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DATA PAPER

Normative Data for Email Writing by Native Speakers of British English

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This dataset includes emails from forty two control participants ranging from 16 to 88 years of age (mean = 46) and 9 to 24 years of education (mean = 13). Three emails were produced by each participant (between 2011 and 2014), each within a time limit of three minutes. It is expected that this normative data will be useful for clinicians and researchers working with adults with acquired language disorders in assessing email writing.

Keywords: Email; writing; neurotypical; control

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(1) Overview

Context

Collection Date(s)

2011–2014

Background

Introduction

Internet use has become an important part of everyday life for people of all ages for participating in work, education and social communication [1,2]. Of all internet activities, email use is the most common [2] and is now considered to be essential for work and education [3, 4]; therefore, those who do not have access to the internet can be considerably disadvantaged [5]. People with aphasia, an acquired multi-modal language disorder resulting from brain injury [6], have significant difficulties with internet and email use, due to their language impairment [7–9]. Although assessments have been developed for measuring internet skills [10–12] and writing abilities [13, 14], there is no standardised measure of email writing. Considering email writing skills in healthy individuals are likely to vary from person to person depending on factors such as experience, keyboard skills, age and education, there is a need for normative data to firstly understand what constitutes neuro-typical email writing ability in order to determine whether an individual could be considered as impaired on this task. Normative email writing data could also be used as a ceiling so that therapists and researchers can measure change following therapies using statistical methods.

(2) Methods

Sample

Forty two participants were recruited to this study. Three different groups were approached: firstly, a database of retired university staff and other healthy adults who had expressed an interest in taking part in psychological studies, representing a range of professional background and years of education; secondly, secondary level school students (aged 16–18) who volunteered to participate in psychological research studies while taking part in a university outreach event; and finally, personal acquaintances of the first author were recruited, including friends and family members. Nine participants were male (21 %) and 33 (79 %) were female. The mean age of participants was 46 (SD = 25) with a range of 16 to 88 years. Half of the participants were between 16 and 50 years of age and the other half were between 51 and 88 years of age. The mean number of years of education was 13 (SD = 3) with a range of 9 to 24 years spent in education. All participants were native speakers of British English. Potential participants were excluded from the study if they had been diagnosed with a neurological condition, learning disability, dyslexia or dysgraphia.

Procedures

Participants were either tested at the university or at home. They were asked to complete the following three email tasks in a Microsoft Word Document on a laptop computer:

1. Write an email arranging to meet a friend at a certain time, place and date.
2. Write an email to a friend telling them about a recent holiday.
3. Write an email to your Member of Parliament (local political representative) about an issue of concern to you at the present time, e.g., library closure.

Participants were timed by the first author. For each task, they were asked to stop writing after three minutes but could also stop before if they wished.

Quality control

The task was explained in detail to participants. The first author monitored time keeping in order to ensure writing tasks took no longer than three minutes.

Ethical issues

The current study was approved by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee. Prior to taking part in the study, each participant was given a participant information sheet and was asked to sign a consent form. Participants' personal information was stored in locked cabinets and on secure university network drives. Participants were referred to with numbers throughout the study. Within emails, personal identifiable information such as names, addresses and professions have been replaced with different names, addresses and professions with the same number of letters.

(3) Dataset description

Object name

Normative data for email writing by native speakers of British English

Data type

Primary data

Format names and versions

Excel workbook

Version 2

Language

English

Repository location

doi:10.7910/DVN/28204

Publication date

07.04.2015

(4) Reuse potential

This email data could be used to answer questions concerning the quantity, quality and range of written language performance in email samples within a neurotypical population. For example, linguistic analyses such as percentage of open class words or adherence to politeness forms could be conducted. Furthermore, age and education could be examined as factors relating to specific email characteristics. Finally, the data could be useful to clinicians or researchers in the rehabilitation of writing

disorders who may wish to use the same email tasks on their patients or participants and to compare results to establish whether they are impaired. Norms on any particular aspect of language could then be used as a ceiling so that changes following therapy can be subjected to statistical analysis.

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