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Variations in opening and closing forms in email correspondence in Danish and Swedish

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Abstract: In this study, we investigate how differences and similarities in opening and closing greetings in professional emails in academia manifest themselves in Danish and Swedish. Our data consist of a corpus of 595 emails (primary data) and two surveys with 1836 respondents (supportive data). An important result is that cultural values, e.g., ideals of equality, in both language areas are expressed through similar linguistic means, but that due to different historical developments, the specific encoding is not identical. Another result is that there is a much larger variety in closing greetings than in opening greetings in both languages, which can be derived from the communication situation where openings and closings and the elements within these serve different purposes.

Keywords: opening and closings, greeting forms, Swedish, Danish, email, politeness, address

1. Introduction

In intercultural pragmatics, it has long been recognised that language and culture are not one and the same thing (cf. Culpeper 2012: 1178; Leech 2014: 275), but that cultural norms (e.g., politeness) are expressed through behavioural means, one of these being language. It has also long been recognised that what counts as polite behaviour is not universal, but something that stems from these norms. A number of studies has been conducted on the differences between Western and Eastern cultural norms and how these are manifested linguistically (e.g., the references in Leech & Larina 2014: 11). This method of comparing linguistic behaviour where large differences are anticipated makes good sense when the aim is to

characterise universals as well as specific cultural values, such as politeness. It is much more transparent what is the essence of these universals or values and what are simply the expressions used to convey this essence when the expressions are easily isolated. However, it has been far less frequently explored how cultural differences manifest themselves in languages of close proximity. In this study, we investigate to what extent and by what means differences and similarities in addressing behaviour between two such languages of close proximity, i.e., Danish and Swedish, manifest themselves linguistically. We focus on greeting behaviour. The aim is to explore how different languages in countries with many of the same values (Denmark, Sweden, Finland) manage these values in everyday communication, and the empirical issue is the primary concern in this paper.¹ As a general framework we rely on familiar work on politeness and social relation as developed by scholars like Goffman (1955), Brown & Gilman (1960), Brown & Levinson (1987 [1978]), and referred to by scholars like Leech (2014).

In order to keep the amount of influencing factors to a manageable level, the linguistic behaviour selected for investigation are opening and closing greetings in professional emails in academia.

In Section 2, we give a brief introduction to the theoretical background of our study. In Section 3, we present the data we analyse and the methods we apply in the analysis. In Sections 4 and 5, we analyse the data, observing the two by two categories (Swedish : Danish; opening greeting : closing greeting). In Section 6, we discuss the results and draw conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Address and politeness

Theoretically, any kind of address to another person entails a face-threatening act (Goffman 1955). Any attention-seeking, no matter how small and no matter how much the addressee, in fact, might want the attention, is inherently an imposition. Leaving a communicative situation also poses a face-threatening act, in that leaving someone might be perceived as a rejection. To mitigate such potential threats, interlocutors make use of various means which – in addition to serving to establish contact and resolving contact (phatic communication) – serve as appeals to the recipient's face, e.g., opening and closing greetings.

Phatic expressions used in entering and leaving a communicative situation are often conventionalised forms of polite expressions reflecting

¹ Swedish is a pluricentric language spoken as L1 also by 5.2% (approx. 288 000) of the inhabitants in Finland (where Swedish is a national language alongside Finnish). Our data in Swedish stems both from Finland and Sweden (see more below).

cultural values. In English, the well-known greeting *how are you* points to a cultural value where showing interest in the well-being of the interlocutor is perceived as positive, and the greeting *see you* points to a cultural value where it is perceived as positive that the sender wants to meet the interlocutor again. Yet, greetings are typically conventionalised, in some cases to the point of being routines, thereby potentially losing their literal meaning. In English, it is not uncommon to write *dear* to complete strangers (e.g., in professional situations), even though the recipient will rarely be someone dear to the sender in the romantic sense.

Leech & Larina (2014: 18) also point to cultural differences in greeting practices. According to them, in British culture, where emotional reticence is a virtue, the greeting *how are you* is completely routinized as a means to say *hello* and it is not expected to prompt a sincere reply. Russians, on the other hand, will answer freely and sincerely to a Russian equivalent of *how are you*, since in Russian culture it is considered natural to tell other people how you feel (Leech & Larina 2014: 18). In Russian culture, protecting the privacy of the individual is associated with hostility; in British culture, this feature carries positive connotations (cf. Leech & Larina 2014: 24), and therefore an expected reply to *how are you* would be something short and unrevealing such as *fine, thank you*, even if the expression once counted as a true inquiry into another person's well-being.

In email correspondence, we find a number of more or less fixed sets of greetings to be used in the events of entering and leaving the communicative situation (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989; Grønning 2006; Bou-Franch 2011; Ewald 2016). In English, *dear + name* is commonly used as a greeting opening a communicative act, and *best wishes, sincerely, kind regards + sender's name* are well-known closing greetings used when leaving the communicative situation.

In this chapter, the object of study are the more or less fixed sets of greetings in Swedish and Danish. In many respects, Swedish (in Sweden and Finland) and Danish express cultural values that are alike. In the whole of Scandinavia, we find very strong ideals of equality (Daun 1996: 215; Palmgren 2008). However, even though equality is of the essence when speaking and writing in Swedish and Danish, some hierarchical relations are still relevant, e.g., the relation between a requester and a requestee, a student and a teacher, etc. We also find a common attitude towards formality; it is not necessarily a virtue to behave very formally. Rather, formal approaches may be perceived as insincere and distant (Jensen, Kragh, & Strudsholm 2016). In working with greetings within the Swedish- and Danish-speaking areas, it is therefore not unreasonable to draw on the well-known notion of distance (Brown & Gilman 1960; Brown & Levinson 1987 [1978]; Leech 2014).

Following Leech (2014), we distinguish between *vertical distance* and *horizontal distance*. The distinction is the familiar one based on Brown &

Gilman's original distinction between *power* (vertical distance) and *solidarity* (horizontal distance):²

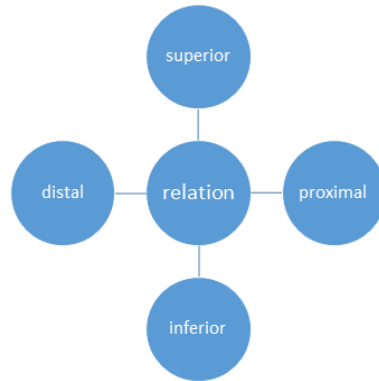


Figure 1. Vertical and horizontal distance

Vertical distance concerns interaction in asymmetrical relations between for instance employer : employee, teacher : student, or old : young. Horizontal distance concerns interaction in symmetrical relations and involves features such as intimacy and formality between, for instance, intimate friends : acquaintances, close family members : distant relations, or colleagues of varying intimacy.

The work of Brown & Gilman (1960) was originally done with the aim to uncover the patterns of the so-called *T/V*-distribution, i.e., the circumstances under which pronouns like French *tu* (*T*) and *vous* (*V*) were used when addressing people. For this, they developed a framework based on the notion of distance, differentiating between hierarchical distance and distance between peers, resulting in the term “pronouns of power and solidarity”. The identification of different kinds of distance as a driving force in the distribution of address forms thus originates from the analysis of pronominal usage. The basic notions, however, are also applicable to other kinds of work on address phenomena such as the use of personal nouns like *Ma'am*, *Sir* and *mate* in English (cf. Moyna, Kluge, & Simon 2019: 2), and the use of opening and closing greetings in written correspondence. The choice of greeting form used when entering and exiting a communicative situation is influenced by the relations between the interlocutors in much the same way as the choice of selecting one pronoun over the other.

Even though the work by Brown & Gilman changed the way politeness and address systems were studied, it has met with criticism. One point of criticism concerned the values behind the notions of power and solidarity, as they may not be universally shared. Indeed, the work analysed the pronominal distribution and changes in some of the languages spoken in

² Also corresponding to Brown & Levinson's P (vertical distance) and D (horizontal distance).

Western Europe, and when the framework was extended to address systems of other languages and cultures, it turned out to be less than enlightening (cf. Clyne, Norrby, & Warren 2009: 15 f.; Moyna et al. 2019: 3). Another point of criticism concerned the limitation of the simple dichotomies of the framework (Clyne et al. 2009: 15 f.; Moyna et al. 2019: 3). As has been pointed out, in reality the factors influencing the choice of one address form over another are much too diverse (i.e., sex, age, profession, etc.) to be captured in the framework based on distance (Braun 1988: 38-42).

However, the importance of the basic notion of distance prevails, as it does provide a general understanding of some of the major influencing factors relevant to how people interact and how they address each other in speech communities like the ones in Western Europe, including Scandinavia.

2.2. Email communication

2.2.1. *The elements of an email*

Historically, the structure of emails is modelled on the traditional paper letter (Grønning 2006). In Scandinavia, the traditional letter contains an opening greeting, the main communication, and a closing greeting as minimum requirements (e.g., Rask 1992; Lund 2004). The main communication is placed in the body of the text and varies in style, according to the purpose of the communication, and the personal and perhaps creative preferences of the writer. The opening and closing greetings used to address the recipient are often rather more formulaic and easy to put on prescriptive lists: how to open a letter, and how to close it (e.g., Jacobsen & Jørgensen 2013: 355-357; Ditlevsen 2014; Gøttsche 2020). Although many individual emails nowadays do not necessarily contain all three elements, but may be stripped down so that they only contain the main communication (e.g., a quick confirmation reply to a request could be simply a *yes, certainly* without further ado), this structure is still the default model that writers will revert to, e.g., when writing a first address and when writing an email to someone they do not know (Jensen et al. 2016).

An email may contain further elements, not necessarily directly related to the main act. The ones of relevance to this study are a kind we, following Nord (2019), call niceties (Swe. *trevligheter*). These may come in the form of different kinds of well-wishing (*hoping all is well with you*), including seasonal greetings (*trust you had a pleasant Easter break*), and also in forms of thanks (*thank you in advance*) and congratulations (*many happy returns*). Depending on the main purpose of the communication, these niceties serve different functions; often they will serve as relational signs of informality, and in some cases (e.g., requests) they may have a stronger bearing on the main act, serving as supportive moves to this.

For the purpose of this study, we shall refer to the following elements:

opening greeting (formulaic salutation, e.g., ‘hi’ (+ name))

main act (varies in form)

closing greeting (formulaic signing off, e.g., ‘sincerely’ + name)

nicety (incl. well-wishings, seasonal greetings, thanks, etc.)

The three elements, opening greeting, main act and closing greeting, always come in this sequence; the element of niceties may appear in the beginning as well as towards the ending of an email. Niceties may also serve as an opening or a closing independently of any formulaic greeting, and may merge with a more formulaic greeting.

In the analysis, when we use the term *greeting*, the opening/closing in question contains a variation of the words from the formulaic expressions, i.e., the Swedish/Danish equivalents to ‘hi’ in opening greetings, and ‘sincerely’ in closing greetings (cf., Tables 1–2, 3–7 for more extensive listings of the inventory of formulaic greeting forms). We also use the short forms *opening* and *closing* as convenient terms for the whole act of entering an email communication and leaving it again. Whenever necessary, we specify whether the opening or closing contains a formulaic expression or not.

The greetings may be subject to abbreviations and reductions. This is a feature which email shares with text chat (Dürscheid & Frehner 2013), but it is also something that in some cultures (e.g., the Danish one) is a continuation of practises used in the traditional letter (Rask 1992). Typically, abbreviations are used in communications where the sender considers the distance to the addressed interlocutor rather small, and abbreviations rarely show up in emails of first address and in emails where the sender wishes to show deference to the addressee.

2.2.2. *Factors influencing the choice of openings and closings*

The choice of openings and closings is influenced by a number of factors. Bou-Franch (2011) points out that vertical distance and also subject matter have an influence on the choice of openings and closings; e.g., much more self-identification seems to be needed for emails sent to someone higher up the social hierarchy, and in the case of requests.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) points out that in emails sent to university faculty we might expect a greater formality and indirectness, as well as a visible awareness of the degree of imposition on the recipient, in particular in cases of requests. This, however, is not necessarily the case, as many have pointed out (cf. Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011). Waldvogel (2007) has worked on emails in workplace cultures, and has found that there are many

cultural differences. In general, openings and closings orient towards the face needs of recipients. Certain workplaces that were analysed had cultures where openings were very formal, but also there was a large amount of variation, due to face needs and social hierarchy.

This research then indicates a number of factors that ought to be taken into account when analysing openings and closings in emails. One is cultural norms; another is hierarchy; a third one is the subject matter. These are all interconnected in different ways. Hierarchy and cultural norms are of particular relevance for our analysis, but we will also discuss the subject matter in a few cases where it plays an important role for the use of a particular greeting.

When it comes to research on cross-cultural differences in email behaviour, we can refer specifically to the work in Jensen, Kragh & Strudsholm (2016). They carried out a cross-cultural study of openings and closings in academia (in emails from teachers to students and from students to teachers) in Swedish and Danish, as well as Italian and French. Since Swedish and Danish are the two languages we are investigating, those results are the ones we will focus on. Table 1 summarises the typical opening greetings for these languages (Jensen et al. 2016: 126). The Table is organised in the following manner: greeting formulas placed under the heading ‘formal’ are greetings found in formal emails; those placed under the heading ‘neutral’ are found in emails with no apparent value as to formal-informal; and those found under the heading ‘informal’ are found in informal emails. The study did not thoroughly investigate the use of first name, last name or full name.

Table 1. Openings greetings in Swedish and Danish

	Swedish	Danish
Formal	<i>hej</i> ‘hi’ <i>bästa/bäste</i> ‘best’ <i>kära/käre</i> ‘dear’	<i>til</i> ‘to’ <i>kære</i> ‘dear’
Neutral	<i>hej</i> ‘hi’ <i>kära/käre</i> ‘dear’	<i>kære</i> ‘dear’ <i>hej</i> ‘hi’
Informal	<i>hej</i> ‘hi’ no opening	<i>hej</i> ‘hi’

We see here that *hej* ‘hi’ is used in Swedish in all types of email, and is used as the most frequent opening. *Bästa/bäste* ‘best’ occurs in formal emails, as does *kära/käre* ‘dear’.³ In Danish, there is a somewhat greater division concerning formality. *Kære* ‘dear’ is used in formal as well as neutral emails, and *hej* ‘hi’ is used in neutral as well as informal emails. Notably, not having an opening was only attested in the data from Swedish.

³ The forms ending in *-e* can be optionally used in Swedish when describing a (single) male person. In the remainder of the text we refer to these adjectives only with *kära* and *bästa*.

When it comes to closing greetings, Table 2 is presented (Jensen et al. 2016: 130).

Table 2. Closing greetings in Swedish and Danish

	Swedish	Danish
Formal	<i>med vänlig hälsning</i> 'with kind regards'	<i>bedste hilsner</i> 'best regards'
Neutral	<i>bästa hälsningar</i> 'best regards' <i>vänliga hälsningar</i> 'kind regards'	<i>med venlig hilsen</i> 'with kind regards' <i>mvh</i> 'with kind regards'
Informal	<i>hälsningar</i> 'greetings/regards'	<i>kh</i> 'd(ear) g(reetings)/regards'

In Swedish, the length of the closing phrase clearly links to formality, and it should be noted that the reduction *mvh* (*med vänlig(a) hälsning(ar)* 'with kind regard(s)') was not attested in the study of Jensen et al. In Danish, the reduced forms *mvh* (*med venlig hilsen* 'with kind regard') and *kh* (*kærlig hilsen* 'dear greeting') did appear, and functioned as neutral or informal closings.

Relating this work to that of Biesenbach-Lucas (2011), we might expect that in emails from students to faculty, there would be more use of formal openings and closings.

3. Method and data⁴

The data used in the investigation come in two forms: firstly, a collection of 595 professional emails in Danish and Swedish between colleagues and from students to teachers (primary data), and secondly, an online survey with 1311 anonymous Danish-speaking respondents and 525 anonymous Swedish-speaking respondents (supportive data).⁵ The participants in the different datasets are not the same. As pointed out above, the data in Swedish, which is a pluricentric language also spoken as a first language by

⁴ All digital material was collected and stored (and deleted) according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the research project has been registered at the Data Protection Agency. It should be noted that the data collection was established before the GDPR legislation of May 2018. The use of personal material raises a number of ethical questions. According to the 2002 and 2012 ethical recommendations of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), what is ethically acceptable is highly dependent on the content, platform and context of the study and 'ambiguity, uncertainty, and disagreement are inevitable' (Ess and AoIR ethics working committee, 2002: 4; Markham & Buchanan, 2012: 4). An important ethical guideline is 'to *do no harm*' (Ess et al. 2002: 8), meaning that the research should not have any physical or psychological negative effects, which we take as our point of departure, when dealing with the ethical challenges of the material.

⁵ Since the survey was carried out online anybody could answer it. The survey in Danish attracted much more attention than we expected, and it turned out to be impossible to collect the same amount of answers to the survey in Swedish. Nonetheless, also the Swedish survey was answered by enough respondents to provide robust results.

5.2 % of the population in Finland, was collected in both Sweden and Finland. Even though some pragmatic differences can often be found between the two national varieties of Swedish (see e.g., Wide et al. 2019), this is not the case in our dataset. Only some minor differences in the use of low-frequent greeting forms are attested in the data. We will point out these differences in the analysis.

3.1 Primary data

The email collection took the form of a sample selected from the large amount of emails received by the five authors of the article in their professional mailboxes. This method follows the one employed by e.g., Bou-Franch (2011: 1775–1775), Ewald (2016: 11–14, and references mentioned therein), and Vismans (2019: 259–260). The sample was collected in accordance with the following principles:

1. The sender/addresser occurs no more than three times in the sample (and in most cases only once), the sender is not a robot or a not-personalised group (e.g., reminders from a library or call for papers).
2. The recipient/addressee is unique in most cases but some group emails are included.
3. The sender and the recipient have a professional relationship (either faculty-student, requestee-requester or colleague-colleague).⁶
4. The emails concern professional matters (emails from very close relations have been screened out, but the sample contains both known and unknown senders).
5. Diversity concerning prior contact between the sender and recipient (i.e., both first inquiries and sender with prior contact).
6. 300 of the emails concern asymmetric relations, i.e., the faculty-student relation, 295 of the emails concern a more symmetric relation, i.e., the colleague-colleague-relation.

The two different languages, Danish and Swedish, are represented in the emails according to the distribution shown in Table 3.⁷

Table 3. Distribution of the data

Language	From students	From colleagues
Danish	150	150

⁶ For convenience, we refer throughout the article to the relationships of both requester-requestee and colleague-colleague as a colleague-colleague relationship.

⁷ Our intention was to have as equal a distribution of emails from both languages, and also from students and colleagues in both. However, this proved not to be possible during the data collection period. Nonetheless, the sample is sufficiently evenly distributed to allow for generalisations to be made about email practices in academic Swedish and Danish. In processing the material, the data from the email collection was anonymised.

3.2 Supportive data

The survey in Danish was carried out in the Autumn of 2018 via the online tool SurveyMonkey; the Swedish survey took place via Google Forms in the Spring of 2019. The purpose of the survey was to collect supportive data on how people (report that they) use specific opening and closing greetings in emails. The questionnaire was open for answers for one week and was distributed through the Danish, Swedish and Finland-Swedish Language Councils and their digital platforms (such as Facebook and LinkedIn) and also via university teachers to students. The Danish survey resulted in answers from 1311 respondents; the Swedish survey resulted in answers from 525. The respondents comprise a random sample of people who filled in the questionnaire – both students and people in general. Background information was collected on the respondents' age, and gender as well as their status as students or not.⁸ The questionnaire itself consisted of 20 (Danish) or 21 (Swedish) questions concerning different kinds of greetings (e.g., *What determines which opening and closing you would use in an email?* and *Who do you write [specific greeting] to?*). The only difference between the two surveys was that the Swedish survey contained a question on the respondents' country of residence (and birth, if different), hence the difference in number of questions.⁹ Both surveys were anonymously answered. In the analyses in Sections 4 and 5, we rely mainly on the primary data, i.e., the email corpus. We support our findings in the email corpus with the survey data whenever relevant. All quotes from the survey data are loyal to the originals and their orthography.

4. Openings

We start the analysis of our empirical findings by presenting by which means senders' address their interlocutors in openings found in the two datasets. In Section 4.1 we present the openings in the dataset in Swedish and in Section 4.2 the openings in the dataset in Danish. A comparison of the two datasets is presented in 4.3. After that we move on to analyse the closings in the emails in Section 5.

4.1 Openings in the dataset in Swedish

⁸ The informants were asked to mark which of the following age groups they belong to: below 20, 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–80, above 80.

⁹ A detailed report on the Danish survey, including practical matters of how the data were obtained, and how the questions were phrased, and more methodological matters such as representativeness is available in Jensen, Hougaard, & Rathje (2020).

As Table 4 shows, the formulaic greetings involving *hej* ‘hi’ dominate heavily in openings in the dataset in Swedish, with 251 out of 295 instances, or 85%. This is in line with previous studies on email openings in Swedish (Clyne et al. 2009: 143–144; Jensen et al. 2016; Nilsson et al. 2020). *Hej* is used both alone and in combination with the addressee’s name (in all but one case, the first name only). Overall, openings involving *hej* are the most frequent opening used by students, with 130 of 150 instances, or 87%. Of these, the use of only *hej* is, however, twice as frequent as *hej* + name (81 vs 42 occurrences, for examples, see (2)–(7) below).

Table 4. Openings in the dataset in Swedish

	Colleagues	Students	Total
No opening	11	12	23
First name only	1	0	1
Title + first name + last name	1	0	1
<i>hej</i> ‘hi’ only	55	81	136
<i>hej</i> ‘hi’ + first name	49	42	91
<i>hej</i> ‘hi’ + noun/pronoun/adverb/longer phrase ¹⁰	17	7	24
<i>hejsan</i> ‘hi there’	0	7	7
<i>godmorgon</i> ‘good morning’ + first name	0	1	1
<i>kära</i> ‘dear’ + noun	2	0	2
<i>ärade</i> ‘honoured’ + noun	1	0	1
<i>bästa</i> ‘best’ + first name + last name/title/noun	7	0	7
Title + name	1	0	1
Nicety as opening	1	0	1
	145	150	295

Our email data confirms the status of *hej* as the neutral greeting in Swedish which can be used in most situations. This status is corroborated by many comments in our supportive data. An example of this is shown in (1).

- (1) *Jag använder "hej" eftersom jag uppfattar det som en neutral hälsningsfras som fungerar bra i såväl formella som mer informella sammanhang.*

‘I use “hej” since I see it as a neutral opening which works well in both formal and informal contexts’ (Student, male, 20–29, Sweden)

In contrast to the findings on reported use attested by Clyne et al. (2009) and Nilsson et al. (2016), we could not find any differences between the emails

¹⁰ For example, *hej vänner* ‘hi friends’, *hej alla* ‘hi everyone’, *hej på er* ‘hi on you’, *hej Xs styrelse* ‘hi board of X’.

from Sweden and Finland concerning the distribution of *hej* combined or not combined with the first name of the addressee, respectively.

In addition to bare *hej* and *hej* + first name, combinations of *hej* with various closer specifications or additional greetings can also be found. Examples (2)–(3) show two of these cases.

(2) *Hej Xs styrelse*
'Hi board of X'

(3) *Hej kära kolleger*
'Hi dear colleagues'

Example (3) shows one of three openings with the adjective *kära* 'dear' in the entire dataset in Swedish. Even though the scope and length of this study does not enable us to systematically map all greeting types in the data with the topic/task of the emails in question, we want to briefly comment on less frequent types of greetings such as this one. In the email message where *hej kära kolleger* 'Hi dear colleagues' is used, the sender asks colleagues at other universities about the time for an annual meeting that they are all expected to participate in. The other two email messages with openings including the adjective *kära* 'dear' are also directed to colleagues or acquaintances in networks relating to work but not the sender's own institution. In both these cases, the senders, who open their email messages with *kära kolleger* 'dear colleagues,' and *kära vänner* 'dear friends' respectively, present information relating to themselves that they hope the recipients would be interested in (a new book, a new email address).

In five cases in the data, niceties in the form of seasonal greetings are already presented in the opening. In one case, the email starts with the seasonal greeting *gott nytt år* 'happy new year' only. In all other cases, the nicety occurs in combination with the greeting *hej* as in example (4) from an email from a student.

(4) *Hej och gott nytt år!*
'Hi and happy new year'

As Table 4 shows, the informal greeting *hejsan* 'hi there' only occurs in the dataset with email messages from students to faculty (both in Sweden and Finland). This is markedly informal in Swedish, but there are so few instances that it does not contradict the general pattern that Swedish colleagues and students prefer to use the neutral *hej* 'hi' as the default greeting. Recall that it has been argued in the literature that students prefer to be formal in emails to faculty (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007), but formality in Swedish is so extreme with the greetings *bästa* or *kära* that the neutral *hej* has taken over as the most appropriate way to be both formal and informal.

The most formal openings in the dataset in Swedish can be found in emails to faculty from administrators at other universities who hope the addressee can take on an assignment as an external expert (evaluating research applications, etc.). In these openings, the adjective *bästa* is used together with titles and/or last names or full names. Example (5) shows one of the cases.

- (5) *Bäste Professor [Last name]*
'Best professor LAST NAME...'

In the cases with *bästa* and titles and/or last/full names, the same (or almost the same) message appears to have been sent to several recipients, although not at the same time. The content is dense and schematic, focusing on facts relating to the expert assignments at hand. The recipients are also addressed with the formal pronoun *ni* 'you.V' in these emails, which is very rare in present-day Swedish (Clyne et al. 2009).¹¹

When combined with other nouns than titles, *bästa* 'best' typically occurs in emails sent to particular groups of people, for example members of academic committees, such as in example (6). The adjective *ärade* 'honoured' in example (7) is used in a similar context (in an email sent from Finland).¹²

- (6) *Bästa medlemmar i...!*
'Best members of...'

- (7) *Ärade mottagare!*
'Honoured recipients'

The emails that examples (6)–(7) occur in are also schematic in character. In the first case, members of a committee receive the documents for the next meeting. In the other case, the recipients are invited to submit papers to a *Festschrift*.

4.2 Openings in the dataset in Danish

In the dataset in Danish, *hej* 'hi' is also the most frequent opening (154 cases in total, i.e., 51%), but it is closely followed by *kære* 'dear' in second place (129 cases in total, i.e., 43%). As discussed above, *hej* is used both alone and with the addressee's first name in the dataset in Swedish. In the dataset in Danish, *hej* is, with a few exceptions (13 cases), only used in

¹¹ V corresponds to latin *vos* and stands for the distal form (familiar forms are marked with T, corresponding to latin *tu*, Brown & Gilman 1960).

¹² This single occurrence of *ärade* represents one of the few differences we could find in the emails from Finland and Sweden.

combination with the addressee's name. In all but two of these cases, it is the first name that is used together with *hej*.

Table 5. Openings in the dataset in Danish

	Colleagues	Students	Total
No opening	10	4	14
First name only	0	0	0
<i>hej</i> 'hi'	5	4	9
<i>hej</i> 'hi' + first name	32	107	139
<i>hej</i> 'hi' + first name + last name	1	1	2
<i>hej</i> 'hi' + name of institution	4	0	4
<i>kære</i> 'dear' + first name	67	31	98
<i>kære</i> 'dear' + first name + last name	25	3	28
<i>kære</i> 'dear' + noun	3	0	3
til 'to' + noun	3	0	3
	150	150	300

In the data in Danish, we see a clear difference in openings in emails from students and colleagues. For colleagues, openings involving *kære* are most frequent, with 95 out of 150 instances, or 63%. For emails from students, the most frequent opening involves *hej*, with 112 of 150 instances, or 75%.

The frequency of *hej* + first name is clearly higher among students (107 cases, 71%) than among colleagues (32 occurrences, 21%) in the dataset in Danish. The difference between colleagues and students when it comes to *hej* + first name is statistically highly significant ($p < 0.01$).¹³

In Danish, colleagues use *kære* + name (+ last name) more than *hej* (+ name) (92 cases vs 33 cases in total). A clear difference between colleagues and students writing in Danish also emerges: colleagues use *kære* + name (+ last name) far more than the students (92 vs 34 cases). This difference is statistically highly significant ($p < 0.01$).

The variation in openings between students and colleagues in the dataset in Danish could be considered in terms of social hierarchy (i.e., vertical distance), but in fact, it might also be explained as a mere generational difference. The students use *hej* and first name significantly more than do colleagues; contrary to this, colleagues use *kære* + (first/last) name more than the students do. Based on the assumption that students in general are younger than colleagues, *hej* + first name could be taken to be the young person's opening greeting, whereas *kære* + name is the one used by people older than the typical student.

The generational hypothesis is corroborated by our supportive data in Danish. In these, it was found that the young respondents (under 30) preferred *hej* + first name and *hej* without a name significantly more than the older respondents (over 30, $p < 0.01$). The respondents over 30, and

¹³ We used a Fisher's exact test with a significance level of 0.5. We use significance testing mainly on the dataset of Danish greetings since the dataset of Swedish greetings showed a very clear pattern.

especially over 60, in turn favoured *kære* + name. Some of the respondents' comments illustrate this generational difference.

- (8) [About *hej* + first name]: *Det kommer an på alderen. Jeg skriver "hej" til mine unge medarbejdere.*
'It depends on age. I write "hej" to my younger employees.'
(Non-student, female, 60–69)
- (9) [About *kære* + first name]: *Mine bedsteforældre, den "gamle" generation, benytter denne*
'My grandparents, the "old" generation, use this one.'
(Student, male, 20–29)

Apparently, in the dataset in Danish the choice of a specific opening depends very much on age. *Hej* 'hi' might be a marker of youth; and this could be one of the reasons why the students, mostly under 30, only use *kære* 'dear' in 23% of the emails written to older faculty (cf. also Rathje, Hougaard, & Jensen 2020). Another reason could be one of formality. We follow up on this in the discussion in Section 6.

4.3 Comparison

As Sections 4.1 and 4.2 have shown, in general, openings in Swedish and Danish are similar in several respects; in both languages, relatively fixed sets of formulaic opening greetings are used, and there is not much variation in the types found in the two languages. However, the frequency by which the specific openings are used differs in the two languages. In the dataset in Swedish, *hej*, with or without the first name of the recipient, is clearly the default, neutral greeting in the emails written in our data, both for emails from colleagues and from students (cf. Clyne et al. 2009: 143–144; Jensen et al. 2016; Nilsson et al. 2020), whereas in the dataset in Danish *hej* and *kære* are used in almost equal measures. *Kære/kära* is an adjective (in the definite form) and it cannot be used without a name (or another noun). *Hej*, however, may appear with or without the name of the addressee. In the dataset in Swedish, it frequently appears without a name; in the dataset in Danish, it hardly ever appears without the name of the addressee. In the dataset in Danish, the full name predominantly appears in combination with *kære*; the use of only the first name is slightly more frequent in combination with *hej* than in combination with *kære*. In the dataset in Swedish, *hej* without any name is the most frequent, and *hej* in combination with the first name is the second most frequent opening; the use of the full name almost never occurs, and never with the default greeting form *hej*. Seasonal greetings (a certain kind of nicety) can be found in the openings of emails in Swedish, although rarely, and Danes do not use *bedste* (or *ærede*) as opening greetings as speakers of Swedish in Sweden and Finland do.

5. Closings

We now turn to the closings that are attested in our primary dataset. In Section 5.1 we present the closings in the dataset in Swedish and in Section 5.2 the closings in the dataset in Danish. A comparison of the two datasets is presented in 5.3.

5.1 Closings in the dataset in Swedish

Table 6 gives an overview of the closings in the email messages in the dataset in Swedish. The picture is much more varied than with openings, indicating that openings are much more standardised and formulaic than closings. The most frequent closing in the emails in Swedish is *(med) vänlig(a) hälsning(ar)* ‘(with) kind greeting(s)’ (79 of 295 instances, or 27%). The abbreviation *mvh*, the second most frequent greeting, is used primarily by students (63 occurrences vs 6 occurrences in emails among colleagues). The bare *hälsningar* ‘greetings’, which is the third most frequent closing in the emails in Swedish (39 cases in total), is used more in emails among colleagues than in emails from students to faculty. With a few exceptions, all closings include the sender’s name in the email.

Table 6. Closings in the dataset in Swedish

	Colleagues	Students	Total
No closing	16	7	23
Sender’s first name only	6	10	16
<i>hälsningar</i> ‘greetings’	29	10	39
<i>hälsar</i> ‘greet(s)’	1	0	1
Abbreviated versions of <i>hälsningar</i> ‘greetings’ (<i>hälsn.</i> , <i>häls.</i> , <i>H.</i> , <i>h.</i> , <i>h</i>)	4	8	12
<i>(de) bästa hälsningar</i> ‘(the) best greetings’	6	0	6
<i>många hälsningar</i> ‘many greetings’	3	0	3
<i>varma hälsningar</i> ‘warm greetings’	1	0	1
<i>(med) (mycket) vänlig(a) hälsning(ar)</i> ‘(with) (very) kind greetings’	40	39	79
<i>vänligen</i> ‘kindly’	0	1	1
<i>mvh</i>	6	63	69
<i>allt gott</i> ‘everything good’	10	0	10
Nicety as closing	20	10	30
Other closings*	3	2	5
	145	150	295

* E.g., greetings in English (e.g., *sincerely*) and questions.

Even though (*med*) *vänlig(a) hälsning(ar)* ‘(with) kind greeting(s)’ is the most frequently used greeting in the dataset in Swedish, it may be conceived as too formal, for example, in emails to close colleagues. In our supportive data, one of the informants made the following comment.

- (10) *Att använda "med vänliga hälsningar" eller "vänliga hälsningar" i situationer som inte är tillräckligt formella för det, exempelvis om man känner varandra, tycker jag signalerar ett otrevligt avståndstagande. Därför blir det oftast bara "hälsningar" när jag mejlar kolleger. Det här är ju väldigt annorlunda än utomlands, så det får jag alltid tänka på när jag mejlar till folk i andra länder, vilket jag ofta gör.*
‘To use "med vänliga hälsningar" or "vänliga hälsningar" in situations which are not formal enough for it, for example when you know one another, signals an unpleasant degree of distance, I think. Therefore, I will often only use “hälsningar” when I mail colleagues. This is very different from abroad, so I always think carefully when I mail people from other countries, which I often do.’ (Non-student, female, 30–39, Sweden)

Similarly, the abbreviation *mvh*, which is the most common greeting in closings by students in our email dataset, seems to be disliked by the informants of our supportive data. In (11), the same informant as in (10), however, acknowledges that students may use *mvh* without negative connotations:

- (11) *Jag använder aldrig förkortningar som "mvh" och liknande, och blir instinktivt stött av dem eftersom jag uppfattar det som att man inte orkar göra en det lilla att skriva ut orden (om man nu vill vara artig, varför inte faktiskt försöka lite). Jag försöker komma ihåg att alla inte har lärt sig det och att det inte måste vara illa menat när t.ex. studenter skriver så. Förkortningarna ger annars ett väldigt dåligt intryck, speciellt när det kommer från officiellt håll/i arbetet från t.ex. andra anställda, eller från organisationer.*
‘I never use abbreviations like “mvh” or the like, and am instinctively repulsed by it since I feel people cannot make the little effort to write the word in full (if you want to be polite, why not make an effort). I try to remember that not everyone has learned this and if a student does it it does not have to be intended to be bad. Otherwise, abbreviations give a very bad impression, especially when the mail is official/from work, such as from other colleagues, or from organisations.’ (Non-student, female, 30–39, Sweden)

A few of the greetings in the data are specified with other adjectives than *vänliga* ‘kind’. There are 10 occurrences of *(de) bästa hälsningar* ‘(the) best greetings’, *många hälsningar* ‘many greetings’ and *varma hälsningar* ‘warm greetings’ in email messages among colleagues. *Många hälsningar* is, for example, used in a couple of email messages containing inquiries about submitted applications that the recipient is expected to have information about.

As in some of the openings, *bästa* ‘best’ can be found in schematic email messages directed to a group of people. Example (12) shows a case where the sender is informing the recipients of a new email address when retiring. The message opens with *kära vänner* ‘Dear friends’ and ends with *med de bästa hälsningar*.

- (12) *Kära vänner,*
‘Dear friends’
[...]
Med de bästa hälsningar
‘With the best greetings’
[First name]

In our supportive data, one informant comments on the use of *bästa hälsningar* in a way that nicely captures the context in (13):

- (13) *Jag använder oftast "bästa hälsningar" i jobbmail eftersom jag tycker att det låter lagom formellt och ändå trevligt. Använder också ganska ofta "hälsar", alltså typ: "Alltså tycker jag att detta låter som en bra idé /hälsar /Namn". Ibland skriver man också på liknande sätt "... tänker /Namn" eller "... funderade /Namn"*
‘I often use “bästa hälsningar” in work mails since I think it sounds formal enough but still pleasant. Also often use “hälsar”, such as like, “so I think it sounds like a good idea / hälsar / Name”. Sometimes you also write like “... thinks /Name” or “... contemplated ¹⁴/Name”’ (Student, non-binary, 50–59)

In 30 cases, 20 of which come in emails between colleagues, niceties are used as closings in the dataset in Swedish. In many of these cases, a greeting is merged with a nicety, such as in (14) where the greeting *hälsningar* is extended with a prepositional phrase that locates the sender geographically. In (15), a reference to the season, *sommar* ‘summer’, is added to make a compound greeting. Example (16) shows a more creative, yet not untypical,

¹⁴ This is a common practice in Swedish to mark the whole email almost as a quote or thought from the writer. It can be seen as a hedging device used to mark that the main body of the mail is purely the idea of the writer.

greeting with more extensive parenthetical information inserted after *hälsningar*.

- (14) *Hälsningar från tåget*
'Greetings from the train'
- (15) *Sommarhälsningar*
'Summer greetings'
- (16) *Kylslagna men optimistiska (sommaren finns trots allt där bakom hörnet någonstans) hälsningar*
'Coldish but optimistic (summer is there somewhere around the corner despite everything) greetings'

Some of the email messages in the dataset in Swedish end with invitations or thanks only, as in the phrases shown in (17) and (18). In a few cases, the closings consist of seasonal greetings only, as in (19), where the sender wishes the recipient a good Lucia day, which is celebrated on 13 December in Sweden and Finland.

- (17) *Välkommen med ditt bidrag!*
'Welcome with your contribution'
- (18) *Tack på förhand!*
'Thank you in advance'
- (19) *Stämningsfull Luciadag!*
'Wonderful Lucia day'

In addition to this, there are altogether 23 cases with no closings and 16 with closings consisting of only the sender's name in the dataset in Swedish. These mails come from students who have been in contact with the teacher by email recently, and so may not feel the need to follow the opening/closing patterns already described. Content-wise, they are often follow-ups to thank a teacher for their help/comments on a piece of work, for example.

Abbreviated forms are very rare in the dataset in Swedish, with only *mvh* being attested among students. This may well reflect the tendency seen in the high frequency of the opening *hej* towards informality in emails, and in particular the ideally non-hierarchical nature of Swedish society, where sameness between people is seen as a fundamental value and striving for equality and symmetrical relations is therefore important (Daun 1996: 215). Abbreviation is a well-known feature of text chat/SMS communication, for example, and is often seen as a marker of informality (cf. Tagg 2016). Thus, it is reasonable to extend this to abbreviated greetings in emails, although it

must be stated that these abbreviations can be viewed very negatively (cf. comment in (11)).

5.2 Closings in the dataset in Danish

As shown in Table 7, in several respects, the closings in the email messages in the dataset in Danish are very similar to the closings in the email messages in Swedish. As in the dataset in Swedish, the most frequent closing in the dataset in Danish is *(med) venlig(e) hilsen(er)* ‘(with) kind greeting(s)’, with a total of 97 of 300 instances, or nearly one third of the data. In the emails in the Danish dataset, the abbreviation *mvh* is also the second most frequent greeting, and furthermore it is mostly used by students (35 occurrences vs 17 occurrences in emails among colleagues). Similar results are found in our supportive data. The respondents find these two closings to be by far the most preferred.

In general, there are more abbreviated forms of closings in the dataset in Danish than in the dataset in Swedish. Also, other abbreviations like *vh* (*venlig hilsen*, ‘kind greeting’), *(d)bh* (*(de) bedste hilsner*, ‘best greetings’), and *kh* (*kærlig hilsen*, ‘dear greeting’) are used, though not as frequently as *mvh*. In our supportive data, the respondents in general describe the use of abbreviations as impolite and lazy. But respondents younger than 30 are significantly more tolerant towards the use of *mvh* than the older respondents; this abbreviation is said to be okay in threading where, according to Bou-Franch (2011), other norms exist.

(20) *Hvis der er tale om længere mailkorrespondancer med høj svarfrekvens og korte meddelelser, kan jeg finde på at skifte til en af de kortere former, fx 'mvh'.*

‘In the case of longer email correspondences with a high response rate and short messages, I can decide to switch to one of the shorter forms, e.g., ‘mvh’.’ (Student, male, 20–29)

Different from the findings in Swedish, the third most frequent closing in the dataset in Danish is *(de) bedste hilsner* ‘(the) best greetings’ (37 cases in total). *Hilsen* ‘greeting’ and *mange (venlige) hilsner/mh* ‘many (kind) greetings’ are used almost equally frequently and thus they share fourth place. With a few exceptions, all closings include the sender’s name in the email.

Table 7. Closings in the dataset in Danish

	Colleagues	Students	Total
No closing	2	4	6
First name only	2	5	7
<i>hilsen</i> ‘greetings’	5	20	25

<i>(de) bedste hilsner</i> ‘(the) best greetings’	28	9	37
<i>(d)bh</i>	2	4	6
<i>mange (venlige) hilsner/mh</i> ‘many kind greetings’	11	10	21
<i>(med) venlig(e) hilsen(er)</i> ‘with kind greetings’	56	41	97
<i>mvh</i>	17	35	52
<i>vh</i>	6	9	15
<i>venligst</i> ‘most kindly’	2	2	4
<i>kærlig hilsen/kærligst</i> ‘dear greeting’	3	1	4
<i>kh</i>	7	4	11
Nicety as closing	6	5	11
Other closings	3	1	4
	150	150	300

There are significant differences between colleagues and students when it comes to the use of certain closings: Students use *mvh* and *hilsen* ‘greetings’ more than colleagues, whereas colleagues on the contrary use *(de) bedste hilsner* ‘(the) best greetings’ more than students. All three differences are highly significant ($p < 0.01$).

5 % of the closings could be termed affectionate greetings: *kærlig hilsen/kærligst/kh* ‘dear greeting/dearest greeting’. Even though these closings are relatively rare, the tendency is that they are used by colleagues rather than by students. This might have to do with the students viewing their relation to the addressee (faculty) as a formal one, considering the vertical distance between them, and therefore the younger participants try to avoid affectionate greetings. This is corroborated by our supportive data.¹⁵ The younger participants inform us that they find the affectionate greetings too personal and old fashioned:

- (21) *'Kærlig hilsen' er for dem, jeg kender godt, men det er også lidt gammeldags. Derfor skriver jeg det ikke til mine venner, men ældre familiemedlemmer kunne jeg godt finde på at skrive det til. Det eller 'Kærligst'*

‘Dear greeting’ I write to the ones I know well, but it is a bit old fashioned. Therefore I don’t write it to my friends, but I might write it to older members of the family. This or ‘Dearest’. (Non-student, female, 20–29)

In 9 cases (4%), neither an opening nor a closing greeting was used, only the name of the sender. These emails all have a student as the sender; in some of the cases a standard, formulaic greeting is replaced by a nicety.

- (22) *Tak for deres beroligende svar :-)*
‘Thank you for your calming answer :)’

¹⁵ Participants older than 30 years use *kære/kærlig hilsen* ‘dear/dear greeting’ significantly more than participants younger than 30.

- (23) *God efterårsferie (hvis du altså holder sådan noget) :) 'Good autumn break (if you have something like that) :)'*

This is equivalent to examples without opening/closing greetings in the dataset in Swedish, in that the student has already had contact via email on a particular issue, and so may not feel the need to follow the conventional opening/closing patterns. Apart from that, using a nicety as closing is not that frequent in the emails in Danish.

As mentioned earlier, Jensen et al. (2016) identify that *(de) bedste hilsner* '(the) best greetings' is primarily used in formal registers in Danish, whereas *mvh* may also be used in neutral ones. Together with another tendency in the dataset (colleagues using *(med) venlig(e) hilsen(er)* '(with) kind greeting(s)' slightly more than the students), this could have at least two explanations: 1) a change in language use has taken place which is reflected in the greetings of the different generations, 2) the students might perceive the communication with faculty as less formal than the colleagues perceive their email correspondences with their peers.

5.3 Comparison

Closings in Swedish and Danish are in some respects similar, in other respects not. '(the) best greetings', which is primarily employed by colleagues, is far more prevalent in the Danish (37) than the Swedish (6) emails; the dataset in Danish even shows 6 examples of the abbreviated version *(d)bh*, something that suggests an acceptance of this greeting. In our supportive data in Danish, 25 % of the respondents report that they use this closing greeting in emails to colleagues and partners. Another difference concerns the use of the abbreviation *mvh*. In the emails in Swedish, the students clearly most frequently use the abbreviation (only 9 % of the *mvh* have a colleague as sender), while the percentage of colleagues using *mvh* in the dataset in Danish is a lot higher (33 % of *mvh* have a colleague as sender). The two datasets also differ when it comes to closings with the first name only or with no formulaic greeting: In the dataset in Swedish, 23 emails end without a closing, while 16 emails end with the sender just writing his/her name; this happens less often in the dataset in Danish (6 occurrences without a closing and 7 with first name only).

In the findings in Swedish as well as Danish, we find a large range of possible closings. This may be described in terms of a continuum. At one end, we find completely conventionalised closings in formulaic expressions such as *(med) venlig(e) hilsen(er)* '(with) kind greeting(s)' and *mvh*. The formulaic greetings may be creatively modified (e.g., *med varme hilsner* 'with warm greetings'). At the other end of the continuum, we find closings with no base in formulaic greetings at all, e.g., a nicety such as *välkommen med ditt bidrag!* 'welcome with your contribution'. Such a nicety used as closing is more frequent in the emails in the dataset in Swedish than in the emails in Danish. The formulaic greetings are to a large extent the same in

the findings in Swedish and Danish. In both datasets, the closing greetings appear in abbreviated as well as non-abbreviated versions, but the abbreviated versions are more common in the findings in Danish than in Swedish.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings in Sections 4 and 5 raise a number of questions. In this section, we discuss schematic patterns (6.1), variation (6.2), affectionate greetings (6.3), formality (6.4), and use of names (6.5). Finally, we offer some conclusions (6.6).

6.1 Schematic patterns in the datasets in Swedish and Danish

In the datasets in Swedish and Danish, we find relatively schematic patterns of mandatory and facultative elements included in an email and of the order in which they appear. Based on our dataset, the standard patterns may be summarised as in Table 8.

Table 8. Mandatory and facultative elements, shown sequentially from top to bottom

Swedish	Danish
Formulaic greeting + name of addressee (facultative, common)	Formulaic greeting + name of addressee (mandatory)
Nicety (facultative)	Nicety (facultative)
Body of the email (mandatory)	Body of the email (mandatory)
Nicety (facultative)	Nicety (facultative)
Formulaic greeting (facultative, common)	Formulaic greeting (mandatory)
Name of sender (mandatory)	Name of sender (mandatory)

It would appear that both languages make use of schematic patterns, but it differs which elements have priority. The schemata for emails in Danish have more mandatory elements than the ones in Swedish. On the other hand, niceties are more common as closings in the dataset in Swedish than in the dataset in Danish. In the emails in Swedish, it is not mandatory to mention the name of the addressee. In Danish, leaving out the name of the addressee in openings is almost never done in our data, and compared to the emails in Swedish, niceties are less common as closings. This might point to a difference between the two languages, where facework is performed through different parts of the elements in the schemata. This contributes to the discussion about what parts of polite behaviour are universal, and what parts are language-specific. In our data, the two languages are parallel in relation to the presence of schematic patterns and the need to perform polite behaviour; a differentiating factor is the specific manner by which the polite behaviour is performed: e.g., use of niceties and writing the name of the

addressee. The specifics have developed historically within the Swedish-speaking and Danish-speaking communities, but the motivation for the specifics are the same; by extension, this motivation might be universal.

6.2 Openings and closings, fixed sets and room for variation

In both Swedish and Danish, we find sets of formulaic greetings. As regards openings, these sets are relatively small, and relatively fixed, with not much variation. In closings, we also find formulaic greetings, but their range is much wider, and they are much more open to modification and creativity. This confirms findings in Jensen et al. (2016). As mentioned in Section 2, Bou-Franch also found that, in general, greetings were much more verbose in closings than in openings in Peninsular Spanish (2011: 1778–1780). Laver (1981: 298–300), convincingly, proposes that departing from the norm in openings and closings, e.g., in a creative manner, could be seen as an attempt to negotiate the relation between the interlocutors, but he does not go into the differences between openings and closings. Goffman (1955: 41), however, could be consulted for an explanation: “Farewells sum up the effect of the encounter upon the relationship and show what the participants may expect of one another when they next meet”. We therefore suggest that a reason for the difference in openings and closings across languages could be that openings and closings have different relational functions. Openings serve *inter alia* to clarify roles while entering a communicative situation, and consequently, when leaving the communicative situation, the closings sum up whatever negotiation of roles there has been throughout the writing and thereby constitute expectations for the next interaction.

6.3 Dear

A notable difference between the datasets in Swedish and Danish concerns the use of the cognates *kära* (Sw.) and *kære* (Da.) meaning ‘dear’. In the emails in Swedish, *kära* seems to be used primarily to underline closeness or sincerity in more formal contexts, whereas *bästa* ‘best’ occurs in emails where the recipient is either doing or being asked to do a favour, or is being informed about something important as a member of a committee or the like. In Danish, on the other hand, the default for emails to colleagues is *kære*, but for students it is *hej* ‘hi’, and this result points to a possible ongoing change in language use from *kære* to *hej*.

This provides a perfect opportunity to study how something with the same origin develops in different directions locally in different regional settings. In both Danish and Swedish, *kære/kära* is an adjective originating from the Low German *caer* and Old French *ker* (from Latin *carus*, meaning ‘dear, precious’). According to the Danish dictionary *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* (1929), *kære* was used in the sense ‘beloved’ before the 18th century, but since then, *kære* has been used increasingly as an opening in

letters (now emails) in a weakened meaning. According to the Swedish dictionary *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* (1939), *kära* is used in openings in letters, in particular when the relation is of an intimate nature, and it is also used in letters of request or reproach. Thus, it has dual connotations: symmetry (horizontal distance) and asymmetry (vertical distance).

In the dataset in Danish, we are probably witnessing an ongoing change in language use, whereby the old meaning ('precious') is revived (i.e., re-semanticised, cf. Norde 2012: 85, 86, 101) as illustrated in this comment from one of the respondents of our supportive data:

- (24) *Jeg bruger i nyere tid sjældnere "kære" og oftere "hej" i formelle emails, for netop her er modtageren jo ikke ens kære. 'Nowadays, I more rarely use "kære" and more often "hej" in formal emails, because in formal emails the recipient is not a dear one.'* (Non-student, female, 40–49)

Together with the result from our supportive data in Danish, the comment in (24) indicates that younger people perceive the affectionate semantic content in *kære* more than was the case in earlier times or among the older respondents, where *kære* apparently was a mere opening greeting with more weak semantic content. The issue of how literally the affectionate semantics are taken is not a new one. In a Danish manual on letter writing, Rask (1992: 59) advises her readers to use *kære* with caution, as it may be perceived as too intimate an address by some recipients. As late as 2016, Jensen et al. (2016: 126) propose that Danish *kære* is used more in formal registers than *hej*, and that on these grounds it can be assumed that the students experience writing to a university professor as less formal than do colleagues writing to each other. We find this explanation less likely than the generational one, and propose that a change in language use is in process. Apparently, the meaning of *kære* has nowadays shifted to the more literal one – at least among younger writers. In Swedish, *kära* is used as a signal of intimacy only in some very specific formal and schematic contexts (see examples (3) and (12)).

6.4 Formality/informality

The hypotheses concerning openings and closings and formality/informality in Jensen et al. (2016) are predominantly attested in this article. This confirmation does not concern the Danish students using *hej* as the primary opening to faculty members and the students in Sweden and Finland using the highly informal *hejsan* to their teachers (see Table 4), though.¹⁶ According to Jensen et al. (2016), in Danish, in formal registers *kære* and *til*

¹⁶ *Hejsan* is used by students in both Sweden and Finland (2 and 5 occurrences, respectively).

are used, and in Swedish *hej*, *kära* and *bästa*. This result might be explained by the non-hierarchical social conventions in Denmark, Sweden and Finland (cf. Palmgren 2008) where students and faculty are ideally perceived as equal, and therefore formal openings are not necessary. Another explanation is that the students simply do not perceive faculty members as authorities, merely as service workers. In either case, the hypothesis formulated by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) that we were to expect more formality from the students to faculty members in their greetings was disconfirmed by our data in Swedish and Danish. An alternative explanation is that this disconfirmation is due to a generational language difference, as mentioned above in 6.3.

6.5 Use of names

As shown in Table 8, there is a difference between the datasets in Swedish and Danish when it comes to the necessity of including the names of the addressee and the sender in formulaic greetings. In the dataset in Danish, the use of first name appears both after *hej* and *kære*, and in relation to *kære* the dataset in Danish also shows a common use of both first name and last name. In the dataset in Swedish, the use of first name is much less frequent and appears almost only after *hej*. The use of last name in the dataset in Swedish only occurs in an opening consisting of a title and name and without a formulaic greeting. The omission of greetings including names may indicate an understanding of the email as a part of an ongoing conversation, but it may also be a relational signal of mutual acquaintance and intimacy: The more that is left out, the closer the relationship. However, the standard of what may count as omission is not universal, but will vary in accordance with what is taken as the agreed standard in a community. In the case of Swedish and Danish, variations like these are best explained as locally negotiated forms.

6.6 Conclusion

In many language-and-culture studies, the ambition is to reveal how different cultural values are expressed through language. In this study, conversely, the object is to investigate language use in cultures sharing many of the same values, e.g., the value of equality. Thus, many of the linguistic expressions used reflect these commonly shared values.

Because of the commonly shared values, one might have expected the inventory and use of openings and closings to be the same, but this, clearly, is not the case. Rather, we see that the inventory of formulaic greetings (e.g., *kära/kære*, *hej*) to a wide extent is the same, but that the connotations they carry are not necessarily the same. To name but one striking example, the cognates *kära* and *kære* are not used in the same kinds of settings, but differ in terms of vertical distance as well as horizontal distance, both synchronically and diachronically, cf. Section 6.3.

This leads to considerations on the relation between linguistic expressions and what they convey. In many studies on politeness from a cross-cultural perspective, a mapping of the linguistic expressions is seen as a source to uncover (often very different) underlying values. In our study, the similarity of underlying values in the two neighbouring languages allow us to see the relation between values and linguistic expressions from a slightly different perspective. The linguistic expressions used in Swedish and Danish are certainly motivated by the same values, but in the course of history they have developed independently of each other, and in modern day Swedish and Danish, they carry the connotations developed locally, and not only that – they are still developing locally. Yet, we also see that individuals adapt their language to the specific discourse situation.

Taking matters like this into account, our study offers an additional perspective on the mechanisms of pragmatic change.

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