

DIGITALIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL LITERACY: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ABBREVIATION USE AND LANGUAGE TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract. *The article examines the pragmatic use of abbreviations in professional discourse, considering how digital communication reshapes the norms of efficiency, clarity and etiquette. While abbreviations can speed up communication and facilitate rapid information processing in emails, chat platforms and collaborative tools, their pragmatic value depends on the audience, genre and institutional conventions. Misunderstandings can arise when shorthand lacks a shared basis or when different forms carry different pragmatic meanings in different cultural and organisational contexts. The study highlights the tension between minimising linguistic effort and maintaining professional identity, face-saving practices and inclusivity. Opaque abbreviations can exclude novices, non-native speakers and cross-disciplinary collaborators. The study therefore argues for a situated, adaptive approach: communicators should calibrate their use of abbreviations according to formality, relationship, medium and accessibility concerns. Organisations, meanwhile, can promote clarity by providing glossaries, style guides and training. Methodologically, corpus-informed analyses combined with pragmatics and discourse studies reveal patterns of conventionalisation and innovation in abbreviation use. The article concludes by urging further empirical work on multimodal contexts and pedagogical interventions that balance communicative efficiency with politeness, transparency and equitable participation in digitally mediated professional settings.*

Keywords: *professional discourse; pragmatics; abbreviations; linguistic etiquette*

Introduction

The use of technological tools in modern communication has changed the way we communicate. Employees now rely more on online platforms, messaging apps and emails than on face-to-face communication. Consequently, communication has become quicker, more concise and often more informal. Professionals are expected to respond rapidly while multitasking in such time-sensitive settings, inevitably promoting the use of shorter forms of expression.

One obvious aspect of this change is the increasing use of acronyms in professional discourse. Examples of abbreviations that are frequently used to save time and shorten messages include acronyms and shortened lexical forms such as ASAP, FYI and pls. They enable writers and speakers to convey ideas effectively, particularly in hectic work environments where brevity is often valued. However, from a pragmatic perspective,

communication involves more than just the transfer of information; it also involves interpreting meaning within a social context. As Malyuga and Orlova note, effective professional communication requires sensitivity to context, cultural norms, and politeness expectations [Malyuga, E. N., & Orlova, S. N., 2017]. In this regard, abbreviations can present certain challenges. While they may be clear to some participants, they can cause confusion or lead to misunderstandings for others, particularly in intercultural or multilingual environments. Furthermore, the excessive or inappropriate use of abbreviations may be perceived as overly informal, or even impolite. This situation highlights the important tension between efficiency and etiquette in professional communication. On the one hand, abbreviations facilitate faster and more efficient interaction. However, they may also weaken the tone of professionalism and reduce the level of politeness in a message. A message that is very brief or highly abbreviated can sometimes appear abrupt or careless, which may have a negative impact on professional relationships.

Although previous research has explored various aspects of business communication and linguistic pragmatics, the role of abbreviations in professional discourse and their impact on communicative etiquette has received limited attention. This study therefore aims to analyse the use of abbreviations from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on how professionals balance efficiency and politeness in their communication. It seeks to answer the following questions: how are abbreviations used in professional discourse? In which contexts are they considered appropriate or inappropriate? And how do they influence perceptions of politeness and professionalism? This research is significant as it contributes to a better understanding of evolving communication practices in modern workplaces, providing practical insights for professionals, educators and researchers.

Main Part

Professional discourse is generally understood as a specialized form of communication that takes place in workplace and institutional contexts, where language is used to achieve specific goals. Scholars such as Khramchenko [Khramchenko, D. S., 2019] and Krhutová [Krhutová, M., 2009] emphasize that professional discourse is shaped by a number of functional-linguistic parameters, including clarity, precision, structure, and relevance. In professional settings, communication is expected to be efficient and purposeful, often focusing on problem-solving, decision-making, and information exchange. At the same time, it is influenced by contextual factors such as participants' roles, hierarchy, and the level of formality required in a given situation. This means that language choices are not random but guided by both communicative goals and social expectations.

From a pragmatic perspective, professional discourse involves more than simply transmitting information. It also includes managing interpersonal relationships and maintaining appropriate levels of politeness and respect. As Jdetawy and Hamzah [Jdetawy, L. F., & Hamzah, M. H., 2020] argue, linguistic etiquette plays a crucial role in shaping how messages are delivered and interpreted. Pragmatic competence allows speakers to choose expressions that are suitable for a particular context, taking into account factors such as social distance, power relations, and cultural norms. In professional environments, failure to follow these norms may lead not only to misunderstanding but also to negative impressions, such as appearing unprofessional or impolite.

The development of digital communication technologies has significantly influenced the nature of professional discourse. Emails, instant messaging platforms, and collaborative tools have introduced new forms of interaction that are often faster and less formal than traditional communication. According to Malyuga and Ermishina [Malyuga, E. N., & Ermishina, V. E., 2020], modern professional discourse increasingly incorporates elements of colloquial language, especially in online contexts where speed and convenience are prioritized. This shift reflects broader changes in communication practices, where the boundaries between formal and informal language are becoming less rigid. One of the most noticeable features of this transformation is the growing use of abbreviations. Abbreviations are linguistic units that shorten longer words or phrases and include forms such as acronyms, initialisms, and clipped words. Mellitus et al. [Mellitus, D. D., Oral, N. N. V. K. A., Anticoagulants, P. A. H., QT, Q. C., & Death, S. S. C., 2005] define abbreviations as tools that help simplify complex terminology, particularly in specialized or technical fields. Similarly, Szafarczyk [Szafarczyk, M., 2025] notes that abbreviations are widely used to increase efficiency by reducing repetition and saving time in communication. In professional discourse, they are especially common in written communication, where brevity is often valued.

Despite their practical advantages, abbreviations also present certain challenges when viewed from a pragmatic perspective. While they contribute to efficiency, they may reduce clarity, particularly when the reader is unfamiliar with specific shortened forms. In addition, their use may influence the perceived tone of a message. As suggested by Jdetawy and Hamzah [Jdetawy, L. F., & Hamzah, M. H., 2020], linguistic etiquette requires speakers to consider how their language choices affect others. In this sense, excessive or inappropriate use of abbreviations may be interpreted as overly informal, abrupt, or even disrespectful, especially in hierarchical or formal contexts.

Furthermore, the use of abbreviations can be influenced by intercultural factors. In globalized professional environments, participants often come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which may lead to different interpretations of abbreviated forms. Malyuga and Ermishina [Malyuga, E. N., & Ermishina, V. E., 2020] highlight that digital communication increases intercultural contact, making it even more important to ensure clarity and appropriateness in language use. What is considered efficient and acceptable in one context may be misunderstood or viewed negatively in another. In addition, the functional-linguistic approach to professional discourse suggests that language choices, including the use of abbreviations, are closely related to communicative purposes. Khramchenko [Khramchenko, D. S., 2019] points out that professional communication must balance informativeness and accessibility. While abbreviations can make messages shorter and more efficient, overuse may reduce accessibility for some readers. Similarly, Krhutová [Krhutová, M., 2009] notes that professional discourse requires a balance between standardization and flexibility, meaning that while certain conventions exist, speakers must adapt their language to specific situations.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that professional discourse is a complex and dynamic phenomenon shaped by both functional and pragmatic factors. Abbreviations represent an important element of this discourse, reflecting the need for efficiency in modern communication. However, their use also raises questions about clarity, politeness, and appropriateness. Although previous studies have addressed professional discourse, linguistic etiquette, and abbreviation use separately, there is still

a need for a more integrated analysis that examines how abbreviations function at the intersection of efficiency and etiquette. This study builds on these theoretical insights to further explore the pragmatic role of abbreviations in professional communication.

In modern professional communication, abbreviations have become a common and almost unavoidable feature, especially in digital environments where speed and efficiency are highly valued. The widespread use of emails, instant messaging, and online platforms has encouraged professionals to shorten their messages in order to save time and respond quickly. As a result, abbreviations such as ASAP, FYI, pls, and thx are now frequently used in workplace communication. However, from a pragmatic perspective, their use is not always straightforward, as meaning and appropriateness depend heavily on context. On the one hand, abbreviations serve as an effective tool for increasing efficiency in communication. They reduce the length of messages, allow for faster typing, and help convey information quickly in time-sensitive situations. For example, a message like “Send the report ASAP” immediately concisely communicates urgency. Similarly, “FYI, the meeting is at 3 PM” efficiently shares information without unnecessary detail. In fast-paced work environments, such forms can improve productivity and make communication more practical, which reflects the functional nature of professional discourse [Khrumchenko, D. S., 2019]. On the other hand, the use of abbreviations may create challenges related to linguistic etiquette and professionalism. From a pragmatic point of view, language choices influence how messages are perceived by others. Shortened forms such as “pls send file” or “thx” may appear too direct, informal, or even careless, especially in communication with superiors or in formal contexts. In such cases, the message may lose important elements of politeness, such as indirectness and respectful tone. As noted in studies on linguistic etiquette, maintaining politeness is essential in professional interaction, and failure to do so can negatively affect relationships and impressions [Jdetawy, L. F., & Hamzah, M. H., 2020].

A key factor in understanding abbreviation use is context. The appropriateness of abbreviations depends on several variables, including the relationship between participants, the communication medium, and the purpose of the message. For instance, in informal communication between colleagues or in internal team chats, abbreviations are generally acceptable and even expected. In contrast, in formal emails, official documents, or communication with higher-ranking individuals, the use of abbreviations may be inappropriate. This supports the idea that professional discourse is flexible and context-dependent, as highlighted by researchers in this field [Khrumchenko, D. S., 2019], [Krhutová, M., 2009]. Another important aspect is the intercultural dimension of professional communication. In globalized workplaces, professionals often interact with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In such contexts, abbreviations may not always be universally understood or accepted. With the growth of digital communication, intercultural contact has increased, making clarity and appropriateness even more important [Malyuga, E. N., & Ermishina, V. E., 2020]. An abbreviation that is clear in one cultural context may cause confusion or be perceived as impolite in another.

The discussion also highlights the central tension between efficiency and etiquette, which is the core focus of this study. While abbreviations contribute to faster and more economical communication, they may reduce clarity and weaken the tone of professionalism if used inappropriately. Abbreviations are designed to simplify

language and reduce repetition [Mellitus, D. D., Oral, N. N. V. K. A., Anticoagulants, P. A. H., QT, Q. C., & Death, S. S. C., 2005], [Szafarczyk, M., 2025], but their overuse may create barriers to understanding, especially for readers who are unfamiliar with them. From this perspective, it can be argued that abbreviation use should be guided by pragmatic awareness. Professionals need to consider their audience, the level of formality, and the potential interpretation of their message. Abbreviations may be useful in informal or routine communication, but they should be limited in formal contexts or when clarity is essential. This reflects the broader principle that effective professional discourse requires a balance between informativeness and appropriateness [Khramchenko, D. S., 2019], [Krhutová, M., 2009]. In summary, abbreviations play an important role in modern professional discourse by supporting efficiency, but they also present challenges related to etiquette and interpretation. Their use is highly context-dependent and influenced by social and cultural factors. Therefore, achieving a balance between efficiency and etiquette is essential for successful professional communication.

Conclusion

The article examined the use of abbreviations in professional discourse from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on the balance between efficiency and linguistic etiquette. Drawing on previous research and theoretical analysis, the study showed that abbreviations are widely used in modern digital communication to make messages shorter and faster. However, the analysis also revealed that their use may affect clarity, politeness, and professionalism. The findings highlight that the appropriateness of abbreviations depends on context, including the relationship between participants, the level of formality, and intercultural factors [Khramchenko, D. S., 2019], [Jdetawy, L. F., & Hamzah, M. H., 2020], [Malyuga, E. N., & Ermishina, V. E., 2020]. Overall, the study concludes that effective professional communication requires a careful balance between efficiency and etiquette. Abbreviations should be used selectively and with awareness of the communicative situation to ensure both clarity and professionalism.

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