of the policies related to the development of computerized communication networks within the country. Such reflections were used to develop José Luiz's individual portrait that I present in the following sections.

3.1.1. Professional role

José Luiz introduced himself as the Commercial Director and one of the two owners of a Brazilian enterprise that, by representing a Finnish corporation, dealt with industrial automation systems directed to cellulose and paper processes. This initial description, however, did not cover his overall work-related functions for, as he explained, the nature of his occupation actually led him to perform distinct professional roles and to assume varied responsibilities within the organization. Firstly, as one of the owners of his own business, he shared with his partner, Luciano, the supervision of financial and administrative issues. Secondly, as commercial director, he planned the company sales policy, and searched for the best representation opportunities, as well as implementing and articulating the negotiations his organization was involved in. Thirdly, as a salesman, he was in charge of selling products or initiating projects and, consequently, he was required
to be in close contact with customers and/or suppliers.

José Luiz seemed to particularly enjoy the dynamic aspect of his sales activities and the inherent mobility which required him to spend most of his working hours out of his office or out of the town. For this reason, he used to get kind of annoyed when he needed to stay the whole week in São Paulo, working indoors. I could witness his impatience and irritation one day when, before starting our third interview, he explained his bad mood by saying: "It's a lot of tension, a lot of work. We end up not having any kind of continuity, right? It's... staying the whole week in São Paulo is... it's abnormal, for sure!" (JLRM3:04-11).

In addition to the three basic tasks described above, but depending either on the context or on the stage reached in the transaction, he might also perform the role of a mediator. When acting in this role, he remained backstage and, displaying perfect timing, he intervened in critical situations when and if required. In these cases, as he was neither in charge of the negotiation itself nor directly involved in it, he was not usually the main recipient of the electronic correspondence which reported the development of that specific transaction he was mediating. However, he invariably received copies of these messages to be informed and updated about the progress of the negotiation. From the perspective of a mediator, therefore, José Luiz interpreted such documents as "follow up accounts" (JLRM1:111-116), but he emphasized that other co-workers, due to their different levels of involvement in these work-related situations, might have equally distinct roles and functions assigned to them.

Throughout our conversations, José Luiz many times commented on the activities he performed at work and on his engagement in them. More than once, however, he referred to them by making fun of himself and saying:

JL: You will find out that I don't have any subject closely related to my area! I don't even work here! I don't even work here! I "visit" this office! It's different! (JLRM1:273-279)

JL: I don't do anything, Maximina. I don't like it! I'm your representative here! I'm your channel. I'm your channel here! (JLRM1:672-678)

JL: Thank God you came here because it has been awful! I didn't have anything else to do and couldn't disguise it anymore! (JLRM1:682-684)
JL: (regarding a specific message) Once again, I won't keep it! (...) I only keep the hope and the joy of living! Not the rest! The rest is for anyone else! The rest is filed! (JLRM1:913-924)

Comments like the ones above might erroneously suggest that José Luiz was not fully committed to his own work or to the business of his company. The sense that emerges from these quotations -- if taken in isolation -- contradicts the one I received when I saw the way he actually carried out his responsibilities. The significance I attributed to his statements was exactly the opposite of the surface meaning: by pretending detachment from his duties, in reality he indicated how much he was really attached to them. I then realized that he was detachedly attached to his work and workplace. By coining this expression, I attempted to link together my perception of his humorous references about his professional activities and the responsible nature of his actual behaviour.

3.1.2. Foreign language skills

José Luiz was quite confident when he commented on issues regarding his foreign language competence. He had no hesitation in defining his performance in English as "good" (JLII:77), and in claiming that communicating in this foreign language was as "natural" as it was in Portuguese (JLII:146-148). Such an initial assertiveness, however, was gradually modified and its meaning became evident when he confirmed that, in fact, he was aware of having "limitations" in both languages (JLII:124-125).

Nevertheless, regardless of any linguistic constraints he might have, José Luiz was undoubtedly confident about his foreign language skills which, according to him, were built up on instructional and experiential foundations. The former was represented by his learning background which was enriched by the completion of what he described as a "reasonably comprehensive EFL course" (JLII:84-85), taken in Brazil. The latter undoubtedly derived from the variety of experiences he lived over time, as a teacher of English, as a bilingual involved either in simultaneous translation or in the translations of advertising materials, and as a professional who worked in English speaking settings, and
had the opportunity to interact frequently with native speakers.

His linguistic self-confidence was also evident when he recalled a specific period of his professional life when, due to the activities he was performing then, he was not required to use the language for professional purposes as he was used to doing before. This period represented a gap of ten years during which his only connection with English was the reading of books and magazines. As he explained, during that period of time, although he definitely refrained from looking for other opportunities to practise the language, he was not worried about having his performance affected. According to his evaluation, he knew he had "learned and acquired enough not to be forgotten anymore!" (JLII:115-116).

His schooling and especially his professional activities contributed to convince him that learning and practice were closely connected. He believed that, by being involved in situations that required the utilization of language in practical terms, some lexical items might be spontaneously acquired and merged into his everyday discourse, while some others might remain passive. Nevertheless, he recognized that certain expressions native speakers instinctively used would never be incorporated into his vocabulary unless he decided to establish this sort of learning as a target goal. Such an awareness is illustrated by the excerpt below:

JL: And... in the United States... always... it's much more fluent... including expressions that we only use when we see them. (simulating the reaction these expressions might cause) "Ah!" But they don't... they don't belong...
M: They haven't been incorporated into... for instance, into the correspondence you send?
JL: ... into the correspondence... that's it. I think they will never be! Right? Unless I would devote time to study more, to exercise my learning... something that I don't have plans to do at all. Right? It's obvious that we always learn, but it comes naturally. Right? By talking with you, I would learn a lot of things; by talking with other people... However, I... not always... sometimes, I begin using a particular expression and, consequently, incorporate it... and my vocabulary is enriched. Many other expressions remain there, locked up, and perhaps I use them eventually. However, it's not a... a process directed towards that, consciously directed towards this aim, right?
M: Something like devoting part of your time to study...
JL: ... to study... that's it...
M: ... and to improve yourself in this sense?
José Luiz therefore made explicit that he had absolutely no intention to learn English on a formal basis again. In fact, during our conversations, he neither pointed out any linguistic difficulty to overcome nor established any particular goal to aim at. As he explained, he might sometimes try to use a new word or expression he picked up from his readings or from conversations with co-workers. However, it happened spontaneously: he never felt compelled to do that.

Considering his previous and current experiences, he concluded by stating that his proficiency in English had already reached a good level and from that moment on, it would *improve through the course of life* (JLFM:625). For this reason, he decided to devote part of his time to learning French and developing his skills in this other foreign language. Commenting on that, he said that his decision was not related to his work and added: "*I want to read Moliere in the original French!*" (JLFM:634). Actually, I could not grasp to what extent these words -- preceded by a pause and followed by a laugh -- conveyed the real explanation for his personal motivation to learn French, or constituted another demonstration of his slightly ironic attitude.

**3.1.3. Computer skills**

... and I started demystifying the machine...

(JLI:168-169)

José Luiz first met computers at work in 1989. "*First of all, it was a mismatch!*" (JLI:155), he recalled. At that time, he began feeling the contradiction of being surrounded by sophisticated machines and high-tech equipment without really understanding the way they operated. Gradually, however, he realized how powerful computers might be and that, therefore, it was time to overcome his limitations in this area.

Initially, he took a course on programming to *lose the fear* (JLI:165-166), as he explained. After this formal beginning, he was enrolled in more detailed training courses which were provided by the companies he worked for, and which were directed specifically
towards the industrial field. This preliminary involvement caused him to begin demystifying computers, and also led him to invest more efforts in computer literacy. For functional reasons, he was then introduced to word processors and got quite impressed by the variety of commands and devices available. Considering his fast adaptation to this kind of software, he felt he would be able to proceed more independently.

After one year of "love-and-hate" (JLII:194) feelings towards computers, José Luiz bought his own in 1990 with two specific goals in mind: to develop his skills in word processing, and to learn how to deal with a spreadsheet. Since then, his level of expertise increased remarkably. Either through self-instruction undertaken by reading manuals and/or manipulating some ready-made software, or through the assistance provided by some co-workers, he started to operate computers with much more autonomy. By reflecting upon his current level of technical expertise, he claimed that he could handle computers well, "within certain limitations, but according to my needs" (JLII:203-204).

José Luiz emphasized that computers gradually became fundamental in his life as a whole, and particularly vital for the performance of his professional activities. In fact, he used computers to store all professional data such as demonstration programs, spreadsheets, reports on customers, budget and profit records, investment plans, administrative material regarding his company, or investment information exchanged with the Finnish corporation his office represented in Brazil. On the other hand, he also stored private information such as his personal agenda, income tax, or bank balance. As he emphasized: "All my life is in there! (...) And everything, absolutely everything, regarding the company!" (JLRM3:1143,1150-1151).

Considering the level reached in his professional career, he perceived computers as "indispensable" tools -- as important as calculators, cellular telephones or electronic organizers (JLRM3:1139-1141). He hardly ever travelled without his portable computer and, consequently, without all the information stocked up in it. By doing that, all data regarding his company, customers and negotiations were invariably available and retrievable wherever he might be and whenever he might need them. He had the feeling
that, due to their increasing relevance, computers would become a sort of "extension"\(^1\) of his body, and he referred to the situation by making fun of it and concluding:

\[\text{JL: Therefore, considering the level I've reached nowadays, it [the computer] is an essential tool to me, right? Some day, I'll get rid of it again! If things keep on going this way, I'll get some chips all over my body... in the future... (laughs)... in the future! (JLRM3:1179-1187)}\]

José Luiz also used computers for functional communicative purposes. According to him, electronic mail constituted a meaningful communication tool because it was not only able to speed up the information flow, but it could also document the information exchange. Its "immediatism" (i.e., the possibility of receiving and sending information immediately) was undoubtedly one of the most relevant features to be preserved in his company. He justified his viewpoint by asserting that "without it [the immediatism] there is no purpose of being connected to a computer everywhere and all the time!" (JLRM1:756-758).

Nevertheless, he admitted he had not carefully examined all the possible e-mail commands yet and, in fact, he perceived himself as quite a lazy person, reluctant to "explore all the devices" (JLII:439) this kind of software might offer. He also reported that in his business trips, he did not log in very frequently either because of his "laziness" or because he knew that "someone in the office" invariably did it for him (JLRM3:1131-1132). Actually, his secretary was in charge of that task and, by using his password, she could easily access his electronic correspondence and, if necessary, be in touch with him through telephone or fax. By revealing this kind of detachment from the electronic medium, he made it explicit that, even in communicative terms, he could operate computers well --- within certain limitations but, certainly, according to his needs.

3.2. My perception of José Luiz

José Luiz was undoubtedly an intriguing interlocutor who, by recurrently inserting amusing remarks in his comments, not only spiced his speech with humour but also

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\(^1\) By focusing on computers as extensions of the human body, my intention is to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan (1964/1995), who perceives and discusses media as extensions of man.
instigated me to speculate about connections between the words he actually used, and what I interpreted as his intentions. Such a speculation induced me, therefore, to reflect upon our meetings and to come up with a metaphor that, to my understanding, might represent the way he dealt with his job activities and with his lived experiences. To me, José Luiz resembled a drawbridge. 

This perception was predominantly grounded on the role he performed as a mediator -- the role that was more evident to me throughout our conversations. Just like a drawbridge, he was solidly attached to one edge -- his company -- and to some extent detached from the other -- his customers. The nature of this position implied movement and indicated that the drawbridge must preserve its inherent ability to move in order to perform its typical functions. The same happened with José Luiz who could not be confined within the perimeter of his office: the performance of his duties required him to keep moving, to keep searching for the precise moment to connect one side to the other. 

Nevertheless, the movement of a drawbridge was contextualized and attuned to the requirements of each situation. Under specific circumstances, the bridge might be pulled up or down to prevent or allow access across it. To be successful, a movement of this sort should involve a general awareness of timing and limitation, as well as being determined by specific factual needs. The combination of such elements -- timing, limitation, needs -- might also be perceived in José Luiz's professional behavior. He knew exactly when to leave the backstage of a negotiation in order to act as a mediator who attempted to accommodate the interaction between both sides, the dialogue between his company and its customers. He also had quite an acute sense of limitation reflected by his comments on language proficiency and computer expertise. In fact, these perceived limitations did not prevent him from performing in accordance with what the situation required. As he emphasized, "within limitations, but according to the needs", he not only took his job activities seriously, but also succeeded in achieving most of his professional goals. 

By using his sense of humor and his slight irony, José Luiz also manipulated the attachment-detachment dualism implicit in the definition of a drawbridge. Sometimes he seemed to be extremely attached to his duties; or other times, by making fun of himself and
of his occupation within the company, he gave the impression of having just a "peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in business development. This movement led me, therefore, to envision him as detachedly attached to his work-related activities and to his peculiar way of performing them. Such a perception led me to coin this expression which, in my opinion, succeeded in capturing the proximity-distance relationship he maintained with his workplace and with his professional tasks.

Interestingly enough, José Luiz -- as the first guide I met -- was the drawbridge that allowed me access to the business territory, and that also led me to find two other travel guides. Due to his direct mediation, I was firstly introduced to Luciano, his partner; and then, as a result of his suggestion, I made contact with Paulo César in a different organization. To me, crossing this metaphorical drawbridge represented my formal entrance to the territory and the concrete possibility to start visualising its various landscapes.

3.3. Meeting Luciano

My first contact with Luciano took place in his company, on the same day I met José Luiz in person. We had a relatively brief conversation, characterized by what I would later perceive as his habitual seriousness and objectivity. Initially, his attention was focused on the specific purposes of my investigation and on its general implications. Gradually, though, the topic changed to time availability. In fact, he placed considerable emphasis on his time constraints and suggested that we should reduce each meeting from two hours to a maximum of forty-five minutes. In his opinion, such an arrangement would optimize our discussions, and make the data collection schedule feasible for him. My initial disappointment as a result of this comment was followed by the realization that the length of each interview should have been presented as a negotiable issue. From that moment on, and due to Luciano's evident preoccupation, I started wondering whether the notion of time would have a peculiar connotation in the business territory.

For six consecutive weeks, always on Wednesday evenings, and even before he concluded his daily workload, we had our interviews which, actually, always lasted more than one hour. As I asked Luciano to select samples of e-mail messages according to his
own criteria, he decided to establish project as the core unit for our discussions. He understood that, by doing so, I would have a more concrete idea of the typical electronic correspondence conveyed within his company. By choosing messages regarding the same project and giving them to me one week in advance, we could, therefore, discuss and reflect upon his workplace and its specific features, upon his ideas about learning and using a foreign language for communicative purposes, and his perceptions regarding computerized communication at work. Grounded on the information that emerged from our conversations, I developed his individual portrait which is outlined in the subsequent sections.

3.3.1. Professional role

I always say that when I need to do something, I 'create' time for that!

(LUCII:477-478)

Luciano was the Technical Director and one of the owners of the organization that was introduced above in Section 3.1. He defined it as an engineering company that dealt with automation systems and instruments regarding cellulose and paper processes. Furthermore, it was responsible for equipment sales and installation, as well as for project development and maintenance. According to him, it was a "small company" (LUCII:100, 316) that promoted "interaction" (LUCII:315-318) among its employees and their job activities, as well as cultivating a deep sense of "teamwork" (LUCII:147-149, LUCFM:1136-1141). For this reason, although mainly accountable for technical issues, he also shared administrative matters and decisions with his partner, José Luiz, who was primarily in charge of the Sales Department.

Broadly speaking, Luciano was primarily responsible for projects, contracts, bids, and requests. However, he actively participated in the elaboration and development of all steps of each transaction by providing detailed technical supervision and system sales support, as well as maintaining sporadic contact with customers. In contrast to some of his co-workers, the nature of his occupation within his company required him to spend most of his working hours in his office. By being simultaneously engaged in various activities and
by invariably working indoors, he gave me the impression of acting like a focal point that
linked together all the perspectives involved in each project and/or negotiation.

Luciano's heavy workload and his responsibilities for numerous aspects of the
company kept him very busy. My perception is that, not only the number of tasks he was
expected to undertake, but also the pressure of the tight schedule under which he seemed
to live compelled him to be focused on time and on ways of optimizing time as his main
concerns. For this reason, "creating time" was the obvious solution when he needed to add
any other assignment or priority to the ones he already had. I was surprised when he
commented on the possibility of doing a particular extra activity by saying: "Only if I create
time to do that, otherwise... I won't do it!" (LUCII:475). However, after listening to a
description of his duties and witnessing his involvement in his daily routine, I gradually
began to understand what he meant by "creating time" and, especially, why he referred to
that concept so often.

### 3.3.2. Foreign language skills

*LUCFM:1665-1657*

Luciano's perception of learning a foreign language was certainly grounded on the
instructional and experiential bases that constituted his story as a learner of English, whose
recollection led him back to his childhood and adolescence.

As he remembered, from elementary school to undergraduate studies, he was
enrolled in English lessons, in addition to the compulsory classes included in the regular
school curriculum. At that time, learning English was a sort of "ritual" (LUCFM:1633),
followed by almost all teenagers, but undertaken with no specific motivation. It also
happened with Luciano who considered these classes as something that, as a teenager,
he was expected to do, as he recalled: "I needed to learn English. Then, I studied English,
and I attended English classes!" (LUCFM:1635-1636). Later on, as a professional at work,
his utilization of the foreign language was restricted to the reading of manuals and technical
material, to occasional telephone calls, and to sporadic personal contact with international
visitors. However, in spite of his English learning background, he did not feel that he had
acquired full proficiency, or enough self-confidence to use the language spontaneously.

The turning point for his linguistic competence came in 1988 when he travelled abroad for the first time. As a result of temporarily working at the Canadian office of the company he represented in Brazil, he was able to spend some time in an English-speaking context, while developing a work-related project. This trip had a decisive impact on him. For the first time he was exposed to situations that required him to deploy a full range of foreign language skills, and as a consequence, he perceived that communicating in English was becoming "natural" to him (LUCII:389).

The linguistic immersion he experienced in Canada not only influenced his performance but also his beliefs about language learning. The opportunity to work abroad made him notice a gap between the language that he was taught at school and the one he could observe in a native-speaking environment. He made this perception explicit by commenting:

L: Because in fact I felt that the language that I've learned at school, that I... and the way it is spoken in restaurants, malls, shops -- you know -- in the movies, anywhere... it has a... well... it has... it has a small ingredient there, you know? It has a slight difference. And I had to go there [abroad] to notice it and reach a better fluency in conversation". (LUCFM:1656-1668)

Although asserting that he was not competent to fully evaluate pedagogic issues, he strongly believed that learning a foreign language should include formal instruction through courses that made linguistic structure explicit. To him, such a formal "quantitative" component (LUCFM:1690-1693) represented a necessary but not sufficient condition for learning, since fluency could only be achieved after spending some time in an English-speaking environment. According to him, therefore, only language immersion and involvement in real life situations could provide the learner with authentic opportunities to practice and interact through the target language for genuine communicative purposes.

Luciano commented that although his level of foreign language proficiency had improved considerably over time, he could still identify vocabulary as a troublesome area which had an effect on his writing, speaking and, sometimes, on his reading skills. He was
aware, therefore, that any improvement in vocabulary would be reflected in performance in general terms. Nevertheless, vocabulary did not constitute a major concern and, for this reason, any effort in this direction would be worthwhile only if he had enough spare time -- or even "patience" (LUCII:408). In my opinion, his lack of strong motivation in developing his foreign language proficiency was founded on the positive results he invariably achieved in his work-related activities, and not on considerations of any other sort. I do believe he would certainly "create time" to invest in his own linguistic development if he thought it was really necessary. As it was, however, he continued to emphasize that he was trapped by his time constraints. Once again, I found myself intrigued by the special connotation time might have for him.

3.3.3. Computer skills

Is there anything within the company that doesn't depend on computers? Uh... I'd say 'nothing!' (LUCII:515-516)

The recollection of his journey from initial computer literacy to computer expertise led Luciano back to 1978, when he was enrolled in his undergraduate engineering course. First as a student and then as a professional at the beginning of his career, he got interested in the considerable potential of computers as working tools. For this reason, he decided to explore issues regarding personal computers, although restricted by the modest level of development that characterized the Brazilian technological scene at that time.

His turning point for computer expertise came in 1988, when he first travelled abroad. As with his views on foreign language learning and proficiency, this business trip to Canada also had a significant impact on him in technological terms. This experience abroad made him definitively open his eyes (LUCII:499), and realize that computers were not only indispensable, but in fact "vital" (LUCII:501) to his professional career.

Reflecting on his current workplace, Luciano identified four significant roles that computers played in the accomplishment of his daily activities: as an operational tool, such machines were used as a component of the automation system that his company installed; as a working tool, they were used to develop and update projects; as a management tool,
they were applied to keep a record of administrative issues; and finally, as a communication tool, they were responsible for interconnecting his office with the Finnish corporation and its branches, as well as with some customers. He defined his work environment as completely computerized, and emphasized that everything depended on computers and/or was connected to them.

Luciano started to use computers for communicative purposes in 1992, when he brought from Canada the system currently adopted by his company. This system replaced the old-fashioned electronic communication process that had been installed one year before, and which was focused on José Luiz as its only user. Because of its greater flexibility and special features, this new system not only benefited other professionals in his office in Brazil, but also enlarged their overall communication network, by promoting more frequent interaction with the corporation in Finland and its other representatives in Canada and in the United States.

Luciano perceived that, among other advantages, CMC integration into job activities led to more efficiency at work. As he explained:

L: ... and... with more efficiency because it's a documented subject. It's a subject... it's a subject that you may send... or you ask for some information and the recipient can... the recipient has time to analyze and, then, reply. And there's no need for you to hang on or to make another telephone call. I mean, it was... I've noticed that its use provides more efficiency than fax or telephone. (LUCRM3: 699-704)

L: It allows the person to have more time! It's what we... I think we have already commented on that. I mean, it gives the recipient time to receive the information, analyze it and, then, reply to it. (LUCRM4:552-554)

I was not surprised when Luciano, by mentioning efficiency, returned to the time theme. To him, these concepts were intimately related. By reflecting on the connection among efficiency and time, a well-known proverb came to my mind -- "Time is money" -- and I promptly associated their meaning with the one of profit. Such an association reflected the popular view that profit was the ultimate goal to be achieved in business. It did not represent, however, Luciano's words or intentions for he did not seem to be primarily a profit-oriented person. In my opinion, Luciano was a professional primarily interested in
optimizing time to accomplish his work-related tasks properly and efficiently. This was the meaning I finally attributed to his constant preoccupation with time issues.

3.4. My perception of Luciano

Luciano was certainly a thought-provoking interlocutor. By constantly mentioning his concerns about time, his compulsion to optimize time, and his attempts to "create time", he challenged my understanding of the meaning that such a concept might have within the boundaries of his professional landscape. My curiosity induced me to overcome this challenge by revisiting, through the transcriptions, the conversations we had. While rereading the reflections we were both involved in, I began forming a picture of Luciano, a metaphorical view that represented his preoccupation with time, as well as his way of dealing with professional duties. To me, Luciano resembled a metronome.

A metronome is a device that, by moving its arm from side to side, produces a clicking sound that not only indicates the speed of a specific piece of music but also, if adjusted, may conform to a variety of different speeds. Its synchronized movement establishes the time of each song, this is, the number of beats that constitute each bar. Although having a peculiar movement and a characteristic sound, a metronome is not able to generate music by itself. A song needs instruments and musicians, as well as a guide to keep them attuned to the rhythm, to the composer's original intention.

Similar features I could metaphorically find in Luciano. Through synchronized movements -- his job activities -- he exercised his role of a guide (of a metronome) by walking through the offices and marking the time of each piece of music -- or the steps of each negotiation. In effect, by providing a focal point that caught the attention of everyone involved in a project, he determined the speed of each transaction. Furthermore, he also encouraged his co-workers to keep pace, and provided them with the necessary technical and administrative support or advice which led negotiations or projects to a conclusion. By attempting to optimize or "create time", but without imposing his own speed on other people, Luciano seemed to conduct the cadence, the flow of each particular transaction, in accordance with its emerging characteristics and requirements.

As a metronome, he was aware that he could not generate music by himself or
undertake, alone, all the steps of a negotiation. To keep the composer's original intention, he needed a piece of music, instruments and musicians. He needed a team to work with. He needed a group of co-workers that, by sharing similar purposes and goals, constituted a harmonious combination that could efficiently articulate various sounds, rhythms, and arrangements. For this reason, the teamwork spirit not only characterized, but profoundly influenced his workplace.

My perception of Luciano as a metronome was, therefore, basically grounded on the notion of time. Nevertheless, the metaphor is not perfect in every respect. The metronome is inescapably trapped in its duty of marking time. Luciano, however, was certainly not as strictly meticulous and methodical as a metronome is expected to be. Regardless of his awareness of time constraints, he was able to "create time" when he felt compelled to, or when he felt it might be worthwhile. For example, Luciano was able to modify his initial speed in order to accommodate the needs of an outsider observer. There is no doubt that he did create some extra time -- quality time -- to guide me in my exploration through the business territory.

3.5. Meeting Paulo César

Paulo César was recommended to me as a potential travel guide by José Luiz who had previously met him on a professional occasion. From our initial contacts, through telephones calls and faxes, I noticed that he was remarkably attentive and clearly interested in accommodating his schedule to mine in order to guide me in my exploration. In person, during our interviews, he was quite responsive to all the topics we raised, always displaying a disposition to discuss, and an explicit commitment to investigate the issues that challenged him.

The six meetings we had -- sometimes at noon, sometimes in the evening -- were developed in a friendly atmosphere that allowed us to jointly analyze either recent or old samples of his electronic correspondence. The reading and discussion of such e-mail messages led us to reflect upon general features of CMC in the workplace, and upon his foreign language performance, including comments on his individual difficulties and ultimate goals in this area. By contrasting current and previous messages, we could also
address topics regarding the development of foreign language writing skills and strategies, and of the utilization of computers for communicative purposes. The recollection of the experiences that Paulo César lived as a professional, as a foreign language learner and speaker, as well as a computer user, enabled me to develop the individual portrait that is presented in the following section.

### 3.5.1. Professional role

It's a position that is called 'project manager', right?

(PCT:513)

Paulo César worked as a Senior Business Manager in the Electronic Commerce Department of a Brazilian company that, broadly speaking, dealt with outsourcing services and electronic commerce products (electronic mail and electronic data interchange, EDI). Apart from its own activities and due to a trading partnership agreement, his organization was also responsible for distributing in Brazil the computerized communication system produced by an American corporation that had a worldwide network of branches.

According to him, his function within the company might be interpreted as that of a project manager who was in charge of attending some specific customers, by solving their problems and responding to their demands. In order to do that, he not only elaborated bids, but also designed projects and provided his customers with the necessary installation support and maintenance assistance. Paulo César's activities involved, therefore, three particular areas: information requests, technical and commercial support requests, and problem solving.

The development of his work-related duties required him to be in close contact with the American associated corporation and, many times, with its other international branches. Mainly from the headquarters in the United States, he got the fundamental technical and commercial support regarding the electronic communication product his organization distributed in Brazil. For this reason, foreign language proficiency and CMC expertise constituted essential requirements for him to perform his professional activities.

Paulo César seemed to be quite cheerful and self-confident when he described his company, the scope of its business, and its preoccupation with staff development. In this
regard, he proudly recalled that he was one of the first employees to operate computers in the company. He also highlighted the organization's interest in providing English for specific purposes (ESP) courses to the professionals involved in international partnerships. His speech spontaneously reflected an involvement developed throughout the thirteen years he had been working either in the technical or in the commercial department of that corporation.

Perhaps at this point, in order to be faithful to the facts, I should explain that he worked for that company for thirteen years. I was really astonished when, just after concluding our last meeting, Paulo César mentioned his dismissal. It was difficult for me to suddenly dissociate him from the company that had been part of his life for well over a decade. I thought I detected a tiny shade of disappointment in his voice when he brought the news up, although he tried to disguise it by commenting on some possible positions he already had in prospect -- contacts which, in fact, led him to get a new job a month later. Nevertheless, for the sake of coherence, since my research was undertaken during the period he still worked for that company, I will resume my narrative by referring to him as part of that corporation.

3.5.2. Foreign language skills

Paulo César's story as a learner of English reflected the experiences lived in two sorts of instructional environments during two distinct periods of his life. Firstly, as a student, his contact with the foreign language -- or his "basic instruction" (PCII:257) -- was restricted to the compulsory classes included in the regular school curriculum, from the elementary to the high school levels. Later on, as a professional within the organization he was currently working for, he was enrolled in the ESP program supported by his company and, therefore, exposed to specific instruction in English for special purposes. According to his description, this course was structured in two-hour classes, twice a week, and its content was mainly focused on general business issues with a minor emphasis on his and
his colleagues' real work-related situations and/or their potential difficulties.

The lack of enthusiasm with which Paulo César commented on the structure of the course he had been enrolled in for six years was an indication that it did not fulfill his legitimate needs: either because of its content which seemed to be, to some extent, disconnected from his actual work environment, or because the regular class schedule often conflicted with business trips or other professional commitments that prevented him from being available for his lessons. By listening to him and thinking about my own experience as a teacher of English, I can assert that, in fact, courses like those could not fulfill the instructors' objectives either. Considering such a situation and reading between the lines of Paulo César's discreet comments, it was possible to understand why he would rather address foreign language issues by focusing on his performance in his own work situation, on the difficulties he had to deal with, on the strategies he adopted, and on the targets he aimed at achieving.

Paulo César's approach to issues regarding foreign language competence was characterized by a cautious self-perception that identified him as having a "medium" (PC II:195) level of proficiency in English. Such an evaluation grew out of a careful reflection upon the skills he was required to master in order to undertake his professional activities properly. When commenting on his listening abilities, for instance, he claimed that he was able to understand from 60% to 70% of telephone calls or face-to-face interactions. As for writing tasks, he recognized that the use of certain strategies -- such as looking up words in dictionaries, or consulting his own previous material -- helped him to overcome some of his difficulties. Nevertheless, writing and speaking constituted his hardest areas for they made him closely confront issues regarding vocabulary.

Paulo César was extremely concerned about vocabulary and conscious of still having "to learn a lot of it" (PCRM1:1019). Although attempting to increase his knowledge in this area by reading books and articles in English, he felt handicapped on many occasions by the gaps he was able to identify in the flow of his ideas:

PC: ... the words. Because sometimes, my biggest problem is just to choose the right word. Sometimes, I don't have... I have... the... the... I know the subject to be addressed but, sometimes, vocabulary items are missing. (PCRM3:487-490)
PC: Sometimes, there are real gaps. I am building up... building up a line of thought, editing a message and building up a line of thought... and I find gaps... gaps that are due to the lack of the appropriate word. *(PC RM3:503-506)*

This concern about accuracy seemed to make him particularly sensitive to issues relating to the choice of grammatical structures and vocabulary:

PC: ... ah... I always attempt to... to be very clear, right? Even when it makes me be repetitive, I attempt to be as clear as possible. *(PCRM1: 289-291)*

PC: I’m extremely worried about writing things that don’t make sense. Because sometimes, you write it in such a way that... due to the inadequacy of some structure... some grammatical structure... you may change the meaning completely or make it unintelligible. Or you may be understood in a completely different way. *(PCII:234-242)*

Punctuation was another area of difficulty that he tried to deal with by using common sense and intuition:

PC: I have no idea about how to punctuate in English. For instance, where to use commas. Honestly! I don’t know the rules regarding punctuation in English. Therefore, I... I particularly... I try to use my common sense. I attempt to use common sense and... and a lot of intuition. But, in fact, I don’t have the technical knowledge about how to punctuate accurately. *(PCRM2:794-803)*

Paulo César also pointed out that he had difficulty in coherently organizing clusters of information into paragraphs. For this reason, he preferred to "itemize" *(PCRM1: 118)* the information to be conveyed rather than writing it in paragraph form:

PC: ... I find it particularly difficult to... to convey those problems into paragraphs, right? Fluently in a paragraph, in one chunk of information. I’d rather do it this way. *(PCRM1:122-127)*

By reflecting on this particular characteristic of his writing, however, he concluded that it was actually a matter of personal style, since he intuitively adopted a similar strategy when composing e-mail messages in his native language.

Paulo César not only acknowledged his areas of difficulty but he was also aware
of the ultimate goals he wanted to achieve. Although his foreign language problems had not had a negative impact on his professional performance, he said that he would like to "write better" (PCRM1:1017,1031), and to "be able to write well" (PCRM1:1031). By identifying "elegant English" as his goal, he meant he would like to be able to use "correct English" (PCRM1:1010-1011), with a certain level of "vocabulary sophistication" (PCFM: 253-254). Nevertheless, despite his efforts to improve his English, he felt he had reached a plateau where no further improvement was taking place:

PC: I think that, nowadays, I've reached such a level that I can feel no meaningful improvement. I don't know whether it has stopped! (laughs) I can't feel it anymore! Maybe it is... maybe it's my own fault because I haven't been doing much to foster my own development, right? I haven't been able to... I haven't been investing efforts in my linguistic development, in my language knowledge.
M: Uh-hum. And this... is this "I haven't been doing much to foster my own development" related to the excess of professional activities that gives you few time to do it?
PC: It's also one of the reasons. But I could do something on the weekends! I think it's lack of interest. I have to be engaged in doing that. If I decide to study hard, I will do it. (PCRM1:1041-1054)

As shown by the extract above, Paulo César did not appeal to time constraints to justify the stagnation he felt in terms of his linguistic development. He did not elaborate his argument, but pointed to "lack of interest" as the main cause. I would go further in my interpretation and speculate on the lack of challenging situations that would require him to use the language in a more sophisticated way, or in more intricate contexts. Ideally, those challenging linguistic situations should emerge either from the performance of his professional duties or from the English classes he used to attend. In practice, however, the ESP course was not thought-provoking and motivating; and his daily routine at work did not challenge him to progress in a linguistic sense either. Considering the nature of the systematic tasks he was used to dealing with, the level of proficiency he had reached seemed to be adequate for him to perform them properly, although he might feel some frustration in more personal terms. For this reason, I believe he had no serious motivation to keep investing time and effort in his own linguistic development.

An interesting aspect of my interviews with Paulo César was, undoubtedly, an
asymmetrical relationship that he sometimes imposed on our conversations. This was apparent when, for instance, he asked me about the appropriateness of a lexical item he had previously used in a message, or mentioned that I should "obviously know" that performance was affected by contextual and personal constraints. The following excerpts illustrate these situations:

PC: (regarding the expression "missed information" he used in one of his messages) Is it correct, Maximina? It's a curiosity I have now.
M: (answering in English) Yes, it is. (returning to Portuguese) It's right.
PC: (asking me in English) Is it correct?
M: "Missed information". Right. It's right! (...)
PC: This "missed" was something that I've used intuitively. That's why I'm asking you whether it's correct. Because when I was writing -- I remember it very well -- I said: "Should I use "any further information" or "missed information"? (PCRM2:621-665)

PC: And you know -- well, you must know that, right? -- but I... I particularly... my fluency depends much on my mood. Right? You must know that! When I am in a good mood, when I am high-spirited... (laughs)... even writing in English, I can write smoothly, I can write in an easier way. But when I'm worried about something, or when I have something that is bothering me... it's difficult, then!
M: Is there a consequent impact on language?
PC: Exactly! (PCRM1:150-162)

The excerpts above indicate that there were occasions when Paulo César situated himself as a student, and referred to me as a teacher, as the language expert. Actually, this relationship emerged from our conversations only when the topic concerned language issues. On the contrary, when the topic related to business or to CMC practices, he assumed a more self-confident manner and tactfully performed the role of an expert. Such a variation in performance caught my attention and made me reflect upon the reasons that led him to assume different roles during the course of a single conversation.

3.5.3. Computer skills

Well, I see the computer as a 'cybernetic co-worker', right? I believe I'd be kind of lost without it in the company!

(PCII:347-349)

Paulo César's professional story concerned not only his performance within the technical and the commercial area of his current company, but also included an account
of his introduction to micro-computers in 1985. Since then, the development of his technological expertise had been built up mainly on the basis of experience in the workplace. Although having an educational background in accountancy and no previous formal instruction in computing, Paulo César was one of the pioneers in using personal computers in his organization. As he recalled, by gradually exploring their potential for professional purposes, he became entirely preoccupied by such machines with which he developed a "very good relationship" (PCII:339).

For Paulo César, computers were a communication device that connected him to other professionals in Brazil and abroad. In addition, however, these machines became "very powerful tools" (PCII:340) that centralized his job activities. For this reason, he expressed his perception of the role played by computers at work by referring to them as his "cybernetic" co-workers (PCII:3467-349). By stating that he "would be kind of lost" without them, he reinforced his view of computers as indispensable tools, used for work-related applications, as well as for professional information storage:

PC: I think that without my computer... uh... I have everything stocked up in there: my schedule, my telephone book, right? All the things regarding... regarding my daily activities, really, I use them in my daily activities. I actually use computers on a regular basis. (PCII: 341-345)

Paulo César also explored the use of computers for personal purposes. Actually, he had one at home which, however, he used "at leisure" (PCII:355,359), as he explained: "There are many options, and we take advantage of them" (PCII:359-360). By mentioning "we", he was also referring to his wife who was a professional in her own right, and who was also involved in the development of this tool for business and personal use. Her perception of computers coincided with Paulo César's, for both of them understood that such machines assisted them in their duties at work. Reflecting on that, Paulo César concluded that both for him and his wife, computers essentially performed the role of "facilitators" (PCII: 391).

Paulo César had been using computers for communicative purposes for about five years. Within his company, electronic mail not only represented one of the products to be
commercialized, it was also a remarkable way of integrating all professionals involved in this enterprise. In this way, information could be disseminated faster, and it was certainly more easily accessed. Broadly speaking, the scope of his international electronic correspondence included the exchange of internal messages which basically consisted of routine matters discussed in English. For this reason, foreign language proficiency constituted, in addition to computer expertise, one of the most relevant requirements for him to perform his job activities and successfully fulfill his objectives at work.

Paulo César reported his CMC activities from a point of view that oscillated between that of an expert who knew the technical features and overall potential of the electronic communication systems he sold, and that of a user who was captivated by the results of manipulating this "open channel of communication" at work (PCRM4:744). Throughout our conversations, however, this strength and self-confidence with regard to computers never emerged in his speech from themes concerned with foreign language proficiency. This certainly constituted an intriguing point to reflect upon.

3.6. My perception of Paulo César

As previously mentioned, Paulo César was a vivid interlocutor who revealed, through the topics he discussed and especially through the ones he subtly avoided, a peculiar discourse movement that placed him either as a polite expert or a humble amateur. This dualism, which was manifested in different ways according to the topic of our discussion, not only intrigued me but also motivated me to speculate to what extent the performance of such alternate roles was relevant to the development of Paulo César's professional and personal profile.

In reflecting upon his distinctive performance throughout our interviews, I began to wonder whether it could be somehow related to his Japanese heritage. Although I had noticed that he was of Japanese descent, I had not previously felt that this was relevant to the topic of my research. As far as I was concerned Paulo César, like the other four practitioners, was a Brazilian professional involved in electronic communication at work. Nevertheless, his discursive shifting from an expert's to an apprentice's point of view, as well as his asymmetrical but respectful way of treating me as an expert in foreign language
matters somehow awoke the feelings I had experienced as a student and teacher in Japan. From this association I started to shape a symbolic view of him: a view that synthesized the teacher-student roles between which he subtly alternated. To me, Paulo César represented an interesting personality type which I portrayed as a Brazilian sensei-gakusei.

My experiences in Japan -- either as a student at the university level or as a temporary teacher of English in two public schools -- made me perceive that the meaning embedded in the Japanese word sensei was actually broader than the one ascribed to its Portuguese (professor) or English (teacher) equivalents. I can distinguish these meanings by saying that being a teacher represents only part of being a sensei. The former's basic connotation is confined to the notion of the one who teaches. The latter expands the former's essential meaning and, in addition to it, incorporates the concept of the one who cares or the one who guides and, therefore, the one who always deserves respect from his/her students.

Considering such a connotation, Paulo César performed the role of a sensei who guided me -- the gakusei -- through his professional landscape, and who taught me the specifics of CMC in his workplace. Conversely, this was the role he assigned to me when the subject of our conversation changed to foreign language issues. In such moments, he tended to see me as the one who had expertise in this area and who, therefore, could teach him something either informally, through our conversations -- by confirming, for instance, the appropriateness of a lexical item he had previously used in a message -- or through the final result of my research, as he explicitly suggested:

PC: And... I don't know... I particularly think that these observations may generate something that can help me somehow... in the future. Your work... the results of your work -- I believe in that -- maybe you can come up with a methodology or with something that may help people like me, who use this kind of tool, to be more productive in what they do. (PCFM:1087-1094)

The metaphor I present to indicate the roles of sensei (or expert) and gakusei (or apprentice) between which Paulo César switched back and forth is not intended to suggest

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2 Sensei is the Japanese word frequently translated into teacher, and gakusei is the one equivalent to student.
any hierarchical connotation or power relationship. To me, it represented his way of recognizing, and dealing with distinct levels of expertise, manifested in accordance with our respective areas of specialization. On the other hand, the metaphor I have used is, undoubtedly, rooted in cultural bases which might be interpreted from two perspectives. It could represent a feature of his cultural heritage as a person of Japanese background which, in my opinion, emerged from his intuitive performance as a polite sensei or as a humble gakusei, depending on the content of our discussions. Furthermore, it could also be perceived as my particular way of sensing the variation in his performance whose impact sparked off a recollection of the cultural, social and educational experiences I had lived in Japan as a student and a teacher.

3.7. Meeting Juciane

I was introduced to Juciane by Paulo César who worked with her at the same company and in the same department, and who told her about my research and its purposes. She got quite interested in participating and undoubtedly, this explicit disposition made her attempt to accommodate our interviews to her tied work schedule. Nevertheless, her business commitments and an unexpected health problem, combined with the fact that I could not stay longer in Brazil, forced us to limit our meetings to five encounters. Although restricted during the data collection phase, our joint reflections continued for some time, through the exchange of electronic messages. By interacting through this medium, we had more opportunities to proceed with our discussions, to clarify remaining issues, to observe other e-mail samples, and to deepen our understanding of the specific CMC practices that involved her in her workplace.

Our conversations were, therefore, marked by her enthusiasm and lively cooperation on reporting her work-related activities and her views of e-mail communication and of foreign language performance for professional purposes. These interviews enriched my exploration of the business territory with an individual female perspective marked by her perception of her interlocutors and their peculiarities, and by the way she expressed and placed herself in the messages she composed. By reading and contrasting recent and old samples of her computerized correspondence, we could not only tackle issues regarding
electronic interactions among professionals of the same company, but also contemplate the development of her performance as a professional, a computer user, and a foreign language speaker. The recollection of the experiences she lived at work, as well as her sensitive reflection upon writing procedures, and upon their e-mail repercussions, helped me to develop the individual portrait whose features I present in the following sections.

3.7.1. Professional role

Well, our aim is to work on a customer since his/her first contact with the company until... until s/he decides to stay with us forever!

(JUCII:70-73)

Juciane was a Business Manager in the Electronic Commerce Department of a Brazilian organization. Broadly speaking, her company dealt with outsourcing services, with system development and distribution, with customized applications, and with personal communication and data exchange processes (e-mail and EDI, respectively). Actually, such communication systems were produced by an American corporation and distributed by her company in Brazil under a trading partnership agreement.

Juciane's duties within her department were primarily focused on selling the communication products her company provided. According to her, the commercial transactions she was involved in did not constitute conventional "shelf sales" (JUCII:44)\(^3\), but could be more precisely interpreted as "non specific sales" (JUCII:42-43). According to this interpretation, selling involved a two-way process that either attracted customers interested in a particular item, or led the company to contact potential clients in order to offer them applications that might suit their individual needs. In order to fulfill this second function, Juciane and her co-workers conducted a survey of market needs, and searched for prospective buyers for whom they might design and implement specific projects, as well as provide installation support and maintenance assistance. As she emphasized, her company's core marketing strategy was to identify possible customers, to give them the best application option, to assist them in product utilization and, by doing that, to keep them

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\(^3\) Literally, she uses the expression "venda de prateleira" to refer to the most conventional selling process through which goods are left on shelves to be seen and selected by potential buyers.
as clients "forever" (JUCII:72-73). The nature of such activities required her, therefore, to be in contact with the customers for whom she was responsible and, simultaneously, with the American suppliers and other international distributors. Considering these features of her professional tasks, computer expertise and foreign language proficiency became essential prerequisites for her to perform her work properly.

Juclane seemed to be completely involved in her professional activities, which she described with a contagious vivacity and with an evident sense of humor. She got passionate when she addressed issues regarding the e-mail systems her company dealt with, and when she identified the personal connections developed with them by stating: "I've been an old friend of the services we provide!" (JUCII:399). By perceiving herself as "an old friend" of these electronic communication products, she revealed a relationship that, actually, had not emerged exclusively from the experiences she had been exposed to during the three years she had been working for her current organization. In fact, it started about two years before, in her previous job where, by performing the role of a systems analyst, she was in charge of technically assisting the implementation and utilization of the same communication systems. In her current function as a manager in the Electronic Commerce Department, however, she had the opportunity to apply the technical expertise formerly acquired in activities that also required her to explore e-mail in a practical sense, as an effective user. In other words, by having a much closer relationship with CMC processes, she could appreciate other aspects of the "friend" she had been in touch with for some time. It is undoubtedly interesting to notice the way she personified the e-mail systems and described the relationship she had established with them. This intriguing feature caught my attention and led me to explore this aspect of her personality in a much deeper sense.

3.7.2. Foreign language skills

I like English very much! I think this feeling helps me a lot! (JUCII:299)

The recollection of the experiences she had lived as a learner of English made
Juciane explicitly assert that learning through practical experience had been the dominant source of her foreign language development. Although she had attended -- and was still attending -- special language classes, she refused to refer to her linguistic background as the result of a "very continuous [learning] process" (JUCII:282). In fact, she was fairly vague when mentioning her experiences as a student, which included a short-term course she took in high school, and another course which she took as an undergraduate.

Nevertheless, she was quite critical when she commented on the ESP program she was currently enrolled in at work. This course was supposed to be oriented to the needs of professionals involved in international business who had their classes at the office, according to a schedule that, to some extent, attempted to accommodate their time constraints. By giving priority to the criterion of having four or five students per group, the focus on proficiency was consequently neglected and, as a result, heterogeneous groups were formed. Furthermore, the professionals' daily routine -- which included frequent meetings and business trips -- prevented them from being present at their classes regularly. In her case, for instance, although trying to attend all the classes, she was compelled to miss them sometimes, and at other times, she was the "only one in class" (JUCII:332-333). To her, this situation obviously impacted on continuity, and frustrated any effort to progressively master the course content. In addition to such organizational drawbacks, she believed that having classes at work also impacted on "commitment" which, in her opinion, tended to be "differentiated" (JUCII:327-328), if compared to what was demanded when the professional had to leave the office and go to a specific language school. As a consequence, she claimed that courses in the workplace led the student to achieve "poorer results than the ones that could be achieved in a school" (JUCII:311-313).

Considering her own experience, she concluded:

J: (...) Therefore, I would say that I have had a... let me put it this way... a reasonable development throughout the three years I've been attending those classes. I think that my improvement has really emerged from 'practice', from my involvement in daily activities. (JUC II:334-338)

Juciane's arguments made me reflect upon the feasibility and effectiveness of
foreign language programs developed in the workplace. Although she had not elaborated her thoughts on issues regarding course content, I assume that they were also affected by the problems she had mentioned. Nevertheless, her comments indicated to what extent she perceived the intimate relationship between practice and learning, as well as showing the way she explored her level of language awareness (Clark and associates, 1991) to convert work-related tasks into concrete educational experiences (Dewey, 1938a:37).

Juciane also demonstrated her language awareness when she judiciously compared her linguistic performance with the skills she needed in order to fulfill her professional activities. According to her evaluation, she had a "pretty good" (JUCII:194) performance in reading and writing -- the two sorts of abilities she most frequently experienced at work, either when she searched for information or when she conveyed it through the electronic medium. By contrasting these skills with the one of speaking, she asserted:

J: Writing is easier because you can rethink and restructure the information before actually sending it. On the contrary, speaking on the phone, for instance, is a little bit... I wouldn't say 'complicated', right?... because I think that, in this case, it's also related to having more practice. But, it's a little bit more difficult because you can... you... in fact, you may not be prepared to listen... to know the questions, the arguments. Then, to communicate becomes slightly more difficult, I mean, to convey the ideas adequately. And sometimes, there's a difference in the pronunciation of a specific word... and you are not there to make a gesture, to draw the idea. (...) Because on the phone, you have no other alternatives, but the words, right? (...) Sometimes I'm a little bit worried about conveying an idea that is not the most correct one. Right? But I believe that this is also a process that requires more practice. (JUCII:201-214, 221-222, 224-228)

The excerpt above illustrates Juciane's comparative lack of confidence about her performance in oral tasks, and the way she emphasized the impact of timing on language production. In her opinion, writing and reading activities allowed her to reflect upon the subject(s) addressed more carefully, as well as building up and if necessary reformulating an accurate reply. On the contrary, listening and speaking activities required her to react on the spot by immediately providing her interlocutor with an intelligible response. Moreover, the excerpt displays Juciane's belief in the impact of practice on the development of foreign language performance, as well as highlighting her concern about
the clear expression of her ideas. The relationship between practice and development was reinforced in the following segment of our conversation:

M: Do you mean that 'experience' can provide you with opportunities for development?
J: Certainly! Certainly! I think that experience... for instance, nowadays... ah... even in writing, I can write much faster, right? I don't have many... it's not a too slow process as it used to be three years ago. Nowadays, it's much easier to sit in front of the computer... to have some information and convey it in a clear way.
M: You can do it straight...
J: (interrupting) Even if it's not absolutely correct, in grammatical terms... ah... I believe I can convey the message. Because the replies are... ah... they conform to what I have asked; the replies always conform to... to what had been explained, right? Therefore, the feedback also...
M: You achieve your objectives.
J: Exactly! (JUCII:232-248)

As shown by the extract above, Juciane used the replies and feedback received as a kind of thermometer to measure the objectivity and appropriateness of her writing. According to her experience, conveying wrong or inaccurate information might "mislead all the process and delay the reply for a long time" (JUCII:258-261). For this reason, messages which included comments like: "You see, it was very clear!, It was pretty good!", or The information was quite precise!" (JUCII:257-258), indicated to her that she had definitely reached her communication goals.

Nevertheless, her concern for accuracy did not extend, on the whole, to grammatical issues. This kind of preoccupation was exclusively restricted to those messages which, depending on their content and/or recipients, required a more detailed writing effort. For communication on a daily basis, accuracy essentially implied the articulation of the content in order to convey information clearly:

J: (...) You know, the 'writing correctly' preoccupation is more related to the way of conveying a particular idea, the way of conveying that message.
M: Is it therefore connected to your intention of 'being clear'?
J: Yes! Exactly! (JUCFM:934-937)

Considering the results invariably received, Juciane believed that, despite any
linguistic difficulty, she performed her duties well and achieved her professional goals successfully. According to her, one of her strengths lay in the fact that she liked English "very much" (JUCII:298), and such a positive feeling undoubtedly helped her overcome any linguistic limitation she might have. Actually, throughout our conversations, she never mentioned any specific troublesome area regarding her foreign language performance; however, she pointed out that, when in doubt, she consulted the dictionary, her "old friend" or her "big friend" (JUCFM:817,819). By saying that, she metaphorically reinforced the personal links that connected her to the foreign language she used, as well as highlighting the affective element which appeared both in her professional performance and in the reflections upon her own practice.

3.7.3. Computer skills

And I get fascinated by this kind of stuff!
(JUCRM2/3:322-323)

Juciane's perception of computers was also marked by a lasting personal relationship whose origin was found in her educational background: firstly, as a data processing technician at the high school level, and then, as a systems analyst during her undergraduate career. The interest in computing developed at that time, and reinforced by her initial professional experiences, encouraged her to search for more practical ways of bringing together technological and business perspectives. Such a motivation led her to take a post-graduate course in business administration and to proceed with studies at this level in the realm of marketing. This experience made her develop an intimate connection with computers which she summarized by asserting: "Well... we are friends! We've been friends for a long time! We're old, old friends!" (JUCII:362-363).

Although having quite a close relationship with computers, Juciane did not have one at home, "yet!!" (personal e-mail, July 24,1996). For this reason, her current contact with such machines was restricted to what was required for the performance of her job activities, which were basically focused on electronic interactions for functional purposes. In terms of her work-related environment, e-mail was not only one of the products to be commercialized, it was also the fundamental working tool explored by all professionals in
the Electronic Commerce Department. According to Juciane, the correspondence involved comprised a "very continuous [communication] process" (JUCII:415), that kept her in touch with the associated corporation in the United States, and with other international distributors, as well as with the other offices of her company in Brazil. Under such circumstances, logging in constituted the very first activity she performed at work every morning — "just like having breakfast" (JUCRM3/4:1534) — and, repeatedly, many times per day.

Juciane seemed to be really attached to the electronic communication process she was involved in. During the three years she had been using this tool, she had developed her own routine and a number of strategies to deal with her correspondence and correspondents. She had also developed a peculiar way of storing e-mail information which certainly distinguished her from other co-workers. She tended to keep as many messages as possible, as she confesses: "I'm a little bit stubborn because I keep everything for a long, long time! (...) Sometimes, there are 400, 500 messages there!" (JUCII:793-794,797-798). However, her most remarkable feature was, undoubtedly, her distinctive approach to interpersonal interaction.

Juciane displayed a lucid perception of the role she performed as a message generator within the electronic communication process. Although a detailed account of this characteristic of hers is presented in Chapter 6, I believe that it is pertinent here to introduce some features of her e-mail writing style, since they also constituted relevant traits of her individual profile. As an e-mail writer, Juciane was primarily concerned about conveying information clearly (JUCII:224-225), and about not being "imperative" (JUCII:640-642, JUCRM2/3:253-254) in her requests and comments. For this reason, she was invariably worried about how information would be interpreted by recipients in such a predominantly written form of interaction. In her opinion, there might be a difference between what the sender had in mind and attempted to convey and what the receiver actually perceive from the exchange of messages. From her perspective, therefore, explaining did not essentially imply understanding:

J: (regarding e-mail correspondence) I think that it's very important to consider the circumstances under which your text is going to be received.
Because, as I've already said, you don't have any visual aids... the environment to contextualize those ideas, right? And what you say and what the interlocutor understands may be very... very distinct. (JUCRM1: 389-397)

J: (...) if you're explaining someone something, your -- quotation -- your "obligation to explain it" is different from the receiver's obligation to understand you. Right? Because what you have in mind is not always conveyed in such a way that leads him/her to interpret it exactly the way you want him/her to do it. People may have different perceptions! Therefore, I have this concern in mind all the time. I think that 'the ball' must be controlled by the one who is in charge of explaining! (...) Well, in my opinion, to understand is not really the recipient's obligation. I believe that when you convey the information, the responsibility [of being as clear as possible] is yours! (JUCRM34:315-324,336-340)

The excerpts above demonstrate that Juciane was aware of her responsibilities as a writer, and extremely conscious of the need to express her ideas clearly to avoid misinterpretation. Motivated by such considerations -- which also revealed her concern for her interlocutors -- it became her habit to contextualize the subject, to provide all the pertinent information, and to make her goals explicit. These concerns about presenting a comprehensive framework of the situation addressed and about supporting it with relevant details led her to put herself in her interlocutor's shoes and to predict how the message would be received: "It's an inversion, right? It's just like if I had to receive that message!" (JUCRM3/4:1230-1231). In her opinion, it was this regular habit of "inversion" that caused her to check her messages regularly for possible content distortions and communication mismatches.

Juciane's consideration for her interlocutors was also evident in the way she justified her requests, and thanked her co-workers for their efforts in assisting her. This procedure had, however, a subjective origin for she did not like being bossed around and, for this reason, she tried to avoid behaving in that way to others. On the other hand, she believed that by expressing appreciation, she attenuated any "imperative" tone that a message might ultimately contain. The extracts below illustrate such features of her writing:

J: (...) I personally don't like to receive a request... to be asked to do something without knowing the reason, the purpose. Therefore, I'm a little bit worried about picturing the situation, providing the context. (JUCRM1: 363-366)
J: I always have this preoccupation: when a co-worker is going to do something for me — undertake a research, make contacts, for instance — I always show that... that I appraise the attention s/he can give to that particular subject, right? I do that in order to avoid any imperative connotation the process may have. (JUCRM1:318-325)

J: Whenever I have to ask someone something, I always attempt to show my consideration for the treatment that my co-worker can give to any specific piece of information. I always acknowledge the job someone has done or will do to me. I do have such a preoccupation! (JUCRM23: 292-297)

One of the most impressive features of Juciane's e-mail writing style was her willingness to reveal her emotions. As she explained, she just could not disguise her feelings: "It's very, very difficult for instance, to feel something and think... and do something different. It's almost impossible! I see myself as an expressive person! I'm too passionate!" (JUCFM:1439-1444). For this reason, she got "fascinated" (JUCRM23:323) when she perceived any sign of reciprocity on the part of her interlocutors to the way she expressed herself, either through their greetings or through the punctuation they used. She justified her intentional procedure by saying:

J: Well, I try to do it... I try to do it... because when the person receives a message, it is just a piece of paper! There's nobody there! Nobody to say a word, to make a gesture, to display a facial expression, right? And I think it's very important. (...) Then, I wait for the exchange of some information to notice whether it [the message exchange] can be this way. I think it's extremely positive because you can establish a friendship connection. Even though it's a distance friendship! (JUCRM2/3:279037)

Juciane's comments above illustrate her perception of CMC interactions, and the personal way in which she intentionally composed her messages. Although involved in written rather than oral face-to-face communication, she explicitly wanted her correspondence to be more than mere pieces of paper -- or words on the screen -- confined to the function of objectively discussing work-related subjects. She wanted her messages to be tools to mediate communication and to narrow the geographical distance between correspondents. I now realize that Juciane, more than creating personal links with computers or electronic communication systems, aimed at creating links with people, at interacting with her co-workers in a more significant way. Even using impersonal machines and addressing functional issues, she wanted to enact a friendly professional relationship.
with her counterparts.

3.8. My perception of Juciane

Juciane was quite a sensitive interlocutor who revealed, through her expressive discourse, the professional and personal connections she had developed with the activities she performed at work, with the foreign language she used for written communication tasks, and with the electronic tool she operated in order to achieve her work-related objectives. The way she described her involvement with computers in general, and with the e-mail system in particular, encouraged me to speculate on the affective component that emerged from her messages, as well as from the oral accounts of her experiences.

By revisiting our conversations through the transcriptions, and reviewing their details through the recorded audio-tapes, I could recall the ideas we shared, and relive the expressions that brightened her face, especially when we addressed an intriguing topic or were engaged in an energizing discussion. By revisiting the e-mail samples we examined throughout our meetings, my attention was promptly caught by her recurrent use of visual devices -- particularly exclamation marks and capital letters -- to emphasize her ideas or to convey her spontaneous reactions. Her remarkable preoccupation with self-expression returned constantly to my mind as a concrete sign of her sensibility revealed either in her correspondence or in our discussions. If I had to graphically represent the impact of Juciane's comments and of the e-mail messages she was used to composing, I would certainly select an exclamation mark. To me, this symbol metaphorically represented her peculiar way of relating to her correspondents, and of involving herself in professional interactions.

As a self-confessed "passionate" person, Juciane particularly regretted the lack of paralinguistic features that, in opposition to face-to-face interactions, characterized CMC communications (JUCFM:1342-1346). She did not interpret this inherent e-mail feature as a "disadvantage" (JUCFM:1376), though. Nevertheless, the realization of this "peculiarity" (JUCFM:1377) of the electronic medium compelled her to be much more conscious of the need to convey contents explicitly, to avoid being over-assertive, and to explore the resources available in word processing to color her messages with more a personal
nuance. For this reason, when she highlighted certain expressions, such as "THANKS A LOT!!" (jucmsg1.2b) or "HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!!" (jucmsg2/3.2a), she truly aimed at emphasizing her feelings: "When I say 'happy new year', I actually wish that person a wonderful year, a very happy year" (JUCRM2/3:285-286). A similar intention of spicing up her writing could be also noticed by the inclusion of greetings in her interlocutor's native language, such as "Como estas??", or "Gracias y saludos" (jucmsg3/4.1). By attempting to get linguistically closer to her interlocutors, she aimed at establishing a friendly professional relationship, over and above the functional purpose that connected them through the electronic medium.

Considering these features of her e-mail writing style, it was quite understandable that people who replied in the same spirit evoked a positive response. She was particularly impressed when a co-worker transcended the constraints of business correspondence and inserted a more personal comment, or a warmer greeting. However, Juciane was aware that strategies like the ones she used could not fully compensate for the drawbacks of interacting through a medium dominated by written text. As she put it: "Even if we use question marks, exclamation marks, we will never substitute the individual's physical presence" (JUCFM:1482-1485). Reflecting on this statement and on her peculiar way of dealing with her CMC correspondence, I realize that for such an affectionate person -- a passionate exclamation mark, as I have pictured her -- it was not possible to substitute face-screen-face for immediate face-to-face interactions without significant losses. Juciane, therefore, sought to neutralize such losses by placing herself in the messages she composed, and by finding ways of conveying her reactions through whatever strategies might be available.

By portraying Juciane as an exclamation mark, I realize that the passionate way she manipulated CMC at work and reflected upon her professional activities, was not exclusively a matter of developing an ergonomic relationship with machines. The affective component in her messages and the way she interpreted them also showed the way she

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* These Spanish expressions correspond to "How are you doing?", and "Thank you and best regards", respectively.
conceived of her relationship with her fellow human beings which was, in her work environment and in her specific case, established and maintained through the medium of computers.

3.9. Meeting Basílio

My initial contacts with Basílio were mediated by his wife -- a former student of mine -- who told him about my research, and conveyed to me his willingness to participate. Actually, I only met him in person on the first day of our interviews. As Basílio worked in a company located in a district not far from the São Paulo downtown area, but not easily accessible by bus, he and his wife kindly suggested that we should have our meetings at their home every Monday evening. Free from the constraints of an office environment and, without the typical interruptions that occur in the workplace, our conversations were relaxed and lasted, in general, much longer than two hours.

The six meetings we had were marked by Basílio's impressive engagement with the reflective process. He displayed a striking enthusiasm for reporting his experiences, analyzing samples of his electronic correspondence, and jointly discussing issues that we both raised. Our conversations about e-mail messages led him to address routinized and uncommon aspects of the computerized communication enacted within his workplace, as well as individual and generalized practices related to the utilization of foreign languages for business purposes. He revealed, throughout our interviews, an evident preoccupation with mapping out the realm of CMC within his company, in emphasizing its impact on work procedures and processes, and in depicting the culture of his corporation. The recollection of Basílio's reflections as a professional, as an e-mail user, and as a foreign language speaker, enabled me to develop the individual portrait that I present in the following sections.

3.9.1. Professional role

*Well, I have a managerial position within the company.*

(BASII:15-16)

Basílio worked in a multinational corporation that dealt with chemical products, and
had a worldwide network of branches. He occupied a managerial position which was characterized by a certain level of mobility that caused him to be transferred to distinct segments within the organization when and if required. By the time of our interviews, he was assigned to the Auditing Department where he and other co-workers jointly performed the comprehensive role of inspecting the activities developed by other divisions of the company, either in São Paulo or in other South American countries. Due to the nature of his current occupation, he was primarily connected with the headquarters in the United States, but frequently in touch with the offices in Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela. Apart from these branches, the international relationships maintained by his corporation also led him to interact with offices in Europe and Asia on an occasional basis. Consequently, he was involved in a regular communication process which was undertaken in Portuguese, Spanish and, especially, in English.

Basílio revealed a distinctive enthusiasm when he addressed issues regarding his workplace and its specifics. He particularly emphasized the mutual cooperation process that involved all the employees and that led them, for instance, to spontaneously monitor and report possible misuses of the working tools available. According to him, such a policy -- which essentially represented the culture of his organization (BASRM2:1587-1589) -- involved neither an imposed mechanism of control nor a contrived spirit of 'caring and sharing', as I had erroneously assumed at first glance. It did involve, however, an attempt to maintain a congenial and efficient working environment, including the development of cooperation among professionals.

A similar cooperative intent was apparent in the generation and broadcasting of e-mail messages that provided general work-related information, procedural advice related to the company policies and/or to computer applications, or messages that reported specific episodes, such as accidents or particular occurrences involving co-workers around the world. As Basílio explained, this practice aimed not only at helping or providing the community members with useful information, but also at reinforcing special concepts, and reminding them of relevant work-related issues (BASRM2:1655-1662). For instance, by making certain incidents public and by explicitly pointing out pertinent concepts under a peculiar "key learning" heading (BASRM2:2023), the company gave its employees the
opportunity to be in touch with and reflect upon experiences lived by their colleagues. As a result, they were able to acquire some practical knowledge that might be useful in analogous circumstances at work, or even transferred to private life situations. For this reason, Basilio asserted that the exchange of e-mail messages like these did not indicate that people were wasting time (BASRM2:1682-1683). On the contrary, this unique feature of their internal correspondence evidenced a cultural aspect of his company which was appraised and preserved carefully by the whole corporation community.

I interpret the computerized communication practices performed within Basilio's corporation as a way of disseminating specialized and up-dated information, as well as of providing its personnel with relevant episodes of its daily routine that they could reflect upon and learn from. I assume that the essence of such procedures was primarily didactic: on the one hand, they drew attention to work-related issues or reinforced the orientation and policies of the corporation; on the other hand, they aimed at vicariously re-living the experiences of individuals who shared the same or similar work environment. In both cases, the exchange of electronic correspondence could be regarded as an effective learning tool. Basilio confirmed my belief and expanded my thoughts by asserting:

B: (...) And what is the purpose of that? It's to equip you with some relevant information that may help you to make the most appropriate decision, when you find yourself in a similar situation. If you don't have any orientation, any information regarding that specific situation, your chances to make the right decision will be much lower. Therefore, this is the idea. (...) Because, by conveying all these experiences, we really seek to generate a higher level of awareness. (BASRM2:1593-1682)

Such explanations made me consider that, in fact, Basilio was disclosing particular features of the educational policy that guided his corporation. I was particularly intrigued by the nature of such didactic practices and, especially, by Basilio's perception of their impact on professional "awareness". My curiosity naturally led me to focus my attention on this topic throughout the reflective process we undertook together.

3.9.2. Foreign language skills

I'm fluent neither in English nor in Spanish. (BASII:249-250)

Our reflections upon foreign language issues led Basilio to cautiously analyze his
proficiency in English and Spanish by comparing the CMC activities he undertook with the results he was expected to achieve. Expressing the general opinion of his colleagues (BASII:270-272), he explained that the electronic communication practices enacted within his corporation were understood to be "relatively simple" (BASII:269-270). This perception was essentially grounded on the fact that the messages exchanged generally dealt with subjects related to the work of each department or broader themes that affected the corporation as a whole. This being the case, electronic interactions invariably entailed a "quite common terminology" (BASII:259) which made it easier to handle vocabulary and, therefore, to read, write or discuss professional themes (BASII:261-262). According to him, debates about unusual or broader topics, although "rare" (BASII:266-267), could happen sometimes and, in some cases, lead to difficulties either in reading or in presenting written comments and arguments. Considering these features of the computerized correspondence he was involved in at work, Basilio concluded that, although he was able to communicate efficiently and reach the required outcomes (BASII:252-254), he did not regard himself as a "fluent" speaker either in English or in Spanish (BASII:249-250).

Basilio's story as a foreign language learner was built up on what I would identify as affective, instructional and experiential bases. With regard to his learning of English, the affective component was to some extent intertwined with the professional requirements that emerged from the performance of his job activities for, although he was "forced to use English at work", he asserted that, in fact, he "always liked it" (BASRM4:1683-1684). On the other hand, his involvement with Spanish was firstly caused by work-related demands which led him to learn and finally appreciate the language, as he explained:

B: I never liked Spanish! However, due to the necessity of travelling frequently, I was compelled to learn a little bit of it and ended up enjoying it somehow, enjoying the sound of some words. (BASRM4: 1687-1694)

Basilio's instructional background in English included "some specific courses" (BASII:317) he had previously taken. However, he was vague in his reference to these courses and, therefore, I came to the conclusion that his most effective linguistic experience came from his engagement in professional activities that required him to
communicate in the foreign language. Throughout our conversations, Basílio confirmed this supposition by mentioning that work-related interactions, such as written communication, telephone calls, business trips and/or personal contacts provided him with substantial opportunities for learning (BASII:318-323). In this sense, he perceived that the frequent exposure to the flow of message exchange implicitly fostered language learning, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition and use, as illustrated by the comments that follow:

B: Ah... what I see is that when you have the possibility of exchanging messages more frequently with many interlocutors, you somehow end up enlarging your knowledge about the foreign language, right? And you notice that – for instance, the way Americans write, or the way a Latin or a South American writes in English, or another person... a person from England, or from any other part of Europe, or the way a person from the Orient writes – you notice that there are certain things that... that are different. And you end up learning many things because each one may use a word differently. Therefore, I think that it [the frequent exchange of messages] helps you enrich your vocabulary somehow. (BASRM4:1370-1383)

B: Regarding English, I think that... I think that the most relevant contribution, at least in my specific case – perhaps if you talked to someone else, s/he would have a slightly different opinion – but I think that the more you are exposed to the language on a daily basis, the more you deal with various native speakers who have their own communication styles, the more you can learn. Because sometimes, each one uses a different vocabulary. (BASRM4:1651-1663)

These extracts emphasize Basílio's perception of the intimate relationship between practice and learning, as well as underscoring the importance he attributed to vocabulary as a significant aspect of language manipulation. In addition to the comments above, he also mentioned that the use of specific e-mail devices -- such as dictionary and spelling check -- also had a positive impact on the way he dealt with the meaning and orthography of certain lexical items and, consequently, they promoted foreign language development. He illustrated his opinion by saying:

B: And there are... I think that there are two important e-mail devices that may also help you. By using the first, you can check the spelling – if you want it. Therefore, it's also a way for you to perceive... "Well, why have I made a mistake? Oh, because I've forgotten the 'm' here!" (...) And the
As previously mentioned, Basílio was engaged in an intense communication process that connected him to the other international branches of his corporation and that was predominately undertaken in English. He explained that, within his company, competence in this foreign language did not constitute a prerequisite; however, if this kind of specialized knowledge was not essentially required, it was certainly "desirable" (BASII: 406). According to him, depending on the employee's position within the corporation hierarchy, a lack of foreign language competence would sooner or later interfere with the performance of certain activities and, consequently, with his/her career development. He illustrated his statement by referring to his own situation:

B: If I didn't have a minimum knowledge of English, and if I didn't have a minimum knowledge of Spanish, I wouldn't perform well... ah... I would be able to perform my activities but... ah... within certain limitations. And I wouldn't achieve the results I've been reaching with the -- quotation -- "minimum" knowledge I have of English and Spanish. (BASII:387-394)

Basílio pointed out that, due to his company's worldwide connections, English had reached the status of "official language" (BASII:276-279). This being the case, it was necessarily used in formal documents (such as in reports), or in messages sent or copied to international professionals who were not able to understand any other language. Nevertheless, considering the place of Brazil within the South American context, it was understandable that a similar emphasis had been gradually given to the Spanish language.

In discussing foreign language utilization within the realm of CMC practices, Basílio explained that, although writing in English still represented the general procedure adopted for international correspondence, he had started to perceive a sort of "flexibility" (BASRM4:646) in incorporating more than one linguistic code in the same electronic message. According to him, depending on the context and on the recipient(s), it was
possible to find messages that displayed greetings in the interlocutor's native language, or that were written in a mixture of Portuguese, Spanish and/or English (BASRM4:637-679). However, Basílio made it clear that electronic interactions which involved exclusively Brazilian professionals were conducted wholly in Portuguese, as he emphasized: "Within Brazil, Portuguese is Portuguese. Period!" (BASFM:71-72).

From his perspective, code switching, or the use of different languages in combination, was a characteristic that emerged from the use of CMC for professional purposes. In his opinion, since the whole emphasis in an e-mail correspondence was on efficient communication, the particular language being used was no longer "too important" (BASRM4:643-645). Rather, the leading purpose of communication was focused on "the information and its content" (BASRM3:76) and, on the other hand, on the selection of the communication medium/media that more adequately suited the situation in hand (BASII:1130-1134). Given this order of priorities, grammatical accuracy did not represent a major consideration either, as he illustrates in the following excerpt:

B: So, it [e-mail] is an efficient mechanism. And, due to that, the more it is used by everybody, the faster it becomes... because nobody is afraid of writing! And there's one important thing: nobody is worried about... ah... let's say... about writing everything accurately. The important thing is to send the message. Therefore, the quantity of grammar agreement mistakes, the quantity of typos that you may find is very big! But nobody is... it's not a preoccupation, it's not a concern. (BASII:1272-1287)

Basílio's comments make it explicit that the content of the messages exchanged was definitely more relevant than the form or, depending on the work-related situation, more important than the linguistic code(s) through which it was conveyed. His strong conviction about the nature of the change brought about by the use of e-mail led Basílio to sum up his argument clearly and unambiguously: "Nowadays, this language taboo was defeated!" (BASRM4:654-655).

Reflecting upon the arguments presented by Basílio, I realized that, to some extent, a sort of linguistic hegemony has been challenged. This should not be seen primarily in terms of switching from one particular linguistic code to another, since English is still the main language used for international business communication. Rather, I conclude that the
hegemony Basílio referred to as having been gradually surmounted related mainly to the previous preoccupation with grammatical accuracy. From this point of view, we can say that the main focus on message generation has shifted from formal features of writing to the transmission of information in a clear and efficient way. This tendency pointed out by Basílio particularly intrigued me and led me to wonder whether content and form could be dissociated in such a way that it might be possible to convey a message fluently without the need for fully articulated form, in writing as well as in speech. Certainly, it led me to wonder to what extent the current emphasis on matching rhetorical functions with a limited set of grammatical exponents would remain a central feature of English for professional purposes instruction.

3.9.3. Computer skills

To me, the story of computers has started within the company.

(BASII:447-448)

Basílio’s development from computer literacy to computer expertise coincided with his engagement in a demanding professional career and was essentially motivated by the need to search for more efficient work-related strategies. Actually, his involvement with computers started around 1980 when, by working at the Finance Department, he was in charge of a particular project that not only led him to be introduced to such machines, but also to implement them in that division of his corporation.

Basílio asserted that the utilization of computers was almost completely disseminated throughout his organization. He estimated that practically 99% of the employees of the Brazilian head office had one machine available to be used on an individual basis, and that only 5% or 10% of them still shared a common printer (BASII: 476-482). As he described it, all the computers were connected to a mainframe, and equipped with basic software that included a spreadsheet, a word processor, some specific applications related to the professional’s activities within his/her department, and e-mail which connected all national and international employees of the corporation together. Computers performed, therefore, a crucial role in his workplace and, for this reason, they
became indispensable for task accomplishment:

B: Therefore, computers have become working tools: the same way you have a pen, you need to have your computer and your printer. (...) They are part of your working tools. (BASIL:472-474,489)

Basílio was quite assertive when he claimed that he did not see himself as an expert either in computing or in electronic mail (BASFM:1462-1464), which he had been using for about eight years. Nevertheless, he explained that he could not do anything without a computer (BASFM:1466-1467). In speculating about the implications of this statement, he commented:

B: Well, I... I don't know if it happens because I think very fast, and when I write my thoughts down in hand, I... I usually get lost. However, when I use a computer, I can write smoothly. (...) You know, I'm used to computers and I like to operate them. I've developed a certain level of acquaintance with them, although I'm not an expert. But I have a certain level of familiarity. On the contrary, some people don't! They don't have the necessary agility and... and they don't like computers!
M: Or, many times, they're not interested in exploring and applying computer devices for the accomplishment of their most elementary tasks, right?
B: Oh, yeah. And, as a consequence, the utilization of e-mail may be affected by this behaviour. Because, if they're afraid or don't like to be in touch with computers, they'll think that using e-mail is much more difficult. (BASFM:1469-1471,1483-1496)

The excerpt above illustrates Basílio's empathy with computers whose inherent speed he perceived as perfectly compatible with the rhythm of his thoughts and writing. These comments revealed that he had developed quite a close relationship and a high level of acquaintance with computers, contrary to the experience of some of his co-workers. Referring to his own expertise compared with the lack of skill of others he had observed in the workplace, he humorously explained:

B: As I usually say, the biggest trouble with computers... right?... per se... with computers per se, regards what there is between the keyboard and the chair! As for the rest, it works out. I believe that everything depends on who is sitting there, on the chair, dealing with the keyboard. (BASFM: 1393-1400)
Basilio's comment made me reflect upon issues regarding the connection between individuals and machines, as well as upon his particular perception of it. Making allowance for his sense of humor, I gathered that his intention was not to assert that computers could never fail. Rather, I assume that he wanted to emphasize the importance of developing a positive attitude towards such tools in order to learn how to use them to the best advantage. If we compare this last excerpt with the one previously quoted, it seems most likely that he wanted to draw attention to the fact that reactions of fear or anxiety might disrupt some professionals' performance. As a result, they would be prevented from exploring the potential of certain working tools and, ultimately, of achieving the standard of work that was expected of them. Basilio's comments led me to reflect on human-computer interface issues, a significant topic that may possibly impact on interpersonal interactions undertaken through computers.

3.10. My perception of Basilio

Basilio was quite a cooperative and responsive interlocutor who displayed a remarkable readiness either to introduce relevant issues for discussion or to provide me with more detailed comments on points that had been previously raised. From the very first interview, he impressed me with his engagement in the reflective process and with his concern about presenting or interpreting his opinions grounded on the experiences he lived at work. By listening to the audio-tapes and re-reading the transcriptions of our meetings, I was able to review, many times, the long conversations we had had and, as a result, recall his description of his company and its culture, and the impact of CMC activities on his workplace, as well as the connections he had perceived between electronic communication and foreign language practices. The more I immersed myself in our conversations, the more I confirmed my initial view of him as a judicious analyst. By envisioning him this way, I could then understand his peculiar conversational style, as well as his contemplative approach to his professional duties and their implications.

My perception of Basilio as an analyst was undoubtedly influenced by his calm way of articulating thoughts and by his reflective pauses before resuming his arguments. He selected his words with care so that they expressed his viewpoint precisely, and it was
clear that everything he said derived from lived personal and professional experience. My view of Basilio was influenced by the interesting way he exploited digressions in order to deepen reflections and reach firmer conclusions. His skill as an analyst was apparent in the way he manipulated the knowledge about his company to provide me with a tangible view of what was or was not relevant in his workplace.

Apart from displaying these special conversational skills, Basilio also took care to distinguish his own accounts from the ones he believed I could interpret as based on impressions of the corporate community as a whole. He made this purpose explicit by regularly stating whose perception he was referring to, as illustrated by the extracts below:

I'm not telling you my own opinion: I'm telling you what happens in the whole company, in general terms. (BASII:271-272)

... and when I say "I", I contemplate what happens within the whole company. (BASRM1:208-209)

... I think that the most relevant contribution, at least in my specific case -- perhaps if you were talking to someone else, s/he would have a slightly different opinion... (BASRM4:1651-1654)

Maybe if you interviewed a hundred people... they would have different opinions. However, I... really... I think that it [agility] is fantastic! I don't know if I think this way because I know that through e-mail I will get a solution. (...) But... maybe other people would think about... what? About the... about the... about the contents? No, no... I don't know! I can't think of any other aspect! (BASFM:1132-1147)

As shown by the quotations above, Basilio's preoccupation with clarifying the scope of the opinions he presented and of identifying whose voice he was expressing or whose voices he was amalgamating into his speech disclosed another trait of the cautious analyst that I recognized him to be. Nevertheless, by speculating on this singular feature of his discourse, I perceived that, in spite of showing an individual characteristic of his, it might be the result of the job he was doing, or it might reflect the requirements of the department he was assigned to. As he pointed out, within the auditing division, professionals were expected to make it clear whose position they were expressing: whether it was an institutional opinion, or one of their own (BASRM3:1655-1674).

By portraying Basilio as a circumspect analyst -- not as a mere reporter of his own
experiences or a spectator of his work-related environment -- I realized that he presented his arguments clearly without imposing his point of view. As a meticulous interpreter of his own practices, Basilio guided me carefully through the paths of his experience, helping me envision the specifics of his professional landscape and, in the process, enlarging my understanding about the business territory he knew so well.

3.11. Beyond experiences and initial perceptions: a composite depiction

The portraits described above clearly indicate that my expedition into the business territory was not a solitary adventure undertaken by a single lonely explorer. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, I could rely on five native travel guides who enriched my views of the land to be explored with distinct but, to some extent, complementary perspectives and perceptions. Reflecting on their reports of their job activities, and on their comments upon foreign language learning and performance, as well as on their recollection of introduction and relationship with computers and e-mail systems, I could conceive of these guides as inhabitants of the target region, and envision the practices and processes in which they were currently engaged in their workplaces.

All of my guides provided me with interesting information that helped me depict them as professionals, as foreign language learners and speakers, and as CMC users. These were the parameters on which, considering the purposes of my inquiry, I focused the individual portraits presented in the previous sections. The task of designing these portraits enabled me to make connections between the circumstances of space, place and time revealed by the personal and professional stories explored by the participants in our meetings. By making such connections, I came to realize that their practical knowledge was shaped by and developed through the links that they tacitly established between past and recent experiences, lived inside and outside the boundaries of their workplaces. Hence, by perceiving that their professional expertise both emerged from and resulted in a set of contextual features, I was able to transcend the description of practical activities and be in touch with the specifics of their professional landscapes. Moreover, I realized that, although deriving from a number of distinct professional backgrounds, some features of their landscapes were interwoven and shared a common area within the business territory. The
recognition of this area enabled me to frame a composite depiction (Moustakas, 1990:68) of these practitioners, a depiction whose features I present in this concluding segment of the chapter.

By crafting the professionals' individual portraits, I was able to show that each one of them impressed me with at least one remarkable feature which I metaphorically explored in order to convey my preliminary view of the individuals and my initial interpretation of their experiences. Specifically, I was fascinated by José Luiz's detached attachment to his workplace and job activities; by Luciano's concerns about time and about "creating" time; by Paulo César's deference to distinct areas of expertise and his ultimate goal to use "an elegant English"; by Juciane's exclamations and passionate way of expressing herself in her computerized correspondence; and by Basílio's analytical way of voicing individual or generalized opinions, and of interpreting his corporation practices in the light of its cultural features.

Apart from such individual characteristics, all of my guides contributed insights and ideas that, taken from a heuristic perspective (Moustakas, 1990:13,68), led me to interpret the essence, qualities, and meaning of the core phenomenological theme (van Manen, 1990:79) that emerged from and permeated our meetings: the impact of practice on learning. This theme constituted the common feature that drew all the participants' landscapes together, and provided the essential foundation on which I could develop a composite portrait.

Their experience as professionals, foreign language learners/speakers and computer users seemed to strengthen the participants' conviction that learning was a situated process (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991), based on their engagement in practical activities, and characterized by significant interactions between knowledge and experience. The stories they told indicated that some aspects of their work impacted positively on their level of technical and/or linguistic knowledge, bringing to their landscapes moments of awakening (Sacks, 1973) and transformation. For example, Luciano experienced an awakening during his first trip abroad which constituted a turning point in terms of his computer expertise and, particularly, foreign language proficiency. Transformation was a feature of the process that made José Luiz demystify computers, that
induced Paulo César and Basílio to acquire computer skills, and that caused Juciane to become a regular user of the e-mail systems whose operational and technical features she was used to dealing with in her previous job.

In addition to awakening and transformation, the increasing engagement in activities which required the participants to rely on computers in order to accomplish more and more intricate tasks led them to develop peculiar perceptions of the human-computer interface. In this regard, José Luiz emphasized the importance that computers had assumed in his personal and professional life by humorously imagining himself with "some chips all over [his] body... in the future" (JLRM3:1186-1187); Paulo César referred to computers as his "cybemetic co-workers" (PCII:347); Juciane perceived the CMC systems she sold and manipulated as her "old friends" (JUCII:399); and Basílio revealed his empathy with computers by relating their inherent speed to the rhythm of his thoughts and writing (BASFM:1469-1471). Interestingly enough, Luciano did not mention his ergonomic relationship with computers. His comments were predominantly focused on the overall features of e-mail systems, as well as on the role computers played in the performance of the activities enacted by his organization. Nevertheless, even without admitting to any close personal involvement, he stressed that "everything" in his company depended on such machines (LUCII:515-516).

The experience of communicating in English through the medium of computers reinforced these professionals' perception that learning is a situated process essentially fostered by practice. Although interpreting their past foreign language learning experiences differently, all the participants had some sort of formal instruction at the elementary and high school levels, and they took special courses in English at a later stage in their careers. In their opinion, however, the continuous exposure to work-related situations requiring them to interact in English represented their most effective source of language development, particularly in terms of vocabulary.

From the professionals' perspective, vocabulary was conceived as a significant aspect of foreign language use which directly impacted on reading and writing skills. Nevertheless, although all of them recognized its relevance and some of them even pointed out certain occasional difficulties, they showed different levels of awareness of their lexical
competence, which ranged from a kind of indifference to a more active concern. On the one hand, José Luiz believed he had reached a sufficient level of linguistic proficiency to ensure that the learning of new lexical items would occur effortlessly, "through the course of life" (JLFM:625). Paulo César, on the other hand, was particularly concerned about the vocabulary gaps that sometimes interfered with his communication, and he was aware of still having to work on this aspect of his linguistic competence. Juciane and Basílio had a relaxed attitude towards vocabulary, regarding it, respectively, as a means of expressing ideas clearly and of dealing with specific work-related terminology. Luciano, although recognizing vocabulary as a troublesome area, did not seem to be worried about it, since he felt that his foreign language performance was adequate for his current professional needs.

Regardless of any foreign language problems that the participants might have, all of them believed that they could communicate at the level required for the efficient performance of their jobs. The fact that they were able to undertake a wide range of activities and to achieve good results reinforced these professionals' belief that practice somehow promoted language learning and development. In the case of José Luiz, Luciano and Basílio, this argument served as a justification for not taking additional language courses, although they recognized the role that such courses might perform in helping them to achieve an even higher level of proficiency.

In addition to the connection between practice and proficiency, time availability was, undoubtedly, another consideration that made the participants reluctant to be enrolled in a concurrent ESP program -- even when the corporation offered it in the workplace (as in Paulo César and Juciane's case), or encouraged their staff to take it in a private language institute (as in Basílio's organization). Sometimes, it was quite hard to accommodate the course timetable to a fixed work schedule, involving frequent meetings and business trips. For this reason, such courses might become frustrating experiences in terms of continuity and content development -- as Paulo César and Juciane both pointed out. According to their specific experience, some ESP courses, although addressing business issues, tend to be disassociated from the practitioner's own work-related environment and needs. This being the case, they lacked authenticity and might generate
either disinterest or feelings of stagnation — as Paulo César claimed.

Such considerations made me think about the possibility of providing fully contextualized foreign language programs, tailor-made to suit the needs of specific individuals, especially those who are convinced that practice on the job is the best way to learn. Under such circumstances, I believe that reflections on the language acquisition process, as well as on experiences lived at work should be encouraged as part of the language program, in addition to careful content selection which would be primarily focused on the professionals' authentic needs, and on the features of the activities they actually perform at work. However, I cannot develop my thoughts on this topic without having a more comprehensive picture of the business setting. For this reason, having introduced my guides, I will now enter the territory itself with them, and start to explore the characteristics of its geography.
CHAPTER 4

GUIDES AND GATES:

ENTERING AND EXPLORING THE BUSINESS TERRITORY

The perceived world is not an immediate, unfounded realm, but that which appears to us through our experience of it.

McCoy, 1993

Exploring the business territory was a challenging adventure that I shared with five native travel guides who escorted me through its several routes. Throughout our conversations, by recalling some episodes of their personal stories, and reflecting upon their work-related activities and experiences, these guides helped me understand the specifics of their professional landscapes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995), and of their community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In a more restricted sense, they also enabled me to design their individual and composite portraits (Moustakas, 1990), which were presented in the previous chapter. By drawing their individual profiles, I attempted to make explicit the roles these guides performed within their companies, as well as some of their perceptions regarding foreign language issues, computer skills, and CMC in the workplace. In shaping their composite portrait, I addressed the impact of practice on learning: the core phenomenological theme (van Manen, 1990) that had emerged from our joint reflections. The main objective of that chapter, then, was to introduce the co-participants in my expedition, and to characterize them as inhabitants of the target land.

In this present chapter, my aim is to enlarge my view of the business territory by contemplating some peculiarities of its geography. This chapter is, therefore, about the three companies my guides work for. In other words, it is about the three metaphorical gates through which I entered the region to be explored. Each corporation is naturally unique in many of its attributes. Nevertheless, despite the differences between the companies, each one has provided me with insights that, being complementary to some extent, have allowed me to present a more comprehensive picture of the entire business
scene. Therefore, understanding the distinctive characteristics of each corporation and the extent of their CMC practices constitutes the account of the explored territory I want to address in this chapter. In order to achieve such an objective, I first describe each corporation separately, by presenting its field of activity, and some features of its structural organization and internal culture, as well as its communication process. By merging the perceptions of the territory obtained in this way, I then highlight some aspects of its geography, and discuss the specifics of the landscape as an educational site. Throughout this chapter, I also comment on some of the feelings and reactions I had when I passed through those entrance gates, and on my attempts to make my own meaning out of the various partial views provided by each one of them.

4.1. Entering the first gate

4.1.1. A house may not be a home

The first company I visited was located in a mixed neighborhood in the greater São Paulo area where residential and commercial buildings co-existed in an almost perfect harmony. It was located in a middle-sized, two-floor house on the corner of two quite noisy streets. The front door and windows were almost always closed -- not only for security reasons, I guessed, but also to avoid the loud sound of the heavy traffic outside. The façade was quite ordinary and discreet: only the name of the company -- displayed in greyish-white metal letters -- and several cars parked in the open front yard indicated that, as opposed to the surrounding residences, that one was an office. The interior still preserved its domestic character, suggesting that the original design had been just adapted to accommodate the standard office furniture to which computers, modems, and printers had been added. Except for the two posters in the reception area (originally, the hall of the house), and for various business trade magazines available next to a couch, no other detail offered a clue about the field of activity of that company or about the nature of its business. Seen from the outside as well as from the inside, there was nothing to reveal that such an unpretentious house contained the Brazilian representatives of a well-known Finnish corporation that also had offices in the United States and Canada.
José Luiz and Luciano were partners in this enterprise, which certainly brought that quiet house to life. Protected by its walls, both they and a small number of co-workers shared rooms and responsibilities in a quite relaxed work-related atmosphere. They were co-workers and not employees -- this was the impression I had from my conversations with José Luiz and Luciano, as well as from my personal observations, and from informal chats with some staff members, while I was waiting for these two professionals to arrive at the office or to be ready for our meetings.

Although making our appointments in advance, according to José Luiz's and Luciano's schedule and at their convenience, many times I had to wait more than one hour to actually start our conversations. Waiting for them was, at the very beginning, a boring and frustrating experience that made me wonder whether they were really interested in my research -- although they had spontaneously agreed on and committed themselves to it. However, I soon realized that this first negative impression had to be revised and contextualized. The central issue was not one of being interested or not, but one of attempting to accommodate an additional activity to a fixed and demanding timetable. In addition to that, I realized that in a business environment, the notion of punctuality seemed to have a different connotation, compared to the one I had acquired by being a teacher. As a teacher, I was used to actually beginning and concluding my classes strictly on time. Perhaps for this reason, I was initially reluctant to accept that the business territory might have a unique conception of what being on time is all about. Nevertheless, waiting was also part of my learning about that target setting, and I soon understood that I had to find a way of not only coping with it, but also taking advantage of it, for the purposes of my investigation. Such a perception helped me to overcome that uncomfortable initial feeling, and to treat my waiting time as an important part of the research. After all, if José Luiz and Luciano were not often punctual, both of them were certainly willing participants who were never worried about finishing our conversations on time either.

Sitting on that couch between the reception desk and the front door provided a strategic location for me to observe the company from a new and unfamiliar perspective. In fact, I could have learned a lot just by being there for two months, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening, watching the staff members' actions, and
contemplating the way they interacted with one another. By playing the unexpected role of a front door observer, I could absorb details about the lifeblood of the organization and, then, enlarge my vicarious view of it. The performance of that role, allied with the one of an interviewer, gave me an opportunity to better understand the implications of José Luiz’s and Luciano’s comments regarding their professional practices.

4.1.2. An office may be seen as a home sometimes

José Luiz and Luciano talked about their corporation with the familiarity and typical confidence of those who not only knew the superficial details of the business they run, but are also acquainted with every single aspect of its organizational structure. Presenting their company and commenting on its characteristics constituted, therefore, quite an easy task for its owners who objectively described it as an engineering enterprise that dealt with cellulose and paper processes. Broadly speaking, José Luiz and Luciano’s corporation was oriented towards industrial automation systems and instruments, and it was responsible for selling and installing equipment, as well as for developing projects and providing customers with continuous assistance and maintenance. According to their description, the present structure of the company comprised three leading sections: the Sales Department, which was primarily managed by José Luiz; the Technical Department, which was predominately handled by Luciano; and the Financial-Administrative Department, whose supervision was shared by both of them. Regarding this latter area, they were also supported by another organization that was in charge of their accounts and personnel issues.

Although they had defined it as a small enterprise, both of them seemed to be proud of its progressive growth, as well as concerned with the direction of its evolution. For this reason, they had already put in perspective the "intention to expand its activities in order to reach other market segments, as the chemical and the electrical ones" (LUCII: 177-179). In this sense, they revealed a quite clear perception that growing in size, as well as diversifying the scope of their business might imply the sharing of more responsibilities, and possibly generate further structural subdivisions (LUCII:157-158). Furthermore, they were also aware that the nature of such subdivisions would inevitably emerge from the direction of the company’s development (LUCII:323-324).
The routine that characterized this company did not seem to be very complicated even to an observer like me, who was not accustomed to the conventions of the commercial milieu. The staff members' habitual movements and the way they jointly performed their tasks gave me the impression of being in a friendly environment where working as a team -- in "partnership" (LUCRM2:921-918, LUCFM:1136-1141) -- constituted one of its most noticeable attributes.

My immediate impression was that such a partnership seemed to be a spontaneous internal feature, resulting from interactions among professionals within this particular office, and fostered through the connections between them and their international counterparts. Nevertheless, through conversations and observations, I came to realize that the togetherness that tacitly emerged from such interpersonal relationships had more complex origins than I had perceived at first glance. Reflecting upon that, José Luiz and Luciano commented:

JL: Regarding the Finnish corporation and its representatives, we [the Brazilian office] have managed to reach a position of a team, and to impose ourselves as a team. Therefore, everybody knows that talking to one of us means talking to everybody: everybody is involved and can make a decision. (...) You know, we are a small company; therefore, we have to be very synchronized: everybody helps one another, and everybody does what has to be done. (JLRM1:619-621,625-627)

L: The company -- just to give you a final idea -- the company is a small business, it's a representation business. Therefore, we have to be an interactive group exactly because there are not too many people and there are not... departments, many departments...
M: ... very isolated departments, right?
L: ... isolated departments that would demand us to have many people taking care of isolated issues. Therefore, most part of the staff has multiple duties. (LUCII:315-322)

The excerpts above highlight an interesting association between the small size of the company and the resulting necessity to work as a team in order to promote interaction among all co-workers, to establish harmony among their multiple activities, and to integrate all departments. As José Luiz emphasized, partnership, in addition to being the distinctive way the corporation was used to performing, seemed to be responsible for the reputation
that it had earned within the larger Finnish organization.

In considering this work environment, the concept of partnership emerged in a number of different ways. José Luiz, for instance, emphasized its functional aspect by contrasting it with individuality, and asserting that the team spirit they encouraged did not detract from the potential every professional had to perform certain job activities independently. He illustrated this point by mentioning a procedure related to e-mail practices:

JL: (…) We work as a team but we attempt to preserve the individuality: each one of us may decide to write a message and, if s/he considers it is the case, send a copy of it to other co-workers. (JLII:317-319)

On the other hand, Luciano seemed to be the one who was more focused on interpreting partnership from the administrator's viewpoint. According to him, the notion embedded in the team approach was also based on organizational principles. He made this perception explicit when he explained to me:

L: ... there is this urge to interaction because it's a small company and it has to work out. Therefore, the staff members need to learn the job of one another, even due to replacements, to vacation... to vacation replacements... or when someone is working on a specific project, I mean, when someone is 100% involved in it, and another one has to perform similar activities in a distinct project. (LUCII:98-105)

As shown by the excerpt above, Luciano presented the interactive feature that characterized his corporation by stressing its practical purposes, and by associating it with the size of his organization. From his perspective, promoting interaction among professionals in a small company, and fostering inter-departmental cooperation made it easier to replace personnel, not only when people were on vacation (as he mentioned), but also during temporary absences caused by business trips or training periods abroad (as I could personally witness). From the administrator's point of view, therefore, Luciano emphasized that, in order to understand the features of interaction within his company, it was necessary to consider the nature of the company itself, as well as the nature of its personnel. He made this point by asserting:
L: Well, it's a characteristic of this organization. It's an engineering company, and not a company where you're dealing with unprepared people who force you to keep on saying: "You have to do this and that!" No, it's not our case! Right? You're dealing with an engineering company where each one knows what his/her tasks are. \( LUCFM:1103-1111 \)

In my opinion, the features of interaction in this organization might also be explored by taking into consideration the nature of the communication process it developed, and the nature of the tools available for this purpose (i.e., telephone, fax, regular mail, and e-mail). According to José Luiz and Luciano, their company was involved in an intense process of communication that interconnected them with their customers, as well as with the other international offices in Finland, the United States, and Canada. In general, interactions with their Brazilian clients -- which were not linked to any CMC network yet (JLII: 252-253) -- were predominantly undertaken through personal contacts (JLII:262-263), telephone calls or faxes (JLII:256-265,390-396; LUCII:539-548), and sometimes through the regular mail (JLRM2:372-377). On the other hand, correspondence with offices in other countries was basically conducted by electronic mail (JLII:267-269). Luciano justified this procedure by explaining:

L: We prefer to use e-mail due to its technical quality of conveying information. When you send a message through the computer, it's 100% guaranteed that the information will reach the other side...
M: ... the way you want it to be.
L: ... complete, exactly the way it was sent. It reaches there... and it may be reproduced exactly the way it is. When using the fax, there's always the possibility of distortion or of... troubles with the printing quality. This fact justifies our preference for computers, for using the network. On one other hand, there's also the cost: using computers is cheaper than using faxes or making telephone calls. You know, on the phone, it's always the same story -- and this is also the reason why one prefers to use the fax -- you avoid the "Good morning", "How have you been?", "How is the weather there?", etc, etc, etc.
M: You mean, you can go straight to the point?
L: You go straight to the point, solve the problem, and that's it.
M: And both faxes and computers may document the topic discussed.
L: Exactly.
M: So both of them serve the purpose...
L: ... the advantage...
M: ... of keeping documentation.
L: Exactly! \( LUCII:650-675 \).
Throughout our conversations, both José Luiz and Luciano referred to the absence of guidelines to determine the selection of the communication medium to be used in each situation. The excerpt mentioned above suggests that cost, quality of reception, and need for documentation might be the features to be considered when choosing a tool; however, such a choice was more likely dependent on the context and on the kind of information to be conveyed (LUCRM1:460-478). Under such circumstances, all devices might be actually used in any negotiation, either in isolation or on a complementary basis (JLRM1:1094-1102, JLRM2:355-358,397-405, LUCRM2:34-38).

Considering the internal communication process, computers constituted the medium predominantly selected. Connected to the same network, Brazilian professionals and their international counterparts could, then, interact more easily, more quickly, and more often. Within the Brazilian office, though, interpersonal communications were never undertaken through e-mail. In this company, the small number of professionals did not justify the cost of accessing a server in Finland, in order to send a message to a co-worker in the office next door (JLRM1:91-97). Nevertheless, in accordance with the teamwork spirit that characterized this company, almost all of the electronic messages received were printed and shared with the people involved in the same project. Such a procedure, therefore, fostered the partnership that remarkably distinguished this corporation.

Following partly from the arguments presented by Luciano and José Luiz, and partly from my own observations and informal conversations I was able to have with some of the staff members, I came to the conclusion that interaction and partnership were two closely connected concepts that helped to explain the tacit inner force that kept all the professionals working together and focused on common goals. In the case of this company, interaction and partnership seemed to emerge spontaneously, rather than being imposed from above. Linked together by the team spirit, the employees became co-workers who not only shared duties and responsibilities, collaborated in developing policies, and helped one another in solving problems; they also shared some leisure time as, for example, when they joined in the Wednesday evening barbecues – which seemed to be a regular feature of the company’s social life.
4.2. Entering the second gate

4.2.1. From shopping mall to business mall

The second company I visited was located in a large business complex that accommodated some of the major enterprises that operate in São Paulo. Compared to the Brazilian conventional architecture, this complex presented a quite innovative concept: from the outside, its tall buildings and the convention centre seemed to be spread out on the ground, and carefully kept in isolation from one another. Underground, however, all of them were connected by a shopping mall where, among other things, business people or visitors could easily buy trendy products, select a newspaper or the latest bestseller, get a last minute gift, rent a car, have a good meal, or stop for a quick snack or some coffee. Although situated in a neighborhood which was really far from the downtown area, this business centre offered a wide variety of facilities, such as public transportation services, shuttle buses (provided by some companies for their employees), a spacious parking lot, and even a heliport. Because of its location, and the organizations that had moved in, as well as the facilities offered, this complex was regarded as the most up-to-date business centre in the city.

The corporation that Paulo César and Luciane worked for was established in one of those buildings, on the seventh floor. Despite the impressive layout of the whole complex, their organization did not have any particularly sophisticated features: its decoration and furniture were very simple in form and style, and its staff members seemed to behave quite informally, either among themselves or with visitors. The special feature of this office was revealed by the interior floor plan. Inside the company area, the private offices and some meeting rooms were mainly located along the sides, utilizing some of the window walls but allowing, through the others, the continuous presence of natural daytime light. The central area was completely subdivided by detachable low wooden divisions that created narrow hallways, as well as small rooms shared by groups of employees. This interesting arrangement could simultaneously provide privacy to those who were sitting at their desks, as well as a comprehensive view of the office when they stood up or walked along the aisles. Actually, it was more like a maze, full of similar pathways that made it
difficult for visitors, like me, to find their way in and out. Possibly because of this interior arrangement, each guest was met at the main door, and escorted to his or her specific destination.

Compared to the company previously described, this one was a larger corporation that, consequently, had more rigid security measures. For this reason, the main entrance door was always kept closed, and guests could hardly ever gain access to the offices without being announced. For this purpose, there was a receptionist who was in charge of identifying them, recording the reason for their visit, giving them a visitor's tag, and announcing their arrival through the internal telephone system. In this organization -- just like many other ones in São Paulo, lately -- the reception was not an open area but, strictly, a waiting room.

As in the case of the previous company I visited, I also had to spend some time in the reception area, waiting for Paulo César and Juciane to be ready for our interviews. Once again, I had the opportunity to reflect on my notion of punctuality, and to confirm my impression that, in business settings, it really had quite a different meaning. Although I visited the corporation early in the morning, when I could witness the staff members' arrival at work, as well as being there late in the afternoon, when I could observe them leaving, my viewpoint was much more restricted this time. If on this occasion I was more sensitive to the possibilities of exploring the reception area as a strategic location (as I had done in the first company); on the other hand, the environmental features of this workplace prevented me from being in closer contact with the firm's employees. In this organization, therefore, I could not fully perform the role of a front door observer and, through it, take advantage of my waiting time in order to enrich my view of this corporation and its personnel. Contrary to the unexpected opportunity I had in the first corporation, my perception of this workplace was mostly grounded on my interlocutors' words and on their interpretations of professional practices and their implications.

4.2.2. Dealing with technology, selling technology

Paulo César and Juciane introduced their company with a vivid enthusiasm that clearly showed their identification with the environment they worked in, and their
commitment to the activities they performed. According to their description, their corporation dealt with outsourcing services, with system development and distribution, and with customized applications, as well as with personal communication and data exchange processes (e-mail and EDI, respectively). Broadly speaking, its present internal structure comprised three main departments: Technical Support, Administrative, and Electronic Commerce. These sections were variously involved in issues related to the applications the company developed, to the products it sold, and to the maintenance it provided its customers with.

According to Paulo César, the company was "100% Brazilian" (PCFM:176,185), but it had been developing "operational or technological partnerships with international and multinational corporations" (PICM:428-431, PCFM:187-188). Regarding these partnerships, their organization was responsible for distributing in Brazil the electronic communication system produced by an American corporation that had a worldwide network of branches. This trading partnership agreement with the American organization was established in 1986, and its development was essentially supported by the Electronic Commerce Department.

Due to this association, the Brazilian company had developed an intensive computerized communication link that interconnected its seven national offices, the head office of its partner in the United States, the international branches and representatives of this American organization, and some of its major clients. Through this communication channel, it was possible to solve problems and doubts about specific applications, and discuss processes and general issues related to the electronic communication system as a whole. In this sense, the same product distributed by the company was also used as a working tool to promote information exchange and connection among the parts involved in each project or negotiation.

The communication process developed by Paulo César and Juciane's organization actually involved the utilization of several devices, such as telephone, fax, conference calls, voice mail, and e-mail (JUCFM:104-106; JUCM:143-152; PCFM:168-171; PCRM:945-951). Their e-mail system included a broader communication network undertaken in English which connected them to the head office of the American corporation, and to the
various international representatives and customers. In addition, their company also maintained an internal electronic channel that associated all the professionals of the Brazilian offices together through the exchange of information and correspondence in Portuguese, exclusively (PCRM2:863-865).

Despite such a variety of communication media, faxes were still the leading tool for handling interactions between their company and other corporations (PCFM:1015-1017,1031-1032); whereas e-mail constituted around 90% of the communication among the company's offices in Brazil and abroad (JUCII:151-152). Nevertheless, the various communication instruments available were often used in association with one another. In this regard, the corporation did not recommend any particular procedure or pattern to be followed, since decisions of this sort were essentially based on the needs of the situation, and on the kind of information to be conveyed (JUCII:149-151). In our conversations, Juciane illustrated the way tools might be selected, the purposes that underlay their utilization, and the way CMC might assist professionals in the performance of their activities. The transcription below is representative of our discussion:

M: (...) Depending on the situation you face, do you have autonomy to select the tool to be used? Or is there any... any kind of pattern you have to follow, any regulations established by the company? How is this selection undertaken?
J: Well, as we work on several projects, on several customers, we usually prefer to communicate through e-mail because it's a way to document even the project itself. For instance, I have a doubt about a specific product or an inquiry about an application. So, since the moment I raise the question, I start to receive some replies... and I collect them. Some time later, I end up with a whole file of the processes regarding that product. This is very interesting because I may use it in the future, in a similar situation with another customer. In this case, I will have all the details regarding that product. For this reason, we prefer to use e-mail. Ah... sometimes, of course, we use it in association, right? We may undertake these activities through e-mail and, many times, we try to discuss a topic - because it's also very interesting to discuss some ideas (simulating a conversation on the phone): "In your message, you told me that the product has such and such specifications. But, can it be changed? Can I implement it any other way?" So, discussions like that, on the phone, are very productive sometimes. Therefore, there's no strict criterion. But we attempt to work this way in order to document what has been done about that specific product, that specific application, that specific customer. It's very interesting.
M: Therefore, there is the intent to keep on associating the various communication tools available to increase the efficiency of procedures,
In the excerpt above, Juciane mentions documentation, and suggests that it might impact on the decision of using CMC for interactions among professionals within her company. Nevertheless, the interpretation she gave to this feature was slightly different from the one adopted by the first organization I visited. In that context, e-mail messages were usually printed and constituted common documents that might be used by any professional within the office. In Juciane's department, however, documentation involved grouping messages in private files which were utilized by each manager on an individual basis. This clearly indicated that the two organizations, although using the same communication tool, had developed different procedures for performing similar tasks. In other words, the same technology might lead to the development of various practices, according to the features that characterized each work-related environment.

Paulo César and Juciane not only shared the same professional environment, but they also occupied similar managerial positions within the Electronic Commerce Department. For this reason, our conversations and the descriptions and comments that emerged from them were much more focused on the features and peculiarities of that particular section of the corporation. Roughly speaking, the department they belonged to was in charge of selling and providing assistance for electronic communication systems, and of developing customized projects and applications oriented to this area. Due to the flexibility of the services provided, the products this company sold could be adapted to various environments within the same organization and could, therefore, fulfill the needs of either small or large corporations (JUCII:16-20). The nature of the commercial activities developed by the company led it to establish an interesting association with its customers, which was basically built up through its managers. In this department, rather than being responsible for running a particular section, managers were primarily accountable for the business interests of some specific clients with whom they maintained direct contact (JUCII:34-39). Hence, being a manager within this division of Paulo César and Juciane's corporation meant dealing with a list of clients and with all the issues related to their
respective accounts. Commenting on such an original perspective of playing their managerial role, Paulo César and Juciane explained:

PC: It's a position that is called 'project manager' (using the English expression), right? There's a manager who is in charge of projects and, then, all requests are sent to that particular person.
M: OK. So, in this case, all the accounts the department has would be divided...
PC: Yes...
M: ... and you'd take care of...
PC: ... There's the customers list 1 ...
M: ... some specific customers.
PC: ... of some specific customers. Uh-hum. That's it! (PCII:613-621)

J: (...) It's what is called 'account management', right? Each customer is... each customer represents an account that belongs to a specific manager. Well, our aim is to work on a customer since his first contact with the company until... until he decides to stay with us forever!
M: ... until he becomes an habitual customer!
J: Exactly! (JUCII:68-75)

In the excerpts above, Paulo César and Juciane describe their relationship with their customers as one characterized by close contact and continuous interaction. By addressing the way they carried out their activities as managers, they made me first reflect upon the advantages of having one professional in charge of all details regarding one specific account. No doubt from the customers' viewpoint, such an approach saved them time, as well as increasing the effectiveness of procedures and solutions. Secondly, the established procedures within the Electronic Commerce Department also led me to notice that, rather than working as a team in a strict sense (as was the case in the first company I visited), these account managers were more likely to be involved in an informal sharing process -- one which was mainly focused on computerized interactions. Such exchanges might comprise all kinds of work-related information, and might be undertaken between professionals within the same office, or between them and their counterparts in other national or international offices. Juciane highlighted the nature of these exchanges by explaining:

1 Literally, he uses the expression "carteiras de clientes".
J: (...) No, there's no such a behavior of sending a message and receiving no reply. Or receiving a reply like... for instance... "Do it by yourself!", "Look for your own information!". Never! What happens is a very efficient process of exchanging information that involves everybody. Therefore, even if that receiver is not the most appropriate person to answer to you — what happens frequently, right?... in the sense of... even in the United States, where people are very specialized in their areas. So, if you ask a question which does not regard to the receiver's area, s/he will tell you who you should write to, or will forward your inquiry to the professional in charge of that matter. Therefore, it's a very friendly process, right? (JUCII: 687-699)

The excerpt above shows that, even if these professionals did not act as a team all the time, sharing all the processes relating to their clients, they were certainly involved in a mutual consultation network that provided them with the necessary conditions to assist their customers in their requirements, and to fulfill their expectations and needs. With the aim of making this link more productive, the Brazilian company also made an effort to improve the qualification of its personnel, by developing their technical expertise or by of improving their foreign language skills. For this reason, it provided training periods in the American corporation (JUCII:271-277, JUCRM34:455-458), and courses of English in the workplace (PCII:259-261, JUCII:300-306).

In describing their professional activities and showing how they performed them, Paulo César and Juciane also emphasized their attempts to meet current market demands. According to them, their company had developed a strategy to identify potential customers and to offer them products that would be appropriate to their specific needs. Their comments on these selling approaches were as follows:

PC: In general, we have... there is a commercial strategy, a marketing strategy, right? We focus our attention on some niches in the market; on the ones we can identify as potential buyers for our products. The idea is to approach that potential customer and, then, offer him/her our products. (PCII:120-125)

J: (...) What we usually do is an investigation into the market. We divide it among the various professionals who work in this area... we divide some specific segments of the market, or some specific corporations that might need the kind of applications we sell. Then, we study the market this way: we identify the companies that would be potential clients, right? (...) And we work on those companies. We investigate their needs and search for... many times, the customer comes to us; sometimes, we are
the ones who, by recognizing specific demands, approach the organizations in order to offer our services. It is, therefore, a selling process, but we undertake a quite comprehensive transaction: it's based on a data search, on a needs analysis, and on a study to evaluate which solution would be the best option for that particular company. After that, we implement the system and provide the customer with the necessary support. After selling our products, we keep a close contact with our clients — this is a continuous process. We also keep on identifying new opportunities for them. (JUCI:45-51,53-64)

These excerpts illustrate the policy that guided this Brazilian company and the way its professionals attended to their customers: on one hand, they took care of those who were spontaneously attracted by the products they sold, the services they provided, and the support they gave during the installation and use of any application. On the other hand, this corporation also employed a distinct marketing approach in order to search for potential clients and offer them its products. In both situations, however, the ultimate goal was to fulfill the customers' needs, and to improve customer service and support, by undertaking a continuous analysis of practical options or new ideas that might optimize the electronic communication process. The work-related policy that characterized this corporation had, in fact, a broader meaning\(^2\) that included solutions to the clients' immediate requirements, as well as long-term guidance to help them to handle their emerging communication needs and to achieve their business purposes.

Such an orientation, therefore, not only gave special character to Paulo César and Juciane's workplace, but also provided me with insights that helped me to frame a more comprehensive view of their company, and of its professional practices and procedures. To me, visiting this work environment represented more than an opportunity to perceive its own unique qualities. By passing through this second entrance gate into the business territory, I could look at the landscape from a different perspective and, consequently,

\(^2\) Corson (1991) presents two meanings for policy. As he explains: "Firstly there is policy in the limited sense: policies of this kind provide major guidance for action by creating frameworks that provide direction yet allow discretion. This form of 'policy' anticipates action; it usually involves the creation of detailed policy documents and is the kind of policy that we are able to state, and must state, with a considerable degree of explicitness. Secondly there is a broader sense for policy: a course of action or inaction towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired end; this kind of policy may embrace both what is actually intended (including 'policy' in the limited sense) and what occurs as a result of the intention" (p.77).
enlarge my perceptions of the whole region to be explored.

4.3. Entering the third gate

4.3.1. Visiting the company without actually being there

As opposed to the other companies I visited, my contact with the third corporation constituted a vicarious experience entirely lived through the descriptions and explanations that Basilio shared with me, sitting in the living room of his apartment. By staying at home, free from the time constraints and interruptions that are a typical feature of any workplace, we were able to enjoy a relaxed environment where we could talk about professional issues, and reflect upon business communication procedures. The selection of this informal site for the interviews was, in fact, a quite convenient solution for both of us. In his case, it was an arrangement that made his participation in the research possible, without affecting the performance of his daily routine at work. In my case, it meant that I could overcome the difficulties of reaching a company situated far from the downtown area, in a district where public transportation services were not easily available. By accommodating our mutual needs in this way, we could develop our Monday-evening conversations in a pleasant atmosphere. Under such circumstances therefore, Basilio could express his thoughts and opinions, as well as elaborate his arguments, without being distracted by the demands of his office schedule.

Nevertheless, discussing professional matters in a domestic setting undoubtedly had an effect on the research process. If on the one hand, we were able to avoid the difficulty of adjusting our meeting time to Basilio's workload in his office; on the other hand, the choice of having our interviews at home prevented me from observing his workplace in person and, thus, from directly feeling its dynamics. However, what had initially appeared as a possible loss was thoroughly counteracted by the quality of Basilio's detailed arguments, sensitive comments, and illustrative stories. In spite of my not having actually been there and, therefore, not having perceived the company and its personnel on site, Basilio's reflections and interpretations not only led me to grasp the essential nature of his corporation, but they also made me understand the daily routines that made up its internal
4.3.2. Working, exchanging experiences, and learning

Basilio talked about his company with a remarkable sense of personal commitment that clearly revealed the way he was integrated into his workplace, as well as the way he dealt with its processes and orientations. The nature of his reflections and the appropriateness of the episodes he reported indicated that his professional engagement went beyond the boundaries of the Auditing Department to which he was currently assigned. In a much broader sense, his professional commitment actually included the entire corporation, in particular the areas where he had developed tangible ties throughout the long period he had been working in the same environment. For this reason, rather than confining his comments to one specific division within the company, he set out to provide an account of the organization as a whole, by delineating a comprehensive view of its communication process, as well as of its internal culture.

The company where Basílio worked at was the Brazilian branch of a well-known American corporation that performed activities related to the chemical field. His organization had a worldwide network of offices which were involved in an extensive communication process that included the headquarters together with branches in South America, Europe, and Asia. In order to support these communication links, the company had several devices available -- such as telephone, fax, e-mail, voice mail, conference calls, and video conferences (BASII:586-594,668-672,873-877) -- that, depending on the situation, might be used in isolation or in association with one another (BASRM4:87-149). Despite such a range of technology, however, telephone calls and faxes were still predominantly used in interactions with customers (BASII:734-745); whereas electronic mail constituted the device more frequently selected for internal communications (BASII:676-679). According to Basílio, the choice of the tool to be used was neither imposed nor suggested by the organization (BASRM4:153-158). On the contrary, it depended entirely on the context, and on the individual's professional judgement (BASII:747-749). Therefore, the communicative practices undertaken by his company were primarily focused on which communication mechanism was the most efficient in each case, and on what kind of
information needed to be conveyed (BASII:1130-1134).

Basilio's organization was particularly committed to its staff members' continuous development. For this reason, it maintained a specific program called Plano de Beneficios\(^3\) (BASII:338-339), that provided total or partial financial support to those who needed improvement in particular areas. Such a program included, for instance, courses of English which could be made available in the workplace, or which could be taken in local language institutes (BASII:349-352). The corporation, therefore, fostered what Basilio termed "an innovative training concept", through which professionals were oriented to specific aspects of their jobs. As a result, they were motivated to overcome their own difficulties in order to reach higher levels of technical expertise or foreign language proficiency. Basilio illustrated this process by saying:

B: It's important to say that... there's an innovative concept regarding this training issue -- it's not only related to English, but also to any other area. It's important to say that, some time ago, the company used to determine what you should do (Illustrating in a dictatorial tone): "You must take a course of English!" Nowadays, the organization only points out certain lacks that the employee has. It's up to him/her to find out adequate mechanisms to overcome them. It happens in any area. And it's up to the employee. If s/he doesn't want to do anything... what's going to happen? What happens is that this attitude may somehow block his/her growth within the corporation. (...) If that employee, for instance, is not able to speak English in order to express his/her ideas clearly, or if s/he is not able to discuss certain subjects [in English], s/he may be restricted to occupy only certain positions within the company. S/he will never reach a managerial or a directorship position. (BASII:352-373)

B: So, let's imagine that there is a position available and that you are a potential candidate because you fulfill the requirements and have the technical knowledge to perform the job. But, in order to do that work, you have to communicate with someone in the United States. If you don't have some basic knowledge of English...
M: It's going to be more...
B: ... well, you have to prepare yourself for that. The company may give you that job and indirectly force you to take a course of English. If you can't overcome that difficulty, it means that you're not performing your job well.
M: Right.
B: Then, you may be transferred or... (with gestures he indicates that the person may be fired)
M: So, knowing the language is not a prerequisite but if the employee

\(^3\) Literally, "benefit plan".
wants to pursue a career within the company, it will be vital, sooner or later.
B: ... sooner or later... either due to the position, or to the performance of certain job activities. *(BASII:421-438)*

These excerpts emphasize the professionals' own responsibility for responding to the opportunities their company presented them with. In my opinion, they show that the concept of personnel development had qualitatively evolved from a philosophy of imposition to one of guidance. According to the training policy currently adopted, the company did not directly impose any obligation on its staff to improve in the directions it judged to be desirable. On the contrary, it either suggested what those directions were, or subtly challenged its employees to progress by giving them the chance of promotion. In both cases, however, the organization supported the self-improvement of individuals by providing resources to help them to achieve the required conditions to get higher positions within the company.

According to Basílio, his company was characterized by certain qualities that, in an intriguing way, had emerged from and resulted in features of its internal culture. Considering the interrelationship between culture and work-related practices, it is particularly interesting to notice how the company involved their professionals -- and how they felt involved -- in what might be interpreted as a mutual cooperation process. Basílio illustrated this involvement by reflecting on two frequent situations regarding e-mail practices:

B: (...) Let's consider that a message like that was sent to 200 people: *(Please, do that and answer to me)*. You know that when you reply to any message, you have the option of including only the sender or all recipients. So, can you imagine what happens if these 200 people decide to reply to everybody?! Sometimes we find a mistake like that -- a terrible mistake. And the reply contains only "OK" Only this! That person writes only this: "OK"... and...
M: ... and sends it to 200 people!
B: ... sends it to everybody, right? Then, the system administrator intervenes and says (in paternal tone): *(Gentlemen, please take care when you reply to your messages... bla, bla, bla... because you've been overloading the system...*" He sends this message to everybody, without mentioning who made the mistake.
M: Uh-hum. So, there is...
B: He generalizes...
M: ... there is this...
B: Yes?
M: ... system administrator?
B: Yes, there's an administrator. And you might ask me how he can discover that.
M: Uh-hum!
B: He, as the system administrator, can't discover it by himself. What happens is that someone...
M: ... uh... someone complains...
B: (promptly) No! It's not a complaint! This person has good intentions. This is true! In general, the person -- who has really good intentions -- sends a message to the administrator and says: "Have you noticed that? It's a good opportunity to send a message to everybody!" This is one situation. (BASRM2:1461-1500)

B: Well, there is this 'formal' way [the one that involves the system administrator], and also another one that can be 'informal' because you try to be in touch with the person. For instance, when you go on vacation, you have to program an auto-answer that says: "I'll be on vacation..." -- in general, everybody writes the same message in Portuguese, Spanish, and English. Then... "I'll be on vacation from... to... If you need anything, please contact Mr. X, extension 0000". That's it! The message is there. Ah... let's say that he would be off from July 15th to August 1st. You send a message to him on August 15th and still receive the auto-answer: "I'll be on vacation... bla, bla, bla... to August 1st!" You think: "How come? Today is August 15th?" He's simply forgotten...
M: ... forgotten to cancel it.
B: ... to cancel it. And nobody has called him! Then, you do it. And if he's not there, you will have his voice mail. And you can say: "I've sent you a message and received a reply that said that you'd be on vacation until August 1st. Today is August 15th!" Then, what happens is that you try to warn that person... "Hey, you came back on August 1st; but today is August 15th, and you still have that auto-answer" ... (simulating the answer)... "Oh, thanks!" ... Therefore, it is what usually happens. It's another way for you to be... alert! (BASRM2:1530-1572)

The situations presented by Basílio made it explicit that all employees within his company were involved in a cooperative process that -- formally or informally -- aimed at adjusting inappropriate uses of the communication tools available, and at guaranteeing the best functioning of their information exchange system. Rather than representing a form of control -- as I had initially supposed -- such a process actually provided a support mechanism through which possible misuses of the working tools might be avoided, the work of individuals continuously improved, and the communication rendered more efficient. This procedure, however, was not confined to CMC practices. According to Basílio, it
represented an agent of the corporation culture in general, and this was the way it should be interpreted:

B: It's a... I'd tell you that this is not a... feature, or that it's not something that has emerged from the utilization of e-mail. It's a characteristic of the company. Even in other situations -- which are not related to e-mail -- you can notice the same preoccupation... in terms of helping, of attempting to convey something that may help someone else. Then, I believe that this comes from... this is the culture of the company, right? (BASRM2:1577-1589)

According to Basilio, the relationship between the internal culture of the company and its work-related procedures might be also illustrated by another routinized practice usually undertaken through the utilization of e-mail. Such a practice was characterized by the broadcasting of particular incidents that, by impacting on the organization in some way, provided its personnel with important tips to learn from. For this reason, in addition to the description of the event itself, some specific remarks or key concepts were incorporated to the messages, conveyed under the heading "key learning". Basilio commented on messages of this sort by describing their features and purposes:

B: Sometimes, due to a message or to an event, you end up using a key learning to reinforce some principles, or some procedures, or to give an additional orientation about a specific issue, right?
M: I'd interpret this kind of message as a way of sharing experiences. (...) To me, the aim that underlies this practice is the one of sharing an experience lived by one co-worker, and of taking advantage of it in order to emphasize what can be learned from that.
B: Yes.
M: In this sense, it's an exchange of experiences, right?
B: In general terms, that's it. That's what happens.
M: Is there any other purpose?
B: Exactly... within the culture... within this culture of looking for... not only helping, promoting knowledge, reinforcing some specific concepts, reminding some relevant aspects, but also...
M: ... is it more likely in the sense of 'learning from someone else's experiences' (using the expression in English)? Is it something like that?
B: Exactly, in this sense. Therefore, it's very common to see messages that... ah... if you are not used to the culture of the company, you may really think that we waste a lot of time with some topics that, outside the company, people would pay no attention to. So, a message like that, that reports an accident that happened in the United States, when a guy wanted to cross a traffic light, stopped, and another car came and crashed! Uh... you would say: "What a waste of time. The guy writes a
message and sends it to everybody around the world*. And it [the accident] was classified as 'preventable'! (reading in English as it was written in the message). If you're not used to the culture of the company... this is the most common thing that we have! Because by conveying all these experiences, we really seek to generate a higher level of awareness. However, to many people [outside the company]... one wastes time with this kind of stuff. (BASRM2:1640-1683)

The excerpt above shows that, in addition to being a working tool through which useful information might be disseminated, CMC practices might also constitute a significant learning tool. In this respect, such practices revealed an explicit commitment Basilio's corporation had to a learning process that encouraged the exchange of knowledge and experiences on an everyday basis. Therefore, by reporting specific events, reinforcing certain concepts or processes, and providing significant comments or *key learnings*, the company fostered a form of vicarious learning whose ultimate goals were twofold: on the one hand, the company aimed at giving its personnel the opportunity to be exposed to and learn from other people's experiences; on the other hand, it attempted to improve their level of awareness and their decision-making skills either in work-related or private situations (BASRM2:1948-1953, BASRM4:1551-1561).

At the same time, Basilio stressed that the role performed by e-mail in the circumstances he reported was exclusively one of a tool, a channel that only helped speed up communication, without determining its results. He insisted on this point by stating:

B: Well... it's important for you to understand that this has not been created because of the mechanism that we've been using [e-mail]. This is also part of the culture of the company.
M: This mechanism only helps to speed up the broadcasting, right?
B: It only helps to speed it up. Only this! It's important to make this point explicit, right?
M: Right.
B: The idea is not the one of... "Oh, now that we have a more efficient communication mechanism, let's convey this kind of messages". No!
M: The point is that this communication medium comes in useful, right?
B: The medium suits our purposes.
M: So, it is an internal procedure, prior to the introduction of e-mail.
B: That's it! That's it! (BASRM2:2037-2053)

Basilio's comments led me to perceive that cooperation (in sharing knowledge and
experiences), reflection (in identifying relevant features of the episodes reported), and awareness (in considering how remarks and key concepts can be professionally and/or personally applied) constituted the essence of such communication practices that, regardless of the medium used, revealed the educational policy that guided his company.

Becoming acquainted with Basílio's company through his descriptions, comments, stories, and reflections was, therefore, a captivating experience that, associated with the ones I had in the other organizations, contributed to enlarge even more my view of the business territory. Our conversations and particularly his comments regarding internal aspects of the culture of his corporation made me clearly understand that workplaces could be meaningful educational sites where knowledge and experience might be shared, specific concepts or procedures might be emphasized and constantly reinforced, decision-making skills might be improved, and higher levels of awareness might be consequently achieved.

4.4. The landscape seen from the gates: an overview of the territory

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my expedition into the business territory proved to be a challenging adventure that allowed me to perceive many peculiarities of its geography, while I walked along the several paths that crossed the target region. Actually, my journey proceeded in a number of stages: from each entrance gate, and with the help of each guide, I could at first envision only a limited part of the whole scenery. However, by collecting and gradually mingling all those partial views, I found I was able to create a more comprehensive picture of the landscape. My perception of the entire territory was, therefore, shaped through attempts to piece together like a jigsaw the various bits of information that emerged from my conversations with each professional, and from the reflections we shared throughout the exploration.

The preliminary views I had from each access point -- or gate -- promptly led me to comparisons and, through them, to the perception of the features that characterized each company, and that revealed their different identities. Each corporation represented, therefore, a unique enterprise, not only because of its distinctive physical or operational features, but also because of its internal culture, work-related routines, or international
connections and commitments. I now realize that my initial involvement in searching for distinctions was only an effort to match the views I had gathered from each entrance gate, and to better define the kind of land I was exploring: after all, each organization had its own qualities and, to me, envisioning their apparent differences was somehow easier at first glance.

This approach enabled me to see how my introduction to those companies had been guided by the individual perspectives of the participants. José Luiz and Luciano, for instance, by presenting their company as a team whose members worked in partnership, provided me with a corporate view of the business they ran. On the other hand, Paulo César and Juciane, by portraying the nature of their activities as account managers, provided me with a departmental view of their organization. Basílio, by attempting to explain the policies and procedures of his corporation in the light of its culture, offered me an educational view of work-related practices. Thus, by viewing the landscape from various perspectives, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of the working style that characterized José Luiz and Luciano’s workplace; of the way Paulo César and Juciane identified and looked after their customers; and I was particularly intrigued by the learning orientation that guided Basílio’s company, and that was apparent in its internal communicative practices.

Nevertheless, the perception of differences only provided a fragmentary view of the entire geography for, beyond the rocky regions of preliminary distinctions, I was able to discern a more harmonious and integrated landscape. Analogies became, then, important for me when I contrasted the communication processes enacted by these three corporations and, especially, when I investigated the computerized practices involved in establishing an internal communication network.

Considering the communication process as a whole, I noticed that all the companies lacked institutional regulations or guidelines to standardize the medium to be used in each work-related interaction. The only apparent criteria were the ones that emerged from the specifics of each context, and from the nature and urgency of the information to be conveyed. By providing freedom of choice, each company relied on its professionals’ sensitivity and decision-making potential to select, among the tools available,
the most appropriate one(s) for the situation in hand.

Because Brazilian customers are not yet online on a large scale, CMC practices in the three corporations were still mainly confined to internal communication, which included the network of company offices round the world. Under these circumstances, the messages transmitted tended to be confined to an exchange of information concerning the specific projects and routines of the various companies, and to the dissemination of instructions and orientations that could affect and/or guide the whole community members. As a result, by ensuring that there was regular interaction between the head office and workers throughout the organization, CMC practices enabled all employees to get involved in a kind of situated learning (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). By taking part in the electronic communication network, they were naturally engaged in a situated negotiation of meanings that placed "understanding and experience in constant interaction" (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 52). In other words, the computerized communication activities performed within these workplaces encouraged the development of professional and situated learning connections among members of the same community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 98).

In my opinion, the effect of participating in this situated process of learning was the acquisition of upgraded technical expertise and specialized work-related knowledge. Moreover, the opportunity to reflect on the experiences of other people engaged in similar tasks (as in Basílio's corporation), encouraged the development of the professionals' awareness and of their decision-making potential. From this perspective, e-mail not only represented an invaluable communication tool, it could also be seen as a significant mediator of learning.

The considerations above led me to conceive of workplaces as educational sites where learning could be seen as a situated lifelong process according to which knowledge was created and recreated through the sharing of experiences, and through the understanding and transformation of such experiences (Dewey, 1938a, 1960; Kolb, 1984). This argument reminded me of Dewey's theory of the experiential continuum (1938a) which places the interaction between past and current experiences as a situated and continuous process. From his perspective, knowing is not simply an internal phenomenon since it
shows a close relationship with a set of lived experiences while involving an active manipulation of the environment. By reflecting upon the conversations I had with my five guides in the light of these theoretical concepts, I was able to see that work-related sites continuously dealt with the manipulation of technical and experiential knowledge in a fully contextualized way.

The perceptions I have now achieved by combining the partial views I have obtained from each of the entrance gates enable me, at this point of my expedition, to provide a more comprehensive portrait of the business territory, including its educational aspects. Nevertheless, the landscape cannot be envisioned in its totality yet, without considering the nature of the communication process that establishes relationships among the inhabitants of this region. This topic, therefore, constitutes the next path to be explored.
CHAPTER 5

"ON THE EXTREMITIES, EXCHANGING OPEN INFORMATION"

A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another... it is a territory shared by both addressee and addressee.
Bakhtin in Clark & Holquist, 1984

As an explorer who had embraced the challenge of investigating CMC in the business territory, I started my expedition by packing my personal, professional and academic experiences, and leaving for the unknown with my mind full of questions and curiosity. I ventured into the target region escorted by five of its inhabitants who not only helped me pass through the entrance gates, but also guided me along the pathways of a land that was unfamiliar to me but extremely familiar to them. From each one of these gates, I could initially distinguish some fragments of the whole terrain. Only after piecing such partial views together -- gradually and patiently -- could I envision the landscape in a more inclusive way.

The journey that I undertook jointly with my guides allowed me to understand the roles they had been performing within their corporations, as well as the significance of some experiences they had lived or had been living at work. Based on our conversations and on the reflections they shared with me, I could draw their individual portraits as professionals, computer users, and foreign language learners and speakers, as well as perceiving the impact of practice on the learning of both specialized and linguistic contents. Furthermore, I could also be in touch with the specifics of their workplaces and, consequently, comprehend better their internal dynamics and cultural features. Aspects of the business territory and of its population were, therefore, the central themes addressed in the two previous chapters of this dissertation. The main objectives I had in mind were the ones of recognizing and presenting a unique community of practice, by perceiving its geography and boundaries, as well as by introducing its members and picturing some features of their professional landscapes.

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Characterizing a specific region and its inhabitants represented to me a way of clearly contextualizing where a particular communicative practice was occurring, and of determining who was involved in it and under what circumstances. Such a depiction was essential to my perception of business settings in a more comprehensive way, and to my understanding of computerized communication processes within the limits of a professional environment. For this reason, after having introduced the community and its members, I will now address the CMC activities performed in the workplace and comment on their inherent qualities in more detail.

My aim in the present chapter is to make meaning of the 152 electronic messages exchanged between Brazilian and international professionals which were provided by the participants throughout our meetings and on which we focused our discussions about CMC practices. I will begin with some general reflections upon e-mail conceptualization, and with a number of comments on the structural organization of the computerized correspondence conveyed within the companies investigated. After, dealing with the notions of *context of situation* and *of culture* (Malinowski, 1923/59), and establishing an exploratory routine of analysis, I will describe the various types of message through which professionals fulfilled the interactive needs that emerged from the performance of their job activities. More specifically, I will identify and discuss the types of genres which characterized the written communication that connected the participants' corporations and their offices abroad. Finally, by contrasting these genres and reflecting upon what they revealed about themselves and their interrelationships, I will formulate my conclusions about the nature of the CMC practices enacted within the professional environments focused on in this study.

### 5.1. Reflecting upon conceptualization

Although theoretical sources\(^1\) provide inclusive discussions and experimental taxonomies regarding electronic mail technologies, I decided to address issues of conceptualization by voicing the participants' perceptions, and presenting some of their

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comments on this theme. Actually, neither one of those professionals revealed any concern about formalizing a thorough concept of e-mail as a communication medium. Nevertheless, throughout our conversations and reflections, they indirectly approached this topic by asserting:

José Luiz: In my mind, this tool represents a fast way of exchanging information among people within the company. Only this! (...) It's a very useful tool which is important to hasten transmission, and to document instructions, requests, and information exchanges. (*JLRM*:1038-1041, *JLFM*:66-68)

Luciano: (...) e-mail is a communication medium. It is part of my work-related activities through which I can either receive or send information. (*LUCFM*:38-40)

Basilio: Well, it's an efficient mechanism. (...) Throughout all these years that I have been using e-mail, its most impressive feature has been the agility, the fast speed. To me, this is undoubtedly the fundamental characteristic. (*BASIL*:1272, *BASF*:1047-1049)

Paulo César: (...) the electronic mail is a tool for interpersonal communication. (...) E-mail plays the role of conveying specific information to a remote point. (*PCII*:64-65, *PCF*:1045-1046)

Juciane: Every time we mention electronic mail, we imagine people on the extremities, exchanging open information. (...) The utilization of e-mail itself does not include document patterning. It's a very open process. (*JUCRM*:1699-701, 733-735)

The excerpts above indicate that -- as opposed to the emphasis usually claimed by theoretical references -- these practitioners did not tend to primarily identify the electronic correspondence as an asynchronous text-based form of communication through which a sender may easily and quickly interact with a single receiver or, at the same time, with multiple recipients. Their comments suggested to me that qualities such as written communication in non-real time and addressability constituted inherent attributes that more likely corresponded to the *tacit knowledge* (Polanyi, 1966/7; Schön, 1983) or perception that they had acquired from their continuous engagement in CMC practices. For this reason, rather than promptly verbalizing such features, José Luiz, Luciano and Basílio were more inclined to emphasize efficiency in speeding up the information flow and in documenting information exchanges as the most evident e-mail characteristic. From the perspective of
these three professionals therefore, the electronic correspondence was essentially identified through the operational features that immediately impacted on the performance of their professional tasks.

On the other hand, although also mentioning the utilization of e-mail as an interpersonal form of communication, Paulo César stressed its potential for conveying information to distant sites. In this sense, therefore, his approach was much closer to the one presented by Juciane. I understood that both of them, by speaking from a quite analogous position, founded their view of the tool on its potential for establishing close links between correspondents who were physically far removed from one another. Such a conceptual similarity was certainly due to the fact that they also had similar professional responsibilities: as managers in the same corporation and department, both of them worked with the identical purpose of trading the communication products their organization represented in Brazil. As e-mail sales representatives, thus, they reinforced the possibility this tool has to build bridges -- which seems to be the very first need any probable buyer attempts to fulfill by purchasing a communication system of this type.

In my opinion, Paulo César and Juciane's perceptions, although embodying a kind of commercial appeal, not only emphasized the possibility of communication and interaction amongst people who are physically located in distinct sites, but also complemented the operational view mentioned by José Luiz, Luciano, and Basílio. Considered together, such perspectives provided a more comprehensive understanding of what e-mail is, what purposes it may be used for and, particularly, how practitioners perceive it as a communication and working tool.

5.2. Reflecting upon the structural organization of e-mail messages

Although there were differences in detail, I noted that the e-mail systems adopted by the corporations focused on in this study were characterized by two recurrent macro-components: the header, which is also identified as the "addressing information area" (Tittel & Robbins, 1994:6), and the body of the message, which corresponds to the "message text area" (Angell & Heslop, 1994:17).

The header essentially comprises condensed information regarding date and time
of transmission, origin and destination of the communication contents, and a summary of
the issue to be addressed. These four basic elements -- location in time, sender,
recipient(s), and topic -- represent the standard subdivisions that are always visible to the
receiver(s), and that are sequentially expressed by the date/time, from, to/cc, and subject
lines. Nevertheless, depending on the features of the system, some supplementary
information may be also included in the header, such as message and page numbering;
quantity of bytes and lines; identification of office, department, occupation or country;
telephone number; or degree of urgency (which was, in fact, used relatively infrequently
in my data).

The arrangement of the header subdivisions in the three corporations is shown in
Figure 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 below where, for purposes of comparison, the standard elements
have been highlighted:

```
Message #  FROM:........................ at [office]....................... DATE....... TIME....... (# bytes: #line)
(Priority: Urgent)
TO:......................................................... at [office]...........................
cc:.......................................................... at [office]...........................
SUBJECT:............................................................................................................

----------------------------------- Message contents -----------------------------------
```

*Figure 5.1: Structural organization of the message header in the first company.*

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>Page #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FROM:.............................................................................. [user's name, office/department, position, country]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO:............................................................................ [user's name, office/department, position, country]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cc:.......................................................... [user's name, office/department, position, country]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECT:............................................................................................................</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

*Figure 5.2: Structural organization of the message header in the second company.*
Comparing the above figures, I understand the header to be a macro-component that concisely displays the *when-who-what* elements involved either in the generation or in the reception of the information. In sum, the header indicates location in time, identifies the sender, designates the audience and prepares recipients for the subject to be addressed in the body of the message.

The body of the message is the second macro-component of e-mail messages, corresponding to the text message area. As opposed to the header, which is characterized by an established sequence of elements, the body does not necessarily present a fixed pattern. Actually, its constitution is quite flexible and can easily accommodate either distinct document types, or various customized formats which may even include the insertion of a reply into the original text. However, even lacking a regular staging\(^2\), the configuration of the body of the message may be tentatively outlined. By comparing the samples in my data, I was able to identify some of its constant components, which I graphically represent as follows:

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\(^2\) The term *staging* is employed by Yule & Mathis (1992:201), and Yli-Jokipii (1994:45) to refer to the parts that constitute a business letter, such as inside addresses, date, greetings, subject headings, and signature. By analogy, I use the same expression to identify the elements presented in the body of an e-mail message.
Among the subdivisions above, the content corresponds to the only compulsory component included in the text area. It represents the development of the topic summarized in the subject line and, consequently, embodies the target information to be posted. Like its equivalent in the message header, the content also regards the what element that keeps both sender and receiver(s) focused on the same piece of information. Hence, this mandatory constituent entails the main purpose of a specific online communication and expresses the goal that motivates the message generation.

The content of the message is frequently introduced and concluded by opening and closing salutations, respectively. Depending on the topic addressed or on the sender's personal writing style, some additional information or comments may be conveyed in a postscript, or even in a separate file which is attached to the message. These elements -- opening and closing salutations, postscript and file transfer indication -- are ones that supplement the content and that, associated with it, make up the structural organization of the e-mail message.

Opening and closing salutations -- which usually include the recipient's and the sender's name, respectively -- correspond to the to/cc and from lines of the header and, therefore, they clearly reinforce the idea of who is involved in a particular online interaction. As a repeated identification of the participants, opening and closing salutations become optional staging subdivisions which may be omitted from the text area without impacting
on subject comprehension, or bringing about any discomfort to the recipient(s). Considering such characteristics, my inclination is to categorize these subdivisions as optional elements that are peripheral to the content itself but that can, if included in the body of the message, reinforce the participants' identity.

Nevertheless, although classified as an introductory, ancillary element, the inclusion or omission of opening salutations was felt to have functional significance in the correspondence conveyed within the three corporations involved in this research. By contrasting the samples collected in these professional environments, I noted that it was incorporated into 72% of the messages exchanged within the first company, and into 91% of the ones conveyed within the second. Regarding the third corporation, this proportion was interestingly reversed, indicating that only 32% of the messages included some kind of initial salutation. In this particular case, I believe that the lower percentage is more likely related to the quantity of samples of corporate circulars and bulletins provided by Basílio, as well as to the nature of these genres -- as I discuss in the following sections of this chapter (Section 5.3.1 and 5.3.2.). Except for messages of these kinds, the remaining ones corroborated the pattern found in the other workplaces which revealed that the use of a vocative or a greeting -- either in isolation or in association -- corresponded to the customary opening salutation design.

By speculating on such a design, I observed that the procedure more frequently followed was the one that identified the receiver by stating his/her name, or by combining it with greetings like hi or hello (which was especially used in the second corporation). Sometimes, however, the sender revealed or attempted to establish a more friendly relationship with the recipient. In this case, such a proximity was indicated by referring to him/her in a very familiar way (as in "Juanito," basmsg4.1), by including a compliment (as in "Nice to talk to you again," pcmmsg4.1), or by joining two colloquial greetings together (as in "Hi, [name]! How are you doing?", basmsg1.2). References to the sender's or to the receiver's linguistic background, although not common, could be noticed when, for instance, a Japanese professional introduced his message with the salutation "Hello Juciane san" (jucmsg2/3.2), or when Juciane referred to a native speaker of Spanish by writing "Hola, [name]" (jucmsg1.2), or "Hola [name], como estas??" (jucmsg3/4.1).
Moreover, opening salutations such as "Dear [name]" (jmsg4.6, lucmsg4.3, pcrmsg1.2, pcrmsg3.1), "Dear Colleague/Colleagues" (jmsg1.1, jmsg3.3, jmsg3.13), "Gentlemen" (jmsg4.7, jmsg4.8), or "Sirs" (jmsg2.5), although proportionally less commonly used, could also be found in the samples I got from the first and second companies. Reflecting on them, I assume that this opening salutation design discloses an evident resemblance with business letters, suggesting that the sender is transferring to the electronic environment, a pattern and level of formality usually acquired from and applied to a distinct communication medium. To some extent, I too adopt an analogous procedure when, by attempting to identify the components of an e-mail message, I use a terminology that is typically related to other forms of business correspondence. I interpret such a behaviour as certainly indicating that either users or researchers are somehow affected by the lack of standardization that characterizes some aspects of written communication through the electronic mode. I believe that conventional forms of commercial correspondence are, on the one hand, a functional parameter for business people to shape their e-mail messages and reach their communication goals. On the other hand, these forms can provide researchers with a comparative frame of reference that, if used as an investigation starting point, may lead them to a more inclusive understanding of the e-mail communication and its specifics.

Closing salutation is another staging subdivision that may be also attached to the message text on an optional basis. Although considered an accessory element, its utilization could be noticed in 93% of the messages exchanged within the first company, and in 94% of the ones conveyed within the second. Regarding the third corporation, the proportion decreased to 66%, which was noticeably lower than the percentage reached in the other workplaces, although still constituting a majority of the messages sent. Nevertheless, despite such a variation and regardless of the document type, I assume that the inclusion of a closing salutation in electronic messages constitutes a natural practice that is customarily performed through the association of a greeting with the sender's identification.

By speculating on this habitual closing salutation design, I perceived that the predominant pattern was the one that combined the sender's signature with "regards"
(basmsg1.3, jilmsg2.4, lucmsg4.1, pcmsg2.2, jucmsg3/4.9), and some of its possible variations\(^3\), such as "regard" (jilmsg1.3), "rgds" (basmsg1.7), "rgs" (jilmsg4.5), "Best regards" (basmsg1.11, jilmsg2.5, pcmsg4.2, jucmsg1.3), "BR" (jilmsg1.9, lucmsg1.7), or "Kind regards" (jucmsg2/3.1, jucmsg3/4.3, jucmsg3/4.8). My reflection upon the recurrence of this sequence, in the light of the paradigm commonly applied to business letters, led me to distinguish an evident parallel between the writing practices performed through these two communication media. According to the *Webster's New Business Writers Guide* (1988/96), closing salutations such as "Regards," "Best regards," or "Kindest regards" include the "most friendly and informal tone, usually used when writer and reader are on a first-name basis" (p.275). In this case, the level of informality is, in my opinion, the main factor that associates both media of communication and that, consequently, induces professionals to spontaneously transfer to electronic messages, the writing patterns that they have been already exposed to while dealing with other forms of business correspondence. Another illustration that corroborated the transference of patterns from business letters to the e-mail environment was, for instance, the association of "Yours faithfully" (jilmsg2.6) with the message generator's name. In this particular case, however, the utilization of a British closing salutation (cf. *Webster's New Business Writers Guide, 1988/96:275*) by a Finnish writer not only indicates that his e-mail writing style is influenced by a formula commonly used in commercial letters, but it may also suggest his probable foreign language learning orientation.

Moreover, certain closing salutations also incorporated to the message writer’s name some additional information, such as name of corporation, department, country, and occupation (basmsg1.6, jilmsg2.6, pcmsg3.3, jucmsg3/4.3). Sometimes, however, the message closing assumed a more impersonal tone and the sender's name was substituted for the indication of the internal division of the company that had generated a specific electronic communication (basmsg2.2). According to the samples collected, such a procedure was restricted to corporate circulars.

Similarly to some opening salutations, closing salutations that referred to the

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\(^3\) The abbreviations presented here reproduce exactly the ones used by the senders.
receiver's linguistic background also constituted quite an unusual practice. Considering the samples collected, Juciane was the only writer who illustrated this procedure, although asserting in her interviews that it hardly ever occurred (JUCRM3/4:22). By reflecting upon the format adopted in this particular situation ("Gracias y saludos, Juciane," jucmsg3/4.1), she explained that closing a message by using the recipient's native language only represented an attempt of hers "to speak their language" (JUCRM3/4:33), or to transcend a cultural barrier.

In addition to the designs mentioned above, another interesting format was the one that associated an expression of gratitude and a greeting with the sender's identification. This kind of arrangement, although not representing a usual practice, could be illustrated by "Thanks and regards" (basmsg1.14, basmsg3.2, jlmsg4.7, pcmsg2.2, jucmsg2/3.2, jucmsg3/4.1), "Many thanks for your assistance and best regards" (pcmsg3.3), or "Thanks again and kind regards" (jucmsg3/4.2). Sometimes, expressions of thanks and good wishes were also incorporated to the same closing (as in "Thanks and have a great weekend," basmsg3.6; and "Thanks and a happy new year," jucmsg2/3.2), suggesting, in my opinion, the sender's intention to establish or maintain a friendly and less formal relationship with the receiver(s). I could also perceive a similar connotation when only an expression of good wishes was juxtapose to the signature (as in "Good luck, [name]," jlmsg4.6).

By investigating the incorporation of an expression of gratitude, I perceived that it might have two distinct positions. Firstly, it could be integrated into the message content, placed either in the beginning of it (as in "Many thanks, any thing now can make a big difference," jlmsg3.11; "Thank you for making the Sales Meeting once again together with us!", jlmsg4.3; "Thank you for your message," jucmsg1.3; "Firstly, thank you very much for your help in the BT installation for the `XX' Company," jucmsg3/4.5), or at the end of the text, before the final greeting and/or the signature (as in "Thanks again for your support, Basilio...", basmsg1.3; "Thanks for your help, [name]...", basmsg3.4; "Thanks for your kind support," lucmsg4.2; "Many thanks in advance for your help," pcmsg1.2; "Thanks a lot for your assistance," pcmsg4.1; "Thanks in advance for your help," jucmsg1.1; "Thanks!!!", jucmsg3/4.8).
Secondly, an expression of gratitude could be incorporated into the closing salutation, as a kind of greeting that not only preceded the sender’s identification, but that was also connected to it through the punctuation. I could identify illustrations of this assumption through closings such as: "Thank you... [name]" (masnsg1.1), "Thank you, [name]" (basmsg2.1), "Thanks, [name]" (basmsg3.3., basmsg3.5, jilmsg3.8, lucmsg4.3), "thanks, [name]" (lucmsg3.3), "Thanks very much, [name]" (pcmsg2.3), and "Thanks much, [name]" (pcmsg2.3).

The considerations presented so far suggested that, although comprising certain recurrent features, opening and closing salutations also conformed to variations that could accommodate distinct writing styles and preferences. To me, such a flexibility contributed to make the investigation into the electronic correspondence quite a riveting topic. Moreover, it made me wonder if patterns of regularity might be also found in the e-mail contents. Intrigued by such a possibility, I then continued my examination of the message text area by venturing into the content structure and attempting to perceive its qualities.

5.3. Making meaning of message content, making meaning of genres

Exploring e-mail content represents, in my opinion, penetrating into the heart of the message body, and being in touch with the core goal of communication. As a heart, a content does not beat in isolation, autonomously; it depends on certain conditions that can give it shape, significance, and life. Such conditions emerge, on the one hand, from the immediate situational context that impacts on message production; and, on the other hand, from the social and cultural background that gives purpose and meaning to message generation and reception. For this reason, I believe that an attempt to interpret content in a comprehensive way involves considerations of the context of situation and context of culture (Malinowsky, 1923/46; Halliday, 1978/92; Hasan, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89) which surround e-mail practices in the workplace. From the context of situation emerges the register theory which reveals field, tenor and mode as the environmental variables that, by respectively articulating ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings, constitute the register aspect of language use (Halliday, 1978/92; Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89; Eggins, 1994). From the context of culture emerges the genre theory through which language use
is connected to the achievement of culturally recognized goals (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89:55; Eggins, 1994:49). From these two complementary theories emerged, therefore, the scaffolding on which I grounded my approach to message content interpretation.

Throughout my conversations with the participants, I was gradually introduced to the message content and to the real context⁴ that required them to communicate with their counterparts in order to share information and discuss processes or procedures. Their descriptions and appreciations not only revealed to me the tacit perception of those who deal with the electronic correspondence at work on a daily basis, but also guided me to understand the repercussion of situational and socio-cultural aspects of the message exchange. Our conversations, therefore, also oriented my considerations of the e-mail register, as well as of the genres possibly conveyed through the electronic medium in the workplace.

The interpretation of e-mail content from the register perspective led me initially to reflect upon the three semiotic components of the situation: field (which accounts for the nature of the social action that is taking place), tenor (which regards the role relationships among participants), and mode (which reveals the function language performs in a specific situation). Considering such components and their features, I firstly realized that, by representing the internal flow of the correspondence exchanged between representative offices or branches in Brazil and their related offices or headquarters abroad, the e-mail messages discussed shared some field similarities. Secondly, by perceiving that those messages entailed symmetrical and/or asymmetrical interactions between Brazilian professionals and their international counterparts, I noticed that they also revealed some parallels in terms of tenor. Thirdly, I observed that, regarding mode, the messages collected were identically conveyed through an asynchronous dialogic exchange process, a hybrid written/spoken medium (Murray, 1985:205-206; Ferrara & associates, 1991:23; Yli-Jokipii, 1994:39) and a visual/textual channel, where the English language performed a constitutive role (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89:57-58).

⁴ Ventola (1995) distinguishes context of situation from real context by stating: "Context of situation does not refer to the 'real context', as it does in some pragmatic theories, but is rather a theoretical abstraction drawn from the study of instances of situations" (p.5).
The similarities detected at first glance, however, demanded deeper and more cautious considerations. By pointing out general resemblances in field, tenor and mode, I did not mean that all communicative activities performed within the three companies had always identical purposes achieved through identical actions; or that the interpersonal interactions were all of the same kind, conveyed through the same textual realization. Variations at the level of one situational component certainly impacted on the others and, for this reason, it is necessary to guard against premature generalizations.

These variations were attested by almost all of my participants throughout our conversations. Among these professionals, Luciano was the only one who did not explicitly mention the interdependence of the situational components -- or the only one who was not entirely aware of it yet. However, the evidences pointed out by the others made me assume that this was a conspicuous characteristic, common to the three work-related environment I researched on. Basílio, for instance, commented that depending on the communicative activity he had to deal with (field), and on the recipients involved in it (tenor), his linguistic approach to message composition, as well as his concern about language accuracy (mode) might vary. The excerpt that follows illustrates his assumption:

B: So, for instance, if I have to send a message to the president of the company -- from Basílio to the president -- I will be informal. I'll be informal... (simulating the message text)... "[first name], regarding the subject you mentioned, I've already replied this way." That's it! If I have to copy the same message to other people too -- even if I usually write to each one of them in an informal way -- I'll be more formal, though.
M: Because, in this case, it wouldn't be...
B: (interrupting me) ... personal...
M: ... a strict person-to-person contact any more.
B: Yeah.
M: It would be a contact...
B: (interrupting me again) I may also share the same level of informality with these other people. But, in this case, I'd write differently. Ah... I don't know... (thinking on the possible message text)... "Regarding our previous conversation, my response to the subject addressed would be this, this, and this...".
M: You mean, you change your way of communicating?
B: (agreeing with me) You change the way of communicating. (reflecting more) Perhaps because you're more worried about the way you write. You want to guarantee that you've written it well. You are more concerned about agreement... about language agreement. (BASRM1: 97-133)
José Luiz also exemplified the interdependence among the situational components by mentioning that the strictness that usually characterized the professional performance of one particular co-worker (tenor), caused him to be, sometimes, deliberately excluded from participating in some steps of certain negotiation discussions (field):

JL: The point is that he is... he's formal, right? We sometimes think that he has certain limitations because he doesn't change the pattern, he has a one-track mind. Sometimes, when we want to discuss different details, something new and interesting for a specific negotiation, we simply bypass him. On purpose! Because he is too formal. It seems that he needs "to do things by the book" all the time! (JLRM2:498-504)

Juciane, in her turn, referred to the relationship among the situational components by explaining that the type of document required by some situations (field) impacted on the linguistic choices she made in order to compose the message (mode):

J: Sometimes I have to send some specific documentation about a project, or certain conditions regarding prices or invoices. Then, I have to convey this information by following a more formal criterion. Right?
M: And would this 'formal criterion' be related to the way you make up each sentence? Do you rethink each word you use?
J: For sure, for sure. It happens, for sure! (JUCRM1:131-141)

Paulo César also reinforced the interdependence among the situational components by reflecting upon to what extent the level of rapport established with a receiver (tenor) influenced his writing process (mode):

PC: I would even say that... ah... depending on who the receiver is, it is easier for me to write. I know some receivers in person: some of them are my private friends, and I have a very close contact with those people. We talk so much — on the phone or in person — that it makes it easier for me to write to them. Because I know that... I know the way they'll understand me; I know to what extent they'll understand me. (PCRMI: 906-916)

The excerpts above not only illustrate the interdependence among the variables of the context of situation (field, tenor, and mode), but also made me understand them as primarily regarding the realization of work-related activities (field) which, through the use
of language (mode), can promote interaction among professionals (tenor) within their respective corporations.

Nevertheless, by reflecting upon those variables (field, mode and tenor), which emerge from the context of situation and which are, therefore, situated on the plane of register, I started to wonder about their repercussions in terms of the context of culture, or genre, and in terms of language use. Ventola (1988:52) and Martin (1992:495) address this relationship by explaining that language constitutes the expression form of register which, at the same time, represents the expression form of genre. It means that, while register reflects a metafunctional diversity (ideational, textual and interpersonal), expressed by its semiotic components (field, mode and tenor), genre is focused on the integration of the meanings engendered by them and expressed through language. In a more recent article, Ventola (1995) comments on this relationship and emphasized the relevance of the social purposes that connect interactants by saying:

In addition to register, there is yet another aspect to be considered when we speak of language use in social contexts. When the relationship of language to context is considered, it is not enough to refer to language as a realization of, curiously put, objects and activities, channels, and participant relations (FIELD, MODE, TENOR). One also needs to consider the social purposes the interactants want to achieve in the contexts where they are engaged in social interactions. The semiotic communication plane of genre is set up to capture this aspect of 'language as social semiotic'. Genres, or social purposes achieved by language use, are not just an additional aspect of context. Genres are semiotic systems that generate particular structures that are ultimately captured by linguistic behaviors via registers. The plane of genre stands in a specific relationship to the plane of register. The system choices from the genre networks are realized by the choices on the register plane, which in turn are realized by the language plane. That is, the genre choices are perceived to determine what kind of choice combinations of FIELD, MODE and TENOR are possible on the register plane in a culture. (p.7)

Contemplating my research context, in the light of such theoretical references, I realized that professional activities regard purposes which practitioners attempt to reach when involved in work-related interactions. This consideration enlarged the scope of my investigation by connecting the immediate situation in which language is produced, to a
wider context where goals are recognized and shared by those involved in performing professional activities through the use of language. The accomplishment of those goals via genre generates particular structures that are linguistically captured via register which, at the same time, functions as the expression of genre. The communication plane of register (context of situation) is, therefore, intrinsically associated with the communication plane of genre (context of culture). For this reason, dealing with one plane means, directly or indirectly, dealing with the other.

Grounded on such reflections, I started my investigation into the contents of the e-mail messages by attempting to distinguish the nature of the professional activities from which they emerge, and by conceiving their situated goals and linguistic realization. This orientation led me, then, to carefully review the texts collected, as well as the transcripts of the interviews with José Luiz, Luciano, Paulo César, Juciane and Basílio.

Throughout our meetings, I could detect a mixture of difficulty and hesitation when the issue of text identification was addressed. The participants' immediate reaction to my inquiries about this subject was to provide me with a thorough contextual description of each message, including details regarding the specifics of each particular negotiation, the goal(s) of the electronic correspondence exchanged, and its results. The misinterpretation of my questions about genre categorization indicates that this topic is not definitely included among the professionals' concerns about e-mail communication, as Basílio summarizes in the following extract of our conversation:

M: Is there any concern about the type of the message to be conveyed?
B: (promptly) No! No... no! It's a... it's a message! And what you really want is that the information reaches the other person. If you labelled it "form," "message," or... no! The relevant point is: that person needs this information! (BASFM:1100-1110)

Reflecting upon his response, I assume that, from the practitioners' viewpoint, the failure to recognize genres explicitly is not a matter of resistance to the concept; it is much more likely a matter of relevance. Considering the nature, scope and demands of their job activities, their attention tends to be primarily focused on the information itself and on the urgent need to communicate it. In this sense, simple descriptions such as "e-mail" or
"message" tend to fulfill their text identification needs entirely. Thus, under such circumstances, genre manipulation seems to be undertaken on an intuitive, tacit basis which is acquired through practice. Nevertheless, even without manifesting an articulate perception of genres, these practitioners could distinguish circulars, and especially reports, from the variety of genres included in the e-mail samples discussed throughout our conversations\(^5\). To them, therefore, those messages could be grouped into reports, circulars, and a set of other genres that they could neither identify nor label promptly.

Interestingly enough, this broad and vague classification was quite similar to the one I came up with when I first reviewed the e-mail content some time after interviewing the participants. My attempt to interpret this intriguing difficulty in identifying certain genres made me observe that the messages classified as reports and circulars presented self-contained texts generated in very specific work-related situations. In this case, the connection between the underlying purpose and its linguistic realization was perhaps more evident and, due to that, texts of these kinds could be more easily recognized. Conversely, the remaining set of (temporarily nameless) genres regarded routinized electronic exchanges and computerized interactive sequences (Freire, 1995:2)\(^6\), that conformed to a more dynamic interactive process through which information was shared, queries were discussed, and negotiations were implemented and/or developed. By displaying process-like features, these genres, therefore, seemed to be somehow subtler and more difficult to distinguish.

These considerations brought me back to the message content and led me to read them from a genre-oriented point of view. This perception was in fact stimulated by a comment presented by Bruner & Weisser (1991) through which they state that "genres exist not only as modes of writing or speaking but as modes of reading and listening"

\(^5\) Although the participants have also mentioned spreadsheets (BASII:1054, JLII:349, LUCII:636), forms (BASII:1068), questionnaires (BASII:153), contracts (JLII:346, LUCII:634), and minutes (LUCRM1:420), my discussion is restricted to the genres that we could jointly reflect upon through the samples provided.

\(^6\) A computerized interactive sequence conforms to the flow of correspondence exchanged from the presentation to the conclusion of a work-related situation. It summarizes, therefore, the interactive chain established through the participants' asynchronous dialogue. Regarding format, a sequence of this kind may be represented by various messages, or it can be abridged in only one exchange which reproduces previous interactions (Freire, 1995:2).
Their statement suggested to me that understanding a genre meant being primarily attuned to it. Furthermore, it reinforced the idea that capturing the meaning of a genre required being focused on the goal that had generated it, on the text through which it was conveyed and, simultaneously, on the situational and socio-cultural context from where it emerged. At least, it seemed to be the case of my investigation for, as Paré & Smart (1994) state, workplace genres are extremely complex interactions which even though presenting similarities with one another, "no two occurrences of the genre are ever identical, and genres are in a constant state of evolution" (p.153). For this reason, in order to read a certain genre and to envision "its tactics, its strategies, and its ceremonial place" (Freadman, 1994:63), I realized that I needed to conduct my efforts to two directions: firstly, to counteract my lack of *background knowledge* (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995:14) of the business community, by relying on and learning from the participants' descriptions, comments and reflections; secondly, to integrate text and context more accurately, and keep myself attuned to the relationship that might emerge from such an association.

Based on these reflections, I reviewed the messages collected and perceived that, by regarding the flow of correspondence conveyed within each corporation, they might be identified as genres of internal written communication. However, this preliminary general characterization was quite comprehensive and clearly included a number of genres which needed to be differentiated from one another. In order to recognize them and sense their specifics, I reexamined each e-mail sample from the perspective of its possible structural patterns (Paré & Smart, 1994:147), its potential rhetorical moves (Swales, 1990:137-166; Bhatia, 1993:45-75), and its probable contextual configuration (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/89: 55-65). The investigation towards this direction not only helped me to reflect upon the general components of the message content and their sequence, but also induced me to unpack the relations between goal, text and context and, then, refine the tentative categorization initially undertaken. As a result, I realized that, considering the samples

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7 My denomination is based on Yates (1989:65-100) who has coined the expression *genres of internal communication* to refer to spoken and written forms of organizational communication, such as circular letters, manuals, forms, in-house magazine, reports, memos, and committee meetings. Considering the specifics of my research, and its characteristics of *field, mode and tenor*, I understand that by using "genres of internal written communication", I define more precisely the nature and scope of the professional interactions focused.
collected, the preliminary designation *circular* was a generalization for *corporate circular* and *bulletin*. Similarly, *report* was an abstraction from *periodic report*, *occasional report* and *for-your-information report*. Furthermore, I could also recognize that, except for the few samples which abridged characteristics of more than one genre, the remaining set of messages actually comprised six distinct genre types: *request*, *response*, *cover message*, *memo*, *acknowledgement* and *discussion*.

These genre types will be introduced and discussed separately in the following sections of this chapter (5.3.1 to 5.3.11).

### 5.3.1. Corporate circular

My approach to the identification of corporate circulars as a genre was initially based on a study by Yates (1989:66-77), in which she discusses some forms of internal communication and business interactions from the perspective of their evolution over time. According to her investigation, a circular is a document issued by an executive or specific division within a company, in response to the needs for hierarchical downward communication. From this viewpoint, a circular constitutes an essential tool to implement plans and decisions whose repercussions affect the whole corporate community.

Although Yates's descriptions and comments had helped me recognize some circulars among the variety of samples collected, I perceived that her classification was rather open and could not account for the specifics of all the documents I had in hand. Even though such documents shared a similar downward communication movement, they meaningfully diverged in scope and content. On the one hand, I found messages that, by addressing more particular themes, regarded issues that restrictively impacted on certain departments or smaller groups of professionals within the company. In my opinion, messages like these could be then identified as bulletins, as I illustrate in Section 5.3.2. On the other hand, I found messages that, by establishing or reaffirming general policies, or by conveying standard instructions, guided procedures related to the whole corporation. In this case, they can be readily classified as circulars, in Yates's terms.

Nevertheless, I was attempting to seek for patterns, as Hart (1986) suggests, and not to impose them on the samples collected. For this reason, due to the underlying
communicative purposes, and to the nature of the target audience, I realized that the designation *corporate circulars* could be much more appropriate to distinguish those e-mail messages. In fact, my classification was also partially inspired by a comment Paulo César made in our third meeting. At that time, he introduced me to the correspondence we were about to discuss, by saying:

PC: (...) The first e-mail is one of those corporate messages I had told you about. It's a kind of message that... (picking it up)... this one... they send... it's broadcasted to everybody* (PCRIS3:14-17).

This explanation made me realize that *corporate* was a pivotal feature that individualized the e-mail recipients in specific communicative situations. As Swales (1990) suggests, *"a discourse community's nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight"* (p.54) and, in this sense, Paulo César's spontaneous comment contributed to make me find out a more accurate denomination for that kind of electronic interaction.

From this perspective, therefore, I conceive corporate circulars as a tool to update work-related procedures or personnel changes, to convey general instructions or information, as well as to situate or reinforce internal policies and/or rules that impact on the whole organization. Broadly speaking, they comprise one-way informative texts which do not require a compulsory reply, although sometimes they may encourage their recipients to react through suggestions, comments or contributions of various kinds.

My considerations regarding corporate circulars as a genre of internal written communication were based on a contrastive investigation into the structural components of the six samples collected from the third company, the two collected from the first, and the one collected from the second. By contemplating the entire message text area, I noticed that opening and closing salutations constituted elements which were more frequently omitted (basmsg1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.14, 2.1, 2.2; pcrmsg3.1), although sometimes their inclusion might also occur, as in the messages provided by the first organization. In these two specific corporate circulars, the opening salutations designated a non-specific audience (*"Dear colleagues,"* jlimsg1.1; *"Gentlemen,"* jlimsg4.8), and the closing salutations were characterized by the association of a greeting (*"Best Regards,"* jlimsg1.1; *"BR,"*
Regarding the message contents, even without presenting a strict sequence of recurrent components, some level of regularity could be identified. Such a regularity was basically established through the presentation of the target situation which was followed by descriptions of a new or established policy, or by the clarification of a special instruction or orientation. Contemplating the illocutionary force (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969/94) that characterizes these components and the meaning that they convey (e.g., "No one should purchase this product for use on Company owned computers," basmsg1.6; "Make sure the access to your telephone equipment room is controlled," basmsg2.2), I consider their recurrence fundamental to genre identification. This assumption can be illustrated by the excerpts that follow:

(SITUATION)
A 'prank macro' that distributes itself through Microsoft Word documents has been detected recently in the [country], [country] and [country]. The macro, currently undetectable by virus scanners, is automatically run when an infected document is opened; the host Word PC or MAC is then infected. Any document subsequently saved by an infected PC or MAC will contain the macro, and pass on the macro if used on another system. The prank does not affect the content of the document, and no files are lost.

(INSTRUCTION)
The Microsoft Corporation has developed a scanning tool that removes and protects against the prank macro. The software will check all Microsoft Word (.doc) documents that were saved after January 1, 1995. Please note that since the software opens all .doc files, a complete scan will take five to ten minutes. The software is called SCAN.DOC and can be found in InfoTalk through the following path:
Info Manager Services
Employee Comm
Security
Computer Viruses
Information on the Microsoft Word Prank Macro
Microsoft Word Antivirus Software - Prank Macro

(pcmsg3.1)

(SITUATION)
Where we are Today:
Microsoft is shipping the "Preview Program" release of the Win95 beta product. As of Monday, March 27, they have begun taking orders worldwide. The purpose of this "Preview" is for Microsoft to globally "seed" the computing community with pre-release copies of Win95. They will advertise and sell this beta version of Win95 for $60 U.S. A Task Team has been chartered with evaluating and piloting this product
in order to determine what the [company] position on Win95 will be, and how to integrate it into our environment in a managed manner. The team will make recommendations, including how and when Win95 should be deployed. We have negotiated a letter from Microsoft which gives [company] the option to continue purchasing Windows 3.1 after Win95 ships, if we desire and so choose. The latest estimate from Microsoft is that Win95 is expected to be released in August.

(POLICY)
The Policy:

No one should purchase this product for use on Company owned computers. Indications are that some end-users have beta copies loaded on machines in our production environment. This creates a potential hazard for our computer assets and the ability to perform needed work.

Reasons for this policy are as follow:

1) The documentation that Microsoft sends with the "Preview Program" clearly states that since this is pre-release beta software, it should only be used on a secondary computer or a primary machine with a full backup. Their warranty reads as follows: "Warranty: Since this is pre-release software, there is no warranty associated with it, and Microsoft cannot be held responsible for any problems resulting from the use of this product". We do not advocate nor condone the use of any beta software for other than evaluation purpose in a controlled environment.

2) As evidenced in #1, this product is not yet a stable production release and, as has always been [company]'s policy, we will not run beta software in our production environment. This is deemed extremely risky and putting the company assets and environment unnecessarily in jeopardy.

3) Early evaluations have uncovered that approximately 50% of Intel 386 based computers will not be able to run any version of Win95. This is due to flaws in certain revisions of the Intel processor not fully supported some 32-bit operations. There are other bugs in the software. We do not yet know of all other bugs or functional limitations that the full evaluation will uncover.

4) Within the Company, there is no support in place for Win95. During the evaluation, an implementation plan will be developed to outline and address the needs of support organizations. Full support will not be positioned until the actual release of the product is available.

5) Product evaluation has been underway for some time, and we are now forming a globally represented task team led by [name] and sponsored by [name]. This effort will entail testing on a regional basis and a pilot which will include both networked and standalone workstations in a true business environment. The task team will complete the evaluation and pilot analysis by mid-July. This assumes that there is no additional delays to Microsoft's projected August release. (basmsg1.6)

(SITUATION)

AT&T and local authorities in several states are issuing warnings of criminal that pose as telephone technicians representing the local company or AT&T. These "technicians" enter your site and steal your PBX equipment. They usually do not steal the whole cabinet, but the cards inside. The ramifications of such an event include lost communications, network outages, and the financial responsibility of replacing the missing equipment.

There have been 3 incidents in the (city) area; the latest incident cost the Company $00,000 to replace the missing cards.
(ORIENTATION)
To help avoid this problem:
1> Make sure the access to your telephone equipment room is controlled. At a minimum have a different key that is only issued to a select few. If you are unsure who has a key replace it and redistribute it only to those who need access.
2> Do not give telephone company technicians 'special consideration' when entering a site. Have them go through the same procedure as any other contractor or vendor.
3> ALL telephone company technicians are assigned photoIDs. Request them!
4> There should be a reason that these technicians are attempting gain access to the site. Why are they there? Who called them?
5> Call the telephone company to confirm there employment. These numbers should be made available to the guard shack (or point of entry) at the site and also in the telephone room ASAP.
6> If possible have the technicians escorted.
7> Question folks that are not employees in the telephone room. These criminals know what they are doing and may have the technical knowledge to back up their claims, but if they do not know anyone at the site to confirm their presence they do not belong there.
8> When in doubt Forbid Access and notify security. If you feel threatened in anyway JUST CALL SECURITY, DO NOT APPROACH. (basmsg2.2)

In addition to the basic components of the corporate circulars illustrated above (situation followed by instruction, policy or orientation), I noticed that three others might be also included in order to introduce the target content, to determine immediate actions, or to motivate and provide the receivers with information regarding response procedures. These accessory structural elements may be exemplified by the excerpts below:

(INTRODUCING THE SITUATION)
This document is the first in a series of communications designed to address the advent of Microsoft Windows 95 (Wind95) within the company. (basmsg1.6)
Recently a man posing as an AT&T technician gained access to a domestic company site and was admitted to the telephone equipment room where he was left alone to do his "work". A short time later, the entire site phone system stopped working. (basmsg2.2)
On June 13, 95, a member of our [department] US field organization was involved in an Automobile accident. Accident has been classified as "preventable". (basmsg2.1)

.REQUESTING PROCEDURES
Please cascade this note to your entire organization cross regionally. (basmsg1.6)
Please send people for training now and let me know the names of the participants asap. (limsg4.8)
(MOTIVATING RESPONSE and GUIDING FURTHER CONTACTS)
You may have additional suggestions as well, which we would like to hear about. If you have questions or comments, please contact your IS representative. (basmsg1.4)
Further communications will be coming your way to keep you informed of the Win95 situation, and of course, you will receive the project recommendations. For more information, please contact [name] or [name]. (basmsg1.6)
If there are any questions please call Mr. "Y" on (000 or COMPANY-000-0000). (basmsg2.2)

The description presented so far suggests that corporate circulars, as a genre, constitute a normative downward form of written communication which standardizes specific procedures or policies, and provides the whole corporation community with instructions applied to specific work-related situations. Considering the samples collected, such a normative connotation was made explicit through the utilization of verbs in the imperative form, as well as through the illocutionary meanings embedded in some modal clauses that conveyed determination, obligation and/or advice. The extracts below illustrate this assumption:

Any input from customers involving sales agreement discrepancies should be reported immediately... (...) Internal control procedures concerning sales agreement should be reviewed periodically... (basmsg1.5, my emphasis)

No one should purchase this product for use on Company owned computers. (...) The documentation that Microsoft sends with the "Preview Program" clearly states that since this is pre-release beta software, it should only be used on a secondary computer or a primary machine with a full backup. (...) we will not run beta software in our production environment. (...) Full support will not be positioned until the actual release of the product is available. (...) Further communications will be coming your way to keep you informed of the Win95 situation, and of course, you will receive the project recommendations. (basmsg1.6, my emphasis)

Beware of mergers as they represent potentially dangerous situations. (...) We should not depend on "anti-lock and other car safety devices" to avoid accidents from occurring. One should understand the capabilities of the vehicles we drive and how it behaves, but we should also be defensive in our driving techniques to avoid testing both, the vehicle and the "safety devices". (...) When you get in your car today, think of the three key learnings indicated above and re-visit in your mind, how you would use these learnings on your next drive... (basmsg2.1, my emphasis)
Make sure the access to your telephone equipment room is controlled.
(...). Do not give telephone company technicians 'special consideration' when entering a site. Have them go through the same procedure as any other contractor or vendor. (...). Request them! (...). Call the telephone company to confirm there employment. These numbers should be made available to the guard shack (or point of entry) at the site and also in the telephone room ASAP. (...). If possible have the technicians escorted.

Question folks that are not employees in the telephone room. (...). When in doubt Forbid Access and notify security. If you feel threatened in anyway JUST CALL SECURITY, DO NOT APPROACH. (basmsg2.2, my emphasis)

Please remember that is your responsibility to scan your computer regularly. All employees must ensure that computers are virus-free and that no new viruses are introduced to the business or to clients. (pcmsg3.1, my emphasis)

By reflecting upon the excerpts above, I realized that corporate circulars, by focusing on instructions and/or policies, conveyed ideational meanings (Halliday, 1978/92), which invariably represented the orientation of the company. Under this characterization therefore, the voice8 that emerged from messages of this kind was the one of the organization which, assimilated by the sender, was then expressed through the first person plural. Such a perception is illustrated by the excerpts below where I highlight the personal pronoun:

By taking some simple steps NOW, we all can contribute to reducing the company's printing costs. (...). These are just few examples of how we can help reduce printing costs. (basmsg1.4)

Where we are today. (...). A Task Team has been chartered with evaluating and piloting this product in order to determine what the [company] position on Win95 will be, and how to integrate it into our environment in a manager manner. (...). ... we have negotiated a letter from Microsoft which gives [company] the option to continue purchasing Windows 3.1 after Win95 ships, if we desire and so choose. (...). This creates a potential hazard for our computer assets and the ability to perform needed work. (...). We do not advocate nor condone the use of any beta software for other than evaluation purpose in a controlled environment. (...). We will not run beta software in our production environment. (...). We do not yet know of all other bugs or functional

8 Actually, e-mail messages may display three modes of voice presentation: (a) the sender's and receiver's voices are assimilated and represent the employees' voice; (b) the sender's voice is amalgamated into the one of the company and constituted the institutional voice; and (c) the sender's and receiver's voices remain distinct.
limitations that the full evaluation will uncover. (...) we are now forming a globally represented task team... (*basmsg1.6*)

*We are currently in the process of developing a [company] infrastructure to support their formation and operation. (*basmsg1.14*)

As we analysed the causes for this accident... (...) *We* should not depend on "anti-lock and other car safety devices" to avoid accidents from occurring. One should understand the capabilities of the vehicles *we* drive and how it behaves, but *we* should also be defensive in *our* driving techniques to avoid testing both, the vehicle and the "safety devices". (*basmsg2.1*)

However, if the voice expressed by the sender was the one of the corporation, the target audience was undoubtedly the whole community members which were directly *involved* (Chafe, 1982:45-49, Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987:105-110) in the situation, and invariably referred to as "you." In the extracts that follow, I illustrate my argument by highlighting the personal pronoun and its related forms:

*You* may have additional suggestions as well, which we would like to hear about. If you have questions or comments, please contact your [name] representative. (*basmsg1.4*)

Further communication will be coming *your* way to keep you informed of the Win95 situation, and of course, you will receive the project recommendations. (*basmsg1.6*)

When you get *your* car today, think of the three key learnings indicated above and re-visit in *your* mind, how *you* would use these learnings on *your* next drive... (*basmsg2.1*)

These "technicians" enter *your* site and steal your PBX equipment. (*basmsg2.2*)

Please remember that is *your* responsibility to scan *your* computer regularly. (*pcmsg3.1*)

The pronominal choice *we-you* illustrated above indicated, therefore, that corporate circulars described a downward communication movement within the companies through which informative and/or normative contents were transferred from the decision maker leaders to the whole community. Nevertheless, considering the samples collected from the second and third corporations, I noticed that, in addition to being informative and/or
normative, the corporate circulars generated in these particular workplaces were sometimes used as a tool to induce reflection or to promote vicarious learning.

The reflective component was a structural feature of the message content conveyed either through the presentation of a series of questions, or by means of summarized concluding statement, as respectively illustrated by the following excerpts:

(QUESTIONS)
By taking some simple steps NOW, we all can contribute to reducing the company’s printing costs, as well as reducing the environmental impact of paper usage. For example, consider the following:

— Is it essential that I print this information? Even a 10 percent reduction in printing will save millions of dollars.
— While editing a document, do I need to print it at all? Can I edit and proofread while viewing the document on screen?
— Can I print two more pages on one side of the paper and two or more on the reverse side? Some of the desktop applications in use across the company today allow for printing multiple pages on each side. If you have this capability, using it can reduce the cost of consumables by about 50 percent.
— Can I print the document on a laser printer instead of an ink-jet printer? It costs about 2.5 cents per page to print from laser printers versus 13 cents a page from most ink-jet printers.

These are just a few examples of how we can help reduce printing costs.

(CONCLUDING STATEMENT)
Please remember that it is your responsibility to scan your computer regularly. All employees must ensure that computers are virus-free and that no new viruses are introduced to the business or to clients.

In my opinion, the corporate circulars that embodied the extracts above have intended to motivate each staff member not only to review his/her own individual working practices, but also to face his/her responsibilities as part of a larger community. By addressing the topic of rational printing procedures or preventive virus checking, each employee could, for example, think about the impact of carelessly performed job activities on the company expenses or on the advantages of using virus-free computers.

It is interesting to notice that in the first excerpt, the sender started speaking through the institutional voice ("we can all contribute"), shifted to questions that simulated self-reflection (e.g., "Is it essential that I print this information?")}, returned to the institutional
voice ("These are just a few examples of how we can help reduce printing costs"), and concluded by referring to the audience and motivating its participation ("You may have additional suggestions as well, which we would like to hear about. If you have questions or comments, please contact your XX representative"). In this case, the sender's pronominal choice was also significant in suggesting that, although the message displayed an orientation to audience, its content was intended to impact on every community member, including him/herself.

I interpret corporate circulars like the ones illustrated above as encouragements to reflection that, by evoking the everyday working practices of professionals will stimulate their thinking and lead to a general work-related awareness. By mentioning awareness here, I refer to the concept of "conscientização" -- or "conscientization", a synonym for awareness -- which, according to Freire (1980:26), does not exist out of the praxis boundaries and, for this reason, involves the action-reflection act. The essence of provoking reflection upon professional practices, and leading the corporate community to think about and be aware of the repercussions of individual procedures is, in my opinion, predominantly educational.

The vicarious learning component, on the other hand, was a structural feature that exclusively belonged to Basílio's corporation. It was usually conveyed under the heading key learning attached to messages that addressed an event or incident which had occurred in any one of the branches worldwide. As an illustration, I have selected an excerpt regarding a car accident which, in addition to making the learning purposes explicit, also includes a concluding statement that appeals to deeper reflection:

**KEY LEARNING:**
As we analyze the causes for this accident, several alternatives could have prevented the accident from occurring. These were:
- Speed and space away from the Ford Van were not correct for the driving conditions prevailing at the time. The wet conditions of the road and the poor visibility because of the size and shape of the Ford Van could have been key observations that would identify a potentially dangerous situation.

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9 According to the original, "A conscientização não pode existir fora da 'práxis', ou melhor, sem o ato ação-reflexão" (Freire,1980:26).
- Beware of mergers as they represent potentially dangerous situations. In the event that the conditions may indicate an "accident-to-happen" environment, waiting is a valid alternative.
- We should not depend on "anti-lock and other car safety devices" to avoid accidents from occurring. One should understand the capabilities of the vehicles we drive and how it behaves, but we should also be defensive in our driving techniques to avoid testing both, the vehicle and the "safety devices".

MESSAGE TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE [DEPARTMENT]
ORGANIZATION:
When you get in your car today, think of the three key learnings indicated above and re-visit in your mind, how you would use these learnings on your next drive... (basmsg2.1)

According to Basilio, the purpose of identifying certain events or incidents, and highlighting key concepts transcends the corporate circular's primary intention of sharing information, and incorporates a principle that characterizes the culture of his company (BASRM2:1655-1657). From this practitioner's perspective, being in touch with someone else's experiences, and being alert to the learning issues emphasized in certain messages means having the opportunity to acquire some useful knowledge that may be either applied to similar occasions at work or transferred to private life situations. In his opinion, the repercussion of such a procedure may be felt in the level of awareness of company personnel and in their decision-making skills (BASRM2:1593-1604, 1680-1682, 1948-1953; BASRM4:1551-1561).

To me, the practice of describing and commenting on the experiences lived by members of the corporate community is predominantly didactic, and emerges from the educational orientation that explicitly guides this company. In my opinion, such a feature not only reflects the culture of Basilio's organization, but is also evidence of the potential that workplaces have as educational sites. Hence, within a work-related environment, learning is a situated and progressive process of knowledge and meaning acquisition which is implemented and nourished, on a daily basis, through sharing and reflecting upon the variety of experiences lived at work.

The reflective and vicarious learning components -- which were evident in the second and third organizations -- were not similarly detected in the corporate circulars collected in the first company. In this specific workplace, this genre seem to be essentially
applied to the dissemination of information, without revealing any other kind of intention or commitments. The transcription of the e-mail message below, for instance, illustrates such a genre:

    Gentlemen
    As earlier informed following training will take place here in [country]:
    18. - 19.9.95 Basic Instruments, [city]
    20. - 21.9.95 Consistency [city]
    22.9.95 Consistency (MCA), [city]
    Please, send people for training now and let me know the names of the participants asap.
    BR. [sender's name]
    (jimsg4.0)

    Nevertheless, by stating that the corporate circulars collected from the first organization do not emphasize reflective hints or specific key concepts to be learned, I do not mean that other documents transmitted or other activities performed within this corporation are not committed to any didactic principle either. In this sense, the content of the message above suggests exactly the opposite: by confirming a forthcoming training period previously announced and requesting the names of participants, the company is actually revealing its concern about personnel development which is, undoubtedly, an educational intent manifested within this workplace.

    The discrepancy I noticed among the three companies is located, however, at the level of genre manifestation: while the corporate circulars generated within the first organization are restricted to the basic informative and normative purposes that characterize this genre and identify it as a working tool; the other organizations have evolved from this stage and, by including specific rhetorical elements (reflective hints and the highlighting of key concepts) have transformed corporate circulars so that they function as working and learning tools at the same time. In my opinion, this evolution illustrates genre situatedness and dynamism that, as suggested by Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995:4-13), conform to principles on which genre characterization is built up. Regarding dynamism however, I disagree with these two authors when they suggest that it only occurs over time. According to the samples collected, I have evidences to assume that genre dynamism -- considered as a response to particular sociocognitive needs of its users and of their
workplaces -- in addition to being longitudinal, may also take place across distinct sites of the same business territory.

5.3.2. Bulletin

The recognition of corporate circulars as a genre introduced me to forms of downward communication, and made me realize that, despite the similarities regarding information origin and direction, corporate circulars and bulletins had, essentially, distinct purposes and addressability. By contrasting samples of both genres, I realized that, rather than normative, a bulletin is a predominantly informative tool, issued by a professional or department in order to make announcements that only affect a restricted target audience within the company. Among these subjects, introduction of a new division leader, specific technical instructions update, presentation of document drafts addressing specific changes within the company, meeting preparation and agenda, post-meeting announcement, and even holiday greetings from a director to his subordinates can be mentioned as illustrations of the themes possibly addressed through this genre.

My considerations regarding bulletins as a genre of internal written communication were grounded on the seven samples collected from the third workplace, and on the one obtained from the first. By contrasting the structural organization of the message text area, I noticed that opening salutations were always omitted, whereas closing salutations -- except for three occurrences (basmsg1.12; 3.6; j1msg4.9) -- were consistently present. In this case, however, I could not identify a preferred design: two senders signed their messages (basmsg1.10, 1.13); one of them used "BR" as a greeting without including any signature (basmsg1.9); and two of them provided an expression of gratitude (bas msg3.5, 3.6) along with their names.

Although opening and closing salutations displayed some kind of regularity -- at least, in terms of the omission and inclusion of message components -- I could not detect the same level of regularity regarding the structural elements of the content. The only component presented in all messages -- which I have labelled target information -- was, in fact, the one that synthesized the core purpose of communication and that, for this reason, was essential for content transmission and comprehension. The excerpts below
illustrate the presentation of this structural segment and its textual realization:

(INTRODUCTION OF A NEW DIVISION LEADER)
I am proud to be part of the [division] team and am looking forward to meeting all of you. Although I will not assume the responsibilities of [department] until mid-year, I think it is important to begin the process of getting to know each other now. I realize that meeting over 3500 [division] employees will take some time to get around to everyone. I want to expedite this process by sharing with you a little about myself and my plan for meeting with you and learning about the [division].
You've probably wondered about what in my background led to the [department] position. Most of my 30 years with [company] have been spent in the [area] and [area] businesses, with a stint as head of [area]. I began my career as a process engineer at the [city] plant and held a succession of positions -- production planning, marketing, and management before being promoted to vice president of [department], vice president of [department] and senior vice president of [department]. I'm an engineer by education, with studies leading toward an MBA. To capitalize on my broad operating business experience, I'm currently attending a program at the [name] School of Business which is uniquely designed to sharpen the financial insight of executives. Outside [company], I'm active as a director of the Bank of [city] and positions in the Medical Center of [city], the YMCA and the University of [city] Advisory Board.
My plan for getting around to meet you is simple -- I'm "just going to do it". I want to meet people as they are naturally engaged in their work, and I would like to keep things informal and open. I would also like to be received as a welcomed visitor to meetings that have already been designed to pursue Business/Functional issues. When we do have a chance to meet, please feel free to be open and honest with me about your feelings, concerns, and perceptions. I will do my best to answer your questions. Likewise, I will need to ask questions of you. I need you to be honest with me, and give me the benefit of your trust. We have got to develop strong partnerships if we are going to meet the challenges that face us. (basmgr1.10)

(MEETING PREPARATION)
During our meeting Thursday, August 18 we would like to take few minutes to discuss principles and policy for valuation of goods shipped between consolidated [company] companies.
Members of the [department] Team have identified a number of instances where products are being shipped between consolidated [company] companies on a "no-charge" basis. Examples include 1) products which are ultimately intended to be given by the receiving company to customers as samples, and 2) raw materials shipped into [country]. We would suggest that this practice be discontinued.
As a matter of principle, goods which are commercially produced or acquired must continue to carry their cost value within the consolidated Company, until such time as they are consumed, disposed or leave our possession. In addition, bookkeeping of the financial value of assets facilitates internal control.
Accordingly, we would suggest that the following standard be adopted:
"Goods which are shipped between consolidated [company] companies will be accounted for as "transfers", and carry their arms-length transfer price and company cost values on the books and records of the receiving company." (basmsg1.12)

(Technical Instructions Update)
As you know, currently to access Results Tracking on TSO you must type 'XDAU.$SPE.RT.CCLIST (AUDIT)' at the READY prompt. If you choose to shorten this logon so that you need only type AUDIT at the READY prompt, follow the direction below:
- Logon to TSO as instructed
- At the CDC-AE Main Menu, choose Option [letter] (Xtra ISPF Libraries)
- Next you will choose option [number] and tab down to Application Library Definition:
  Name ===> (type Auditing)
  Description ===> (type Results Tracking)
- Press the Enter key
- The next screen will prompt you for Library Names:
  after the first ===> type `xdau.$spe.rt.cclist' (with the single quotes)
- Press enter
- Press PF3
- This should take you to a screen that allows you to activate your Results Tracking logon. Tab down to the left hand column of the line that reads AUDITING and type a [letter] in that column.
- Press Enter
- Press PF3 (this will take you back to the Main menu for TSO)
- Logoff
*** THIS IS A ONE-TIME PROCEDURE. ONCE YOU DO THIS YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ENTER AUDIT AT THE READY PROMPT TO ACCESS RESULTS***
************************************************************
- The next time you logon (you must use OMNILOG as your procedure), you only need to type AUDIT at the ready prompt to enter Results Tracking.
(basmsg1.13)

(Holiday Greetings)
I wish all of you and your family a safe and happy holiday season, and a prosperous new year. (basmsg1.9)

By comparing the structural elements of the bulletins collected, I perceived that the target information component could be addressed in two different ways. On the one hand, it could be the only element presented, constituting, therefore, the entire message content. As an illustration, I could refer to one particular bulletin which, issued after a meeting, objectively announced to its participants the directory of sales support, representatives or agents around the world (jmsg4.9). In this case, in order to preserve the anonymity of the professionals mentioned, since only their names and respective countries were indicated,
the message is not transcribed but only briefly described.

On the other hand, even without presenting any kind of recurrent pattern, some other components could be attached to the target information, in order to contextualize its main purpose, to conclude its presentation, to elicit comments and suggestions, or to guide procedures for further communication. These elements may be illustrated by the extracts that follow:

(CONTEXTUALIZING)
AS 1994 DRAWS TO A CLOSE, I WANT TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK EACH OF YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS AND FOR HELPING [COMPANY] HAVE A VERY SUCCESSFUL YEAR. WE IN INTERNAL AUDITING HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE. EVERY PLACE I VISIT I RECEIVE POSITIVE FEEDBACK ABOUT OUR EFFORTS TO ADD VALUE TO THE BUSINESS AND TO HELP THE BUSINESSES WITH THEIR CHALLENGES. I AM VERY PROUD OF OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND KNOW WE ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK AS WE REDIRECT OUR FOCUS TO MORE VALUE-ADDING ACTIVITIES. 1995 WILL BE ANOTHER CHALLENGING YEAR AS WE TRY TO HOLD OUR GAINS, AND CONTINUE TO IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT. I LOOK FORWARD TO THIS CHALLENGE AND TO WORKING WITH YOU TO HELP IMPROVE [COMPANY]'S PERFORMANCE AROUND THE GLOBE. (basmsg1.9)

(CONCLUDING STATEMENT)
Again, I look forward to our meeting and our new relationship. (basmsg1.10)
If it is agreed, we suggest that each accounting organization review their current practices and align to the standard. (basmsg1.12)

(MOTIVATING RESPONSE)
Appreciate your comments/upgrades Thursday. (basmsg1.12)

(GUIDING FURTHER CONTACTS)
If you have any problems setting this up, give me a call (000-0000) (basmsg1.13)

The description presented so far emphasizes that target information is the only recurrent component that characterizes the content of bulletins, although other occasional elements (contextualization, concluding statement, response motivation, and further contact orientation) may be also attached to it on an optional basis. Considering such a flexibility, I suggest that the lack of a standardized design impacts on the message organization which may vary according to individual writing styles, including bilingual communication. My suggestion is based on two particular bulletins provided by Basilio
which were issued by the same professional within his corporation. The first one of them -- which I transcribe below -- referred to a meeting agenda, and displayed an innovative structural sequence through which contextualization, further contact orientation and closing salutation preceded the presentation of the target information:

(contextualizing)
BELOW YOU WILL FIND THE AGENDA FOR OUR MEETING ON JAN 12nd FROM 2 TO 5 PM [COUNTRY] TIME.

(guiding further contact)
IF YOU HAVE ANY SUBJECT TO BE DISCUSSED, SEND TO ME AND WE WILL TRY REORGANIZE THE AGENDA.

(closing salutation)
THANKS,
[SENDER’S NAME]

(presenting the target information)
A=> METRICS (ALL) 10 MIN
B=> 95 OBJECTIVES (ALL) 30 MIN
C=> STATUS FIXED ASSETS (name) 10 MIN
D=> STATUS GTDB PROJECT (name, name) 10 MIN
E=> [DEPT.] [COUNTRY] (name) 5 MIN
F=> [DEPT.] [COUNTRY] [COUNTRY] (name, name) 5 MIN
G=> 1995 ACC. CHANGES STATUS (ALL) 10 MIN
H=> GMC STATUS (name) 10 MIN
I=> NON CAPITAL COST (name) 10 MIN
J=> RECONCILIATION RECOGNITION (name) 5 MIN
K=> CRITERIA TO EVALUATE CONTRIBUTION (name) 20 MIN
L=> PENDING ISSUES (name) 5 MIN
L=> PATHFORWARD FOR NEXT MEETING (name) 5 MIN
M=> REFLECTION (ALL) 5 MIN (basmsg3.5)

The second bulletin presented the same structural organization and similarly, addressed topics to be discussed in a forthcoming meeting. In this case, however, contextualization and closing salutation were conveyed in Portuguese, and preceded the target information which was displayed in both Portuguese and English, as indicated by the excerpt that follows:

(contextualizing)
ABAIXO SEGUE MATERIAL QUE VAMOS DISCUTIR E VALIDAR NA REUNIAO DE 10/05.
(closing salutation)
GRATO
[sender's name]

(target information)
TRATAMENTO DE DUTIES NA REUNIÃO
(...)
COMENTARIOS DOS USA
* CUSTOMS DUTY IS A VARIABLE EXPENSE
* FOR SHIPMENTS OF RAW MATERIALS OR SEMI-FINISHED PRODUCTS, DUTY SHOULD BECOME PART OF THE PRODUCT COST.
* FOR FINISHED PRODUCT SHIPMENTS DIRECT TO CUSTOMERS, DUTY SHOULD BE CHARGED TO [DEPARTMENT].
* FOR FINISHED PRODUCT SHIPMENTS TO SUBSIDIARIES THAT WILL BE WAREHOUSED, DUTY SHOULD BE CHARGED TO INVENTORY (SUBS ARE CONSIDERED VENDORS) AND ONLY WHEN THE PRODUCT IS SOLD, SHOULD THE TOTAL COST OF THE INVENTORY, INCLUDING DUTY, BE CHARGED TO [DEPARTMENT].
* PRODUCT THAT YOU ARE BRINGING INTO THE COUNTRY FOR RESALE, THE CUSTOMS DUTIES SHOULD BE TREATED AS PART OF THE INVENTORY COST AND ADDED IN WITH THE FINISHED PRODUCT. THIS WOULD IN TURN WILL SHOW UP IN THE COST OF MANUFACTURE WHEN THE PRODUCT IS SOLD TO THE END CUSTOMER. COSTUME DUTIES ON INVENTORY THAT IS TRANSFERRED FOR CONSUMPTION ARE ALSO CONSIDERED INVENTORY COSTS. "FEV/94"

DEFINICAO PARA A [HEADQUARTER] - A PARTIR DE JAN/95
TODOS AS DESPESAS INCORRIDAS NO PROCESSO DE IMPORTACAO DE PRODUTOS PARA REVENDA OU PARA SER UTILIZADO NO PROCESSO DE PRODUCAO, DEVEM SER CONSIDERADOS COMO CUSTO DE INVENTARIO E, QUANDO VENDIDOS REGISTRADOS COMO CUSTO DAS MERCADORIAS VENDIDAS [DEPARTMENT]. COM ISTO, ELIMINAMOS A FIGURA DE DESPESAS DIFERIDAS TANTO PARA AS REVENDAS COMO PARA AS MANUFATURAS DE AGRICOLA. (bmsg3.6)

Considering these two specific messages and the fact that both were composed by the same person, I assume that the structural organization of the content, as well as the utilization of upper-case letters, can be attributed to the individual writing style that characterizes this particular professional, regardless of the language used for communication. The bilingual format displayed in the second message, however, is not merely a matter of individual preference but, according to Basílio (BASRM3:1275-1284), it reveals a common procedure followed in his company when informal messages are conveyed. The explanation for such a practice lies in the fact that Portuguese and Spanish are closely related languages, and may be used interchangeably in a South America
context. The English used in this case refers to issues addressed in previous correspondence and, because of the recipients' linguistic competence, it does not require translation.

The lack of recurrent components at the level of message content does not affect the recognition of bulletins as a genre for, as claimed by Orlikowski & Yates (1994:544), the identification of genres within a community is based on characteristics of purpose and/or form. In this case, the lack of formal standardization emphasizes the social action (Miller,1994) that involves the interactants, and its leading communicative purpose (Swales,1990) of addressing general information to a restricted audience within the corporation. Bearing in mind the flexible structural organization of bulletins, I assume that the inclusion of certain elements is not sufficient to constitute a genre definition. Rather, it reveals the message generator's linguistic and rhetorical repertoire (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995:24), which is activated according to the situation and to the participants involved in it. In my opinion, rather than following a mandatory pattern of realization, these accessory components reinforce the basic purpose of bulletins.

5.3.3. Periodic report

Similarly to corporate circulars and bulletins, my approach to reports was also initially grounded on the ontological study undertaken by Yates (1989:77-59). From her perspective, a report is an upward form of communication through which information from lower levels within the corporation is transmitted to the opposite upper level. Under such a characterization, a report constitutes a systematic management tool and, therefore, a mechanism on the basis of which decisions and future plans can be made. In her investigation, Yates distinguishes two types of reports: (a) routine or periodic reports which, by providing information on normal operations at regular intervals, can be used for monitoring efficiency, and (b) special reports which address more specific themes in response to particular requests.

Yates's comments had certainly enlightened my understanding of reports as genres of internal written communication which may describe an upward movement of information within the company. However, I perceived that her categorization, although focused on the
purpose and frequency of communication, was too generalized to account for the nuances of the documents I found in the corporations involved in this research. The samples collected indicated that objectivity in presenting facts, as well as manipulation of narrative and/or descriptive modes could be also associated with purpose and frequency and, together with them, impact on report production. Furthermore, I noted that the combination of such aspects would not only generate more detailed differences between the two types presented, but it would also lead to the recognition of another report variety which Yates does not include in her description.

The e-mail messages provided by my participants suggested to me three types of grouping. Firstly, I had a quite objective kind of document that, by describing an upward communication movement, summarized the performance and achievements of a particular segment within the company at pre-established and regular periods of time. Considering such attributes, these documents could fit into the denomination periodic reports, in Yates's terms. Secondly, I identified another type of communication which was not necessarily generated in response to a previous request, but was primarily motivated by the need to report sporadic events or unexpected situations. Samples of this kind could be faced as occasional reports, as I illustrate in Section 5.3.4. Thirdly, I found an informal and predominantly narrative variety of messages that, issued as a request response, could describe an upward communication movement, as well as being used to spread information out across the hierarchy. In this specific case, the main purpose was the one of providing the receiver with an informative reply, conveyed through the narration or description of facts, events and/or situated procedures. In my opinion, documents of this kind could be better identified as for-your-information reports, as I describe in Section 5.3.5.

The classification that I suggest above (periodic, occasional, and for-your-information report) more adequately represents the specifics of the e-mail samples collected from the workplaces focused on in this research. Nevertheless, although they all share the same report denomination, due to their descriptive-narrative qualities, I do not perceive them as parts or subdivisions of the same genre. In my opinion, the nature and purpose of the social action that generate these three particular sorts of e-mail messages, as well as their textual realization, place them in different planes and, consequently, I depict
them as distinct genres.

From this perspective, I conceive a periodic report as a genre of upward communication through which accomplishments and outcomes of certain job activities are described, or negotiations take place, or further opportunities are summarized and updated. For this reason, it constitutes a critical tool for evaluating plans, procedures and/or strategies. Moreover, by attempting to regularly document transaction processes, as well as performance results, it may be used as a mechanism for individual and/or departmental assessment and control. Broadly speaking, a periodic report provides a one-way channel of communication which does not require any specific reply, although it implicitly displays the potential for subsequent evaluative comments.

According to Basílio and Paulo César, a periodic report embodies a standardized structure which is pre-established by the company or department and, for this reason, conforms to its official orientation. Although both professionals were customarily involved in this kind of writing activity, they had been experiencing it differently. Basílio, for instance, defined the audit reports he composed as specific documents (BASFM:532-538) whose pattern followed a regular sequence to be reproduced in similar work-related situations:

B: (...) If you saw the report — in our case, the formal Audit Report — you'd realize it follows a pattern. So, when I say it's a formal report... ah... it has some characteristics... it has some characteristics that you have to follow. Then, what's formal? You have to say: which audit it was, when you did it, when the final meeting was. After that, you have to start another paragraph in which you say the opinion of the department regarding the job performed, and you summarize the main findings. At the end, in the third paragraph, you acknowledge everybody's participation. It's formal! Then, comes the second page. On the second page, you go into details. So, you start to expand the topics you've mentioned in the second paragraph summary: you give more details, you include the audit recommendations, and the opinion of the person who was audited. M: So, when you say 'formal' you mean 'structured'? B: (confirming) Structured. (BASRM3:1918-1947)

Paulo César, on the other hand, dealt with periodic reports that, by utilizing a pre-established structural framework, constituted a kind of form to be filled out monthly with an updated summary of progress in the development of his department:
PC: Well, it's a report... the monthly report, right? It's a report that I have to send every month, and it regards the activities performed within this division of the company in Brazil. I sent it to the Latin America Manager, right? So, it's a kind of activity that I do frequently. It has a pre-established structure, and I only have to write the updates here... (pointing at the companies mentioned)... of each one.

M: Would it be a kind of form, then? If I could...

PC: Yes...

M: ... compare it somehow...

PC: Yes. It has a pre-established format. It has to be done this way. I only include the monthly updates in this report, OK? (PCRM2:10-26)

Both examples presented above show that periodic reports frequently contain confidential information concerning the internal operation of companies or departments. For this reason, my access to such documents was quite restricted: apart from comments and descriptions, I was given only one e-mail sample of this kind. This message was provided by Paulo César with an explicit request:

PC: Regarding this one, Maximina, I would like you not to divulge it because it has customers, information about customers we've been working on, right? So, this one... I would like you to keep its confidentiality.

M: Right.

PC: But as for the other messages... it's OK.

M: May I mention it as a document type?

PC: Yes. (...) If you want, you can use it for observation. You can do that. However, the names that are mentioned, I wouldn't... we wouldn't like them to appear anywhere.

M: Right! (PCRM2:28-47)

Under such circumstances, my perception of periodic reports was restricted to the information I gathered during conversations with the participants, together with an analysis of the one actual sample I was able to collect. By analyzing the text area of that e-mail message, I noticed that it did not include any kind of salutation and, therefore, both sender and receiver were identified through the to and from lines of the header. Regarding content presentation, it was introduced by the title "MONTHLY REPORT" (also indicated in the subject line), and organized according to a sequence of capitalized topics, structured as follows:
I. HIGH ACTIVITIES/MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES
CLOSSED BUSINESS
MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES
II. EVENTS
III. ISSUES
IV. COMPETITIVE INFORMATION
(pcmsg2.1.)

In my opinion, the sequence of items according to which this periodic report is designed reveals the areas of interest and of business concentration on which Paulo César's department is focused. By maintaining the structure presented above, the periodic report writing task is significantly simplified: the professional revises the activities undertaken and the progress achieved with each customer every month, and objectively records their updated position.

By contrasting such a format with the one described by Basílio, I assume that the reproduction of the same structure or sequence of compulsory components contributes to standardize periodic report writing practices within these corporations. Such an observation recalls a comment made by Paré & Smart (1994):

Some organizations attempt to ensure the standardization of certain textual features by codifying structure, rhetorical moves, and/or style in-house guidelines or manuals. In other organizations, these features are often conventionalized by tacit agreement — the lore of the tribe, as it were. (p.148)

Considering the procedures performed within Paulo Caceres and Bacillus organization, I assume that the convention which surrounds the periodic report structure is more likely to be situated within the realm of tacit agreement, since both companies do not prescribe any writing rules in a printed institutional guideline.

Unfortunately, the difficulty of obtaining access to periodic report samples prevented me from undertaking a more detailed analysis, or from drawing parallels among possible manifestations of this genre across different workplaces. My investigations in this direction allowed me to recognize the existence of another genre of internal written communication which, by virtue of its unique characteristics and its particular
communicative purpose, may be regarded as a distinct genre type. Firmer conclusions, however, would require me to overcome the restrictions of corporation confidentiality in order to obtain more extensive data.

5.3.4. Occasional report

In contrast to the periodic report area, my investigation of occasional reports was somewhat more detailed. In this case, in addition to counting on my participants' comments and descriptions, I could also analyze two e-mail samples from distinct workplaces, and subtly press a little further against the boundaries of business confidentiality. By walking through this region, I realized that an occasional report is a genre of internal written communication which primarily originates in the description of sporadic facts and events, or unexpected situations. Its generation, therefore, is determined neither by a pre-established routine nor necessarily by a superior's previous request. As a genre of upward communication and a systematic management tool (Yates, 1989:77), its reception may impact on analyzing the performance of individuals, as well as on reviewing and/or formulating plans and operational procedures.

My approach to occasional reports was grounded on the two specific samples collected from the second and third companies. Considering the structural organization of the message text area, I noticed that the e-mail conveyed within the second corporation (jucmsg2/3.1) was introduced by the association of an informal greeting ("Hello") with the recipients' names; and closed by a salutation that followed the same design ("Kind regards, Juciane," jucmsg2/3.1). The occasional report obtained from the third company, however, did not contain any kind of opening salutation, although its closing displayed the combination of an expression of gratitude -- used as a kind of greeting -- with the sender's signature ("Thanks, [name]," basmsg3.3).

By contrasting the body of both messages, I perceived that the lack of regularity not only involved the inclusion/omission of salutations, but it was an attribute that extended to other structural elements of the message contents. The occasional report collected from Basílio's corporation, for instance, comprised a sequence of four elements, which I identified as follows:
I just learned that, at 8:30 am this morning, 03 armed individuals robbed Banco [name] branch located inside our [name of the branch] plant in [city] - [state]. No personal injuries were sustained nor any property damages occurred for [company]. There was no reaction and no shooting happened.

According to [name of the branch], the robbers entered the plant from the cliff in the back. They apparently waited there since last night. Workers were subdued when they went up the hill to mow. The robbers seemed to be waiting the armored car to arrive (today is pay day), but instead they came down when they met the workers. Loss to the bank was low (apparently, $0M). Robbers left the plant through the front gate. One of them was hooded, which indicates he/she was afraid of recognition. They fled in a waiting car. Local police are on the scene.

We will give you more details as they come in.

Meantime, we appreciate any inputs you may have.

The purpose that motivated the occasional report above was one of immediately notifying hierarchical superiors and colleagues of a bank robbery which occurred at one of the company branches, even without having the whole picture of the incident and its consequences (as shown by the recurrent use of "apparently"). Having provided a preliminary report of the situation, the sender then made explicit his intention of supplying with further information, as well as of inviting a reaction from the receiver. Apart from the message purpose and its realization, it is interesting to note the descriptive style adopted which, because of its objectivity and neutrality, is reminiscent of a police report.

The occasional report collected from the second corporation (jucmsg2/3.1), on the other hand, concerned a presentation jointly undertaken by Juciane and a colleague from another company. In this case, however, the message content presented a more intricate structural organization that comprised three broad elements -- introduction, summary of the event, and conclusion -- which were designed through the association of specific sub-components.

In the introduction, Juciane briefly contextualized the event, described its impact
completed in the first week. We had 22 people committed and 15 showed up.

We posed the interview 4 weeks in advance and we had our audience managers.

different companies. We hired logistics, marketing and systems

The Larger oil is gaining 20 new people so we invited about 50 people from

collect a high 800 merit on EDM. Vendor managed inventory at part

With the objective of prompting new applications of EDM services,

Business solutions.

relies on products is growing fast, offering excellent opportunities for

Under this scenario, the demand for EDM and information technology

organizations in [country], particularly those leading on the consumer

The need to improve customer service has been recognized by most

WHY A VMI PRESENTATION:

which was highlighted with capital letters:

The summary of the event was presented through an explicit sequence of topics:

2. Identifying opportunities:

1. Show the SCM and VMI concepts and benefits;

So [Company A] and [Company B] decided to organize an event in order

value the SCM and VMI concepts. As we understand of this kind

we have defined some areas such as analyze the market. Study and

improve a VMI solution.

[Company B] and are working together to identify opportunities

[CONTEXTUALIZING]

Sequence:

details regarding the presentation itself. These subdivisions were displayed in the following work. "We will need your help and attention," and prepared the reader for the forthcoming work. "The presentation was a success" and immediate consequences. (now we have a lot of

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THE PROGRAM:
The program of our seminar was presented in two parts. The first was about basic Logistics concepts such as order cycles and inventory management. The second half was the introduction to VMI: how it works, potential benefits and restrictions to overcome.

[COMPANY A'S HQ] AND [COMPANY A]:
We presented the partnership between [COMPANY A's HQ] and [Company A] to bring to Brazil the VMI solution.

FIRST RESULT:
After the lecture we had some time for questions & answers. We had an enthusiastic debate on the subject. After that, we ended the event with a questionnaire to survey participants impression about Supply Chain Management.

BASIC RESULTS OF THE SURVEY:
85% of participants were from manufacturing companies
46% said that SCM is a hot subject in their company and
46% said that it is becoming an important subject.
23% said they plan to implement a VMI solution immediately and
46% in the next year.
46% said they already use EDI technology for over 2 years.
85% said that internal management culture will be the main obstacle for implementation.

NEXT STEP:
According to a suggestion from some participants we should create a FORUM to discuss a VMI solution. The forum would be coordinated by [Company A]-[Company B] with participation open to potential clients, representing retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers. In this forum (that has to start very soon) we will discuss, identify and document the best practices in SCM-VMI.

HOW IS THE MARKET AND OUR COMPETITION:
The results of the half-day seminar plus the feeling we have about other market segments and the emerging competition (IBM/Advantis, Interchange, etc) places an urgency to decision making. We already have two companies requesting a proposal.

The conclusion of this occasional report, in its turn, was subdivided into the two elements illustrated below:

(DISPLAYING AVAILABILITY FOR FURTHER CONTACT)
In case of any doubts, please make contact.

(EXPRESSING GRATITUDE)
Thanks in advance for your help.

By reflecting upon the structural organization of these two occasional reports, I noticed that, although displaying some distinctions, both of them contextualized the situation to be reported, suggested the relevance of capturing the receiver's involvement ("we appreciate any inputs you may have," basmsg3.3; and "we will need your help and
attention in this matter," jucmsg2/3.1), as well as expressing, in advance, the sender's gratitude for the recipient's attention and possible assistance ("Thanks, [name]," basmsg3.3, and "Thanks in advance for your help," jucmsg2/3.1). In my opinion, the recurrence of such structural components does not constitute by themselves a precise evidence to support genre identification. In this case, such a recognition is primarily grounded on the communicative purpose both e-mail messages attempt to fulfill, as well as on the social action that involves participants in the upward movement described by the information reported.

The strength of the communicative purpose factor was also attested by Basílio and Juciane throughout our conversations and discussions about these two messages. Basílio was predominantly attuned to it and to the context of its realization. However, he revealed a kind of reluctance to classify the message he provided as a report, as I had suggested. For him, communication would be a better denomination, as illustrated by the excerpt below:

M: Would you classify this message as a report? If you had to identify the document type, how would you do it?
B: (with hesitation) Well, it's a communication... formal... a communication from the Legal Department, telling that he had just been notified about a bank robbery... a bank within our plant, right?... that nobody was hurt... these things. You see, he informed his manager in the United States, the president for the South America Region, the Financial Director... right? And another person in the Regional Audit Dept., right? And, after that, he forwarded this message to these three people. So, here, we have a... it's a... a communication of the fact. (BASRM3:521-545)

Juciane, on the other hand, expanded her comments on context and purpose, and pointed out features that, according to her, would conform to a report, as a generic designation. The transcription of part of our conversation illustrates this argument:

J: This message is more likely a report – as we mentioned last meeting. The report of a joint presentation we did, I mean, my corporation and a consulting company. And this is the report. You'll notice that, regarding the text and the message as a whole, it was something that I did, I did it again, I structured it. I was worried about grammar because the people I had to send it to were the Manager for Latin America and the Latin America Director of the company we represent in Brazil. So, I attempted to pay more attention to grammar. In other words, I spent more time in writing it.
Juciane's comments above, in addition to explicitly identifying the message genre, highlight some attributes of e-mail production that certainly impact on the final written product. By explaining her preoccupation with content articulation, with language accuracy, and with the receivers' hierarchical position, she distinguishes messages of this kind from the ordinary flow of electronic correspondence. From her perspective therefore, an occasional report is a unique document not only because of its content weight and destination, but also because it requires a more judicious approach to self-expression. Nevertheless, I understand that such demands for message writing do not necessarily imply formality. In the e-mail message she composed (jucmsg2/3.1), for instance, the salutation expressed by "Hello" and the utilization of the receivers' first names were quite colloquial, regardless of the hierarchical function these recipients perform within the corporation.

The reflection upon the possibility of considering the two e-mail messages discussed so far as manifestations of the same genre reinforces my perception that genre identification cannot be exclusively grounded on recurrences situated at the level of structural patterns. Restricting identification to these terms makes genre recognition fragmentary and, in this case, less tangible. However, if the structural components are not necessarily the same, the presentation of content follows the same descriptive mode which certainly gives these messages some level of relevant similarity. In addition to this feature, I believe that the resemblance between them is essentially supported by their analogous intent of reporting to a hierarchical superior, the details of an unexpected fact (the bank robbery), or the performance and results of an occasional job activity (the presentation).
The social action that characterizes both professional situations, and the communicative purpose that involves the interactants constitute, therefore, the substantial bases on which I sustain the recognition of occasional report as a genre.

This argument brings me back to two considerations of genre. Firstly, it makes me reflect upon the position assumed by Callaghan & associates (1993) who state that:

A key insight of genre theory is that language occurs in a social context and that it is structured according to the purposes it serves in a particular context and according to the social relations entailed by that activity.
(p.181)

From their perspective, I understand that the lack of a strict recurrent structural organization does not impact negatively on genre recognition, for it is primarily focused on the specifics of the social situation and on the purpose that involve participants and orient their interaction through the use of language. In this sense therefore, genre identification is not restricted to arbitrary distinctions regarding form.

Secondly, this argument makes me think again about the considerations of genre suggested by Bazerman (1988:314). According to him, a genre involves a pattern of regularity that not only embodies repeated features in multiple texts, but also regularities in the production and interpretation of those texts, as well as regularities situated at the level of writers and readers' social relations. From this perspective, I conclude that description is the common feature that links together the two examples under discussion. Moreover, regularities at the level of text production and interpretation are located in the way the communicative purpose is conveyed and captured by senders and receivers who are connected by an asymmetrical professional relationship. Under such a characterization, and regardless of the number of samples to which I had access, there is reason to believe that the two messages presented have constituted examples of occasional report as a genre of internal written communication.

5.3.5. For-your-information report

The four genres presented so far illustrate two reverse communication movements
which the circulation of information may possibly describe within any company: on the one hand, corporate circulars and bulletins share the same downward direction; and, on the other hand, periodic and occasional reports invariably imply an upward destination. Considering such a polarity, the recognition of for-your-information reports (henceforth FYI reports) as a genre of internal written communication introduced me to an innovative variety of electronic interaction through which information is disseminated across the community without regard to hierarchy. Free from the constraints of describing a specific communication movement within the organization, FYI reports constitute a genre whose primary purpose is the one of providing the receiver(s) with an informative reply, generated as a reaction to a previous request. This reply, however, may be conveyed through the report of situated procedures, and/or through the presentation of comments or suggestions regarding a particular work-related situation. Their informative quality, as well as their inherent narrative or descriptive attributes, induced me, therefore, to identify them as FYI reports.

My approach to FYI reports was grounded on the twelve samples collected from the second company, on the three provided by the third, and on the two gathered from the first. By considering the entire message text area, my attention was initially directed to the identification of regularities at the level of salutations. In this sense, I noticed that, except for one sample, which was introduced neither by a greeting nor by a vocative (jucmsg1.1), the inclusion of both opening and closing salutations constituted a routinized practice, performed without a specific design standardization. Nevertheless, if I could not recognize the recurrent utilization of the same pattern, I could distinguish that either opening or closing salutations revealed meaningful tendencies towards particular formats.

According to the samples collected, the opening salutation most commonly adopted was the one that associated the colloquial greetings "hi" or "hello" with the receiver's identification (jmsg2.7, pcmsg2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, jucmsg1.2a, 2/3.2a, 2/3.2b, 2/3.2c, 3/4.1). Apart from such a format, some messages were only introduced by the recipient's name (bmsg3.4a, pcmsg1.2, jucmsg1.2b) which, sometimes, was not graphically separated from the report content, but attached to it through the punctuation. This unique opening arrangement was only used in four messages, displayed in the following manner:
"[name], thanks for the note. First, let me say I am always careful..." (basmsg3.2)
"[name], this responds to your request that I comment on procedures..." (basmsg3.4b)
"[name], please find below information from [name]..." (lucmsg2.1)
"[name], I tried to get in touch with the responsible person at [branch]..." (pcmsg3.2).

Similarly, closing salutations were also conveyed through various formats. The two most popular designs were the ones in which the sender's name was indicated either in isolation (basmsg3.2, 3.4a, lucmsg2.1, pcmsg1.2, jucmsg1.1, jucmsg1.2a, jucmsg 2/3.2a, 2/3.2b), or associated with "regards" or "best regards" (limsg2.7, pcmsg2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 3.2, jucmsg1.2b). In addition to those arrangements, the remaining varieties displayed the sender's identification preceded by an expression of gratitude ("Thanks," basmsg3.4b), or by the combination of it with a greeting ("Thanks and best regards," jucmsg2/3.2c, jucmsg3/4.1).

Regarding the message content, I perceived that even without presenting a strict sequence of recurrent components, some level of structural regularity could be identified in the FYI report organization. Such a regularity was primarily established through the presentation of a fundamental element -- the request reply -- which summarized the communicative purpose of providing the receiver with an informative response to his/her inquiry. The extracts below illustrate this main structural component:

First, let me say I am always careful when someone identifies "[branch]" as the reason for conducting business in a particular manner. I do not know the specifics, but if you would let me know who in [branch] specifically is granting the sales people this authority, then we can follow up directly with that person.

As a general rule, my own belief is that [name] can redelegate any authority that she has to her staff. We have taken the initiative to give [name] a specific level of authority and if it is her wish to redelegate that to her people then she is free to do so. I do not know specifically if this is consistent with others in the region, but I believe it is consistent with how we deal with authority limits in the states. I agree with you that the authority limits are the basis of a good internal control procedure, so we need to make sure we do not have unlimited authority but as long as we are confident the limits are within the limits we set for [name], then I am ok with this. (basmsg3.2)

The situation on this customer is just wait the liberation of finance.
They told me last week it will be possible very soon, but is not clear how soon.
This week I will be there to try to start the process without the official finance from FINEP and later on we only adjust the account. (jilmsg2.7)

For your request, I think it is a little difficult to inform you the details of "XxXx-ITECS" by e-mail\textsuperscript{10}. So, I will send you some FAX which can let you and XxXxXx Brazil know "XxXx-ITECS". (jucmsg2/3.2b)

Paulo César told me that you have a question about the installation charge to XxXxXx in [city].
I have just sent a message to [name] (He is [country] during this week) asking him to inform us how he want us to proceed with that. (jucmsg3/4.1)

Paulo, I tried to get in touch with the responsible person at [company]. However, we can only follow up on this tomorrow morning. There are open questions left. (pcmmsg3.2)

The error reported below was probably due to the fact that you are running the system on the development catalog and disconnect can occur because of other work which we are doing here, my apologies for this, we will try to keep the disconnects to a minimum. You should not experience (m)any disconnects when the system is moved to production.
The status with the multi-user is proceeding slowly, due to other work commitments I am unable to spend as much time as is necessary to complete the development. However, I will continue to work on it and as there is only one small problem left to be resolved I think that when I get the opportunity I will begin anyway to move it to production. (pcmmsg2.2b)

By comparing the samples collected, I perceived that the request reply, as the fundamental constituent of FYI reports, was sometimes introduced by two specific structural elements. In this case, their primary function was the one of situating the receiver either through mentioning and acknowledging a previous communication, or through providing him/her with a brief contextualization of the issue to be addressed. Such components may be identified in the following examples:

(Acknowledging a Previous Communication)

[\textit{name}], thanks for the note. (basmsg3.2)
Thanks for explaining the legal process of approving a borrowing within [\textit{company}]. (basmsg3.4a)
[\textit{name}], this responds to your request... (basmsg3.4b)

\textsuperscript{10} The code "XxXx" is used henceforth to indicate pieces of information which were deleted by the participants during the interview.
As per your request, I'm preparing a report... (pcmsg2.2a)
Thanks for your fax message! (jucmsg2/3.2a)
For your request, I think... (jucmsg2/3.2b)

(CONTEXTUALIZING)
Please take a look at the e-mail sent by [name]. We share the issues pointed by her and we are worry about this application. (pcmsg 2.2a)
We have been contacted [name] of [company] and Client Services in [country] identified a MODEM configuration problem. (pcmsg2.3)

In addition to these two introductory elements, I noticed that the request reply was sometimes followed by some structural components whose function was more likely the one of concluding the e-mail communication. In these cases, the sender might emphasize specific issues, explain additional procedures, request or provide support, confirm the continuous delivery of updated information, motivate further communication, solicit the recipient's reaction, express gratitude (which could introduce or conclude the message, as well as being used at the beginning and repeated at the end of the same text), or express some other specific wish (as seasons' greetings, for instance). These optional components are illustrated by the extracts that I transcribe below:

(EMPHASIZING SPECIFIC ISSUES)
We need to assure that this application will have the necessary support in the future to keep the client. On the other hand, Brazilian Customs application needs to be conducted on a completely different way as from my point of view it's a pure CARGO*LINK Air Application without any customization so I would like to emphasize that we need to decide how we will support this application in the future. (pcmsg2.2a)

I would like to remind you that I will be leaving [company] on September 30th, someone will be taking over the support of C*L/AIR in [city], however, as far as I know this person will only provide support on the generic C*L/AIR product and I feel that you should ensure that somehow you provide yourselves with the technical knowledge to support the C*L/AIR - OSI system within your own organization, this is a difficult time for the Value Added Applications group, their priority is to transition the generic applications from [city] to [city], it is incumbent on you to ensure that the progress which we have made so far on the development of this opportunity is not damaged. (pcmsg2.2b)

You should contact your client and ask him to find out all the details about the trading partner (which now must has an STERLING address) and after you find out that information, get the necessary trading partnership setup between the [company] client and the STERLING user. (jucmsg1.2b)
(EXPLAINING ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES)
By copy, I ask [name] to comment from an internal control perspective. (basmsg3.4b)
By copying [NAME] and [NAME], I'm asking both to give you any missed info. (pcmsg2.3)

(REQUESTING OR PROVIDING SUPPORT)
I think we will need to discuss about [customer] and I'm sure you will help us to have a good solution in this case. (pcmsg2.2a)
I will give you whatever support that I can in this matter. (pcmsg2.2b)
Please, let me know if you have any suggestion. (jucmsg1.2a)

(ASSERTING THE CONTINUOUS DELIVERY OF UPDATED INFORMATION)
I will keep you informed asap. (pcmsg1.2)
I will keep you informed of my progress. (pcmsg2.2b)
We will let you know as soon as possible. (pcmsg3.2)
So I will let you know when the details are decided. (jucmsg2/3.2c)
As soon as I receive any information about this matter I will let you know. (jucmsg3/4.1)

(MOTIVATING FURTHER COMMUNICATION)
If you have any questions or further doubts about the internal control aspects of this issue, please let me know. (basmsg3.4a)
Please let me know if you need any additional information. (pcmsg2.3)
If you or [company] want to know further information, please feel free to contact me. (jucmsg2.3.2d)

(SOLICITING THE RECIPIENT'S REACTION)
Please advise. (jucmsg2.1)
Looking forward to getting an answer asap. (jucmsg1.1)

(EXPRESSING GRATITUDE)
Thanks for explaining the legal process of approving a borrowing within [company]. (...) Thanks for your help [name]... (basmsg3.4a)
Thanks! (jucmsg1.2a)
Better luck to you in your efforts. (jucmsg1.1)

(EXPRESSING SOME SPECIFIC WISH)
HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!! (jucmsg2/3.2a)
Thanks and a happy new year. (jucmsg2/3.2b)

By reflecting upon the structural organization described so far, I understand that FYI reports as a genre of internal written communication have two essential attributes.
Firstly, they constitute working tools through which senders may identify work-related procedures (their own or those of their co-workers'), and/or comment on typical professional situations and their implications. From this perspective, FYI reports emphasize *ideational* meanings (Halliday, 1978/92) which are predominantly focused on the information to be disseminated and on its situated content or processing. This perception may be illustrated by the excerpts below:

I contacted my authority limits expert in Finance *(name)* to ask about Corporate delegation of this authority. He asked the Treasury folks who then contacted the lawyer of Treasury who contacted you. So, as you can see, we made a complete circle!! *(basmgs3.4a)*

They told me last week it will be possible very soon, but is not clear how soon. This week I will be there to try to start the process without the official finance from FINEP and later on we only adjust the account. *(jilmsg2.7)*

[customer] had informed me that he is not going to [country] only because his taking his wife with him and he would not leave her by herself in [country] once she does not speak any English or German. He said (not very clearly) that if his wife could go with him, he would be able to make August 16 or 17 ([our company] paying tickets). *(lucmsg2.1)*

It seems they have copied it on another AS400 to [company] to communicate with [agent], without any mood. They are continuing to try, in spite of warning from [name]. So, having difficulties to set up it on a new system, they are calling us again to do it. *(pcmsg1.2)*

As per your request I'm preparing a report with the current status of Brazilian Customs opportunity in Brazil but I would like to advise that [customer]'s application is customized specifically for [customer] requirements and needs. *(pcmsg2.2a)*

I think you could call XXXXXX until now. I also know you are not in [country]. While we do not get any info from XXXXXX, I am trying to know about Control Data Corporation. So, I've sent an e-mail to EDIHELP and I've also copied you. I hope it is OK. *(jucmsg1.2a)*

I make a contact with XXXXXX HQ today. And it seems that there is certainly a plan to exchange data between HQ and [country] by "XXXX-TECS". But the details (schedule, etc) has not been decided yet. So I will let you know when the details are decided. *(jucmsg2/3.2c)*

Secondly, I understand that FYI reports may also constitute a tool for the senders to convey their positioning regarding the situations addressed, and to reveal, through their
discursive choices, who they are, what they think, how they feel and/or react. Under such a characterization, the messages composed -- in addition to their inherent informative feature -- also disclose the senders' identities as writers. By mentioning "writer identities," I refer to the idea presented by Ivanic (1994)\(^\text{11}\), to whom writing not only involves transmission of information, but it can also potentially illustrate the writer's social identities. According to him, such identities -- which may be constructed and captured through the texts produced -- are partly attributes of the writer, of the reader, and of the socio-cultural context which supports the emerging discourses. From this perspective therefore, FYI reports also express *interpersonal* meanings (Halliday, 1978/92) which are focused on the social relations that connect the participants of a specific work-related situation.

My perception of the sender's positioning was particularly evidenced by the samples collected from the second and third companies. In these workplaces -- as opposed to the first one, in which FYI reports were mainly situated at the ideational level -- the message generator expressed him/herself by explicitly conveying his/her opinions, concerns, suggestions or advice, through the utilization of the first person singular. By identifying him/herself directly with the positioning expressed in the message, the sender clearly indicated an "involvement" (Chafe, 1982:45-49, Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987:105-110) with him/herself and with the receiver(s), as well as with the specifics of the situation addressed. The extracts below (which I have intentionally highlighted) illustrate my interpretation:

For me, there is little internal control exposure relative to this since the 2 director limit is required here in South America and in fact, the borrowing function involves very few people unique to the Treasury area. I see no internal control need to set a $$ limit for various levels within Treasury to authorize a borrowing for subsequent approval by 2 [company] directors. (basmsg3.4a)

I would like to remind you that I will be leaving [company] on September 30th, someone will be taking over the support of C* LAIR in [city], however, as far as I know this person will only provide support on the generic C* LAIR product and I feel that you should ensure that somehow

\(^{11}\) Grounded on Halliday (1985) and Fairclough (1992), Ivanic (1994) presents the notion of "writer identities", intentionally expressed in the plural form to emphasize the idea of simultaneous identification with a variety of social groups, and to account for "the plurality and complexity of the resulting identity" (p.5). According to Ivanic, writers are, consciously or unconsciously, "positioned by the discourse(s) they draw as they write". (p.4)
you provide yourselves with the technical knowledge to support the C'TAIR - OSI system within your own organization, this is a difficult time for the Value Added Applications group, their priority is to transition the generic applications from [city] to [city], it is incumbent on you to ensure that the progress which we have made so far on the development of this opportunity is not damaged. I will give you whatever support that I can in this matter. (pcmsg2.2b)

[name], I'm sorry if this incident caused any problem to you. Personally I suggest you to contact the [department] responsible for Gulfstream and ask him if we can cross charge his CC. I also need to advise you that our Administrative staff did not receive any information about Gulfstream users in [country] from MCATS. (pcmsg2.3)

Nevertheless, in addition to individualizing his/her positioning and expressing his/her own voice through the choice of the first person singular pronoun, I perceived that the sender sometimes attenuated the personal tone by converting it into the pronoun "we" and, thus, speaking through the institutional or corporate voice. In my opinion, such a writing strategy implies a sense of "inclusiveness" (Muhlhausler & Harré, 1990) which not only incorporates the receivers as parts of the same group, but also tends to widen the scope of individual positionings by giving them a departmental connotation and support. Such an interpretation may be evidenced by the excerpts transcribed below where I have emphasized the contrast "I-we":

First, let me say I am always careful when someone identifies "[branch]" as the reason for conducting business in a particular manner. I do not know the specifics, but if you would let me know who in [branch] specifically is granting the sales people this authority, then we can follow up directly with that person.

As a general rule, my own belief is that [name] can redelegate any authority that she has to her staff. We have taken the initiative to give [name] a specific level of authority and if it is her wish to redelegate that to her people then she is free to do so. I do not know specifically if this is consistent with others in the region, but I believe it is consistent with how we deal with authority limits in the states.

I agree with you that the authority limits are the basis of a good internal control procedure, so we need to make sure we do not have unlimited authority but as long as we are confident the limits are within the limits we set for [name], then I am ok with this. (basmsg3.2)

Please take a look at the e-mail sent by [name]. we share the same issues pointed out by her and we are worry about this application. (...) We need to assure that this application will have the necessary support in the future to keep the client. On the other hand, Brazilian
Customs application needs to be conducted on a completely different way as from my point of view it's a pure CARGO*LINK Air application without any customization so I would like to emphasize that we need to decide how we will support this application in the future. (pcmsg2.2a)

The descriptions and considerations presented so far lead me to conceive FYI reports as a genre of internal written communication which, by describing a unique interactive trajectory across the company hierarchy, conveys a combination of ideational and interpersonal meanings. This genre, even without presenting a regular sequence of recurrent structural components, is primarily identified by the core purpose of providing the receiver(s) with an informative reply related to a particular request. When addressing the issue inquired, the sender may then keep him/herself exclusively attuned to the ideational quality of its response, or commit him/herself to its content, by expressing personal viewpoints or merging his/her own voice with the one of the corporation.

Under such a characterization, FYI reports formed a pivotal interactive chain with the requests that generate them, establishing a relationship which is, in my opinion, similar to the one represented by conversational "adjacency pairs" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Nevertheless, in order to better understand such an interactive association, as well as the whole communicative dimension that emerges from FYI reports, I feel that it is essential, at this point in my discussion, to venture into their origin -- the requests -- and then start to explore the connections that interrelate both genres.

5.3.6. Request

Considering the quantity of e-mail messages collected, as well as the variety of genres to which they correspond, requests emerge as the predominant written form of electronic communication conveyed within the companies investigated. Broadly speaking, a request constitutes "an expression of need" (Yli-Jokipii, 1994:60) which requires its respondent(s) to provide information about typical work-related procedures; about project implementation, development and/or support; as well as about delays in performing certain activities or responding to previous requests. By comprising a requestive meaning and suggesting a reply expectation, this genre establishes, therefore, an interactive relationship
with FYI reports and responses (Section 5.3.7), whose essence conforms to an "asking and giving information" movement or to "action-reaction" -- as Luciano tacitly perceives it (LUCRM4:526-528).

My approach to requests was grounded on the twenty-six samples collected from the second corporation, on the nineteen gathered from the first, and on the nine provided by the third. By initially speculating on the entire message text area, I noticed that, except for the example that did not include any kind of salutation (basmsg1.10), for the eight that were not introduced by opening references (basmsg1.1, 1.11, 1.12, jlmsg2.4, 2.6, 3.4, 3.5, pcmsg2.3a), and for the one that did not display any closing (basmsg3.4b), the utilization of such staging elements constituted a regular practice, conveyed through a variety of designs. Such designs, although not strictly standardized, revealed, however, significant tendency towards some specific formats which, in my opinion, more likely complied with individual writing styles and/or preferences.

Regarding opening salutations, I perceived that the arrangement most commonly adopted was the one that associated the receiver's identification with the colloquial greeting "hello" (used in most of the messages), or sometimes with "hi" (basmsg1.2, jlmsg3.3) or "dear" (lucmsg4.3, pcmsg1.1). Apart from this format, the preference was predominantly focused on the utilization of the recipient's name which was conveyed either separately from the message content or graphically attached to it as a simple vocative (basmsg1.7, 3.4b, lucmsg4.2).

Some opening salutations, however, caught my attention due to the level of informality conveyed (as in "Hi, [name]! How are you doing?", basmsg1.2; "Hello there," pcmsg2.3b; "Hello, [name]. Nice to talk to you again," pcmsg 4.1); or conversely, due to the formality expressed by the sender (as in "Sirs," jlmsg2.5; "Dear Colleagues," jlmsg4.3; "Gentlemen," jlmsg4.7). Moreover, some opening salutations also referred to the receiver's linguistic background, as in "Hello [name] san" (jucmsg2/3.2) or "Hola [name]" (jucmsg 3/4.1). In these cases, however, both messages were composed by Juciane who explicitly revealed her intention to establish rapport with the receivers by attempting to "break the ice" (JUCRM3/4:15-19), or to "speak their language" (JUCRM3/4:33). Considering the utilization of the Spanish language, Juciane's intention was also reinforced by including
"Gracias y saludos" (jucmsg3/4.1) as the closing reference in the same message.

Similarly to opening salutations, the predominant format adopted to conclude requests was the one that combined a greeting -- especially "regards," "best regards" and "kind regards" -- with the sender's signature. In this case, I could also sense nuances of formality and informality through the utilization of "Yours faithfully" (jilmsg2.6) and "Cheers" (pcmsg4.2b), respectively. Apart from such designs, the one that only presented the sender's identification, as well as the one that displayed the association of gratitude with a greeting (basmsg3.2, jilmsg4.7, pcmsg2.2, 2.3b, 3.3, jucmsg3/4.2) constituted other alternatives possibly adopted, although they were less frequently used.

The reflection upon opening and closing salutations led me to examine the message content area and to search for possible features of standardization at the level of its structure. My observation towards this direction was inspired by the cross-cultural study undertaken by Yli-Jokipii (1994), who investigated samples of real-life and textbook requests collected in the United States, Britain and Finland. According to her research, each request has a "core" which may be conveyed alone or, where appropriate, preceded or followed by pre- or post-request "expansions" (p.32,78). These expansions may comprise "discoursal types" such as "grounding", "conditioning" and "temporal" which she defines the way as follows:


Broadly speaking, the descriptive components or labels\textsuperscript{12} presented by Yli-Jokipii -- core and expansions -- also occurred in the e-mail requests collected from the companies focused on in my research. By reviewing my sample in the light of her findings, I too noticed

\textsuperscript{12} Yli-Jokipii (1994) cautiously suggests that the descriptive components she presents should be taken as labels, and not as categories or units. She justifies her assumption by stating that the concepts which underlie those components are not "clear-cut", and by asserting that "labelling takes place on the reader's cognitive level rather than on the basis of structural criteria". (p.78)
that the request content was based on a core segment which embodied the essential meaning of the message. In my opinion, the recurrence of this element and of its illocutionary force establishes a regularity that, by making the purpose of the communication explicit, as well as by revealing the nature of the social action that connects the interactants, distinguishes requests as a genre.

Nevertheless, if the utilization of the core constituted a compulsory attribute of requests as a genre of internal written communication, its presentation was to some extent flexible to comply with the specifics of the situations addressed, as well as with the sender's writing style. By reflecting upon the samples collected, I detected that the core element could appear in three potential configurations. Firstly, it was displayed as the only component of the message content, followed optionally by an expansion that expressed gratitude. The transcriptions below illustrate such a presentation:

*** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATIONS *** (basmsg1.10)
Please let me know if you need anything more. (basmsg1.12)
Please share your findings with [name], [function] for the South America region. Thanks. (basmsg3.4)
What is the name of the company that represents [company] products in Brazil? (jilmsg1.3)
What is the situation? (jilmsg2.4)
Has anyone contacted this user? Please let me know asap. (pcmsg2.3b)
Any news about my message below??
Thanks for any help. (jucmsg1.3)
Could you please inform us how a UFTU*PC System Multiple copy software is delivered to a client?
Thanks in advance for your help. (jucmsg2/3.3a)
Any news about my message below?
Thanks and regards. (jucmsg3/4.9)

Secondly, the core was combined with one of its possible expansions which either contextualized or reinforced the reason for solicitation. This configuration is demonstrated by the excerpts below where I have highlighted the requestive meaning:

Regarding previous messages sent to you (with some PC-files attached)
I'd like to know if our historical data structure served to your expectation in [country]. Did you have any difficulty in receiving the files? Was it easy to understand the formulas in the spreadsheets?
Is there any other thing I can do for you to help? (basmsg1.2)
As the mentioned address refers to our main office in [country] I would like to know if this person is visiting somebody here or how could I re-address this correspondence to reach the right person. (basmsg1.7)

In order to increase the safety alertness among our colleagues, each of your representative in the Safety Committee has been suggested to make a 15 minute presentation to your Business/Function teams by end of August. Please give them the opportunity and the attention that the subject deserves. It will show our endeavor to work in preventing with the same determination that we do in correcting. (basmsg1.11)

Could you please help me with the question below.
There is one customer asking to install one Pulp EII in one place with pH close to 14. They have in this point NaOH and I am worry about build up at the blade.
Do you think a blade with teflon will avoid it or even so we are going to have the problem.
The Cs. is 4% and flow, velocity are OK. They are measuring cotton fiber (softwood) to produce Rayon. We already had a test with LL blade and the performance was very good. (jimsg3.2)

Again just like we did in [company]'s case please send by DHL to me in [city] original of the $000,000 order to [country] and a clean copy of your original of the domestic order. Please let me know when can I expect these. Have you received the originals? (jimsg 3.6)

As agreed pls give that money in real to [name] and I deduct that from the expense payments that I have here waiting form him when he gets here. (jimsg4.1)

Now after having the heavy week behind you we would like to ask you for your feedback. (jimsg4.3)

I am in desperate need of some [equipment] transmitters for a mill in the [country], to replace some ST6,S that have been damaged by fire. The delivery time from [city] I am advised is earliest week 39, but the mill require them asap. Can any of you help?
I require ten transmitters in total, but if anybody can assist with a couple of transmitters that will suffice until the order from [city] is delivered. (jimsg4.7)

Pls send Excell files for [company] report, so we will be able to print in colour. Also send WP and Excell files for [company] report. (jimsg4.10)

[name], as per our phone conversation today, we will be waiting for your information on this matter tomorrow. I will not be here but as I've told you, please forward your conclusions (or any doubt) to [name], who is replacing me. Anyhow, I will be at the office for some days during next week, when, if necessary, we can sort everything out. (lucmsg4.2)

Please, if it is possible for you, send us this material via DHL next
Monday in order to us having enough time to include the information in our presentation. (jucmsg3/4.2)

Thirdly, the core was clearly identified as a distinctive structural element that, if compared to the second configuration indicated above, appeared to be relatively independent from the expansions possibly attached to it. In both cases however, such expansions, by surrounding the requestive segment, helped it reinforce its meaning. The extracts below present the core element of some e-mail requests, and illustrate this third kind of configuration which corresponds to the format most commonly adopted by the companies focused on in this study:

Would you please let me know what travel agency/agencies you are currently using in [country]? And, if there is any information that your organization would find helpful, please do not hesitate to let us know. (basmsg1.1)

REASONS TO ME ADDRESS THIS MESSAGE TO YOU ARE: (1) I'D LIKE TO KNOW IF THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT PROCEDURE ABOUT LIMITS OF AUTHORITY FOR NW/AFS WHEN COMPARED IT WITH OTHER BUSINESS (LIKE AG. FOR EXAMPLE). (2) I AM A LITTLE CONCERNS ABOUT INTERNAL CONTROLS, SINCE MY FEELING IS THAT SALES PEOPLE ARE VERY "FREE" TO DETERMINE PRICES, DISCOUNTS AND PAYMENT TERMS (I DON'T WANT TO FREEZE THEY HANDS, BUT AT LEAST, I'D LIKE TO FEEL COMFORTABLE THAT THERE ARE A RATIONAL AND ADEQUATE APPROVAL FOR EACH DECISION). (basmsg3.2)

Would you please send [name] the name of the party with whom the questions originated. (basmsg3.4)

Did you talk with [company]? Do they have any idea when they get the import licence. Also are they ready to wire transmit the payment to [country] as soon as they get the licence? (jilmsg1.6)

Please send me the market report, sales estimation and budget for 1996 by 12.8. (jilmsg2.5)

Could you please reserve some time to talk about our debts as well as to review the payments. (jilmsg3.1)

Please tell me if is it OK for you? (jilmsg3.3)

Don't they have to wait for their payment or letter of credit before we give the system to their forwarder? (jilmsg3.4)

Please let me know what are [customer]'s intentions on payment. (jilmsg3.5)
Would you please advise [name], who is going to replace me, about it ASAP? (lucmsg4.3)

Do you have any idea what happened, what is the meaning of this error: DISCONNECT RECEIVED in the log file? In time: What is the status about the multi-user environment? (pcmsg 2.2)

Can someone PLEASE respond to this request. (pcmsg2.3a)

Please contact this user as soon as possible and let me know if I can do anything to help speed up in resolving this issue. (pcmsg2.3c)

Could you please inform the status of this implementation? I also need to know if they will access the service thru [company] local node or thru a PPDN? If the access will be done thru PPDN what are the costs involved? (pcmsg3.3)

Could you please provide us this information? Please fax me all the information that you have. (pcmsg4.2a)

So, I would appreciate if you could contact [name] at [company] (Phone # 000 0000000) and ask him what are their plans with [customer] in [country] (application, etc). (jucmsg1.1)

Can you contact XxXxXx?? And...
1. Let them know that [company] would like to receive the documents directly in their office in [country] and they are looking for an alternative to do this, one is [company] services.
2. If [name] tell you that they only use Control Data Corporation and they do not suggest an alternative, we will have to know if a E*E user can exchange EDI documents with a Control Data Corporation user. Please let me know if it is possible for you help us in this matter. (juc msg1.2b)

We need some more details about the installation at XxXxXx:
1. Are they still using U#address?
2. As [name] informed us, they already use Posnet to access [company]. Will it be necessary to perform the installation again?
3. What was discussed between Posnet and XxXxXx [country] about this installation? (jucmsg3/4.1)

Anyway, we would appreciate if you could help them with the installation and learning how to use the software. (jucmsg3/4.3)

Could you please call [name] next Tuesday? Is it possible for you? (jucmsg3/4.4)

We would like to know if you have any news from [name] - [company] [country]. (jucmsg3/4.5)

We would appreciate if you could inform us asap what is the [company] service that [customer] uses in [country]. (jucmsg3/4.6)

So, we need your help to contact [name] (phone # 000 000-0000) and
give her the necessary information. *(jucmsg3/4.8)*

It would be very useful if you could send us some information about the [company] solution sold to [customer] and, if possible, the [company] experience in this market. *(jucmsg3/4.9b)*

In addition to the core structural component presented above and its possible configurations, I also noticed that, as suggested by Yli-Jokipii (1994), other elements could be included in the message content as pre- or post-request expansions. According to the samples I collected, these expansions, by surrounding the core on a complementary basis, served the purpose of explicitly introducing or concluding the meaning expressed by the target request.

My identification of preliminary expansions indicated that the request could be basically prefaced by three structural components which I defined as introduction, grounding, and contextualization. In my opinion, the purpose of including such elements is primarily one of preparing the receiver for the request to be conveyed, by mentioning or acknowledging previous communication regarding the same topic, or by providing introductory details about who is performing the request, as well as about the reasons that motivate and the context that situates the purpose of a specific solicitation. Such a perception is illustrated by the excerpts below:

*(INTRODUCTION)*

I am with the [company] Business Travel organization (in Sourcing) here in [city]... specifically, I am responsible for, among other things, the daily operations of our 2 travel agencies... [name of one agency] and [name of the other agency]. *(basmsg1.1)*

[name], my name is [sender's name] and I work for [department], in Brazil, South America region. *(basmsg1.7)*

Thank you for the [company] Ltda balance sheets (consolidation forms) send to [name]. *(jilmsg2.6)*

Thank you for making the CS Sales Meeting once again together with us!! *(jilmsg4.3)*

I'm responsible for [customer] Account in Brazil. *(pcmsg3.3)*

Thanks for you message. *(jucmsg2/3.2)*

Thanks for your [e-mail]. *(jucmsg3/4.2, 3/4.3)*

Firstly, thank you very much for your help in the BT installation for [customer]. *(jucmsg3/4.5)*

Let me introduce myself: My name is Juciane and I am Account Manager in [company] - [company] distributor in Brasil. *(jucmsg3/4.6, 3/4.9b)*
(GROUNDING)
We have in [country] 14.8 and 15.8 meetings concerning [company] operations in South-America. Please send me the market report, sales estimation and budget for 1996 by 12.8. (jilmsg2.5)
As you know I am leaving [company] and I still do not have a positioning about credit of this commission to FI account. (jucmsg4.3)
As I told you last week when I met you in [city], I need to contact our RNN to a PDN port using LL circuit at 9600BPS. I'm not sure what steps to follow in order to get this connection. (pcmsg4.1)
[name] needs the following information before fly to [city]. He is planning to visit [customer] during the week after the Christmas. (pcmsg4.2a)
Before we fly all the way to [city] to find out we have a modern problem we should have the following information... (pcmsg4.2b)

(CONTEXTUALIZATION)
In the last meeting of your [branch] Safety Committee it was strongly discussed our excellent safety performance so far in the year, but also a very much concerning issue: the deteriorating [branch] Safety Placard Index, month after month, indicating that despite the good performance in the year, the trend regarding safety is a matter of concern. We have reached a 20% index in June, down from 85% obtained in January! The safety inspections conducted by all of you have demonstrated numerous safety deviations that need to be fixed. (basmsg1.11)

One of our e-mail clients in [country] have an agent in [city] called [agent's name] and they are facing some difficulties in connecting [company] using AS400 Mailbox package.
[name] of [company-city] called me this morning and told me that a person in [company-country] (name) tried to contact you in order to get your assistance in configure the AS400 Mailbox to access [company]. (pcmsg4.1)

This user is using N*Connect v3.4. Apparently, they haven't had any luck connecting to the [company] network dialing the [city] #s, they are now dialing long distance to [company-city], which costs a lot of money. (pcmsg2.3c)

[customer] is a big bank in [country] and they need to exchange messages and files with [company] using [e-mail].
[customer] is signing a local contract and they have asked us to create their own catalog and [e-mail] addresses.
Their need is to send/receive files with the [company] office in [country] and to exchange messages with Internet users at [company] in [country].
[customer] has informed us they will use an application developed by [company] to create the files that will be sent to them. But the [customer] people could not explain us if this is an customized application that also includes the communication package. (jucmsg1.1)

I was out visiting some clients outside [city] all last week. One of them: [customer].
Last Wednesday the software BT Windows was installed in the export department at [customer]. They are able to send/receive messages through [e-mail] service.
We will try to get a software copy to be installed in their office in [city]. We will look for the better way to do that. As soon as we get it we will let you know and I will send the demo addresses for the test too. [customer] is looking forward to start exchanging messages using [email]. (jucmsg3/4.3)

On the other hand, my search for post-request expansions, led me to recognize some other structural components. By contrasting the samples collected, I saw that through such complementary elements, the sender could provide additional information (displayed either in the message content area or in a postscript), emphasize the receiver's participation in solving the situation addressed, motivate further communication, inform the attachment of files related to the topic, or express his/her expectation for a reply\(^\text{13}\). The excerpts below present instances of such post-request expansions:

\[(PROVIDING\ ADDITIONAL\ INFORMATION)\]

JUST FOR YOUR INFORMATION, IN AG. - [COUNTRY], WE USE THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURE:

1) SBU DETERMINES A AUTHORITY LIMITS FOR EACH REGIONAL HEAD.

2) BASED ON THIS LIMITS THE REGIONAL HEAD DELEGATE PART OF THEY LIMITS TO THEY LEADERSHIP TEAM. (FOR EXAMPLE, THE LIMITS OF AUTHORITY DETERMINE A MAXIMUM OF 20% DISCOUNT OVER SELLING PRICE FOR THE REGIONAL HEAD, WHILE THE SALES MANAGERS RECEIVES FROM 5 TO 10% DEPENDING ON THEY NEED).

3) LIMITS ARE USED BY FINANCE GROUP AS A WAY TO STRENGTHEN INTERNAL CONTROLS IN EACH FUNCTION. (basmsg3.2)

According to [name], there are two points that [company] needs assistance:

1) Attach Text Files to a Message - they are getting the error code 135 when sending an attach file.

2) They cannot connect [company] automatically. They can only connect successfully using the interactive feature of AS400 Mailbox. [name] left a message in your voice mail this afternoon. (pcmsg1.1)

It will happen next week. (jucmsg3/4.2)

They have already asked [company] a similar solution but [company] could not offer any alternative. (jucmsg3/4.7)

Please consider also that [customer] will inform us their decision during this week. (jucmsg3/4.9)

\(^{13}\) In my opinion, by expressing reply expectation, the sender is, in fact, indirectly requesting the receiver(s) to respond. This kind of solicitation, however, does not embody the core meaning of a requestive message and, for this reason, I perceive it as a simple structural component, recurrently included in the electronic correspondence regardless of its main communicative purpose.
P.S.: Our official post-office is on strike and this envelope went to [branch], then it was sent to [name] in [country] and now it returned to Brazil. (basmsg1.7)
P.S. My FAX # is 55 11 000000. (pcmsg4.2)
PS.: If you need any information about EDI application (Software, etc) used by XxXxXx [country], you can contact Sterling Software: [name] (000) 000-0000. (jucmsg1.2b)
PS.: The [customer] pilot is not the same case of [customer]. They are not having any problems to delay the tests. Many times it is really necessary to have pilot tests to sell our service here in [country]. (jucmsg3/4.3)
PS.: [name] told me that you will call [name] to explain our intention with [customer]. Please, inform him that first we want to give all information to [customer] and only after everything is OK we intend to contact him to provide the contract and installation. (jucmsg3/4.6)

(EMPHASIZING THE RECEIVER'S PARTICIPATION)
Your kindly assistance will be welcome. (pcmsg1.7)
All information you can get with [name] will be significant help. (jucmsg3/4.8)

(MOTIVATING FURTHER COMMUNICATION)
If you need any further information please contact me. (jimsg3.2)
Please let me know if you need any additional information. (pcmsg1.1)
Contact me if you have any doubt or if you need any additional information. (jucmsg1.2b)
Please, let me know if you need any additional information. (jucmsg 3/4.5)
Please, let us know if you need any additional information. (jucmsg 3/4.6)

(INFORMING ATTACHMENTS)
Attached is the MCATS concerning this implementation. (pcmsg3.3)

(EXPRESSING REPLY EXPECTATION)
Waiting for your prompt response. (basmsg1.7)
Please return if is it possible. (jimsg3.1)
Any suggestions for improving the meeting will be welcomed. (jimsg4.3)
Please advise if possible by return. (jimsg4.7)
Please let me know asap. (pcmsg2.3b)
Looking forward to getting an answer asap. (jucmsg1.1)
Please let me know your opinion. (jucmsg1.2a)
We would appreciate if you could send us a [message] as soon as you get news about [customer]. (jucmsg3/4.8)

Considering the identification of expansions, I perceived that, apart from the ones described above, two others were also possibly conveyed in requestive messages: grounding and expressing gratitude. These structural components, however, had relative freedom of movement in that they were able to either precede the core (as illustrated previously) or to follow it. Regardless of its collocation, grounding always referred to reasons that supported the target request. Nevertheless, when performing a post-request
position, it could also address time constraints. My perception of grounding as a post-request expansion is illustrated by the extracts that follow:

This all needs to happen quickly end of next week or during the following week. We MUST get the system out from [city] building. (jilmsg1.6)
That is supposed to happen this coming Monday. (jilmsg3.4)
We need to get a proof of payment to [country] before we can ship the system. We will be ready to ship on Thursday of this week. (jilmsg3.5)
I am travelling on Sunday to [country] and would like to have the original with me. I would show that in the head office meeting next week. (jilmsg3.6)

(name), as you already know, we need to do our best in order to have it done ASAP, once statement has not been consolidated for several months. (lucmsg4.2)
My client's getting very anxious. (pcmsg2.3a)
So [name] can analyze all the configuration. (pcmsg4.2a)
I'm just trying to understand what happened exactly in order to solve this issue as soon as possible. (jucmsg3/4.1)
Please, we need this information asap, so that we can inform [customer - country] when they can start the test. (jucmsg3/4.5)
Cellulose and paper industries are very important in [country]. As they use to export big part of their production and they have offices and/or representatives around the world, they are a good opportunity for our services. (jucmsg3/4.9b)

On the other hand, expressions of gratitude could be emphatically displayed at the beginning, or at the end, or in both positions in the same message, as shown by the excerpts that follow:

Thank you... (basmfg1.1)
Many thanks in advance for your help. (pcmsg1.1)
Thanks a lot for your assistance. (pcmsg4.1, 4.2a)
Thanks in advance for your help. (jucmsg1.1, jucmsg2/3.3a, jucmsg 3/4.6, jucmsg3/4.7, jucmsg3/4.9b)
Thank you all very much. (jucmsg1.2a)
THANKS A LOT! (jucmsg1.2b)
Thanks for any help. (jucmsg1.3)
Thanks for your message. (...) Thanks for your help! (jucmsg2/3.2)
Thanks for your [e-mail]. (...) Many thanks. Thanks again and kind regards. (jucmsg3/4.2)
Thanks for your attention in this issue. (jucmsg2/3.3b)
Thanks for your [e-mail]. (...) Thanks again for your help. (...) Thanks for your understanding and help! (jucmsg3/4.3)
Thanks for your help. (jucmsg3/4.4)
Firstly, thank you very much for your help in the XX installation for [company]. (...) Thanks a lot for your attention in this matter. (jucmsg3/4.5)
Thanks beforehand for your help. (...) Thanks!!! (jucmsg3/4.6)
By reflecting upon the inclusion of expressions of gratitude, I realized that, although used by other professionals included in the sample, such a component was particularly evident in Juciane's requestive writings, especially in her "old messages" (JUCRM2/3:4-5), that is, in the ones she had composed one year before our conversations. In her specific case, gratitude was not only conveyed as a request introduction but, simultaneously, it could also be a post-request element, incorporated in the content, in the closing salutation or in the postscript. The excerpts below illustrate this feature of her writing style:

(introduction) Thanks for your [e-mail].
(content) Many thanks.
(closing salutation) Thanks again and kind regards. (jucmsg3/4.2)

(introduction) Thanks for your [e-mail].
(content) Thanks again for your help.
(postscript) Thanks for your understanding and help. (jucmsg3/4.3)

(introduction) Firstly, thank you very much for your help in the BT installation for [customer]
(content) Thanks a lot for your attention in this matter. (jucmsg3/4.5)

(content) Thanks beforehand for your help. (...) Thanks!!! (jucmsg3/4.8)

From Juciane's perspective, this characteristic of hers expressed a conscious intention of not being "imperative" (JUCII:640-642, JUCRM3/4:253-254), and of acknowledging, even in advance, any effort done by the recipient(s) in order to help her solve a specific work-related doubt or difficulty (JUCRM1:318-325, JUCRM2/3:292-297). Nevertheless, I understand it as a token of "mitigation" through which, by recognizing the relevance of the respondents' participation and assistance, Juciane attenuated the requestive force embedded in the core of her message content.

Such a perception led me, then, to re-examine the other samples collected and to speculate on possible ways of stressing and/or diminishing their requestive force. The investigation revealed that requests were realized by imperative, declarative, interrogative

14 As summarized by Yli-Jokipii (1994:157), the concept of "mitigation" is suggested by Fraser (1980:342), and reinforced by Held (1994:134), as an attribute of spoken discourse. In general terms, it refers to "weakening" (Brown & Levinson,1987:147), "downgrading" (House & Kasper,1981:166), or "minimizing" (Held,1989:168) the content to be conveyed, by reducing its force and making it more appealing to the recipient.
and modal-initial clauses (Yli-Jokipii, 1994:151-187), and that these possible realizations might or might not include features of modality (Halliday, 1985; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Fairclough, 1992).

Considering the samples collected, I noticed that solicitations realized through the imperative form were always modalized by the utilization of the courtesy subjunct please which mitigated the requestive force expressed by the core element. The extracts that follow illustrate my interpretation and indicate that even in the only occurrence where the imperative was not immediately introduced by please ("Also send WP and Excell files...") it was displayed in the preceding request ("Please send Excell files..."):

... please do not hesitate to let us know. (basmsg1.1)

*** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATIONS ***
(basmsg1.10)

Please give them the opportunity and the attention that the subject deserves. (basmsg1.11)

Please let me know if you need anything more. (basmsg1.12)

Please share your findings with [name], [function] for the South America region. (basmsg3.4a)

Please send me the market report, sales estimation and budget for 1996 by 12.8. (jimsg2.5)

Please tell me if it is OK for you? (jimsg3.3)

Please let me know what are [customer]'s intentions on payment. (jimsg3.5)

... please send by DHL to me in [city] original of the $000,000 order to [country] and a clean copy of your original of the domestic order. Please let me know when can I except these. (jimsg3.6)

... pls give that money in real to [name] and I deduct that from the expense payments that I have here waiting for him when he gets here. (jimsg4.1)

Please send Excell files for [customer] report, so we will be able to print in colour. Also send WP and Excell files for [customer] report. (jimsg4.10)

... please forward your conclusions (or any doubts) to [name], who is replacing me. (jucmsg4.2)

Please contact this user as soon as possible and let me know if I can do anything to help speed up in resolving this issue. (pcmsg2.3c)

If not please let me know. (pcmsg4.1)

Please let me know your opinion. (jucmsg1.2a)

Please let me know if it is possible for you help us in this matter. (jucmsg1.2b)

Please, if it is possible for you, send us this material via DHL next Monday in order to us having enough time to include the information in our presentation. (jucmsg3/4.2)

Regarding the declarative clause realization, I perceived that the requestive force
was predominantly attenuated by the utilization of the modal patterns: "I/we would like," "I/we would like to know if," and "I/we would appreciate if you could," as shown by the extracts that follow:

I'd like to know if our historical data structure served to your expectations in [country]. (bsmsg1.2)
... I would like to know if this person is visiting somebody here or how could I re-address this correspondence to reach the right person. (bsmsg1.7)
I'D LIKE TO KNOW IF THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT PROCEDURE ABOUT LIMITS OF AUTHORITY FOR NW/AFS WHEN COMPARED IT WITH OTHER BUSINESS (LIKE AG. FOR EXAMPLE). (bsmsg3.2)
... we would like to ask you for your feedback. (jimsg4.3)
So, I would appreciate if you could contact [name] at [customer] (Phone # 000 0000000) and ask him what are their plans with [customer] in Brazil (application, etc). (jucmsg1.7)
So, I would like to know if [name] could contact them. (jucmsg1.2a)
We would appreciate if you could send us more details about the "XXXX-ITECS". (jucmsg2/3.2)
... we would appreciate if you could help them with the installation and learning how to use the software. (jucmsg3/4.3)
We would like to know if you have any news from [name] - [customer - country]. (jucmsg3/4.5)
We would appreciate if you could inform us asap what is the [company] service that [customer] uses in [country]. (jucmsg3/4.6)
We would like your suggestion about this matter. (jucmsg3/4.7)

In my opinion, the declarative realization illustrated above indicates that the senders politely express their solicitations by positioning themselves at the lower level of an asymmetric relationship which makes it explicit that the receivers have some information they need, or can do something to help them in a specific work-related situation. My interpretation of this strategy is supported by two particular instances presented below, and by Juciane's and Paulo César's reflections upon them:

(1) It would be very useful if you could send us some information about the [company] solution sold to [customer] and, if possible, the [company] experience in this market. (jucmsg3/4.9b)

(2) I'm would like to ask your kindly assistance in helping [name] to configure the software. (pcm31.1)

In the first excerpt above (1), the sender -- Juciane -- intensifies her request by stressing the impact of obtaining the information solicited ("It would be very useful"), by
appealing to the receiver's ability to provide it ("you could send us some information"), as well as by asserting the possibility of having her request accepted or denied ("if you could send... if possible"). In this case, she explains her attitude by referring to the contextual features of that particular interaction through which she asked another account manager for details regarding one of his customers. With regard to the delicacy of this professional situation and the process of message composition, she comments:

J: In this context, I attempted to put myself in the receiver's shoes... as if "I" was receiving the message. Besides that, in most cases, the account managers are extremely jealous of their customers! Right? They [the customers] belong to them [the managers]; they are their life! I mean...
M: They [the customers] are not anyone else's business!
J: ... anyone else's business. So, you receive a message like that: "I want information about that customer". Right? "You're responsible for him... you're responsible for that customer and I want information about him!" Ah, OK! I mean, I don't know who that person is and why s/he is asking me! And... even in the sense of selecting which information I can offer about that customer if, in fact, I don't know why this co-worker wants these data. Therefore, it's an inversion, right? I wrote the message as if I was receiving it. (JUCRM3/4:1214-1231)

Considering the second extract presented (2), the sender -- Paulo César -- also refers to contextual features to explain the reason why he incorporates the courtesy subjunct kindly in his request. Regardless of the grammar mistake he made, the idea that underlies the message production and that guides his lexical choice is worth mentioning:

PC: So, you can see that I used... you see... "kindly assistance". I've reinforced it [the meaning]. I attempted to convey the intention of not... not directly asking him to help me, but I... the intention was the one of saying that he was doing a "big favor" in helping me with that customer. (...) I remember that I was worried about finding a word that could synthesize such a feeling.
M: So, you mean you had second intentions in this case?
PC: Yes... it had to be this way... because the customer knew that they didn't have authorization to use this product, right? And, at the same time, I wanted them to start working soon, right? I mean, I have my own interests involved. But he [the co-worker] could perfectly say: "No, I'm not going to do that for you!" Right? So, this was the situation. (PCRM1:315-344)

The comments made by Juciane and Paulo César reveal that, at least in these two
situations upon which they reflected, there was a conscious intention of theirs to diminish the requestive force of their messages, in order to adjust themselves to the contextual conditions that motivated those specific interactions. Apart from these occurrences, neither one of the participants mentioned any explicit intent of this kind. For this reason, I assume that modalization devices tend to be spontaneously acquired through continuous involvement in e-mail practices, and tacitly reproduced in similar requestive activities.

Regarding the declarative realization, I noticed that, as opposed to the possibilities described so far, the requestive force of a message could be conveyed as a consequence of the contextualization that preceded the solicitation itself, indicated by the discourse marker so (Fraser, 1990:394) — without including, in this case, any features of modalization. Such a format, although less frequently adopted, can be illustrated by the two occurrences that follow:

So I'm asking your assistance to give me the way to do it. (pcmsg4.1)
So, we need your help to contact [name] (phone # 000 000-0000) and give her the necessary information. (jucmsg3/4.6)

My investigation into the realizations of requests also indicated that, in addition to being conveyed through imperative and declarative clauses, they could be performed through the utilization of two basic varieties of interrogative forms. Firstly, the interrogative request was expressed by yes/no questions which, due to the nature of the response demanded, constituted a "closed category," identified as "polar interrogative" (Yli-Jokipii, 1994:160). The excerpts below illustrate such a possibility:

Did you have any difficulty in receiving the files? Was it easy to understand the formulas in the spreadsheets? Is there any other thing I can do for you to help? (basmg1.2)
Did you talk with [customer]? Do they have any idea when they get the import licence. Also are they ready to wire transmit the payment to [country] as soon as they get the licence? (jimsg1.6)
Do you think a blade with teflon will avoid it or even so we are going to have a problem. (jimsg3.2)
Have you received the originals? (jimsg3.6)
Was it $000? (jimsg4.1)
Do you know these people? (jimsg4.2)
Do you have any idea what happened, what is the meaning of this error: DISCONNECT RECEIVED in the log file? In time: What is the status
Secondly, interrogative requests were conveyed by *wh-questions* which, as opposed to the preceding variety, constituted an "open-ended category," identified as "open interrogative" (Yli-Jokipii, 1994:160), as shown by the extracts that follow:

What is the name of the company that represents [company] products in Brazil? (jmmsg1.3)
What is the situation? (jmmsg2.4)
How much did I give to you? (jmmsg4.1)
If the access will be done thru PPDN what are the costs involved? (pcmsg3.3)
What kind of Modem do we have attached to the NACS server. (...) What speed parity, flowcontrol settings are set on the server when the port for the modem is in idle state and when it is connected. (pcmsg4.2b)
How is the documentation? (jucmsg2/3.3b)
What was discussed between Posnet and [company-country] about this installation? (jucmsg3/4.1)

By reflecting upon these interrogative requests, I perceived that, regardless of their category, they did not suggest any kind of asymmetric relationship between interactants — as evidenced, for instance, by some requests performed through the declarative mode. In my opinion, conveying requests through questions characterizes a conversational movement which is recurrently used among co-workers in electronic business communication, and through which mutual co-operation and partnership may be established and/or maintained.

Nevertheless, I also realized that interrogative requests portrayed three distinct rhetorical functions, as suggested by Yli-Jokipii (1994:162). Firstly, they played an "information seeking" function which might be illustrated by the polar and open interrogative instances previously discussed. Secondly, they performed a "persuasive" role through which the sender, by inquiring about a specific procedure, induced the receiver to reflect
upon adopting an alternative approach. This function may be illustrated by the questions that follow:

Also, why is $00,000 credit on returned old system reduce only the import part? Why does it not effect the domestic part at all, same way than 5% discount? (jimsg1.7)
Don't we have to wait for their payment or letter of credit before we give the system to their forwarded? (jimsg3.4)

Thirdly, the interrogative request realized a "critical" rhetorical function through which the sender expressed his/her criticism concerning the delay in performing a specific work-related activity, as shown by the excerpts below:

Has anyone contacted this user? (pcmsg2.3b)
[Is there] Any news about my [e-mail] below?? (jucmsg1.4, jucmsg 3/4.9a)
Can someone PLEASE respond to the request. (pcmsg2.3a)

The last excerpt mentioned above leads me to discuss another variety of request realization which, broadly speaking, also conforms to the interrogative format and, for this reason, shares similarities with the ones described so far. Nevertheless, its distinctive feature is primarily located in the thematic modal which, by conveying a unique type of emphasis, introduces another possibility of requestive expression: the modal-initial clause.

Considering the samples collected, the modal-initial realization constituted an effective approach to request presentation. In this case, the core meaning of the solicitation was modalized by "would you please" and "can/could you please," as illustrated by the instances that follow:

Would you please let me know what travel agency/agencies you are currently using in Brazil? (basmsg1.1)
Would you please send [name] the name of the party with whom the questions originated. (basmsg3.4b)
Would you please advise [name], who is going to replace me, about it ASAP? (lucmsg4.3)

Could you please reserve some time to talk about our debits as well as to review the payments. (jilmsg3.1)
Could you please help me with the question below. (jilmsg3.2)
Can any of you help me? (jimsg4.7)
Could you get us Corporative copy of [e-mail] post office software to be installed down there? (...
Could you please inform the status of this implementation? (pcmsg3.3)
Could you please check if I get all necessary information to fill the WNO form. (pcmsg4.1)
Could you please provide us this information? (pcmsg4.2a)
Can you contact XxXxXx?? (jucmsg1.2b)
Could you please inform us how a UFTU*PC System Multiple copy software is delivery to a client? (jucmsg2/3.3a)
Could you please call [name] next Tuesday? (jucmsg3/4.4)

By reflecting upon the extracts above, my attention was immediately directed to the way senders expressed the requestive meaning of their messages. For instance, by conveying "Would you please let me know...?", "Could you please reserve some time...", or "Can any of you help me?", the core requestive meaning was in fact located in "let me know," "reserve some time," and "help me," respectively. The utilization of modals in an initial position, therefore, reduced the force of the solicitation which was then displayed indirectly, and in a polite way. On the one hand, the indirect presentation of questions was also corroborated by the inconsistency of punctuation, reflected by the arbitrary inclusion or omission of the interrogation mark. On the other hand, the predominance of past-tense modals -- consistently followed by please as a "requestive sticker," used to assure that the utterance should be "taken as a request" (Yli-Jokipii, 1994:166-167) -- also reinforced the intention of mitigating "face threatening acts" (Brown & Levinson, 1987:60) and, simultaneously, of stressing politeness (Palmer, 1987:119-120).

Furthermore, by using modal-initial requests, the senders revealed that they were focused on the receivers' possibility or ability (Coates, 1983:23-30) to attend to their solicitations. Similar emphasis on the receiver(s) could be attested by the substantial utilization of the second-person pronoun you. In my opinion, such a preference reveals that, by requesting information and/or guidance from receivers, as well as by manifesting their possibility and/or ability to help, senders explicitly attempt to "involve" (Chafe, 1982; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987) them in the situation addressed. Among the modal-initial instances that I found, only one sample displayed a sort of deviation from this pattern: "Can we offer them any solution?" (jucmsg3/4.7). Even in this case, however, the sender excluded neither
the receiver nor him/herself from participating. Conversely, by using we (i.e., you and I), the sender suggested an association with the recipient in order to solve together the target situation. Considering such characteristics, I assume that requests are forms of receiver-oriented communication.

The examples discussed so far suggest that requests, due to the nature of their communicative purpose and of the social action that connects their participants, not only constitute a major genre of internal written communication, but may be the leading e-mail genre conveyed within the companies investigated. By utilizing them, senders may address various kinds of solicitations to different hierarchical levels within the organization and, then, involve receivers in the situations to be solved. By soliciting their co-workers' intervention as well as by expressing their reply expectation, senders establish an interactive chain with their interlocutors which gives requests a receiver-oriented characterization. In addition to that, the development of such an interactive chain also gives requests and their possible answers -- FYI reports and responses -- a conversational quality that, in my opinion, reproduces the notion of "adjacency pairs" suggested by Schegloff & Sacks (1973). Nevertheless, before exploring this perception in depth and arguing for the bases on which I have grounded this assumption, I feel that, at this point in my discussion, it is necessary to explore the remaining part of the interactive sequence -- the response -- and venture into this other request oriented genre.

5.3.7. Response

My approach to responses was based on the six samples collected from the first company, on the four provided by the second, and on the one gathered from the third. Following the procedure previously established, I started my investigation into responses through an overview of the message text area taken as a whole. By confronting the samples collected from this perspective, I firstly noticed that, except for the two responses that presented no opening salutations (j1msg3.12, lucmsg4.3), and for the one that did not display any kind of closing references (pcmsg2.3), the use of such structural elements incorporated into a number of patterns or designs, constituted a regular practice.

Considering the opening salutations, the format most frequently adopted was the
one that evidenced the receiver's name displayed in isolation (basmsg4.1, jilmsg1.4, lucmsg2.3, 3.1, jucmsg2/3.3, 3/4.9). Apart from such a model, I observed that, although less frequent, the association of the recipient's identification with greetings such as "hello" (jilmsg4.11, jucmsg3/4.3) or "dear" (pcmsg 2.3) were also included in some messages. Closing salutations, on the other hand, displayed a higher level of design consistency which was revealed through the predominant combination of the sender's name with variations of the same greeting: "best regards" (jilmsg1.4, 4.11, jucmsg 3/4.3), "regards" (jilmsg3.12, lucmsg3.1, jucmsg2/3.3, 3/4.9), and "BR" (lucmsg2.3, lucmsg 4.3). The only deviation from such a pattern was found in the sample that exclusively contained the sender's signature (basmsg4.1).

The relative regularity detected at the level of salutations led me then to investigate the message content area and to search for potential features of structural standardization. By contrasting the samples collected, I perceived that, even without presenting a strict sequence of recurrent components, all messages of this kind were focused on a compulsory element -- the target response -- which expressed the intention of providing the receiver(s) with an informative reply, as requested. Such an element, by embodying the core purpose of communication and by indicating the nature of the social action that involved the participants, constituted, therefore, the fundamental feature for genre identification. The excerpts below illustrate such a component:

Let's fix the meeting time when you are here. (jilmsg4.11)

I received [customer] order: #073.550 dated July 24/95 of total US$000.000.00. (lucmsg2.3)

OK with me. (jilmsg3.12)

Let's do following:
1. Check that your pricing files are in c:\xdsas1\quote sub directory.
2. Replace your existing xd10_1.xlm file with attached. This file is in c:\xdsas1 sub directory. This corrects some other problems. Now the password is again 'none'
3. Try to retrieve my [customer] costing which I am sending as a separate message. I have done that with my tool and I can retrieve that without problems. (lucmsg3.1)

[customer]
[address]
[city - country - zip code]
If you are talking about the UFTU*PC System Multiple Copy Software Licence, it is available in [application]. (jucmsg2/3.3)

Regarding the "demo" software, I don't have software available to send to clients unless someone is being billed for it. I can order it and have it billed to your office (cost center), or I can have it billed to the US client or you can send them a demo copy if you have an extra one available. (jucmsg3/4.3)

I know of two, possible three, clients in the paper manufacturing industry.

Client Acc Rep  
[customer] [name]  
[customer] [name]  
[customer] ???.???

(...I am not sure what kind of solution we have provided [customer] and [customer]. I think it may be MNS. (jucmsg3/4.9)

Throughout my investigation of the target response, I also observed that, in addition to the illustration above, such an element could be displayed under distinct configurations which, although evidenced in only two response samples, are worth mentioning. Firstly, it was explicitly stated as the only constituent of the message content, as shown by the example that follows:

[name], [company] Paper Machinery representative in [country] is:  
[NAME]  
[address]  
[city - state - ZIP code]  
[telephone number]  
[fax number]  
Contact person: [name]  
Best Regards  
[sender's name]  
(j1msg1.4)

Secondly, the target response element was inserted into the original request, as illustrated by the example below where I have intentionally highlighted the reply (originally conveyed in upper-case letters). In this instance, it is also interesting to notice that the insertion affected not only the fundamental response component but also the closing salutation:
Dear [professional 1],
As you know I am leaving [company] and I still do not have a positioning about credit of this commission to FI account.
- THIS COMMISSION PAYMENT IS NOW OK.
Would you please advise [name], who is going to replace me, about it ASAP?
Thanks
BR
[PROFESSIONAL 1's NAME]
[professional 2's name]
lucm@.

By reflecting upon such a procedure from a practical perspective, I understand that insertion may save time to response processing, as well as avoid the need to refer to or rephrase issues addressed in the original request. Luciano expands this perception of mine by pointing out that the context plays a determinant role in the configuration choice, as illustrated by the following excerpt of our conversation:

M: (referring to lucmsg4.3) In this case, the insertion of the reply into the original message was once again used.
L: That's right, that's right.
M: It seems to me that this is a procedure, or this is a method that is quite common. It's a little bit different from the sample we saw last week in which there was a sequence of messages, but they were separated. So, there was a "reply"...
L: Oh, yeah.
M: ... there was a "forward"...
L: Yes. Well... there are methods...
M: Is it a different system?
L: (without paying attention to me)... different methods but...
M: ... anyway, you have the same...
L: ... in fact, here, you... when you do it this way, when you insert the response, you insert it immediately after each subject. When you use a "reply" [command], you have to give references somehow... or you write just one text, mentioning many subjects. In this case, the reader has to... maybe... keep an eye to the message below, to know what you're talking about. So, it depends on the subject, on the quantity of subjects, maybe. Then, you choose one method or the other.
M: In a message like that, it's easier for the reader to see the question and its immediate answer.
L: That's right.
M: So, communication is faster this way.
L: Yes, yes. (LUCRM4:104-136)

On the other hand, from a communicative perspective, I hypothesize that insertion procedures constitute a way of simulating a dialogic interaction, by reproducing in the
written mode the classic conversational turn-taking movement (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973: 293; Sacks & associates, 1974: 700-701). The reading of inserted messages encourages me to regard them as a real piece of conversation, and to pursue the interlocutors' alternate and organized flow of giving/taking the floor (Gumperz, 1982). In my opinion, through such a procedure, the respondent may not only provide the receiver with the content of his/her reply, but also insert it in the original message exactly where s/he would react or take the floor, if the interaction had been conducted orally. Nevertheless, although inserted messages do seem to reproduce instances of conversation quite realistically, I agree with Wilkins (1991: 61) when she states that the electronic turn-taking movement does not account for interruptions, negotiations or paralinguistic features that typically characterize face-to-face interactions. Regardless of these constraints, I believe that insertion presupposes an easier way of either conveying or capturing the meaning of consecutive electronic exchanges, by directly and immediately associating a response with its respective request.

Considering these qualities, I was intrigued by the fact that insertion was not customarily adopted by users in business settings. In fact, according to my observation of the samples collected, this procedure was restricted to the electronic correspondence conveyed within the first company and, even in this environment, it was not performed on a regular basis. In discussing the issue of format selection within her organization, Juciane provided me with a revealing insight:

J: We do this way [without insertions] for two reasons. First, I believe that it's... because it's a characteristic and, then, we end up... let's say... we end up doing like it was done here [using a message to illustrate her comment]: I sent the information and the last message -- the one that I'd sent or received before -- I sent the last message below. Second, it's a feature of the software. Because when you use the reply command, the previous message automatically follows your text. Right? Then, you have the option of deleting it or inserting your text in the original one. (JUC RM3/4: 1457-1488)

According to her, therefore, the incorporation of previous messages constitutes a natural feature of the software, resulting from the utilization of the reply command. By using such a device and having the preceding communication displayed on the screen, the professional often tends to immediately compose his/her text, placing it in an initial position.
I understand that, on the one hand, inserting responses into the original e-mail impacts positively on the receiver's reading and comprehension process, for the relationship between requestive and responsive topics is easily identified. Considering the response elaboration, on the other hand, I believe that insertions require the sender to spend extra time in reading the original text again in order to position his/her responses. Under such circumstances, producing the reply message as a separate text may perhaps be a way of speeding up the response processing. Anyhow, all of the participants attested that they utilized the insertion format and this led me to believe that, as Luciano said (LUCRM4:104-136), the context is really the pivotal determinant for choices regarding format.

Proceeding with my investigation into the message text area, I realized that, in addition to the compulsory target element described so far, other complementary components could be included in a responsive e-mail, performing the function of either introducing or concluding the message. According to the samples collected, I saw that the introductory segments could be presented as contextual references, comments, or as a response marker which preceded the target response element. The excerpts below illustrate such components:

(CONTEXTUAL REFERENCES)
I have had exactly the same problem than you (*file XD10QAP.XLL does not exist* etc) with the files I have got from you. Files that I have created seem to work ok. (lucmsg3.1)
The customer in [country] was unable to communicate with the [company] node in [city] but he can communicate with [city]. (pcmsg2.3)

(INSTITUTIONAL COMMENTS)
I'm looking forward to meet you during your stay in [country]. (jims 4.1)
This isn't going to be another [customer] pilot scenario is it? Anyway, I will be glad to assist your effort in any way that I am able. (jucmsg 3/4.3)

(RESPONSE MARKER)
Here is the information you've requested:.... (pcmsg2.3)

The concluding segment, on the other hand, provided the target response component with additional information, with a notification of further procedures, with guidance relating to their procedures, or with a reply solicitation (followed, or not, by an expression of gratitude). Such components are illustrated by the extracts that follow:
I think you should book hotel Holiday Inn [place], very close to office. Telephone number is 000-000-0000. (jirmg3.12)
Also I have learned that some salesmen in [country] have had similar problem when they have by accident entered data (quantities) in wrong columns. (lucmsg3.1)
I believe the [application] # has been changed from 2051.120 to 088.68. (jucmsg2/3.3)

(name) will fax it. (lucmsg2.3)

I am not sure if [customer] is a client, but you can send a [e-mail] to FAST and find out. (...) Send the Acct Reps a [e-mail] asking for information. (jucmsg3/4.9)

Let me see how it works now. (lucmsg3.1)
Please keep me informed of any progress. Thank You. (pcmsg2.3)
Let me know how you would like to handle the software issue. (jucmsg 3/4.3)

By observing the meanings conveyed by the above messages, as well as the number of instances of the various patterns that occurred in my data, I perceived that responses -- except for their target element -- did not display a strict sequence of recurrent components. Furthermore, by reflecting upon the target response and its illocutionary force, I realized that responses conformed to a quite objective form of communication which was grounded on the purpose of directly providing an informative reply, as requested. As opposed to FYI reports -- which also represented an alternative answer to requests -- responses were primarily focused on an explicit transmission of information, without including details and/or descriptions of situated procedures, or expressions of personal opinions and suggestions. For this reason, it appears that responses deal predominantly with ideational content.

Under such a characterization, however, two responsive messages deserve particular attention for, to some extent and for different reasons, they diverge from the ones portrayed so far. The first e-mail was composed by Basilio and represented the electronic response generated by a telephone request:
Juanito,
entendi hablar con vos, pero era un poquito después de las 4:30 hs, entonces decidí enviarte la mensajey transcribir el comentario de él, (3) que es el siguiente: (4) [name].

Comentarios generales15:
"We still have a poor system to approve travel expenses in [country]"

Para los items de gastos de viaje, respondió A51=#; A52=#; A53=#; A54=#16

(5) And that is all my friend...

(6) If you want, I can fax you his questionnaire including the answers and comments.

(7) Basilio.

(basmsg4.1)

Regarding the structural organization of the message text area, the response above consists of (1) opening salutation, (2) explanation of the communication tool selected, (3) response marker, (4) target response, (5) concluding comment, (6) statement of availability for providing more detailed information, and (7) closing salutation.

Among these elements, (1) and (5) explicitly reveal the friendship that connects both professionals who, due to their work-related activities, interact with each other on a daily basis (BASRM4:313-314), through the various communication media available (e.g., computer, telephone, fax). Basilio refers to this professional as a friend and, in spite of the fact that he is communicating with a much older colleague (BASRM4:334-335), he uses the diminutive form of his name (Juanito), reproducing through e-mail, the same informal approach adopted by him in telephone conversations (BASRM4:331-332). Such a behavior uncovers Basilio's "involvement" (Chafe, 1982; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987) with the receiver, and clearly indicates that, in addition to the core ideational content conveyed, his message also embodies interpersonal attributes.

The bilingual aspect of this response certainly constitutes another reason to draw attention to it. In this specific context, Basilio's intention was to provide his South American co-worker with the information requested, by reproducing it in English (4), exactly the way it was displayed in the original questionnaire received. According to Basilio's explanations

15 "(1) Johnnie, (2) I've tried to talk to you but it was a little after 4:30 pm; therefore I've decided to send you a message and transcribe his comment, (3) which is the one that follows: (4) [name] general comments:...."

16 "As for the travel expense issue, he answered: A51=#; A52=#; A53=#; A54=#"
(BASRM4:16-66), the linguistic code switch that followed this transcription -- (5) and (6) -- represented a conscious decision he made when, at that point of the message composition, he remembered our conversations and the reflective process he was jointly developing with me -- as I discuss in Chapter 6 (Section 6.5.6). Nevertheless, if in this situation the inclusion of different languages in the same e-mail was a deliberate decision, manifested by a specific professional in a particular context, it does not necessarily indicate that other instances of electronic messages, produced either by Basílio or by one of his colleagues, are characterized by a similar level of awareness and/or determination. Considering Basílio's comments, although English constitutes the "official" language of his company (BASS:81-82, 276-279), it is possible, and natural, to produce and/or receive messages that also incorporate Spanish and/or Portuguese (BASS:142-144, BASRM3:1279-1282, BASRM4:637-679, BASFM:50-51). Hence, linguistic code switch constitutes a quality that distinguishes the electronic correspondence conveyed within Basílio's organization, and it is not necessarily a feature of a particular genre of internal written communication.

The second e-mail which deserves special comment was addressed to Juciane in response to her request for assistance in a specific software installation:

(1) Hello Juciane,
(2) This isn't going to be another [customer] pilot scenario is it!? Anyway, I will be glad to assist your effort in any way that I am able.
(3) Regarding the "demo" software, I don't have software available to send to clients unless someone is being billed for it. I can order it and have it billed to your office (cost center), or I can have it billed to the US client or you can send them a demo copy if you have an extra one available.
(4) Let me know how you would like to handle the software issue.
(5) Best Regards,
[sender's full name]
[department]
(jucmsg34.3)

Considering its structural organization, the responsive message above includes (1) opening salutation, (2) introductory comment, (3) target response, (4) soliciting further contact, and (5) closing salutation. Among these components, the second one called my attention immediately. This element not only presented a preliminary remark through which
the message content was introduced, but also conveyed a manifestation of flaming\textsuperscript{17}, which has been defined as "the exchange of emotionally charged, hostile, or insulting messages on computer-mediated communication networks" (Thompsen, 1994:51).

In this particular situation, the sender's impetuous feeling was expressed by the initial negative clause ("This isn't going to be..."), followed by an affirmative tag question ("...is it"), and emphasized by the punctuation which simultaneously indicated surprise (exclamation mark) and doubt (question mark). However, the impact of this sentence was immediately cushioned by the writer's offer to, somehow, provide help ("Anyway, I will be glad to assist your effort in any way that I am able"). Such an impulsive reaction to her request was promptly taken up by Juciane, who commented on the situation and its impact by saying:

J: He is "fight... "kid..."\textsuperscript{18} -- well, quotation -- he is "telling" me... I'm asking him a new 'case' for the customer, and he is saying: "Ah, it's not going to happen the same thing that happened with the other pilot -- the one which the customer had problems with!" So, he's kind of complaining... or... it's an alert for me not to repeat it, right? (JUC RM3/4:561-566)

J: Exclamation and interrogation together, right? (reading the message) "Anyway, I'll be glad to assist you". It means, first he kicks me and, then, he pleases me. (simulating the sender's voice) "That's all right... all right... I will...", right? "But in this case... for instance... regarding the software... I don't have it available to help the customer, unless I charge for that" He means... he was not too open to help me, right? (JUC RM3/4:650-663)

J: It's a... simple situation, right? But his way of speaking... let's say... kind of angry! (JUCRM3/4:675-676)

Juciane's comments revealed that she understood the sender's complaint, as well as the admonition conveyed through his "angry way of speaking." The perception that, in fact, "he was not too open to help" led her to react through an ensuing message (juc

\textsuperscript{17} According to Sproull \& Kiesler (1991/92), "the phenomenon of flaming suggests that through electronic mail, actions and decisions, not just talk, might become more extreme and impulsive. Because reminders of settings and kinds of people are weak or nonexistent, decision makers might feel less bound by convention and less concerned with consequences" (p.49).

\textsuperscript{18} Juciane expressed her ideas by mumbling "bring... brinc...", which indicated her initial hesitation in assuming that the sender was "brigando" (fighting) or "brincando" (kidding). In the transcription, by using "fight..." (instead of fighting) and "kid..." (instead of kidding), I attempted to translate into English, the same connotation conveyed by her original speech in which the words in Portuguese were induced but not fully verbalized.
msg3M.3) in which -- although intentionally including various expressions of gratitude ("Thanks for your e-mail"... "Thanks again for your help"... "Thanks for your understanding and help!") -- she suggests her previous request ("Anyway, we would appreciate if you could help them with the installation and learning how to use the software"), presented the specifics of the focused situation ("The [customer] pilot is not the same case of [customer]. They are not having any problems to delay the tests"), and provided a cultural explanation to emphasize that the Brazilian context demands a distinct approach to customers ("Many times it is really necessary to have pilot tests to sell our service here in Brazil").

This electronic episode evidenced the interesting way in which Juciane manipulated the sender's flaming manifestation and elaborated on her intended request: by deliberately pretending mitigation through the emphatic use of expressions of gratitude, she not only subtly reinforced her previous request, but also gave cultural reasons to support it, and to emphasize the necessity of processing it in a specific way. According to her, by composing her message in an intentionally polite way (JUCRM3/4:579-605), she aimed at keeping her connection with that particular professional "in a nice way" without "allowing" him, however, to "fight" with her (JUCRM3/4:627-629). In my opinion, Juciane's reaction is rooted in her personal determination of not being "imperative" (JUCII:640-642, JUCRM3/4:253-254), and of always acknowledging her co-workers' assistance (JUCRM1: 318-325, JUCRM2/3:292-297), as previously mentioned.

My interpretation of this flaming episode is that outcomes of this kind emerge when the sender is primarily caught up in an impassioned personal "involvement" (Chafe, 1982; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987) and, then, impulsively reacts by attacking the closest target: the author of the original message. In this case, the message generator, who is "detached" (ibid) neither from the context nor from the audience, promptly reacts to the former by colliding with the latter. By using this particular episode to reflect upon the phenomenon of flaming in general, I consider that such an impulsive reaction corresponds to a peculiar way of using language to express "ideational" and "interpersonal" content (Halliday, 1978/92), regardless of the genre being used.

The comments presented so far indicate that a response, as a genre, is primarily focused on the communicative purpose of providing the receiver(s) with an objective
informative reply, elicited by a previous request. From this perspective, therefore, requests and responses share an interactive relationship which is similar to the one shared by requests and FYI reports. In my opinion, the connection between these genres -- which display a question/solicitation and its ensuing reply -- reproduces, through the electronic medium, the one that connects conversational question-answer utterance sequences. Considering the spoken discourse, Schegloff & Sacks (1973) classify such an association as "adjacency pairs" (p.295-296). By analogy, but also by emphasizing the communication tool used, I perceive it as electronic adjacency pairs in which the "first pair part" (questions or solicitations) is always represented by requests, whereas the realization of the "second pair part" (answers) may be portrayed through either FYI reports or responses.

Apart from the fact that they are both elicited by a previous request, FYI reports and responses do not have a great deal in common. On the one hand, FYI reports respond to a request through the narration/description of situated procedures, and/or through the presentation of comments or suggestions regarding a particular context. For this reason, the FYI report genre may frequently include ideational and interpersonal meanings in the same message. On the other hand, responses are focused on transmitting the requested information as concisely and objectively as possible, without including the writer's personal views on the subject or situation addressed. Therefore, the response genre consists of ideational meanings, predominantly.

Hence, if to some extent both genres involve the core communicative purpose of providing the receiver(s) with a reply, the achievement of such a goal is undertaken through distinct levels of involvement in the situation, as well as through distinct ways of expressing the target information. It appears that the convergence of purposes is essentially induced by the nature of the requestive genre that originates either FYI reports or responses, and that establishes with them a relationship of electronic adjacency pairs. Nevertheless, such an apparent convergence is significantly modified by different realizations at the formal and content levels which, therefore, allow us to recognize them as distinct genres.

According to this interpretation, requests such as questions/solicitations engender resulting answers which are articulated either through responses or FYI reports. Considering their embedded communicative goals, my perception is that requests and
responses, as well as requests and FYI reports represent pairs of interconnected genres -- or "systems of genre" (Bazerman, 1992/94; Swales, 1992) -- which follow upon another, and interact with each other in specific ways. By representing a system that entails question-answer sequences, these electronic adjacency pairs, as related genres, "instantiate participation of all the parties" (Bazerman, 1992/94:99) and, therefore, account for the thorough interactive chain that they represent.

5.3.8. Cover message

Similarly to requests, FYI reports and responses, cover messages also represent another variety of genre which, by describing a non-specific interactive movement within the organizations, circulate across the corporate community without regard to status distinctions. Broadly speaking, a cover message constitutes a "kind of picture-frame," generated for the purpose of announcing the delivery of general documents which may be appended to the same e-mail or to a separate electronic file. In general, this genre consists of a brief and concise message, primarily focused on the item attached, which is invariably summarized in the subject line of the header.

My approach to cover messages was grounded on the five samples collected from the first company, and on the two provided by the third. An overview of the entire message text area showed that, except for three examples which were introduced by opening salutations ("Dear Colleague," jmsg3.13; "Hi again [name]," jmsg 4.10; "[name]," luc msg1.6), the remaining ones were characterized by its omission. As opposed to this introductory element, the inclusion of closing salutations constituted, however, a customary practice, evidenced in all messages collected, although conveyed through distinct realizations. In this case, the design most frequently adopted revealed the association of variations of the same greeting ("rgs," jmsg4.5; "regards," lucmsg1.6; or "Best regards," jmsg3.13, 4.4, 4.10) with the sender's signature. Apart from this format, the combination

19 This term was actually used by Swales (1996:47) to express his perception of a submission letter which, according to him, has been also referred to as "cover letter" (APA Publication Manual 1983), "covering letter" (Day, 1983), and "letter of transmittal" (Michaelson, 1986). I have adopted his image here for I understand that it synthesizes precisely the role performed by cover messages as an electronic version of cover letters.
of an expression of gratitude with a greeting ("Thanks and regards," basmsgs1.14; "Thanks and have a nice weekend," basmsg3.6), constituted the other possibility represented in the data.

Although opening and closing salutations displayed some regularity -- at least, in terms of omission and inclusion, respectively -- I realized that there was little evidence of standardization in the structural organization of the message content. Considering the samples collected, the only recurrent segment was the one through which the sender not only attested the delivery itself, but also specified the type of document or file appended. This fundamental component -- the attachment indicator -- revealed the basic purpose of the communication and, for this reason, it played an essential role in content transmission and comprehension. Due to the nature of the meaning conveyed and to the need for promptly expressing it, the attachment indicator was always presented in an initial position, without any kind of introduction or preliminary comments, but invariably including "attached," "enclosed" or "included" as its consistent textual markers.

By observing the attachment indicator element more accurately, as well as by attempting to grasp its relationship with other possible message components, I noticed that this fundamental segment could be displayed under distinct configurations. Firstly, it could appear as the only content element as shown in the following examples:

Please find enclosed internal announcement from [name] for further distribution in your offices. (jilmsg4.4)
incl. list of give-aways. (jilmsg4.5)
Attached pls find the WP file on last week's [customer] meeting. (luc msg1.6)

Secondly, it could appear as an initial statement, followed by others which expanded or concluded its meaning. The transcription below, in which I have highlighted the attachment indicator segment, illustrates such a configuration:

Enclosed please find the detailed program for the Control Systems
Sales Meeting 2/1995 at [place], [city].
The meeting will start in the Auditorium of [place] on Monday 4th Sept. at
9:00 o'clock and end on Thursday 7th Sept. 1995 at 16:00 o'clock.
Clothing during the meeting is casual.
For Wednesday evening we have planned a trip by boat to [tourist site] with outdoors entertainment.  
Pls remember to take the silver [company] name badge to the meeting!  
Looking forward to seeing you at [place]!  
(jlmsg3.13)

Thirdly, the attachment indicator was expanded into another structural segment which provided the receiver(s) with some explanation about the document appended. To illustrate such a configuration, I have transcribed two examples and highlighted the basic component of cover messages:

The attached strategy document was developed by [division] in an effort to clarify our direction regarding [department] for new ventures in the region.  
The introduction of [department] and the number of new Joint Venture projects in the region has added a new dimension to integrated systems. We believe it is critical that each business, country and function unit understand and align with this strategy.  
Please contact either:  
[name] -- [department]  
[name] -- [department]  
[name] -- [department]  
[name] -- [department]  
if you have any questions or need further elaboration, we would appreciate your sharing this within your organization as appropriate.  
(basmsg1.14)

Attached are more [customer] files that you need but I don’t have the reports with me to know which one they used. Sorry for the length of this.  
I will send once without attachment so you know I tried. Again, if you can’t get such a long message or can’t use Excell V5 or WP6 files let me know.  
(jlmsg4.10)

Apart from these configurations, I also distinguished one occurrence in which the reason for document delivery was emphasized through its insertion into the attachment indicator. The transcription below, in which I have also highlighted the basic component of cover messages, illustrates this relatively infrequent presentation:

Attached for your review and comment is a draft summary of the accounting changes that are being adopted or considered for 1995. Our intent is to resolve any outstanding issued at the next [department] Accounting Board meeting on August 23rd. Please provide any additions or comments by August 18th.  
(basmsg3.6)
The configurations presented above illustrated the attachment indicator as the first and main component of the e-mail message, whose core meaning was easily detectable through the recurrent use of specific verbs (e.g., attach, enclose, include) as its textual markers. However, in proceeding with my investigation into the content of the samples collected, I found that this compulsory element could be complemented or expanded by the optional inclusion of a number of other segments. Among these ancillary segments, I noted that additional explanations regarding the content of the item appended, information regarding reasons for delivery and the delivery process adopted, presentation of general and/or personal comments, recommendation for further work-related procedures, as well as guidance and/or motivation for future communication constituted potential elements through which the core purpose of cover messages could be developed or emphasized. The excerpts that follow illustrate my point:

(Explaining the Item Appended)
These principles are being followed globally this year... (basmsg1.8)
The attached strategy document was developed by [division] in an effort to clarify our direction regarding [department] for new ventures in the region.
The introduction of [department] and the number of new Joint Venture projects in the region has added a new dimension to integrated systems. (basmsg1.14)

The meeting will start in the Auditorium of [place] on Monday 4th Sept. at 9:00 o'clock and end on Thursday 7th Sept. 1995 at 16:00 o'clock.
Clothing during the meeting is casual.
For Wednesday evening we have planned a trip by boat to [tourist site] with outdoors entertainment.
Pls remember to take the silver [company] name badge to the meeting! (jmsg3.13)

 provid reasons for delivery)
... for your review and comment... Our intent is to resolve any outstanding issues at the next [department] Accounting Board meeting on August 23rd. (basmsg3.6)

(Presenting General Comments)
We believe it is critical that each business, country and function unit understand and align with this strategy. (basmsg1.14)

(Presenting Personal Comments)
Looking forward to seeing you at [place]! (jmsg3.13)
... but I don't have the reports with me to know which one they used. Sorry for the length of this. (jmsg4.10)
(EXPLAINING THE DELIVERY PROCESS)
I will send once without attachment so you know I tried. (jilmsg4.10)

(RECOMMENDING FURTHER PROCEDURES)
PS: Please distribute as appropriate in your organizations. (basmsg1.8)
We would appreciate your sharing this within your organization as appropriate. (basmsg1.14)
Please provide any additions or comments by August 18th. (basmsg3.6)

(GUIDING FUTURE COMMUNICATION)
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the appropriate local Accounting Manager:
[country]: [name] / [name]
[country]: [name] / [name]
[country]: [name]
[country]: [name] (basmsg1.8)

Please contact either:
[name] -- [department]
[name] -- [department]
[name] -- [department]
[name] -- [department]
if you have any questions or need further elaboration. (basmsg1.14)

(MOTIVATING FURTHER COMMUNICATION)
Again, if you can't get such a long message or can't use Excell V5 or WP6 files let me know. (jilmsg4.10)

The descriptions and comments presented so far are evidence that the omission of introductory elements, the objective way in which the core meaning is transmitted, and the consistent utilization of definite textual markers constitute a set of specific formal attributes which not only distinguish cover messages from other types of business correspondence, but also support its recognition as a distinctive genre. Even in the absence of a consistent structural organization, genre identification is, in this particular case, founded on the nature of the social action (Miller, 1994) and of the communicative purpose (Swales, 1990) shared by interactants, as well as on the formal features through which the main goal is textually marked and conveyed. This leads me to the conclusion that the identification of cover messages as a genre is, as Orlikowski & Yates (1994:544) suggest, based on features of both purpose and form.

By reflecting upon the role performed by cover messages within the organizations they emerge from, I suggest that they belong to a "genre set" (Devitt, 1991:340) or "genre
repertoire" (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994:544). Although identified through different labels, the idea that underlies both notions is the one of similarly grouping the various related but distinct genres enacted by a community, and conventionally used by its members to express their communicative purposes and rhetorical needs.

From this perspective, the genres included in the same set/repertoire are not marked by any systematic or adjacency pair relationship, like the one which establishes a link between requests and FYI reports, or requests and responses. Considering the connection between these particular genres -- or "systems of genre" (Bazerman, 1994:97) -- the participation of both sides of the emerging interactive chain is taken into account and, consequently, the whole sequence of exchanges reveals a mutual interdependence through which one genre evokes the other or gives it a reason for being. On the other hand, cover messages -- as part of the genre set or repertoire available within the corporations -- represent "the work of one side of a multiple person interaction" (Bazerman, 1994:98), whose content does not necessary imply the compulsory generation of subsequent electronic communications. In my opinion, any reaction from the receiver(s) is, in this case, bound up with the document enclosed and not primarily caused by the message whose core purpose is one of simply announcing its attachment. For this reason, I believe that the "picture-frame" image (Swales, 1996:47) not only captures precisely the relationship between the cover message and the document it introduces, but it also suggests its impact on the recipient who, metaphorically speaking, invariably reacts to the picture itself, and hardly ever to its frame.

5.3.9. Memo

Memos constitute another variety of genre of internal written communication included in the set or repertoire established by the business community, and used by its members to convey information across the entire organization. The word memo can be regarded as the "professional's word" for the Latin form memorandum, whose literal

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20 The concept of "genra set" was first presented by Devitt, and later on referred to as "the community's genre repertoire" by Orlikowski & Yates.
meaning is something that "ought to be remembered" (Yli-Jokipii, 1994:45).

The historical evolution of this genre was examined by Yates (1989:95-98) in her ontological study of types of internal communication in business settings. According to her investigation, memos emerged as a genre in the second decade of the twentieth century. At that time, by "reflecting the preoccupation with efficiency and system" (p.95), they started to diverge from external correspondence in form and style, in order to be easier to read, handle and file. In a more recent study, based on the computerized correspondence exchanged by a temporary group of language computer designers whose ultimate goal was to produce a manual, Orlikowski and Yates (1994) identified memos as the predominant form of communication within the repertoire of genres used by that target community. According to their findings, the typical memo had "subject line, no aside to individuals, no embedded message, no graphical elements, no heading, no nonstandard elements, no opening, no sign-off" (p.556).

The studies mentioned above influenced my investigation into memos, and provided me with insights that led me to reflect upon their features of purpose and form. By speculating on the messages collected, I was particularly intrigued by the similar informative purpose that underlay their generation, as well as by certain formal aspects that distinguished their presentation and that, to some extent, conflicted with the definition suggested by Orlikowski & Yates (1994).

My approach to memos was grounded on the four samples gathered from the third company and on the two provided by the first, which initially led me to investigate the entire message text area. By contrasting these samples, and investigating their structural components, I perceived that, except for one memo that displayed an opening salutation ("Dear [name]," jImsg4.6), and for the two that included closing references ("regards, [name]," jImsg1.1; "Good luck, [name]," jImsg4.6), the omission of those initial and final segments constituted a regular practice through which the receiver's attention was promptly directed to the content of the memo.

The observation of those introductory and concluding segments also led me to explore the content area in a search for possible features of standardization. My analysis revealed that, if the omission of salutations represented a feature of regularity at the
organizational level, it was not possible to distinguish any other component or succession of components that suggested the utilization of a regular organizational pattern. This indicates that a memo, as a genre, constitutes a peculiar kind of internal written communication which is exclusively focused on the purpose of informing or alerting the receiver(s) about issues to be known and/or remembered.

According to the samples collected, a memo was motivated, on the one hand, by the intention of establishing or reinforcing a specific orientation expressed by a message sequence of messages appended to it. For example, a memo might announce the transmission of a corporate circular (basmsg2.2, jllmsg1.1), or of an occasional report (basmsg3.3). Sometimes, however, it might appear as the first part of a series of documents which were forwarded in the same message, such as a bulletin plus a specific request (basmsg1.10), or a cover message plus a corporate circular (basmsg1.14). On the other hand, I perceived that a memo was also used for the purpose of communicating a special work-related procedure (the delivery of a specific piece of material, for instance), without reproducing any previous message, but subtly alluding to a previous conversation between the sender and receiver (jllmsg4.6).

According to this characterization therefore, a memo presented a distinct configuration and performed a dual role. In the first place, it could be used as an objective alert to emphasize the content of the forwarded message(s), as shown by the memos below:

(1) fyi. (basmsg1.10)  
(2) FOR INFORMATION (basmsg1.14)  
(3) FOR INFO (basmsg3.3)  
(4) FYI (jllmsg1.1)

In the second place, it could be used by the sender to express his/her comments on a specific work-related situation addressed in an embedded message, or to notify co-workers of a particular procedure, as illustrated respectively by the memos that follow:

(5) The physical security of our telecom rooms is easy to overlook on our audits. I don't know that we could have prevented this from occurring, but we can 'raise awareness'.... (basmsg2.2)
(6) So your back in BraUI, it was nice to meet you again. I mailed today the sales tool and Pasve-sc application and hope this can be of any benefit. (jim Against 4.6)

Considering all the memos illustrated above, and the relationship that they established with the messages they introduced, I noticed that, except for sample (5) -- through which the sender expressed his personal opinion -- the remaining memos performed an ancillary function within the communication process. This perception of mine was actually corroborated by José Luiz when he commented on e-mail (6), by saying:

JL: This person, for instance... it was not necessary for him to send me an e-mail message, telling me that he had sent... that he was sending it [the material] through the snail mail. Right? If he hadn't told me anything... when I got it... I'd understand it... that it would be related to the conversation I had with him. (JLRM4:699-707)

By deepening my reflections upon the samples transcribed above, I realized that, although these memos shared a similar informative purpose, they were not characterized by any formal regularity. As opposed to the genres previously discussed, a memo did not present a particular component that, displayed in all messages, could represent its core purpose in a straightforward way. In terms of configuration, I perceived that such a purpose might be expressed by an explicit textual marker -- "for your information" -- as in messages (1), (2), (3) and (4); or evidenced by the segment "I mailed today the sales tool and the Pasve-sc application," in message (6). However, the same level of explicitness was not found in message (5), in which the for-your-information purpose was subtly expanded by the sender's comments on the corporate circular appended, and by his final comment on "raising awareness..." -- which was strategically followed by a series of ellipsis points. In this particular memo, the communicative purpose was, therefore, expressed in the semantic content of the message, rather than being conveyed through a specific structural component.

Considering other aspects of structural organization, I perceived that the memos in my sample corresponded to the pattern described by Orlikowski & Yates (1994), in that they displayed the topic of the message in the subject line, and lacked headings, asides
to individuals, and graphical elements. However, the memos in my sample deviated from the pattern detected by these authors, in that they revealed the occasional inclusion of opening and closing salutations, the utilization of nonstandard segments (as indicated by the transcriptions (5) and (6) mentioned above), as well as the consistent attachment of previous messages.

These discrepancies led me to reflect upon the differences between the two studies. On the one hand, Orlikowski & Yates's research included, among other genres, the 540 memos produced by a group of knowledge workers temporarily engaged in a multiyear, inter-organizational project. According to their findings, the memos revealed no consistent definition of purpose but a high level of consistency in terms of form. However, according to them, "most of the participants used an electronic mail system that provided fields for the standard memo header, and the memo may thus have served as a default genre" (ibid, p.555). My study, on the other hand, was based on a much more restricted sample of six memos that, among other genres, emerged from the electronic communication routinely exchanged between Brazilian and international professionals within the same corporation. According to my findings, the memos revealed no formal regularity, but a high level of correlation in terms of purpose. However, although diverging from one another in some respects, both studies revealed the relevance of form and purpose which, as claimed by Orlinkowski & Yates (1994:544), constitute the fundamental aspects upon which genre identification rely. In my opinion, the divergence of results indicates that further investigation is required, both within and across communities, to determine whether memos can be established as a distinct genre.

5.3.10. Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement is a genre of internal written communication which emerged exclusively from the set or repertoire enacted by professionals within the third corporation investigated. As perceived by Basílio, it conforms to a "routinized" (BASRM1:240) form of computerized correspondence, which involves an "informal" (BASRM1:54,230), or "quite simple" (BASRM1:250) expression of gratitude addressed either to a particular individual or to multiple recipients.
Actually, my approach to this genre was limited to the two examples collected from Basilio's organization and, for this reason, the arguments I present here, rather than implying generalizations, should be contemplated from a quite restricted perspective. Nevertheless, the tentative analysis of these two messages suggest some insights on genre identification.

Following the procedure established for the genres previously discussed, I started to investigate acknowledgments by examining the message text area. This initial overview showed that both examples included an opening salutation ("[name]," basmsg1.3; "Teammates," basmsg1.9), as well as closing references ("regards, [name]," basmsg1.3; "[name]," basmsg1.9). In terms of content, I perceived that the expression of gratitude was conveyed through a fundamental segment -- the acknowledgement indicator -- which summarized the sender's intention to appreciate the work done by a single co-worker or group of professionals. In both examples, such a purpose was represented by the utilization of "thanks," used as a kind of textual marker, as shown by the transcriptions below where I have highlighted the acknowledgment segment:

- Thanks for the great detailed support from auditing regarding the Limits of Authority procedures. Basilio did a great job of reviewing the procedures in detail and helping to upgrade the words. While I would have liked this review to have occurred in Jan/Feb., I am glad that we did the work now before finalizing the implementation of the procedures. Thanks again for the support, Basilio... (basmsg1.3)

- MANY THANKS TO ALL OF YOU. I OWE YOU THE PROFESSIONAL RESPECT THAT AUDITING GAINED THROUGHOUT OUR REGION. (basmsg1.9)

In addition to this core element, both messages above displayed another segment that followed the acknowledgement indicator and provided some explanation which either contextualized or emphasized the main reason for expressing gratitude. The extracts below illustrate this complementary component:

- Basilio did a great job of reviewing the procedures in detail and helping to upgrade the words. (basmsg1.3)
I OWE YOU THE PROFESSIONAL RESPECT THAT AUDITING
GAINED THROUGHOUT OUR REGION. (basmsg1.9)

In one of the messages, however, the sender included additional comments on the
situation and reinforced the feeling of gratitude conveyed by the acknowledgement
indicator:

While I would have liked this review to have occurred in Jan./Feb., I am
glad that we did the work now before finalizing the implementation of the
procedures.
Thanks again for the support, Basilio... (basmsg1.3)

The illustrations above indicated that making an acknowledgement entails the use
of a distinctive structural organization through which the components of messages and their
meanings are easily recognized. In addition, two specific aspects came to my attention: the
use of capital letters and of ellipsis points.

According to Basilio (BASRM3:1352-1356), the manipulation of certain visual
devices -- such as shifting from small to capital letters or vice versa, using quotation marks
or asterisks, among others -- represents a strategic way of stressing a particular issue.
From his perspective, by conveying an acknowledgement through capital letters (bas
msg1.9), the sender -- in this case, the General Auditing Manager -- emphasized, through
the text and through its layout, his intention of congratulating all auditors worldwide for their
professional achievements.

The use of ellipsis points, on the other hand, constituted a punctuation device, used
by the message generator in the subject line ("Thanks for Auditing Support...") and in the
last sentence ("Thanks again for the support, Basilio...") of the same acknowledgement
(basmsg1.3). When discussing this message with Basilio, I noticed his hesitation in pointing
out one specific reason that could have motivated the repeated use of such a punctuation
mark, as illustrated by the following excerpts of our conversation:

B: The ellipsis points here... to me... I'd simply say that she wanted to say
something else, more than what was written. Or... simply because it's her
habit, when she concludes, she uses these three periods. Nothing else.
M: Isn't there any other relevant meaning?
In my opinion, Basílio's comments involve two interrelated arguments: the utilization of ellipsis points constitutes a trait of an individual's writing style, but it can be also used as a rhetorical device to suggest some particular intention. Considering this specific e-mail, the message generator utilized an elliptical punctuation strategy (in the subject line and in the last sentence of the message) to signal her subtle criticism of the delay in implementing a certain work-related procedure, as expressed by the segment: "While I would have liked this review to have occurred in Jan./Feb., I am glad that we did the work now before finalizing the implementation of the procedures" (basmsg1.3). The possible negative impact of such a complaint was, on the one hand, attenuated by the emphatic repetition of her acknowledgement intention; however, her disappointment remained there: expressed by her embedded comments and also insinuated by the ellipsis points. Through her use of punctuation, therefore, she indicated a trailing off of speech which served to conceal her real feelings, while conveying the idea that she wanted to say more than what was actually written. As the message was sent to the General Auditing Manager and copied to Basílio, I infer that the criticism was addressed to the former and the acknowledgement, in fact, addressed to the latter. Hence, the strategic inclusion of ellipsis points in this e-mail, regardless of whether or not it was a feature of her personal writing style, also contained an illocutionary intention whose roots were located in the situational context.

In reflecting upon the meanings conveyed in this specific e-mail message (acknowledgement and complaint), I initially suspected that it could be an illustration of "genre overlap" (Orlikowski & Yates,1994) -- which I fully describe in Section 5.3.12. However, as Swales (1990) suggests, "a discourse community's nomenclature for genres
is an important source of insight" (p.54), and, for this reason, my conversation with Basílio was decisive for genre recognition. From his perspective, despite other meanings that could be suggested, the purpose of this communication was the one of expressing acknowledgement for a job he had undertaken (BASRM1:220-227). Perhaps the other recipient of the same message might have identified the complaint intention as the fundamental one, in spite of the fact that it was disguised by recurrent expressions of gratitude. Without having more information about the context, it is not possible to speculate further about the sender's intention or the other receiver's interpretation. Given this lack of contextual detail, Basílio's understanding that the message contained an acknowledgement which incorporated a complaint segment, conveyed as a comment and not as the core purpose of communication, constituted a useful insight.

5.3.11. Discussion

As opposed to the acknowledgement function discussed above, identifying discussion as a genre of internal written communication was a relatively easy task. A discussion in this context can be identified as a computerized interactive sequence (Freire, 1995:2) through which practitioners engage in a process of situated conversation that supports the performance of their regular job activities. Under such a characterization, this genre conforms to the electronic exchange of information, opinions, and/or suggestions that, by transcending the request-response format, represents the scaffolding on which meanings are negotiated and professional knowledge is shared and developed. According to José Luiz's tacit perception, discussion constitutes a form of "exercise" (JLRM2:70-71,330-331), practiced throughout the interactions that precede the implementation of a project, and that monitor its evolution.

Considering the resemblance with oral conversations and the customary inclusion of previous correspondence, my conception of discussion as a genre is similar to the one developed by Orlikowski & Yates (1994:555), which they refer to as dialogue21. In my

21 In their research on the electronic communications exchanged by a group of computer language designers, Orlikowski & Yates (1994), identify dialogue as a genre included in the repertoire enacted by their target community. According to them, this genre constitutes "a form of written interaction that is modeled on oral dialogue, but it makes
opinion, both formulations incorporate "the metaphor of a conversation" (ibid, p.557), which captures the dialogic movement that is reproduced in the written mode by a sequence of forwarded or interwoven messages. Nevertheless, I believe that discussion provides a better description for my present purposes, since this term accounts for and conveys more precisely the idea of mutual consultations and of co-construction of knowledge which individualize this kind of electronic communication.

My approach to discussion was grounded on the thirty-one samples collected from the first corporation, and on the two provided by the second. By following the investigative routine adopted for the genres previously described, my exploration of discussion was initially undertaken through considerations of the message text area taken as a whole. From this perspective, I noticed that, except for the samples that did not include any kind of opening salutation (jlmsg1.9, 1.10, 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.1c, 2.1d, 2.3b, 3.8c, 3.11a, lucmsg1.2b, 4.12b), the pattern generally chosen to introduce a message was the one that only displayed the receiver's name. Other forms of salutation included the association of the greeting "hello" with the recipient's name (jlmsg1.9b, lucmsg3.3b, jucmsg1.3b), or the isolated use of the greeting "hi" (jlmsg3.11, jucmsg1.3a).

Regarding closing salutations, I observed that, except for the three messages characterized by its omission (jlmsg2.1c, 3.8c, lucmsg3.4b), the style most frequently used was one that combined variations of the same formula ("regards," "Best regards," "BR") with the sender's name. In addition, closure was sometimes indicated by the inclusion of an expression of gratitude ("thanks"), followed by the sender's identification (jlmsg3.8a, lucmsg3.3a).

The regularity revealed by the utilization of opening and closing salutations, and by the preference for expressing them through specific formulas led me to investigate the message content in order to search for other potential features of standardization at the level of discourse organization. By proceeding on this path, I perceived that, as opposed to the genres previously described, it was not possible to express the structure of a

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use of the documentary quality of written communication and of the capability provided by the electronic medium to insert all or part of a previous message* (p.555).
discussion as a single basic component, regularly included in all messages of the same kind, and possibly complemented by or expanded into certain ancillary segment(s). Rather, the discussion sequence was essentially based on *the chain of rhetorical events* (Smart, 1993:124) enacted by the professionals through the interactive flow of message exchanges, representing a number of distinct configurations.

Firstly, such an interactive sequence could be outlined by the delivery of separate messages, whose essential connection was grounded on the discussion of the same topic, as shown by the transcriptions that follow:

*(FIRST MESSAGE)*
[name] returned my phone call today. He told that [name] is late and will not be able to start [customer A] machine till November 20. That gives us time to take care of our internal training. Be careful NOT to announce this information to [customer A]. let them tell this to us. For now, let's just plan as [name] was suggesting. *(jimsg3.9)*

*(SECOND MESSAGE)*
Many thanks. anything now can make a big difference. [competitor] is pushing hard against us, but looks we have the preference. [name] told me production, projects and maintenance prefers [our company] than [competitor]. At the moment the subject is with [name], the industrial Director, who is analysing prices and scope of supply. He have asked me alternatives for payment in long terms. I have a meeting with him on Aug.15 in order to talk about it. I am planning to offer the same thing we are using with [customer B], and also [customer C]. Do you thing [our company] can finance directly for instance in 12 months? Please send your comments. *(jimsg3.11)*

*(THIRD MESSAGE)*
When I discussed with [name] he said that they indeed are working on replacing ALL old Sentry systems (customer D and customer E) at some time schedule. When I told him about [customer D] is about to make decision, he was surprised. I said that their pulp mill washer project would be the only to proceed now. The other projects would be waiting for [name] recommendations. He will call to the mill and find out the latest. *(jimsg3.11a)*

Secondly, a discussion could be summarized in a single e-mail message, through the systematic reproduction of previous communications whose chronological sequence
could be retrieved through a bottom-up reading movement. In my opinion, this configuration, by recapitulating and displaying the flow of the entire correspondence, helps the receiver(s) go back and forth through messages and, consequently, be promptly attuned to the subject addressed and its context. This alternative arrangement is illustrated by the e-mail sequence transcribed below where the sequence displayed in the original message is preserved:

(LATEST MESSAGE)
Add-on cost for optional stainless steel shrouds is 20% of the scanner cost. I assume we do NOT do those, pls confirm.

(PREVIOUS MESSAGE)
We are proposing to have NEW system. You were in the meeting were they decided to include filters to avoid corrosion in our stations. They had many problems in Sentry because of that. So, we can ask them in the spec meeting but I suspect this is gonna be their request. We have same price for IQ scanner as Ultrascanner (which has stainless steel shrouds). why is it not quoting tool option for stainless steel add on?

(lucmsg2.2)

Thirdly, the discussion sequence could be represented by the insertion of the receiver’s reply into the original message, reproducing, in the written mode, a typical conversational "turn-taking" movement (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973:293, Sacks & associates, 1974:700-701). The transcriptions\(^\text{22}\) below portray such a dialogic pattern, and indicate that the insertion process can sometimes affect the closing salutation (as in the first example), or can be evidenced by a preliminary warning regarding the format adopted (as in the second message):

[professional B's name]
What is the Local Area Network that you have in your office? Is that Novell? Novell 3.12
Reason for the question is that I am thinking that maybe we could chance the cc:mail system so that in [country] you all would dial up to your server which we would make a 'post office'. Your server in return would make phone call couple of times per day to [city]. That might dramatically reduce the cc:mail costs. We are already working to implement this solution. I'll buy a fast data modem card (14.4/28.8) to take with me.

\(^{22}\) For the sake of making my argument explicit, I have highlighted the excerpts that correspond to the reply message inserted in the original one.
Could get us Corporative copy of Cc:mail post office software to be installed down there?
Another (but related question); Can you get data lines in [city]? What is the cost? What I am thinking is that this type high quality line would allow us to connect remotely from [city] or [country] to the EWS in your office if needed. Also server could make the cc:mail calls thru this line. Maybe Luciano could go ahead and search with TELESP/TELEBRAS a way, if it exists, and prices to have one. For sure it would be very handy.
regards, [professional A's name]
Regards, [professional B's name]
(lucmsg4.1)

See my comments below.
regards, [professional A's name]
[professional A's name],
[name] from PCC just called asking CDBW performance results. [competitor] is telling them we are not able to show results and they are proposing 2 sigma < 0.625% against payment.
They are also telling we have problems in [customer] and we lost [customer] because of services. I can handle the last issue and I told we will guarantee (our normal) < 1% over mapped reel averaged profile and we will propose acceptance against that result: 10% of domestic payment (which is very low guarantee terms compared to [competitor]). However I must send him by fax our guarantees and before these discussions they were willing to pay 100% CAD the imported (Jetmatic). What can we change here? Maybe 50% of Jetmatic 2 months after results!
Stay with 1% and on Jetmatic 50% on shipment and 50% immediately after 'sustained' results gained (i.e. 400 hours of operation on guaranteed level). But if of you do this I would like you to give more aggressive terms on domestic portion also, 00% what you mentioned is really very 'weak.'
Please send your comments and suggestion. I will fax him tomorrow. I am still waiting your reply to fax him on spares.
I do not know what to say on the spares other that I do not want to have huge piles of consignment parts at the mill or in [city]. Try to promise the minimum. Problem is to define what are the critical parts.
Did you reach [name] last monday?
No. I have not reached him.
BR, [professional B's name].
(jimsg2.3)

In addition to the possibilities demonstrated above, I also found one occurrence in which the discussion sequence was represented by a succession of forwarded and interwoven messages, reproduced in the same e-mail, as indicated by the transcription that follows:

(LATEST MESSAGE)
I agree with payment in small instalments for the DXD i.e., the 1st phase. However, I think that CD weight payment 100% (or even 80%) only after
achieved results to far too aggressive. I think that we must get our payments about as our costs accumulate and the margin portion could be paid only after results reached.

(SECOND MESSAGE AND INSERTION)
Good, let's do it.

-> proposal is done!! Customer know our prices, so payments terms in now what it is needed to be played with them. What about 8 months payment terms, after system acceptance, if we reach our guarantees (.. or 80% of [name]'s report). It will insure investment return to [customer] and I guess we can convince about DXD. What about payments splitted in 12-18 times? You discussed with [name] this option, right? Let's say: we deliver in November DXD + CDMO + SIU upgrade and CDBW + Jetmatic in April/96. First phase (DXD) they pay in 12-18 months (as part of maintenance budget) and Second phase after investment return - 8 months after acceptance. However, I am sure that we can not deliver Jetmatic or scanner by November. DXD is Ok if order is very soon.

(ORIGINAL MESSAGE)
I learned VIB has been pushed to deliver to [customer] up to November/95 (it will be confirmed tomorrow). So, if we want to push for DXD we better rush our proposal. From what [name] reported we can improve a lot there. It is where we can ask for investment return for instance in 6-8 months: DXD upgrade + CDMO + Jetmatic.

(jlmsg2.1)

By reflecting upon the various configurations presented so far, I assume that discussion constitutes a genre which displays a fuzzy structural organization, and which is, therefore, essentially focused on purpose rather than on form. In my opinion, its formal characteristics emerge from the nature of the social action that involves participants and that engages them in a conversational process whose main goal is the one of debating and/or clarifying specific work-related issues. Considering the lack of institutional patterns for modelling and monitoring electronic communications, I infer that variations at the formal level are also generated by the distinct ways professionals involve themselves in and respond to the subjects addressed. For this reason, the ideational meanings conveyed through the discussion sequences are customarily spiced with a personal connotation revealed through individual styles of presenting arguments and emphasizing viewpoints. Such an interpretation is illustrated by the extracts below:
We do NOT keep any spares on site, right? *(jmsg1.5b)*

Hold a second! Do you intend this list to be parts that we will keep at the site, I hope NOT. Also I think that this is not the right time to give this list. This will confuse the issues now and maybe delay the issue of PO. We MUST get that done first. *(jmsg1.5b)*

I do not think that doing this proposal properly by next Thursday is realistic! Problem areas are: application packages & the fact that we MUST involve people from [country] on this... (...) Also that requires XIS which is NOT a problem because XIX is needed anyway because of their data archive requirements. *(jmsg1.9a)*

At the same time lets start the process with [country] and later on make a FANTASTIC proposal. *(jmsg1.9b)*

--> proposal is done! *(jmsg2.1c)*

So they need to know the date for sure ASAP also because they need to issue Letter of Credit, which includes this information, in order to make the first 15% payment. *(jmsg3.8a)*

Please advise and/or inform who should we contact to sort this thing out ASAP. *(jmsg3.8a)*

Terms FOB in our factory means that CUSTOMER needs to arrange the carrier to come and pick up the system and we load the system into the carrier (airplane, truck or ship). (...) Also what I have understood the requirement on 'Brazilian flag' ship does NOT exist any more. *(jmsg3.8b)*

Be careful NOT to announce this information to [customer], let them tell this to us. *(jmsg3.9)*

I understood from [name] they were going to keep old Sensors and WE did not complain about it in the meeting because you were not interested on them. We discussed it before! Should we make statement that we do not agree once we gave 40K discount AND sensors refund?? (...) There's NO interest of not giving you the needed info. *(lucmsg1.7)*

We are proposing to have a NEW system. *(lucmsg2.2a)*

I assume we do NOT do those, pls confirm. *(lucmsg2.2b)*

We could supply it!? *(lucmsg3.3d)*

We would appreciate if you could help us in this matter! *(lucmsg1.4b)*

The examples above also suggest that the utilization of capital letters, as well as exclamation and question marks may constitute relevant visual devices through which professionals reinforce opinions or solicitations, make specific arguments even more
explicit, and/or voice emotional reactions to the issue(s) addressed. It appears that capitalization and/or punctuation provide a way of counteracting the lack of paralinguistic features that invariably characterizes electronic conversations among participants who are neither visually nor auditorily present. Although such devices may be used regardless of the genre conveyed, I consider that in a discussion sequence, because of its inherently interactional nature, they perform a significant role as tools not only for stressing particular responses, but also for the expression of strong feeling through manifestations of flaming.

Such a perception was grounded on an episode of flaming identified among the discussion samples collected from the first corporation. In this sequence, the professional in charge of shipment issues, surprised by the topic discussed between two of her co-workers, jumped into their conversation, and vented her anger. She seemed to be quite annoyed to know about a customer's sudden decision to cancel all the delivery arrangements she had already undertaken, and to use another forwarder -- different from the one she was about to sign a contract with. She reacted to the situation by saying:

PLEASE (allow) me to say that I will be not popular with our FORWARDERS IF they do not get a chance at this CONTRACT.
I used their time extensively to put together cost AIR/VESSEL & SCHEDULES etc. because it was important that we know what time frame is for us to work toward. (jimag3.8c)

In my opinion, the impact of her message was certainly emphasized by the capitalization of certain words, and by the utilization of brackets through which she "allowed" herself to break in on the conversation, and voice her reasons for complaining. Furthermore, the omission of opening and closing salutations reinforced the strong nature of her intervention. I believe that, in this episode, both content and form impacted on the development of the discussion, motivating a response by one of the co-workers involved. In his reply, by asserting that the customer would appreciate her efforts in contacting a forwarder, and that the delivery could be still undertaken through the company she had negotiated with, he attempts to lessen the discomfort generated by the situation, and solve the emerging professional impasse. He, then, resumes the discussion by saying:
[her name],
I am quite sure that this assistance is quite acceptable for [customer] and they agree to use forwarder that you have worked with. [name] (or name) should now communicate the details to [customer] so that they can confirm to the freight company that they (customer) will accept to pay the shipment invoice.

regards, [sender's name]

ps. what are the shipping details now? When does it leave, how, where does it go and what is the cost for [customer]? (jmsg3.8d)

This manifestation of flaming was noted by José Luiz who had received a copy of this discussion sequence and commented on it with me. He interpreted that her reaction was not "impolite" (JLRM3:500-503), although conveying her resentment for feeling compelled to deal with the customer’s new plans, after having committed herself to a specific forwarder. On the other hand, José Luiz considered that the co-worker’s message was quite an appropriate reply through which, rather than apologizing, he tried to clarify the situation (JLRM3:528-533), and deal with the repercussions of her hasty complaint. José Luiz concluded his reflection upon this episode by complimenting the co-worker’s competence in coping with the situation, and claiming: "He should have been a diplomat!" (JLRM3:628).

The descriptions presented so far illustrate that discussion, as a genre, consists of a computerized interactive sequence through which information is exchanged, viewpoints are articulated, observations and suggestions are voiced, and feedback is provided. Under such a characterization, a discussion involves professionals in a situated conversation which, by referring to previous correspondence and/or interweaving messages, reproduces in the written mode their usual conversational approach to dealing with work-related issues. Although discussions lack a structural organization based on a sequence of easily identified components, their ideational and interpersonal meanings emerge from the core communicative purpose of debating and clarifying professional procedures and/or situations.

Reflecting upon these qualities leads me to propose that the interactive movement enacted by a discussion represents the scaffolding on which professionals, by alternating the roles of informants and inquirers, negotiate meanings and share specialized
knowledge. This assumption is illustrated by the transcription (1) and the excerpt (2) that follow:

(1)
(FIRST MESSAGE: professional A to professional B)
What is required from the PC that will connect via CIS and XD Link software to DXD? Is it Ethernet connection? What boards are needed? Is any 486PC ok? (lucmsg3.3a)

(SECOND MESSAGE: professional B to professional A)
PC can be almost anything 286 up. Serial port can be used or ethernet. If ethernet is used, I believe the card we are using is SMC 8216C. Check NWS docs. PCTCP software is also needed in this case. (lucmsg3.3b)

(THIRD MESSAGE: professional A to professional C)
This is a spec for the [customer]'s lab link PC. (lucmsg3.3c)

(FORTH MESSAGE: professional C to professional A)
[Name], please inform if Ethernet SMC card is needed (I don't have NWS docs) or any NE 2000 ethernet can be used. Reason is that they can buy those but not the SMC. we could supply it? What is PCTCP sw? Is it any std for TCP/IP connection? I am not familiar with. (lucmsg3.3d)

(2)
(PROFESSIONAL A'S MESSAGE - PROFESSIONAL B'S REPLY INSERTED)
Pls find attached excell file ITEMPR2.XLS for [customer 1] system, options and spares. We sent them itemized prices as per column UNIT VALUE and it is about same sequence as in proposal.
FOR [CUSTOMER 1];
What is the purpose of this list and when were these prices sent? They only should have the last two (2) pages which are the spare parts. The first few pages are complete stations, scanner and sensors etc.
What is our commitment on spares again with [customer 1]? They have not purchased any spares? We do NOT keep any spares on site, right? We have all relevant spares available in [city], right?
We proposed to [customer 2] spares as showed by file SPAREKLL.XLS without items showed by "??" and as far as I could verify in proposals we did not price them. So we can prepare it now. Items marked with "??" I suggest to be included and change sensors/scanners to IQ. Also include IM and OM modules. GDU must be GDU2 because of headbox video, right?
FOR [CUSTOMER 2];
Hold a second! Do you intend this list to be parts that we will keep at the site, I hope NOT. Also I think that this is not the right time to give this list. This will confuse the issues now and maybe delay the issue of PP. We MUST get that done first. Also we need to do some careful thinking on which parts we keep at the site, it is a lot of unnecessary money tied up at one site. They will not have to...
purchase these as replacement parts anyway during warranty period, same applies to [customer 1]. Why would we give this list and these prices now? Also some parts on this list are not valid. Example: I think our spare CPU should be CPU40, I don't think we use DMU, we do not have ESUESA but we have ECU etc. (jmsg1.5)

The discussion transcribed above (1) represents the sequential interaction among three professionals who were engaged in a process of exchanging technical information: A requested information from B who responded to him; A then passed the information on to C, who resumed the conversation by replying to him with an additional question. This discussion sequence illustrates, therefore, the flow of information seeking throughout which questions lead to solutions which, in their turn, give rise to new queries; professionals position themselves either as informants or as inquirers; and, gradually, knowledge is constructed and disseminated.

On the other hand, excerpt (2) reproduces part of a discussion about two specific customers. In this situation, professionals A and B, by respectively reporting on and querying the development of the projects regarding these clients, were arguing out the procedures undertaken, and attempting to clarify some divergent points. In my opinion, these professionals were performing the role of equally experienced partners whose interaction increased their understanding of specific work-related issues.

Throughout my investigation into discussions, I was aware that the relatively frequent utilization of this genre in the correspondence exchanged within the first company (thirty samples), contrasted with the quantity revealed by the second (two messages), constituted an intriguing aspect to be explored. This consideration led me, first, to reflect upon the only discussion sequence provided by the second corporation, and to speculate on its characteristics. By analyzing this sample in more detail, I noticed that the discussion was not actually concluded, as shown by the transcription below, reproduced here in its chronological order:

(FIRST MESSAGE: professional A to professional B)
Thank you for your message. I want to confirm a few items with you:
1. The solution with XxXxXx is Sales Force Automation. We automated
their domestic 3000 person salesforce. These are the people that call on the retail stores. I would not consider this success story a logistics success as you indicated. Please let me know if my participation is still appropriate.

2. Can you confirm that you wanted me to do the actual delivery of the presentation? I will be at [event] starting Friday April 21st until April 29th and will not be able to pull e-mail. You can leave messages at (000) 000-0000.

(SECOND MESSAGE: professional C to professional A)

Regarding the Logistics Presentation here in [country], we think your participation is appropriate and you could inform us what you consider interesting to present as a [company] success story. The only thing is that the case has to be based in some logistic process. In fact we are late to confirm our participation in this seminar but we still have some time if next Tuesday we can send to [center - university] (the organization group) the confirmation, the title of the presentation and some general information about it. We would appreciate if you could help us in this matter! We are at your disposal for additional information. Thanks in advance for your help. (jucmsg1.4b)

(THIRD MESSAGE: professional C to professional A)

Any news about my [e-mail] below?? Thanks for any help. (jucmsg1.3c)

The discussion sequence above included the two initial messages (jucmsg 1.3a and b) in which professionals A and C attempted to reach an agreement regarding the presentation (which had been suggested by professional B) of a logistic project in a particular event. However, the discussion ended at this point, without any conclusion. The third message (jucmsg1.3c) constituted, in fact, a manifestation of a distinct genre -- a request -- through which professional C retrieved the topic previously introduced, and indirectly inquired about professional A's final decision on the presentation.

I realize that the interruption of this discussion sequence may have been motivated by reasons to which I did not have access, or that it may have been concluded through some other communication medium. However, I believe that the discontinuity revealed in this specific situation, allied to the lack of other occurrences of the same genre, constitute an indication that discussion (although occurring sporadically) does not belong to the set repertoire of this specific workplace -- as it does not suit the repertoire enacted by the third company either (see Section 5.4). Considering the genres most frequently conveyed
by the professionals within the second corporation, my perception is that the negotiation of meaning which emerges from the mutual consultations among them, as well as the resulting construction and dissemination of professional knowledge, conforms to purposes which are predominantly pursued and realized through the utilization of requests, FYI reports and responses -- as I explain in Section 5.4.

On the other hand, the correspondence enacted within José Luiz and Luciano’s workplace, is primarily focused on the sharing of discussion sequences which represent, therefore, its most popular genre. In my opinion, such a preference for co-constructing meaning and knowledge through dialogic interaction is founded on the teamwork spirit (JLII:317-319, LUCII:98-105) that characterizes this professional environment, as fully detailed in Chapter 4.

Such a perception suggests that there is a significant relationship between the genres enacted by each corporation and the features of its internal organization and culture. As suggested by Orlikowski & Yates (1994:561), the presence or absence of certain genres from a repertoire reveals what forms of interaction are or are not valued or salient to a community. For this reason, studying the various genres adopted by a company also means grasping the interactive patterns that its professionals value or neglect. In this sense therefore, the identification of discussion as the genre most frequently used within the first company corroborates the interactive connection that binds its community members together into a team, and that conforms to an inherent quality of their electronic communication practices.

5.3.12. Mixed genres, genre overlap or blurred genres

The variety of genres presented and discussed so far revealed that the electronic communication conducted within the corporations focused on in this study was depicted by a set of independent genres (corporate circular, bulletin, periodic report, occasional report, cover message, memo, acknowledgement, discussion), as well as by systems of genres (request-FYI report, request-response). As opposed to what Czamiawska-Joerges
(1993:198) and Orlikowski & Yates (1994:544)\textsuperscript{23} claim, most of the samples collected indicated that these genres, in use, conformed to distinct categories which emerged from specific social actions whose communicative purposes could be distinguished by a profile of regularities that accounted for features of content and/or form across texts.

Nevertheless, there were two messages collected from the third corporation which resisted to being classified under a single heading. In both cases, the messages were ambiguous in that they were manifestations of interwoven purposes which were joined together in the same electronic communication. The first of them was a preliminary comment on a corporate circular appended, as shown by the transcription below:

Attached are the principles for accruing costs at the end of the year. These principles are being followed globally this year and we ask for your support and assistance in "living" these principles for year-end 1994. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the appropriate local Accounting Manager:

[country]: [name]/[name]
[country]: [name]/[name]
[country]: [name]
[country]: [name]

Thanks for your help,

[sender's name]

P.S. Please distribute as appropriate in your organizations.

(basmg1.8)

My first reaction was to identify this example as a cover message in which the attachment indicator segment ("Attached are the principles for accruing costs at the end of the year") was followed by an explanation ("These principles are being followed globally this year"), and complemented by instructions for further communications ("If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the appropriate local Accounting Manager"), and further action ("P.S. Please distribute as appropriate in your organizations"). However, I noticed that this e-mail also included an emphatic request ("and we ask for your support

\textsuperscript{23} Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) points out that "genres are never homogeneous and clearly separate" (p.198). By mentioning this assumption and, in my opinion, by attempting to attenuate the impact of its assertiveness, Orlikowski & Yates (1994) rephrase her comment and state that genres, in use, "are rarely homogeneous and clearly separate, with particular communicative actions often being characterized by several generic strategies" (p.544). Regardless of their agreement, and of the determinism expressed either by "never" or "rarely", I could not find evidences to support their argument thoroughly, for my samples have evidenced the enactment of eleven distinct genres whose characterization indicates that they conform to specific communicative purposes.
and assistance in "living" these principles for year-end 1994"), made more compelling by the use of quotation marks round the word "living." This message, therefore, fulfilled the purpose of notifying the recipients about the delivery of a specific document and, simultaneously, of requesting the adoption of the principles expressed in it.

Interestingly enough, the second example shared certain similarities with the first one mentioned. The similarity between the two messages was due not only to the fact that both were generated within the same work environment, but also to the fact that both were issued as an introductory comment to a corporate circular appended. The second message was conveyed in the following manner:

I AM ATTACHING [name]'S REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE [division] SAFETY COMMITTEE! PLEASE, READ AND REFLECT UPON IT CAREFULLY!
[name]: PLEASE, MAKE SURE THAT [name] GETS A COPY. I BELIEVE HE HAS NOT BEEN ADDED TO THE E-MAIL SYSTEM, HAS HE?
"... THAT THE FUTURE MAY LEARN FROM THE PAST!"
THANK YOU, [sender's name]
(basmsg2.1)

The first statement ("I AM ATTACHING [name]'S REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE [division] SAFETY COMMITTEE!"), and its textual marker ("attaching") led me to reflect that one of the purposes of this message was to inform the recipients about the attachment of a document whose subject referred to a car accident involving an employee of the company in the United States. As in the first case, my immediate reaction was to identify this e-mail as a cover message. However, I noticed that the purpose shifted to that of a memo in which the sender first reminded one specific professional that a copy of the message should reach a particular co-worker ("[name]: PLEASE, MAKE SURE THAT [name] GETS A COPY. I BELIEVE HE HAS NOT BEEN ADDED TO THE E-MAIL SYSTEM, HAS HE?"), and then, reminded the whole audience about the relevance of the document attached ("... THAT THE FUTURE MAY LEARN FROM THE PAST!"). In this second case, then, a single e-mail realized the dual purpose of communicating the delivery of a corporate circular and of emphasizing its relevance, either to a single or to multiple recipients.
By reflecting upon these messages and their interwoven purposes -- cover message and request, cover message and memo, respectively -- I realized that they constituted instances of "mixed genres", "genre overlap" or "blurred genres".

The idea of mixed genres was originally expressed by Fairclough (1992), who stated that they "combine elements of two or more genres, such as 'chat' in television chat shows, which is part conversation and part entertainment and performance" (p.68). A similar terminology was used by Halliday (1993), who briefly addressed this notion by mentioning that "mixed modes engender mixed genres, as in electronic mail" (p.68). Nevertheless, neither one of these authors went into further details or explored this class of genre in a deeper way.

The concept of genre overlap was suggested by Orlikowski & Yates (1994) who, by focusing on organizational sites, perceived it as a type of interaction among genres "in which a particular communicative action may involve the enactment of more than one separate genre" (p.544). On the other hand, the notion of blurred genre was proposed by Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) in their discussion of patterns of discourse in an academic context. Firstly, by saying that:

Learning genres of academic discourse thus involve learning both spoken and written modes, as mediated by the technologies entering the culture such as e-mail and electronic conferences. Because technology alters genres, producing blurred genres (see, e.g., Ferrara, Brunner, & Whitemore, 1991; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), part of one's apprenticeship involves becoming fluent in various communicative media. (p.11)

they referred to the impact of technology on the production of hybrid discourses that associate spoken and written modes, and give rise to blurred genres. Secondly, they used the same term to comment on the 1985 article by Christie and to interpret her conclusion about the ambiguity revealed by certain texts produced by children, which appear to contain "a concatenation of narrative and descriptive/expository elements" (p.157).

In other words, Berkenkotter & Huckin's account draws attention to the hybrid discourses resulting from the utilization of technological tools, while these same authors, together with Fairclough, Halliday, and Orlikowski & Yates, stress a similar phenomenon:
the interweaving of distinct purposes that provokes genres to mix, blur or overlap.

Nevertheless, the circumstances that surrounded those particular messages led me to further reflections. Considering that both of them emerged from the electronic correspondence conveyed within the same company, and that, both displayed an overlap between cover messages and other distinct genres, I suspected that they might not only constitute instances of blurred genres, but possibly indicate that a new genre had been shaped by the community members of this particular corporation.

Such a possibility is supported by a number of arguments. First, as Paré (1993) points out, "groups of people create and use written discourse in particular ways for particular ends" (p.111). Secondly, Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) assert that genres are dynamic rhetorical forms that "change over time in response to their users' sociocognitive needs" (p.4). Thirdly, Smart (1993) argues that a community "invents the genres it needs for creating written knowledge" (p.124-125). According to these authors, therefore, a community may either create new genres or even modify the existing ones, in response to specific needs that emerge from the performance of certain work-related activities.

In my opinion, this interpretation sheds light on the procedure identified in the third company in which the original purpose of a cover message, as a genre, was enriched by the meaningful association of other distinct purposes. Such an association was tacitly perceived by Basílio when we discussed the requestive component expressed in the first message previously transcribed (basmg1.8). By focusing on the meaning conveyed through the postscript added to that specific message, he comments:

B: Well, the first explanation I have is: if I have to send a message, I'll send it to a certain number of people and, then, ask them to broadcast it. And I have to trust that they will do it, because I have no means to check

24 By investigating the community of executives and research staff at the Bank of Canada, Smart (1993) asserts: "I have developed a theory on how the community invents the genres it needs for creating written knowledge. According to this theory, four major contextual influences - the executives' issue-resolving mandate, several mental constructs that inform their thinking, a tacit understanding between the executives and the research staff about the delegation of problem-solving responsibility, and the intertextual resonance of prior written discourse - shape the executives' reading practices and consequent expectations. These expectations, conveyed and given authority through the institutional hierarchy, in turn exert a compelling force on the composing processes of the staff as they collaborate in preparing documents for the executives' use, thereby giving rise to a body of typified discourse. This theory can be used to account for both textual features common to all community's genres and for textual features that differentiate these genres" (p.124-125).
it out! The second explanation is: the power of certain messages is strengthened if you distribute it through... through a specific division. In this case, I can think: "No, I'd better send it to the vice-presidents because when they forward it to their subordinates they can add some additional comments, or call their attention to a particular point which is more specific or relevant to their organizations". Therefore, I can think this way, right? Another possibility... I want them to react somehow to the content of that message. Then, by saying: "Please distribute this within your organization", I mean that he has to do something else. However, this procedure varies a lot! (BASRM2:1298-1322)

By speculating on the reasons why a message was not forwarded to many recipients, but transmitted to specific division leaders who would then do it, Basilio revealed that the purpose of communicating the delivery of a document could be associated with other contextual meanings. His comments, therefore, not only corroborate my assumption that messages like those constitute instances of genre overlap or blurred genres, but also suggest that my suspicion regarding genre evolution is not completely discounted. As Schryer (1993:200, 1994:107-108) argues, the concept of genres help researchers to describe "stabilized-for-now" or "stabilized-enough" sites of social and ideological action. And this seems to be the case I face here. Nevertheless, without having more samples of the same kind to confirm my suspicion that a genre type is in the process of being remade or reshaped, I can only assert that, for now, these samples, by displaying an overlap of distinct purposes, conform to instances of mixed or blurred genres.

5.4. Rethinking genres from a contrastive perspective

The inventory of genres that I presented in the previous sections of this chapter accounted for the assorted textual possibilities through which a number of professionals fulfilled the interactive needs that emerged from the performance of their job activities. It conformed, therefore, to the diverse social actions that involved practitioners within their workplaces, and to the various purposes that they shared and achieved through the exchange of electronic correspondence in English. Considering the semiotic components of the situations that gave rise to them (field, mode, tenor), these genres can be gathered together under the broad denomination: genres of internal written communication.

The descriptions and discussions that precede this concluding section represent
my attempt to identify and characterize each variety of genre, without counting on a pre-established framework of analysis or on any specific checklist of categories. This deliberate research procedure reflects my agreement with Moffett (1968), who points out that creating analytical categories implies trading "a loss of reality for a gain in control" (p.23); as well as with Fairclough (1992), who asserts that "too rigid an analytical framework can lead one to lose sight of the complexities of discourse" (p.125).

Therefore, following on from such arguments, I established a routine of analysis which allowed me to consider the samples collected in a systematic way, but at the same time, from a preliminary perspective which allowed them to reveal their own inherent qualities. By seeking for patterns rather than imposing them on the data, and by considering that purpose and/or form constitute the basis on which genre identification is built up (Orlikowski & Yates,1994:544), I approached the e-mail correspondence provided by the participants by speculating on potential resemblances of purpose and on possible regularities of form. This procedure led me to group the messages in accordance with an emerging correlation between text and context, and not simply in terms of their structural organization. In order to accomplish this intent, the professionals' voices and their insights were taken into account for, as Swales (1992) remarks, "we need more socio-cognitive input than the text itself provides" (p.8). Their experiences and perceptions constituted, therefore, relevant sources of insight which, associated with the analytic procedure adopted, enabled me to recognize the genres, perceive their specific features, and explore how the community achieves its rhetorical needs through the utilization of the genres enacted.

Throughout the procedure discussed above, I basically dealt with genres individually, without accounting for comparisons and/or contrasts. Nevertheless, genres not only perform single roles, but they also interact with one another. Considering their possible connections, I perceived that the genres displayed within the corporations investigated could perform three functions. Firstly, some genres (corporate circular, bulletin, periodic report, occasional report, cover message, memo, acknowledgement, discussion) displayed independent features which, by conveying only one side of a multiple person interaction (Bazerman,1994:98), allowed me to represent them as parts of the "set" (Devitt,1991:340)
or "repertoire" (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994:544) established by a community. Secondly, I realized that other genres, by engendering a systematic interdependence among different types (request-FYI report, request-response), could be associated in a "system" (Bazerman, 1994:97-99). Such a system entailed the participation of both sides of the interactive chain, in such a way that the pattern of initiation and response could be regarded as an electronic adjacency pair. Thirdly, I noticed that some messages performed overlapping functions (blurred genres) which served various purposes and, therefore, had the effect of combining different genres in the same electronic message.

Apart from these relationships, genres also described particular communication movements within the companies, which were determined by the possible directions in which the flow of information was disseminated. Considering the origin and destination of the electronic messages, I identified genres of downward and upward communication, as well as genres that performed a free trajectory across the company hierarchy. Contrasts among the genres according to the origin and destination of information are indicated in the following diagram:

![Diagram 5.1: Contrast among genres according to the origin and destination of information.](image-url)

By reflecting upon the contrasts indicated above, I realized that genres of downward communication, by conveying information that impacted either on the whole community (as in corporate circulars), or on a restricted group within the organization (as in bulletins), could be also interpreted as receiver-oriented genres. Conversely, genres of
upward communication, by converging information to hierarchical superiors (as in periodic and occasional reports), could be regarded as sender-oriented genres. Comparatively, those genres that circulated freely across the hierarchy, by grouping senders and receivers around the various subjects addressed, could be seen as interaction-oriented genres.

Such considerations regarding the flow of information within the companies, led me next to contemplate genres according to their potential to generate replies. By reflecting upon this feature, I perceived that some genres established a two-way communication track which gave rise to single or multiple replies; whereas other genres involved a one-way channel of communication which required no compulsory reaction from the recipient(s). Therefore, depending on the purpose of the message and the subject addressed, genres might embody higher or lower interactive properties. Looked at from this perspective, the genres displayed by the corporations focused on in this study might be represented as follows:

- INTERACTIVE
  no compulsory reply
  one-way communication channel

+ INTERACTIVE
  single or multiple replies
  two-way communication channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- INTERACTIVE</th>
<th>+ INTERACTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cover message</td>
<td>corporate circular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>memo</td>
<td>bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acknowledgement</td>
<td>periodic report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>occasional report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FYI report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>request</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagram 5.2: Contrast among genres as reply generators.

Diagram 5.2 summarizes my perception of the genres analyzed as reply generators. The genres are arranged on a two-point scale which suggests that, for instance, a discussion is more interactive than a corporate circular which, in its turn, may potentially generate more replies than a cover message. Nevertheless, the placement of each genre type along the scale does not imply a set of permanent positions or a universally valid characterization. Rather, it indicates possible locations occupied by each genre, according to the features which emerged during my analysis of the procedures in
three specific companies.

The next aspect to be considered concerned the tendency of different genres to convey predominantly *ideational* and/or *interpersonal meanings* (Halliday, 1978/92). My purpose here is to identify the leading tendency of each genre type, while recognizing that meaning of both kinds can be displayed simultaneously in a single genre. According to my interpretation, genres as corporate circulars, bulletins, periodic and occasional reports tended to primarily emphasize ideational content; while acknowledgements displayed a tendency to convey mainly interpersonal meanings. On the other hand, requests, responses and discussions seemed to frequently combine meanings of both kinds. The remaining genres, although associating these two, revealed specific tendencies such that FYI reports were predominantly interpersonal in nature, whereas memos and cover messages tended to have more ideational content. My conclusions regarding the presence of ideational and/or interpersonal content in the different genres are summarized in Diagram 5.3:

```
IDEATIONAL  IDEATIONAL & INTERPERSONAL  INTERPERSONAL
<--------------------------------------------------->
corporate circular  memo  request  FYI report  acknowledgement
bulletin  cover message  response
periodic report
occasional report
discussion
```

*Diagram 5.3: Contrast among genres according to the meanings conveyed.*

My reflections upon ideational and interpersonal meanings led me to contemplate the participants' "involvement" (Chafe, 1982; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987) in the situations addressed and in the articulation of individual and institutional voices. Although such features were more salient in corporate circulars and in FYI reports (as discussed in Section 5.3.1 and 5.3.5), they constituted features that actually permeated all genres, indicating, therefore, that they more appropriately regarded as a CMC intrinsic quality, as suggested by Murray (1985:216-217) and Wilkins (1991:67-69).

Involvement and voice were features that I could perceive through the inclusion of
opening and closing salutations (previously discussed), as well as through the utilization of the first and second person pronouns (I and you). Regarding pronominal choices, however, there was a certain ambiguity appearing in the use of we which alternatively indicated an association of the sender with the receiver (I and you), an amalgamation of the sender with a specific co-worker or team of professionals (I and s/he, I and they), or an assimilation of the institutional voice by the sender (the company or the department and I).

Having noted this intriguing ambiguity, I decided to examine the number of occurrences of each pronoun, according to the movement described by the information within the corporations. In order to do that, I used a special software -- WordSmith Tools -- which, by relating each pronoun to the number of running words of the document, provided me with its frequency and percentage of use, as indicated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRES OF DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>GENRES OF UPWARD COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>GENRES OF ACROSS HIERARCHY COMMUNICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(running words = 5496)</td>
<td>(running words = 2017)</td>
<td>(running words = 11749)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOU - 39 - 0.70%</td>
<td>WE - 40 - 1.98%</td>
<td>I - 202 - 1.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE - 33 - 0.60%</td>
<td>YOU - 4 - 0.20%</td>
<td>WE - 180 - 1.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - 32 - 0.58%</td>
<td>I - 3 - 0.14%</td>
<td>YOU - 165 - 1.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Contrast among genres according to the use of first and second person pronouns.

In reviewing the results presented in Table 5.1, I perceived that genres of downward communication -- as receiver-oriented genres -- revealed an emphasis on you (the receiver) to whom the messages were addressed by a personalized I (the sender). However, the frequent occurrence of we and the fact that it occurred almost as often as you and I suggested that the professionals involved were appealing to a sense of membership through which the downward connotation inevitably attached to corporate circulars and bulletins was considerably reduced.
Considering the genres of upward communication, the frequent occurrence of we could be explained by the quantity and nature of the messages analyzed, which included one periodic and two occasional reports. The periodic report (pcmsg2.1), for instance, addressed departmental achievements and, in this situation, Paulo César felt that the use of we was more appropriate to convey the activities which were, in fact, undertaken by a group of professionals. As for the occasional reports, one of them (jucmsg2/3.1) consisted of the description of a presentation jointly undertaken by Juciane and a colleague from another corporation. In this case, therefore, the plural form we was used to refer to both professionals involved in the mentioned event. As for the other occasional report (bas msg3.3), I noted an interesting pronominal movement. The report was composed by a professional who was in charge of describing a bank robbery occurred in one of the branches of his corporation. He began his message by assuming the authorship of the report and providing his superiors with what he knew about the incident ("I just learned that...".). Then, he reported the information gathered from the company branch ("According to the [branch], the robbers entered the plant...".). However, to conclude his text, he assumed the departmental voice through the use of we and invoked his superiors' orientation by using you ("We will give you more details as they come in. Meantime, we appreciate any inputs you may have"). Taking this explanation into account, the pronominal choice displayed by these e-mail messages clearly indicated that they were focused on the transmission of information from the sender/senders (I and we) to the receiver (you). For this reason, they could certainly be referred to as sender-oriented genres.

On the other hand, genres of across-hierarchy communication, which I have interpreted as interaction-oriented genres, involved an emphasis on the sender who could be represented by one professional (I) or by an amalgamation of multiple voices (we, i.e., the company, the department, a group of co-workers). In these messages, the sender(s) felt it appropriate to include an interactive link that attempted to involve the receiver(s) in the discussion or solution of the problem addressed.

In addition to the role performed by pronominal choices in promoting involvement and establishing interaction among correspondents, I noticed that graphological features such as capitalization and punctuation (especially exclamation marks, question marks, and
ellipses points) could be related to the various grammatical and thematic devices which were used to emphasize either the professionals' opinions or their emotionally charged reactions. This perception led me to reflect upon the overall format displayed by some genres (especially responses and discussions) and conclude that, for instance, the insertion of replies into the original messages represented a significant aspect of text organization which emerged from specific situations and resulted in a particular pattern of interaction.

In my opinion, by inserting their voices into the messages received, senders could reproduce in the written mode the turn-taking movement (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973:293, Sacks & associates, 1974:700-701) that invariably occurs in face-to-face interactions. For me, it represented a way of introducing a more personal dialogic rhythm into the monologic mode of discourse that characterizes asynchronous communication through computers.

However, Murray (1985:212-216) has a different approach to the electronic turn-taking movement. She claims that computerized interactions allow participants "to violate" (p.212) this conversational principle, although this violation does not imply the negative consequences it often does in person-to-person encounters. According to her, such a transgression can be identified in four frequent situations: (1) the sender may make a second utterance before receiving a response to the first; (2) the recipient may not respond to an utterance; (3) a message may interrupt an utterance (particularly in a real-time mediated interaction); and (4) adjacency pairs do not necessarily occur as pairs. She concludes her arguments by stating that the concept of turn and turn-allocation as a means of organizing conversation "does not apply to computer conversation" which requires another means for description (p.216). Although recognizing that her assumption tackles features of computerized conversations that actually occur, I perceive that rather than violating the oral pattern, computerized communications have been re-creating the interpersonal relationship process which, by emerging from a mediated form of interaction, has been gradually assuming its own characterization.

By proceeding in my investigation into the formal properties of messages conveyed through the electronic medium, I also perceived that the genres of across-hierarchy communication displayed a "reduced register" (Ferrara & associates, 1991:18-21),
characterized by the omission of pronouns, articles and finite forms of copula, and by the simplification of certain words through abbreviations, as shown in the following excerpts:

| Looking forward to hear from you soon. (basmsg1.2) |
| Waiting for your prompt answer. (bamsmsg1.7) |
| [competitor] is pushing hard against us, but [I] looks we have the preference. (jilmsg3.11) |
| OK with me. (jilmsg3.12) |
| Looking forward to seeing you at [place]. (jilmsg3.13) |
| I mailed today the sales tool and [I] Pasve-sc application and [I] hope this can be of any benefit. (jilmsg4.6) |
| Sorry for the length of this. (jilmsg4.10) |
| Regret [I] cannot provide too much detailed information re: [customer]. (jucmsg1.1) |

Regarding [I] previous messages sent to you... (basmsg1.2)
| I see [I] couple of mistakes there... (jilmsg1.7) |
| I am in [I] ccmail twice a day. (jilmsg1.10) |
| --> [I] proposal is done! (jilmsg2.1) |
| Telephone number is 000-000-0000. (jilmsg3.12) |
| ... they agree to use [I] forwarder that you have worked with. (jilmsg 3.8d) |
| [I] Following people have responded... (jilmsg4.2) |
| Lets do [I] following... (lucmsmsg3.7) |
| [I] Best board machine references with your systems are... (...) Let's use [I] serial port connection. (lucmsg3.4b) |

Rgds, [name]. (basmsg1.7)
Pts find attached excell file... BR [name] (jilmsg1.5) regar (jilmsg1.3)
| So they need to know the date for sure ASAP... (...) As you already know, our price is FOB so they also need information on boats... (jilmsg 3.8a) |
| As agreed pts give that money in reas to [name]... (jilmsg4.1) |
| incl. list of give-aways. rgs [name] (jilmsg4.5) |
| Pts send EXCELL files for [customer], so we will be able to print in colour. Also send WP and Excell files for [customer] (jilmsg4.10) |
| This is the spec for the [customer]'s lab link PC. (lucmsg3.3c) |
| ... we need to do our best in order to have it done ASAP... (lucmsg4.2) |

The reduced register portrayed above induced me to reflect upon to what extent written short-cuts like those could be caused by a somehow less competent language user, by a professional dealing with his electronic correspondence under time constraints, by the manifestation of a personal writing style, or by a deliberate intention to write more concisely. By presenting these possibilities, however, I imply that a detailed investigation of e-mail reduced register, associated with discussions with the professionals who use this
writing device, would constitute an interesting topic for further research.

The discussion presented so far illustrates what genres can reveal about themselves and their interrelationships. Nevertheless, as suggested by Devitt (1991), "in examining the genre set of a community, we are examining the community's situations, its recurring activities and relationships" (p.340). Orlikowski & Yates (1994) reinforce this idea by stating that genres can also "reproduce important aspects of [the] community's identity and its organizing process" (p.546). These assumptions led me to investigate the variety of genres represented in the data in order to design a profile for each corporation. However, it is important to emphasize that the reduced number of examples of certain genres -- as illustrated by Table 5.2 below -- impacted on the presentation of firm conclusions. In spite of that, the portraits presented here were confirmed by the professionals in their interviews (see Chapter 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE IDENTIFICATION</th>
<th>FIRST COMPANY</th>
<th>SECOND COMPANY</th>
<th>THIRD COMPANY</th>
<th>total per genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORPORATE CIRCULAR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BULLETIN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERIODIC REPORT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCCASIONAL REPORT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYI REPORT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REQUEST</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESPONSE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVER MESSAGE</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEMO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENRE OVERLAP/BLURRED GENRE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total per company</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>152</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Overview of the genres collected from each corporation (shading indicates the most frequently used genres)
In reflecting upon the genres manipulated by the first corporation, I noted a marked predominance of discussions and requests. These genres, by circulating freely across the hierarchy, by generating a two-way communication channel, and by associating ideational and interpersonal meanings together, confirmed the intensive interactive process and the teamwork spirit that involved professionals in this particular workplace. These features were reinforced by the relative absence of typical genres of downward communication, such as corporate circulars and bulletins. Furthermore, the inclusion of cover messages in the data indicated that the delivery of documents (electronic files, in this case) tended to be a recognized practice within this company.

The landscape portrayed by the second corporation revealed that its internal correspondence was essentially focused on a systematic interdependence between requests, FYI reports and responses -- genres that described a free trajectory within the company, and that included both ideational and interpersonal meanings. By basing its electronic communication practices on a system of initiation-response adjacency pairs, this company emphasized the development of a mutual consultation network from which professionals could get technical support and/or information to assist their customers.

The set repertoire enacted by the third corporation displayed an interesting variety of genres which, if compared to the other workplaces investigated, did not indicate a strong emphasis on any particular organizational strategy. However, the relative emphasis given to the transmission of bulletins and corporate circulars indicated the particular preoccupation this organization had with the dissemination of instructions, procedures and policy statements that affected either individual departments or the whole company. By conveying such ideational meanings, and by divulging experiences lived by co-workers, these genres tended to be seen by the corporate community as significant tools to remind or reinforce aspects of the company internal culture, as well as to promote reflection and vicarious learning -- as attested by Basílio (BASRM2:1593-1604,1640-1683).

Considering the overall electronic correspondence conveyed within the three organizations focused on this study, I concluded that CMC practices were predominantly focused on the systematic manipulation of electronic adjacency pairs -- requests & responses and requests & FYI reports -- followed by the utilization of discussions. The
preponderance of these genres indicated that communication through computers in the business settings investigated was characterized by the exchange of specialized information and the co-construction of professional knowledge which supported the performance of routine job activities. In my opinion, the manipulation of such genres represents the scaffolding on which ideational and interpersonal meanings are shared and negotiated across the company hierarchy. On the other hand, the transmission of corporate circulars and bulletins provided the community with general information, which not only suggested a standard for internal procedures and policies, but also implicitly revealed features of the internal culture of each corporation.
CHAPTER 6

BEYOND SHARING EXPERIENCES:
A JOINT REFLECTION UPON PRACTICE

Through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

Freire, 1970/93

At this point of my journey through the business territory, I started to experience a sense of completion which emerged from the feeling of being able to establish steadier connections, piece partial views together more skillfully, and envision the scenery in a much more inclusive way. In recollecting my journey at this moment, I picture myself walking along the main routes and short-cuts of an initially unknown region, talking with my guides, registering facts and interpretations, and venturing into the paths of their professional landscapes. I also recall myself re-reading many times the texts of these conversations or of the e-mail messages we discussed and, in doing that, revisiting the participants' reflections upon their experiences or upon the computerized communication practices that involved them at work. Throughout my expedition, therefore, by portraying the corporations and their internal culture, identifying the activities performed by some professionals, and observing samples of their electronic correspondence, I envisioned the territory itself, its inhabitants, and the nature of the electronic communication process in which they were engaged.

Nevertheless, the scope of this exploration goes beyond these boundaries. It also entails the reflections upon practice (Schon, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1992) the five participants shared with me, and the influence of them on their perceptions of CMC in the workplace. These reflections constitute the central focus of this present chapter whose aim is twofold: on the one hand, I intend to present the meaning these professionals made of their electronic practices, as well as their perceptions of the expedition we undertook together. In this regard, this section evokes and to some extent expands the individual portraits
presented in Chapter 3, emphasizing the contemplative aspect of the participants' personalities, and providing a complementary perspective on the profiles previously established. In addition, my purpose in this chapter is to provide the reader with my own interpretation of our adventure and the echoes of it in me as a teacher and explorer.

To achieve these goals, I will begin this chapter by discussing the participants' commitment to the research, their understanding of the characterization and significance of using e-mail for professional purposes, and their overall reactions to the reflective process jointly developed. The reader will notice, however, that the accounts presented do not necessarily refer to the same topics in a similar sequential order. This flexible format was intentionally selected with a view to reproducing the intuitive engagement of the professionals in those themes which seemed to be more representative of the meaning they tacitly made of their professional practice. A contrastive view of the participants' reflections will be provided in the concluding section of the chapter in which, by recollecting the experiences I lived within the business territory, I will also consider the relevance of sharing the research process with the participants and of taking their perceptions as a source of insight about the topic being investigated.

6.1. Reflecting with José Luiz

I think it was enjoyable... it was like doing a report about my activities and rethinking the use of this tool.

(JLFM:803-805)

As I talked to José Luiz, I appreciated his humorous statements and slightly ironic comments, as well as respecting his provocative attached-detached way of addressing professional or reflective themes. Sometimes engaged and talkative, sometimes more distant and superficial, he imposed a unique rhythm on our conversations by alternating moments of deeper involvement and of peripheral participation. Applying the same metaphor that I had previously used to describe his professional performance (Chapter 3, Section 3.2), our interviews suggested the movement of a drawbridge, which seemed to be pulled up or down according to the topic addressed or to his preoccupation with the
duties he had to deal with after our early Monday morning meetings. Through the special features of his conversational style, José Luiz revealed himself as a subtle and intriguing interlocutor who, however, placed no restrictions in my way as I attempted to understand the nature of his corporation and of his computerized correspondence.

6.1.1. Understanding the nature of electronic communication

José Luiz perceived the electronic communication that took place within his company as a fast, concise, and safe way of exchanging person-to-person information, and of documenting correspondence (JLRM1:205; JLFM:656-659,692). According to him, its potential to speed up the exchange of messages and to stimulate the composition of "more oriented responses" (JLFM:752) certainly brought more "efficiency" (JLFM:719) to the completion of some work-related activities. However, agility, conciseness, efficiency, and documentation were not the only attractive features of electronic communication. For him, "immediatism" (JLRM1:756-758) also constituted a significant attribute of e-mail systems which justified being connected to computers on a regular basis. By mentioning such qualities José Luiz revealed that his understanding of the tool was primarily grounded on the operational features that might hasten the flow of information among professionals, while supporting the performance of their routine tasks.

6.1.2. Content or form, content and form: a conflicting perspective

From José Luiz's perspective, "the urgency and relevance of the subject itself" (JLFM:968) constituted the most important feature of e-mail correspondence. By adding "Only this!" (JLFM:969) to the above statement, he not only reinforced that his concern about e-mail messages was exclusively focused on content, but also subtly indicated a conflict of interest which, in his opinion, put our perceptions of the e-mail correspondence somehow apart. He was puzzled by my queries which actually had a dual purpose. On the one hand, I wanted to investigate the content of the messages, information which were promptly provided by the participants. On the other hand, I wanted to focus on aspects of formal structure and of foreign language use which were not frequently perceived by users at first glance. José Luiz seemed to be particularly sensitive to this confrontation between
content and form against which he invariably reacted, as illustrated by the extract below:

JL: We always say that the commercial language most frequently spoken is "the broken English"!
M: "Broken English"? In what sense? Do you mean "broken" in the grammatical sense?
JL: Grammatical, that's it. We... we change words, we speak in a poor way. Right? And nobody cares!
M: So, this is of no concern to you.
JL: (promptly) No!
M: You are worried about the information...
JL: (interrupting me) Communication.
M: Maybe for this reason we have... I've been emphasizing one feature that is not relevant to you.
JL: Yes... no doubt about it!
M: You are primarily focused on the information, and I'm also focused on how this information is conveyed.
JL: Yes. Perfectly! (JLRM4:973-988)

It was interesting to note that, in spite of my attempts to clarify the scope of my investigation, he maintained a kind of resistance to the idea that my approach to e-mail messages was complementary rather than opposed to his. However, even considering my interest as a researcher to some extent distinct from his as a user, José Luiz did not refuse to reply to my questions or provide me with either explanations or more articulate interpretations of every theme addressed in our meetings. In this regard, I perceived that he got particularly intrigued by two topics that I raised: formality and the contrastive use of the personal pronouns I and we.

My interest in the formal features of messages actually amazed José Luiz who verbalized this feeling more than once: "I don't know why you're so interested in formality!" (JLRM4:956-957), "Your preoccupation with formality was a surprise to me" (JLRM4:1031-1032). This interest of mine challenged his tacit perception of e-mail messages as an informal medium of communication which, for him, resembled oral interactions (JLRM4:888-890). Furthermore, it led him to wonder about the relevance of investigating traits of both written and spoken discourse and of distinguishing between more or less elaborate texts. However, although claiming no personal interest in this topic (JLRM4:959-963), José Luiz explained that, broadly speaking, formality was an attribute revealed either by the nature of the information conveyed ("There are subjects which are more or less formal,"
JLFM:440-441), or by the level of acquaintance among interactants (JLRM3:635-641). Considering the overall communication process enacted within his corporation in the light of these factors, he asserted that the electronic correspondence he was exposed to has invariably tended to be informal:

JL: Well, considering the Finnish corporation I represent in Brazil, I would say that it's kind of difficult to assert when a message is formal. We don't... don't... don't think of it as... and... I mean, everything is taken seriously, without being formal... without using the language in a way that could be taken as formal, right? And... well, it's different. For instance, if you compared all of these internal messages with the ones we send to customers -- letters, fax, right? -- the treatment is very different. I would classify what we write to our clients as formal.
M: And what do you base this difference on?
JL: (promptly) Language. (reflecting) Yes... language.
M: On the language?
JL: On the language.
M: Is it more articulate? Is this the difference?
JL: More articulate... yes, that's it. And... among us, there's no need for formality. The Finnish company preaches non-formality. (JLRM4:556-578)

In my view, the extract above reveals two arguments. On the one hand, by asserting that electronic messages even written in an informal, spontaneous way were invariably taken seriously by the corporate community, José Luiz denied any possible interpretation that would associate informality with lack of seriousness. On the other hand, by contrasting internal with external correspondence, and distinguishing between different levels of formality and text elaboration, he suggested that letters or faxes tended to be treated as formal documents which, delivered by the company to its customers, expressed the firm's point of view and acknowledged its commitments. From his perspective, e-mail messages consisted of discussions or an exchange of specialized knowledge and information that supported the development of specific negotiations. They represented, therefore, the textualization of internal work-related processes which reflected the informal way professionals interacted with one another within his corporation.

Similarly to his reaction to formality, José Luiz was surprised when I mentioned pronominal variation, a topic which he had never paid attention to before (JLRM4:1068). In reflecting upon the contrastive use of I and we, his initial reaction was to point out that
the preference for the plural pronoun was a traditional feature of Brazilian commercial correspondence (JLRM1:175-179). He noticed that this preference was more apparent in certain co-workers — including Luciano — who revealed a more conventional writing style (JLRM1:169-172), and who tended to reproduce in the electronic medium the conventional pattern usually applied to business letters. However, as opposed to this practice, he believed that the use of the singular pronoun seemed to be more appropriate to the person-to-person communication process that took place within his company (JLRM1:205-206,227-228). For this reason, he used it more frequently (JLRM1:159), restricting the use of the plural form to situations when he was describing the activities undertaken by a group of professionals (JLRM1:218-219). At a later point in our conversations, he reframed this preliminary view and concluded that the occasional use of we suggested a "language habit" which had developed as a result of thinking in Portuguese, a language that was, in his opinion, "richer" than English (JLRM4:1067-1085). In other words, by drawing on his foreign language awareness, José Luiz revealed his perception of an interlanguage phenomenon through which certain features of the mother tongue were instinctively transferred to the production of a text in English.

6.1.3. Envisioning features of cross-cultural communication

Throughout our interviews, I perceived that if José Luiz was not consciously alert to features of formality or pronominal variation, he was sensitive to issues regarding cross-cultural communication, particularly ones concerning lexical choices. He believed that native speakers had a higher level of expertise in terms of vocabulary manipulation which would never be achieved by non-native speakers (JLRM3:198-210). He also believed that there were differences between native speakers and that, for example, Canadians were more explicit and careful writers than Americans (JLFM:546-557). With regard to more general language use, José Luiz commented on his international counterparts' reactions to occasional linguistic misunderstandings and/or difficulties revealed by non-native speakers of English:

JL: So, when any misunderstanding happens, nobody gets offended, right? Neither us nor them! And... people from North America are very
cooperative. So, when we make a mistake which is evident, they sometimes misunderstand us, but they attenuate the situation by joking... giving us alternatives and attempting to guide us. And when it happens with Finland, we go deeper on the topic. When it happens with a Finnish co-worker, we say: "You see, what I've attempted to say was this, this, and that!" And it's worked out well. It's part of our routine, right? It doesn't happen frequently because we've been improving our way of expressing ideas, our way of speaking. But, it still happens sometimes.

M: When you say that you've been "improving your way of speaking," you mean you've been learning how to express your ideas objectively?

JL: Yeah... I think that this is a good definition. We've been more concise... we can manage the language better. (JLRM1:995-1018)

JL: I believe that Finland and Brazil have a similar situation because English is a foreign language in both countries. I don't care that much because I think that we try to do our best and we do it the way we can, right? In this sense, I feel even more comfortable in communicating with the United States because they will understand us better, for sure. And we feel free of: "if you don't understand well, ask!" And nobody is ashamed of it. Nobody gets offended. (...) And we feel that people from Canada and from the United States are always willing to teach us when we have a problem. (JLRM3:272-293)

The extracts above show that the exchange of electronic correspondence between José Luiz's company and its related offices abroad was marked by mutual cooperation through which language mismatches and/or difficulties were overcome in a friendly way. In my opinion, the same teamwork spirit that characterized the negotiations these professionals shared together was transferred to the linguistic realm and reflected in the way they dealt with occasional communication drawbacks. Therefore, by reducing any discomfort that might result from misunderstandings among native and non-native speakers of English, all the professionals felt comfortable working together in order to achieve the maximum clarification of their ideas.

6.1.4. Interpreting lived experiences, conceiving of professional growth

Throughout the reflective process, I realized that José Luiz became particularly animated and expressive when he talked about the development of his CMC skills and his professional growth. By recalling the transformations he went through over time, he was able to identify three areas -- foreign language proficiency, computer expertise, and understanding of a multinational company organization -- which had particular significance
for him. According to José Luiz, foreign language proficiency was gradually achieved through interpersonal interactions or through the manipulation of faxes and other kinds of written correspondence (JLRM3:1055-1056). He noticed that various lexical items that belonged to the standard commercial language, as well as colloquial expressions typically used in business communication had been effortlessly incorporated into his vocabulary (JLRM3:1055-1058). He noticed, therefore, that the experiences lived at work led him to learn how to express his ideas more clearly and to use expressions that helped him to "polish" his texts or to make them stylistically more acceptable (JLRM1:1042-1043). According to him, his confidence in using the foreign language also had an affective aspect for the more accepted he was by his international counterparts, the more comfortable he felt in interacting in English (JLRM3:1059-1061).

The experiences José Luiz lived in the workplace also allowed him to overcome his fear of computers and to achieve technological expertise. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1.3), the demands of his professional environment forced him to learn how to operate computers and, gradually, to deal with them on his own. He said that he was not worried about using these machines anymore for, in his experience, co-workers invariably helped one another to solve general difficulties and problems with specific computer programs (JLRM3:1097-1100).

In reflecting upon the third area of significant impact, José Luiz emphasized that his current connection to the Finnish corporation his office represented led him to understand the internal mechanisms and the hierarchical structure of a multinational enterprise:

JL: The last aspect is... to understand the organization of a company that works with several countries at the same time. I've never had this chance before, although I have already worked for foreign corporations. I had no idea about it before. Right? I had a perception of a multinational company, but "multinational" was a word that did not define many things to me. And nowadays, I... I sometimes make decisions to maintain this "multinational" status.
M: So, your current experience is completely different from the one you had before being a representative of this Finnish corporation.
JL: Right. Besides that, to understand the hierarchy within that company. It's something different for us Latin Americans. Because, sometimes, you talk to the director and, theoretically, the director decides everything. But,
then, you realize that this is not exactly what happens there. Right? The director is an important person and, perhaps, the one who makes the final decisions. But the process... if you try to develop it through the director, you'll waste a lot of time. Ah... going along the vertical path does not help you. And this mechanism is quite strong within a Latin organization. For instance: "Talk to the boss because the boss decides everything!"

M: Is the sense of power stronger within the Latin structure?
JL: Much stronger. The boss is the boss! He is the one who can! And the rest... is the rest. And, according to the experience I have been living, it doesn't happen in Finland, Canada or in the United States. It doesn't mean that the boss can't decide or that he isn't influential; but you can resolve many things by dealing with people from sales, from marketing, and sometimes from people connected to research and development. And we have access to those people.
M: You mean that each division has more autonomy...
JL: That's it.
M: ... and that power relationships are more symmetrical?
JL: Exactly. (...) Therefore, learning the hierarchy, the structure of this Finnish corporation, the way they plan things as a multinational company that comes from a country to which exporting means surviving... from a country that needs to deal with new technologies. Understanding this philosophy represented a huge change in my life. (...) Therefore, all the things that I've learned help me deal with the company as a whole. Right? Either within Brazil or with our international contacts. And without having that initial submissiveness, right?
M: Do you believe this is a Brazilian characteristic?
JL: (promptly) I do! I think we go from an extreme submissiveness to an extreme arrogance. Right? Maybe because we think that we are from the Third World... and everything is novelty to us, right? I've already overcome this stage and started to face things more realistically, I mean, cost-benefit. I've been realistic with a commercial connotation. (JLRM3: 1234-1356)

The extract above shows that José Luiz's comments were particularly insightful when he addressed aspects related to his professional development such as learning the specifics of multinational corporations or interacting with countries that had a distinct type of business organization. In this case, his background provided him not only with the ability to detect cross-cultural differences, but also with specialized knowledge which helped him to structure his own company according to international standards. In my opinion, his comments suggested an entrepreneur who was attentive to the organization, structure, and evolution of his business, and who felt particularly comfortable operating within his own experiential continuum (Dewey, 1938a), but who at the same time was prepared to learn from his own practice.
6.1.5. A critical view of the Brazilian CMC context

Commenting on the establishment of a wider computerized communication network in Brazil, José Luiz particularly criticized the policy adopted by the Brazilian Telecommunication Enterprise (Embratel) which, in his opinion, had been responsible for preventing a more rapid growth:

JL: Electronic communication is undertaken through a normal telephone line, but this channel is still restricted within Brazil. Telecommunication in Brazil is precarious. It's quite difficult to connect during the day: the line is always busy. If we want to do it more easily, we have to try it early in the morning, before 8:00 am, or after 7:00 pm.
M: What about international connections? Are they easier?
JL: It's the same. It's the same channel. We have to go through Embratel... it's the same channel. (JLFM:456-469)

JL: Even when I travel, I can access my e-mail... it's also possible. But again, within Brazil, I mean, outside São Paulo, there is an additional difficulty to access it, right? Many hotels, for instance, do not allow this type of connection yet. And... many regions don't have a good communication system either. Therefore, my absence from the office could be minimized but it is sometimes aggravated by this fact. (JLFM:319-332)

JL: Computerized communication has not been expanded because Embratel doesn't want it! But I'm sure that as soon as Embratel provides us with alternatives, it will grow faster. And... instantly, to be more emphatic. (JLFM:94-99)

JL: And... I think that here, in Brazil, Embratel is the biggest obstacle. The moment we have a better communication system, better positioned satellites, and... and more compatible costs, I believe that computerized communication will increase faster, right? It will increase instantly. (JLFM:703-713)

The picture provided by José Luiz explained why the adoption of CMC systems was still restricted to some corporations and to relatively few customers in Brazil. Furthermore, it also clarified why some organizations were searching for private servers or other alternatives (JLFM:103-112) to the Embratel system. In his opinion, the difficulties created by the official regulations not only prevented CMC utilization on a large scale in the country; they also obliged some companies -- including his own -- to operate within specific technical limits. As a result, he believed that, in his workplace, e-mail was not being utilized to its full potential:
JL: Throughout our conversations, I realized that... well, it was actually a suspicion that I had... that the utilization of this tool is quite restricted.
M: In which sense is it restricted?
JL: It is... apparently, what we're used to seeing or what we understand as electronic communication is much broader than the way we've been using it. Much broader. And in... in our particular case, in our country, communication through Embratel has been very, very difficult. Right? I've observed the way it works in Atlanta: when you send a message, it goes to a server that collects all the correspondence and, from time to time, sends the received messages out. And this is transparent to the user, right? Even if the professional is using a word processor when a message arrives, s/he receives a warning informing him/her about it. This is a system that we could also install here, right? However, nowadays, it doesn't make any sense to do it because the channel of communication does not exist!
M: So, you have to face some technical limitations...
JL: Limitations... that's it... that's it. (JLRM4:1091-1126)

José Luiz seemed to be quite annoyed when he mentioned CMC constraints and the resulting problems. From his perspective, the main contradiction lay in the fact that Embratel had "a great technical team" (JLFM:938) and "excellent resources" (JLFM: 940). However, few channels of communication were available, and high prices were preventing the access of many potential users (JLFM:82-90). In spite of these difficulties, he believed that as soon as the official organization could offer a good public service at a reasonable charge, the CMC network would quickly spread (JLFM:117-118) and integrate all companies, customers, and suppliers (JLFM:88-90). José Luiz summarized his critical perception of CMC within his country by saying: "It's much more likely a political matter than a technological one" (JLFM:933).

6.1.6. Contemplating the research process
José Luiz adopted a critical stance when he considered the effect of our conversations on the performance of his routine activities. In recalling our discussion of e-mail, including its advantages and disadvantages, he concluded that his reflections constituted an enjoyable and pleasant way of rethinking the tool (JLFM:803-807). He emphasized that, throughout our meetings, he had to contemplate CMC practices from various perspectives and pay more attention to specific issues and details in order to answer my questions. As a result of this stop-and-think exercise, he realized that he tended
to keep too many messages, rather than filing only the ones that summarized the content of current discussions (JLFM:857-864). Furthermore, he realized that because of lack of time (JLFM:878) or laziness (JLFM:879), he was not exploring all the available e-mail functions such as the reply command (JLFM:852). Our conversations, therefore, by leading him to reflect upon his daily routine, compelled him to learn more about the e-mail system, so that he could use the tool more efficiently (JLFM:829-830). Considering this aspect of his performance, José Luiz claimed that his way of dealing with e-mail had already improved (JLFM:840-842).

Apart from these practical considerations, José Luiz pointed out that the reflective process he was engaged in supported his personal belief that professionals should reserve part of their time to review their own practice:

JL: I believe that people should... people, not companies, people... should understand that they need to reserve some of their time... part of their day to review their way of doing things. Right? For instance, for us Brazilians, it's very important to exercise the control over time. We never know how to control time. Right? We are always "atrasadinhos," doing things in the last minute.
M: It seems that we are always running after something...
JL: Yes. It makes no sense! Right? We have to learn how to deal with that. We have to practice how to deal with that. And we should do that by ourselves, and not wait for the corporation's initiative. Because when the company does something in this sense, it will be obviously directed towards its own needs!
M: Right.
JL: And the most important growth is the one of the individual's. The individual is the good raw material. (JLRM3:1569-1590)

The comments above indicate that José Luiz was concerned about constantly rethinking and re-evaluating his routine at work. From his perspective, this inner process -- which impacted on the individual's self-development -- was part of each professional's responsibility and should be continuously exercised, regardless of the nature of the job or of the company's orientation. In my opinion, José Luiz suggested that the process of reflection, taken as an everyday procedure, could lead practitioners to realize the

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1 *Atrasadinhos* is the Portuguese term that identifies individuals who are invariably late. In this context, however, José Luiz gave this expression an ironic connotation.
significance of their own work-related routines. In this regard, it was clear that José Luiz had given consideration to a wide range of linguistic and professional issues, including the nature of cross-cultural interaction, the organization of multinational companies, and the implications of CMC policies in Brazil. It seemed to me that the inner exercise he suggested constituted a practice that he constantly performed for he not only appraised the experiences he lived at work, but he also sought to transform them into educational experiences (Dewey, 1938a).

In reflecting upon the last excerpt transcribed above, I also realized that from the fact of living with and interpreting his own experiences arose José Luiz's view of individuals as "good raw material" in which it was worth investing. Such a perception encouraged him, for instance, to provide his subordinates with opportunities for training periods either in Brazil or abroad (JLRM3: 1497-1499). In my view, this concern about promoting his employees' professional development was simultaneously related to his personal belief and to his interests as a businessman. My interpretation of the comments he made and of his behavior as an executive was that to foster his employees' growth and to enlarge their perspectives with new experiences implied not only nurturing their individual potential but, indirectly, encouraging them to strive for the improvement of the corporation.

Nevertheless, José Luiz seemed to preserve a biased conception about the relationship between an individual's education and his/her life orientation. For example, when he commented that: "I think that, although I have a technical background, I'm quite humane" (JLRM3: 1487-1488), he revealed his conviction that the nature of his educational background was to some extent incompatible with the values by which he had been living. In my opinion, the conflict that he suggested was not a simple either-or matter -- and his professional behavior endorsed that. Unfortunately, I did not interrupt him to discuss this issue, nor did I pursue it in our subsequent interviews. For this reason, I can only state my personal opinion, without presenting José Luiz's explicit comments on the issue.

To summarize, my conversations with José Luiz addressed various aspects of his work and its CMC practices. Throughout the interviews, it became clear to me that he was less concerned about the linguistic details of his e-mail correspondence and more attuned to the characteristics of his professional environment. According to him, the opportunity to
reflect led him not only to comment on his work, but also to rethink the situations in which he used computers and their potential use for communicative purposes (JLFM:803-805). Regarding the aims of my inquiry and of the conversations we shared together, José Luiz concluded that he was "happy" with my interest in researching CMC issues because he believed that Brazilians need to learn more quickly about "the new technologies" that might facilitate their lives at work (JLFM:901-905). He expected that if such an investigation had any repercussion (JLFM:924-926), other corporations that operated with the same technology could benefit from our reflections upon the electronic medium to improve their CMC performance.

6.2. Reflecting with Luciano

And... to some extent, this reflection made me think... led me to a self-criticism. (...) Well, having 'created' time for it was good - let's put it this way. (LUCFM:20-21,92)

Talking to Luciano involved being in touch with his concern about time and his determination to optimize it or even "create" it when necessary. By stating that, I do not mean that our conversations were somehow constricted or strictly regulated by his habitually tight schedule. On the contrary, they were usually longer than we had previously planned, while always remaining clearly focused on the topics under discussion. Throughout our meetings, Luciano showed an increasing interest in describing the specifics of his professional landscape and in reflecting upon features of the computerized correspondence he dealt with at work. He was a cautious interlocutor who always thought carefully about the questions raised, and who sometimes made it explicit that he needed more time to reflect on a particular issue.

6.2.1. Understanding the nature of electronic communication

Luciano perceived the electronic communication enacted within his company as a safe way of exchanging and documenting information (LUCFM:1318-1319). From his perspective, its inherent "action-reaction" movement (LURCM4:618-619), its potential to
bring people closer together, and its relatively low cost (LUCRM4:549) gave e-mail significant advantages over other communication media. These features also made it a suitable instrument for promoting "integration" (LUCFM:1534-1540) among Brazilian and international professionals. In this regard, Luciano agreed completely with my argument that CMC metaphorically placed "one office next to the other," with the result that every interlocutor became "the next office neighbor" (LUCFM:1246-1240).

According to Luciano, in addition to integrating co-workers and documenting the flow of their interactions, e-mail undoubtedly generated more work-related "efficiency" (LUCFM:1340). From his point of view, efficiency meant the possibility of delivering the information requested immediately (LUCFM:1326-1328) or, depending on the situation, of having enough time "to receive the message, evaluate its contents and, then, reply to it" (LUCRM4:552-554). His perception of e-mail as an efficient communication and working tool was, therefore, closely connected to the idea of time control and manipulation which resulted in advantages for both senders and receivers.

6.2.2. Gaining efficiency, losing opportunities for personal contacts

Although Luciano pointed to integration and efficiency as potential advantages of computerized communication, he noticed that the utilization of e-mail resulted in fewer opportunities for face-to-face personal interaction (LUCFM:1374-1375). He illustrated this point by recalling an episode involving a co-worker who was one of his most frequent CMC interlocutors:

L: I believe that this [lack of personal contact] is the only disadvantage. I don't know whether there is any other one that I could point out now, but... Well, recently, we could... I could attest it, for instance, by talking to a colleague with whom I have been always in touch through e-mail. He called me up and said: "Gosh, we haven't talked for ages!" Right? He said: "You see, this damn shit... damn shit e-mail"
M: So, e-mail ends up determining a very peculiar kind of "personal contact," right?
L: That's it.
M: Because the person is somehow present but... not completely.
L: That's it. And it's... it's true that we don't use the phone that much because we have the electronic medium available. Therefore, if it's an advantage on the one hand, it's a disadvantage on the other hand. I mean, you miss opportunities for personal contacts, right? Personal...
In my opinion, Luciano's comments drew attention to a potential problem in the use of computers. It may be that the loss of direct personal contact represents the price to be paid for speeding up the exchange of information and increasing work-related efficiency. On the other hand, I believe that corporations need to devote more attention to this problem in order to find ways of counteracting any potential negative effects.

Apparently, Luciano shared the same belief for, as he explained, his company was attempting to provide more opportunities for personal contacts, particularly among professionals who performed a more influential role in decision-making activities (LUCFM: 1017-1024). Based on his own experience, he stated that knowing one's co-workers in person and being in touch with "their other side" (LUCFM:1462-1463), not only lessened formality (LUCRM3:742-755), but also enriched the communication process. He illustrated this argument by providing me with an interesting image:

L: Over time, we've learned that a straight contact with people facilitates communication. You can interact through computers but you know the other person's face, right?
M: You can even 'listen' to the other person's voice while you're reading the message!
L: (pointing at the screen) It's like having a person's photograph here, and talking through this photograph. Is it right?
M: Right.
L: Do you understand me?
M: Uh-hum.
L: And... according to the kind of reply you get... sometimes, you can conceive of the intonation... you can give a little bit of... ah... ah... of color... right?... to the conversation, right? ... intonation and...
M: ... and even comprehension, right? For instance, if you saw a very objective message, you could interpret it as a rude reply...
L: Aggressive?
M: ... maybe aggressive. However, if you know the way that...
L: (interrupting me) You can understand his/her message better...
M: ... it's easier to understand it.
L: I think that... I think that... that's it: that's the point. Therefore, knowing the interlocutor in person is important. And, over time, we've learned that,
besides the electronic contact, it's good to have a constant personal relationship... it facilitates communication. (*LUCFM: 985-1017*)

Luciano's habit of imagining his interlocutor's photograph on the monitor gave me an idea of how the knowledge acquired from personal contacts could influence online conversations and bring "color" to screen-to-screen professional discussions. In my opinion, this metaphor also revealed Luciano's tacit strategy of compensating for the lack of visual aids and paralinguistic features that characterized the electronic medium.

Nevertheless, the image provided by Luciano led me to reflect that if impressions collected from personal contacts could enhance the electronic communication process, the frequency of e-mail interactions could also strengthen the knowledge acquired in person, increase the level of rapport among interlocutors and, consequently, facilitate the subsequent exchange of correspondence. This argument seemed to be valid for, by considering these intertwined variables (frequency of communication and personal contact), Luciano was able to contrast two international colleagues who displayed quite distinct personalities and working styles. The first professional he mentioned invariably included "*some comments and suggestions*" (*LUCFM:902*) in his messages, and sought to "*nourish the conversation*" (*LUCFM:933-934*) in order to reach a "*maybe more articulate*" (*LUCFM:934-935*) solution for the topic(s) discussed. In effect, this colleague seemed to foster interaction during each step in the negotiation process. The second co-worker, on the contrary, went "*very straight to the point*" (*LUCFM:898-899,923*) and seemed to avoid commenting on the subject(s) addressed. In other words, he preferred not to provide "*partial feedback*" (*LUCFM:941-942*), but a concise and objective reply ("*just one line or a paragraph,*" *LUCFM:942-943*), when he had either "*the issue resolved*" (*LUCFM:974*), or a more complete idea of the situation. According to Luciano, knowing these professionals in person and being able to "*conceive of their pictures on the screen,*" or perhaps to "*grasp the intended intonation of their words*" made his communication with them vivid, "*colored,*" and, consequently, much easier to negotiate (*LUCFM:992-1001*).

6.2.3. The expansion of the CMC network in Brazil: a matter of time

Throughout our conversations, Luciano suggested that integration and efficiency
constituted e-mail attributes which were constantly jeopardized by certain peculiarities of the Brazilian computerized communication network. For example, the lack of telephone lines in certain cities, and the resulting impossibility of contacting co-workers while they were travelling created communication problems which seriously affected some aspects of his work (LUCRM1:528-552). On the other hand, as prices were still quite high, his company was compelled to restrict the number of e-mail connections per day, as he explains:

L: The reason for not accessing e-mail many times a day is because we pay to use the communication network. So, we obviously -- "we", again! -- we attempt to optimize it. I mean, to login some times... three times a day, in average, to optimize its use. (LUCRM1:345-352)

L: It is 'possible' to login every time we want to. However, it isn't 'feasible' to do it all the time!
M: Uh-hum. Well, when I say that it's not possible, I mean that the cost would be very high. Because the system allows you to do that.
L: Yes. So, I think that, in this case, the word would be... you'd better say 'feasible'. (LUCFM: 262-267)

In contrast to José Luiz, Luciano did not comment on the broader issues that might have been preventing the development of computerized communications in Brazil. I felt that his comments on this subject were focused on those factors that immediately affected his company's internal efficiency. Although I attempted to draw him out on this theme, he confined himself to generalized remarks, as illustrated by the excerpt that follows:

M: If you had more facilities, an easier access -- in São Paulo, for instance -- would you face it as an advantage for the development of your work-related activities, for your contact with customers?
L: But, in this case, we'd have to rely on an internal communication network in Brazil, right?
M: Right.
L: And... I don't know... it would require a... I think it's a matter of time. I believe that it will happen sooner or later, right? But... not yet. The country is not prepared for that, you know. I don't think it is.
M: Would you consider this situation a disadvantage?
L: No, I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't think of it as a disadvantage.
M: Or does communication flow through other media?
L: Yes... it flows through other media. I believe that if everybody had this communication medium, we would have more integration, for sure. I mean, I'd have better conditions to know how the correspondence arrived there, when it arrived there. (...) So, it would help us with our customers, for sure, right? But I think that the market is not prepared to support it, yet.
For instance, Internet is here... It's a reality. And people... the number of companies that use its services has already increased. But it's still restricted... within Brazil, for instance. And I think that its utilization is restricted even in the United States...

M: Do you think that using the Internet services is still an exception?
L: Exactly! There's a... there's a niche there, right? It's not... there's not... this issue has not been "globalized" yet, right? (...) I'd compare it with micro-computers some time ago. Some people perceived them as working tools which were difficult to be understood. Nowadays, you can find them everywhere, in every store. Even in Brazil, where this area is not too updated. You can find one in every place. (...) It's a kind of domestic item, like a television, an air conditioner... So, I think that computerized communication will follow the same pattern of evolution.

(LUCFM:1498-1574)

Luciano's comments above suggest that he perceived the expansion of CMC practices and the access of customers to the electronic network from a conformist point of view. Although he acknowledged the advantages that CMC connections on a large scale would bring to his company and to the business world in general, at the same time he pointed out that improvements would take place in due course, and that meanwhile the current difficulties could be dealt with through the utilization of other media. Furthermore, the landscape he envisioned was characterized by common difficulties that affected other countries. It was possible, in his opinion, that Brazil was not yet ready to support the growth of such a service. My feeling was that, since he sensed he could not overcome the restrictions imposed by the prevailing context -- which would be resolved as a result of a natural process of evolution -- he seemed to be patiently waiting for the changes to happen.

6.2.4. Conceiving of e-mail from a formal perspective

Apart from the themes related to the conceptualization and operation of e-mail, my conversations with Luciano also addressed some formal features of the correspondence exchanged. In this regard, my mention of the contrastive use of I and we impacted on him so remarkably that his overall response to the reflective process changed completely from that moment on. My impression was that his increasing interest in speculating on the connotations of pronominal variation -- which was apparent both in the messages we commented on and in his own discourse throughout the interviews -- suggested that for him this topic constituted the most significant reflective turn (Schön, 1991:9-12, 1992:123). The
sequence of excerpts shows how he attempted to understand the principles that regulated the pronominal choices he made:

L: Well, I think that it's... I think that it's... (reflecting and concluding) exactly! I think that it's a habit, right? You see, in this message, I've answered "we confirmed...". Because, in fact, I was not the one who had confirmed. Another co-worker did it. (...) But I was part of the team involved in this activity. (...) But I haven't confirmed it myself, I mean, I haven't done the whole job myself. It was done by another person, or another people.
M: Right. So, you've represented the...
L: So, it was...
M: ... voice of the company...
L: That's it!
M: ... in this case.

L: When I give a suggestion and express my own viewpoint, I don't write "we," but "I". Right? It happens this way.
M: Is it always clear to you that "we" refers to a joint task...
L: Yes, it is.
M: ... undertaken in partnership with other people?
L: Exactly, exactly.
M: And that when it's a private opinion, you express it by using "I." For instance, "I think..."
L: Exactly. Exactly.
M: ... "I suggest...," or something like that.
L: (confirming) When it's a private opinion or suggestion. Exactly. But when I am representing the company... I mean, it's spontaneous, it's spontaneous. I think that it's normal to reply with "we," in the sense of... of "we," the company. (LUCRM1:229-250)

L: (considering the pronominal variation in international messages) No, I can't notice that. But I believe... I believe that, in general... in general, when we exchange correspondence... (reflecting and concluding)... no, no, I can't... I can't comment on that. I'll think about it and pay more attention to it. (LUCII: 260-264)

M: Maybe the utilization of "I" or "we" was something so spontaneous that you've never paid attention to.
L: Yes. It looks like a Brazilian politician... anyway! (LUCRM1:267-269)

L: Well, regarding the comment on "we" and on "I"... I'll think about it, too. (...) I'll think about this subject, too. But... it's interesting. (LUCRM1: 633-638)

L: I think that this topic constitutes by itself a MA thesis... or a PhD thesis!
M: How did it affect you or lead you to pay more attention to this topic?
L: I think that I... I've started to think about this issue more carefully. I've started to think about it. But it is... (reflecting)... perhaps because I perform a technical and a managerial function at the same time... many
times, I use "we" when I speak as a director. I think that I really... the conclusion that I've just reached is that... (reflecting)... when I present a technical view, I use "I," and when I present a... ah... the company's view, as a director, I then use "we." I think that this... this is, I think that this is... I think that this is the point! (LUCRM:300-302,307-323)

L: Ah... I think that in some cases... if we want to establish a policy, an internal procedure of the company... I think that it would be never expressed by "I." Right? Because... (reflecting)... I think that... I don't know...
M: The connotation would be... dictatorial?
L: Exactly! "We..." I don't know... maybe we wouldn't use "we." either. Maybe we'd use a more impersonal format. But, in fact, the idea would be "we." (...) So... I think that... (reflecting) when there is a... let's say... using "I," the first person... in the singular... I think that it would really indicate a more dictatorial connotation. (LUCRM:839-850, 893-896)

L: One of the topics that we've emphasized in one of our meetings was, for instance, the "I" and "we" differentiation, right? It made me... when I write... I believe that, over time... it will be spontaneous again, but I've been thinking about this issue. When I write... I am... I am more... I remember it and, then, I stop to evaluate whether I should use "I" or "we," right? It reflects a political posture, the Brazilian political posture. Brazilians use "we"! (LUCFM:67-79)

The extracts above show that Luciano's reflection upon pronouns led him to "reframe" (Schön,1987:49; Russel & Munby,1991:164) his initial perception of them as a mere habit, and to develop a more articulate view which associated them with the professional roles he performed within his corporation. Furthermore, the reflective pauses in his speech suggest that he was not only intrigued by the topic, but also that he was trying to recall various situations in order to reflect on their pragmatic implications. From his perspective, the first person singular pronoun represented the manifestation of his voice as a technician, and his commitment to the opinions and/or suggestions conveyed. On the other hand, the plural pronoun indicated either his collaboration with other co-workers or his voice as the director or representative of the corporation. I understood that, by using we and assuming the institutional voice, he attenuated the strength of the policies and/or internal procedures announced, and generated more involvement with his audience. As a result of these reflections, Luciano found himself monitoring his pronominal choices and wondering about the appropriateness of using the singular or plural form in each case. In general, however, regardless of the pronouns selected, he felt that the electronic
correspondence exchanged within his company was fairly informal in nature (LUCRM2: 372-378).

Formality constituted another issue upon which I encouraged Luciano to reflect. Throughout our conversations, he attempted to identify formal and informal features by observing certain examples of the correspondence, and tentatively switching -- i.e., "reframing" -- from one possible explanation to another. In his search for clarification, he speculated on potential indicators: first, he suggested that pronominal variation impacted on formality (LUCRM2:324-329); second, he reconsidered this idea (LUCRM2:356) and asserted that formality referred to "the text as a whole, to the way of expressing ideas, to the words" (LUCRM2:357-359); third, he added that the level of rapport among co-workers was also relevant (LUCRM3:742-757); and finally, he claimed that formality was a "rather subjective" matter (LUCFM:1175-1176). In spite of this conclusion, he attempted to formulate a general rule by stating that a formal message constituted a "definition" or "communication" (LUCFM:1189-1192,1195) which not necessarily require a reply. By contrast, informal e-mail messages usually involved an "asking-giving information movement" (LUCFM:1192-1193,1205-1206) which encouraged interaction -- like the internal messages regularly conveyed within his company.

The flow of thoughts presented above indicates that Luciano's concept of a formal communication tended to be based on the nature of the content and on the interactive features of the message. Furthermore, his search for a definition which would serve to clarify his thoughts suggested that Luciano was drawn to the notion of formality on a subconscious level. In spite of the fact that he failed to articulate a clear notion of formality, he was able to distinguish it as a factor that had influenced his development as an e-mail writer. By comparing his current messages with the ones he had composed when he was first introduced to the electronic medium, he identified the following sequence of events: (a) the increased efficiency brought about by e-mail encouraged him to use it more often; (b) by continuously manipulating this tool, he strengthened his level of rapport with other co-workers, and increased his contact with the foreign language; and (c) as a result of these successive interactions, he modified the initial formality and started to communicate more spontaneously (LUCRM3:694-709, LUCFM:850-877). Hence, Luciano's growth as
an e-mail writer revealed that formality, in addition to influencing the content of the message, was also somehow connected to the potential of the electronic medium to encourage more integration among professionals, an increase in work-related efficiency, and recurrent exposure to the foreign language.

6.2.5. The participant, the researcher, and the research process

Interestingly enough, Luciano never pointed out or even suggested that the topics raised were not relevant to him or to the understanding of e-mail communication. His responses to the issues discussed were invariably characterized by his willingness to provide me with explanations, or by his predisposition to reflect, to articulate opinions, to search for meanings, and to contribute his own insights. He was aware of having an approach to e-mail messages which was in some ways different from mine ("I don't look at the message from the same perspective you do," LUCRM3:803-805), and of having a tacit commitment to help me achieve a more inclusive understanding of CMC practices in the workplace ("So, if I can notice anything else, I will help you," LUCRM3:809-810). Nevertheless, it appears that he had attributed a peculiar role to me as a researcher, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

L: Well... you've been collecting information and, then, you can evaluate and give suggestions or... right?... or even definitions, right? (LUCRM4:218-221)

L: I think I'll be even surprised by some things that you'll point out but I will, I will agree with them! (LUCRM4:906-907)

The comments above suggest that, to some extent, Luciano saw me as someone who could "evaluate" the information collected, rather than interpret it. By perceiving my participation this way, he then set his expectations for "suggestions" or "definitions," and asserted his belief that he would agree with my findings. It was interesting to note that by transferring the responsibility for evaluation to me, he had not realized that he was, in fact, the one who was performing the evaluative role. To illustrate my argument, I present one excerpt from our third meeting when we discussed the filing procedures followed by his
company:

L: Well, we have never established a pattern for that [filing], or a pattern to determine that only the most recent message should be filed and not the others... the previous ones. So, there's no pattern... no definite pattern. But it is... let's say that, as far as I know, this way, this method [filing all messages] is more efficient.
M: Because you could take out the messages that do not display the whole sequence, or that are abridged in a subsequent message.
L: Yes, exactly. (reflecting) The other possibility would be to sort them out according to their subject... and these messages share the same subject... you'd have four messages stapled together and filed. Right? The common procedure within the company is to file technical subjects and administrative subjects separately. Then, these messages would be filed as a technical subject.
M: Right.
L: So, I think that there's no general rule but the... the... (concluding) Yes... it makes me think and consider this possibility, right?
M: Well, here I am with my comments!
L: Yes... yes... yes.
M: Well, this is the role I play: to make you think!
L: No... so... in the sense of even establishing a pattern, right?
M: I don't know to what extent it would be feasible because...
L: It doesn't happen frequently... but it... it happens sometimes. (...) Anyway, I believe that... I believe that it's worth thinking about it, although the percentage of messages like that is not that high... considering the sent and received messages, I'd say it's about 10 or 20%, right? (...) In fact, I think it's difficult for a small company to establish many rules, particularly in this case. And... I think that the number of people involved in this e-mail process is... questionable! Anyway... it makes me think!

The excerpt above illustrates that my role as a researcher was to raise specific issues, and to mediate the reflective encounter between Luciano and his own professional practices. The pauses in his speech and the development of his thoughts indicated that, by responding to my curiosity about the topic discussed, he was compelled to examine and, therefore, to evaluate the filing procedures of his company which, in spite of my comments, he perceived as "efficient." In our last meeting, however, I noticed that Luciano changed the evaluative role he had assigned to me, and concluded that the reflections he shared with me led him to undertake a "self-criticism," to rethink his own work-related activities:

L: I think that the most important aspect of our discussion, of the interviews... is to make me think a little bit. I've always known that I do not... I do not optimize my time very well... because I waste a lot of time with things that are not important. And... to some extent, this reflection made me think... led me to a self-criticism.
M: About your work in general? About your activities?
L: About the work in general because... we've talked a lot about e-mail... and e-mail is my channel, my medium of communication, especially with my supplier... and my supplier is, let's say, my heart. Right? So... my supplier produces the material we sell and provides us with marketing support, sales support, technical support. And e-mail is our medium of communication. It is part of my work because I also perform other activities with the information that I receive or send through it. So, by analogy, I can use these reflections for the other things that I do. I think that it was a way of practicing a little bit, of doing... of stopping and undertaking a self-criticism. Because, as I told you, if I had stopped and asked myself: "Do I have... do I have time for the interviews?", I would have said: "No!" But I told you: "I'll... I'll do them and I... I'll create time! I'll create time and I'll do them!" And this forces me... this has forced me somehow to undertake this self-criticism or to rethink many things and... I'd like to know the results of your research... of my participation. Based on them... maybe I can come up with more conclusions, right? (...) Therefore, I think it's worth it. It's obvious that I'll conclude something else when... when I see the results of your research... well, having created time for it was good - let's put it this way. (LUCFM:14-65,88-92)

These comments illustrate that, if "evaluate" was not an inaccurate lexical choice that Luciano made when expressed his previous idea, he had evolved in a reflective way throughout our conversations. In this last meeting, he first of all re-elaborated his former perception of the research and of our roles, but later reformulated his expectations in a manner which excluded any evaluative connotation. The excerpt above also indicates that, through the process of revisiting his professional routines and examining his e-mail correspondence, Luciano found that he could be "in touch with the understandings" that he had been gradually and tacitly forming "in the midst of action" (Schön, 1992:126). In this sense, he not only reflected on his own practices, but also reached a degree of self-awareness which led him to confront his notion of time manipulation, and to conclude that having "created" time for our discussions was worthwhile.

6.3. Reflecting with Paulo César

I don't know... I've never, I've never noticed that, Maximina. Honestly, I've never noticed that. Ah... I don't know. I have to think more about it! You've been raising some issues that...!!! (PCRM2:1035-1040)

Talking to Paulo César was an experience that allowed me to be in touch with quite
an attentive interlocutor, responsive to all the topics raised and invariably interested in sharing his descriptions and thoughts. Throughout our meetings, by alternating the role of a CMC expert and of a foreign language apprentice who aimed at using "a more elegant English" (PCRM1:1010-1011), he revealed a predisposition to reflect, and an explicit commitment to the issues that challenged him. As a professional in charge of selling computerized communication systems, but also as a user who dealt with them to perform his job activities, Paulo César displayed a clear understanding of the implications of using e-mail as either a working or a communication tool.

6.3.1. Understanding the nature of electronic communication

From Paulo César's perspective, e-mail constituted a means of conveying information to distant sites and an instrument to promote interpersonal interaction. Due to its inherent operational speed ("E-mail is much faster than fax or telex, for instance," PCFM:59-60), and to the technical support that insured the "integrity" of the messages exchanged (PCFM:63-66), Paulo César emphasized that the utilization of computerized communication systems provided their users with a "safe" and "trustworthy" (PCFM:62,67) form of manipulating information and dealing with correspondence. Considering these "basic" (PCFM:87) attributes in association with the possibility of documenting interactions (PCII:490-493) and of intensifying the frequency of communication among professionals due to cost advantages ("The cost is quite interesting if compared to the traditional communication media," PCFM:71-72), he claimed that the integration of CMC systems impacted positively on work-related "efficiency" (PCFM:69-71).

Paulo César perceived the electronic communication enacted within his workplace as an "open channel of communication" (PCRM4:744) through which information was "democratically" disseminated across the organization hierarchy and interactions among all community members were undertaken more easily (PCRM4:714-719,726-731,744-748). In such circumstances, all professionals shared the same access to the flow of information exchanged and, because they could operate the system independently, they became more "autonomous" (PCRM4:680-683) in handling their own correspondence. With regard to electronic interactions undertaken in English, Paulo César emphasized that e-mail provided
users with time to think about the reply or even to "consult the dictionary" while they were editing the message (PCRM3:594-599). According to this argument, if computers saved time by speeding up the regular flow of information delivery, they also guaranteed additional time either to compose a message in the foreign language or to read and understand its contents (PCRM3:607-619). From Paulo César's viewpoint, therefore, the implications in terms of time control and manipulation of messages constituted one of the most striking advantages brought to the office environment by the utilization of the electronic medium.

6.3.2. The seller and the user: a contrastive view of e-mail

Paulo César seemed to be so convinced of the value of using computers for communication that he became extremely articulate in discussing the advantages of the medium, without pausing to suggest any of the obstacles or apparent difficulties. His enthusiasm revealed the viewpoint of a sales representative who was used to emphasizing the benefits of his equipment in order to sell it to his clients. For this reason, my question about the possible disadvantages of the system at first puzzled him ("I've never thought about it. We have to sell the advantages. But... disadvantages!", PCFM: 901-902) and then challenged him to reflect upon the tool from what was for him a new and unfamiliar perspective:

PC: Maximina, I'd say that there are some organizations that are now so involved or that have already transferred too many activities to this kind of system that... ah... they've become extremely dependent on e-mail, right? So, either basic activities or very important activities of the company became dependent on this kind of system. For instance, some customers... well, our system is not 100% free of problems, right? We can't guarantee that it will be 100% available, I mean, available all the time. So, when it fails, it's a problem because the company has already transferred all of its former structure -- which was based on written document or on any other communication medium -- and... it's already established such a link with the electronic system that if, by any chance, the connection is unavailable, that company has no means to go back to its former structure.
M: And could this problem be caused by the telephone line overload, I mean, by any external reason?
PC: Yes... there can be all sorts of problems: from an internal problem that we may have -- but, in this case, it would be our fault. Therefore, we
are very careful – the American company whose product we sell in Brazil is so concerned about it, that it guarantees 99.6% per year. I mean, it guarantees that the system will be available 99.6% of the times it is accessed in one year, right? Ah... but we depend on other variables... or on factors which are not under our control. For instance, if the link with an international satellite fails... there's noting we can do. We don't have means to solve the problem. (...) Therefore, this would be a disadvantage. But a 'macro' disadvantage. (...) Because the main advantage is to substitute that former system for the electronic one, to get rid of the former process which was slow and not productive, right? You can increase efficiency by using the electronic system. So, as soon as the electronic system is installed, and as soon as it starts to work within the company, they get rid of whatever they had before. And there's no way to go back to the previous structure, right? Broadly speaking, this is the disadvantage that I can see. (PCFM:903-933,989-1001)

Paulo César's comments suggest that, although it may sound contradictory, the only disadvantage of adopting CMC was caused by the fact that users might depend too much on the efficiency gains and positive outcomes this communication process invariably offered. However, even while presenting this as a possible problem, he continue to emphasize the benefits of adopting the electronic system, implying that the obstacles occasionally encountered constituted a risk that was worth taking.

Thus, the scene described by Paulo César was quite different from the one criticized by José Luiz, and vaguely mentioned by Luciano. Paulo César described a product which, based on a private server supported by an American corporation, avoided many of the problems of the Embratel system and guaranteed a higher level of operational reliability. In my view, the contrast between the seller's viewpoint (such as the one presented by Paulo César) and the perspective of some customers (such as the one displayed by José Luiz), revealed another facet of the Brazilian CMC environment. In spite of the policies of the governmental agency, Paulo César's comments suggested that companies interested in using e-mail could find alternative solutions by contracting with private corporations to provide them with the support they needed. Although comparisons between the services provided by Embratel and those provided by private corporations are beyond the scope of my present discussion, it is worth mentioning that this topic illustrates the complexity of the Brazilian telecommunication context and clearly indicates the need for more detailed discussions concerning the development of CMC in Brazil.
6.3.3. Opening eyes to formal features of e-mail

Throughout our conversations, Paulo César revealed an increasing engagement in the reflective process, and a particular commitment to the topics addressed. Similarly to his reaction to my inquiry about e-mail disadvantages, he many times expressed his surprise by questions regarding features of his professional practice, or manifested his determination to better observe his routine way of dealing with correspondence. The excerpts below illustrate the nature of his comments:

You've called my attention to this aspect now. But I think that... I've never thought about it! But I think that I also do the same thing when I write in Portuguese! (PCRM1:140-143)

I'll consider this aspect more carefully. I'll start to pay more attention to it. (PCRM2:521-522)

But I'll pay more attention to that, right, Maximina? (PCRM2:527)

How interesting it is! (PCRM2:1031)

You've called my attention to this aspect but, honestly, I've never noticed or considered whether a structure like that is easier to be understood. (PCRM2:1007-1009)

I don't know... I've never, I've never noticed that, Maximina. Honestly, I've never noticed that. Ah... I don't know. I have to think more about it! You've been raising some issues that...!!!" (PCRM2:1035-1040)

I don't know... I think that I'll be alert to these things from now on. (PCRM2:1078-1079)

But I've never noticed it before, right? (PCRM3:364)

By reacting to some of the issues raised with comments like the ones above, Paulo César made me feel like an eye-opener who challenged his understanding of his e-mail correspondence, mediated his reflection upon them, and led him to conceive of them from a perspective other than the one of an habitual user.

As an eye-opener, for instance, I called Paulo César's attention to the pronominal variation displayed in some e-mail messages we discussed. He was particularly intrigued by the contrastive use of the first person singular and plural pronouns (I and we), which he had never noticed before either in message generation or in message reception (PCRM2:219). His prompt reaction to my comment was to assert: "In fact, I don't like using 'I'!"
and, then, after reviewing some examples of his correspondence more carefully, he concluded: "I use 'we' a lot, Maximina!" (PCRM2:315). After reflecting further, he realized that his choice of pronouns was determined by the nature of the subject addressed. The first person singular pronoun seemed to be more adequate to the expression of his personal opinions (PCRM2:228-230), while the use of the first person plural seemed more appropriate in situations that required him to address the activities performed by a group of co-workers (PCRM2:221-226), to convey the institutional voice (PCRM2:317-318), or to politely "admonish" (PCRM2:322-323) or to "force someone to do something" (PCRM3:423-424).

In situations when he was criticizing a colleague's performance, he said that his choice of the plural pronoun was quite deliberate. According to him, the use of we in situations like these indicated his wish to avoid embarrassment, and his consideration for the person addressed to whom he was determined not to be "rude":

PC: (...) I don't know whether it's a weakness that I have, but I can't be rude. Even if I try to do it, right? I don't... I think that... first of all, because... it's a co-worker who is there! (PCRM4:879-883)

The excerpt above shows Paulo César's intriguing association between politeness and weakness, and his deliberate decision to adopt a respectful attitude towards other professionals. Although, depending on the context, he could be either "diplomatic" or "austere"; he also claimed that he would never be "aggressive" with his colleagues in any situation (PCRM1:692-705). I concluded that from this conscious behavior emerged the lexical choices he made, as well as his intention to conceal his personal voice in any episode that involved him in a confrontation with a co-worker. These considerations, therefore, not only revealed Paulo César's characteristics as an individual, but also provided an insight into his identity as a writer (Jovančić, 1994).

Considering the comments he made throughout our conversations, I realized that Paulo César's reflections upon pronominal variation had actually impacted on his view of e-mail messages, constituting a reflective turn he took as a result of our discussions. This perception was confirmed in our last meeting when, by stating: "Every time I have to use
a pronoun, I think of that* (PCFM:1075-1077), he emphasized that he had started to think about his unconscious writing strategies from a new perspective. In this regard, I felt that I had performed the role of an eye-opener who had helped him to be more attentive both to the more formal aspects of his e-mail correspondence, and to certain aspects of his own personality which were reflected in his writing.

6.3.4. Recalling e-mail writing strategies

In thinking about his performance as an e-mail writer, Paulo César showed an explicit concern about foreign language issues and about dealing with native speakers of English. When he reflected upon his correspondence, he realized that the increasing need to interact with native speakers through e-mail together with his determination to present his ideas "clearly" (PCRM1:289) had led him to develop some strategies -- or "tactics" (PCRM3:972) -- to counteract possible linguistic difficulties. Among these compensatory strategies (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, 1989), Paulo César included the use of "graphics" (PCRM4:138), his habit of "recycling" some of the texts received (PCRM4:81-83), and a preference for "itemizing" message content (PCRM1:116-127), as the most obvious ways of overcoming the difficulties he experienced when writing in English.

The incorporation of graphics into electronic correspondence was a strategy he used when he was working within the technical area of his company. Graphics, according to him, helped to "clarify" (PCRM4:32) the content of his messages, in addition to being relevant to the subjects addressed by that department (PCRM4:140-142). Recycling messages, a strategy which Paulo César had used earlier in his career, involved the use of texts produced by native speakers as a reference. He could not say exactly when he discontinued this procedure. However, he thought that it happened gradually, as a result of an increase in his workload which made it necessary for him to reply to his messages more quickly (PCRM4:370-375). In recalling the use of this strategy, Paulo César explained:

PC: At that time, I was used to building up my messages on the ones that I received. Well... it happened more frequently in the beginning, right? I wish I had those messages here. I too would like to see them. But I couldn't retrieve them.
M: It would be interesting.
PC: Messages from 1991. But, I don't have them anymore.
M: So, you mean that the strategy you used was the one of recycling extracts of other messages to write yours?
PC: That's it. And the results were pretty good! Really!
M: And did it take you longer to reply to messages?
PC: For sure! It took me longer than nowadays... much longer...
M: Did you consult the dictionary, for instance?
PC: A lot!
M: Or ask for your colleagues' help?
PC: Uh-hum. I needed much more help, right? For this reason, I used those received messages, trying to recycle some extracts and use them in my own texts, right? Or with the help of a dictionary. Therefore, it took me much longer to reply to a message at that time. It happened four years ago. Four... five years ago. (PCRM4:81-114)

PC: Would you like to see how I used this kind of strategy? I've just seen a message here that called my attention to this fact. You see (reading the native speaker's message): "Before we fly all way...," right, "... to New Jersey to find out we have a modern problem we should have the following..." It means... he was telling me that before going... because I was... the request was... my request was for him to go to New Jersey. He works in the West coast of the United States, right? He stays in the West coast office and he would have to cross the country to see my customer there, right? So, he wrote it this way. And I used this excerpt in my message... (pointing out to the specific sentence)... you see... to explain...
M: (reading Paulo César's message) "... before fly [sic] to New Jersey..."
PC: Can you see?
M: It's interesting.
PC: I used to do it a lot!
M: Were you aware of it at that time?
PC: Yes. Yes.
M: Did it represent your way of structuring your messages, then?
PC: ... expressing my ideas... Exactly!
M: It's interesting.
PC: Because Richard is American, right? So I trusted his English a lot.
M: Did you do the same with messages that came from non-native speakers of English?
PC: No... I...
M: Can you remember?
PC: No... I don't think so. I did it a lot with messages written by native speakers.
M: Did they represent a pattern to you?
PC: Uh... maybe... I don't know whether I considered them this way... right?... I've never realized that. But I always used messages from people who had English as their native language as a reference. (PC RM4:260-304)

The above extract shows Paulo César's reluctance to identify the messages composed by native speakers as patterns to be followed. He suggests that, rather than exact models, he regarded them as a kind of structural scaffolding (PCRM4:425-433) that
could guide him to express his own ideas more adequately. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that if he did not consciously use the texts of native speakers as a model, he unconsciously regarded such texts as a criterion of excellence in foreign language manipulation.

The use of graphics and the recycling of messages produced by native speakers were strategies that Paulo César had developed and discarded over time, due to his increasing exposure to e-mail which provided him with more opportunities to write in English. A similar evolution did not occur with itemizing contents, though. According to him, presenting information in point form enabled him to avoid the need to compose coherent paragraphs (PCRM1:122-127), a skill that he found difficult. When he reflected on this habit, however, he realized that he applied the same procedure to messages written in Portuguese (PCRM1:140-143) and that, therefore, this strategy was probably a feature of his general writing style, regardless of the language being used.

6.3.5. Of writers and writing: an approach to cross-cultural communication

At one point in our conversation, Paulo César commented that the language he happened to be using (English or Portuguese) had an effect on how objective he was in his presentation of ideas:

PC: When I write a message, I always attempt to contextualize... provide the reader with brief comments about the situation in general and, then, address the main purpose of the communication. (...) M: Do you only do this when you have to write a message in English? Or do you do it as a general procedure? PC: (reflecting) I think that I only do it in messages written in English. Because we have another e-mail system: an internal system that only works within the company. It doesn't have a... (reflecting)... ah... not in Portuguese. In Portuguese, I'm more concise. M: Are you more objective? PC: Yes. If I thought about this aspect, I would say that when I write in Portuguese, or when I have to send a message in Portuguese, I'm really more objective. M: Isn't this way of expressing ideas somehow related to the subject addressed? PC: (promptly) No. (PCRM2:848-876)

The comments above suggest Paulo César's was not aware that his different levels of proficiency in Portuguese and English led him to produce texts differently, either in terms of conciseness or of objectivity. Because he was determined to be clear in content
presentation, and because he was less proficient in the foreign language, he ended up being more prolix in English and producing more dense and informative texts which tended to be characterized by longer sentences.

Sentence length constituted a topic that I addressed in one of our meetings and that interested Paulo César considerably. He had never thought about e-mail messages from this point of view, but he had observed that Brazilians tended to compose longer sentences in English (PCRM2:946-950). However, in examining the samples he provided, we both noticed that, if this feature represented an interlanguage phenomenon displayed by Brazilian writers, it could also be seen in some of the electronic texts written by native speakers. To support this argument, we discussed one specific message, which I transcribe below:

The error reported below was probably due to the fact that you are running the system on the development catalog and disconnect can occur because of other work which we are doing here, my apologies for this, we will try to keep the disconnects to a minimum. You should not experience (m)any disconnects when the system is moved to production.

The status with the multi-user is proceeding slowly, due to other work commitments I am unable to spend as much time as is necessary to complete the development. However, I will continue to work on it and as there is only one small problem left to be resolved I think that when I get the opportunity I will begin anyway to move it to production. I will keep you informed of my progress.

I would like to remind you that I will be leaving [company] on September 30th, someone will be taking over the support of [application] in [city], however, as far as I know this person will only provide support on the generic [application] product and I feel that you should ensure that somehow you provide yourselves with the technical knowledge to support the [application] system within your own organization, this is a difficult time for the Value Added Applications group, their priority is to transition the generic applications from [city] to [city], it is incumbent on you to ensure that the progress which we have made so far on the development of this opportunity is not damaged. I will give you whatever support that I can in this matter. (pcmsg2.2b)

The message above -- particularly its last paragraph -- impacted on Paulo César's concerns about the length of his sentences ("Sometimes, I notice that my sentences are actually quite long," PCRM2:929-930), and on his belief that his punctuation in English was weak ("I don't know how to punctuate... really, I don't know how to do it!," PCRM2:926-927). Paulo César admitted that he did not pay much attention to these formal features of
texts when he was reading messages. In justifying this attitude, he said humorously that either he had got used to the style of his correspondents, or he did not notice it because he wrote in the same kind of way (PCRM3:797-804).

Paulo César's reflections on native and non-native speakers' use of language led him to comment on the writing styles of some of his international correspondents. He noticed that German writers were particularly concise: salutations were included in the body of the message, paragraphs were written in a close sequence (i.e., without space lines between them), and the content tended to be expressed in quite a condensed way (PCRM3:81-125). American co-workers also presented their content objectively (PCRM2:348-349) and, because they tended to individualize their opinions by using the first person singular pronoun, Paulo César perceived them as more "self-centred" (PCRM2:362-363, 502-503). Their messages, however, invariably included an opening salutation and, "at least, a 'regards' in the end" (PCRM3:135). As for the correspondence exchanged with South American counterparts, he commented that Argentinians were "concise" (PCFM:837) and that the requests from Chile were particularly "cordial" and "polite" (PCRM3:198-204). The messages composed by Japanese professionals were similar in style to those of their Brazilian counterparts: they also included many details (PCRM3:178-182) and tended to employ the first person plural pronoun (PCRM2:362). Finally, Paulo César pointed out that messages from France were also detailed, but they were more "objective" than the ones from Japan (PCRM3:188-189).

The cross-cultural insights presented above and the emerging understanding of similarities and differences among interlocutors of various nationalities constituted one relevant reflective turn taken by Paulo César, as he commented:

PC: You've called my attention to features of the messages that I receive. Honestly, I've never thought about French people, for instance, about how they write. However, your work really... the meetings we had... ah... firstly, they made me pay more attention to the messages that I receive, right? And everything here is true [referring to the summary of our discussions that I gave to him in our last meeting]... everything that you wrote here is true, right? The way through which different people with whom I interact through e-mail... the way they convey information, or format their messages, right? And... I don't know... I particularly think that these observations may generate something that can help me somehow... in the
future. Your work... the results of your work -- I believe in that -- maybe you can come up with a methodology or with something that may help people like me -- who use this kind of tool -- to be more productive in what they do.

M: After these five meetings, six meetings today, do you feel that you have been deserving more attention to your messages? Is this the immediate result you could point out?

PC: Yes, because of the issues we've discussed, right?

M: Do you believe that they can result in more efficiency in terms of your way of communicating?

PC: Maybe... (reflecting)... yes... maybe. Also the punctuation... I've been trying to write shorter sentences...

M: But it was not a criticism that...

PC: (interrupting me) No. no. But I've really noticed that... by talking to you, I've noticed that actually... on that day, discussing that message, I noticed that shorter sentences made it actually easier to understand the message.

M: Well, this is a feature that, as I told you, I've been also working on to improve in my own writing in English.

PC: Right.

M: So, in this sense, I can relate to your difficulty: we're on the same boat!

PC: Yes... that's true! (PCFM:1077-1123)

The excerpt above shows that, by comparing his interlocutors' writing styles and making some generalizations according to their nationalities, Paulo César was able to focus on his own writing and perceive areas which he needed to improve (such as punctuation and sentence length). I perceived that the cross-cultural comments that he made, by making him think about writers and writing, and distinguish between various communicative conventions, led to an increase in his general language awareness. Encouraged in this way, he was able to progress from the mere observation of differences in style to a more conscious aim of changing and overcoming what he felt to be areas of his foreign language weakness. This process of increasing awareness, which began with simple perception ("I don't know how to punctuate," PCRM2:926) and progressed to the active development of new learning strategies ("I've been trying to write shorter sentences," PCFM:1106-1107), helped him to see the point of my research and convinced him that other professionals could benefit from its results and reach a higher level of linguistic performance. This comment alerted me to the fact that a deeper investigation into features of cross-cultural communication and their impact on language awareness might constitute an interesting area for further research on CMC in business settings.
In summary, my conversations with Paulo César were characterized by various reflective turns which revealed his encounter with aspects of his tacit performance in the workplace. By reflecting upon the various issues discussed throughout our meetings, Paulo César concluded that he could gain useful insights into his current professional practices, as well as understanding how they had evolved over time. He realized that his involvement in activities that required him to deal quickly with large quantities of information and to interact with international colleagues on a daily basis provided a unique opportunity to develop his foreign language skills (PCRM4:383-396). As a result, his English had gradually become "more elegant" and "richer" in terms of vocabulary selection and use (PCRM4:400-412). I believe that Paulo César’s insights into his own foreign language development constituted one of the most important reflective turns he took throughout the process of reflecting upon his CMC routines.

6.4. Reflecting with Juciane
I think that one aspect is very clear to me now: how much I attempt to convey and actually reveal about myself in the messages I write.

(JUCFM:1523-1525)

Talking to Juciane helped me to get in touch with her passionate way of recalling and reporting experiences, and with her sensitive approach to the interpretation of the electronic correspondence she was exposed to at work. Throughout our meetings, I could sense that her involvement with computers and with electronic communication systems was not only a matter of professional commitment; in addition, she seemed to be personally engaged and particularly interested in their communicative potential. For this reason, our conversations were focused, on the one hand, on features of her practice and on the way she engaged with the overall electronic correspondence enacted by her corporation. On the other hand, they were spiced by with her interesting comments on how she envisioned her interlocutors, as well as on how she positioned herself in the messages she composed.

6.4.1. Understanding the nature of electronic communication
Juciane's perception of electronic communication was characterized by a dual
perspective. Firstly, as a user, she conceived of it as an "ideal" way to overcome both distances and "time zones" (JUCII:157-166), and to engage faraway professionals in an "informal and open" process of communication (JUCII:613), which followed no pre-established patterns (JUCRM2/3:731-733). Secondly, as an e-mail sales representative, she saw that its ability to speed up "work-related procedures" (JUCRM2/3:971) and "decision-making processes" (JUCRM2/3:980), to reduce the "quantity of paper" (JUC RM2/3:997), to open up *new horizons for communication* (JUCRM2/3:1116), and to offer significant "cost" advantages (JUCRM2/3:1060-1061) were the main arguments that caused customers to join in an electronic communication network. Based on a combination of these two perspectives, Juciane summarized her interpretation of CMC as a process which involved "people on the extremities, exchanging open information" (JUC RM1:700-701).

6.4.2. The origins of an ethos self-portrayal mode of writing

Juciane became particularly enthusiastic when she addressed the characteristics of e-mail and talked about its apparently obvious advantages. For me, her reaction of promptly pointing out a number of reasons for adopting CMC systems seemed to be coherent with her job of as a sales representative who was accustomed to convincing potential buyers of the inherent qualities of the products she handled. Considering the nature of her job, I could understand her initial hesitation in commenting on the possible disadvantages of e-mail. My curiosity in this respect certainly challenged her conventional arguments and led her to think about the tool from a different point of view. Juciane, however, welcomed my invitation to reflection and actually surprised me with a long and interesting explanation:

J: It's not because I'm proud of the product but... I can't see the electronic mail as a disadvantage... because it is quite useful to develop some work-related processes. As I told you, you have a tool available for each kind of communication. So, disadvantages... perhaps... it would be wonderful if everybody could talk to everybody. Perhaps we could understand people better and grasp their individual perceptions. I think that it would render communication a more personal connotation, a more human connotation! I mean, e-mail ends up blocking this side, just like any other tool, such as fax, telephone. I think that people's expression, the way they speak, the way they position themselves in a subject, the attention they
give it, these are features that you can’t convey through e-mail, even if try to do it.
M: And does it happen regardless of the language?
J: Regardless of the language.
M: You mean that a personal contact is missing, for instance... facial expressions...
J: Yes.
M: ... intonation... these kinds of features?
J: Exactly... exactly... exactly, I can imagine a specific co-worker receiving my message and... (simulating his reaction) "What?! She did it again!" (laughs) And my reaction to his message: "He’s fighting with me again" And... and... people from Japan, right? I say: "Gosh, this is great! He’s replied to me! He’s helping me! It’s great!" So, all these human features that you can never convey through a machine, regardless of the tool you use. The personal aspects that compel people to make decisions, right?... that make people react to situations... this is something that you simply can’t convey, right? (...) But I don’t interpret it as a disadvantage. I’d refer to it as a “peculiarity” I mean, it’s not possible to convey these human features the way we’d like to, right? It’s very, very difficult. So, we have to cope with this fact, by taking advantage of the tools that make communication possible, that speed it up. But we always miss something.... part of these human aspects. So, considering such human aspects.... this is — quotation — “the disadvantage” I could point out. However, if you consider its speed, its purpose, its technical features, it’s difficult to point out something and say: "Look, you’ll have problems in this area!” Maybe some resistance to certain changes within the company: a person, for instance, who is used to taking a piece of paper and writing, or to sending a fax, or to giving a call, and who has never touched a computer... so there’s a natural resistance to change to a new technology. And to change to e-mail implies a cultural change... a change in the way of communicating. (...) Under such circumstances, I think that resistance could constitute a drawback that prevents people from taking advantage of the tool. But, considering the everyday communication, feelings are the only thing that you can’t convey. Although part of them goes together with your message anyway...
M: Well, you have some alternatives, right? The telephone, for instance.
J: Exactly. But even though, you can simulate much easier. I mean, it’s very, very, very difficult for me, for instance, to feel something and think... and do something different. It’s almost impossible! I see myself as an expressive person. I’m too passionate! And these things affect me, right? But some people can always simulate their feelings naturally, even in person, right? And through the equipment... through an e-mail message or a fax... you can hide your feelings, right? (...) Even though you use more question marks, exclamation marks... you’ll never substitute for the individual’s physical presence. I believe that it’s a characteristic. I’m not sure about saying that it’s a disadvantage, right? But... that’s it! (JUCFM: 1319-1363, 1373-1399, 1427-1448, 1482-1490)

In the extract above, by regretting the lack of immediate face-to-face contact, Juciane mentions a constraint, a "peculiarity," which emerged not only from computerized
interactions but also from any sort of mediated communication. She was aware that her idealized vision of having professionals in person sharing their feelings and reactions would be actually inconceivable in an organization that had many international connections. For this reason, she believed that taking advantage of new technologies involved using compensatory mechanisms that would fulfill professional communication needs while speeding up the exchange of work-related knowledge or information. In her opinion, resisting or even refusing the use of e-mail and of the cultural changes that it implied would be equivalent to denying the development of a new phase of information technology.

Juciane's comments, therefore, disclosed her perception of certain constraints that characterized the electronic tool and illustrated her concern about the roles performed by human beings within this form of text-based communication. As a self-described "passionate" person (JUCFM:1439-1444), she seemed to be particularly concerned about the possibility of simulating or hiding genuine feelings or reactions through the use of the electronic medium. By mentioning this concern, she led me to reflect upon modes of textual self-representation and realize that she felt trapped by the prevailing conventions which, by conflicting with her own personality, impacted on her performance as an e-mail user. My interpretation of her remarks led me to reflect on the difference between two forms of self-portrayal in written discourse -- ethos and persona\(^2\) -- which emerged from her wish to give voice to herself in her writings, in contrast to some of her interlocutors who, according to her, seemed to disguise their true feelings. By considering the correspondence she was engaged in, I concluded that her messages were explicitly characterized by the ethos mode of self-representation, identified by the frequent use of capital letters and exclamation marks, and by the recurrent use of expressions of gratitude or other acknowledgements, as mentioned in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7.3).

Nevertheless, Juciane's comments indicated that, although she wanted to adopt

\(^2\) As distinguished by Cherry (1988), "ethos is one of three major 'pisteis', or means of persuasion, treated by Aristotle in the Rhetoric. It refers to the need for rhatos to portray themselves in their speeches as having a good moral character, 'practical wisdom', and a concern for the audience in order to achieve credibility and thereby persuasion. Persona, on the other hand, has its origins in Roman drama and has been employed in literary critical theory to refer to an intentional 'mask' a writer adopts in the written text" (p.259). As interpreted by Ivanic (1994:10), ethos conforms to "personal qualities"; whereas persona represents "social role."
an *ethos* self-portrayal mode of writing and although she had an empathetic consideration for her audience, it was not her aim to ingratiate herself with co-workers in the hope that they would support her in difficult situations. Rather, her aim was to maintain a friendly professional relationship (JUCRM2/3:335-337), by providing her colleagues with something more significant than, as she said, a mere "piece of paper" (JUCRM2/3:279-289) or, as I expressed it, a screen full of words. She realized that this was a feature that individualized her messages, since it was not a regular practice on the part of her colleagues:

J: Well, it's not something that I would classify as a pattern. Right? Because I believe that, even within our group, here, in this branch of the company, I believe that I am the one who does it more often. Or... perhaps, the only one! Right? But... ah... I see it as a characteristic of mine. In general, people don't do it. (JUCRM2/3:314-322)

Juciane's *ethos* mode of self-portrayal constituted, therefore, a distinctive feature of her writing which she deliberately attempted to preserve, whatever the language used for communication, and in spite of the prevailing *persona* mode of self-representation that was evident within her corporation. By making her feelings and her consideration for her colleagues explicit, Juciane not only strengthened her professional connections (even from a distance), but also counteracted the effects of focusing communication mainly on written texts. Moreover, Juciane noticed that by reacting spontaneously and by aiming at increasing the level of rapport among her correspondents, the formality which usually characterized the initial exchange of messages was quite noticeably reduced during the course of the interaction (JUCRMII:653-657; JUCFM:539-542).

**6.4.3. Putting herself in her interlocutors' shoes**

It was clear to me that Juciane's *ethos* mode of self-representation emerged from her way of envisioning interpersonal communication through computers. However, I realized that it was also rooted in her determination to convey information clearly (JUCII: 224-225) and in her decision not to be "imperative" in her writings (JUCII:640-642, JUCRM3/4:253-254). These two prominent concerns had, in their turn, a subjective origin (Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3), for Juciane did not appreciate being bossed around, and she did not enjoy performing activities without knowing their explicit purposes (JUCRM1:318-
Such concerns encouraged her invariably to contextualize her messages (JUCFM:749-755), to explain the reasons for her requests (JUCRM1:318-325,355-356, 363-366), to acknowledge any assistance received (JUCRM1:324-325), and to try to put herself in her colleagues' shoes in order to anticipate how the message would be received and interpreted by them (JUCRM3/4:1230-1231). In my view, this latter feature of her writing style indicated the peculiar way through which she perceived and performed her role as a message generator.

Because she was interacting through a predominantly written medium of communication, Juciane was sensitive to the need for expressing content clearly, so as to avoid any possible ambiguities ("I believe that when you convey information, the responsibility for being as clear as possible is yours!", JUCRM3/4:339-340). In my opinion, her perception of the possibility of divergence between the sender's intention and the receiver's interpretation led her to an almost obsessive commitment to her role as a writer and to a persistent preoccupation with accurate expression. By overemphasizing her responsibility as a writer, Juciane tended to reduce the responsibility of her readers, particularly in cases where a breakdown in communication actually occurred. In these cases, she tended to react by assuming full responsibility for the misunderstanding, and by apologizing for not conveying her ideas accurately. In reflecting upon this somewhat unusual habit, Juciane admitted that it was based on something in her personality:

J: The concern about doing... doing this way, taking responsibility to minimize the consequences and attempt to reach the results... this is a characteristic of mine! And, sometimes, I think that it's a little bit exaggerated! (JUCRM3/4:386-390)

This characteristic, however, was manifested differently, according to the language being used:

J: I think that it happens in English more often. Because I may have more doubts about having written properly, right?... about having used the right words or right expressions. So, I think that I put the blame on me perhaps because I'm not sure about having used the language properly. If I knew I was absolutely right, perhaps I would not do the same. But, in general, when I ask something and the person gives me a confused answer, I automatically assume responsibility for the misunderstanding: "Ah, I'm sorry. I think I haven't expressed myself properly!" But in Portuguese... I think that in Portuguese... well, it's my language. And I believe that the
person on the other extremity would have better conditions to understand me — or, at least, to ask me. Therefore, I think that when I write in Portuguese, I don't behave like that.

M: So, to some extent, do you think that the language impacts on this procedure of yours?
J: Oh, yes.
M: And does it make you feel more insecure and think: "Have I been clear enough?"

The above comments suggest that Juciane's technique for dealing with breakdowns in communication might be more directly related to her level of language proficiency. This argument is supported by four remarks that Juciane made either about her co-workers or about herself. First, she stated that her international colleagues were hardly ever responsible for their mutual comprehension problems ("No! No. This is quite difficult to happen," JUCRM2/3:499). Second, she perceived American professionals as being invariably assertive ("They react by saying: "Do it this way!" or "Do it that way!", JUCRM2/3:531-532), and "more objective because, obviously, they are using their own language," JUCFM:1107-1108). Third, she was aware of some personal problems in using English ("I'm not sure about using the language properly. If I knew I was absolutely right, perhaps I would not do the same," JUCRM2/3:601-605). Finally, she emphasized that her response to communication problems in Portuguese was primarily focused on a possible lack of information rather than on the comprehension process itself ("In Portuguese, I wouldn't mention comprehension, right?", JUCRM2/3:651). These comments led me to believe that Juciane felt insecure about expressing herself in a foreign language, and that this was the main reason both for her concern with accuracy, and her tendency to assume responsibility for any misunderstandings that might occur.

Juciane's consideration of the way she dealt with communication mismatches also led her to tackle issues concerning the overall nature of her electronic interactions with colleagues in other countries. According to her, most differences in writing style were due not to cultural background (JUCRM2/3:372-374), but rather to individual personality ("According to my experience, to the conditions I have to analyze it, I would say it's more personal, individual," JUCRM2/3:372-374). At the same time, she did offer some
generalizations about the correspondence generated by American professionals -- her most customary e-mail correspondents.

Juciane noticed that, in contrast to Brazilians -- who invariably provided many details in longer texts (JUCRM2/3:397-399) -- the American approach to information was, in general, straightforward and quite succinct. She had noticed that the terseness of the American professional style sometimes created doubts among Brazilian readers and, consequently, forced them to intensify the exchange of messages in order to reach a more explicit understanding (JUCRM2/3:405-415). In these situations, what might appear as a clearly expressed content from the native speaker's point of view might not be perceived as such by foreign recipients. By the same token, information conveyed in English by Brazilian senders could be interpreted as too detailed and verbose by native speakers. In addressing the issue of misinterpretation caused by different levels of explicitness, Juciane reiterated her belief that the writer's primary aim should be one of providing the reader with clear information in balanced texts, relative degrees of terseness or prolixity being a secondary consideration.

6.4.4. "What I know about the language is what I am going to use anyway!"

Throughout our conversations, Juciane made it clear that explicitness, rather than language accuracy, was her main concern when she composed messages in English (JUCFM:934-935). According to her, the fact of interacting with native speakers, although not restricting her communicative performance (JUCRM1:487-488), required a level of attention to content presentation -- to explicitness -- over and above what was required when she was writing in English to non-native speakers:

J: Well... it is not a preoccupation because it doesn't help me, right? What I know about the language is what I'm going to use anyway. The fact of having an American or English recipient won't affect me or make me change in this sense. But, sometimes, I try to use... ah... something more -- quotation -- "sophisticated," right? A phrasal verb... something that I know that the receiver will understand, and that is relevant to that context. And, sometimes, I don't do the same to write a message to Latin America, for instance.

M: You mean, writing to a native speaker impacts on you in the sense of having a different attention somehow.
J: Yes... but it's not... it's not an extremely different process. I'm not going to waste time to analyze: "Oh, an English is going to read it. So, I'm going to take care: I'm not going to write this and that" You know, my concern about writing correctly conforms to my concern about how to convey that idea, how to convey that message.

M: Once again, your concern is about explicitness.

J: Yes, exactly. (...) I think that explicitness is my concern. I don't... I can't see it in the sense of... we talked a lot about it... "Ah, just because they are American or they are English, or because they are native speakers and know the language... ah, poor me! I won't be able to write at their level." Because if I thought this way, I wouldn't be able to write a word! And I would say: "Thr! I'm not going to send it because he won't understand it!"

M: That's why you've said that, although it constitutes a kind of -- quotation -- "concern"...

J: (interrupting) Exactly... quotation -- "concern"...

M: ... it doesn't block your writing, right?

J: No... no...

M: However, something changes...

J: Yes, it does.

M: And it's your concern about explicitness, right?

J: It changes... it changes...

M: (joking) Well, it's "explicit" now!

J: Well, this is exactly my concern! (JUCFM:911-937,980-1005)

The excerpt above illustrates an interesting aspect of Juciane's foreign language awareness: rather than feeling intimidated by the native speakers' level of language expertise or aiming to write accurately "at their level," she was primarily concerned with composing clear texts and with an explicit presentation of content. The strategy shows that, as a non-native speaker, she was aware of the limits of her foreign language competence but at the same time she was satisfied that, within its limits, she was able to convey her ideas in an unambiguous way. In my opinion, her willingness to experiment with "sophisticated" structures -- she gave the example of phrasal verbs -- showed that her ultimate aim was to develop her foreign language skills, by taking advantage of her exposure to interactions in English, as well as learning from the professional situations she experienced at work.

6.4.5. Recalling lived experiences, conceiving of foreign language growth

By reflecting upon her linguistic performance, Juciane was able to see that her proficiency had clearly evolved over time ("My English has improved!", JUCRM2/3:883).
Over the years, her increasing involvement in activities that required her to communicate in the foreign language made her overcome her initial difficulties and brought her to accept communication in English as a natural part of her duties at work:

J: In the beginning, I used to say: "Oh! I have to reply in English! I have to say this and that!" It was a little bit complicated because I didn't have a lot of involvement with the foreign language. And then, by doing it on an everyday basis, I can now sit there and write a message easily. I can write more easily nowadays. I mean, it takes me less time to structure a message, to express some ideas, to organize information. It takes me less time... it has become easier. (...) I think that my concern about making mistakes was really big in the beginning - just like in any life situation, right? In the beginning, you are afraid of making mistakes. Then, you get used to it, you get used to your own mistakes, right? So, nowadays, I don't have that preoccupation with... "Oh! They will kill me if I write something wrong!" I don't have such a concern anymore because... let's say... in average, I can write, convey my ideas in such a way that... well, there are mistakes, of course -- sometimes, serious mistakes, right? But, considering the results I have been achieving, the way people have been replying, communication has been easier. I think that the more you see good the results, the more you get relaxed. (JUCRM2/3:887-897, 928-946)

As illustrated above, Juciane's perception of her foreign language development included the acceptance of her own mistakes, as well as the recognition of her everyday practice at work as a major influence in encouraging greater fluency. It seemed to me that, by learning how to deal with her own limitations in the foreign language, and by paying special attention to the e-mail messages conveyed by native speakers, she had been tacitly transforming her routine activities into an "educational experience" (Dewey, 1938a). As shown by the extract below, Juciane confirmed this impression in our final meeting, when I discussed with her my initial conclusions about her comments and reflections:

M: It seems to me that you pay more attention to certain structures conveyed by native speakers as a way of learning them and, then, being able to use them, right?
J: Yes. Yes.
M: So, by being in touch with these messages, you learn new structures or get new information about the language.
J: Oh, yes. For sure!
M: Then, you tend to consider native speakers' messages as a kind of "examples" in linguistic terms, right?
J: Yes.
M: They are useful to learn certain peculiarities of the language, right?
J: Yes.
M: To learn some expressions, more difficult expressions, right?
J: Yes, that's true... that's true. We always end up incorporating some things, even without perceiving it consciously. (JUCFM:1009-1027)

It was interesting to see how the development of Juciane's professional self-confidence found an echo in her writing in English. This became evident to me when she recalled features of her former e-mail messages and compared them with her current correspondence in the foreign language. She pointed out that in the beginning she preferred the first person plural pronoun (we), which she tended to use indiscriminately, and not only in those contexts when an activity had been jointly performed ("I used 'we' in every circumstance... I've started to generalize it," JUCRM2/3:812-815). She could not say exactly when and why this habit had changed (JUCRM2/3:825-826), but she did notice that her present messages were much more focused on the first person singular pronoun ("When I am the person who is asking, I use 'I';" JUCRM2/3:871-872). In my opinion, this shift in pronoun use emerged spontaneously from her increased professional self-confidence, as a result of which she stopped hiding behind the ambiguous use of we, and instead began to assume full responsibility for her own opinions and requests. It is possible, furthermore, that this general increase in self-confidence also provided the basis for her current inclination to risk exposing herself and her feelings in her electronic messages.

6.3.6. Leaving her own world and conceiving of it as an outsider

Juciane's response to our reflections upon tacit aspects of her practice was quite impressive. I could sense her increasing enthusiasm while she was involved in exploring her ethos mode of writing and its motivation; in explaining her consideration for her co-workers; in revealing her determination to present information in an explicit and contextualized way; in asserting her concern about not being too demanding; and, particularly, in describing how she conceived of her role as a writer. Her perception of herself as being remarkably present in her professional correspondence seemed to be one of the most important insights she derived from our discussions:
J: I would like to emphasize two aspects. Firstly, I think that, many times, it's important to leave our own world, our daily routine and participate in other activities, or in activities related to our area... something that I would never find easily or that I would never be involved in -- just like this process we went through. So, I think that... to realize many interesting things, right?... to contribute somehow. So, I think that these are important aspects. Secondly, I think that to stop and reflect upon how... I think that one aspect is very clear to me now: how much I attempt to convey and actually reveal about myself in the messages I write. Perhaps I wouldn't... I felt it as something that... let's say, I get up in the morning, walk, come to work... I write messages and... everything is rather...

M: Everything is part of your routine.

J: Exactly. These things are included in my routine and perhaps I would never stop to look at them as if I were out of them, right? I would never stop to consider how I actually perform my routine. So, I think that in terms of reflection, it was quite interesting to perceive how much I convey about what I really am, about the changes I've been going through, about my way of writing. I thought it was... It was great! Sometimes, things that are extremely simple but... "You do these things every day! How come you have never realized them?!" But I have never realized them!

M: Well, this is the point: the more you do them, the less you pay attention to them.

J: Yes... so, the fact of stopping and looking at all of those things was really interesting. I think that these two aspects: working on a different subject and being able to contribute, as well as reflecting upon how I write, how I structure messages, how I do it... to stop and analyze each topic. I think it was... it was really great! (JUCFM:1509-1549)

Clearly, Juciane felt that she had gained some valuable insights not only about her professional practice, but also about herself. In other words, by stepping out of her own world and contemplating her professional landscape as if she were temporarily detached from it, she was able to gain a new perspective on her work, and to reflect upon herself within the context of her computerized correspondence.

6.5. Reflecting with Basílio

You only realize that you've got older when you see a ten-year-old picture, right? Then, you say: "Gosh, is that me?!" Therefore, I felt myself in this position, contemplating a ten-year-old picture and saying: "Oh, God, what has changed? The nose has become a little bit bigger!" -- or whatever change you can realize when you observe an older picture. So, I think that it was an interesting aspect; the reflection was very... very natural, a very natural reflective process.

(BASFM:1535-1545)

Talking to Basílio and vicariously visiting his workplace was a unique experience.
I was impressed by Basílio's readiness to think carefully about every issue, to support his arguments with illustrations drawn from his personal experience, and to manage the presentation of private and generalized viewpoints. Throughout our conversations, I could sense that he was particularly concerned about distinguishing between the procedures that had actually been created by the use of e-mail and those which had existed before and which had simply been speeded up by this new technology. His articulate accounts and his ready cooperation in the reflective process certainly helped me to put CMC practices into perspective and to increase my understanding of what they were contributing to the realm of professional interaction.

6.5.1. Understanding the nature of electronic communication

Basilio perceived of e-mail as a "very efficient mechanism" for communication (BASII:832-833,1272), through which "serious problems" could be easily resolved, regardless of the distance or time zone differences that might keep co-workers apart (BASII:833-839). In his opinion, by connecting all members of the corporate community, the computerized network constituted a "fundamental" tool which contributed to integration (BASRM3:354-371), and which provided all professionals -- "from the president to the lowest hierarchical level" (BASRM3:368-369) -- with equal access to information. This being the case, denying its use meant being isolated from an intense and "dynamic" (BASRM3:167) interactive process which primarily involved the company's personnel, but which also extended to its suppliers, distributors, sales representatives, and customers (BASII:731-733, BASFM:1004-1006). As Basílio emphasized, dealing with e-mail was one of the basic tasks to be learned by new employees, and represented an activity without which it was impossible to survive within his organization (BASRM1:77-79).

Apart from a tacit commitment to read and reply to every message (BASRM2:1261-1264), Basílio could not identify any other regular procedure that could characterize the exchange of electronic messages (BASRM2:1390-1393). He perceived that the correspondence, by lacking institutional regulations regarding format or even types of texts to be conveyed, implied no limitation of use and no content restrictions (BASII:1096-1204). As he commented: "You'll find everything! Everything that you want, you will find here,
right?" (BASRM1:61-62). By saying that, however, he realized that his statements could lead to an erroneous interpretation. For this reason, he explained that, since e-mail represented a "working tool" that supported "work-related themes exclusively," it should not be used for private matters (BASRM3:1310-1315) or announcements ("This is not an advertisement list or a general announce list", BASII:1245-1246). Nevertheless, he assured that there was a place for the inclusion of personal references designed to nurture interpersonal communication, to increase the level of rapport among co-workers, and to involve people in a more friendly professional relationship:

B: Actually, e-mail is an effective medium of communication among professionals. Therefore, you have to use it... ah... sometimes, as a way of knowing the person you are interacting to. (BASII:1213-1216)

Considering Basílio's remarks, I perceived that he did not intend to suggest that in his company the expression of personal feelings was somehow restricted by institutional regulations. On the contrary, he commented that capital letters, exclamation marks and ellipsis points were frequently used to emphasize personal interpretations of the topics addressed (BASFM:570-576). According to him, the spontaneous expression of personal feelings depended on each professional and, for this reason, various possibilities could be explored: "It is personal! It is really personal! Each one can express his/her feelings the way s/he thinks it is more convenient" (BASRM2:531-532). In recalling the messages he composed and rethinking them from this perspective, Basílio initially claimed that "nothing" affected him or generated an impulsive reaction (BASRM3:1390-1401,1474-1475). However, even while maintaining a predominantly neutral attitude, he explained that, when the situation required, he expressed feelings indirectly by inserting a subtly "sarcasric" comment (BASRM3:1564-1568) whose meaning was invariably understood by his interlocutors. It seemed to me that Basílio's strategy was designed to meet the needs of a specific situation rather than indicating a deliberate intention to always conceal his thoughts. Nevertheless, his comments reminded me of Juciane's perception that texts conveyed through the electronic medium could be more easily manipulated to disguise genuine emotions. Her ideas, combined with Basílio's strategic use of sarcasm, suggested
that individual forms of voicing or disguising personal feelings through e-mail and their impact on work-related processes might constitute an interesting topic for research.

6.5.2. Interpreting human-machine interface issues

Basilio perceived that agility represented the most remarkable attribute of the electronic tool, and the one that had impressed him the most. The comments he made as well as his speculation about other professionals' possible interpretations -- made me realize that he was genuinely captivated by the "fantastic" ability of e-mail to reach his co-workers easily, and to enable him to receive their replies almost immediately:

B: Throughout all of these years that I have been using this tool, the aspect that has impressed me the most is, undoubtedly, its agility, its quickness. To me, this is its fundamental feature. (...) To me, it doesn't matter the form, or the content, or whatever I have written. The feature that really impresses me is the agility, the fact of knowing that I can send a message to a guy in the United States and five minutes later, I can receive his reply!
M: But even the organization of contents is affected by agility, isn't it?
B: Yes... it... agility ends up impacting on contents organization, too. However, the central issue is agility! And the speed with which you can solve the situations. I can't see another... another thing that could be more important than that. And I think that, if this is the most relevant feature, everything ends up being shaped by it. (...) There are many things that have called my attention throughout these years, but none of them has ever called my attention more than this agility to solve problems. (...) Therefore, this is... this is what actually impresses me, you know.
M: Is this the most important feature?
B: To me! To me! (...) Perhaps, if you interviewed one hundred people...
M: I'd probably find some different opinions.
B: ... they would have different opinions. However, I really... I think that it's fantastic!
M: This is, in fact, the core issue for you.
B: I don't know if it's because I like to solve things this way... then, it's something that I like to use because I know I'll get a solution.
M: It conforms to your personal way of dealing with job activities, perhaps.
B: Yes... But, maybe other people would think about... what? About the... about the... about contents? No, no... I don't know! I can't think of any other aspect! (...) Because what happens is that several messages which were usually sent through other media, changed to e-mail in order to provide people with a quicker access to information, and to avoid those "famous" information distortions across the various levels of the organization. Therefore, I have evidences that... let's say, I have witnessed situations that lead me to believe that people, in general, also perceive e-mail as a form of speeding up processes. And not as a mere word processor that, by pressing a button, will transmit a message without requiring them to use the internal mail system, to make a hard copy, or
whatever.
M: So it's not only the process of writing a message...
B: Yes...
M: ... but also of sending it, and reaching the receiver as soon as possible.
B: ... of sending it quickly. Because you could think: is the fact of not having a secretary to compose your messages an advantage? Maybe. Is the fact of not having a hard copy and not using the internal mail an advantage? Maybe. How long would it take you to have your message received in the United States? Ah... maybe people perceive all of these facts as advantages. I don't think of them as a result of agility. I'm trying to think of any other feature that would make more sense to me but I... I can't think of anything else. (BASFM:1047-1049, 1053-1069, 1099-1104, 1117-1122, 1132-1147, 1160-1192)

The extract above indicates that Basílio's perception of agility as the most striking quality of CMC was based on its ability to facilitate the writing process, to shorten distances, and to disseminate information across the company safely and rapidly. According to him, e-mail agility would meet the needs of large corporations which, without the help of this technology would look like "drowsy elephants, walking slowly until finding their beds" (BASFM:1277-1281). Apart from that, Basílio's emphasis on e-mail agility was also founded on his intrinsic empathy with electronic systems whose inherent ability to speed up office routines coincided with the rhythm of his own work habits. By mentioning such a personal connection, Basílio drew attention to a relevant aspect of the ergonomic relationship that associated him, as a professional, with the tool he used to perform his duties at work.

Human-machine interface issues was a topic to which Basílio returned many times throughout our conversations. In taking some of the experiences lived at work into account, Basílio perceived that the level of rapport some colleagues established with computers might not only affect their way of dealing with the machines themselves, but might also interfere with their ability or willingness to handle electronic communication systems. He noted that the reluctance of professionals to participate in the corporate electronic network -- although having noticeably decreased over time (BASFM:1414-1417) -- was a behavior that could still be witnessed and that, sometimes, was justified by quite peculiar excuses. By recollecting situations like these, Basílio illustrated the arguments used by some professionals and emphasized his disagreement with them:
B: There are many people who don’t like e-mail. Have I mentioned that?
M: No, no... you haven’t.
B: So... they don’t like it. And why don’t they like it? First, because they understand that they receive a lot of messages which, in their opinion, they should not be receiving. However, I contest this reason: the problem is not the sender’s, but the receiver’s. Right? Because each receiver should somehow guide his/her correspondents not to do that. Anyway, they don’t like e-mail! Second, some people claim that they don’t have time to access the electronic system. Then, they don’t like e-mail because they don’t have time to log in. I also contest that reason: first of all, because I think that it’s only a matter of managing time; and because they should understand that if e-mail is the mechanism of communication that involves the whole company, and if everybody uses it, they should use it, too.
M: So, it’s not a matter of having time to access e-mail, but accessing e-mail constitutes a job activity that they are expected to do.
B: It’s not someone else’s problem; it’s their problem! Right? If everybody uses it... right? Therefore, I don’t agree with this argument either. Ah... finally, well, we can listen to all sorts of excuses: "Oh, the system is slow today; so, I’m not going to log in" Right? Yes, this is true! So... in general, depending on the way... depending on the individual, s/he can imagine all kinds of problems, right?
M: Do you believe that excuses like those -- excuses that people use to avoid being online -- indicate a kind of aversion to the machine itself and not to the system, to the e-mail system?
B: It can be... it can be everything! (BASFM:1348-1388)

Considering the comments above, it was interesting to observe how a professional who showed a remarkable empathy with computers and computerized communication systems positioned himself against some colleagues who gave all sorts of excuses for their reluctance to use e-mail. Basílio’s comments suggest that dealing with e-mail messages is not simply a matter of technical expertise but actually involves more general skills such as an ability to manage time and to protect oneself from correspondence overload (BASRM4:1516-1522). I concluded that if objections to using e-mail partly emerged, as Basílio pointed out, from the users’ affective reactions to computers and CMC systems themselves, they might also arise from the way professionals regarded the job activities that were mediated by the electronic tool.

Basílio supported this interpretation when he commented that different ways of understanding and performing general office tasks might interfere with the individuals’ perception of the tools they used. He illustrated this opinion by pointing out that, in contrast to the resistance previously discussed, some colleagues regarded their use of computers...
and their participation in the e-mail network as an indication of a more distinguished technological and/or professional status:

B: Another interesting point to mention is that many professionals want to have the trendiest computer on their desks - even if they have no idea at all about what there is in it! So, it's only a matter of status, right? And considering the status they think they've reached... ah... composing a message and letting everybody know that they have done it... "Gosh, I have prepared this message while my secretary is doing... doing what?" Therefore, there's a more... let's say... a more personal connotation through which these people judge certain facts that may not mean that much nowadays. But, in this case, the status they think they have reached is also relevant to them. Their way of working and of dealing with their duties may influence their perception of the tool. (*BASFM:1421-1438*)

Basílio's reflections upon individual responses to the use of computers and of e-mail systems made me consider to what extent distinct ways of perceiving technology and of interacting with or through technological tools might influence the willingness of individuals to accept or reject prevailing e-mail practices -- or even to create new practices. Although an inquiry of this sort is beyond the scope of my present discussion, Basílio's comments suggest that it could provide an interesting topic for further research on CMC practices in business settings.

6.5.3. The context, the foreign language, and the electronic text

In spite of the different perceptions and reactions previously outlined, Basílio emphasized that the agility and efficiency of the electronic medium impacted positively on the communication processes enacted by his company. According to him, by relying on a fast and efficient medium, and by primarily focusing communication on "the information and its contents" (*BASRM3:76*), the frequency of interaction was intensified ("people feel motivated to write more," *BASFM:872-873*), and the level of rapport among professionals increased ("The more you interact with a co-worker, the more familiar s/he becomes," *BASRM1:90-92*). Furthermore, he noticed that communication became more objective ("The aim is to write brief and objective messages," *BASRM3:1912*), more spontaneous ("Nobody is afraid of writing; nobody is worried about writing accurately," *BASII:1272-1278*).
The scene portrayed by Basílio suggested that, within his corporation, CMC practices were performed in quite a relaxed atmosphere in which formal features of writing were not a dominant concern. Nevertheless, although Basílio revealed no particular concern about message composition, his reflections showed that he had in fact developed specific writing strategies depending on the language being used:

B: So, for instance, when I communicate in Spanish, I have a way of writing which is different from when I write in English, and different from when I write in Portuguese. Then, if I write in Portuguese, I usually compose long sentences and know exactly the meaning I want to convey. When I write in English, I usually... well, this is my experience; if you talk to anyone else, maybe this person will have a different experience to report, but I keep on writing, keep on writing. I mean, I write everything I want and, then, I notice that... that I've written a book!

M: Do you notice that you've composed very long sentences?

B: Yes... and in the same paragraph! Then, I go back to the text and start... well, I start to review and improve whatever I have written. In Spanish -- if I want to write in Spanish -- my inclination is to compose short sentences. In Spanish, verb conjugation is much more similar to Portuguese. But some things are completely different, and I have to pay attention to change them. I have more difficulty in Spanish. For this reason, I'd rather write short sentences. This is my way of writing. I've already realized that, right? In English, however, my main concern is about the aspect that you've just mentioned: the length of the sentence.

M: So, are you conscious about the length of your sentences?

B: Yes, I am. Because if you ask anyone to review your text in English, the first concern everybody expresses is about it: "Be careful! Don't write long sentences!" (...) But, on the other hand, if I write in Portuguese to an Argentinian co-worker, I tend to compose short sentences because the difficulty you have to interpret longer texts in a foreign language may be the difficulty this person also has. So... this is an interesting point because, depending on the message and on the recipient, the text just flows! I'm not worried about certain things. However, depending on the message, I pay attention to this aspect.

M: Does it happen spontaneously?

B: Yes, it's natural. I don't mean that I stop to think: "No, I'll write this way to this particular person!" No! It's a natural reaction. It's not conscious all the time: it's not a rule to be followed in every situation. There are certain things that I just do. That's it! However, this is an aspect that I tend to take into consideration.

M: Do you think that it's a kind of strategy, a kind of communication strategy, that you use to make yourself understood, and to facilitate the recipient's comprehension as well?

B: Yes... (reflecting better)... maybe both... because, considering the Spanish language... it's a difficulty of mine.
M: Maybe it's a strategy that you use to express yourself, to make yourself understood.
B: Yes. Yes. (BASRM3:681-769)

The excerpt above shows how Basilio dealt with his distinct levels of language proficiency in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, in order to compose his messages and make their contents explicit. I found it interesting to notice how he manipulated the length of his sentences in order to adjust them to the characteristics of the language (as illustrated by his texts in English, contrasted with the ones written in Portuguese), to his co-workers' linguistic difficulties (as shown by his messages addressed in Portuguese to Spanish recipients), or to his own proficiency in Spanish. According to his comments, sentence length constituted a feature of writing to which he was attentive in electronic correspondence received in English (BASRM3:649-654), and an aspect that he constantly monitored in the messages that he composed in that language (BASRM3:663-665). However, considering his experience as an e-mail user, he did not believe that the length of sentences was associated with language proficiency for, as he remarks: "I notice it [the use of long sentences] in many messages, regardless of the professional's competence in English," BASRM3:656-658).

In my opinion, Basilio's arguments involved a kind of contradiction: on the one hand, he asserted that, according to his observation, the length of sentences was not related to the individual's competence in English; on the other hand, based on his own performance, he explained that he tended to compose shorter sentences in Spanish -- a language in which he recognized himself to be less proficient ("I have more difficulty in Spanish. For this reason, I'd rather write short sentences"). A comparison between these statements could suggest, therefore, that the same linguistic phenomenon (sentence length) might have different connotations depending on the language used. Unfortunately, I did not realize the contradictory effect of Basilio's statements during our interview and, for this reason, I was not able to point it out or discuss it with him. Without having encouraged Basilio to articulate his thoughts more clearly about the relationship between sentence length and language proficiency, I cannot even be sure that the argument set out above represents his own opinion. Nevertheless, in spite of this lack of clarity, Basilio's comments
led me to conclude that sentence length constitutes a feature of message composition that
might somehow interfere with explicitness and comprehension.

6.5.4. Recalling some writing strategies
Throughout our conversations, Basílio mentioned some characteristics of his e-mail
writing procedures, such as his preference for using lower-case letters (BASRM2: 693-694), for preserving a space line between paragraphs (BASRM2:717-718), and for
justifying his texts (BASRM2:704-705). In addition to these choices of format, Basílio -- like
Paulo César (Section 6.3.4) -- also mentioned the recycling of previous messages as a
strategy that helped him to compose his own electronic texts. However, if both of them had
adopted the same strategy, they made different use of it: Paulo César restricted his
recycling strategy to texts composed by native speakers of English, whose words he
reproduced or adapted as a means of solving foreign language difficulties. Basílio, on the
other hand, explored some of the messages received as a frame to "recreate" and
"improve" his electronic correspondence:

B: (...) Sometimes, you want to write something that reminds you of a
message previously received. Then you say: "Nobody could write it better
than he did!" And then you go there and... copy the text literally or...
change some things here and there and... that's it!
M: So, this is a strategy that you can also use.
B: Yes... I can also use it. But it's possible only because of the tool.
Because if I had to look for that message in my "paper" files and... and
transcribe what was written in it, I'd rather do it by myself! However, I
think: "Well, I believe that that message..." So, I access my electronic
folder, retrieve that message, select the paragraph and... that's it. It's
much easier than writing. Do you know what I mean? And... there are
some situations... some interesting situations in which you have to reply
to a guy and then, by retrieving his own message, you only change the
beginning of it. Right? You delete the interrogation mark, change the
position of the verb and that's it! It's the same thing! I mean... I'm not
telling you... I'm not exaggerating by providing you with this example.
What I mean is that, in general, you copy more frequently, right? You use
the information that is there more frequently. So... I think that this example
is very interesting. And it doesn't happen only with me. You can retrieve,
for instance... particularly formal reports, the ones that we have to do in
the Auditing Department... you go for the reports sent from anywhere else
in the world, the ones that had already addressed the same theme and then...
M: ... you perceive that they are the similar.
B: ... then, you say: "Gosh! I would change only a few things here!"
Then... you don't copy it literally but you use it... maybe you change it here and there because you think that, by doing that, it would be better, but the structures remain the same.

M: In this case, by using the electronic tool and its devices, it's possible to use the same message again, to recycle it.

B: To recycle it... (reflecting and concluding)... to recreate it! Yes... and you... and you recreate it or you do a... let's say, a "continuous improvement" based on that document that you have received as reference. Therefore, I think that... considering this possibility, you end up learning, too. And, in this sense, you end up... ah... ah... you end up developing your language proficiency. (BASRM4:1417-1482)

The excerpt above illustrates that Basílio's recycling strategy was motivated by a desire to simplify and speed up the message-generation process by referring to similar work-related situations and to the texts produced in them. As he pointed out, the possibility of applying such a strategy emerged from CMC technology which facilitated access to and manipulation of correspondence previously filed. By retrieving documents and rethinking them so that they might be incorporated into new documents, Basílio created an additional opportunity to interact with the texts received and to learn from them. Basílio's comments indicated, therefore, that the utilization of e-mail could transcend its initial role as a working and communication tool, and become a mediator of language learning.

6.5.5. The electronic tool in the work-related environment

The changes that had taken place in the workplace as a result of introducing e-mail was one of the themes addressed in our conversations, and one that particularly stimulated Basílio's reflections. I have already mentioned that for him agility was the essential advantage that CMC systems had brought to his working environment (BAS RM3:1759-1760). However, when I looked at his arguments in more detail, I realized that the concept of agility emerged from a complex set of instrumental, operational, communicative, and professional factors.

By recalling the changes that occurred in the office environment over time, Basílio drew attention to the fact that the use of the electronic tool itself had evolved considerably. According to him, e-mail had evolved from its relatively simple origins and had gradually become an instrument for disseminating information and instructions across the company,
a sort of file where corporate procedures and policies might be available for consultation, and a channel for complex data interchange of all kinds (BASRM4:1056-1062,1222-1224).

In addition, Basílio emphasized that, by providing a more symmetrical access to information and reducing the possibility of content distortion, the utilization of the electronic medium intensified and accelerated the flow of message exchange, motivating professionals to write more frequently and to "keep much information stored" (BASFM:830). Furthermore, the use of letterhead correspondence within the company was practically eliminated (BASRM4:1304-1306) and the quantity of internal paper documents decreased remarkably (BASRM4:1070-1071). As a result, the classic filing concept, as well as the standard filing procedures were tacitly revised and transformed (BASRM3: 2140-2142). Basílio also explained that, because of the importance attached to this channel of communication and to its increasing utilization (BASRM4:1615-1617), e-mail messages became documents in which the electronic address substituted for the sender's signature (BASRM4:1338-1340).

As illustrated above, Basílio seemed to be quite confident in describing the instrumental and operational changes that had occurred in his organization after the introduction of e-mail. However, when he talked about the impact of e-mail on the communication process enacted within his company, he seemed to be confused by his own arguments:

B: In my opinion, considering the exchange of routinized messages, of those simpler messages... ah... ah... e-mail hasn't brought any novelty. The only innovation that I can see is the speed, the agility. As for the formal messages, they remain the same - exactly the same.
M: When you say "formal messages," do you mean the ones that receive the connotation of a document?
B: Yes... of a document.
M: Such as the report, for instance.
B: The Auditing Report, for instance. The report that I write and send through e-mail is the same that I'd write by using a typewriter, or by asking my secretary to type it. Exactly the same thing! Nothing has changed! So, the only difference that I see is the agility. As for the rest, it's the same.
M: Do you think that, in terms of communication, it remains the same?
B: Yes, it does. But, let's consider another aspect which regards the computer itself: due to the speed of information, I'd say that communication has become... ah... ah... a less formal process. (...) The
 speed of the process impacts on your way of writing. And so, you lose
formality. You can even write a sentence in Spanish, another in
Portuguese and another in English; or a sentence with words in various
languages. You’re not worried about... about agreement or whatever.
M: In this sense, communication has become less formal, right?
B: ... and faster...
M: ... and more flexible, in the sense of allowing professionals to express
themselves more spontaneously.
B: I have no doubt about that! I don’t know how you want to deal with this
information; but, in my opinion, the main point is agility. E-mail brought
agility in every sense. And, one example of this agility is represented by
the way you write. (BASRM3:1799-1826,1868-1890)

As shown in the extract above, Basílio initially denied that the communication
process had changed, although he finally admitted that the correspondence had become
less formal in terms of accepting linguistic code switch as a regular practice, and more
flexible with regard to language accuracy. However, he did not see these innovations as
a consequence of using the electronic tool as such, but as a result of the agility it had
brought to correspondence delivery. The intriguing aspect of his argument was his ability
to distinguish between the use of the tool and its inherent attributes and, then, to interpret
the new writing procedures as emerging from its inherent attributes and not from the use
of the tool. In reflecting upon the conclusion of his thoughts, I believe that he was aware
of the inconsistency of his arguments and, then, left me with a responsibility to work on
implications: “I don’t know how you want to deal with this information; but, in my opinion,
the main point is agility” (BASRM3:1886-1887).

Considering the instrumental, operational, and communicative issues presented
so far, Basílio pointed out that the professional repercussions of having a CMC system
available at work were quite significant. He mentioned that e-mail provided professionals
with the possibility of dealing with their own correspondence independently, without
requiring the assistance of secretaries or being restricted to the schedule of the internal
mail delivery (BASRM3:2239-2253). As a result, e-mail had indirectly led to the redefinition
of certain occupations, such as secretaries, who now were able to focus on administrative
support tasks (“She is not a secretary anymore. She is an administrative assistant,”
BASRM3:2330). Furthermore, Basílio emphasized that, due to the frequency of electronic
interactions and to the conscious manipulation of messages, e-mail impacted significantly
on the professionals' decision-making processes:

B: I perceive that people, in general, have disciplined themselves to know exactly which messages they should send and to whom they have to do it. If you participate in a distribution list, for instance, it is quite common to receive questions like that: *You've noticed that we've been sending messages about this topic to you. Are you interested in keeping on receiving them?* And you may reply to it by saying: *Yes* or *No* and... that's it! So, nowadays, we have this mechanism because... some time ago, the quantity of unnecessary messages was quite big. Another important aspect that I can perceive is that, through the exchange of messages, you can actually see empowerment.

M: (interrupting) Whose empowerment? The users' empowerment?
B: ... empowerment in the sense of making decisions. We can see it across the company hierarchical levels: people making decisions without the supervisor's agreement. Because, for instance... I'm not talking about the Auditing Department because we are a very small group to be taken as an example. But if you consider the area where I used to work before -- the Control Department -- where we dealt with too many subjects and too many people, the quantity of messages that I used to receive was much bigger. And most of them regarded subjects that involved other co-workers who wanted to keep me posted. But... *Why do I have to know about this?*
M: So, nowadays, certain things just don't have to be informed, right?
B: No, they don't need a formal authorization from the supervisor, saying that: *Now you can do it. I've already given my authorization. So, you can do it now*. This doesn't exist anymore! Then, it means empowerment.
M: Then, there's more autonomy...
B: It means that people started to perform their own roles, and only the subjects that represent an exception should be really informed. And, in this sense, the communication process, the communication medium plays an important role as a tool to provide you with the possibility of making the decision that is appropriate. (*BASRM4:1541-1590*)

The comments above led me to suppose that e-mail, by allowing an equal access to information, by strengthening the professional relationship among co-workers, and by impacting on their decision-making processes, had somehow levelled out the hierarchy within the corporation. Nevertheless, although partially agreeing with this interpretation, Basílio did not believe that changes at the organizational level had originated with the electronic medium:

B: I think that you are right. I believe that when you give people more power, that when they start to make more decisions and to be more responsible for them, you end up flattening the hierarchical levels. Let's see what used to happen before: you had the supervisor, the supervisor's
boss, the manager, the manager's boss, the senior manager, or whoever. I mean, between the president and the clerk, you used to have ten, twelve different levels. Nowadays, you have only three. Sometimes, you may have four. Then...

M: (Interrupting) Can communication among them flow straightforward?

B: The process of communication is much faster now, right? And what has caused it? It was not the electronic mail. No! It's the whole structure! Nowadays, you just can't have an organization with 420 managers anymore. The process would be blocked because the supervisor couldn't make a decision without the manager's authorization... and without the senior manager's permission, and so forth.

M: You mean that one should talk to the other before...

B: (interrupting me) So, we don't have this structure anymore. This doesn't exist! You must be responsible or you are not the right person for that position. You are out of the process. Then, how do you speed up these processes? You do it by taking advantage of the adequate tools! And e-mail is one of them. (BASRM3:2433-2466)

By presenting the arguments above, Basílio made it clear that, to him, the adoption of a fast communication process had emerged from a natural demand for accelerating work-related procedures, which e-mail did not originate but to which it had contributed significantly. Although he acknowledged the importance of some of the innovations brought by this tool to the workplace, Basílio believed that CMC practices represented only one aspect of a wider process of "restructuration and cost reduction" (BASRM3:2279-2284) which affected all corporations. These arguments defined Basílio's perception of the role performed by the electronic tool within the business setting and led him to the following conclusion:

B: All the points that I've been mentioning have the purpose to make it clear that all of those innovations were not caused by e-mail... by the utilization of one specific information medium. They were caused, in fact, by a whole set of factors. And e-mail only represented one of them. (...) Then, the issue is not to place e-mail as the central reason for changing; but make it clear that... (pause)

M: ... the changes brought e-mail with them.

B: E-mail was one of the mechanisms that were used to achieve the goal that you had. Right? And, as a consequence, the behavior has changed. (BASRM3:2350-2355,2368-2374)

Basílio's comments led me to conclude that even if e-mail could not be held accountable for all of the changes that had occurred in the workplace, its utilization and the
remarkable agility that it brought to office routines had affected not only the overall nature of the work itself, but also the relationships among co-workers, their interaction with and through foreign languages, and the way they conceived of their own job activities. Furthermore, his comments led me to realize that, apart from the professional implications, increasing dependence on the electronic medium could also influence some aspects of one's private life:

B: You know that, for instance, I haven't read a book for a long time. Ah... how long?... one year... I think that... no, not one year... maybe six months. The last book I read was six months ago! And even so, it was for professional purposes, and not for entertainment. And why? Because the amount of information that this kind of communication process forces you to deal with is enormous. Then, I'd rather have a... a kind of visual communication. (BASRM3:1488-1500)

The arguments presented so far illustrate Basilio's understanding of what was the most important theme addressed in our conversations, and also reveal his impressive engagement in the reflective process we undertook together. As shown by the excerpts above, he revealed a natural disposition to comment on the issues we had both raised, and to enrich his comments by providing me with vignettes of the experiences he had lived or the situations he had witnessed at work. Moreover, his determination to clarify his own ideas and to identify the voice(s) he was amalgamating into his discourse indicated that everything he said was the result of cautious reflection and interpretation.

6.5.6. Contemplating a ten-year-old photograph

In commenting on the research process, Basilio realized that the fact of reflecting upon CMC procedures and of selecting samples for discussion impacted on his perception of e-mail activities, leading him to think about routine situations of message reception in an unfamiliar way (BASFM:1568-1580). As he pointed out, he caught himself contemplating the correspondence received more carefully, and speculating on its underlying meaning or possible hidden intentions ("What is the meaning of this message? What is there between its lines?", BASFM:1573-1574). Basilio revealed that, through the reflections upon his practice he shared with me, he started to develop an inquiring and more contemplative
approach to the electronic messages he dealt with at work. To illustrate the effect of our meetings, he provided me with an episode in which he felt a tangible influence of the reflective process we shared together:

M: (confirming the relevance of recording the episode commented before actually starting the interview) I think it's important to record it. It's a very interesting message.\(^3\) a bilingual message! So, you transcribed -- in English -- the information that you had received?
B: Yes... here it is... this information was conveyed in this questionnaire, right? And I only transcribed what my co-worker had written. And I selected the answers that he'd given to some questions, right?
M: Right.
B: And...
M: And then, as you mentioned before starting the recording, after writing the last answer, you remembered...
B: It was the moment when I remembered our discussions. And then, I said to myself: "So, I'll..." Because this was exactly what the person had written in English. So, I wanted to transcribe exactly what he had said.
M: In this case, it was only a transcription.
B: But the rest... well, after writing it, I would finish the message and write... ah... *Well, that's all my friend!*, and so forth...
M: And you would write it in...
B: Spanish.
M: ... in Spanish. OK.
B: But then, I said...
M: Then, you wrote it in English. That's interesting!
B: But I could've written it in Portuguese, right? *Bom, se você quiser alguma coisa a mais, eu posso transmitir.*\(^4\)
M: You were you talking to a person from South America... from...
B: From Argentina, right?
M: Right. It's interesting. Is it common to write messages this way?
B: Yes. I wrote it and pressed "send"... and if you ask me now... I haven't even read it. I mean, it's a message that is so simple that I simply... I stopped to think about what I was writing at the moment that I thought of you. I said: *"Well, this message is interesting!"* Then, I wrote it in English... and then, I... sent it. To tell you the truth, I haven't read what I've written. I... now. I'm reading it now, here. (BASRM4:13-66)

\(^{3}\) The message to which we referred to in this excerpt is transcribed below:

Juanito, ententei hablar con vos, pero era un poquito después de las 4:30 hs, entonces decidi enviarte la mensajey transcribir el comentario de el, que es el siguiente:

[name].
Comentarios generales:
*"We still have a poor system to approve travel expenses in [country]"
Para los ítems de gastos de viaje, respondió A51=#; A52=#; A53=#; A54=#
And that is all my friend...
If you want, I can fax you his questionnaire including the answers and comments.
Basilio (basmsg4.1)

\(^{4}\) "Well, if you want anything else, I can send it to you".
In the excerpt above, Basílio recalled an episode of message production in which his conscious decision to switch the linguistic code used for communication was motivated by our conversations. As he explained, on that occasion and at one particular point in the message composition process, he remembered our interviews and the themes discussed and decided to use a specific feature of e-mail writing ("I stopped to think about what I was writing at the moment that I thought of you," BASFM:59-60). It was interesting to notice that, although language switch was a communicative device commonly used by professionals in his company, Basílio made deliberate use of it on this occasion. This shows that, as a result of reflection, a procedure which Basílio was used to employing on an intuitive basis had became a conscious strategy which he made use of when he composed that particular message.

In addition to the situation mentioned above, Basílio commented that being in touch with tacit aspects of his practice in an interpretative way also provided him with the possibility of perceiving himself as part of a comprehensive process of change which affected his workplace as a whole. His account of this realization may be illustrated by the following comments made at our final meeting:

B: In general terms, I would say that I'd never stopped to think about the issues we discussed. Therefore, reflecting upon them was interesting, right? Because... ah... innovations have occurred, right?... and I... just like many other people... we took part in them, but we have never stopped to think about what has actually changed. I mean, you only realize that you've got older when you take a ten-year-old picture, right? Then, you say: "Gosh, is that me?" Therefore, I felt myself in this position, contemplating a ten-year-old picture and saying: "Oh, God, what has changed? The nose became a little bit bigger!"... or whatever change you can realize when you observe an older picture. So, I think that it was an interesting aspect; the reflection was very... very natural, a very natural reflective process. Another aspect that I want to mention is that I've commented on your research with at least two co-workers, and they had the same reaction: "Is it that important?" -- without any intention to underestimate your work. However, as our discussions progressed, they reached the same conclusion that I did: "Gosh, we were part of a process of transformation! We've been living in a world where so many important things have been happening that we end up... we don't give them the relevance they deserve!"

M: It seems that what is routinized is not that important.

B: Exactly! You don't pay attention to, right? And e-mail is one of these things. I mean, I think that e-mail represents a significant innovation within this process - just like many other things. Ah... I think it was interesting
because we could also reflect upon people's behavior. Since you motivated me to talk about certain things, I perceived that, from that moment on, I started to pay attention to some messages that I received and composed. (BASFM:1527-1566)

In the extract above, Basilio summarizes the impact of the reflective process by making use of quite an interesting image. He associates the process of recollecting work-related routines with one of examining an old photograph which leads him to make comparisons between past and present, thereby making him aware of the changes that have occurred in his own activities, in his organization, and in the behavior of his colleagues. The metaphor he used to describe the way he perceived himself rethinking his practice was consistent with the way he reported on his own reflective process -- a process which was, as he commented, shared with and endorsed by some of his colleagues. By observing the "photograph" -- or reflecting upon work-related practices -- and realizing the various changes that had taken place in the office environment, he envisioned himself as part of a wider transformational process that had impacted on the nature of his job activities and on his way of performing them.

Basilio concluded our conversations by saying that they were an "interesting" process that have made him "reflect upon a lot of things" (BASFM:1618-1619). Contrary to his first idea that "one hour would be enough to talk about e-mail" (BASFM:1599-1600), he felt involved in an "enjoyable" exchange of thoughts and experiences (BASFM:1604), which made him aware of having spent "a very productive time" (BASFM:1600). As a concluding remark, he said that he was "curious to see the end of this story" (BASFM:1622-1623).

6.6. Reflecting upon reflections upon practice

Talking to the five participants and walking through the paths of their professional lives was a singular experience which enabled me to be in touch with their different but complementary perceptions of e-mail and of its utilization in an office context. Although some of the participants shared the same work-related environment (as in the case of José Luiz and Luciano, or Paulo César and Juciane), each individual had a unique way of
thinking about e-mail and, consequently, of interpreting it. By collecting and contrasting the arguments presented, I was able to grasp the similarities and divergencies of their opinions and to visualize better the scope and nuances of the electronic communication process enacted within their companies. Furthermore, I was able to envision the specifics of each participant's professional landscape and, through them, to gain a more inclusive picture of the business territory.

The accounts presented in the previous sections of this chapter illustrate the participants' metaphorical encounter with the specifics of their professional practice and, particularly, with the communicative activities they undertook through the medium of e-mail. Their reflections show that, although they were all focused on communicating in the same language (English) and through the same channel (e-mail), each individual emphasized certain aspects which were more significant to them and which represented the meaning they tacitly made of CMC and of its utilization. As a researcher, I found that their intuitive engagement in particular themes contributed to my understanding of the tool and of its impact on the professionals who use it.

Throughout this reflective process, it became evident that the practitioners and I shared the role of researchers, establishing a significant "partnership" (Schön, 1983:323). As we walked together investigating the same concerns, the professionals and I became immersed in the work-related situations discussed and, through them, we were able to get in touch with the understandings formed "spontaneously in the midst of action" (Schön, 1992:126). Hence, this research was characterized by an interpretation of the target phenomenon from the analyst's viewpoint, while at the same time recognizing and even emphasizing the perspective of those who actually experienced it at work on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, although performing the role of research partners, the professionals and I made distinct meanings of the findings we had discovered together through shared reflections. To those practitioners, being in touch with their own routines and becoming aware of the principles that guided them involved looking at their activities from a new perspective and becoming conscious of alternative ways of handling them (cf. Schön, 1983:310). In this sense, reflecting upon their work-related procedures led the participants to a higher level of self-awareness. For instance, José Luiz, by making a "report" of his
activities, realized that he had not explored e-mail in all of its potential, and that he tended to keep too many messages; Luciano, by undertaking a process of "self-criticism," concluded that he did not optimize time as much as he could; Paulo César, by feeling challenged by my curiosity, became aware of some peculiarities of cross-cultural communication and of the development of his own foreign language proficiency; Luciane, by "leaving her own world," realized the uniqueness of her writing style and perceived herself as vividly present in the texts she composed; and Basílio, by contemplating "an old photograph," visualized himself as part of the process of change that was occurring within his corporation.

Furthermore, discussing e-mail utilization and the messages produced and received led those practitioners to new modes of interaction with their CMC activities, either by "seeing" them differently (Russell & Munby, 1991:164) or by somehow "reframing" them (Schön, 1987:49, Russell & Munby, 1991:164-165). For example, José Luiz started to explore other e-mail devices and, according to his evaluation, started to handle the tool more efficiently; Luciano felt compelled to observe features of pronominal variation in the correspondence he was exposed to; Paulo César got involved in reducing the length of his sentences in English; Luciane pursued her investigation into the messages (as attested by the virtual conversations we maintained for some time after the end of the research period, and by the supplementary messages she then sent to me through e-mail); and Basílio found himself speculating on the content of messages more carefully, attempting to grasp their exact connotations and possible hidden meanings. Considering the evidence that emerged from my interviews with those professionals, I came to the conclusion that the process of rethinking tacit work-related routines generates a movement of attention-surprise-reflection-realization which results in new understanding and, sometimes, in the restructuring of some customary practices.

On the other hand, as far as I am concerned, the meaning I made of the practitioners' reflective processes was oriented to the purposes of my inquiry which, in addition to focusing on their perceptions and interpretations of CMC activities, also included their way of interacting with their international counterparts in English. The process I went through included, therefore, the reflections upon practice the participants shared with me
throughout our meetings, and deeper reflections on my part, which started during the data collection phase and continued throughout the data analysis. To some extent, therefore, I mediated these professionals' encounter with their tacit work-related routines, but they also mediated my understanding of the messages they produced and/or received at work (as illustrated in Chapter 5). For this reason, being in touch with their practice and witnessing their reflective turns (Schön, 1991:9-12, 1992:123), allowed me to perceive the scope of CMC within the business context and to grasp the meaning of their electronic messages, as well as the implications of communicating in a foreign language through the electronic medium.

In the realm of conceptualization, my conversations with the five professionals enabled me to identify agility as the most significant quality of e-mail. As they emphasized, the speed brought to work-related procedures by the utilization of the electronic tool tended to strengthen interaction among co-workers who, involved in an intense and efficient communication process, were predominantly focused on the relevance and urgency of the information to be conveyed. Reflecting upon these features of online communication, I realized that they not only impacted on the way professionals perceived their e-mail interactions performed in English, but also on the way they dealt with and interpreted foreign language issues. In my view, the results of increased agility and involvement in a practical communication process could be summed up under two headings: (a) the relationship between content and form, and (b) the impact of practice on learning.

Firstly, by dealing with a content-centred form of communication, the participants tended to approach formal aspects of writing in quite a relaxed way. They seemed to be aware of the grammatical mistakes in their everyday messages, but emphatically stated that language accuracy issues were no concern of theirs, since they almost always achieved positive results from their linguistic performance. This perception justified, for instance, their lack of interest in reflecting on formality and their lack of attention to pronominal variation. Regarding these themes, I had to emphasize that they actually represented a serious interest for me, motivated by my wish to understand why electronic messages were usually described as informal, and to observe whether the involvement of voice (Chafe, 1998; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987) in the use of the certain pronouns (I and
was as evident to them as it was to me when we contemplated samples of their corporations' correspondence. The opportunity to reflect provided by the research led them to think carefully about these aspects of their messages and to develop new meanings as part of the process of making their insights clear to me.

Making meaning explicit was the basic concept that emerged when the participants reflected upon formality. Although at first they attributed no particular importance to this concept, they got involved in explanations that made it clear to me that issues concerning the nature of the subjects addressed and/or the level of rapport between senders and receivers were involved. Moreover, I realized that the level of formality selected had different implications depending on whether one was writing a letter to a customer or composing an internal e-mail message.

Searching for new meanings was the reflective movement that characterized Luciano's and Paulo César's response to the issue of pronominal variation, and this led them to start questioning their own choices and the ones displayed in the correspondence that they received. In opposition to their seeking-for-meaning reaction, José Luiz, who doubted the relevance of an inquiry in this direction, attempted to make his perception explicit to me by asserting that the use of the plural pronoun was nothing more than a "language habit" or an interlanguage phenomenon. Juçiane and Basílio, however, maintained a more neutral position which involved neither a search for nor an articulation of meaning. Although admitting that the contrast between I and we was apparent to them sometimes, these two participants addressed this theme in a more superficial way.

Considering the impact of the electronic medium on the frequency and speed of interactions, the participants emphasized that e-mail provided them with more opportunities to be in touch with international colleagues and, consequently, to have more exposure to English. From this point of view, reading and replying to electronic messages constituted genuine language learning experiences through which they could, for instance, not only acquire new vocabulary, but also increase their range of general writing strategies. This argument led me to realize that, for them, learning English was a situated process that emerged spontaneously from their continuous engagement into practical business activities, and from their tacit transformation (Dewey, 1938a, 1960; Kolb, 1984) of these
experiences in *educational* ones (Dewey, 1938a).

There is no doubt that the interaction between content and form and the implications of practical experience for foreign language learning were major topics that emerged from my inquiry and that, undoubtedly, affected me as a teacher of English. As a result, I felt challenged to think about English programs for business purposes from a new perspective. This topic will be dealt with in the concluding chapter.

I can now start to prepare my trip back to the university, carrying with me much more knowledge about the business territory, its geography, its inhabitants, and its communication processes. However, before actually returning, it is time to reflect upon the whole trip and to recollect the purposes that made me venture into a new land. With this aim in mind, I will attempt to draw together the sites I visited, the experiences I lived and shared, and, particularly, the meanings I made during my journey.
CHAPTER 7

FLASHES OF RECOLLECTION: LOOKING BACK TO GO AHEAD

Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed the gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery.

Polanyi, 1962

My expedition through the business territory was practically over and it was time to get ready for the trip back to the academic setting. Packing up to return, however, made me realize that my luggage had become much heavier and that my view of the target land had been enlarged and had become considerably richer. In reviewing the material I had gathered and the pictures I had taken to register particular moments of the journey, as well as in recollecting the experiences, reflections and interpretations the participants had shared with me, I found myself thinking about the territory in a different way. I found that I had become more sensitive to the geographic features of the sites I had visited, more connected to the specifics of my guides' professional landscapes and foreign language awareness, and much more attuned to the communication process that link them to their international counterparts. Thinking about my journey while I was still packing up led me to compare my initial questioning and inquiry purposes with what I had accomplished and, consequently, to experience other quite significant moments of meaning. This retrospective and interpretive movement, which allowed me to establish steadier connections and to draw appropriate conclusions, constitutes the account I want to present to my readers before actually leaving the territory and completing the report of my adventure.

My aim in this final chapter is, therefore, to outline the results of my exploration and to sketch the paths that might form possible routes to be ventured on in further expeditions. In order to achieve these goals, I firstly rethink the research questions in the light of the participants' interpretation of the e-mail correspondence they were involved in at work and of how they perceived the repercussions of reflecting upon their professional practices. Secondly, I will make some suggestions for further research in the field of computerized communication. Thirdly, I will briefly outline some implications of my inquiry for ESP
programs designed for business people. Finally, I will conclude this travel report by summarizing my exploration through the business territory.

7.1. Revisiting the research questions

As indicated in Chapter 2 (section 2.1), my investigation aimed at studying what it was like to interact in English through computers within business settings from the Brazilian professionals' point of view. In focusing on this purpose from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, my search for an understanding of the CMC practices performed in the foreign language involved the participants' contextualization and descriptions of a number of e-mail messages they had routinely exchanged within their corporations. In addition, it included their reflections upon the e-mail activities they were engaged in at work and their interpretation of significant episodes that formed their *experiential continuum* (Dewey, 1938a) and which were lived within their *professional knowledge landscape* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

The nature of my inquiry led me to explore the participants' interpretations of events and to deal with their interpretations in the context of the constraints provided by the methodology. As stated by Gadamer (1975), "*understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs, the event in which the meaning of all statements is formed and actualized*" (p.164-165). This statement suggests that recalling experiences represents being in touch with "*a remembered moment*" of life -- not with the whole flow of life (cf. Dillthey, 1994:151) -- which, through retrospective reflection, will be grasped or re-experienced in a new and enriching way. Interpreting lived experience, then, will not result in an absolute or irrefutable understanding of a previous event, but will somehow transform it into a new experience which will be perceived and understood from a different contextual perspective. In other words, as Gadamer (1986) asserts, "*when we interpret the meaning of something we actually interpret an interpretation*" (p.68). By taking these arguments into account, I grounded my understanding of the target phenomenon on the consideration of the various "*moments of meaning*" (Moustakas, 1990:55) in which interpretations emerged and on a cautious attempt to establish a pattern of relationships between them. In this way, I attempted to establish a "*validating circle of inquiry*" (van Manen, 1990:27), in which lived
experience validated and was validated by lived experience. By adopting this approach, I constructed "a possible interpretation" (van Manen, 1990:41) of the nature of the experiences the professionals recalled during our conversations and described CMC practices the way I thought the five practitioners actually lived and understood them.

7.1.1. Seeking for the essential nature of CMC practices

The first research question -- What meaning do Brazilian professionals make of CMC practices at work? -- led me to investigate the way they experienced the electronic medium as a means of interacting with their international counterparts for work-related purposes. By bringing together the tool, the practitioners, and their communicative aims, this question focused on the way Brazilian professionals conceived of e-mail and on its significance for the performance of their routine office tasks.

The first reaction of the participants was to characterize e-mail as a safe, fast, and efficient communication medium. I realized that, by mentioning these three qualities, the practitioners not only outlined their essential understanding of the tool but also indicated its most remarkable features. For them, safety referred to integrity, which meant there was a guarantee that the same piece of information would reach all of its recipients exactly the way it had been generated. In this regard, by providing multiple addressability and avoiding the need to paraphrase, e-mail could ensure that the content would not be distorted and that access to information would be available on a more symmetrical basis. On the other hand, by asserting that e-mail was a fast channel of communication, the professionals emphasized its potential to connect remote sites easily, to overcome time zone differences, and to accelerate the flow of information delivery across the company. From their perspective, the agility provided by the electronic tool increased the frequency of interaction among co-workers, encouraged more integration among the hierarchical levels within the organization and, consequently, provided gains in the decision-making process and in the performance of certain job activities.

In addition to safety, agility and efficiency, the participants also referred to the impact of e-mail on documentation, autonomy, and time control and manipulation. From their viewpoint, documentation involved the ability to store and access every message at
any time and for various purposes. By supporting the documentation of the flow of message-exchange electronically, e-mail caused a significant decrease in paper manipulation and letterhead correspondence, as well as leading to a reassessment of the traditional filing procedures. Autonomy referred to the independent use of the electronic tool without restricting message reception and transmission to the schedule of the internal mail delivery and without relegating these activities to the secretarial level -- a point made by Basílio. In assigning to each professional the responsibility for managing his/her own electronic correspondence, e-mail indirectly changed the nature of certain occupations, particularly that of the secretaries who took on the role of administrative assistants, as clearly acknowledged in Basílio's corporation. Furthermore, autonomy in dealing with electronic correspondence also had the effect of increasing the practitioners' professional awareness and empowerment -- qualities that were particularly strengthened in situations which required them to make decisions quickly and independently, without counting on their superiors' formal authorization. On the other hand, the participants associated the utilization of e-mail with the opportunities for enhanced time management. For example, if the original messages were composed according to their degree of urgency, the replies could be also adjusted according to each professional's availability to process the information. In this regard, Luciano pointed out that, as opposed to telephone calls, e-mail provided the receiver with enough time to evaluate the message and to prepare a response before actually replying. Another point mentioned by Luciano was that e-mail allowed the sender to save time by proceeding with other work while s/he waited for a specific response or information.

The description provided by the participants suggested that, as a form of "textualization of work-related procedures" (Zuboff, 1988:180) and as the leading channel of internal communication, e-mail provided an innovative way of performing certain job activities and of dealing with and distributing information across the company. It was also implicit in the practitioners' remarks that, as claimed by Zuboff (ibid), an e-mail text was the result of a "radical centralization" of information in a single computer system which, at the same time, involved an equally "radical decentralization" through which texts could be "constituted at any time from any place" (p.180). In reflecting on this formulation in the light
of the participants' views, I realized that electronic texts could be retrieved at any time, from practically any place, and undoubtedly for various purposes -- including the one of partially reproducing previous messages, as Basílio mentioned. His description made it clear that e-mail texts were not regulated by conventional principles of authorship and that the information conveyed within the corporation tended to be seen as belonging in common to its community members who could use it for professional purposes in many ways.

On the other hand, I realized that the notion of decentralization could be also understood as a means of guaranteeing equal access to information which, through the electronic medium, could be delivered simultaneously to literally unlimited number of receivers. In addition, I realized that decentralization also impacted on the process of communication between distinct hierarchical levels within the organization, reducing the distance between them and bringing them somehow closer to one another. In my view, the proximity provided by e-mail engendered a more informal pattern of interaction which affected not only upward and downward channels of communication, but also the flow of interpersonal communication enacted across the company hierarchy. Except for Basílio, the participants agreed with this interpretation and supported my view that, to some extent, e-mail has flattened the corporation hierarchy. Basílio, however, maintained a partly divergent point of view, emphasizing that e-mail, although a significant influence, was not the cause of the structural transformations perceived within his corporation. For him, these transformations resulted from a more inclusive process of change that included the introduction of e-mail and found in it an ideal way to speed up work-related activities -- a need which had already been perceived (chapter 6, section 6.5.5).

As a fast form of communication based on written texts and primarily focused on the information to be conveyed, e-mail seemed to impact on the various participants differently and, consequently, to lead them to distinct perceptions and reactions. Luciano, for instance, pointed out that the increasing use of the electronic tool reduced opportunities for more concrete personal contacts. On the other hand, Basílio displayed a particular empathy with CMC systems whose inherent agility was compatible with his own working style. However, in his occasionally sarcastic responses, he made the point that e-mail allowed its users to dissimulate and to hide their real thoughts. In this regard, Juciane
developed a particular feeling against the possibility of using the e-mail text to hide or disguise genuine reactions. As explained in Chapter 6 (section 6.4.2), she had developed an individual set of strategies to counteract this feeling and to give expression to her own personality in the messages she composed. José Luiz and Paulo César seemed to be less sensitive to this theme: although they emphasized the relevance of e-mail to the performance of their professional activities, they made no particular comment on the facilitation or otherwise of personal relationships.

My analysis of the participants' reflections and interpretations provided me with a variety of views of the electronic tool and CMC systems, revealing the different ways they tended to be perceived by salespeople, entrepreneurs and simple users. Due to the nature of their professional occupations, Paulo César and Luciane's approach to e-mail intuitively displayed the viewpoint of the sales representative who was convinced of the advantages of the system and accustomed to pointing out the benefits to potential customers. From a mainly commercial perspective, they stated that e-mail represented the ideal way to shorten distances and to accelerate the flow of information at a relatively low cost. Furthermore, they seemed to be proud of the fact that their corporation could ensure excellent connection facilities, continuous assistance and maintenance, and, by using a private server, offer an alternative to those companies interested in adopting or expanding their electronic network.

On the other hand, José Luiz and Luciano represented the point of view of the entrepreneur who was not only aware of the advantages of e-mail, but also attentive to the cost factor and to the concrete possibilities of using the system in practical terms. Although they knew that e-mail, by improving their communication with their offices abroad, suited their communicative needs, they regretted the lack of available telephone lines, the difficulties in accessing the system during working hours, and the restrictive policies adopted by Embratel. For them, the attitude adopted by the official telecommunication agency obstructed the utilization of the network at any time or from any place and hindered the inclusion of clients on a large scale. The peculiarities of the Brazilian context, however, affected the two entrepreneurs differently: Luciano adopted a tolerant attitude and pointed to "time" as a natural solution. While he waited for the situation to improve, he took
advantage of other communication tools as a way of overcoming the existing difficulties. José Luiz, by contrast, adopted a more combative attitude, claiming that he could not accept that Embratel's "great technical team" and "excellent resources" had to stand idle because of political reasons.

As a simple user who was involved neither in selling nor in buying e-mail systems, Basílio looked at the tool and its utilization from an operational and communicative point of view, drawing attention to the aspects that directly affected the performance of his activities at work. In this regard, the agility with which the electronic medium responded to his professional needs and to his personal working style, as well as its potential to connect worldwide co-workers and to receive their replies promptly constituted the most attractive features of this form of communication. From his perspective as a user, Basílio was not particularly attentive to the commercial or political factors that affected the installation or expansion of e-mail networks; his only concern was to have the tool available and to be able to use it to fulfill his communicative needs. For this reason, I believe, he was more sensitive to individual reluctance or resistance to accessing the system -- as discussed in Chapter 6 (section 6.5.2) -- against which he reacted by displaying his absolute disagreement.

The considerations presented so far summarize the essential nature of CMC in a Brazilian context and show how the practitioners conceptualized e-mail and how it impacted on their working environment and on the performance of certain activities. However, although addressing many issues, my comments on the first research question only account for part of the meaning the participants made of the electronic medium. Their overall understanding of the tool will be grasped only if we examine their views on the interactive characteristics of e-mail and their reflections upon the tacit routines performed at work and the experiences lived within their professional landscapes. Since these topics relate to the second and third research questions, I will deal with them separately in the next two sections.

7.1.2. Seeking for the meaning of interacting through computers

The second research question -- *What is the nature of interacting through
computers in a foreign language for professional purposes? -- led me to investigate the participants' experience of communicating in English through e-mail. By including the instrument itself, the language being used, the practitioners involved, and their activities or goals, this question focused on the way Brazilian professionals conceived of the electronic communication process undertaken in English within their corporations. Furthermore, this question also referred to how various linguistic issues were perceived and handled in an environment that associated native and non-native speakers together in the completion of a variety of work-related tasks.

According to the five participants, the communication enacted through the electronic medium included the exchange of messages among co-workers within the same company and among professionals in related offices in various countries. It constituted, therefore, a form of internal correspondence focusing on the content to be delivered either to the whole community or to specific recipients. This being the case, e-mail messages could describe various communicative movements within the company. Firstly, they could be directed downward. In this case, they constituted a channel for updating procedures, for bringing about personnel changes, for conveying general instructions and information, for reinforcing internal rules and policies, and (on a more restricted scale) for distributing departmental announcements. In describing a downward movement of communication, e-mail messages could be identified as corporate circulars and bulletins, as presented in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.1 and 5.3.2). Secondly, e-mail messages could be directed upward and become an instrument for the regular reporting of individual or departmental activities and/or descriptions of sporadic events or unexpected situations. As presented in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.3 and 5.3.4), messages like those could be identified as periodic and occasional reports. Finally, electronic correspondence could circulate across the company hierarchy, conveying all sorts of information, requests and/or advice. In this case, the e-mail text constituted a tool through which professional meaning was negotiated and specialized knowledge was shared or developed. As described in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.5 to 5.3.11), correspondence directed upward included various sorts of documents that could be, for instance, identified as requests, responses, for-your-information reports, cover messages, memos, acknowledgements, discussions, and a special type of message which was
characterized by the overlap of various communicative purposes (section 5.3.12).

The communicative movements presented above illustrated, therefore, the various kinds of social actions (Miller, 1994) and communicative purposes (Swales, 1990) that associated co-workers together through the electronic medium and that gave rise to the genres enacted and tacitly manipulated by their corporate communities. In drawing special attention to them, I realized that these genres not only performed single roles, but they also interact with one another in two specific ways. Firstly, some genres (corporate circular, bulletin, periodic report, occasional report, cover message, acknowledgement, discussion, and memo) displayed independent features that, by conveying only one side of a multiple person interaction, characterized them as part of a set (Devitt, 1991:340) or repertoire (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994:544) established by a community. Secondly, other genres (request, FYI report, and response) established an interdependent relationship among themselves that associated them together in a system (Bazerman, 1994:97-99). I perceived that such a system included the participation of both sides of the interactive chain, in such a way that the pattern of initiation and response could be regarded as an electronic adjacency pair. However, I also found some messages which performed overlapping functions (blurred or mixed genres) and that, by combining different genres in a single e-mail message, served various purposes. These roles performed by genres indicated, therefore, what they could show about themselves and about their relationships.

On the other hand, I also perceived that genres could reveal aspects of the community that manipulated them. In this regard, the predominance of discussions and requests in the first corporation involved in this study indicated its focus on an intensive interactive process that characterized its teamwork style. By contrast, the second company based its CMC practices on a system of initiation-response adjacency pairs (requests, FYI reports and responses) which characterized the mutual consultation network from which professionals could get technical support and/or information to assist their customers. The third corporation displayed a variety of genres which did not indicate a strong emphasis on any particular organizational pattern. However, the relative importance given to bulletins and corporate circulars could indicate a preoccupation with the dissemination of instructions, procedures and policy statements, which regarded its intention to reinforce
aspects of the company internal culture. In spite of dealing with a restricted corpus of 152 messages which included quite a reduced number of examples of certain genres (see chapter 5, section 5.4, table 5.2), I realized that the electronic correspondence focused on in this study tended to be predominantly based on the manipulation of requests, responses, FYI reports, and discussions. The emphasis given to these specific genres led me to conclude that CMC practices were characterized by the exchange of specialized information and by the co-construction of knowledge which supported the performance of routine job activities.

The participants showed no hesitation in identifying electronic correspondence as an informal process of communication which was constrained neither by institutional regulations nor by the patterns traditionally associated with business letters. For them, since their fundamental concern was with the subjects to be conveyed and with the urgency of requesting or sending specific information, their preoccupation with the formal features of writing was certainly reduced. For this reason, they perceived electronic messages as compatible with the utilization of customized formats, with the expression of individual writing styles, and with a tolerant approach to issues involving grammatical form and accuracy.

The fact of basing interaction on a written format seemed to affect the participants differently. Juciane was the one who most regretted her inability to include paralinguistic devices in her electronic messages, which would have helped her to express her reactions and feelings. This perceived constraint led her to develop an unusual compensatory strategy: by exploring an ethos mode of self-portrayal in writing (chapter 6, section 6.4.2) and by consistently using specific visual devices (such as upper-case letters, exclamation marks, and questions marks), she attempted to counteract a lack that, rather than a disadvantage, she perceived as a "peculiarity" of CMC systems. As a result of deliberately showing her reactions, emphasizing her feelings, and making her consideration for her co-workers evident, the content of her messages tended to associate professional and subjective components together, reflecting not only her identity as a writer (Ivanic, 1990), but also a remarkable trait of her "passionate" personality.

The contrast between different writing styles provided a theme that was not only
apparent in Juciane's messages but was also evident to some participants when they reflected upon the texts received from international colleagues. According to José Luiz and Juciane's perception and, particularly, to Paulo César's comments on cross-cultural communication, some differences were identified not only in features of format, but also in terms of objectivity in conveying content. They recognized that American co-workers were quite concise and, because they could communicate in their own native language, they expressed their ideas more clearly. By contrast, Brazilians tend to contextualize their messages, usually providing more extensive background information and more elaborate details.

Interestingly enough, the professionals were aware that the correspondence exchanged through the computerized medium entailed a number of grammatical mistakes and typographical errors about which they were not very concerned since their priority was the accurate transmission of content. Throughout our conversations, however, it became evident that this assumption was to some extent misleading for, as they pointed out, the distinction between content and form, as well as their relaxed approach to writing, should be limited to certain contexts. As they explained, the nature of the target situation and of the document to be delivered, as well as the nature of the target audience, were factors that determined whether or not they should pay special attention to language accuracy and matters of text organization. Periodic reports, for instance, required a higher level of textual elaboration than that which was applied in routine correspondence, as mentioned by Paulo César, Juciane and Basílio. By the same token, an e-mail message addressed to the president of the company and copied to other recipients also required special attention in terms of formality, as Basílio commented. By perceiving this interrelationship between context, recipients and language use, and by tacitly dealing with the interdependency among the semiotic components of the situation (field, tenor, and mode), the participants revealed, therefore, an intuitive manipulation of the notion of register (chapter 5, section 5.3).

In interpreting interactions undertaken through the foreign language, all of the participants emphasized the role performed by computers in intensifying their exposure to English and in providing them with significant opportunities to enlarge their lexical
repertoire. Unquestionably, for them, vocabulary constituted the most troublesome area and the one that might sometimes interfere with their reading and writing activities, as particularly mentioned by Paulo César. They recognized that interacting with native speakers and being required to comprehend and compose messages in English on a daily basis led them to acquire new expressions and patterns of language use and, consequently, to develop their foreign language proficiency considerably. From their perspective, therefore, e-mail not only constituted a valuable communication tool; it was also perceived as an important mediator of learning.

It was clear to me that the participants' engagement in practical activities led them to live enriching foreign language experiences and to intuitively recognize that learning was a situated process (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), developed through participation, i.e., through the significant interaction between experience and understanding (Lave & Wenger, 1991:51-52). Although all of them had been submitted to formal instruction in English, they were unanimous in asserting that their involvement in genuine situations that required them to communicate in the foreign language represented their most effective and continuous source of language development. E-mail, therefore, provided them with the ideal context for establishing contact with the target language and its (native or non-native) speakers and, through the exchange of professional knowledge, to develop their general linguistic competence and technical language skills. This unique understanding of electronic interactions as learning opportunities made me realize that work-related environments constitute practical educational sites in which knowledge and meaning are exchanged, negotiated, created and recreated.

This point of view was reinforced by Basílio's comments on a procedure developed in his corporation according to which the contents of certain episodes were electronically shared with the whole community and some concepts were highlighted by the heading "key learning" (chapter 4, section 4.3.2). This practice showed a specific didactic orientation that, by encouraging the exchange of experiences and reflection upon their meaning, promoted a vicarious form of learning which ultimately impacted on decision-making processes and professional awareness. In comparing the two learning situations mentioned -- the one in which professionals transformed electronic interactions into foreign language learning
opportunities and the one in which the company provided its employees with an opportunity to learn from their co-workers' experiences -- I concluded that conceiving of workplaces as educational sites involves reflecting on each professional's learning agenda and on his/her willingness to interact with each potential learning situation and to transform this experience into an educational one. On the other hand, understanding work-related environments as educational settings also involves the recognition of the educational policy that guides each company and that is made explicit through their regular routines.

It will be clear from the comments presented so far that interacting through the electronic medium in the foreign language is a highly complex matter that requires the intuitive mastery of the genres of internal written communication enacted by each corporate community. Furthermore, dealing with e-mail messages and making them potential learning tools involves interaction with and understanding of the experiences lived through the medium and through the foreign language in order to establish significant interconnections among them in such a way that they can be transformed into educational experiences (Dewey, 1938a, 1960; Kolb, 1984). In my opinion, this situated movement of interaction, understanding, and transformation of experiences constitutes the bridge between practice and learning which was perceived and instinctively performed by the practitioners.

7.1.3. Seeking for the meaning of reflecting upon practice

The third research question -- *What are the repercussions of the reflective process on the participants' perception of their CMC practices?* -- led me to investigate what was involved in reflecting upon e-mail activities performed at work. This question established links between the electronic tool, the participants, and their practices, and referred to the reflective turns the participants took while they interpreted their experiences and reflected upon the features of their professional landscapes.

In rethinking my conversations with the participants in the light of this research question, I perceived that the act of recalling the experiences lived inside and outside their workplaces led them to search for meaning that involved *telling lived stories, establishing relationships, and thinking again about them* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995b:153-157). Their engagement in sharing facts and interpretations made them partners in my investigation
(Schön, 1983: 323) and -- at least during the period of my research -- they became inquirers into their own practices and professional landscapes. However, I noticed that, although they all engaged in a similar process of examining their electronic correspondence and of looking backwards and forwards across their own experiences, each professional developed a preference for certain themes, subtly indicating the interpretive directions in which s/he was willing to go. Although these directions were tacitly understood throughout our meetings, they became evident when José Luiz defined his comments as a "report", when Luciano identified his reflections as a "self-criticism", when Luciane perceived herself "leaving her own world", when Basílio caught himself contemplating "a ten-year-old picture", and even when Paulo César found that he could not summarize his perceptions by using a single word or expression. It seemed to me that these individual reactions revealed the inner interpretations the participants made of the hermeneutic conversations we shared together.

In characterizing his reflective process as a report, José Luiz emphasized the descriptive viewpoint from which he approached his personal and professional experiences. This aspect of his comments seemed particularly important because through descriptions he could more easily realize the restricted use he had been making of the electronic medium and feel motivated to explore a wider range of strategies. In this regard, his descriptions were decisive in making him take a reflective turn that led from perception to concrete action. At the same time, his report had a contemplative aspect, shown by his reflections upon his professional development, by the linguistic differences he perceived in messages produced by native and non-native speakers of English, by his interest in promoting his employees' growth, and, particularly, by his criticism of the constraints he felt in the Brazilian CMC context. In addressing these topics, his descriptive approach took on more critical overtones that revealed features of his professional and foreign language awareness. For me, therefore, contemplating José Luiz's accounts involved going beyond his descriptions and attempting to understand the more fundamental critical point of view from which he regarded certain aspects of his professional landscape.

Luciano's perception of his reflective process as self-criticism did not extend throughout our conversations. As described in Chapter 6 (section 6.2.5), he had initially
attributed to me an evaluative role, expecting me to provide him with new insights and assuring me in advance that he would agree with my conclusions. It was only in our last meeting that he reframed this view and asserted his own accountability for the interpretation of his professional practices. In fact, some of my comments called into question certain routines of his company such as the one regarding filing procedures. However, the criticism -- or self-criticism -- emerged from his own reflections upon these routines and from the conclusions he came to about their relevance and efficiency. In reviewing his practice from a critical perspective, he also confronted his notion of time and concluded that he had not been managing it effectively. This realization constituted a reflective turn which, taken as a result of his self-criticism, led to new insights about the way he was performing of his job activities. Luciano's reflections, however, also involved some linguistic issues, particularly, the theme of pronominal variation. In this regard, the use of we, in spite of representing a feature of his company's electronic correspondence, conformed to a characteristic that he found evident in his own speech. His marked personal and professional curiosity about the use of this pronoun, which caused him to start monitoring his e-mail messages more carefully, led me to believe that this linguistic reflective turn had impacted on him more strikingly than the issue of time control and manipulation.

Juciane's image of stepping outside her own world and contemplating her routines and e-mail messages as if from a distance drew attention to the strategy through which she was able to envision the features of her practice and the specifics of her professional landscape. I noted that the reflective process she undertook, rather than being confined to the confrontation of a professional with the tacit routines performed at work, included a passionate self-encounter through which she perceived the extent to which her personal voice was in her electronic texts. By describing her ethos self-portrayal mode of writing and its motivation, as well as by outlining her role as a message generator, Juciane realized her identity as a writer (Ivančić, 1994) and made it explicit that the reflective turn she took, in addition to its linguistic and professional aspects, also involved a deeper understanding of her own subjectivity.

Basílio symbolized the detailed analysis in which he got involved by envisioning his
reflective process as an old photograph that he could examine carefully and in so doing
distinguish the aspects that had changed over time. This metaphor led me to recall his
comments and the nature of the themes addressed and to realize that the location where
our conversations took place constituted an important research variable. The fact of being
at home, free from the typical constraints and interruptions of an office environment
certainly encouraged Basílio to dig deeper into his memories and to provide me with
several fascinating vignettes of his experiences. Perhaps location has also influenced the
image conveyed by his metaphor since recalling memories through pictures seems to be
an activity that we usually undertake at home. Sitting comfortably in his living room and
observing an old photograph of his corporation led Basílio to reflect on its policies, routines,
and computerized processes. He also went back to the origins of his company, reviewing
the development of his own professional practices and the policy changes in which he
played a role. Perceiving himself within a wider process of transformation, which included
the introduction of e-mail and the ensuing changes in the nature and performance of his
activities, undoubtedly represented Basílio's reflective turn.

In contrast to the other participants, Paulo César's perception of his reflective
process was not expressed by a convenient metaphor or keyword. It seemed that, for him,
getting in touch with his tacit routines and thinking of e-mail messages from an unfamiliar
point of view resulted in outcomes that could not be condensed in a few words. I too found
it difficult to coin an expression that could adequately convey the movement of surprise-
reflection-realization that he displayed many times throughout our meetings. This reaction
was particularly evident when, for instance, he contrasted the e-mail messages composed
by professionals of various nationalities and outlined an interesting cross-cultural analogy
based on the peculiarities of their writing styles. He displayed a similar reaction when, in
discussing issues of pronominal variation, he realized the various connotations associated
with the use of the first person plural pronoun. His reflections upon cross-cultural
communication and upon pronominal variation resulted in a much clearer perception of
writers and writing styles and, consequently, he developed an increased awareness of how
he composed messages in English and of what were his troublesome areas in the realm
of foreign language proficiency (i.e., sentence length and punctuation). This discovery
resulted from the reflective turns he took by thinking of his correspondence and his work in general from a more contemplative viewpoint. Nevertheless, Paulo César’s genuine surprise when confronted with certain themes and his search for meaning made me feel like an eye-opener who challenged his understanding of e-mail messages from a linguistic perspective, mediated his reflection upon them, and led him to conceive of them differently. On the other hand, if I opened his eyes in the first place, he kept them open in a process of continuing self-realization and improvement. Perhaps this image of *keeping eyes open* could express Paulo César’s reflective process for, in my view, it captures not only his reaction to what went beyond his normal understanding, but also his determination to deal with his discoveries and to be more attentive to their impact on his performance in English.

The accounts presented so far represent the most significant reflective turns taken by the participants through the reflective process we shared together. They show that using e-mail messages written in English as input for reflection did not lead participants to linguistic insights exclusively. As perceived by the outcomes outlined here and in Chapter 6, they motivated professionals to recall past events and experiences, to rethink the frames of their practice, to establish novel associations with various aspects of their routines, to visualize alternative possibilities, and to interact with their professional landscapes in an innovative way. Hence, the perceptions achieved through reflection enabled the participants to understand their existing practice or to make new meanings and to reformulate their instrumental, linguistic and professional procedures.

### 7.2. Opening up new research directions

My conversations with the participants was an enriching experience for me not only because it allowed me to envision the peculiarities of e-mail messages conveyed in English, to be in touch with the perceptions and interpretations professionals made of their tacit practice, and to recognize some features of their professional landscapes. They were also significant because they opened up new research horizons and led me to foresee some possible routes to be explored in further expeditions through the business territory. To give the readers an idea of these possibilities, I will make some suggestions:

1. **Genres of online professional communication:** Further research focused on this
theme and on a larger corpus of e-mail messages would not only increase the understanding of the genres customarily conveyed through the electronic medium, but also result in a more detailed description of the ones less frequently manipulated (such as periodic and occasional reports, memos, or acknowledgements, for instance). Furthermore, an inquiry of this sort would provide more information about the nature of blurred/mixed genres and of the genres *invented* (Smart, 1993:124-125) by specific communities to achieve their unique rhetorical purposes.

2. **The use of "we" in online professional correspondence:** Further research on this topic would explore the ambiguities involved in the use of the first person plural pronoun, particularly with regard to the circumstances of involvement (Chafe, 1982:45-49, Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987:105-110) of senders and receivers, and incorporation of the institutional voice.

3. **Internal and external e-mail communication:** This topic would explore the similarities and differences between "internal" e-mail involving professionals within the same corporation, and "external" e-mail involving a corporation and its customers and suppliers.

4. **A contrastive view of e-mail and other forms of professional correspondence:** Research focused on this topic would contrast the correspondence generated through e-mail with that conducted through others forms of written communication such as faxes or business letters. This investigation would aim at examining the impact of the medium on text generation and whether and to what extent the utilization of e-mail might have an effect on genre characterization.

5. **Contrastive use of English in online cross-cultural communication:** An inquiry based on this topic would compare messages generated by native and non-native speakers, particularly with regard to content presentation (e.g., objectivity and/or explicitness in dealing with information), formal features of texts (e.g., lexical choices, sentence length and/or punctuation), and use of repair strategies in coping with communication breakdowns.

6. **Communication styles based on gender:** A study of this sort would focus on a comparison of e-mail messages generated by male and female professionals, exploring
issues such as the spontaneous expression of feelings and impulsive reactions, hedging, power, status, politeness, acknowledgments and apologies, consideration for interlocutors, flaming, and communication mismatches.

7. Human-machine interface issues: An investigation of this topic would examine, for instance, to what extent different ways of conceiving of technology and interacting with or through technological tools might have an effect on the willingness of individuals to continue with prevailing e-mail practices, or to seek new ways of making use of the computerized medium for professional purposes.

7.3. Conceiving of ESP courses from a different perspective

The experiences I lived within the business territory, in addition to promoting a richer understanding of CMC practices at work, made me reflect upon certain features of the Brazilian ESP context and to wonder about the possibility of applying the discoveries I had made to courses focused on developing writing skills.

The teaching of English for business purposes in Brazil remains a practically unexplored area, characterized by the lack of systematic large-scale investigation. Apart from some research focused on professional contexts and from the outcomes that have recently begun to emerge from the DIRECT project (chapter 1, section 1.6), the study of oral and written communication performed in English in the workplace can be thought of as being in its preliminary stages. By contrast, the academic field has received more attention and become the focus of more diligent inquiry, particularly inspired by the national project for ESP at Brazilian universities -- "Ensino de Inglês Instrumental em Universidades Brasileiras" -- coordinated by Dr. Antonieta Celani. For more than fifteen years, the development of this project has resulted in a very productive research agenda in the areas of foreign language learning and teaching, of teacher education, and of reading, as well as influencing research design in general terms (cf. Kleiman,1994:30). In spite of the intrinsic differences between academic and other professional settings, the results achieved by this ESP project have also benefited the initial investigation into business environments and provided inquiry in this area with constructive insights.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2 (section 2.1), the learning and teaching of English for
business purposes in Brazil is characterized, on the one hand, by professionals who wish to achieve higher levels of foreign language specialization and, on the other hand, by teachers of English who have been "unexpectedly" (Strevens, 1988:8) required to teach business students whose needs and expectations they are not familiar with. Under such circumstances, language teachers have not only to cope with their lack of background knowledge about professional environments in general, but also to deal with students who have specific needs of their own. As indicated by the five participants in the research I have undertaken, their engagement in practical activities that required them to interact in English on a daily basis represented for them the most effective source of foreign language learning, particularly with regard to the acquisition of new expressions and patterns of language use. In addition, all of them were quite emphatic in claiming that, in spite of any linguistic difficulty they might have, they were able to establish and maintain an efficient communication process with international co-workers, as shown by the positive results of the negotiations they jointly developed. The implications of these two factors -- the impact of practice on learning and the consideration of the outcomes received as a way of assessing foreign language performance -- led me to conceive of the teaching of English for business purposes from a different perspective and to explore an idea that took these important insights into account.

In rethinking ESP programs for business people in the light of my investigation, I realized that an association between lived experience (the background knowledge acquired by negotiating meaning in various situations), reflection (the recollection of past events and the continual search for meaning), and practice (tacit performance) might result in a significant new approach to the teaching and learning of writing skills. This three-dimensional approach, by leading students to review examples of their own correspondence and to think about them from a fresh point of view, might provide them with opportunities to reflect on and to re-interpret the tacit frames of the written tasks they customarily perform in English. By focusing lesson content on the search for the communicative objectives that characterize recurrent situations, students might come up with alternative ways of overcoming their difficulties and expressing themselves in English more effectively. In addition, by recalling the circumstances that surround the production
and reception of particular texts, these students might be brought to relive their past and more recent experiences involving use of the target language and to establish connections between them. In other words, discussing samples of the texts produced in their own work-related activities might enable them to interact not only with English in a different way, but also with their own experiential continuum, thus providing more opportunities for them to perceive job activities as potential learning situations and to transform their professional experiences into educational ones.

The approach I have in mind could be realized through workshops on writing which, rather than making use of prescriptive exercises, would be focused on shared exploratory activities as a result of which students and teachers would become partners in the investigation of how rhetorical goals might be better reached through written texts in English. These workshops would be based on the professionals' tacit knowledge about their work-related practices, on their language awareness, on reflections upon experiences lived through the foreign language, and on their own interpretation of this whole set of influences. Considering the nature of the target language skill (writing) and the professionals' difficulty in finding time to attend special language courses, the workshops might be developed through the electronic medium. This channel of communication would enable students to participate in discussions at a time convenient to them, and would also provide a text of the reflective process which could be accessed at any time.

This approach would involve students in discussing samples of their own routine correspondence and would constitute an indirect way of exploring written genres in a teaching/learning situation. I do not suggest the explicit conceptualization of genres, but the development of the intuitive knowledge professionals already have about them, that is, about the social actions they represent and about the communicative purposes they convey, as well as about the patterns of language use required in each interaction. The three-dimensional approach I suggest takes the students' "matrix of practical experience" (Phelps, 1988:213) as its starting point; conceives of genres within their genuine context (cf. Freedman, 1994:194), and entails "familiarity with the context rather than with the text-type" (Greenwood, 1994:238).

In a broader curricular perspective, I believe that, as suggested by van Lier (1996),
my approach evokes awareness (in the sense that new learning would be related to existing knowledge), focuses on authenticity (since learning would be based on the interpretation of the written texts generated in work-related situations), and aims at autonomy and achievement by attempting to provide the learners with the opportunity to reflect upon the frames of their own practice and upon possible ways of assessing and improving their own performance. My three-dimensional approach arises, therefore, from the consideration that professionals not only have a tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966/67) about the routines they are involved in at work, but they also have a tacit conception of genres and genre manipulation which is built up through engagement in everyday communication. My aim as a teacher would be to help business students to make this knowledge come to the surface and to turn it into a conscious perception that would enable them to see how they might develop appropriate rhetorical and linguistic responses to their customary work-related situations.

7.4. Leaving a previously unknown territory

My expedition through the business territory was not a solitary adventure lived by a single curious explorer. It was a complex and enjoyable trip, made more meaningful by the company of five travel guides who accompanied me through the paths of their reflections and interpretations, taught me the special features of their region, and showed new routes to be ventured into. Together with them, I lived enriching experiences that opened up my eyes to new meaning and that now make me conceive of the territory from a different perspective.

I return to the academic setting carrying much heavier luggage, which includes the information these guides shared with me about the e-mail messages they exchanged at work, about their overall working practices, and about their professional landscapes in general. I can now conceive of the genres of internal written communication as rhetorical categories that, associated together in a set/reertoire or in a system characterize the community that enacted and manipulated them. I can now perceive the connection between lived experience, reflection, and interpretation, as well as the role they perform in providing a deeper understanding of routine practices and foreign language
performance. I now believe that I have a more inclusive picture of the nature of CMC practices at work, of the meaning of interacting through computers in English, and of the repercussions of reflecting upon practice. I have undoubtedly made, as far as my own perceptions are concerned, some exciting discoveries.

I left my guides with different realizations of what they had achieved. Among the outcomes of the exploration we shared together, José Luiz found that e-mail might have broader applications and that it could provide him with more strategies to be explored and effectively used. Luciano became more attentive to the use of we and to issues of pronominal variation. Paulo César started to improve his writing skills by monitoring the length of his sentences in English. Juciane realized the uniqueness of her ethos mode of self-portrayal and, by observing her routines from a distance, she found that she was vividly present in the e-mail messages she composed. Basílio perceived himself as part of a wide process of transformation that was taking place within his company. In their distinct ways, therefore, the participants all made significant discoveries in instrumental, linguistic, and professional terms.

In looking back over the adventure we lived together, I can say that, by making these discoveries, my guides and I have made ourselves "into persons seeing and thinking differently" (Polanyi, 1962:143). We have certainly crossed a heuristic gap in partnership: the guides have revealed the unknown to me and I have helped them to be more closely in touch with the tacit aspect of their practices. I can now leave the territory with an unequivocal conviction: if this expedition is now over, my journey through the business territory has only just begun.
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APPENDIX 1:

Graphic representation of the thematization process
APPENDIX 2: Theme description

Q.S.R. NUDIST Power version, revision 3.0.4d GUI.
License: MAXIMINA M. FREIRE.

(1) /Workplace
*** Definition:
It characterizes the work environment as a whole.

(1 1) /Workplace/Features
*** Definition:
It displays general aspects of the workplace.

(1 2) /Workplace/FL activities
*** Definition:
It displays the foreign language activities performed at work.

(1 3) /Workplace/Communication
*** Definition:
It addresses general aspects of work-related communication.

(1 3 1) /Workplace/Communication /Process
*** Definition:
It details the communication process enacted by the company.

(1 3 2) /Workplace/Communication /Tools
*** Definition:
It refers to the tools used for communication at work.

(1 3 2 1) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail
*** Definition:
It refers to e-mail practices performed within the company.

(1 3 2 1 1) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail/Concept
*** Definition:
It conceptualizes e-mail from the professionals' perspectives.

(1 3 2 1 2) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail/Text types
*** Definition:
It identifies the text types possibly conveyed through e-mail.

(1 3 2 1 3) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail/Filing procedures
*** Definition:
It describes filing procedures and the impact of e-mail on them.

(1 3 2 1 4) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail/Software-System
*** Definition:
It describes general features of the e-mail software/system.

(1 3 2 1 5) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail/Complaints
*** Definition:
It addresses general complaints/problems regarding e-mail communication.
(1 3 2 1 6) /Workplace/Communication /Tools/E-mail/Impact
*** Definition:
It illustrates the main changes brought by e-mail to the workplace.

(1 3 3) /Workplace/Communication /Selection
*** Definition:
It presents the criteria used to select the communication tool.

(1 4) /Workplace/Gender issues
*** Definition:
It addresses gender issues within the workplace.

(1 5) /Workplace/Culture
*** Definition:
It addresses issues regarding the culture of the company.

(1 6) /Workplace/Context
*** Definition:
It illustrates some comments on the Brazilian business context/communication.

(2) /Professionals
*** Definition:
It characterizes the professionals within their work-related environment.

(2 1) /Professional/Job description
*** Definition:
It describes each professional's occupation and activities.

(2 2) /Professional/FL issues
*** Definition:
It illustrates the relationship between the professional and the FL.

(2 2 1) /Professional/FL issues/Performance
*** Definition:
It refers to how professionals perceive their FL performance.

(2 2 2) /Professional/FL issues/Learning
*** Definition:
It details some of the professionals' FL learning experiences.

(2 2 3) /Professional/FL issues/Use
*** Definition:
It illustrates issues of language use (either FLs or EFL).

(2 2 4) /Professional/FL issues/Difficulties
*** Definition:
It addresses some of the professionals' FL difficulties.

(2 2 5) /Professional/FL issues/Goals
*** Definition:
It refers to the professionals' specific FL goals.

(2 3) /Professional/Computers
*** Definition:
It addresses the relationship between professionals and computers.
(231) /Professional/Computers /Introduction
*** Definition:
It reports the professionals' introduction to computers.

(232) /Professional/Computers /Involvement
*** Definition:
It displays the professionals' involvement with computers.

(233) /Professional/Computers /Role
*** Definition:
It displays the role performed by computers.

(234) /Professional/Computers /Correspondence
*** Definition:
It displays each professional's routinized procedures through e-mail.

(235) /Professional/Computers /Comments
*** Definition:
It addresses issues regarding the ergonomic relationship.

(24) /Professional/Profile
*** Definition:
It displays each professional's self-image and characterization.

(25) /Professional/Beliefs
*** Definition:
It displays some of the professionals' beliefs.

(26) /Professional/Research
*** Definition:
It presents the professionals' responses to research.

(261) /Professional/Research/Engagement
*** Definition:
It displays reactions to involvement in the research.

(262) /Professional/Research/Expectations
*** Definition:
It addresses the professionals' expectations regarding the research.

(263) /Professional/Research/Relevance
*** Definition:
It refers to the relevance of the research from the participants' perspective.

(27) /Professional/Reflective process
*** Definition:
It presents the professionals' responses to the reflective process.

(3) /Messages
*** Definition:
It details format, contents, and features of e-mail messages.

(31) /Messages/Characterization
*** Definition:
It displays specific features of the company's e-mail system.
(3 2) /Messages/Criterion
*** Definition:
It details the reasons for having selected particular messages to be discussed.

(3 3) /Messages/Procedures
*** Definition:
It illustrates some e-mail procedures: their purposes and meaning.

(3 4) /Messages/Concerns
*** Definition:
It displays some concerns regarding form, contents and procedures.

(3 5) /Messages/C.H.A.
*** Definition:
It illustrates specific procedures of control/help/assistance.

(3 5 1) /Messages/C.H.A/ Formal
*** Definition:
It illustrates corporate procedures of control/help/assistance.

(3 5 2) /Messages/C.H.A/Informal
*** Definition:
It illustrates individual forms of control/help/assistance.

(3 6) /Messages/Personal styles
*** Definition:
It illustrates ways of formating, writing and communicating through e-mail.

(3 7) /Messages/Structure
*** Definition:
It presents some details on form, format, and language selection.

(3 8) /Messages/Patterns
*** Definition:
It refers to corporate patterns/rules regarding e-mail practices.

(3 9) /Messages/R.W.R.S.
*** Definition:
It illustrates reading and writing resources and/or strategies.

(3 10) /Messages/Interaction
*** Definition:
It addresses some features of interpersonal interaction.

(3 10 1) /Messages/Interaction/Formality-Familiarity
*** Definition:
It addresses the relationship between familiarity & formality.

(3 10 2) /Messages/Interaction/NS-NNS
*** Definition:
It addresses issues of cross-cultural communication.

(3 10 3) /Messages/Interaction/Intercutors
*** Definition:
It refers to specific interlocutors and their characteristics.
(3 10 4) /Messages/Interaction/Feelings
*** Definition:
It addresses individual forms of expressing feelings and/or reactions.

(3 10 5) /Messages/Interaction/I-WE
*** Definition:
It addresses the contrastive use of I-WE and its connotations.

(3 11) /Messages/Communication problems
*** Definition:
It refers to communication problems/gaps/mismatches.

(3 12) /Messages/Development
*** Definition:
It addresses the environmental and linguistic changes occurred over time.

(3 12 1) /Messages/Development/Environmental
*** Definition:
It illustrates the environmental changes occurred over time.

(3 12 2) /Messages/Development/Linguistic
*** Definition:
It illustrates the changes in FL proficiency occurred over time.

(3 13) /Messages/Appreciation
*** Definition:
It consists of evaluative comments on e-mail practices.

(3 13 1) /Messages/Appreciation/Pivotal aspects
*** Definition:
It refers to the e-mail pivotal aspects.

(3 13 2) /Messages/Appreciation/Advantages
*** Definition:
It refers to the advantages of using e-mail.

(3 13 3) /Messages/Appreciation/Disadvantages
*** Definition:
It refers to the disadvantages of using e-mail.

(3 14) /Messages/Effects
*** Definition:
It displays the professionals' intentions and some comments on results.

(3 15) /Messages/Preferences
*** Definition:
It illustrates the professionals' preferences regarding format and style.
APPENDIX 3: Example of a theme and its representative excerpts

Q.S.R. NUDIST Power version, revision 3.0.4d GUI.
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(2.4) /Professional/Profile

*** Definition:

It displays each professional’s self-image and characterization.

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: BASFM
+++ Retrieval for this document: 42 units out of 1957, = 2.1%
++ Text units 1132-1147:

1132 B: E. Então, pode ser que, se você estivesse fazendo essa
1133 entrevista aqui com cem outras pessoas...
1134 M: (entendendo o ponto) Logical! Poderia encontrar outra opinião.
1135 B: ... eles teriam uma opinião diferente. Agora, eu, realmente... eu
1136 acho isso fantástico!
1137 M: Ésse e o grande toque!
1138 B: Não sei se eu gosto de resolver as coisas assim...
1139 M: Uh-hum.
1140 B: ... então, isso é um negócio que eu gosto de usar porque eu sei
1141 que eu vou conseguir resolver as coisas.
1142 M: Ele vai estar com o seu estilo de tratar as coisas, talvez.
1143 B: Sabe, e...
1144 M: Uh-hum.
1145 B: Agora... pode ser que outras pessoas vão pensar no que? Na...
1146 na... no conteúdo? Não, não... não sei! Não consigo pensar em
1147 outra coisa!
++ Text units 1462-1487:
1462 B: Agora, em compensação, tem aqueles... ah... eu não sou um
1463 expert em micro, em micro-informática, nem no "ONLY ONE" - no
1464 correio eletrônico.
1465 M: Uh-hum.
1466 B: Mas eu, realmente, não faco absolutamente nada, se eu não
1467 estiver com o micro do lado, né?
1468 M: Uh-hum.
1469 B: Então, eu... eu... não sei se eu consigo pensar muito rápido, se
1470 for escrever alguma coisa, eu... eu... normalmente, eu me perco.
1471 B: Então, se eu estou escrevendo no computador, eu... siuuu...
1472 (indicando a velocidade).
1473 M: Vai direto... uh-hum...
1474 B: ... e aquilo, realmente, me ajuda a... e tem até certas pessoas
1475 que acham muito interessante a forma como eu preparo
1476 determinados trabalhos, né?
1477 M: Uh-hum.
1478 B: Porque, se eu estou num processador de textos, e... e... eu
1479 começo a colocar tópicos... pa, pa, pa... depois, começo em cada
1480 um deles... pa, pa, pa... e, no fim: "Como é que você conseguiu
1481 resumir tudo isso?"
1482 M: Uh-hum
1483 B: Entao, eu tenho o hábito, eu gosto do micro. Tenho, sabe, uma
1484 carta familiaridade com ele - não sou nenhum expert.
1485 M: Uh-hum.
B: Mas tenho uma certa familiaridade. Em compensacao, outros, nao! Ne? Ja nao tem a agilidade e... e, ainda, nao gostam!

++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: BASRM3
++ Retrieval for this document: 59 units out of 2559, = 2.3%
++ Text units 1388-1411:
1388 B: Born, eu sou... eu sou um pouco sarcatico.
1389 M: Uh-hum.
1390 B: Na? Entao, ah... eu, normalmente, nao saio do normal.
1391 M: Certo.
1392 B: Ta?
1393 M: Ta?
1394 B: Ta?
1395 M: Uh-hum
1396 B: Na? Entao, pode estar chovendo... (risos)... ou com sol... ou qualquer coisa...
1397 M: Certo.
1398 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1399 M: Uh-hum.
1400 B: Mas, eu mantenho... meio tranquilo. Na mensagem que vocé esta vendo, através do correio eletronico, isso se torna muito mais facil. Entao, vocé tem muito mais tempo pra raciocinar e saber qual sentimento que vocé vai responder.
1401 M: Certo.
1402 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1403 M: Uh-hum.
1404 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1405 M: Certo.
1406 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1407 M: Uh-hum.
1408 B: Mas, eu mantenho... meio tranquilo. Na mensagem que vocé esta vendo, através do correio eletronico, isso se torna muito mais facil. Entao, vocé tem muito mais tempo pra raciocinar e saber qual sentimento que vocé vai responder.
1409 M: Certo.
1410 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1411 M: Uh-hum.
1412 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1413 M: Uh-hum.
1414 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1415 M: Certo.
1416 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1417 M: Uh-hum.
1418 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1419 M: Certo.
1420 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1421 M: Uh-hum.
1422 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1423 M: Certo.
1424 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1425 M: Uh-hum.
1426 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1427 M: Certo.
1428 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1429 M: Uh-hum.
1430 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1431 M: Certo.
1432 B: O que... e dificil vocé controlar!
1433 M: Uh-hum.
1434 B: Na? Entao, pode ser o que aparecer na frente, normalmente, eu tenho uma reacao... normal. O que... o que esta acontecendo nao impacta a minha reacao. Isso, num processo de comunicação verbal, face-a-face.
1435 M: Certo.
1627 de modo geral, eu não sei se... se pela... pela forma como eu faco
1628 as coisas e que isso interfere na maneira como eu leio as coisas,
1629 mas eu não... não acho muito comum as pessoas... ah... colocarem
1630 nas mensagens o sentimento.
++ Text units 1642-1648:
1642 B: Agora, eu tenho a minha característica pessoal: eu gosto de tirar
1643 sarro!
1644 M: Certo.
1645 B: Então, eu sou... procuro ser, realmente, sarcástico nas... nas
1646 coisas que eu faco. Pronto!
1647 M: Certo. E... esse e um... um traco seu.
1648 B: Agora, isso e meu! Como você perguntou aqui: "Como você...?"

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: BASRM4
+++ Retrieval for this document: 5 units out of 1875, = 0.27%
++ Text units 396-400:
396 B: Ne? E... eu, principalmente! Porque, como eu gosto da falar
397 espanhol - coisa que eu não gostava, mas eu gosto de falar, agora,
398 espanhol - então, eu procuro falar, um boa parte do tempo, em
399 espanhol. So que o problema deles e que eles querem ficar
400 ouvindo português! (risos)
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JLFM
+++ Retrieval for this document: 15 units out of 1056, = 1.4%
++ Text units 291-305:
291 M: Uh-hum?
292 B: (interrompendo) So uma coisa,.
293 M: Certo...
294 B: No meu caso, ela tem acesso ao meu ccmail mesmo!
295 M: Certo.
296 B: Ta? Não e so o office, não.
297 M: Uh-hum.
298 B: Ela entra no meu ccmail.
299 M: Certo...
300 B: Ta?
301 M: Uh-hum. E... ai, no caso de... de viagens, ne?... das suas
302 viagens. Ah...
303 B: (brincando) Ou preguiçal (risos)
304 M: (continuando a briancadeira) Isso, eu posso botar entre
305 parenteses, no trabalho...
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JLI
+++ Retrieval for this document: 3 units out of 489, = 0.61%
++ Text units 439-441:
439 B: Eu sou muito preguiçoso pra usar todos os recursos, ne? Mas
440 ele e um processador de texto relativamente pobre mas ele permite
441 que voce copie o arquivo. Ele e bastante rico em funcoes de
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JLRM1
+++ Retrieval for this document: 33 units out of 1151, = 2.9%
++ Text units 273-279:
273 B: ... voce vai... E! Voce vai descobrir que nao, eu nao tenho
274 nenhum assunto ligado a minha area diretamente! (risos)
275 M: Entao, voce destroi todos os documentos!
276 B: Eu nem... eu nem trabalho aqui. (risos) Eu nem trabalho aqui!
277 Eu frequento esse escritorio!
278 M: Ah, ta bom!,
279 JL: E diferente! (risos)
++ Text units 672-685:
672 JL: (brincando) Eu nao faco nada, Maximina.
673 M: Eu estou vendo! (risos)
674 JL: Eu nao gosto!
675 M: Voce colecciona as mensagens pra mim, entao!
676 JL: Eu sou seu canal! (risos)
677 M: Voce esta incumbido disso!
678 JL: Eu sou seu canal aqui!
679 M: Tudo o que passar por voce, voce pega e copia pra mim.
680 JL: Deixa corrego!
681 M: Voce e o meu espiao aqui dentro, ne? (risos)
682 JL: Ainda bem que voce apareceu porque senao, ia ser horrivel!
683 M: Senao eu nao tinha...
684 JL: Eu nao tinha mais o que fazer, como disfarcar! (risos)
685 M: Ah, entao, pode deixar que eu vou te amolar bastante! (risos e ++)
913 JL: Mais uma vez: isso nao fica comigo! (risos)
914 M: (brincando) O que fica com voce, Jose Luiz?
915 JL: (brincando) A esperanca! (risos)
916 M: ... de que tudo de certo...
917 JL: ... de que tudo corra bem. (risos)
918 M: Eu acho que voce deve ser o pe-quente da empresa, por isso
919 que tudo passa por voce! (risos) Porque, ai, voce da o seu aval, a
920 sua... seus fluidos positivos.
921 JL: Espero que sim, ne? (risos) O que fica comigo e so a
922 esperanca, sabe, e a alegria de viver!
923 M: Que bom!
924 JL: O resto, nao! E pra alguém ai! Fica arquivado!
+)
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JLRM3
+++ Retrieval for this document: 13 units out of 1636, = 0.79%
++ Text units 1131-1132:
1131 JL: Ne? Nem sempre eu acesso o ccmail mas... por preguia ou
1132 porque eu sei que acessam aqui do escritorio e que esta tudo bem.
++ Text units 1462-1470:
1462 JL: Ta? E... eu fui o "cobaio"! (risos) Entao, pra mim, as coisas
1463 demoraram mais. Mas eu percebi que se eu quisesse que todo
1464 mundo se submetesse ao mesmo processo, e... ia, primeiro,
1465 demorar muito...
1466 M: Certo.
1467 JL: ... pra mim demorou muito - embora, ne, meu QI nao seja tão
1468 elevado... - isso, a gente nao tem como levar em conta. E... mas,
1469 as conclusoes que a gente chega, e... em determinada, em
1470 determinado estagio do processo, pode desviar muito do proposito.
++ Text units 1487-1488:
1487 JL: Entao, as pessoas sao diferentes. Eu acho que, embora eu
1488 tenha uma formao tecnica, eu sou muito humano.
+)
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JLRM4
+++ Retrieval for this document: 7 units out of 1165, = 0.60%
++ Text units 264-270:
264 M: O software te da o recurso de, por exemplo, voce marcar as
265 mensagens e mandar pra impressao todas juntas?
266 JL: Uuuhhh...
267 M: Nao?
268 JL: Nao sei se... eu nao sei fazer isso ai.
269 M: Uh-hum.
270 JL: Aparentemente, não.
271
272 J: ... e Marketing... que esta em curso, ne?
273 M: Certo.
274 J: E nesse contexto. Eu acho que, se a gente for destacar uma desvantagem, seria essa.
275 M: Seria essa?
276 J: E difícil passar...
277 M: Uh-hum...
278 J: ... ne?... ah... as expressões e tudo o mais... - por mais que a gente use, ne, ponto de interrogacao, uma exclamacao...
279 M: Nunca substitui a presença da outra pessoa.
280 J: Nunca substitui a presença.
281
282 J: Aí, então, eu fiquei um bom tempo sem estar praticando. Mas eu tenho uma coisa bastante importante: porque eu gosto muito do inglês!
J: Entao, mesmo eu nao... nao tido... nao tenha tido um curso
297 muito bom, muito... assim, avançado em termos de aprendizado,
298 eu gosto muito do ingles. Entao, isso, eu acho que facilita bastante.
299 M: Claro!
++ Text units 355-363:
300 M: Uh-hum. E em relacao ao computador? Em relacao a maquina?
301 J: Uh-hum.
302 M: Ah... eu nao sei qual e a tua formacao, ne, qual e o teu curso. Ah...
303 a maquina... como e que... como e que voce começou a ter esse
304 contato com ela? Fol, primeiramente, por objetivos particulares e,
305 depois, em funcao de trabalho? Ou comeceu com o trabalho e se
306 estendeu pra sua vida particular? Como e que... como e que voce
307 relaciona?
308 J: E... nos somos amigas... nos somos amigas ha bastante tempo!
309 (risos) Somos veeelahos amigos! E... na verdade, eu ja fiz, no
++ Text units 395-401:
310 J: E... um dado interessante e que, antes de trabalhar aqui, na
311 Proceda, essa empresa em que eu trabalhava como analista de
312 sistemas era usuario desse servico da GE Information Services.
313 M: Uh-hum.
314 J: Entao, eu tambem sou uma velha amiga dos nossos servicos!
315 (risos) Entao, naquela epoca, eu nao era usuario, mas eu era a
316 pessoa que dava suporte interno na empresa a esses servicos.
++ Text units 640-650:
317 J: Entao, muit... a gente usa muito dessas questoes. E eu tenho
318 uma preocupacao muito, muito grande de nao ser, assim,
319 imperativa nas minhas perguntas, ne?
320 M: Uh-hum.
321 J: Como e... (com entonaçao autoritaria)... "Voce pode me mandar
322 a informacao?", ne?... (mostrando a diferenca) ..."Eu apreciaria
323 muito se voce pudesse mandar essa informacao pra mim."
324 M: Uh-hum.
325 J: E... "Eu me sentiria muito grata..." Entao, eu tenho a
326 preocupacao de tornar as questoes bastante... nesse sentido,
327 ne?
++ Text units 793-798:
328 J: Eu sou ate um pouquinho teimoso porque eu guardo por um
329 tempo! (risos) E... o pessoal brinca comigo porque a gente tem,
330 dentro da aplicacao, o que eles chamam de "caixinhas de entrada",
331 "caixinhas de saida". E na "caixinha de entrada" - que e onde eu
332 recebo as minhas informacoes - as vezes, ficam 400, 500
333 mensagens, ne?
+++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JUCRM1
+++ Retrieval for this document: 60 units out of 798, = 7.5%
++ Text units 318-339:
334 J: Eu... eu tenho sempre uma preocupacao assim: se a pessoa vai
335 fazer algum trabalho, vai ter que fazer uma pesquisa, vai ter que
336 entrar em contato, entao, eu procuro ser o... ah... o mais... ah...
337 passar, o mais possivel, que eu... ah... quer dizer, que me
338 preocupa a atencao que ele esta dando pra esse assunto, ne?
339 M: Certo...
340 J: ... que eu agradeco muito a atencao dele... ah... pra nao ficar um
341 processo muito imperativo. Eu tenho um pouco de preocupacao
342 que, as vezes, as pessoas, nas proprias mensagens, sao um
343 pouquinho... diretas demais. E voce nao tem a pessoa, la, falando,
344 ne? E a pessoa, indo, de repente, ela le de uma forma muito fria,
330 M: Você sente isso quando recebe mensagens?
331 J: E... as vezes, sim. As vezes, vem um tom muito frio e você
332 não... as vezes, não intencionalmente, não?
333 M: Uh-hum.
334 J: Então, eu procuro dar esse tom de que... ah... agradeço muito.
335 Quando, às vezes, eu falo várias vezes com as mesmas pessoas,
336 então: "Olha, preciso da sua ajuda novamente", ne? "Obrigada por
337 contar com sua ajuda!"
338 M: Uh-hum.
339 J: Então, essa ideia de que...
++ Text units 355-376:
355 J: ... dar informações, porque eu acho que eu ruim um
356 pessoa
357 M: Certo.
358 J: Ne? Então, eu sempre procuro dizer que a... dar um pouquinho
359 do perfil do cliente aqui... o porque que ele quer fazer essa
360 comunicação... o que e que ele esta esperando... ah... dar um
361 pouquinho da visão, né? Não e so perguntar: "E possível fazer tal
362 coisa?", ou "Você pode entrar em contato?"... pra não ficar um
363 negócio, assim, que... eu, particularmente, não gosto, né, de
364 receber uma... um pedido de algum trabalho aonde eu não sei nem
365 porque que aquilo está sendo realizado. Então, eu tenho um
366 pouquinho de preocupação de esbocar o cenário.
367 M: Então, você prefere esse tipo de... de contextualização quando
368 você vai dar uma informação?
369 J: Isso.
370 M: Essa sua preocupação, ela estaria relacionada, apenas, as
371 mensagens que você redige num... num outro idioma: em inglês ou
372 espanhol, algumas vezes? Ou isso e uma característica de redação
373 sua, que você faz em qualquer situação, em qualquer língua?
374 J: (rindo) E... eu acho que...
375 M: E?
376 J: ... e uma característica minha!
++ Text units 380-381:
380 J: Uh-hum... Não, mas eu acho que, de uma maneira geral, eu
381 acabo... com essa tendência.
++ Text units 459-462:
459 J: Então, essa e a primeira preocupação com relação a isso, né?...
460 de repente, estar passando uma informação errada. Mas, dentro do
461 meu conhecimento, fazer o máximo possível pra... pra estar
462 correto.
++ Text units 471-480:
471 J: E... também, pra que... ja que você está fazendo esse trabalho
472 em inglês, fazer o mais correto possível, né?
473 M: Certo.
474 J: Mas, se eu ficar em dúvida de uma palavra, eu vou la... checo
475 no dicionário... e tal... e vejo.
476 M: Uh-hum.
477 J: A não ser casos que, realmente, não de tempo, né? Porque, as
478 vezes, tem algumas mensagens que a gente... não da tempo, você
479 tem que fazer aquilo muito rápido. Então, você escreve... vamos
480 dizer...
++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: JUCRM23
+++ Retrieval for this document: 103 units out of 1229. = 8.4%
++ Text units 124-129:
124 dicionário. Dificilmente, eu vou escrever alguma coisa, assim... vou
125 chutar!
126 M: Certo.
127 J: Sabe? Ou eu tenho certeza, ou eu estou errando consciente
128 mesmo! (risos) Eu erro porque eu não sabia, ou porque eu me
129 confundi, ou não... naquele momento, faltou atenção.
++ Text units 134-141:
134 M: Uh-hum. Quer dizer que a tua primeira reação é...
135 J: (interrompendo) E escrever certo!
136 M: ... procurar o dicionário... pra escrever?
137 J: E... procurar o dicionário. Se eu ficar em dúvida, eu mudo a
138 estória. As vezes, eu falo: "Ah, ta muita estranha essa frase. Eu
139 acho que ela não está correta! Ela não está dando sentido!"
140 M: Uh-hum.
141 J: Então, eu reescrevo: eu escrevo de outro jeito, ne? Porque eu
++ Text units 279-283:
279 J: E... eu procuro. Eu procuro porque, quando a pessoa recebe um
280 papel, ele e simplesmente um papel: não tem ninguém lá, falando,
281 nem fazendo mimica, nem mostrando a expressão, ne?
282 M: Uh-hum.
283 J: E eu acho que isso é muito importante. Então, de alguma forma,
++ Text units 292-304:
292 J: E sempre que eu vou solicitar alguma coisa, eu procuro
demonstrar que, realmente, eu me preocupo com a atenção que a
293 pessoa está dando pra aquela informação...
294 M: Uh-hum.
295 J: ... eu procuro agradecer por aquele trabalho que a pessoa fez
296 ou ira fazer. Então, eu tenho essa preocupação também. Quando
297 e alguma coisa urgente, eu coloco, lá, tudo em maiúsculas, coloco
deseninhos, ne?...
298 M: Uh-hum.
299 J: E eu acho que isso é muito importante. Então, de alguma forma,
++ Text units 502-510:
502 M: Você e que se... você se coloca numa posição assim: como pra
503 não dizer: "Olha, eu acho que você..."
504 M & J: ... não entendeu..."
505 J: E...
506 M: ... então, você puxa a culpa pra você: "Eu acho que eu não fui
507 clara, ne?"
508 J: E... e... e o que, normalmente, a gente faz.
509 M: Uh-hum.
510 J: Quer dizer, eu, particularmente, faco. Quando eu vejo que... ah...
++ Text units 536-545:
536 forma... ". Mas, isso em último caso. Normalmente, eu falo: "Ah,
537 desculpe. Eu acho que eu me expressei errado. Esta aqui, eu vou
538 tentar te explicar de novo!"
539 M: Certo.
540 J: Ne?
541 M: Mas você nunca recebe esse tipo de atitude quando o problema
542 surge la?
543 J: Muito dificil! Muito dificil!
544 M: Uh-hum.
545 J: Muito raro!
++ Text units 578-583:
578 J: Mas e muito caracteristico da pessoas. Eu acho que nas
579 mensagens, de uma maneira geral, se a gente fosse analisar, ai,
580 um pouquinho mais detalhadamente, ne, eu
581 acho que muito do... da forma como a pessoa se expressa em
582 outras situacoes, ne... - na conversa talvez -... ela realmente tende
583 a repassar isso pra o que ela escreve.
++ Text units 600-608:
600 as expressoes corretas. Entao, eu acho que... nesse caso, eu puxo
601 a culpa pro meu lado talvez por falta de conhecimento de causa,
602 ne? Se eu tivesse absoluta certeza... Quando eu tenho absoluta
603 certeza daquilo que eu escrevi, que esta extremamente correto e,
604 talvez, a pessoa nao tenha se dado conta daquilo, talvez eu nao
605 assumisse tanto a culpa. Mas de uma maneira geral, se eu
606 pergunto alguma coisa e a pessoa se confunde pra responder, eu
607 automaticamente trago a culpa pra mim: "Ah, desculpe. Eu acho
608 que nao me expressei bem!"
++ Text units 640-642:
640 J: Entao, eu tenho essa preocupacao em puxar esse... esse... essa
641 caracteristica... esse... vamos dizer, entre aspas, "o problema pra
642 mim": "Eu acho que eu nao expliquei direito".
++ Text units 812-823:
812 J: Ne? Qualquer situacao, eu colocava "we"... "we"... "we"... "we",
813 ne?... sempre, em qualquer outra situacao, ne? Eu estava
814 começando a generalizar isso. Entao, eu acho que, em alguns
815 casos, eu cometo bastante: "I need your help".
816 M: Uh-hum.
817 J: "Could you help me?", ne? Entao, sempre colocando, realmente,
818 a mim... porque sou eu que estou mandando a mensagem e sou
819 eu que vou estar recebando, ne?
820 M: Uh-hum.
821 J: Entao, mesmo que tenham outras pessoas envolvidas no
822 processo, eu... particularmente, tenho utilizado... tenho procurado
823 utilizar dessa forma.
++ Text units 926-926:
926 J: E... eu acho que eu tenho menos medo de errar!
++ Text units 928-943:
928 J: Ta? Eu acho que a preocupacao em errar, no inicio, ela e muito
929 grande - como em qualquer situacao da vida da gente, ne? E... o
930 inicio, voce tem aquele maior medo de errar, ne? Depois, voce vai
931 convivendo com aquilo e vai, tambem, se acostumando com os
932 proprios erros, ne? Entao, hoje, eu nao tenho uma preocupacao,
933 assim: "Ah... ne?... Vao acabar comigo, aqui, se eu escrever
934 errado!"
935 M: Uh-hum.
936 J: Eu ja nao tenho essa preocupacao porque eu sei quem vamos
937 dizer, na media, eu vou estar escrevendo... passando a
938 mensagem, passando as ideias... de uma forma...
939 M: Certo...
940 J: ... vamos dizer, que podam ate existirem erros - ate, as vezes,
941 erros graves, ne? Mas, de uma forma... pelos resultados que eu
942 vejo, ne?... quando o pessoal responde... ah... de uma forma
943 tranquila... quando a comunicacao acontece, ne?
Ficar preocupado com... essa forma ou de, de repente, assumir a responsabilidade das coisas pra minimizar e tentar chegar no resultado, é uma característica minha!

M: Certo.

J: Eu até, às vezes, eu acho que é, até, um pouco exagerado!

M: Uh-hum.

J: Quer dizer, não me mancium um detalhamento grande sobre essa empresa, né? ...

M: Certo.

J: E... exato. E... e... nesse contexto, eu me coloco no lugar da pessoa... como se eu recebo uma mensagem: "Olha..." - ainda

M: Pois, me coloco a disposição para continuar discutindo o assunto. Mas de uma forma bastante resumida.

M: ... interessante se você tivesse oportunidade de estar se desenvolvendo mais, mas...

L: Se eu criasse tempo pra fazer isso, senão... você não faz.

M: E, se nos tivéssemos um dia de 48 horas.

L: E, exato. Eu digo que, quando eu preciso fazer as coisas, eu "crio" tempo pra fazer aquilo.

M: Porque, senão, não dá.

L: E.

L: Tem pessoa que gosta de usar um pouco disso, que gosta de...

M: E, as vezes, a pessoa naturalmente mais... brincalhona... não sei...

L: E muitas vezes, a pessoa faz mesmo numa... no sentido de questionar algumas coisas, né?

M: Uh-hum.

L: O que... o que normalmente me gera um pouco de... ira! (risos)
423 Nao e, nao e...
424 M: Voce acha que...
425 L: ... nao e tão longe assim! Nao e ira, mas...
426 M: Mas... atinge, ne?
427 L: E!
428 M: ... de alguma forma.
429 L: isso ai

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: PCFM
+++ Retrieval for this document: 5 units out of 1177, = 0.42%
++ Text units 260-264:
260 M: E a sua preocupacao - esse me pareceu um dado bem assim.
261 claro, ne, nas nossas conversas - e a preocupacao em ser claro,
262 em dizer... em expor a tua ideia da forma...
263 M & PC: ... mais clara possivel.
264 PC: Uh-hum.

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: PCII
+++ Retrieval for this document: 9 units out of 735, = 1.2%
++ Text units 234-242:
234 PC: Tendo. Eu tenho muita preocupacao em escrever... coisas que
235 nao fazem sentido. Ne?
236 M: Certo.
237 PC: Porque, as vezes, voce faz alguma colocacao e por... por...
238 por... saiba de alguma estrutura gramatical ali, pode mudar
239 completamente o sentido da coisa ou nao ser compreensivel
240 aqui, ne?
241 M: Uh-hum.
242 PC: Ou ser entendido de outra maneira.

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: PCRM1
+++ Retrieval for this document: 7 units out of 1149, = 0.61%
++ Text units 288-291:
288 PC: E... eu, quando estava redigindo essa mensagem aqui,
289 ah... eu procuero sempre dest... ser muito claro, ne? Mesmo que
290 eu tenha que ser repetitivo, as vezes, eu procuero o mais
291 claro que eu possa, ne?
++ Text units 694-695:
694 PC: Ai, nao tem duvida! A gente conhece as palavras pra, pra
695 ser duro mesmo.
++ Text units 702-702:
702 PC: Ne? Voce tam que ser mais diplomatico ai.

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: PCRM2
+++ Retrieval for this document: 26 units out of 1112, = 2.3%
++ Text units 296-298:
296 PC: Eu, eu nao... eu... eu nao gosto muito de usar "I" mesmo, viu?
297 M: Uh-hum.
298 PC: Eu, realmente, nao...
++ Text units 315-315:
315 PC: Eu uso bastante o "we", viu, Maximina?
++ Text units 320-330:
320 PC: E algumas coisas... quando eu tenho que colocar uma opiniao
321 pessoal mesmo, ai, eu sou obrigado a usar "I". Eu, quando eu...
322 principalmente, eu uso o "we", quando eu preciso chamar a
323 atencao de algum.
324 M: Uh-hum.
(pensando mais) Eu não sei se eu acho que é mais polido
ou... (risos)...
M: E uma coisa mais...
PC: Não fica pessoal, entendeu?
M: E uma coisa mais habitual pra você?
PC: Pra coisa... e.
++ Text units 435-440:
PC: E, aí, eu respondi porque eu vi essas mensagens andando,
ne? Eu tenho cópias de algumas mensagens ai, que o pessoal
manda, ne?
M: Certo.
PC: Eu vi as mensagens rodando sem... sem resposta e eu
respondi.
++ Text units 590-594:
também, uma outra coisa que eu sempre procuro fazer mas
minhas mensagens e tirar a pendência que existe conosco e ou...
se, se for uma coisa que esteja ao meu alcance de resolver, ja
resolver; ou, se eu... se for o caso, passar a pendência pro lado
deles.
++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: PCRM3
+++ Retrieval for this document: 11 units out of 1011, = 1.1%
++ Text units 423-433:
PC: E, no sentido de quando... ah... eu preciso forçar alguém a
fazer alguma coisa, eu prefiro usar "we".
M: Uh-hum.
PC: Ne? Eu não sei se isso... faz com que...
M: Faz você não ficar tão direto...
PC: E... e...
M: ... tão agressivo.
PC: Ou quando é preciso fazer alguma coisa numa posição mais
agressiva, eu prefiro usar "we".
M: Uh-hum.
PC: Ne?
++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: PCRM4
+++ Retrieval for this document: 11 units out of 957, = 1.1%
++ Text units 878-888:
PC: Eu vou... eu... acontece o seguinte: eu, particularmente,
Maximina, eu... ah... eu não sei se isso é um defeito meu, eu não
consigo ser rispido com as pessoas.
M: Uh-hum.
PC: Por mais que eu tente, ne? Eu não... eu acho que é... primeiro,
porque eu considero que é um colega de trabalho que está lá e -
o assunto sendo grave, ne? - eu procuro sempre enfatizar que...
mas, eu vou trazer uma pra você ver.
M: Uh-hum. Ou mesmo...
PC: (me interrompendo e brincando) Vou procurar uma que eu
estava bem bravo, mesmo!
+++ Total number of text units retrieved = 539
+++ Retrievals in 21 out of 29 documents, = 72%.
+++ The documents with retrievals have a total of 26086 text units,
so text units retrieved in these documents = 2.1%.
+++ All documents have a total of 35606 text units,
so text units found in these documents = 1.5%.

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405