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German Lessons and E-Mail Etiquette: Salutations and Greetings in Turkish University Students' Correspondence

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Abstract

The present study examines the impact of German language instruction on the email correspondence skills of Turkish university students, with a particular focus on the use of salutation and closing formulas in emails addressed to their instructors. To this end, students' emails were analysed for their use of salutations and closing phrases, the types of these formulas, the influence of German language instruction on these aspects, and the preferred language for such correspondence. Frequency tables and the expanded classification system of salutations and closings in emails proposed by Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020), based on Bou-Franch (2011), were employed to analyse the data. The study sample consisted of students majoring in German as a Foreign Language at a Turkish university, who were still in their preparatory year. Data were collected and analysed from students across various levels of German instruction (A0, A1.1, A1.2, and A2.1). The results indicate a notable improvement in the use of salutations and closing phrases as students advanced in their German proficiency. At level A0, none of the participants used salutations or closings. However, a notable increase in the use of these formal elements was observed at higher levels, with students at A2.1 showing the highest adherence to formal email conventions.

Keywords: E-Mail Correspondence, German as a Foreign Language, Salutation Formulas, Closing Phrases, Foreign Language Instruction.

Introduction

Studies indicate that email correspondence is among the most frequently utilized forms of communication in professional settings (Algryani & Aljardani, 2023; Baggia et al., 2022; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Bloch, 2002; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018; Kadan, 2023) and plays a particularly dominant role in academia (Akçay & Celik, 2017; Al-Sayyed & Rabab'ah, 2020; Bou-Franch, 2013). Since this form of communication differs from oral communication, targeted instruction in so-called email literacy is essential (Chen, 2006). While the current literature has not reached a consensus on whether the email genre requires its own unified language, certain conventions must nonetheless be observed (Akçay & Celik, 2017; Algryani & Aljardani, 2023; Androutsopoulos, 2006; Bou-Franch, 2011; Chen, 2006; Kadan, 2023). These conventions are crucial, as the manner in which an email is composed can influence the recipient's perception of the sender (Harting, 2010; Riel et al., 2020). The fact that emails can, depending on the context, be considered either conceptually oral texts or more formal written correspondence (Bou-Franch, 2011; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018; Chen, 2006)—especially in the case of formal emails—adds to their complexity. For instance, Hulgaard (2021, p.119) describes that emails are often perceived as oral texts in Denmark, while they are regarded as written texts in Germany.

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The author concludes that these differing perspectives necessitate distinct approaches to email composition. Both native and foreign language instruction aim to equip learners with the competencies required to adhere to these conventions.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and textbooks based on it, such as *Netzwerk neu A1-A2*, *Das Leben A1-A2*, and *Studio21*, writing emails and short messages (SMS) are relevant topics that learners are expected to master at levels A1 and A2. This study examines how learners of German in Turkey compose emails to their instructors in a university context. The focus is on comparing the use of salutation and closing formulas before and after completing A1-level German instruction. It analyses whether Turkish university students of German as a Foreign Language (DaF) use salutation and closing formulas in their correspondence with instructors and how A1-level German instruction influences this practice.

Numerous studies address various aspects of student email composition. However, no research specifically investigates whether Turkish learners of German in Turkey use salutation and closing formulas in emails to their instructors and how these elements develop after A1-level instruction. The findings of this study are particularly relevant for assessing the extent to which Turkish learners of German can maintain appropriate and polite communication with their instructors. Furthermore, the study aims to evaluate the impact of A1-level German instruction on learners' use of salutation and closing formulas, providing targeted suggestions for improvement. Overall, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by offering new insights into the email communication habits of Turkish learners of German and serving as a foundation for further research in this area.

Bausch et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of German as a foreign language (DaF) instruction in fostering communicative abilities and preparing learners for functional language use beyond the academic context. Learners should engage with various authentic texts, including the ability to compose formal and informal emails. In short, DaF instruction abroad aims to develop learners into competent and communication-oriented users of the German language (Bausch et al., 2009). Studies involving Turkish students (Akçay & Celik, 2017; Kadan, 2023; Özcakmak & Hakkoymaz, 2017) indicate that this skill is not yet at the desired level. DaF instruction can help compensate for deficiencies in students' native language, Turkish. These language skills can create retroactive interference, wherein learning a foreign language influences the native language. According to Heillinger (1980), this influence manifests when acquiring a foreign language compensates for deficiencies in the native language, such as the deliberate use of formal structures. Thus, DaF instruction not only enhances the foreign language but also promotes improved linguistic awareness of the Turkish mother tongue.

In order to analyse how Turkish German learners use structural elements in their email correspondence with university teachers and the influence of A1 and A2.1 level German lessons on the writing of salutations and closing formulas in emails, the following research questions will be answered:

1. Do Turkish DaF learners adequately use structural elements in their email correspondence with university instructors, and does DaF instruction at levels A1 and A2.1 influence the composition of emails regarding these structural elements?
2. What types of salutation and closing formulas do DaF learners use depending on their language level, and which language do they prefer for this purpose?

Literature Review

Email writing has become indispensable, particularly in professional and academic contexts. Education, especially in the native and foreign language curricula, prepares learners for these demands. In the curricula for Turkish, English, and German courses provided by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, email composition is listed as a learning objective.

In the Turkish curriculum for ninth grade, learners are expected to learn the phases of writing letters and emails. However, the curriculum does not specify whether these are formal or informal emails, nor whether such distinctions should be discussed (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018). Nevertheless, it can be inferred that the curriculum aims to provide learners with fundamental knowledge to use emails effectively and appropriately in professional life.

Similarly, the English curriculum includes teaching email composition. In ninth grade, learners are introduced to emails: *“Students will be able to write simple sentences and phrases (a postcard, an e-mail, or a hotel registration form)”* (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019a, p. 23). In tenth grade, a more specific context for emails is provided: *“Students will be able to write an e-mail to a friend about holiday experiences”* (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019a, p. 38). This indicates that while a general introduction occurs in ninth grade, contextual details are emphasized in tenth grade.

The German curriculum also incorporates email writing. At level A1.1, the curriculum states: *“Can inquire or share information about everyday life through short messages (SMS, email)”* (Topic 4: Daily Life) (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 30). The same description appears in Topic 6: Special Days (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 32). For A1.2 (Topic 8: Food and Drink), it again notes: *“Can inquire or share information about everyday life through short messages (email)”* (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 42). At A2.1 (Topic 5: Festivals and Gifts), the curriculum states: *“Can write short, simple, personal letters/emails/invitations”* (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 48). At B1.1, *“writing emails”* is listed under communicative actions (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 59) but without further details.

Interestingly, email writing is addressed more frequently in the German curriculum than in the English curriculum. This might reflect the cultural significance of email writing. In German-speaking regions, written communication via letters or emails holds great importance, which is mirrored in teaching practices.

From a theoretical perspective, instructors at Turkish universities might assume that learners are at least aware that emails consist of specific parts and formalities. Given the inclusion of this topic in the Turkish Ministry of National Education's curriculum and informational documents about email writing published by some universities (Altas, n.d.; Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Uzaktan Eğitim Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2021; Şen & Ünlü Bayramlı, 2012), it can be assumed that the formalities of email writing are also considered significant in Turkish culture.

When teaching the skill of writing emails, learners should be made aware that this text genre is culture-specific (Harting, 2010, p. 410) and follows certain rules, so that knowledge from one language cannot simply be transferred to another (Harting, 2006, p. 103). Address and closing formulas in emails, which are the main focus of this study, are also conventions shaped by cultural influences. Therefore, these parts of an email should also be regarded as culture-specific aspects and addressed accordingly in teaching to avoid "violations of politeness conventions of the target language" (see *ibid.*). Riel et al. (2020, p. 155) also point out that foreign language learners often face difficulties, particularly with forms of address, and frequently transfer them

from their first language. They also describe this phenomenon as crucial for the success or failure of the respective relationship.

Harting (2010) compares the requests in emails written by Japanese and German learners in Japanese and German. In doing so, he examines typical patterns of both groups and concludes that there are significant differences between the address and closing formulas in emails written by Japanese and German students. Students with L1 German used address forms 100% of the time, whereas 70% of students with Japanese as L1 used them. Interestingly, however, 95% of Japanese students wrote an address in German. Harting (2010, p. 406) also describes the differences in the forms used, with Japanese students using addresses such as "Morgen" or various apologetic expressions. German students, on the other hand, tend to use greeting formulas such as "Hallo" or "Sehr geehrte/r" (see *ibid.*). In emails written by students with L2 German, Harting (2010) identifies a transfer from the mother tongue in the address formulas. Closing formulas appear to be obligatory for students with German as L1 (99%) and optional for students with Japanese as L1 (57%), with Japanese students with L2 German reaching a rate of 90% in this aspect. Content-wise, it was found that German emails often contain formalized farewell greetings such as "Mit freundlichen Grüßen," while Japanese emails use less formal greetings. Differences were also noted regarding the mention of the name at the end of the email. While Japanese students mention first and last names or only last names, this behavior is described as "unusual" in German emails. In German emails, the first name is preferred, and the last name is added when the recipient of the email is a teacher.

Studies on email correspondence by Turkish learners in their native or foreign languages are limited. In their study on the ability of Turkish first-year students to write an email in their native language, Özcakmak and Hakkoymaz (2017) find that learners primarily focus on including a description in the email content, using appropriate language, and having email addresses that reflect their first and last names. They further note that learners are unaware of the key aspects to consider when writing an email. 38% of participants reported using address and closing formulas.

Another study by Kadan (2023) on Turkish students' emails reveals that their ability to write emails is not at the desired level, as students are unaware of the components that an email should include. 58% of participants in this study did not consider address and closing formulas to be mandatory.

Akçay and Celik (2017) also examine the ability of students to write emails, focusing on prospective Turkish language teachers, who will later be responsible for teaching this skill. Unfortunately, it turns out that these future teachers do not pay special attention to the components of the email. The authors also point out that emails can be either formal or informal and should be formulated accordingly (Akçay & Celik, 2017, p. 171). The result of their study indicates that 88% of participants do not use an address formula, while the students who do use an address exclusively say "hocam" and "hoca," which can be translated as "my teacher." The authors conclude that learners do not use closing formulas, but only address forms. Regarding closing formulas, Akçay and Celik (2017) note that 97% of participants did not use any greeting or similar expression. They also establish rules for writing an appropriate email (Akçay & Celik, 2017, p. 168).

Chen (2015) reports in her study with Chinese English learners that their ability to write emails, especially regarding "framing moves"—the subject line, the greeting, and the closing—improved after an implementation phase, in comparison to the content of the email. Chen (2015)

describes the "frame" of an email as easier to learn because it is formulaic and controllable. Although she describes this email framework as optional, she points out that these elements should be used when emails are sent to recipients who hold a higher hierarchical position (Chen, 2015, p. 133).

Bou-Franch (2011, p. 1773) explains that an email consists of three parts: "openings, topical sequences or body, and closings," which can be either obligatory or optional. The greeting and closing are described as optional but are considered essential because they establish the social relationship between the sender and recipient (Bou-Franch, 2013). In her study of emails from British and Spanish students to their professors, she found that 77% of British and 93% of Spanish emails contained greetings, and all emails included closing formulas. In the study by Baggia et al. (2022, p. 120), it is highlighted that learners in Serbia and Slovenia fail to use the appropriate form of address. Here, the emails are either too informal or dive directly into the subject.

The study by Algryani and Al Jardani (2023) examines whether students in Oman can use the standards of formal email writing. They find that a large number of students' emails do not adhere to the standard format of formal professional emails, which includes a subject, a greeting, and a closing. They conclude that formality in emails is not a significant criterion for students when corresponding with professors.

Another study on the greeting and closing formulas in Arabic and English emails from students was conducted by Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020). They find that 18% of learners do not use a greeting in Arabic emails and instead jump directly to the topic. They also note that five out of the eleven types of greeting formulas identified by Bou-Franch (2011), which were expanded by the authors, are used in Arabic emails. For the English emails, a lower rate (8%) of emails without a greeting was found. The most common opening in Arabic emails is a single greeting word. The percentage of students who do not use a closing formula in their Arabic emails is 22%, while the rate for English emails is 4%. In Arabic emails, the most frequent closing is "just thanks" (29%), while in English emails, two common forms are "Farewell [Name and Last Name]" and "just farewell."

Teaching the Skill of Writing Emails Through the Textbooks *Netzwerk Neu A1* and *A2*

In the context of German language instruction at levels A1 and A2.1, students in Turkey learn how to write emails, with a focus on the correct use of salutation and closing formulas. According to the curriculum for German as a Foreign Language (e.g., *Netzwerk neu A1* and *A2*), email writing is already addressed at the early levels. This skill is not only important for exams by the Goethe-Institut, TELC, and ÖSD but also essential for practical language use (cf. Dengler et al., 2022b). It is expected that learners will be able to write appropriate emails in both formal and informal contexts, which is especially required in academic and professional settings.

The introduction and deepening of email competence take place in the textbooks "*Netzwerk neu A1*" and "*Netzwerk neu A2*" through a series of exercises and tasks. In the first lessons at the A1 level, students are introduced to basic concepts. For example, in Lesson 5, an email is presented in which a previously agreed appointment is canceled (Dengler et al., 2022a, p. 59). Students first recognize the elements of an informal email, including the salutation and closing. In Lesson 6 (Dengler et al., 2022a, p. 67), an exercise follows where a formal invitation email is written, also using salutation and closing formulas. These tasks gradually familiarize learners with the basic requirements of email writing.

From Lesson 7 onward, which marks the transition to A2, formal emails are placed in focus. This is particularly relevant as formal emails play a central role in academic correspondence. In Lesson 7 (Dengler et al., 2022a, p. 86), students learn to use formal greetings and closing formulas, as attention to politeness conventions also plays an important role in these contexts.

The exercises in the workbook, which students complete as homework, explicitly require them to use salutations and closing formulas correctly. In the first homework assignment after Lesson 5, students are asked to write an informal email, with the salutation given as an example (Dengler et al., 2022, p. 7). Other tasks involve correcting emails and replying to messages, further strengthening the application of email competence.

However, it is noticeable that the treatment of salutation and closing in the tasks and exercises at the beginning of the textbook is limited to informal forms. Only from Lesson 7 onward is there explicit attention to formal emails, laying the foundation for the requirements in academic contexts. This aspect is crucial for understanding how students are prepared during their education to handle formal emails.

In summary, the introduction of email competence occurs gradually, and learners are increasingly familiarized with the relevant framework elements from the A1 level onward. As the course progresses and with the corresponding homework assignments, students are expected to develop a clearer awareness of the importance of salutations and closing formulas. However, the textbook structure lacks a differentiated consideration and practice of various formal salutation forms, which are particularly important in later academic correspondence. This could further enhance the learning process regarding formal email communication.

Methodology

This study examines the awareness of German language learners in Turkey when composing emails to their university instructors. The focus is on the optional elements of an email: the salutation/greeting and the closing. The goal is to determine whether the learners described have developed awareness of these elements in formal emails in their native language or any of their foreign languages. After determining the current use of these elements, the study will explore whether German language instruction at the A1 and A2.1 levels influences the use of these elements in the emails written by students to their instructors. This study employs both a quantitative and qualitative research design, focusing on the analysis of written correspondence from German language learners. The aim is to understand the development of their pragmatic competence, particularly regarding the use of salutations and closing formulas in emails throughout their language learning process.

Participants

The population of the study consists of students from preparatory classes for German language programs in Turkey. The sample includes students from a German as a Foreign Language preparatory class at a public university in Turkey. The participants have 24 hours of German lessons per week, with 12 hours taught using the "Netzwerk neu" textbook. Students receive 15 weeks of instruction per semester. All participants have completed their basic education through the 12th grade in the Turkish education system. Before their university studies, all participants learned English as their first foreign language and had received a total of approximately 720 hours of German instruction in the preparatory class by the time data was collected. About 360 hours of the total instruction time were dedicated to the "Netzwerk neu" textbook. All participants start the preparatory year at level A0. The participants were informed about the

purpose of the study and gave their consent for the use of their emails for research purposes. The anonymity of the participants was maintained at all times.

Data Collection

For data collection, students were asked to send their homework assignments via email to their instructor. The language of the email was not relevant, as the focus was on determining the awareness of the structural elements of an email, and the learners had very limited German proficiency at the time of the first data collection. Writing emails had not yet been covered in their German lessons. During the data collection, four different homework assignments were required: two at the A1 level and two at the A2.1 level. The data collection took place in the winter semester of 2023 and the summer semester of 2024. A total of 101 emails were analyzed: 32 for the first homework, 19 for the second, 32 for the third, and 18 for the fourth. For each submission, the same assignment was given: "Send your homework via email."

The first data collection occurred after Lesson 3 of the A1 level of the "Netzwerk neu A1" textbook. The second data collection was after Lesson 12 of the A1 level, which marks the end of the textbook. The third data collection took place after Lesson 2 of the "Netzwerk neu A2.1" textbook, and the fourth data collection occurred after Lesson 5 of the A2.1 level, which marks the end of the A2.1 level. As described, the task of writing emails is revisited after each lesson in the textbook.

Data Analysis

The emails were subjected to qualitative content analysis in order to identify patterns and differences in the use of salutations and closing formulas. The analysis was based on a predefined categorization system that classified various types of greetings and closing formulas. The results were then broken down according to the learners' proficiency levels to investigate the development of linguistic competence over time. Frequency tables were also created for data analysis, which constitutes the quantitative part of the study. For further analysis, the extended classification by Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020), based on Bou-Franch (2011), was used to categorize salutations and closing formulas in emails. These categories were translated into German by the researcher. For all homework assignments and proficiency levels, a frequency table was created to document the use of the structural elements and show how the usage developed across the different levels. The values were summarized in tables according to the specified criteria.

Criteria for analysing the formulation of salutations:

- (1) No opening formula: The email starts without any kind of salutation.
- (2) Greeting word only: The email starts with 'Selam', 'Merhaba', 'iyi günler' in Turkish or 'Hallo', 'Guten Tag' etc. in German.
- (3) First name only: The email user starts the email with the name of the addressee directly such as 'Mehmet'.
- (4) Greeting and name: The email starts with a greeting formula in addition to the first name of the addressee: 'Merhaba Mehmet' in Turkish or 'Hallo Mehmet' in German.
- (5) Greeting and title: This refers to the use of greeting word(s) in addition to the title without mentioning the name: 'Merhaba hocam' in Turkish or 'Hallo Professor' in German.

(6) Greeting, title and name in which the three components are combined together in one line: 'Merhaba Mehmet hocam' in Turkish or 'Hallo Professor Mehmet'

(7) Greeting, title and last name: 'Merhaba Özdemir hocam in Turkish' or 'Hallo Professor Özdemir' in German

(8) Title only refers to the use of title without referring to the name such as 'Hocam' in Turkish or 'Professor' in German.

(9) Title and name in which the title and the first name appear together as in 'Mehmet hocam' in Turkish or 'Herr Mehmet' in German.

(10) Title and last name which refers to a combination of the title and the last name as it appears in 'Özdemir hocam' in Turkish or 'Herr Özdemir' in German.

(11) Title, name and last name: 'Mehmet Özdemir hocam' in Turkish or 'Herr Mehmet Özdemir'

(12) Others: Categories not included in the above examples (Bou-Franch, 2011, quoted in Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah, 2020).

Criteria for Analysing the Closing Formulation:

(1) No closing formula in which the email is left without any expression to close the email.

(2) Signature name only where the first name only appears like 'Mehmet'.

(3) Signature name and last name in which the email ends with the first name plus the last name, such as 'Mehmet Özdemir'.

(4) Leave-taking which refers to the use of 'Saygılarımla' in Turkish or 'Mit freundlichen Grüßen' in German.

(5) Leave-taking and name which refers to the use of 'Saygılarımla' in Turkish or 'Mit freundlichen Grüßen' plus the first name of the sender, such as 'Saygılarımla, Mehmet'.

(6) Leave-taking, name and last name refers to the use of 'Saygılarımla Mehmet Özdemir' in Turkish or, 'Mit freundlichen Grüßen, Mehmet Özdemir' in German.

(7) Thanks, leave-taking, name and last name that is embodied by the combination of the four elements, namely, thanks, leave-taking, name and last name: 'Teşekkürler, saygılarımla, Mehmet Özdemir' in Turkish or 'Vielen Dank und mit freundlichen Grüßen, Mehmet Özdemir'.

(8) Thanks only in which the email is closed by adding an expression of thanking, such as 'Teşekkürler' in Turkish or 'Vielen Dank' in German.

(9) Thanks and name refers to the use of the thanking expression plus the first name as in 'Teşekkürler, Mehmet' in Turkish or 'Vielen Dank, Mehmet' in German.

(10) Thanks, name and last name as in 'Teşekkürler, Mehmet Özdemir' in Turkish or 'Vielen Dank, Mehmet Özdemir' in German.

(11) Others: Categories not included in the above examples (Bou-Franch, 2011, quoted in Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah, 2020).

Findings

The manuscript should be inserted here. Please use Cambria as the font type, 10 points as the font size; single line spacing, zero spacing before and after paragraphs; justify the text, and do not use indentations throughout the article. Each paragraph must contain at least 3 sentences. APA 6 writing style should be consistently used for in-text citations, tables, figures and bibliography. Each subsequent paragraph should be inserted following one line break after the previous paragraph. There should be no indentation throughout the article, and the spacing values before and after the paragraphs should be 0.

In Table 1, it is shown whether salutation forms were used or not, based on the level and the homework assignment.

Homework	Level	Salutation	%	No Salutation	%	Total
1	A0	0	0	32	100	32
2	A1.1	8	42,11	11	57,89	19
3	A1.2	17	53,13	15	46,88	32
4	A2.1	14	77,78	4	22,22	18

Table 1. Use of formulations of salutation in e-mails

In the first homework assignment (level A0), no form of address was used. At level A1.1, 42.11% of students used formulations of salutation, while 57.89% did not. The proportion of students using a form of address rose to 53.13% at level A1.2 and to 77.78% at level A2.1. This shows an increasing tendency to use formulations of salutation as the level of German increases.

In Table 2, it is shown whether closing forms were used or not, based on the level and the homework assignment.

Homework	Level	Closing	%	No Closing	%	Total
1	A0	0	0	32	100	32
2	A1.1	6	31,58	13	68,42	19
3	A1.2	15	46,88	17	53,13	32
4	A2.1	16	88,89	2	11,11	18

Table 2. Use of Closing Formulations in Emails

No closing formulations were used in the first homework assignment (level A0). At level A1.1, 31.58% of students used closing formulations, while 68.42% did not. The proportion of closing formulations rose to 46.88% at level A1.2 and 88.89% at level A2.1. This shows an increasing tendency towards the use of closing formulations as the level of German increases.

In Table 3, it is shown which language was preferred when using salutation forms.

Number of Salutations	Level	Type of Salutation	f	%	Turkish	%	German	%
1	A0	No opening formula	32	100	-		-	-
1	A1.1	No opening formula	11	57,89	-		11	100
		Opening generally existing	8	42,11	-	-	8	100
2		Greeting and title	4	21,05	-	-	4	100
3		Greeting only	3	15,79	-	-	3	100
4		Greeting first name and title	1	5,26	-	-	1	100
1	A1.2	No opening formula	15	46,88	-	-	-	-
		Opening generally existing	17	53,13	3	17,65	14	82,35
2		Greeting and title	13	40,63	3	23,08	10	76,92
3		Greeting first name and title	1	3,13	-	-	1	100
4		Greeting, title and last name	3	9,38	-	-	3	100
1	A2.1	No opening formula	4	22,22	-	-	-	-
		Opening generally existing	14	77,78	2	14,28	12	85,71
2		Greeting and title	7	38,89	-	-	7	100
3		Greeting first name and title	4	22,22	2	50	2	50
4		Greeting, title and last name	3	16,67	-	-	3	100

Table 3. Formulations of Salutation and Preferred Language

No formulations of salutation were used at level A0. At level A1.1, the forms of address varied, with 21.05% using 'greeting and title' and 15.79% using 'greeting only' in German. At level A1.2, different forms of address were used, mainly in German, with 'greeting and title' being the most common at 40.63%. At level A2.1, students used 'greeting and title' (38.89%) and 'greeting, first name and title' (22.22%), partly in Turkish and partly in German.

For level A1.2, slightly more than half of the students (46.88%) did not use any form of address. For those who did use a form of address, the following formulations were used:

- Greeting and title: 40.63% of students use this form of address, with 76.92% of these salutations being formulated in German.
- Greeting, title and last name: 9.38% use this form of address, and all were written in German.
- Greeting, title and name: 3.13% of students use this form, also in German.
- It is noticeable that German is favoured in all forms of address.
- At level A2.1, 22.22% of students do not use any form of address. Of those who do use a form of address, the formulations are distributed as follows:
- Greeting and title: 38.89% use this form, all in German.
- Greeting, title and last name: 22.22% use this form of address, whereby the use is evenly distributed between German and Turkish.
- Greeting, title and name: 16.67% of students use this form, and all salutations were written in German.

German is also the preferred language for salutations at this level.

In Table 4, it is shown which language was preferred when using closing forms.

Number of Closings	Level	Type of Closing	f	%	Turkish	%	German	%
1	A0	No closing formula	32	100	-	-	-	-
1	A1.1	No closing formula	13	68,42	-	-	-	-
		Closing formula generally existing	6	31,58	-	-	6	100
2		Greeting word only	2	10,53	-	-	2	100
3		Leave-taking and name	1	5,26	-	-	1	100

4		Leave-taking, name and last name	3	15,79	-	-	3	100
1	A1.2	No closing formula	15	46,88	-	-	-	-
		Closing formula generally existing	17	53,12	-	-	17	100
2		Signature name and last name	1	3,13	-	-	-	-
3		Greeting word only	4	12,5	-	-	4	100
4		Leave-taking and name	1	3,13	-	-	1	100
5		Leave-taking, name and last name	11	34,38	-	-	11	100
1	A2.1	No closing formula	2	11,11	-	-	-	-
		Closing formula generally existing	16	88,89	1	6,25	14	87,5
2		Signature name and last name	1	5,56	-	-	-	-
3		Greeting word only	2	11,11	-	-	2	100
4		Leave-taking, name and last name	13	72,22	1	7,69	12	92,31

Table 4. Frequency Table on Closing Formulations and Preferred Language

Table 4 describes the distribution of the different types of closing formulations used by German learners in their emails to lecturers and the preferred language at different language levels. It can be seen that learners at levels A0 and A1.1 often do not use closing formulations (100% and 68.42%). Learners at level A1.1 who do use closing formulations use the following types:

- Leave-taking, name and last name, name and last name: 15.79%, all in German.
- Leave-taking only: 10.53%, all in German.
- Leave-taking and name: 5.26%, all in German.

At level A1.2, 46.88% of students do not yet use a closing formulation. The learners who do use a closing formulation use the following forms:

- Leave-taking, name and last name: 34.38%, all in German.
- Leave-taking only: 12.5%, all in German.
- Leave-taking and name: 3.13%, all in German.

Signature name and last name: 3.13%, no information on language.

At level A2.1, 11.11% of students did not use a closing formulation. The learners who do use a closing formulation use the following types:

- Leave-taking, name and last name: 72.22%, 92.31% in German.
- Leave-taking only: 11.11%, all in German.
- Signature name and last name: 5.56%, no information on language.

It is evident that German is favoured at all levels, especially in the closing formulations

Conclusions and Discussion

One goal of this study was to examine to what extent Turkish learners of German adhere to the formal conventions of an email and whether German language instruction influences this adherence. The results from Research Question 1 show that Turkish university students did not use any salutation or closing formulas in their emails to their teachers prior to receiving German instruction. This result is surprising, as it would be expected that students had been trained in the use of formal email conventions during their secondary education through the curricula of the Turkish Ministry of National Education (see Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019a; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019b) in both their native and foreign language classes. Whether this is truly the case could be clarified through a survey of the students. However, a look at current studies on this topic in Turkey indicates that this result is not an isolated case. This suggests that the topic is scarcely addressed in pre-university education.

The results of this study confirm the findings of Özcakmak and Hakkoymaz (2017: 995), who discovered that students in their first semester lacked the necessary knowledge to write a formal email and that corresponding courses should be offered. Kadan (2023: 1194) also notes that students have not reached the expected level regarding salutations in emails. In his study, it was found that 58% of the analyzed emails lacked salutation or closing formulas, which, in comparison to the results of this study, seems relatively positive. Another relevant study by Akcay and Celik (2013) revealed that the majority of students did not use any salutation or closing formula: 88% of the analyzed emails contained no salutation, and 97% had no closing. It is particularly noteworthy that this study focused on students in Turkish teacher training programs.

In the few studies from Turkey addressing the ability to write formal emails, it becomes evident that targeted education in this area is lacking. This gap should be addressed through courses at universities or even earlier in schools, as writing formal emails requires a higher level of pragmatic competence (Chauhan, 2022, p. 79). This suggestion is supported by the findings of this study. International studies also emphasize the need for explicit education in this area (see Baggia, 2022; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Bou-Franch, 2011). Since the formal components of an email can influence the relationship between correspondents (see Filippone and Survinski, 2016; Harting, 2010; Riel et al., 2020), proper training in this area is especially important. Harting (2010) found that all emails from L1 German speakers contained a salutation, while 70% of emails from L1 Japanese speakers and 95% of emails from L2 German speakers also included salutations. For closing formulas, L1 German and L2 German emails showed rates of 95% and 90%, respectively. In contrast, only 8% of emails from L1 Japanese speakers contained a closing formula. From this, it can be concluded that Turkish students significantly differ from students

in Germany in terms of the formal components of an email and are more comparable to students from Japan.

Similarly, Bou-Franch's (2011) work with Spanish students and their emails found that 85% used salutations and 97% used closing formulas. This result contrasts with the results of Turkish students, who did not use salutations or closing formulas at all at the beginning of the semester. The study by Algryani and Al-Jardani (2023) from Oman, which examined Arabic emails, also found that these students rarely used salutations or closing formulas, which is comparable to the results of the Turkish participants in this study.

For Research Question 1, it can also be concluded that German language instruction had a positive influence on the use of salutation and closing formulas in emails. As the level increased and the number of exercises grew, the learners' awareness of using salutations and closings in emails also increased. While no such formulations were used before the German instruction, the percentage of emails with salutation reached 42.11% and 31.58% with closing formulas after level A1.1. After level A1.2, the number continued to increase: salutations were used in 53.13% of emails and closing formulas in 46.88%. Finally, the highest percentages of salutation and closing formulas were observed at level A2.1: 77.78% of emails included a salutation, and 88.89% included a closing. Thus, it can be concluded that German language instruction leads to a marked improvement in students' email communication and enhances their understanding of using salutations and closings. This result aligns with the findings of Chen (2015), who showed that explicit instruction on email writing, particularly regarding the formal elements, leads to success. Both results suggest that instruction on writing emails is promising. Therefore, the question arises whether Turkish students in various departments and universities are not receiving the required skills in their pre-university education, even though it is outlined in the curriculum. Further studies should expand the sample size to obtain a more representative picture of German departments in Turkey.

The salutation and closing formulas learned in German instruction could also be transferred to emails written in Turkish, as these are similar. The information provided by Karadeniz Technical University indicates that greetings, titles, or greetings with titles and names are appropriate (Altas, n.d.). Retroactive interference can therefore be considered promising for the aspect of salutations.

For Research Question 2, it can be concluded that learners at level A1.1 in the German language course use different types of salutation and closing formulas. Across all levels, three different types of salutations and closings were used, with the same types being used at each level. It shows that with increasing proficiency, there is no clear development in the types of salutations used. The most common form was "greeting and title," which was always in German. These were mostly formulations like "Hallo meine Lehrerin" or "Hallo liebe Lehrerin." This suggests that learners are attempting to transfer their knowledge from their native language to the foreign language, even though this form of address is not typical in German. In Turkish, teachers are addressed with "hocam" (meaning "my teacher"). This transfer of knowledge from the native language was also found in Harting's (2010) work with Japanese German learners. However, it could also be due to the fact that formal salutations in emails had not been addressed in the textbook up to this point. Some emails were opened with just a greeting, even in German, and one email began with "greeting and title," including the teacher's first name, which also comes from Turkish ("Hallo Mehmet Lehrer").

Only at level A1.2 was the more appropriate form "greeting, last name, and title" used (6.25%). It is encouraging that the number of students using "greeting, last name, and title" increased slightly with each level, as this form of address is considered one of the most appropriate in German. At level A2.1, this form was used in 16.67% of emails.

For closing formulas, the most commonly used form was "closing, first and last name of the sender." Interestingly, the informal emails presented in the textbook showed that the closing only consisted of "closing and first name." Most learners who wrote a closing either transferred from their native language or first language or correctly used their first and last names. Some learners used "closing and first name," which corresponds to the example presented in the textbook chapters. This could also be because learners are often addressed by first names and tutored in Turkish higher education. Similarly, learners preferred German for their closing formulas. However, the analysis shows that there is no significant development in the types of closing formulas. All three levels used the same types of closing formulas, with only the number of learners who used a closing increasing with each level. It should be noted, however, that the closing formula considered appropriate in German, "closing, first and last name of the sender," increased with proficiency, from 5.26% at A1.1 to 72.22% at A2.1. This shows a clear quantitative and qualitative development through German language instruction. In comparison to salutations, the development in the closing section is more pronounced, suggesting that the transfer from the native language is easier in the closing than in the salutation section.

A comparison with Arabic emails from the study by Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020) shows that, similar to the Turkish students in this study, in the early stages, there was often no salutation or only a greeting word used. Likewise, closing formulas were often absent in the endings. Furthermore, it was found that in both the salutation and closing sections of the emails, learners used three different types of phrases. Biesenbach-Lucas (2009, cited in Chen, 2015) pointed out that American students used 31 types of greeting phrases in their emails to university instructors. This diversity is missing in the emails of Turkish students in this study, which may be because the content of the analyzed emails primarily involved submitting homework and did not include requests, pleas, or apologies. Further studies with different types of student requests could complement this analysis. Chen (2015: 133) identifies thanking as the most common closing formula used by students, followed by farewells, apologies, and well-wishes. Therefore, the aspect of the content of the requested email can be seen as a limitation of this study. Further studies with varying types of student requests could be used for comparison.

Al-Sayyed and Rabab'ah (2020) found three types of salutations in English emails from L1 Arabic speakers: "Greeting and Name," "Only Greeting Word," and "Greeting and Title." The most commonly used formulation by Turkish students was also "Greeting and Title." For Arabic emails, five types of closing phrases were identified, with "Only Greeting Word," "No Salutation," and "Greeting, Title, and Name" being the most frequent. These results are comparable to those of the Turkish students, who mainly used "Closing, First and Last Name" and "Only Closing Phrase."

For Research Question 2, it was also found that learners prefer to write their emails to their instructors primarily in German when they are given the choice. This can lead to interferences, which learners need to be made aware of. It is encouraging that students in German-language programs prefer German and feel confident in using it, even though their native language was also an option. This result aligns with the findings of Üstün (2020), who demonstrated that learners feel comfortable in their studies and enjoy taking the course.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University under approval number 2024.06.142

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The sole author of this manuscript is responsible for the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of the results, and writing of the manuscript

Statement of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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