

DIGITAL SPEECH ETIQUETTE IN MESSAGING APPS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNICATION AND THE PROTECTION OF PERSONAL BOUNDARIES IN THE WORKPLACE

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Introduction: Business communication has changed dramatically over the past few years. Face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and even formal emails are no longer the main channels for workplace interaction. Today, most professional communication happens through messengers like Telegram, WhatsApp, Slack, and Bitrix24. Fast, convenient, always available. Humanity finally invented a way to discuss quarterly reports at 11:47 PM from bed [3, p. 46]. At the same time, technology evolved much faster than communication culture itself. The speed and accessibility of messengers created the illusion that employees should remain constantly available. As a result, the line between work and personal life became increasingly blurred. In this environment, speech etiquette gained a completely new role. It is no longer just about politeness or professional image. Digital etiquette, often called “netiquette,” has turned into a tool for protecting psychological comfort, personal boundaries, and mental well-being. It helps reduce informational overload, prevent burnout, and make workplace communication more structured and respectful [6, p. 204]. In many ways, it functions as a kind of “psychological ecology” for people drowning in endless notifications and unread chats. Modern office culture somehow managed to turn green dots near avatars into a source of existential pressure [4, p. 14]. The purpose of this paper is to examine how traditional speech etiquette transforms within corporate messengers and which linguistic and organizational norms help maintain healthy personal boundaries in digital communication.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Digital Speech Etiquette and Personal Boundaries.

Traditionally, speech etiquette is understood as a system of socially accepted communication rules that regulate behavior within a community. In digital environments, however, these norms adapt to the technical realities of online platforms [5, p. 120]. Unlike face-to-face communication, messaging apps lack tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and immediate emotional feedback. Because of this, people rely on alternative signals: punctuation, emojis, formatting, response speed, and message structure. Oddly enough, one extra period can sometimes sound colder than an actual argument.

Personal boundaries in digital communication refer to an individual’s right to maintain psychological comfort, protect private time, and avoid unwanted intrusion into personal space [2, p. 18]. In workplace chats, these boundaries are commonly violated on three levels:

Temporal level — intrusion into personal time outside working hours;

Informational level — overwhelming employees with poorly structured or unnecessary messages;

Hierarchical level — excessive familiarity or inappropriate communication style.

2. Temporal Boundaries and the “Right to Disconnect”. With smartphones constantly within reach, many employees experience pressure to remain permanently online. This expectation has become one of the strongest modern workplace stress factors. Digital communication may

have made work faster, but it also quietly removed the feeling that the workday ever truly ends [3, p. 50].

2.1. Messages Outside Working Hours. Sending work-related messages late in the evening or during weekends directly interferes with personal space. Even when managers write phrases like “No rush, answer tomorrow,” the notification itself already shifts the employee’s attention back to work mode.

A single sound notification may seem insignificant, but psychologically it interrupts rest and creates background anxiety. The brain does not particularly care that the spreadsheet can technically wait until Monday [2, p. 55].

Etiquette norm:Modern digital etiquette increasingly supports the principle of the “right to disconnect.” Work messages should not be sent outside working hours unless there is a genuine emergency. Delayed message functions available in most messengers provide a simple and respectful solution.

2.2. Expectations About Response Time. Unlike phone calls, messengers are asynchronous communication tools. They allow people to respond when convenient rather than immediately. Demanding instant replies creates unnecessary stress and constantly interrupts concentration. In professional environments, an acceptable response window is generally considered to be within 1.5 to 2 hours during the workday [1, p. 89]. If a task requires more time, a short acknowledgment message helps maintain professional communication:

“Received, I’ll send a detailed response by 3 PM.” This small habit reduces uncertainty and prevents the endless spiral of passive-aggressive “?” messages. Civilization continues to cling to fragile systems.

3. Message Structure as a Form of Respect: Digital boundaries are violated not only by timing but also by the way information is presented. In an era where attention has become one of the most limited resources, clear communication matters more than ever [1, p. 34].

3.1. Fragmented Messaging. One of the most frustrating habits in workplace chats is splitting one thought into multiple short messages: “Hi” “Quick question” “Did you finish the report?”

This format repeatedly interrupts the recipient with notifications and forces them to reconstruct fragmented information piece by piece [2, p. 73]. **Etiquette norm:** One message should contain one complete thought [1, p. 42]. Ideally, it includes: greeting; purpose of the message; deadline or expected action. For example: “Alexey, good afternoon. Could you please confirm whether the sales report for last month is ready? The director requested it before 4 PM. Thank you.” This structure saves time and reduces unnecessary tension.

3.2. Voice Messages in Professional Communication. Voice messages remain one of the most controversial elements of workplace etiquette. While they save time for the sender, they often create inconvenience for the recipient. Text messages can be scanned quickly, searched, copied, and reread. Audio messages require headphones, quiet surroundings, and additional time [1, p. 112]. Listening to a three-minute voice message just to discover the actual request was “send me the file” feels less like communication and more like an ambush.

Etiquette norm: In professional communication, voice messages should only be used after prior agreement [2, p. 84]. For example: “Irina, would it be okay if I send a short voice message? I’m currently on the move and typing is difficult.” This approach respects the other person’s situation instead of assuming unlimited availability and patience.

4. Linguistic Markers, Hierarchy, and the “Digital Shout”. A workplace chat functions as a virtual office. Communication style within it reflects professionalism, hierarchy, and respect for colleagues.

4.1. Excessive Use of Mass Mentions. Tags such as @all or @channel force notifications on every participant in a chat. Overusing them for minor issues resembles entering an office with a megaphone simply to ask who ordered coffee [2, p. 102].

Etiquette norm: Mass mentions should be reserved for urgent or critically important situations. In most cases, it is more appropriate to tag only the specific employee responsible for the task: “@Ivan, could you please check the layout?”

4.2. Emojis, Punctuation, and CAPS LOCK. Small textual details strongly influence how messages are emotionally perceived [5, p. 128].

CAPS LOCK is commonly associated with shouting or aggression. Messages like “URGENT! DO THIS NOW!” are perceived as emotionally aggressive and unprofessional [1, p. 154]. Excessive exclamation marks create panic or emotional pressure.

Interestingly, a period at the end of very short replies like “Okay.” is often interpreted as passive aggression in digital communication [4, p. 18].

Because of this, many professionals intentionally omit periods in short informal workplace responses to soften the tone. Emojis may also help humanize communication, but moderation remains important. One or two neutral emojis are generally acceptable [2, p. 41]. Excessive use of stickers or overly informal reactions can undermine professional boundaries, especially in communication between employees and managers.

Conclusion. Digital speech etiquette has gradually evolved into an independent communication system with its own rules and norms. Today, its role extends far beyond traditional politeness. It protects attention, time, emotional stability, and personal boundaries in an environment where work notifications follow people almost everywhere [6, p. 210].

Respect for personal boundaries in workplace messengers is built on predictability, asynchronous communication, and awareness of other people’s cognitive load. Structured messages, reasonable response expectations, restrained use of visual markers, and respect for non-working hours have become indicators of professionalism in modern corporate culture.

The quality of digital communication increasingly shapes the psychological climate within organizations. In many ways, workplace culture today is revealed not during formal meetings but inside the quiet chaos of group chats where someone is still sending “Hi” as a separate message before typing the actual question forty seconds later.

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