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ABSTRACT

Computer mediated communication (CMC) is a widely used communicative tool within various professional and social groups. The focus of the present article is on the Linguist List (LL), which can be described as an edited person-to-group international academic mailing list, and with a particular speech act: a request for information (RFI). Because RFIs are found on most CMC mailing lists, they can be argued to be the reason for such lists. The purpose of this study is two-fold: to find out whether LL inquiries can be labeled a genre, and to detect some of the established or emergent requesting conventions of this new and relatively unexplored medium in terms of the discourse strategies manifested in it. (Contains 39 references.) (KFT)

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Queries on the Linguist List: A Move-Structure Analysis of a Computer-Mediated Genre

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Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a widely used communicative tool within various professional and social groups. The term refers to a large variety of communication systems, ranging from electronic mail to international scholarly conferencing over the Internet. Electronic discourse is a new form of communication, whose linguistic properties and effects on individuals and organizations are important areas of study (see e.g. DuBartell 1995, Foertsch 1995, Herring 1996, Sproull & Kiesler 1986, Yates 1993, Zuboff 1988). The linguistic characteristics of CMC are formed and reformed in relation to the communicative needs of its innumerable daily users. One of the areas of central interest to discourse linguists is therefore the emergence and development of various CMC genres. When comparing CMC genres and their linguistic properties with corresponding spoken or written genres, several linguists have shown that they manifest characteristics of both speech and writing and differ from both in a fundamental way. We are thus clearly dealing with a new semiotic phenomenon.

The focus of the present article is on the Linguist List (henceforth LL), which can be described as an edited person-to-group international academic mailing list. We will be concerned with a particular speech act, i.e. Request for Information (henceforth RFI), which is manifested in the messages posted on the LL in the section labelled 'Queries' (abbreviated 'Qs'). Since RFIs are found in some form on most CMC mailing lists, they can be argued to constitute one of the *raisons d'être* of such lists.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to find out whether or not LL queries can be labelled a 'genre', and secondly, to detect some of the established or emergent requesting conventions of this new and relatively unexplored medium in terms of the discourse strategies manifested in it. In this investigation, we draw on the concept of 'genre' proposed by Swales (1990) and further developed by Bhatia (1993), as a useful analytic tool for studying the move structure of these queries. We view the notion of 'genre' as closely tied to its context and culture and therefore see the relationship between genres and their situational and cultural contexts as bidirectional and dynamic. Genres are, in the first place, characterized by text-external criteria (cf. Virtanen 1992). In what follows, we will therefore start the discussion with the communicative goals of the LL queries and the discourse community within which these communicative events take place. The notions of 'genre' and rhetorical 'move' will then be dealt with in some detail. Finally, we will turn our attention to the content and the organization of that content in the LL queries, to analyse their move structure

and comment on the overall discourse strategies that they manifest. The important issue of how RFIs found on the LL differ from RFIs communicated through traditional media is beyond the scope of the present paper, which focuses on CMC exclusively.

The material of this study consists of a total of 40 LL queries, 20 posted between December 8, 1996 and February 10, 1997, and another 20 posted between March 17 and May 14, 1998. The corpus was selected by singling out every fifth query out of a total of 200 queries that were posted on the LL within those two periods of time. The volume and number of the issue of the LL in which a given query appears will be noted in brackets at the end of each example, e.g. (LL 9:226). To avoid unauthorized sender identification the names of the requesters will be replaced by [Name].

1. LL queries as a genre

To decide whether LL queries constitute a genre, we need to pay close attention to their communicative goals, the discourse community within which they occur, and finally, the notion of genre itself. At the end of this section we will also discuss rhetorical moves in some detail. However, section 2 will focus more fully on the generic structure of the LL queries, in terms of the rhetorical moves detected in them.

For discussions of text classifications based on text-external criteria, representing different linguistic orientations, see e.g. Bhatia 1993, Eggins 1994, Eggins & Martin 1997, Enkvist 1982, Gläser 1987, Halliday & Hasan 1985, Hymes 1972, Orlikowski & Yates 1994, Preston 1986, Saville-Troike 1982, Swales 1990, Ventola 1984. For a discussion of the notion of 'genre' in relation to 'text type', see Virtanen 1992, and in relation to 'register', see Eggins 1994, Eggins & Martin 1997.

1.1 Communicative goals of the LL queries

If LL queries constitute a genre, they should share a set of communicative goals (cf. Swales 1990:58). Queries are essentially messages requesting help or information and hence requiring a response. To convey this to the intended audience is the primary goal of any RFI (see e.g. Trosborg 1995:187). It is thus also the *sine qua non* of the LL queries and therefore their main communicative goal. Queries thus have an obvious referential and persuasive function, often inseparable from one another in actual texts. These are manifested in four concrete communicative goals, subsumed under the main or superordinate goal.

We can distinguish a hierarchy of communicative goals shared by the LL queries under attention. While their primary goal is to convey to the target audience the fact that the requester wants help or information from them, there is a set of more concrete communicative goals which are subordinated to this main goal and which, hence, reinforce it in relation to the referential function of the texts or their persuasive function. More specifically, we can characterize LL queries in terms of four communicative goals subsumed under the main (superordinate) goal. It is the identification of this set of communicative goals that motivates calling the LL queries a genre (cf. Swales 1990:46ff, 58, Bhatia 1993:13-14, 19ff, 30-33, Kong 1998:111). In what follows, we will discuss the four goals in relation to the referential and persuasive functions of the LL queries, even if these two functions are often inseparable from one another in actual texts.

To start with the referential function, requesters wish to describe clearly and concisely what information is needed. Secondly, they may also wish to provide the intended readership with the necessary background information on the subject. This can, for instance, take the form of references to earlier studies or to the present knowledge of the requester, which have the purpose of orienting the requestees to target their responses as precisely as possible towards the desired information. The first of these two referential goals is superordinate in relation to the second, which has the function of grounding the topic by creating a request space.

The persuasive function of the queries under attention is primarily shown in another pair of concrete communicative goals. Thus the third goal has to do with the need to justify the request. In view of the desired response, it is profitable to give the audience reasons which indicate that the need for information is real, urgent and compelling. Finally, requesters also have the goal to build rapport with the target readership, to encourage them to respond to the query. Of these two persuasive goals, the rapport-building one is superordinate to the goal of justifying the request, which will simply reinforce rapport-building. It is more fundamental to RFIs and can occur without the goal of justifying the request. The rapport-building goal is, however, in its turn subordinate to the main goal of conveying the need for help or information.

Figure 1 summarizes the hierarchy of the four communicative goals in relation to one another and to the main goal of the genre.

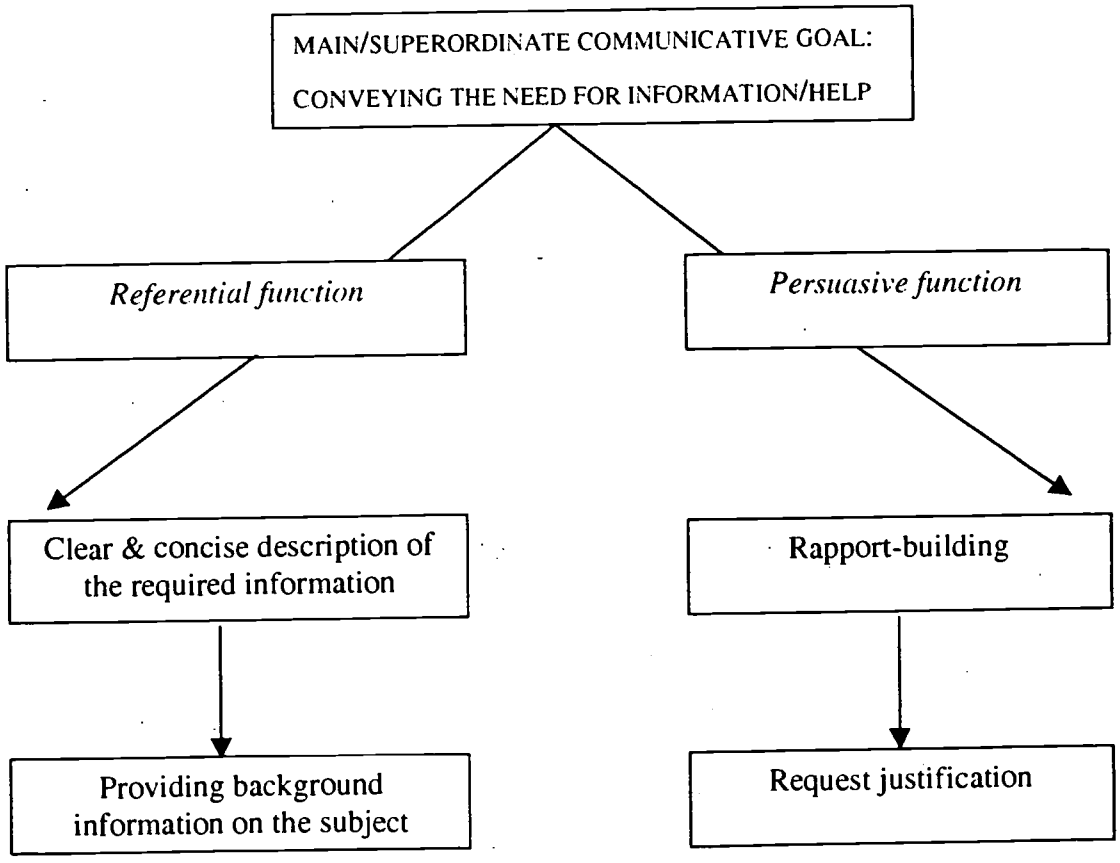

Figure 1. The hierarchy of the communicative goals shared by the LL queries

The hierarchy of the communicative goals of the LL queries implies that only the primary goal is obligatorily present in the communicative event. To qualify as a genre, however, these texts also need to be shown to share a set of concrete communicative goals, which we have identified above in relation to the referential and persuasive functions of the messages. We consider the above set of four subordinate goals prototypical of the genre.

As the senders of the LL queries form an international community, we can expect diversity in terms of the explicit and implicit expression of the above four communicative goals in the messages. This diversity can be related to the requesters' varying proficiency in spoken and written English, their genre awareness and their notion of the target readership. Furthermore, it can also be related to the prevalent requesting conventions of the requesters' own culture and of other cultures which they are familiar with and hence of the discourse strategies which they choose to employ for this very purpose. In the analysis of the present data, we will attempt to establish the explicit expression of the four goals in the various queries in light of the rhetorical moves manifested in them. To anticipate, the data show variation in terms of the relative weight given to the referential and persuasive functions in the individual queries and the amount of text that the different requesters have considered necessary to include in the message in view of their communicative goals. There is also diversity in the ordering of the individual moves in these messages. An attempt will be made to explain these differences and to pinpoint similarities across texts.

The identification of the above four subordinate communicative goals for the RFIs under attention indicates that LL queries do, in fact, constitute a genre in the sense of a type of communicative event (see e.g. Hymes 1972, Saville-Troike 1982:137-140, Swales 1990:45ff). We regard communicative events as multifaceted discourse phenomena, which can but need not include several speech acts. Genres as a category of communicative events emerge in social contexts and help construct those contexts. What we thus need to do next is to take a look at the discourse community producing the LL queries. Compared to the RFIs produced orally or through traditional forms of writing, the distinguishing features of this CMC genre are precisely the notion of the 'discourse community' and the easy access to it provided by the medium.

1.2 Discourse community

Genre analysis deals with language use within a 'discourse community', which is constituted by a group of people connected for instance, by occupation, special interests, shared knowledge, possessions, beliefs or behaviour. While a speech community inherits its members by birth or adoption, a discourse community recruits them by persuasion or by relevant qualification (cf. Saville-Troike 1982, Swales 1990). A discourse community affects the form and content of the texts that emerge as the outcome of communicative events taking place within that community. Switching the perspective, we can see that these texts, in fact, also help construct, maintain or alter that very discourse community (cf. Duranti & Goodwin 1992). In this light it is important to study the different genres evolving through a medium which provides us with a new form of semiotic dynamism. We need to examine the discourse

communities that create those genres and investigate the mechanisms through which those genres help constitute, maintain or change such communities.

Swales (1990:24-27) defines a discourse community in terms of six characteristics. The first two of these are a broadly agreed set of common public goals and mechanisms of intercommunication among the members of the community. In addition, it is important to note that a discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback. Moreover, it uses and possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims, and it has acquired some specific lexis, e.g. a specific nomenclature for particular genres. Finally, a discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

In this light, we can argue that the community of linguists participating in the LL is a good example of a discourse community. To start with, this community has a broadly accepted set of common public goals; in other words, its members wish to share and/or increase their knowledge in some field of linguistics. Furthermore, this discourse community has an accessible participatory mechanism, i.e. e-mail, which connects its members to one another for information purposes. List members intercommunicate using specific genres such as electronic 'Discussion', 'Summary' and 'Queries'. The discourse community participating in the LL also shares a highly specialized terminology and a high level of expertise. Finally, in light of the flow of established and new participants continually joining the LL, it is crucial to note that a prerequisite of becoming an equal member of the discourse community is precisely the acquisition of the genre conventions prevalent or emergent in that community.

Since the members of the LL discourse community are involved in research and teaching in higher education, it is essential for them to be able to communicate with one another, to follow and contribute to the development of their field, to find out about and participate in relevant conferences and in the discussion of issues deemed timely by the community. To establish credentials, native and non-native speakers of English alike make an effort to familiarize themselves with the discourse used by the given community; otherwise they run the risk of being regarded as 'laypersons' by its members. At the same time, it is the contributions of the individual linguists that add to the dynamism of that very discourse. What is essential for members of the LL is an awareness of its genre dynamics. Hence, familiarity with the prototypical form and content of the LL genre entitled 'Queries' is likely to increase the probability of receiving the desired response from the intended audience. Conventions are there to be broken so that they can be improved to better suit the communicative needs of the discourse community; yet, in order to purposefully break a genre-specific convention, members of a discourse community need to be familiar with that very convention in the first place, in order to be able to weigh the pros and cons of prototypicality in view of their overall communicative goal.

1.3 The notion of 'genre'

Following Swales (1990:45ff), we view the notion of 'genre' as a recognized class of communicative events, in which language plays a fundamental role. Genre is in the first place defined by a set of communicative goals shared by a discourse community. The notion of communicative event allows for the dynamism necessary for the

analysis of genres in relation to context and culture. Genres come into being as a result of intertextual and interdiscursive processes: they are created, maintained, altered, done away with and replaced with others by a discourse community for particular communicative needs which arise in the given culture and in given situational contexts. Yet, in order to understand how the idealized notion of genre in itself affects and helps create a given situational context and a context of culture, we also need to reverse the perspective (cf. Duranti & Goodwin 1992).

The situational context of the LL queries constitutes a meeting point for participants representing very different cultures. While this affects its development, the genre itself in fact helps create this very context. The particular discourse community comes into being partly through a set of shared genres, of which the LL queries form one. The shared genres thus conform to the changing needs of the flow of participants in the discourse community and hence they change over time.

Interestingly, Yates and Orlikowski (1992) claim that organizational communication genres such as memos, expense forms or résumés are socially recognized types of communication, routinely used by the members of an organization in order to achieve particular communicative purposes. Each of these genres plays a specific role and has a particular meaning associated with certain types of work practices and interaction norms. Thus, the use of these genres not only mediates communication, but also shapes the norms of interaction in a community.

Genres are prototypical notions which help us structure the world around us and our communicative behaviour in that world. They thus serve to facilitate communication within a discourse community. Manifestations of genres in actual texts can be near-prototypical or they can show varying degrees of prototypicality. Swales (1990:52-58) stresses the fact that the rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their schematic (or generic) structure, i.e. selection of content, the ordering of that content, and the form which texts realizing the genre take. Swales sees the schematic structure of a genre as a result of the conventions of the discourse community within which the genre is recognized, acquired and reproduced. Finally, he makes it clear that a discourse community's nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight.

By virtue of constituting a shared prototype, a genre invites, however, deviation from the idealized core of the category and its generic structure – deviation which can extend further and further out to the periphery. This process can eventually help reform the entire genre or replace it with another, in line with the communicative needs of the given discourse community. Thus, Yates and Orlikowski (1992) suggest that genres are produced, reproduced, and altered by individuals through a process of structuring. In other words, members of a discourse community use a particular genre by drawing on their knowledge of a set of genre norms, and in so doing they reproduce or challenge the genre. When community members use genres established through tradition, they reinforce those genres. Community members can, however, challenge and eventually modify these genres through their actions. When changes to established genres occur repeatedly and become widely accepted by the community, new or modified genres may emerge, either alongside existing genres or as substitutes for those which have lost currency. Yates and Orlikowski (1992) show for example

how the memo genre emerged initially as a variant of the business letter genre and ultimately as distinct from it.

Genres may thus evolve over time due to the mutual interaction of established practices and the individual actions of the community members (Yates & Orlikowski 1992). Genres are dynamic rhetorical forms, developed through the participants' responses to recurrent situations. They stabilize experience and give it meaning and coherence. This explains why genres change over time in response to the needs of the participants.

The genre of LL queries conforms to a series of text-external criteria. Hence, we have identified a set of communicative goals shared by the participants of the discourse community who engage in the type of communicative event taking place in the context of these queries. Unlike genres which serve to restrict access to a particular discourse community, the label of this genre is transparent enough for the flow of newcomers to the list to recognize the category of communicative events in terms of the cultures familiar to them. It also allows development of the genre in accordance with the needs of the given discourse community.

Bhatia (1993) discusses closely related sub-genres such as sales promotion letters and job applications found within one and the same promotional genre. He also points out that for instance, abstracts and introductions in research papers have very different communicative goals, which motivates considering them as two separate genres. Furthermore, he rightly stresses the fact that genre mixing is an essential characteristic of genre dynamics (Bhatia 1997, cf. also Ventola 1984). This raises the issue of the level of delicacy in the analysis of a given genre. As shown by the analysis of text types (see e.g. de Beaugrande & Dressler 1981, Smith 1985, Virtanen 1992), we need to pay attention to variation within prototypes, combinations of different text types, and dominances manifested in actual texts by varying amounts and characters of textual material used to signal particular types of text. Continuing Bhatia's line of thinking we argue that e-mail queries have one dominant primary communicative goal, i.e. to request information or help. They can, however, vary greatly as to the degree of prototypicality that they conform to, probably due to a large extent to the international character of the list. Yet, LL queries establish constraints on allowable contributions in terms of content, generic structure and the form that they can exhibit. On the LL, for instance, there are specific constraints on the participants to mail their replies directly to the requester, who is strongly urged to send a summary of the responses to the list. Compliance with these constraints can therefore be assumed to affect the move structure of the queries. We will show below that two specific moves which we call APPEAL FOR DIRECT CONTACT and PROMISE OF SUMMARY are in fact a product of these constraints.

It now remains for us to turn to the exponents of this particular genre. We will examine LL queries in terms of their content, the overall organization of that content and the textual form given by the requesters to their messages in view of their communicative goals. We will do so by conducting an analysis of the rhetorical moves found in the data, since they are assumed to reflect the discourse strategies opted for by the particular requesters. Although it is beyond the scope of the present study to make comparisons between computer-mediated RFIs and RFIs made using traditional

forms of speech and writing, we will continually bear in mind the fact that the LL-query genre under attention is one that takes place in the context of CMC.

1.4 Rhetorical moves

The notion of 'move' has been central to early British discourse analysis (see e.g. Sinclair & Coulthard 1975), and more recently it has been widely employed within the framework of genre analysis (see Swales 1990, Bhatia 1993, cf. also Connor 1996). This notion provides genre analysts with a handy tool as they need to identify units of content in a text using a processual concept that can be related to the discourse strategy chosen by the text producer in view of a given set of communicative goals. This is so because moves serve particular communicative functions, which are subordinate to the overall communicative goal of the genre. Typical moves or a typical sequence of moves can thus be interpreted as identifying rhetorical features of a given genre. Yet, the relationship between prototypical strategies, manifested in a generic move structure, and prototypical genres is bidirectional, and the genre itself is constituted through the intertextuality of the rhetorical moves occurring in actual texts, from which a generic structure can be abstracted. We can thus study move structure as a conventionalized means of facilitating people's task of recognizing and maintaining genres, or altering them over time. Yet, as discourse linguists we need to be extremely cautious not to lose sight of the dynamism of genres, which is always a risk in the analysis of texts as products of various discourse processes.

Move structure is exposed in texts through linguistic signals. Hence, a set of lexico-grammatical markers repeatedly used to make a particular move will affect the expectations of the discourse community and potentially constitute a prefabricated pattern that can be modified for the purposes of a particular text. Boundaries between moves can also be signalled through conventionalized typographic means such as sentences or paragraphs, but there exists no one-to-one relation between the two.

Writers make use of a variety of lexico-grammatical resources in order to achieve the communicative goal of a particular move, while still conforming to the standard practices of the genre. Writers can also exploit the conventions of the genre in order to achieve special effects or private goals. Still, a complete disregard of genre characteristics is usually qualified by community members as being odd. Consequently, there is a risk that the piece of writing in question will no longer be recognized by them as belonging to that particular genre (Bhatia 1993:14).

2. Analysis of move structure in LL queries

Following Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), we will now identify the genre-specific move structure of the LL queries in the data. We will separate the moves that appear to be obligatory in the genre because they are present in all queries, from optional moves, which do not appear in every single query. This method allows us to establish the core moves of the LL query prototype and recognize the periphery of optional moves. Our concern will also be with moves which are imposed by the list policy. Once we have identified the moves manifested in the queries under attention, we will proceed to the analysis of the overall discourse strategies with the help of the presence

and relative placement of individual moves in the data. This analysis will allow us to establish three different types of discourse strategies apparent in the data.

2.1 Identification of genre-specific moves

As pointed out above, RFIs are a very common speech act on various mailing lists and they can make up the majority of the messages on such a list. We have argued above that RFIs, in fact, constitute one of the *raisons d'être* of computer-mediated mailing lists. RFIs have been described as 'illocutionary acts whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to the hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act for the benefit of the speaker (requester)' (Trosborg 1995:187). In this section we show that some LL queries contain only one essential element: the yet unfulfilled request.

To start with, we identify the repertoire of moves in the data. Figure 2 lists the moves with a representative example of the linguistic realization of each of them. The list of moves is detailed and will be further analysed below. Labels for moves are printed in small capitals (e.g. OPENING SALUTATION) to distinguish them from the rest of the text.

Move	Example
• **Opening salutation**	*Dear Linguists/Listers/Hello!*
• **Appeal for help**	*I need your help!*
• **Topic and/or sender introduction**	*I am a graduate student working on...*
• **Topic clarification**	*I'm currently researching/examining...*
• **Present knowledge**	*I know about the corpus which...*
• **Gap in knowledge or problem**	*The history of the notion is not known...*
• **Additional gap**	*There is an attestation, but I don't know*
• **Request for information or help: direct, indirect**	*Does anyone know if...* *I would love to be able to find out...*
• **Additional requests**	*In addition, any other information would be greatly appreciated.*
• **Repetition of previous request**	*What do you think about it?*
• **Justification of the request**	*We were told this list exists...*
• **Clarification of the request**	*What I would like, ideally, is a table...*
• **Promise of summary (imposed)**	*I will post a summary of replies.*
• **Refusal of summary**	*I will NOT post a summary*
• **Gratitude for anticipated help**	*Many thanks for any help.*
• **Additional gratitude**	*Again, thank you for your time...*
• **Appeal for direct contact (imposed)**	*Would you please reply directly?*
• **Promise of individual reply**	*...but I will answer individual inquiries*
• **Complimentary closing**	*Yours/Greetings/Regards*
• **Signature**	name (surname) of the sender

Figure 2. Moves traced in the corpus, illustrated by a representative example

Table 1 indicates the frequencies of the individual moves in the data. The 40 queries examined consist of a totality of 211 moves, which gives an average of 5.28 moves per query. The second column indicates the number of the queries containing a given move. If a query contains a particular move twice or several times, this move is

labelled ADDITIONAL and counted separately; the ADDITIONAL category consists of nine moves, i.e. 4% of the total of 211 moves. These moves are truly additional, not mere repetitions of another move, as will be seen in (2) below. The third column in Table 1 shows the percentage of the queries which include a given move. Finally, each of the following moves occurs only once in the data and they are therefore excluded from Table 1: APPEAL FOR HELP, REPETITION OF PREVIOUS REQUEST, REFUSAL OF SUMMARY, and PROMISE OF INDIVIDUAL REPLY.

Table 1. Frequency of moves in the corpus

Move	Number of queries including the move	% of total (N = 40)
Opening salutation	10	25
Topic and/or sender introduction	31	77.5
Topic clarification	7	17.5
Present knowledge	3	7.5
Gap in knowledge or problem	11	27.5
Additional gap	2	5
Request for information or help	40	100
Additional requests	5	12.5
Justification of the request	14	35
Clarification of the request	10	25
Promise of summary (imposed)	5	12.5
Gratitude for anticipated help	30	75
Additional gratitude	2	5
Appeal for direct contact (imposed)	3	7.5
Complimentary closing	3	7.5
Signature	35	87.5

The queries examined manifest great fluctuation in the number and order of moves, which makes the establishment of a prototype difficult. Yet, none of the 40 queries analysed contains all the moves given in Figure 2. This fact is likely to reflect the generic structure of the genre in the sense that some moves seem to be compulsory while others are optional. The actual REQUEST move is expectedly present in all of the 40 queries, which motivates classifying it as a compulsory move and hence highly prototypical of the genre. Other very frequent moves include SIGNATURE (present in 88% of the messages), TOPIC AND/OR SENDER INTRODUCTION (present in 78% of the queries) and expression of GRATITUDE for the anticipated help (75%), in that order. The reason why SIGNATURE is not always included is the identification of senders and their e-mail addresses in the header of the individual messages. As at least three fourths of the messages include these three moves, we also classify them as prototypical, i.e. as part of the core characteristics of the genre. In fact, the SIGNATURE move was missing in only five of the queries and the other two in some ten queries.

The following query illustrates an instance where the four prototypical moves are present. Move 1 is an opening move, the compulsory Move 2 constitutes the main body of the message, and Moves 3 and 4 are closing moves.

(1) **MOVE 1: TOPIC INTRODUCTION**
A discussion of Irishisms came up on another list and has left us with a puzzle:
"I'm after going to the pub to fetch me Gran"

MOVE 2: REQUEST
Does it mean a) I will go to the pub to get Granny or
b) I've already gone to the pub and got Granny

MOVE 3: GRATITUDE
Thanks in advance

MOVE 4: SIGNATURE
[Name]

(LL 8:50)

The REQUEST move can be argued to be sufficient in view of the primary goal of the genre (see 1.1 above). The inclusion of information concerning the TOPIC AND/OR SENDER in the query will help create a request space and hence it fulfils the second referential goal defined in section 1.1 above. These two moves can also serve the persuasive goals of the genre through the linguistic form given to them by the requester. Furthermore, the inclusion of the SIGNATURE move is a trace of related genres mediated through traditional forms of writing and may in due course disappear from CMC as superfluous. Herring (1996b:87) argues that the participants' tendency to sign their messages suggests that they regard them as written correspondence. SIGNATURE is closely connected with the conventionalized expressions of GRATITUDE, and the data here manifest a variety of styles, ranging from very formal to informal thanking. Incidentally, two of the LL queries make use of two different expressions of GRATITUDE, one informal and one more formal, see (2) below. Adding an expression of GRATITUDE to one's message has the persuasive function of creating audience involvement: it is a rapport-building move, optimistically 'focusing on co-operation' and 'assuming the co-operation' of the other list members to encourage them to respond to the query (see Brown & Levinson 1987:67-70, cf. also Maricic 1999:36-44). The inclusion of the SIGNATURE move can be argued to do so, too, by virtue of making the requester visible. Some messages include a SIGNATURE even if there is no expression of GRATITUDE, which would seem to indicate that not all requesters are aware of the fact that SIGNATURE is informationally superfluous in CMC. Alternatively, the motivation behind its use can be related to the persuasive function of the message as this move also serves to explicitly close the message.

The next group of moves is clearly less prominent in the data, as compared to the four core moves identified above. These optional moves are not necessary in view of the primary communicative goal of the genre. Yet it is quite natural to find them in a LL query since they do not deviate enough from the prototype to make a query odd in any way. In other words, although their low frequency in the data clearly motivates their exclusion from the core of the category, the presence of any of these moves in a LL query will be acceptable to the discourse community in terms of the prevailing prototype and will not demand urgent alterations to the conventions of the genre. Rather, they serve to reinforce the shared communicative goals, referential and persuasive.

The most frequent of these peripheral moves is JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST (present in 35% of the queries), which has the persuasive function of reinforcing rapport-building in view of the desired response. In Section 1.1, above, we argued that request justification is one of the genre-specific communicative goals (see Fig. 1). Since this move, however, has a conspicuously lower frequency in the data than the four prototypical moves discussed above, we will deal with it in more detail in Section 2.2, below.

The indication of a PROBLEM or GAP in the requester's present knowledge was found in 28% of the queries. Other peripheral moves include CLARIFICATION OF THE REQUEST and TOPIC CLARIFICATION, present in 25% and 18% of the queries, respectively. These three moves primarily serve the referential function of the genre and hence strengthen the main goal. All of the four peripheral moves appear in the main body of the message.

Another optional move is the OPENING SALUTATION, which appears in 25% of the queries. This move adds to reader involvement and reflects the conventions of formal or informal written correspondence. It is much more frequent than the COMPLIMENTARY CLOSING but it still occurs clearly less often than the expression of GRATITUDE for anticipated help and SIGNATURE. In other words, closing with the help of these two moves is prototypical while a conventionalized opening is peripheral. Three fourths of the queries start directly with the TOPIC AND/OR SENDER INTRODUCTION.

Finally, some of the moves can be considered prototypical of the genre, not because they occur frequently in the data but because they are imposed by the list policy. These moves include the PROMISE OF A SUMMARY and the APPEAL FOR DIRECT CONTACT, related to the plea made by the list administrators to participants to send their replies directly to the requester and to requesters to post summaries of these replies to the list. This policy has created another LL genre, labelled 'Sum' (short for 'Summary'). As can be seen in Table 1, however, these moves are rare in the data: PROMISES OF A SUMMARY are only found in five of the 40 queries and APPEALS FOR DIRECT CONTACT appear in three of them.

The restrictions imposed by the list have a great impact on the type of messages permitted, their move structure and hence the type of discourse generated by the list. On the surface, it thus looks as if very few requesters complied with the norms of the list, since the moves imposed by the list are not conspicuously present in the data. This situation, however, raises the issue of 'textual silence' present in the genre and the acquisition of the content of that silence by newcomers (for discussions of textual silence, see e.g. Gill & Whedbee 1997, Huckin 1997). Moves imposed by the list administration need not be present in a message since the discourse community takes them for granted: its members are simply assumed to be familiar with the policy. Genre-specific textual silence has to be acquired by members of a given discourse community and it is therefore not self-evident for newcomers. It would therefore be interesting to try to find out whether the very requesters in our data who articulate these 'silent' moves in their messages are, in fact, newcomers. The LL provides its members with clear documentation on its policy, which helps newcomers adapt to it if they wish to do so. This facilitates access to the discourse community created by the

computer-mediated list; yet, the genre-specific conventions are only acquired through increased familiarity with the list.

As pointed out above, certain moves are sometimes used recursively in one and the same message. Hence, some extremely complex queries consist of several ADDITIONAL REQUESTS, GAPS and expressions of GRATITUDE. In (2), we thus find four instances of related REQUESTS (Moves 1, 3 and 7), establishment of two GAPS in the requester's present knowledge (Moves 4 and 8) indicated by italics, and two instances of expression of GRATITUDE (Moves 5 and 9). Two queries in the data contain more than one GAP.

(2) **MOVE 1: REQUEST**
Is anyone familiar with any recent work on English Quasi-modals?

MOVE 2: REQUEST JUSTIFICATION
I am studying the expression 'be fixing to' and there is little directly relating to it in the literature.

MOVE 3: ADDITIONAL REQUEST
Perhaps someone has investigated this form and would like to compare notes?

MOVE 4: GAP/PROBLEM
I have read Marvin Ching's 1987 article and Guy Bailey et al.'s "The apparent time construct", which uses 'be fixing to' to prove the validity of the apparent time construct for lexical items, *but that is about all there is.*

MOVE 5: ANTICIPATORY GRATITUDE
Thanks in advance for any assistance.

MOVE 6: REQUEST CLARIFICATION
This is primarily a southern dialect feature (in the U.S.), but E. Ward Gilman, editor of Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, claims that it is "showing signs of breaking out of its regional shell."

MOVE 7: ADDITIONAL REQUESTS
If you have time and the inclination, where in the U.S. have you heard this? Any sense of the nativity of the speakers?

MOVE 8: ADDITIONAL GAP
There is one attestation of it in New York in 1916, *but I don't know the circumstances.*

MOVE 9: ADDITIONAL GRATITUDE
Again, thank you for your time and interest.

MOVE 10: SIGNATURE
[Name]

(LL 7:1739)

2.2 Three discourse strategies

To establish the prototypical move structure of the genre it is not sufficient to identify the individual moves that constitute its core and those which rather appear to be peripheral. We also need to take a look at the overall discourse strategy manifested in these texts. In this section we focus on the ordering of moves in the data, in particular the placement of the obligatory core move, REQUEST, in relation to a potential JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST. This allows us to distinguish three discourse strategies that are conspicuous in the data.

Even if no two queries in the data manifest an identical move structure, Figure 2 in 2.1, above, reflects the overall order of moves to some degree, especially as concerns the initial and final moves. In particular, the ordering of the four core moves tends to be that of TOPIC AND/OR SENDER INTRODUCTION, REQUEST, GRATITUDE, and SIGNATURE. In 30 of the 40 queries (75%), the opening move is TOPIC AND/OR SENDER INTRODUCTION; the REQUEST move occurs before this move only once. The two closing moves GRATITUDE and SIGNATURE appear in this order after the REQUEST move.

What is more interesting, the relative placement of the two moves REQUEST and JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST shows systematic variation across the data. There is, in fact, reason to believe that the variation is in part due to the international character of the list; we assume that, to an extent, it reflects the various cultural backgrounds of the participants. Another dimension to be taken into account is the constitution of the discourse community, where we find students, teachers, researchers and other interested participants who are at different stages of their academic lives. Also, some of them are newcomers in the discourse community while others are established members who post messages frequently (cf. Veselinova & Dry 1995).

It is a well-known fact that different cultures make use of different rhetorical patterns, manifested in various kinds of discourse (for discussions, see e.g. Connor 1996, Galtung 1979, Isaksson-Wikberg 1999, Mauranen, this volume; Scollon & Scollon 1995). As concerns strategies used in requesting information or assistance, the situation is no different (see e.g. Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, Trosborg 1995). For instance, on the basis of a study of business request letters, Kong (1998:105-106) argues that Eastern cultures such as the Chinese culture prefer the inductive move pattern 'JUSTIFICATION – REQUEST' while the Anglo-American culture favours the deductive pattern 'REQUEST – JUSTIFICATION'. This is very much in line with findings concerning formal expository or argumentative writing which have been presented by several different scholars.

While the REQUEST move is obligatory, Table 1 in 2.1 above shows that only 14 out of the total of 40 queries (35%) include the JUSTIFICATION move. JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST cannot thus be argued to make part of the core moves of the genre on the grounds of high frequency in the data; recall that the four core moves distinguished above were present in 75-100% of the queries. Yet, the JUSTIFICATION move must be given due attention: it realizes one of the communicative goals of the genre, as established in 1.1 above, and this makes it a highly prominent move in the text. It is thus on this basis that we argue that JUSTIFICATION, too, constitutes a prototypical move in the genre.

Without being aware of the cultural background of the requesters, we find that out of the 14 justified queries, 8 make use of the deductive strategy of 'REQUEST – JUSTIFICATION'. In contrast, 6 of the queries exhibit the inductive strategy of 'JUSTIFICATION – REQUEST'. This shows that those who include both moves in their messages fall into two groups of fairly similar size as concerns the relative placement of the JUSTIFICATION move.

The following examples illustrate the two discourse strategies realized through the relative ordering of the REQUEST and JUSTIFICATION moves. In (3) below we can see the deductive strategy of 'REQUEST – JUSTIFICATION', which has been repeatedly claimed to represent Anglo-American rhetoric (cf. also (2) above). Whether the appearance of this pattern (in 20% of the queries) is due to a large number of Anglo-American participants or to the fact that English is the 'lingua franca' of the list cannot be answered on the basis of this study; it is, however, an issue worth further investigation.

(3) MOVE 1: TOPIC INTRODUCTION
A group of students from the cuny graduate center is working on a pilot study investigating the past tense morpheme -ed and its allomorphs,

MOVE 2: REQUEST
we would like to know if someone could point us in the direction of a list of verbs listed by frequency.

MOVE 3: REQUEST JUSTIFICATION
We were told this list exists we just don't know where.

MOVE 4: ANTICIPATORY GRATITUDE
It would be much appreciated.

MOVE 5: SIGNATURE
[Name]

(LL 9:402)

The inductive strategy of 'JUSTIFICATION – REQUEST', found in 15% of the queries, is illustrated in (4), which constitutes the beginning of a long questionnaire. Since it is not possible to know the professional and cultural background of the requesters on the basis of their name, address and affiliation, we can only assume that this strategy is representative of Eastern cultures on the grounds of the literature on the issue. To repeat, we believe that the issues of cultural influence and the degree of adaptation to the given discourse community are worth a study of their own.

(4) MOVE 1: SALUTATION
Dear linguists,

MOVE 2: TOPIC INTRODUCTION
I am working on infinitive Dative subjects in Russian, such as
(1) "Ne znaju, chto mne delat'"
not know what-Acc I-Dat to-do
"I do not know what I must do"

MOVE 3: TOPIC CLARIFICATION
I am trying to find out which head checks the Dative feature of such subjects (or assigns Dative to them).

MOVE 4: JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST
For the sake of that, I am looking for comparative data from different Slavic languages (Czech, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Slovak, Slovene). In every single Slavic language, I am trying to get evidence for a correlation between existence of Dative "subjects" with modals meaning "necessary" ("must") and "possible" ("can") and existence of Dative infinitive subjects, such as in (1).

MOVE 5: ANTICIPATORY GRATITUDE
I will appreciate all the native speakers of Slavic languages who can answer the following questions:

MOVE 6: REQUESTS/QUESTIONNAIRE
I have two big questions [....]

MOVE 7: REQUEST CLARIFICATION
(Note that these Dative "subjects" are not structural subjects with which the predicate agrees, but just sentence-initial noun phrases which occur with 3 sg. neut. predicate.) I give the literal English translations of possible examples: [....]

MOVE 8: ADDITIONAL REQUESTS (4)
[Name]

(LL 9:471)

As pointed out above, the two strategies 'REQUEST – JUSTIFICATION' and 'JUSTIFICATION – REQUEST' were only adopted in 35% of the messages. We therefore also need to consider these two strategies in relation to the third type, i.e. the one in which the JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST is not voiced. The fact that the remaining 26 requesters (65%) did not justify their requests at all shows that the 'Ø JUSTIFICATION' strategy is the most common of the three. Also, these queries are extremely concise, consisting of the request proper and a few other moves such as a brief expression of gratitude or a plain signature. This raises the issue of emergent strategies in CMC; in other words, the popularity of the 'Ø JUSTIFICATION' strategy among participants in the list suggests that it is a CMC characteristic gaining ground within the LL discourse community. This type is illustrated by (5) below (cf. also (1) in 2.1, above).

(5) MOVE 1: REQUEST
Does anyone out there know of any text readability formulae which do not make use of sentence (or word) length?

MOVE 2: SIGNATURE
[Name]

(LL 8:141)

Queries such as (5) are extremely straightforward. This makes the formulation of the REQUEST itself worth paying attention to because RFIs are face-threatening acts *par*

excellence. According to Brown & Levinson (1987), this kind of 'bald-on-record' strategy is used by people who are fairly familiar with each other, such as friends, colleagues or family, and who are very comfortable in their environment. Common interests, the length of the requester's participation in the list and a potential sense of reduced social distance may create a feeling of community among the LL participants. Consequently, some members of the discourse community will feel comfortable enough in the context of known and unknown colleagues sharing an interest in linguistics, to post a straightforward, assertive request.

As stated above, queries of the deductive type, where the REQUEST precedes the JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST, indicate a view of politeness in which the requester is very much aware of imposing on the requestee's time; this strategy represents the Anglo-American rhetoric, where the readers' time and effort are highly valued (cf. e.g. Mauranen, this volume). In (2) above, the requester is in fact thanking the requestees for their time. In this light, opting for the 'Ø JUSTIFICATION' strategy appears to be an even more conspicuous indication of a concern for the requestees' time.

In contrast, the use of the inductive strategy, as in (4) above, indicates that the requester places a heavier weight on the requestees' sense of autonomy. The requester wishes to avoid violating the independence of the requestees by not imposing on them and hence intruding on their space. The linguistic manifestation of focusing on this risk consists of the requester being indirect and deferent in style (Brown & Levinson 1987:67; for a discussion of politeness strategies in LL queries, cf. Maricic 1999).

Brown & Levinson (1987:66-67) claim that the weight of imposition of the RFI, i.e. its length and difficulty, has a great impact on the choice of politeness strategy. Thus, very long, imposing messages tend to trigger more indirectness and are usually combined with formal openings and closings. This explains the requester's need to justify the request before actually asking for help, as seen in (3) above and (6) below.

(6) **MOVE 1: SALUTATION**
Dear linguists,

MOVE 2: TOPIC INTRODUCTION
it is quite obvious what "yes" and "no" mean as an answer to affirmative questions: Can you see me? - No, (I can't) means: I cannot see you, Can you see me? - Yes, (I can) means: I can see you. If the question is negative, "yes" and "no" in English refer to the propositional content of the question only, so the implication of "yes" and "no" is still the same: Can't you see me? – No, (I can't) means: I cannot see you, Can't you see me? – Yes, (I can) means: I can see you. German behaves similarly in principle but shows the peculiarity that there are different renderings of "yes" after an affirmative question ("ja") and after a negative question ("doch").

MOVE 3: REQUEST JUSTIFICATION
I have heard of languages in which the scope of "yes" and "no" includes the negation within the question, so here one would have: Can't you see me? – Yes, (I can't) meaning: I cannot see you, Can't you see me? – No, (I can) meaning: I can see you. If I remember rightly, Japanese and Kisuaheli were said to construct "yes" and "no" this way. There are probably also languages which have no word like "yes" and "no" altogether (classical Latin).

MOVE 4: REQUEST
Now I am looking for - information on the way different languages behave in this respect - references to general literature on the topic.

MOVE 5: INDIRECT GRATITUDE
I will be glad for any answer.

MOVE 6: PROMISE OF SUMMARY
A summary will be posted.

MOVE 7: SIGNATURE
[Name]

(LL 8:83)

Another issue worth considering in the light of the length and complexity of the queries and the degree of (in)directness adopted in them, concerns the composition of the discourse community. Some of the members feel that they are very much part of that community while others are clearly newcomers. Maricic (1999) found that newcomers lacking the feeling of belonging to the community tended to introduce themselves and their research interests making use of a higher degree of negative politeness strategies and a more formal and deferent style than the other participants (cf. also Veselinova & Dry 1995).

3. Conclusion

In this paper we have established that queries on the LL constitute a genre, in the sense of a type of communicative event in which language plays a major role. We have done so by identifying a shared set of communicative goals and relating the genre to the discourse community within which it takes place and which is in part constructed through it. Secondly, we have identified the prototypical move structure of the genre, paying special attention to core moves and the three discourse strategies manifest in the data. Since we are concerned with a computer-mediated genre, we have been particularly interested in any indication of emergent requesting conventions in this new medium.

The results indicate that moves identified in the study can be considered prototypical on three different grounds: (a) they are prominent because of high frequency (cf. the four core moves TOPIC AND/OR SENDER INTRODUCTION, REQUEST, GRATITUDE, and SIGNATURE, identified in 2.1, of which the REQUEST move is obligatorily present in all queries); (b) they are prominent by virtue of realizing central communicative goals of the genre (cf. esp. the discussion in 2.2 of the JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST move, present in only one third of the queries); and (c) they are prominent on the basis of the list policy, explicitly documented for the benefit of newcomers. We have found indications of moves of the last kind becoming silent in the texts as new members of the discourse community increase their familiarity with the list. We have also found that two thirds of the requesters do not justify the request, which would tend to point to a strong feeling of belonging to the discourse community and a high degree of familiarity with the list. Finally, there was little difference in the

frequencies of the two patterns 'REQUEST – JUSTIFICATION' and 'JUSTIFICATION – REQUEST' (6 versus 8 occurrences). The choice of strategy may be a result of cultural differences in rhetoric so that the former order would reflect the Anglo-American rhetoric to a higher degree than the latter one. Starting with the REQUEST is of high value in contexts where the requester is motivated to save the requestees' time. This is even more true of the queries which do not voice the JUSTIFICATION move at all. Starting with the JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUEST is generally assumed to reflect Eastern rhetoric. Even though the data are clearly too few and too opaque to permit conclusions concerning this multifaceted issue, we have chosen to raise it in the hope of future investigations in the area.

To round off with a consideration of CMC characteristics discerned in the data, we predict increased brevity and directness in the development of the genre. Because of the superfluity of the epistolary conventions, we believe that they will disappear in due course. However, the last to disappear is likely to be the requester's name at the end of the message. Not necessarily identical with the formal identification in the header, a short signature appears to serve an important interpersonal function in the increasingly simplified computer-mediated RFI.

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