

"Good Morning, My Dear Dr." Openings and Closings in University Students' Academic Emails

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Abstract

The current study investigates the openings and closings in the emails of Jordanian undergraduate students to their professors. It is significant as it provides invaluable insights into different aspects of student-professor interpersonal communication. This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining how Jordanian university undergraduates open and close their first-contact emails to their professors. This study uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The sample of this study consisted of 200 authentic Arabic email messages drawn from a professor's mail inbox. The data were analyzed based on Salazar-Campillo & Codina-Espurz's typology of opening and closing. The findings reveal that the emails included all the opening and closing moves reported by previous research, however, with clear variation. The findings also show that openings and closings are used as politeness strategies to create a positive tone for student-professor academic interactions. Moreover, the study concludes that the emails resorted to more informal opening and closing formulas. The emails in this study do not conform to the norms and etiquette of student-professor email interaction. Furthermore, this study reports the use of emojis in almost all moves of the opening and closing sequences. Based on the findings, future studies are recommended.

Keywords: openings; closings; emails; pragmatics; Jordanian; students

1. Introduction

Email is an asynchronous means of communication that allows individuals to send and receive online messages. It has become a vital part of communication in the personal, academic and professional environments (Crystal, 2006; Salazar-Campillo, 2018). In the academic context, student-professor interactions, according to Biesenbach-Lucas (2007), have shifted from face-to-face consultations to more and more 'cyber-consultations' at the university level. Email provides an essential means for students to interact digitally with peers, administrative staff, and, specifically, professors. It allows students to request feedback, clarification, and information in a short period (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Email also helps facilitate student-professor communication and improve students' academic performance (Weiss & Hanson-Baldauf, 2008). Email is a convenient communication method that adopts many standard features from both conversational and written language (Chen, 2001; Crystal, 2006). It constitutes an innovative, hybrid text type in which users can display a wide range of discourse styles when used for different communicative purposes and in various settings (Chen, 2001). The aspects of these online interactions, such as language choice, formality, politeness, and tone, convey an abundance of information that goes beyond the simple exchange of words.

An email generally includes three primary structural components: openings, content usually performing a communicative act, and closings (Bou-Franch, 2011; Crystal, 2006). According to Waldvogel (2007) openings and closings play a significant social role in emails as in other forms of interaction. They are regarded as optional email sequences (Bou-Franch, 2011; Crystal, 2006), whereas content is an obligatory element in emails (Bou-Franch, 2011). An exciting aspect of email communication is the openings and closings of emails. Although openings and closing may seem routine and optional (Crystal, 2006; Heyd 2008), they signal a sender's identity, gender, age, education, occupation, social role, as well as attitudes and feelings. In the educational setting, openings and closings have particular functions (Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2018). For example, a suitable opening of an email, such as "Dear Dr. Fred", sets the scene for the subsequent communication and helps maintain the relationship between the student and professor. On the other hand, a proper closing, such as "Best regards + sender's name", signals professionalism, respect and formality. Openings and closings also help email senders build rapport and maintain interpersonal relations (Halenko & Winder, 2022).

In spite of their significance, very little attention has been paid to the study of openings and closings in student-professor email communication within the Jordanian academic context, especially in emails written in Arabic. Therefore, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining how Jordanian university undergraduates open and close their first-contact emails to their professors. This study

seeks to answer the following two straightforward questions:

RQ 1: What are the opening realizations of Jordanian students' emails?

RQ 2: What are the closing realizations of Jordanian students' emails?

This study provides insight into the practice of academic online communication. It can help students, professors, and institutions better understand the professional etiquette of student-professor email communication in an academic setting. It can also help them generate more effective emails, thereby facilitating their online communication and improving their academic experience.

2. Literature Review

A good number of studies have examined openings and closings of emails in academic contexts. Bou-Franch (2006) examined the opening moves in thirty emails of Spanish students. Her study's findings revealed that nearly all the emails analyzed contained openings, particularly (greetings (89%) and identification of self (70%)). She also found that some openings were less formal than other openings were. In her study of whether the use of openings and closings was affected by initiating and follow-up emails, Bou-Franch (2011) specified that more informality occurred from initial to follow-up emails. She mainly showed that 95 percent of initiating emails contained openings, particularly (greeting (93%) and identification of self (60%)). She argued that the Spanish students mostly opted for solidarity and intimacy with their professors due to the impact of increasing solidarity between students and professors in the Spanish academic context.

Hallajian and David (2014) studied the openings and closings of Iranian post-graduate students' emails to their Malaysian professors. Their findings indicated that more attention was paid to closings than openings, although both were shown to have high frequency. They indicated significant variations in the way Iranian students open and close their emails. They also used less formal address terms as they tended to use more first name (FN) than last name (LN). Moreover, Salazar-Campillo (2018) investigated the openings and closings in graduate students' first-contact emails. The students' emails were generated by two groups of students: Spanish, the first group L1 and English, the students' foreign language. In their email openings, only a greeting or a greeting and the professor's FN were employed; none of the groups demonstrated the desired level of politeness to the professor.

On the other hand, closings included status-appropriate politeness irrespective of the language used. In a Norwegian context, Savić (2018) looked into the openings and closings in 109 emails of Norwegian students written in English. She noted a great use of openings and closings in the data despite their optionality in emails, emphasizing the students' desire for interpersonal interactions. Familiarity was identified in the openings, but formality was spotted in the closings. Her findings also highlighted the impact of social distance in the use of these textual elements.

In a similar vein, Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) and Salazar-Campillo and Codina-Espurz (2018) investigated politeness in openings and closings in initial and follow-up emails. Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) argued that the use of politeness strategies helps maintain social distance and that informality represents solidarity, closeness, and rapport. Their study's findings indicated that openings were more informal; the majority of them consisted of a greeting followed by the professor's first name. Concerning closings, their research findings revealed a drop in polite expressions, specially in the follow-up emails, reflecting a shift toward a more conversational communication style (Salazar-Campillo & Codina-Espurz, 2018).

In addition, Chen (2001) and Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2013) have compared the use of openings and closings of two groups of students' emails in academia. For example, in his comparison of Taiwanese (TS) and Americans' email's openings and closings, Chen (2001) found that the TS tended to use a formal address term (title + LN) with their professors, while the Americans used the professor's FN to indicate intimacy and solidarity. He also explained that the TS used the deference term "dear" more than the Americans (83% and 26%, respectively). Furthermore, unlike the TS, who used self-introduction in 60% of their data, Americans only used it in 9% of their emails. The Taiwanese and the American data contained similar percentages of phatic communication. Finally, the TS showed more tendency to use complimentary close than the Americans did. Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2013) made a comparison between Peninsular Spanish (PS) and British English (BE) emails to investigate the role of (in)formality and (in)directness in 100 impromptu undergraduates' emails to their lecturers. Their findings highlighted different conventions for closings. Whereas thanking, leave-taking, and signature made nearly 90 % of all closings of PS, the signature and the thanking moves were the most frequent among BE. Their analysis also showed a preference for "unmarked directness' and formality in PS and for conventional indirectness and informality in BE" (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2013, p. 18).

Several scholars have also explored familiarity and intimacy in the opening and closing of emails in an educational setting. Waldvogel (2007), who compared the openings and closings in the emails of an educational institution and a manufacturing plant, found that the openings and closings in the emails of the educational setting were more informal and intimate than those of the manufacturing plant, which included more politeness cues. Biesenbach-Lucas' (2007) examination of native and non-native students' politeness in their emails to their professors showed students' preference to use directness, especially in low-imposition requests. This finding signals the students' awareness of email etiquette with their professors. In addition, in his investigation of American university students' (in English and Spanish) openings and closings, Félix-Brasdefer (2012) stated a significant level of pragmalinguistic variation. For instance, the students used informal openings in the L1, but they generated more formal openings in the L2. Their email closings tended to be more formal than their email openings. He ascribed these variations in formality and directness to cross-cultural reasons. Eslami (2013), an Iranian author, examined Iranian and American students' email openings and closings. She found that non-native students employed greater deference and lengthier variety of moves in their email openings and closing, reflecting the students' cultural backgrounds. Bou-Franch (2011) showed that while

students emphasized solidarity in their opening sequences, they opted for deference in their closing sequences. Salazar-Campillo and Codina-Espurz (2018) showed a tendency for informality. According to them, the familiarity in salutation was due to a transfer of the L1 Spanish norms on how to address a professor. Danielewics-Betz (2013) argued that the 1200 academic emails she analyzed generally violated politeness norms with regard to forms of address, openings, and closings.

Since our study investigates openings and closings of emails in the Jordanian context, it is significant to discuss some of the studies carried out in the Arab and Jordanian settings. For example, Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020) examined email greetings and farewells in 100 Arabic and 100 English emails in an academic setting. In the Arabic email openings, their findings showed that "greeting word only" and "no opening formula" were the highest, whereas a "thanks only" formula was the highest in the email farewells. In the English email openings, "greeting and name", "greeting word only", and "greeting and title" were used to open an email, and "leave-taking, name and last name", and "leave-taking only" formulas were used to close an email. In another study, Al-Momani (2016) examined email communication in a university setting. Specifically, she analyzed 750 emails she received from her MA and PhD students during her employment at the University of Jordan to look for linguistic patterns. She found that the majority of the emails contained openings (75%), whereas (35%) of the emails did not have any closing formula. She also cited that (52%) of the emails sent between the students had no greetings, and (73%) had no closings, which was ascribed to informality in this type of emails. In contrast, the student-professor emails contained more openings and closings, expressing social and power status between them. Studying the openings and closings in 182 emails of a group of Tunisian students to their professors, Amor (2018) concluded that students were heedful to openings and closings in their emails. Furthermore, he explained that the students followed no standards in writing their emails. For example, they employed formal and informal closings, with the formal style used more. They also used a great variety of address forms, indicating that they might need to be made aware of the suitable forms or styles to use. His findings also revealed that the most frequent endearment word used in salutation was the deference term "dear". A common error in Amor's (2018) data was the use of incorrect address forms, such as the use of "Mr." instead of "Prof.". This literature review shows that studies examining the openings and closings in Jordanian students' emails in an academic setting are scarce. Therefore, this study attempts to fill in this gap in the literature.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

A corpus of 200 authentic emails was compiled. The emails were written and sent by Jordanian male and female undergraduate students enrolled at Yarmouk University in Jordan to their professor, who is teaching Linguistics and Translation. The email messages were randomly collected from the email account of the professor. They were selected from the emails received over four years (beginning of 2022 and end of 2023). The emails had different types of content, the most common of which were request emails (43%) followed by inquiry emails (38%). The senders' information (name, university ID number, email address) was kept anonymous for confidentiality purposes. An e-consent was obtained from the students. Some consent forms were hard to obtain because some of the students had graduated before study commenced. Thus, they were excluded from the analysis.

There are six important factors that our data collection process took into consideration: (1) All the emails were written by Jordanian undergraduates; this study focuses on Jordanian Arabic. (2) All the emails were first-contact emails between undergraduate students and their professors. Such emails tend to be more formal and more carefully designed (3) All the emails selected were generated in Arabic. Emails written in English were excluded because the aim of this study is investigate email etiquette in Arabic; (4) The power dimension was stable (the professor being authority in an academic context). (5) The social dimension was low; there was a certain level of interaction between the students and the professor. (6) All the emails were generated within a university educational setting. Therefore, we can claim that our data is representative of authentic and natural student-professor communication

3.2 Data Analysis

Opening and closing sequences are made up of moves. A move is defined as "the minimal functional discourse unit". Hence, each move was taken as a structural unit of analysis. This study used descriptive statistics to present the findings. The data analysis was carried out by all co-authors at the same time. The agreement among them was very high. All Issues of complexities were resolved. Finally, the findings of the analysis were interpreted and discussed based on culture-specific practices of email etiquette in Arabic. This study adopts Salazar-Campillo and Codina-Espurz's (2018) typology of opening and closing, as shown in Table 1. However, additional categories found in the data were added to accommodate for the data variation. Table 1 summarizes the opening and closing sequences and their moves.

Table 1. Opening and Closing Sequences Based on Salazar-Campillo and Codina-Espurz (2018)

Name	Explanation	Example
Salutation/greeting	The writer opens the email with a greeting	- "Dear Dr./ Hi/Hello/ Good morning/assalamualikum Dr. XXX"
pleasantry	The writer makes polite social remarks, such as gratitude, apology, or wishing, that function as phatic communication	-"I hope this email finds you well. How are You?"
Self- identification	The writer identifies himself/herself	-"I am XXX from TRA 105."
Pre-closing	The writer is ready to sign off and make reference to the email request	Thanking, apologizing, promising, or appealing
Thanking	The writer thanks his/her addressee for his/her kindness and assistance	"Thanks for your time."

Apology	The writer apologizes to his/her addressee for making the request or for any inconvenience	“I am sorry to bother you, but I need an extension on this assignment.”
Promise	The writer makes a promise to be fulfilled upon completion of the requested act	“Could you give me an extension? I promise I will have it ready by tomorrow.”
Appeal	The writer makes a request for help, support, mercy, etc.	“ Please, Dr., Give us a bonus!”
Closing	The writer closes his/her email by using a farewell/ closing remark	Best/ sincerely/ kind regards
Signature	The writer signs the email with his/her given name	FN/ FN+LN/ FN+MN+LN

4. Findings and Discussion

Before addressing the research questions, a presentation of the structure of the students’ emails is given in Table 2. It provides the frequencies and the percentages of the openings and closing sequences.

Table 2. Students’ Emails Structure

Opening	Frequency	Percentage	Closing	Frequency	Percentage
Salutation	194	97%	Pre-closing	78	39%
Pleasantry	45	22.5%	Complimentary close	54	27%
Identification of Self	62	31%	Signature	24	12%

Table 2 shows that all elements of emails mentioned in previous literature were found in the emails of the Jordanian students. Despite their optional nature (Bou-Franch, 2011; Crystal, 2006), Jordanian students showed high tendency to include openings and closings in their emails, lending support to previous studies, such as Amor’s (2018), Codina-Espurz (2021), and Salazar-Campillo’s (2023), among others. As far as openings are concerned, this study agrees with the findings of Bou Franch (2011), Hallajian and David (2014), Amor (2018), that email openings are made up of the three moves mentioned in Table 1. Our study also shows agreement with the same studies concerning the closing sequence, which consists of a pre-closing, complimentary close, and signature.

4.1 What Are the Opening Realizations of Jordanian Students’ Emails?

The findings show that salutations, pleasantry expressions, and identification of self were all identified in the opening sequences of the students’ emails, however, with varying degrees. Table 3 presents the distribution of the opening realizations of the students’ emails. It shows that 194 (97%) emails contained a salutation, 45 (22.5%) contained a pleasantry expression, and 62 (31%) contained a self-identification move.

Table 3. Opening Realizations in Students’ Emails

Opening	Frequency	percentage
Salutation	194	97%
Pleasantry	45	22.5%
Identification of Self	62	31%

4.1.1 Salutation

Salutations are greeting expressions typically used at the beginning of emails to establish a friendly atmosphere and to express deference and politeness (Waldvogel, 2007; Salazar-Campillo, 2018). The data show that a very high percentage of the emails, specifically 194 (97.5%), contained a salutation. This finding lends support to the findings of Bou-Franch’s (2011), Félix-Brasdefer’s (2012), Salazar-Campillo’s (2018), Amor’s (2018), Al-Sayyed and Rabab’ah’s (2020), Oandasan’s (2021), Salazar-Campillo’s (2023). The high percentage of greetings signals politeness, respect, and less directness (Waldvogel, 2007; Economidou Kogetsidis, 2011; Salazar-Campillo, 2018). In our study, the frequent utilization of salutations agrees with Jordanian cultural norms, as it is considered impolite to ignore greetings in social interactions. Table 4 presents the frequencies and percentages of the greeting structures of the students’ emails.

Table 4. Frequencies and Percentages of the Greeting Structures

No.	Greeting	Frequency	percentage
1	Title + deference term	1	.5%
2	Title + deference term + emoji	1	.5%
3	Only greeting expression	16	8%
4	Greeting + title	99	49.5%
5	Greeting + title + greeting	20	10%
6	Double greeting + title	8	4%
7	Greeting + title + first name (FN)	35	17.5%
8	Greeting + title + first name +Last name (LN)	1	.5%
9	Greeting + title + emoji	2	1%
10	Title + greeting	7	3.5%
11	Title + double greeting	2	1%
12	Title + first name + double greeting	2	1%
13	No greeting	(6)	3%
	Total	200	100%

Table 3 shows that thirteen greeting forms were identified in the data. Out of the sixteen greeting structures mentioned in Salazar-Campillo and Codina-Espurz's (2018) typology, only 5 greeting structures were found, namely, only greeting, greeting + title, greeting + title + FN, and greeting + title + FN + LN, and no greeting. However, new structures appeared in the data: Title + deference term, title + deference term + emoji, greeting + title + greeting, greeting + greeting +title, greeting + title + emoji, title + greeting, title + greeting + greeting, title + FN+ greeting + greeting. The presence of 12 greeting structures in the students' email openings reveals so much variation, agreeing with Félix-Brasdefer (2012), who found great variation in student-professor email openings. In contrast, this finding does not agree with that of Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020), who claimed that the openings of Arabic emails do not have enough variation.

The term of deference “dear” was scarce; it was only used in two emails. In one email, it was used with an address form, e.g., ‘daktoory ilfaadhil’ (My dear Dr.). In the other email, it occurred with a title + emoji ‘daktoory ilʕaziiz □’ (My Dear Dr. □). The absence of the deference term “dear” in the emails signals a lack of formality and politeness (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Despite the fact that student-professor email interactions require particular degrees of formality, the absence of the term “dear” may be attributed to cultural norms. Its scarce presence in our data may be ascribed to the fact that emails written in Arabic do not usually include this term. They typically start with a greeting without the term of deference “dear”. The use of red rose emoji □ in the second example may be used to strengthen the speech act, to express closeness and intimacy, or as a politeness strategy (Savić, 2018; Yang & Liu 2020; Al Rousan et al., in press).

An interesting finding is that 16 (8%) emails had only greeting expression. No form of title was used in this structure. This percentage is considered low compared to that of Salazar-Campillo (2018), who reported that 44% of her emails had only a greeting formula. The use of only greeting expression and the use of zero title indicate impoliteness, and abruptness (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Bou-Franch, 2011). It is also a signal of closeness and familiarity through which the students try to build rapport with their professor (Hofstede, 2001). Although these emails were the first written encounters between the students and the professor, the students failed to adhere to the norms of politeness in writing emails. This failure may be a result of the students’ lack of competence in email etiquette or the fact that they were trying to establish a friendly atmosphere with their professors. Half of the greeting expressions used in these emails such as ‘ʔassalamu alaikom wa rahmatulahi wa barakatuh’ (God’s mercy and blessing be upon you), are regarded as formal in Arabic. In contrast, others like ‘salamualaikom’ (Peace be upon you) and ‘sabaaho’ (Good morning) are informal expressions in Arabic.

The data also showed that 178 (89%) emails contained a greeting expression + title, however, in different structures and orders. According to Chen (2006) and Amor (2018), the correct use of a suitable title in student-professor email interaction is considered polite. Moreover, the deletion of a title is considered unacceptable in student-professor email communication in many countries (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). The most preferred structure was a greeting expression + title, which appeared in 99 (49.5) emails, such as ‘yiʕTeek ilʕaafiyih daktoor’ (May God grant you good health), and ‘ʔassalmualaikom’ (Peace be Upon You). The position of a greeting before a title may indicate friendliness and intimacy. The second one is a greeting + title + a greeting sequence, which was identified in 20 (10%), as in ‘ʔassalamualikom daktoor yiʕTeel ilʕaafiyih’ (Peace be upon you, Dr., May God grant you good health), and ‘marhaba daktoor yiʕTeek ilʕaafiyih’ (Hi Dr., May God grant you good health). In all twenty examples, the greeting expression ‘yiʕTeek ilʕaafiyih’, which is also a form of a prayer, was preceded by either the greetings ‘peace be upon you or Hi’. This combination was not mentioned in any previous research. It may be used to emphasize respect and politeness.

The formula greeting expression + greeting expression + title appeared in 8 (4%) examples, such as ‘masaaʔ ilkheer yiʕTeek ilʕaafiyih daktoor’ (Good evening; May God grant you good health). The use of double greetings may be due to a common linguistic practice in Jordanian culture. It may also be a student’s preference since it is a friendly way to begin a conversation. Moreover, it emphasizes respect and politeness. Double greetings highlight the idea that emails adopt features of a spoken language. It is noteworthy that 2 (1%) emails contained a greeting expression + title + emoji, such as ‘salam daktoor ♥ □’, meaning (Hi, Dr. ♥ □ □). Although emoji inclusion in emails may be deemed inappropriate, especially in an academic setting, the use of *red heart emoji* in this contexts along with the word ‘salam’, which is a short form of ‘ʔasslamualaikom wa rahmatulahi wa barakatuh’ expresses informality and intimacy. Emojis, such as the red heart, can also boost the speech act of greeting and mitigate the request (Yang & Liu 2020; Al Rousan et al., in Press). They can also help people express feelings and emotions and attitudes (Al Rousan et al., 2022). Furthermore, the formulas title +greeting expression ‘daktoor yiʕTeek ilʕaafiyih’ and title + double greeting ‘daktoor yiʕTeek ilʕaafiyih w yiʕʕid masaak’ (May God grant you good health Dr. and Good evening) were also found in the data. The former appeared in 7 (3.5%) examples, whereas the latter appeared in 2 (1%). Even though this structure is regarded as unacceptable (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007), its use may convey a sense of formality, distance, and professionalism. It could also be a means to acknowledge the receiver’s identity. Additionally, the sender in the above two examples may have used it to express a sense of seriousness and urgency.

Similar to previous research, such as Chen (2006), Salazar-Campillo (2018), Amor, (2018), Codina-Espurz (2021), and Salazar-Campillo (2023), our data included greeting expressions + title + name (FN or FN+LN), although in different orders. The most frequent of these was the formula greeting + title+ FN, appearing in 35 (17.5) emails, for example, 'Marhaba daktoor Rafat' (Hello Dr. Rafat). Only in 1 example, FN+LN were used, 'ʔassalamualikom daktoor rafat alrousan' (Peace be Upon You, Dr. Rafat Al Rousan). However, in two instances the greeting formula title + FN + greeting E + greeting E were identified, e.g., 'daktoor rafat asʕada allah masaak wa aʕTak alʕaafyiah' (Dr. Rafat, good evening, and may God grant you good health). The first structure signifies a lack of formality since 28 (14%) out of the 35 (17.5) examples in this formula used informal expressions that are typically used between equals in Jordanian-spoken Arabic (JSA). It also emphasizes the fact that emails adopt features of a spoken language (Crystal, 2006). Although the use of a greeting expression + title +

FN+LN maintains a level of formality and respect, in JSA, it is very uncommon to find such a formula, even in the most formal context. That is why only one example having this formula was detected in the data. Moreover, the inclusion of double greetings may emphasize politeness and deference by the sender. This finding does not with any of the previous studies' findings. No previous studies have revealed a similar finding. This emphasizes the fact that greeting expressions may be culture-specific. Particularly interesting is the finding that only one example demonstrates the inclusion of FN+LN, while 35 (17.5%) only used FN. This may be associated with reducing social distance between the sender and the receiver. The students in this study may wish to be friendly and close to their professor. Chen (2006, p. 8) stated that "when the professor's first name was used, it helped to shorten the distance and lessen the status difference between student and professor". In Savić's (2018) terms, using the professor's FN in the opening improves instructor evaluation of students' emails. On the other hand, the use of LN is a strategy employed to "recognize social difference" (Zhu, 2015, p. 215). It may also be used as a mitigating device to reduce the face-threatening act resulting from the request or inquiry. One more justification is that, in Jordanian culture, it is not very common to address a high-status individual using his LN. Unlike previous studies such as Codina-Espurz and Salazar-Campillo (2019) and Codina-Espurz (2021), which indicated frequent use of a greeting + FN, this study did not come across any of these. The absence of such a structure is due to the fact that it is very impolite to use it with a superior in a Jordanian setting.

Furthermore, the data revealed that a few emails had no greetings of any kind. Specifically, 6 (3%) emails started directly with the communicative speech act (i.e., request or make an appointment). This finding was also reported by Walvogel (2007), Salazar-Campillo (2023), Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020). Although neglecting a greeting in an informal context may be regarded as acceptable, it can be considered disrespectful, direct, and even offensive in formal settings such as the academic context. A professor may probably take it personally and think that the student is trying to avoid the acknowledgement of his/ her superior status. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) pointed out that the zero greeting can be viewed as a pragmatic infelicity. The intentional skipping of a greeting in emails by students may be attributed to the fact that some students tend to direct and focus on the content of the email rather than its openings and closings. It could also indicate a lack of respect and politeness (Lan, 2000; Amor, 2018). In addition, a lack of pragmatic competence may be a factor behind leaving out a greeting expression (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007).

4.1.2 Pleasantry

The second move identified in the opening sequence is the pleasantry move. It is a phatic communication expression used to establish social contact (Codina-Espurz, 2021), maintain a friendly conversational atmosphere (Cummings, 2010, mitigate a speech act (Amor, 2018), express emotions (Hallajian & David, 2014), and convey politeness (Rygg, 2021), "establish and maintain a feeling of social solidarity and well-being" (Lyons, 1968, p. 417), and express social concerns. Pleasantries are small talk that can carry light information, such as "the weather is nice" (Radovanovic & Ragnedda, 2012).

This study revealed that pleasantry was used in 45 (22.5%) emails. This is the first contact between the students and their professor, in which they are trying to be polite and formal. It may also be attributed to Jordanian cultural practices that use pleasantry expressions immediately after greetings in social interactions. Our finding is supported by Hallajian and David's (2014) and Amor's (2018) studies, which showed that 37% and 28.6% of their emails receptively contained pleasantry moves. Table 5 below presents the frequencies and percentages of the pleasantry realizations yielded by the data analysis.

Table 5. Pleasantry Realizations in Students' Emails

Pleasantry	Frequency	Percentage
Gratitude	13	6.5%
Gratitude + title+ emoji	2	1%
Apology	26	13%
Apology + title	2	1%
Apology + title + Emoji	1	.5%
Wish + emoji	1	.5%
No pleasantry	155	77.5%
Total	200	100 %

The data analysis revealed that three pleasantry structures appeared in the students' emails. The most common one is apology, which was included in 29 (14.5%) emails. Apology, as a pleasantry move, came in three forms: only apology, apology + title, and apology + title + emoji. An example of apology, which was identified in 26 (13%) emails, is 'ʔaasif 9ala ilʔizʔaaj' (I am really sorry for the disturbance." an example of apology + title", which appeared in 2 (1%) emails, is 'iʔtithaari ʔan ʔizʔaajak daktoor' (My apology for disturbing you Dr.". Lastly, an example of the last structure, which showed up in 1 (.5%) email only, is 'ʔaasif jiddan ʔal ʔizʔaaj daktoor + ❤️🙏' (I am really sorry for the disturbance, Dr. + ❤️🙏). Gratitude, on the other hand, appeared in 15 (7.5%) examples, such as ' bilbidaayih bahib ashkurak ʔala juhuudak' (in the beginning, I like to thank you for your efforts) and ' (bilbidaayih kul iltagdeer wa lihtiraam' (In the beginning, all appreciation and respect). Two (1%) of these examples were accompanied by a title + emoji as in 'kuli lihtiraam wa ltagdeer wa lshukur lak daktoor ❤️🙏' (All respect, appreciation, and thanks to you Dr.+ ❤️🙏"). The last pleasantry move was wishing. It appeared in 1 (.5%) only. Before presenting his/her request, the sender of this email expressed his/her wishes to the professor for a happy year accompanied by a flower emoji. The majority of the emails, precisely 155 (77.5) emails, did not contain a pleasantry move. The students launched their messages directly after the greeting. This emphasizes the claim by Chen (2001) that in emails, phatic communication is optional and used at its minimum because it is not a strategy but a matter of personal choice.

By using these three pleasantries moves, the students may be attempting to establish a positive tone for the interaction with their professor by showing friendliness and politeness. This idea agrees with Rygg (2021) that pleasantries moves are strongly linked with positive politeness in Norwegian culture. The students may also be aiming to capture the professor’s attention and prepare him for the content of the email. For example, the use of an apology may express the students’ desire to admit a potential mistake, so they apologize ahead of time to address the matter. On the other hand, the use of wishing, besides expressing courtesy and politeness, could demonstrate a personal aspect of the student-professor’s relations besides the academic one. This is in line with Chen (2001), Hallajian and David (2014) and Amor (2018), who argued that pleasantries moves are related to personal concerns and worries, such as health and well-being.

Furthermore, pleasantries moves can be used to mitigate the force of the requestive speech act. This may be due to the cultural norms, where Jordanian people tend to be polite before commencing a request or a question. Additionally, the use of emojis in this move is a strategy for strengthening the speech acts of apology, gratitude, and wishing, weakening the force of the speech act (Al Rousan et al., in Press), or manipulating the emotions of the addressee (Amor, 2018).

4.1.3 Identification of Self

In this opening move, the students introduce themselves prior to writing the content, by including their names and background information (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Zhu, 2015). Typically, it is a strategy used when the speaker meets the hearer for the first time (Chen, 2001). Hence, students may self-introduce themselves since the emails are directed to the professor who is unfamiliar with them. Moreover, they do it for politeness purposes because students must address their professors with deference (Salazar-Campillo, 2023). Others identify themselves to set the scene for the interaction. Moreover, mentioning a student’s name at the opening of an email helps create a sense of connection and familiarity with their professor. Different realizations of self-identification were found in the data. Table 6 presents the realizations of the self-identification move in the students’ emails.

Table 6. Realizations of Identification of Self in Students’ Emails

Identification of Self	Frequency	Percentage
First name + last name + course name	30	15%
First name + last name	16	8%
First name + last name + course name + ID no.	4	2%
First name + last name + course name + seat no.	3	1.5%
First name + last name + ID no. + course name + seat no.	2	1%
Full name (first + middle + final)	2	1%
First name + course name	5	2.5%
No identification of self	138	69%
Total	200	100%

Almost two-third of the emails, specifically 62 (31%), had a self-introduction move, among which 55 (27.5%) emails contained the sender’s FN + LN. Specifically, 30 (15%) emails contained the course name with the FN and LNs, 16 (8%) had the FN + LN only, 4 (2%) came with the FN + LN + course name + ID no., 3 (1.5) with the FN+ LN+ course name+ seat no., and 2 (1%) contained FN + LN + ID no. + course name + seat #. Moreover, 5 (2.5%) emails contained the FN + course name in the self-identification move, and 2(1%) contained the full name (FN+ middle + LN). The data also show that 138 (69%) emails were written without a self-identification move.

The reasons why the students resorted to self-identification can be summarized in the following points. Firstly, students are expected to be polite and respectful when addressing their professors. According to Amor (2018) and Salazar-Campillo (2018), it is impolite to leave out a self-identification move from the opening of your email. Secondly, in large classes with many students, it is often difficult for professors to identify the sender’s identity, especially since emails do not always give enough identifying information. As a result, some professors ask their students to identify themselves in the opening of their emails. This can be supported by the finding that 55 emails contained the FN + LN. According to Salazar-Campillo (2018), the most appropriate way for self-identification seems to be by using FN + LN. Also, some students are aware of this particular issue, so they mention their names without being asked by their professors. This way, their requests may not go unnoticed or unanswered, particularly if the professor does not know them. That is why we found some examples where the students mentioned their FN + LN + course title + ID no. + seat no., such as ‘Ahmad Bashayreh+TRA 321+XXXXX+76’ to leave no chance for mistaken identity. Thirdly, since these emails are first-contact emails, students like to “construct his or her professional identity and relationship with the addressee (Waldvogel, 2007, p. 457). On the other hand, 138 (69%) emails did not include self-identification, which may be regarded as impolite and disrespectful because a sender is required to identify himself/herself prior to making a request in formal emails (Campillo, 2018).

4.2 What Are the Closing Realizations of Jordanian Students’ Emails?

Closing plays a significant role in social interactions. Just like openings in emails, closings have social functions as they can strengthen the relationship between the sender and the receiver (Campillo, 2018; Waldvogel, 2007). They can also help establish a ground for subsequent communication. Closings can enhance politeness, respect, and pragmatic competence (Campillo, 2018; Bou-Franch, 2011). The data analysis shows that three realizations were identified within the closings of the students’ emails: pre-closing statement, complimentary close, and signature. Table 7 presents the distribution of these closing realizations. It shows that 78 (39%) emails contained a pre-closing, 54 (27%) included a complimentary close, and only 24 (12%) had a signature.

Table 7. Closing Realizations of Students' Emails

Opening	Frequency	Percentage
Pre-closing	78	39%
Complimentary close	54	27%
Signature	24	12%

4.2.1 Pre-closing

The first closing move is pre-closing, which shows the sender's readiness to begin signing off his email (Salazar-Campillo, 2018). Particularly, 78 (39%) contained pre-closings expressing different forms of gratitude, apology, and appeal. This finding is consistent with the findings of Bou-Franch (2011), Hallajian and David (2014), Amor (2018), and Balman and Sangmok (2020), however, with different percentages. Similar to informal letters, pre-closing often precedes the closing of emails. In pre-closings, the students mainly used three forms: gratitude, apology, and appeal. Precisely, the emails included 71 (35.5%) speech act of gratitude, 25 (12.5%) speech act of apology, and 4 (2%) speech act of appeal. This finding is in line with Salazar-Campillo's (2023) that the most frequent pre-closing was gratitude, followed by apology. Félix-Brasdefer (2012) also revealed a high frequency of gratitude in pre-closing in his study.

Fifteen pre-closing realizations appeared in the data, the most frequent of which was gratitude only, which accounted for (33%) of the pre-closings, followed by apology only, accounting for (16.5). Other structures of gratitude also showed up in the emails, including gratitude + title (5%), gratitude + title + FN (.5%), gratitude + title + apology (2.5%), gratitude + emoji (2%), gratitude + apology (1%), and gratitude + apology + emoji (red rose) (.5%). Concerning apology, 5 other apology realizations besides apology only were identified, such as apology + title (2%), apology + gratitude (1%), apology + gratitude + title (1%), apology + emoji (1%), apology + title+ gratitude + emoji (.5%). Appeal + title appeared in 4 (2%) emails. Finally, no pre-closing accounted for 61% of the overall pre-closings.

Table 8. Pre-closing realizations in students' Emails

Pre-closing	Frequency	Percentage
Gratitude only	48	24%
Gratitude + title	10	5%
Gratitude + title + first name	1	.5%
Gratitude + emoji	4	2%
Gratitude + apology	2	1%
Gratitude + title+ apology	5	2.5%
Gratitude + apology + emoji	1	.5%
Apology only	14	7%
Apology + title	4	2%
Apology + emoji	2	1%
Apology+ gratitude	2	1%
Apology + gratitude+ title	2	1%
Apology + title + gratitude +emoji	1	.5%
Appeal + title	4	2%
No pre-closing	100	50%
Total	200	100%

In the emails, the students expressed their gratitude to their professor for his effort, as in 'kul ishukur limajhoodak' (All the gratitude for your effort), understanding, as in 'kul ishukur latafahumak' (All the thanks for your understanding), and time, for example, 'shukran šala wagtak' (Thank you for your time). They also thanked him in advance of their request, e.g., shukran salaf (Thanks in advance), and they used the word shukran (Thank you) only. Gratitude is an expression of politeness used by the students before closing their emails. The use of gratitude may guarantee a positive response from the professor to the students' requests. Furthermore, it means that the students tend to appreciate their professor for his effort, time, and understanding. Gratitude is also a means by which individuals show politeness (Balman & Sangmok, 2020), mitigate requests (Oandasan, 2021), and maintain closeness and solidarity (Campillo, 2018). To express solidarity, the students included the title with the gratitude expressions, such as 'shukran šala kul shi daktooma' (Thank you for everything, our Dr.), and the title + FN, such as (Thank you for your cooperation Dr. Rafat). The expressions 'shukran' and 'yišTeek ilšaafiyih', both meaning (Thank you)", were dominantly used by the students to express their gratitude. To boost the force of their speech act of gratitude, the students used emojis following their gratitude expression in 4 (2%) emails. Not only does the use of emojis boost the speech act of gratitude (Al Rousan et al., in Press), but it also signals closeness and familiarity (Savić, 2018) and mitigates the force of the request act. In their attempt to show more politeness and respect, the students accompanied gratitude with apology, as in 'shukran wu? aasif? itha? azšajtak' (Thank you, and sorry if bothered you), apology + title, as in 'shukran ?ilak daktoor w aasfih šal ?izšaj' (Thank you Dr. and sorry for the disturbance), and apology + title + emoji, such as 'yišTeek ilšaafiyih w ?aasfih šal ?izšaj kaman marrah ❤️🙏' (Lit. May God grant you health, and sorry once more for the disturbance ❤️🙏). Noteworthy is the finding that the majority of the students' pre-closings contained informal language that indicates familiarity and closeness. The employment of pre-closing demonstrates that the senders were aware of its importance, since it helps them get a positive response from the professor by being polite, respectful, and professional.

Concerning apology, whose primary purpose is to save the sender's positive face, the students apologized for disturbing their professor, for example, 'ba9tathir 9an ?iz9ajak' (I apologize for disturbing you), for sending an email at a late time, for instance, '?ana ?aasif inni

bab9athlak bi halwagt' (I apologize for writing to you at this time.), or for writing a long message, such as '?aasif ʕala risaaliḥ aTaweelah' (I apologize for this lengthy message.). In four emails, the title was mentioned, as in 'ba9tathir salaf daktuur 9an il'iz9aaj' (I apologize in advance for the disturbance). The use of the title here gives the email a sense of closeness and intimacy. It also establishes connection and familiarity (Campillo, 2018). Emojis were also included in the speech act of apology, aiming to boost the force of the speech act, for example, 'aʕtathir ʕan il'izʕaaj ☹️' (I apologize for the disturbance ☹️). The broken heart in this example is a strategy used to win the heart of the professor. Apology and gratitude combined in one pre-closing appeared in 5 emails, for example, 'baʕtathir minnak wa shukran litafahumak limawgifi' (I apologize to you and thank you for your understanding). The use of both apology and gratitude may help establish and maintain a positive tone in the email. The inclusion of titles and emojis in this kind of pre-closing also expresses a sense of friendliness, closeness, and politeness.

Moreover, the students resorted to appeals in their emails to seek assistance and understanding from their professor as well as resolve issues of conflict with respect to academic affairs. In our data, the students appealed to their professor for a make-up exam, extra grades, waiving an absence, or making a deadline extension. For example, one student wrote, 'batrajaak daktuur la tiḥsbuḥ għyaab' (I beg Dr., Do not count it as an absence). Another student wrote, 'yaa daktuur khaleena nʕeed limtiḥaan' (Please, Dr., allow us to retake the exam). It is important to note that all the appeal examples included a title. Using a title in the appeal move indicates informality and closeness, which the student may be seeking to convince the professor with the appeal.

Finally, the no pre-closing move, which appeared in 100 (50%) emails, may indicate one of the following or more. Besides indicating impoliteness, the absence of a pre-closing may convey indirectness and haste. It may also communicate a need for email pragmatic competence and awareness of its etiquette, because some of these students are still in their first year, and their experience with academic emails is still at its minimum.

4.2.2 Complimentary Close

It is a closing move at the end of an email in which a word or phrase, such as 'sincerely', 'regards', and 'best wishes', is used before the signature. Some of these expressions are considered formal such as 'yours sincerely', and others, like 'cheers,' are considered informal. Table 9 presents the Complimentary Close realizations in the data.

Table 9. Complimentary Close in Students' Emails

Complimentary Close	Frequency	Percentage
Respect	18	9%
Respect + emoji	2	1%
Wish	6	3%
Supplication	6	3%
Goodbye	4	2%
No Complimentary Close	168	84%
Total	200	100%

Six realizations were identified, the most common of which is expressing respect and valuing the position of the professor; it was recorded in 18 (9%) emails, such as 'kuli il'ihiraam' (All respect), 'kuli ilḥob' (All the love). Specifically, 17 of the respect examples were informal expressions used among people with the same status. This means that the students tried to maintain a friendly tone with their professor. Two examples of *red heart* emojis were recorded in this formula, such as 'kuli ilḥob ❤️☹️' (All the love ❤️☹️). The students included the emojis to strengthen the illocutionary force of the speech act of expressing respect.

In addition, the emails included a wish, such as 'ʕuTlah saʕeeda' (Happy holiday) and 'jumʕah mubaarakah' (blessed Friday). This can help build a friendly atmosphere and a positive relationship with the professor. Prayers were also offered in 6 (3%) emails. This social, linguistic practice is common in the Jordanian culture, where praying for someone is deemed very respectful, intimate, and a sign of goodwill, as in 'rabna yiʕTeek hata yirdheek, daktuur' (May God rewards you until you are satisfied, Dr.) The title followed all the instances in this form, adding more informality, closeness, and sincerity. The use of goodbye was also documented in 6 (3%) emails, half of which used informal expressions, such as 'salam' (bye), and 'itdhal ibkheer', also (good bye). Formal expressions, such as 'dumtum bikheer' and 'bi ʔamaan ilaah', both meaning (goodbye) also appeared in the data. Saying goodbye is a respectful way to end an interaction, whether in face-to-face or online interactions. It is a form of leave-taking that refers to a phatic communication function of language (Salazar-Campillo, 2018). However, some students were oriented towards skipping this move, resulting in a disrespectful and rude email. It could also indicate a lack of awareness of the importance of this move in such a context (Al-Sayyed & Rabab'ah, 2020). In addition, it can be ascribed to the fact that many students had already used an expression of gratitude or apology in the pre-closing move, so it would be redundant to use another expression in the complimentary move.

4.2.3 Signature

A signature is an integral part of an email in which the sender signs the email with his/her name and includes some information about himself/herself, such as name, job title, and contact information. Signature is regarded as a significant form of rapport management (Virtanen & Maricic, 2000) and a politeness marker (Chen, 2001). This move was realized in 6 different forms and appeared only in 24 (12%) emails. Contrary to findings revealed by Bou-Franch (2011), Lorenzo Dus and Bou-Franch (2013), Amor (2018), and Codins-Espurz and Salazar Campillo (2019), where the signature was a highly frequent closing move, it was found to be the least common closing move in

this study. This could be due to the fact that the students have already identified themselves in the opening move, so they probably believe that it is unnecessary to mention their name once again.

Table 10. Signature Realizations in Students' Emails

Signature	Frequency	Percentage
First name	4	2%
First name+ last name	15	7.5%
First name + last name + nickname	1	.5%
First name + last name + ID no.	1	.5%
University ID number	1	.5%
First name + last name + course name	2	1%
No signature	176	88%
Total	200	100%

Table 10 shows that the emails had 7 signature realizations. The most frequently used one was signature FN+ LN, such as 'Aya Darawsheh', appearing in 15 (7.5%) emails. The students here seek formality and deference. The signature FN only, included in 4 (2%) emails, such as 'Raghad', was the second most frequent form. The signature FN only signals informality and closeness (Savić 2018). The users of this form try to be as close as possible to the professor to guarantee positive responses and future communication. Nevertheless, for formality and clarity purposes, the students, in 2 emails, mentioned their FN + LN + course title, for example, 'Rami Al Khateeb-TRA 104'. One interesting example is that one student mentioned her nickname along with her FN and LN, 'Issra' Al Omari- Best smile'. This example indicates familiarity, intimacy, and clarity. One email signature included the student's ID number only, and one email contained the student's ID number after his FN and LN. ID numbers can be essential elements of a signature block since they have information about the sender. Finally, 176 (88%) emails did not have a signature. The absence of a signature may be attributed to a number of factors, including pragmatic incompetence (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007), informality (Savić, 2018), personal preference (Crystal, 2006), and convenience (Hallajian & David, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The aim of our study is to empirically explore the openings and closings used in Jordanian undergraduates' emails to their professors. Similar to a number of previous research, this study has concluded that openings and closings are used as politeness strategies to create a positive tone for student-professor academic interactions. Politeness indicates social distance and deference. It also preserves social relations and successful interactions between the two parties. The study has concluded that the students in our study resorted to more informal opening and closing formulas. However, openings were more informal than closings. Typically, informality signals solidarity and closeness. This study has also shown that all the elements of the email were identified in the students' emails, lending support to previous studies on the same topic, such as Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011), Amor (2018), Salazar-Campiloo (2018), Savić (2018), Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020), Codins-Espurz (2021), among others. This study has also revealed a wide variation in the openings and closings of the Jordanian students' emails. This variation shows that there is no predictable or standardized form related to emails written in Arabic by the students. It also demonstrates the students' tendency towards the interpersonal side of interaction with their professors.

Student-professor emails should be polite and formal (Sifianou, 2013). Our findings have revealed that the emails in this study do not conform to the norms and etiquette of student-professor emails. Furthermore, this study has also concluded, more than any other previous studies, the use of emojis in almost all moves of the opening and closing sequences. In addition to helping the students make up for the absence of paralinguistic features found in face-to-face communication, emojis were found to serve as boosters and mitigators for the speech acts included in the emails, thereby signalling solidarity, closeness, and expressiveness. This study has some limitations. First, the data was confined to emails selected from the email account of only one professor by students from the same department, the Translation Department. Examining data from more professors' accounts across various departments and universities may yield different results. Second, the study focused exclusively on emails written and sent in Arabic. The study of English emails could show more variation and discrepancies since English is the medium of instruction in many fields of study in Jordan. Finally, this study recommends that a future study be carried out on gender differences in the openings and closings of university students' emails.

Authors' contributions

Dr. Rafat Mahmoud Al Rousan and Dr. Nabil Al-Awawdeh were responsible for data collection and analysis, theoretical sections, study design and revising, Hala Hassan, Malak AlRousan were responsible for designing tables and organizing sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Authors contributed equally to the study.

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