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# FACEWORK IN NON-FACE-THREATENING EMAILS BY NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

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The aim of this research is to investigate the speech act of assignment submission and presence of facework in submission emails sent to faculty members by native and nonnative English speaking graduate students. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) and Spencer-Oatey's (2002, 2008) rapport management framework were utilized to analyze the emails. The corpus consisted of 105 emails from 40 NES and NNES students. Drawing on speech event analysis approach (Merrison, Wilson, Davies, & Haugh, 2012), we analyze both submission head act as well as optional elements like openings, small talk and closings in an email. Our exploratory study revealed that, contrary to the argument that CMC is a lean medium (Duthler, 2006) in which it is difficult to achieve interpersonal communication, through the employment of opening, small talk and closing strategies, students attended to relational goals in their email communication.

**Key words:** Submission email, politeness, rapport management, computer-mediated communication.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has opened new venues for student-faculty communication. Specifically, emails have been utilized for out of class communication between professors and students. However, because emails similar to other forms of asynchronous CMC lack contextual cues and immediate feedback typical of face-to-face communication or synchronous CMC, it is more difficult for senders to ascertain what kinds of impression their messages exert on the recipient(s). Fortunately, CMC offers affordances such as time to reflect and plan what to say, how to say, and manipulate linguistic and non-linguistic cues to optimize self-presentation. Linguistic cues such as openings, small talk, and closings can be strategically implemented with more forethought and less cognitive load in email communication than synchronous or face-to-face communication (Bou-Franch, 2006; Eslami, 2013; Herring, 1996). Previous research on politeness in email communication between students and faculty has mainly focused on face threatening speech acts such as requests and apologies. However, students also frequently use emails to submit their assignments and papers to faculty members. It is, therefore, insightful to examine if and to what extent facework is used in submission emails, which are basically a response to faculty members' request to submit assignments/papers and thus are not face-threatening speech acts as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Thus, the goal of this exploratory study is to examine how students actively manage facework with faculty members when submitting their assignments through emails. Submission emails are email messages that attach assignments to the emails sent to the faculty members, and due to the absence of face-threaten-

ing speech act(s) (i.e., students are responding to requests from professors, not asking professors to help them), students are not required to employ facework and politeness strategies (e. g., opening and closing).

According to Androutsopoulous (2006), prior research on email communication or in the field of CMC focused on language use but ignored the dynamic between technological, social and contextual factors that shape the CMC medium. The assumption was that CMC offers a level-playing field for exchange of information and minimizes the power distance between speakers, leading to diversity and an egalitarian-oriented communication style. In other words, CMC mainly serve the purpose of information exchange than interpersonal communication (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992).

However, contradictory research results have challenged the notion that CMC provides an egalitarian playing grounds (Bloch, 2002; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007)). For example, in a study of address forms in initiating and follow-up emails between students and faculty, Bou-Franch (2011) found follow-up emails sent down the institutional hierarchy contained less address formulas (e. g., opening and closing). In fact, Herring (2003) argued existent power relations in the real world usually transfer to the Internet. Also, recent research demonstrates interpersonal features such as openings and closings exert considerable influence in CMC (Bou-Franch, 2011; Duthier, 2006; Eslami, 2013; Herring, 2007; Walvogel, 2007). Therefore, the current research focus on CMC has shifted to user-related approaches and interpersonal features of CMC (Herring, 2007).

Drawing on the findings of politeness research, this paper seeks to build a model for analyzing a 'non-face-threatening' speech act (submission emails), and illustrate that facework can account for the use of linguistic strategies that maintain a harmonious relationship between the interlocutors. The following is the organization of this paper. In section two we provide a detailed literature review of the theoretical framework: politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2002; 2008) as well as empirical studies on student-faculty email communication and on openings, small talk and closings. The methodology and analysis procedure are presented in the third section. Following the method section, we present results and discussion. Finally in section five we present conclusion and limitation of the study.

## II. POLITENESS THEORY

Email communication has become a primary mode of communication between students and their professors. Because the participants do not benefit from immediate feedback present in face-to-face communication, all understanding must be achieved through linguistic exchanges. Additionally, in institutional context of academia constructing and negotiating social identities is accomplished mainly through work related communication. As a result, both task oriented and social interaction in the academic context has to be intertwined with politeness strategies that allow for a balance of transactional and relational work. Accordingly, linguistic politeness is an important and essential element of student-faculty interactions in academic settings. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research on the politeness manifestation in computer-mediated task oriented interactions especially in relation to non-face-threatening speech functions (e.g., submitting assignments).

During the course of institutional interactions the interactants' face (Goffman, 1967) is often threatened (Darics, 2010). In order to achieve both transactional and relational goals and provide supporting environments, the face-threatening acts have to be mitigated by different types of face work. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory has been used as the politeness framework for most of the CMC studies. In their groundbreaking work on linguistic politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that people's concern on face influenced their use of politeness strategies. Harrison (2000) for example, applied Brown and Levinson's framework to email discourse to identify politeness strategies. Vinagre (2008) in her study of politeness strategies on collaborative emails found that positive politeness strategies constituted the majority of politeness strategies and concluded that politeness was subordinated to clarity in these email communications. However, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has been criticized because it considers politeness as face-threatening act (FTA) mitigation and does not consider the use of politeness in situations that are not face-threatening. Furthermore, the interactional perspective of politeness is ignored and the emphasis is on the speaker's intentions (Locher & Watts, 2005).

In this model, face is consisted of two interrelated aspects, negative face and positive face. Negative face can be conceptualized as the desire for privacy and a focus on deference, whereas positive face is a person's want of inclusion and solidarity. For example, addressing a professor with title and last name indicates the distance between student and faculty. On the other hand, first name address signifies both the student and professor are in an academic fraternity. Moreover, politeness strategies are coupled with different types of speech acts such as requests and apologies. Three factors: power, social distance and politeness influenced variations in the employment of politeness strategies. The politeness strategies are used to mitigate the force of face-threatening acts, that is, actions that violate people's want of privacy or freedom of action. In other words, for Brown and Levinson, politeness is essentially the use of various linguistic strategies to soften the force of a FTA.

Although influential, Brown and Levinson's (1987) model has come under attacks by other linguists. Matsumoto (1988) and Gu (1990) argued that in collectivistic cultures such as Japan and China, face is a collective construct and thus Brown and Levinson's (1987) emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy did not address the needs of the group.

Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2008) proposed a modified framework for conceptualization of face and rapport in light of scholars' challenges on Brown and Levinson's (1987) model. Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2008), through examination of face sensitive incidents, delineated a rapport management model. This model entailed three interconnected components: the management of face, the management of sociality rights and obligations and the management of interactional goals.

According to Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2008), face management is concerned with how people actively manage face sensitivities during interaction. On the other hand, the management of sociality rights and obligations involves the management of social expectations. Sociality rights are people's behavioral expectations and if these expectations

are not met, interpersonal rapport will be affected. Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2008) delineated two fundamental components of sociality rights: equity and association.

Equity is the fundamental belief for a person's entitlement to personal considerations from others so that other people do not mistreat us or impose upon us. There are two components under equity (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, 2008): the notion of cost-benefit and the related issue of autonomy-imposition. Association, on the contrary, is a person's belief for social involvement with others in keeping with the types of relationship that we have with them. According to Spencer-Oatey, association rights connect with interactional involvement-detachment and affective involvement-detachment. Interactional involvement is the extent to which we feel comfortable for appropriate amounts of social chitchat or small talk with others. Affective involvement, in contrast, is our shared concern with other's feelings and interest.

Finally, people often have specific agendas when they interact with others, which Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2008) referred to as interactional goals. Interactional goals can be relational as well as transactional. For instance, when submitting an assignment through email attachment, students are merely responding to the professor's request, thus fulfilling a transactional goal. However, by using relational language such as opening, closing and small talk, students may enhance rapport with the professor and thus achieve a relational goal in student-faculty communication.

In summary, this section provided the theoretical underpinning of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, 2008). These two theoretical models provide a framework for analyzing students' submission email and reveal how interactional goals manage both transactional and relational aspects of email communication

### **Pragmatics of student-faculty email communication**

Advances in information and communication technology have led to increased use of online communication, including email. Email has been widely adopted for both personal and institutional communication because of its high transmission speed (Crystal, 2001). As email lacks paralinguistic cues present in face-to-face or synchronous communication (e.g., chat), an email sender needs to exercise more caution in constructing appropriate messages, especially in a high power difference situation, such as student-faculty communication (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). To effectively communicate with faculty members, students need to have sufficient pragmatic competence, awareness of politeness conventions and an understanding of email etiquette (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). They also may need more time to plan and compose emails in which various face-threatening acts may be committed (Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Furthermore, they have to make sociopragmatic choices regarding forms of address, degree of formality and directness, closings, presence and amount of mitigation and the types of modification strategies (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). This means they must assess the relationship with professors and the degree of imposition of their requests in relation to rights and obligations of the parties involved (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011).

Comparative studies have found that, in general, even non-native English speaking students with high English language proficiency may lack appropriate pragmalinguistic ability to sufficiently mitigate their email requests and often resort to nonacademic reasons (e.g. working full time), which are not appropriate in academic contexts (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Chalak, Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Felix-Bradsdefer, 2012; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Studies (e.g., Jessmer & Anderson, 2001) have shown that polite and grammatical email messages were evaluated most positively by the recipients. In addition to the head act, most email messages include various other components such as greetings, closings, and small talk, the existence of which can influence the tone and politeness level of the message. Several studies have examined the opening and closing sequences of emails to determine the factors that influence the choice of these pragmatic strategies and how the choices affect the relational tone of the email message.

### **Openings**

A typical e-mail message usually contains three distinguishable components: a) opening, b) body of the message, and c) closing. Several studies have revealed how interactants in email use apologies, indirectness, inclusive forms and greetings and closing in order to create a good work climate (Hossjer, 2013; Waldvogel, 2007). A number of studies have investigated opening strategies in authentic emails in workplace and academic settings (Bjorge, 2007, Bou-Franch, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Eslami, 2013; Gains, 1999; Gimenez, 2001, 2006; Formentelli, 2009; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2013; Waldvogel, 2007).

Overall, the examination of opening sequences in email communication has revealed differences based on cultural differences, message sequence (initiating or follow-up email) and language proficiency of the students. The choice of opening moves depends not only on the context but also on the producer's cultural and social background. The relationship between the interlocutors also plays a very important role in the choice of pragmatic strategies. Bou-Franch's (2011) study showed that in e-mail conversation between students and lecturers and between lecturers in Peninsular Spanish, openings and closings were prevalent, especially in unequal relationship emails (students-lecturers). Bjorge (2007) study revealed that power differences and asymmetry in relationships are particularly stressed in cultures with a high power-distance index (Hofstede, 2001). The results of the study verified that students with high power distance culture origins would employ more formal opening strategies than those from low power distance ones. Her data showed that students from high power distance cultures tended to use more formal forms, such as "Dear Professor/Sir/Madam/Teacher + professor's first and last name". On the other hand, students whose countries of origin were categorized as low power distance cultures favored informal greetings like "Dear + professor's first name", "Hi/Hello + professor's first name" or even had no openings.

Eslami's (2013) comparative study of Iranian and American graduate students' email opening strategies also corroborated the influence of cultural factors on strategy use. She investigated 300 requestive emails addressed to one professor. Results indicated both groups adopted openings in their emails. However, the number of opening moves was

not only higher in the Iranian students' emails but also lengthier. Moreover, Iranian students used more small talk in their opening sequence indicating a more relational communication style. Similar findings are reported by Merrison et al. (2012) and Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch (2010) studies on British and Australian and British and Spanish students' email messages.

### Small Talk

Opening strategies are not the only elements available for tailoring messages to individual email recipient. Small talk, defined as a non-task oriented conversation about neutral topics, can function as a mitigator to soften face threats and provide an initial time interval that allows interlocutors to size each other up and establish an interactional style and some degree of mutual trust and rapport. (Bickmore & Cassell, 1999). Pullin (2010) conducted a study that investigated the function of small talk and how *English as a lingua franca* speaker utilized this important tool to manage rapport with colleagues and clients. She found that small talk served the function of creating a relaxed atmosphere before the beginning of serious talk (meeting) and thus nurtured rapport. In addition, as the boss joined the banter, small talk helped mitigate power and nurture solidarity.

In addition, Hossjer (2013) introduced two functions of small talk in a study of workplace email communication. She classified small talk as 1) a face-boosting act (FBA), which mostly consists of people discussing their daily lives or describing annoyances in their work for establishment of a generally positive attitude in a situation or 2) a tool that mitigates FTA such as explanations for why something has not been done. In a corpus of 3200 emails spanning three years, she found both types of small talk. For example, in the last paragraph of an email explaining the delay of an article, the writer used a variety of strategies such as well-wishing, praise, and joke to downgrade the fact that he committed a FTA of late submission of an article for publication

### Closings

According to Waldvogel (2007) and Eslami (2013), closings in emails consist of three elements: pre-closing phatic comments like "Have a nice day"; farewell formula and; any name signoff. In addition, "thanks" is considered as a closing strategy when it comes with or without the writer's name. Studies on closing strategies found that these three moves (pre-closing, farewell, self-identification) were not always present in emails examined and thus stylistic variation existed. One factor that conditions these variations is cultural differences. Borge (2007) revealed that, consistent with opening strategies, students from more authoritative cultures (e.g., Iran, China, Jordan) tended to opt for formal alternative in their email closings than students from egalitarian cultures (e.g., U.S., Britain). Similarly, Larina (2015) has addressed culture-specific communicative styles and defines it as a "systematic and regular use of typical strategies" (p. 197). She connects the communication styles of Russian vs British speakers to *power distance*, which is higher in Russian communication than in English communication (Larina, 2005).

Additionally, Bou-Franch (2006) also found great variation in the closing strategies in her email corpus. All 30 emails contained closings, of which thanking and signature were most prevalent. Leave-taking (e.g., "see you in class on Monday"), a subcompo-

ment of pre-closing, also was found in the emails. Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch's (2013) comparison between Peninsular Spanish (PS) and British English (BE) emails also evidenced different stylistic conventions for closings. In the PS data, thanking, leave-taking (e.g. "See you soon") and signature comprised almost ninety percent of all closing moves whereas the most two frequently used moves in BE data were signature and thanking. Eslami (2013) study compared the email closings of native English speaking (NES) American students and non-native English speaking (NNES) Iranian students. The findings revealed differences in the closing strategies the two groups used. Iranian NNES students oriented towards a more formal style of communication by employing more thanking, apologizing, farewell and name sign-off in their closing sequences. Also, compared to American NES students, the Iranian students' closing sequence was denser, consisting of more words and moves (11.1 words and 3.9 moves in Iranian closing sequence compared to 4.1 words and 2.1 moves in American closing sequence).

In summary, a review of relevant studies on relational language use in emails indicated that students do actively utilize rapport management strategies by a combination of different opening, small talk and closing moves. However, as previously indicated, context internal and context external factors affect the type and amount of facework students employ in their email messages. Therefore, the focus of this study is to investigate to what extent, and how, facework is attended to in non-face-threatening emails (i.e., submission emails). Furthermore, the amount and type of facework used by the two groups of NES and NNES students in their email communications with faculty is examined to understand the similarities and differences between the two groups. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do NES and NNES students attend to relational aspect of communication in their assignment submission emails?
2. Are there differences in the patterns of facework strategies in NES and NNES students' assignment submission emails?
3. What types of openings, small talk and closings do NES and NNES students use in their assignment submission emails?

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

Drawing on politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, 2008), we examine different strategies that NES and NNES students adopt to realize their submission head act and the amount and type of opening, small talk and closing strategies in their email messages. Participants, data collection and analysis procedure will be provided in the following subsections.

#### **Email data and Participants**

The corpus consisted of 105 emails (49 NES messages, 56 NNES messages) from 40 students (20 NES, 20 NNES students) sent to a faculty member over a course of several semesters. To comply with the university's Institutional Review Board requirements, personal information related to the participants will stay confidential and pseudonyms are used. The professor to whom these email messages were sent is a female faculty member. She encourages communication with emails through inclusion of her email

address on her course syllabi. She maintains a formal style of communication with her students, and does not encourage students to address her on a first name basis. Similarly, the institutional culture of the university, does not encourage the use of first name for addressing faculty members and the norm for students is to use title plus last name to address faculty members.

The senders of emails are NES and NNES graduate students pursuing advanced degrees at a large Mid-western university. Only the email messages that were sent to the faculty member with the main purpose of submitting assignments/papers were used for this study. The NNES graduate students were mainly from Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia) pursuing their master's and doctorate degree at the university. In line with the NNES graduate students, the NES students were also master and doctoral students at the same university.

### Data Analysis Procedure

To analyze the data, first the head act and other optional moves in the email message were identified. In addition to the main message (head act), email messages may include some optional components such as openings, small talk, and closings. The analysis consisted of: a) identifying emails that were mainly sent to submit assignments (submission emails), b) identification and analysis of submission head act, c) identification and analysis of other optional components (openings, small talk, and closings).

The analysis and classification of the different moves in the email messages were based on previous studies on email communication (e.g., Bou-Franch, 2006; Eslami, 2013). Following the identification and classification of different moves, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

### Findings Opening Moves

Openings are considered optional elements in the email communication and can include greeting, self-identification and small talk. Examples for each of the move from the data are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

Moves in opening sequence

Greeting	Dear Dr. Henson, Dr. Henson, Hello Dr. Henson
Self-identification	I am Junwook Yu
Small talk	I hope you are having a nice week!

We further analyzed the frequency and occurrence of different kinds of moves within the opening sequence. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentages of opening moves in NES and NNES data

Types of Opening Moves	NES	NNES
Greeting	49 (78%)	55 (72%)
Self-Identification	1 (2%)	4 (5%)
Small Talk	13 (20%)	18 (23%)
Total	56 (100%)	77 (100%)

As table 2 indicates, greeting was the most common move in the opening sequence. Specifically, both NES and NNES groups utilized nearly two-thirds of greetings in their opening sequence. While some small talk was employed, we can see that both groups of students seldom used self-identification in their openings. It may be that the familiarity between the professor and students obviated the use of name identification in the opening sequence.

Chi-square test was used to examine if difference between the groups was significant statistically. The statistical test revealed NES and NNES students' use of opening strategies were not statistically different. However, although statistically there was no difference in the two group's employment of opening strategies, closer examination revealed qualitative difference in NES students' and their counterparts' opening strategies. Specifically, one third of NES greetings were realized using positive politeness strategies that indicated informality and solidarity (e.g., *Hi, Dr. Henson*). On the other hand, over two thirds of openings in NNES data employed pragmatic expressions indicating deference and independence (e. g., *Dear Dr. Henson*). This result corroborated previous research's claim (Bjorge, 2007; Bou-Franch, 2006, 2011; Chen, 2006) that NNES students observed the power difference between the sender and the recipient (i.e., professor, instructor).

In addition to greeting, NES and NNES students employed similar amounts of small talk in their opening sequences. A closer examination of the contents following Hossjer's (2013) classification revealed that only face-boosting small talk was used. This was not unexpected because students were only submitting their assignments. Because we excluded those emails containing a request in addition to assignment submission, these emails could be categorized as containing no FTA and thus the existence of small talk only suggests students' rapport management move. A content analysis revealed that similar to opening strategies, there were also qualitative differences in small talks. Whereas NES students' small talk emphasized their effort and responsibility of the submitted assignment, the NNES students orientated to the professor's kindness in instruction and caring for students. Examples of NES and NNES students' small talk are presented below.

**Example 1**

Small talk from NESS' email message

I'm excited about some of the sources that I found

**Example 2**

Small talk from NNESS' email message

So glad to cooperate with you for my first semester. I have learnt a lot from you, classmates, books and papers~!!! Thank you so much for being so patient!

However, other small talks are more ritualistic, generally orientating to the well-being of the professor (e.g., *Hope you are doing fine; Hope all is well with you*). In contrast to other moves in the opening sequence, both groups of students tried to convey a positive politeness orientation. This result was in line with previous research (Bou-Franch, 2006, 2011; Eslami, 2013).

### Submission head act strategies

The head act structures used to submit the assignments/papers (submission head acts) were analyzed following variations in syntactic structures. We present different types of submission head acts in Table 3.

Table 3

**Syntactic structures of the submission head act**

Syntactic Structure	Examples
Please plus a verb phrase	Please check the attachment for table of specification.
Attach plus a verb phrase	Attached is the annotated bibliography for class.
Pronominal plus a verb phrase	My bibliography is attached.
Adverbial plus a verb phrase	Here is my evaluation from Chapters 18 and 19 discussion.
Demonstrative plus a verb phrase	This is my assignment

In line with opening sequence, we further calculated the frequency and percentages of different types of submission head acts found in NES and NNES email messages. Table 4 presents data of these calculations.

Table 4

**Submission head act by group**

	NES Students	NNES Students
Please + VP	8 (15%)	4 (7%)
Attached + VP	16 (30%)	25 (46%)
Adverbial +VP	23 (43%)	8 (15%)
Subjective + VP	4 (7%)	9 (17%)
Possessive + VP	3 (5%)	1 (2%)
Demonstrative +VP	0 (0%)	6 (11%)
Question	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Total	54	54

Table 4 indicates that NES and NNES students employed different submission strategies. While nearly half of NES students employed the adverbial +VP strategy (e.g., *here are the evaluations for my group members*, 43%), NNES students mostly used attachment strategy (e.g., *attached is my annotated bibliography*, 46%). However, the NES group also preferred attachment strategy as the percentage was the second most prominent from the data. We ran chi-square test to determine if differences between NES and NNES group were statistically meaningful. The statistical test revealed that NNES group's use of submission strategies did not differ significantly from NES group's usage ( $df = 3$ ,  $\chi^2_{crit} = 7.81$ ,  $\chi^2_{obs} = 5.1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, although statistically similar, we found NNES group used more and varied types of submission strategies, two of which (demonstrative and question) were not found in the NES data. Despite these two additional strategies, the data indicated that both groups' submission strategies were more similar than different. Both employed ritualistic structures such as attachment and adverbial strategies for submitting their assignments. Interestingly, there were instances of the politeness marker *please* in the head act. Because these emails are transactional in nature, students are not required to mitigate the head act. Therefore the existence of please strategies may have suggested students' attention to relational aspect of communication.

### Closing Moves

Closing sequences contained up to four different moves: thanking, phatic comment, farewell and name sign-off. Table 5 present lists of moves in the closing sequence.

Table 5

Moves in closing sequence

Thanking	Thank you, thanks
Phatic Comment	Have a good weekend
Farwell	Best, with regards
Name sign-off	Emma

We further analyzed the frequency and percentages of types of moves found in closing sequences of these email messages. Results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Percentages of closing moves in NES and NNES data

Types of Opening Moves	NES	NNES
Thanking	23 (20%)	38 (22%)
Phatic Comment	34 (29%)	50 (29%)
Farewell	10 (9%)	37 (21%)
Name Sign-off	50 (42%)	49 (28%)
Total	117	174

Table 6 indicates that although NES and NNES employed similar opening moves, both groups diverged in the use of closing strategies. Whereas NNES students employed a combined 50% of phatic comment and farewell strategies in their closing sequences, phatic comment is the most prominent move identified in the NESs' closing sequences. The NNES students' more frequent use of all types of moves than NES students corresponded with previous research showing that in comparison to NESs, NNES students have a tendency to use more interpersonal moves (Bou-Franch, 2011; Chen, 2006; Eslami, 2013) in their email communication.

Chi-square test indicated statistically significant differences in NES and NNES students' closing strategies ( $df = 2, \chi^2_{crit} = 5.99, \chi^2_{obs} = 11.7, p < .05$ ). A closer look at the data revealed that compared to NNES students; NES students barely used the farewell move for closing. This result was in line with Eslami (2013), which documented NESs' lack of use for farewell move. However, this may only reflect a stylistic difference because NES and NNES students used similar amounts of thanking moves. Bou-Franch (2006) argued that the thanking move indicated an expression of deference through the use of negative politeness strategy showing recognition of indebtedness to the receiver. The last closing move, name sign-off, was used less frequently in emails sent by NNES students than by NES students (42% vs. 28%).

### Orientation of solidarity and deference

As Bou-Franch (2006) and Eslami (2013) indicated, email senders express their orientations toward deference or solidarity by using different types of opening and closing strategies. Waldvogel (2007) also indicated openings and closings reflected the de-

gree of politeness due to their orientation to the email recipients' face needs. Following previous studies (Bjorge, 2007; Eslami, 2013), informal, direct moves such as “*Hi*” are considered as expressions of familiarity and solidarity, thus indicating positive politeness moves. On the other hand, formal, indirect moves like “*Dear Dr. LN*” or “*Best regards*” indicate deference and are considered as negative politeness strategies (Bou-Franch, 2006, 2011; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Waldvogel, 2007). We examined the distributions of these strategies in this study. Table 7 presents distributions of positive and negative politeness strategies.

Table 7

**Positive and negative politeness strategies in greeting and farewell moves**

		NES	NNES
<b>Opening</b>	Positive Politeness	89.8%	23.6%
	Negative Politeness	10.2%	76.4%
<b>Closing</b>	Positive Politeness	30.2%	34.5%
	Negative Politeness	69.8%	65.5%

As indicated in table 4 above, NES students overwhelmingly employed positive politeness strategies (89.8%) in their email openings compared to NNES students (23.6%). NNES students employed formal greetings indicating deference and independence (e.g., *Dear Dr. Henson*, 76.4%), whereas only a small fraction of formal greetings appeared in NES data (10.2%). As Bou-Franch (2006) and Eslami (2013) showed, using formal greetings with recipients' LN puts emphasis on deference and distance in the institutional hierarchy.

However, while a divergent pattern existed for greetings in NES and NNES students' email messages, both groups orientated toward formal farewell moves (NES, 69.8%, NNES, 65.5%). NNES students used variants (such as *best regard*, *respectfully*, *sincerely*, *all the best*) whereas variants used by NES students include *sincerely* and *best*. The farewell move pattern found in the data is a reflection of students' understanding of roles and obligations in the institution (Harford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996) and demonstrated that existing unequal power relationship was transferred from the physical world to the virtual world (Herring, 2007). Therefore, in contrast to the claim that CMC provides an egalitarian communication medium, email interaction in the institutional setting still preserves the general formal manner of communication as in face-to-face meetings. Our findings show social and cultural expectations extant in the context which email communication happens still exert influence on its outcome.

### **Rapport Management Strategies**

In the rapport management framework, four rapport orientations were identified: rapport enhancement orientation, rapport maintenance orientation, rapport neglect orientation and rapport challenge orientation. Because in submitting assignments through email, students are essentially responding to a professor's requests, a sentence such as *this is my assignment* in a bare email would suffice for this goal. However, as previous sections indicated, both NES and NNES students actively used interpersonal features (e.g., opening, small talk, closing) in their emails. These results suggested both groups of stu-

dents held a rapport enhancement orientation, which Spencer-Oatey (2008) explained as the motivation to enhance the harmony of the relationship. In terms of face, students were employing these optional elements in an email to attend to the face needs of the faculty recipient. However, NES and NNES students diverged in the way they claimed sociality rights with the professor. Specifically, by using negative politeness strategies in opening and closing sequences, NNES students indicated their awareness of institutional hierarchy (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Eslami, 2013; Merrison et al., 2012) and used a more deferential politeness style (Chen, 2006; Merrison et al., 2012). On the other hand, the NES group orientated toward affective involvement with the use of positive politeness strategies. However, both groups held the same interactional goal, which is to enhance rapport with the faculty recipient as students typically rely on faculty members for a variety of “services” in institutional encounters (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Merrison et al., 2012).

## **V. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This study provided taxonomy for analyzing students’ submission emails. As far as we know, this is the first study that has addressed submission emails, which are frequently used by students to send their assignments or papers to their faculty members. To summarize, our exploratory study of NESs’ and NNESs’ assignment submission emails revealed that, contrary to the argument that CMC is a lean medium (Duthler, 2006) in which it is difficult to achieve interpersonal communication, through the employment of opening, small talk and closing strategies, students attended to relational goals in their email communication. Whereas in face-to-face communication, students may just hand in their assignments without the need for any relational work, in online communication, even when there is no face-threat involved in the communication event, and students are responding to the faculty members’ course related requests, they still attend to facework and relational communication.

As submitted by other researchers (e.g., Eslami, 2005; Bayraktaroglu, 1991), there are two types of acts affecting face value. The first one as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), are face threatening acts. The second one is face-enhancing acts. The face-enhancing acts are acts that satisfy the face wants of the addressee and can include both positive and negative politeness strategies (Eslami, 2005). It is our claim, that the speech acts that were used by students to submit their assignments electronically are all face-enhancing act since they are all optional acts without which the illocutionary force of submission can be realized.

However, NES and NNES students’ differed in their conceptualizations of student-mentor relationship. Whereas NNES students emphasized more deference in opening and closing strategies, the NES students orientated more toward solidarity with professors. Ultimately their goal is to maintain harmony in ongoing mentoring relationship. The findings have implications for digital communication in general and the importance of relational work in a bare communication medium with mainly transactional communication intentions.

More research is needed to investigate gender differences in the realization of facework in email communication. We recommend that further researchers collect emails

from different groups of students sent to different faculty members of different genders or ranks to compare how students manage rapport. It would also be beneficial to conduct other studies with students from more diverse backgrounds and in different institutional culture to substantiate the findings of this study.

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## **СТРАТЕГИИ ВЕЖЛИВОСТИ В ЭЛЕКТРОННЫХ ПИСЬМАХ СТУДЕНТОВ**

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Цель настоящей работы — изучение с позиций теории вежливости электронных писем англоязычных и неанглоязычных студентов магистратуры, отправляющих задания своим преподавателям, и выявление различий в стратегиях вежливости в данном речевом акте. Теоретическую основу исследования составили теория вежливости Браун и Левинсона (1987) и теория достижения взаимопонимания (Spencer-Oatey 2002, 2008). Материалом исследования послужили 105 писем сорока англоязычных и неанглоязычных студентов. Опираясь на метод анализа речевых актов (Merrison, Wilson, Davies, & Naugh, 2012), мы рассматривали как основной речевой акт подачи задания, так и вспомогательные элементы письма — вступление, так называемый small talk и завершающие фразы. Наше исследование показало, что, несмотря на представление о том, что компьютерные технологии ограничивают возможности межличностного общения (Duthler 2006), помимо основного речевого акта, студенты широко использовали вспомогательные структурные элементы письма для передачи межличностных отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** электронное сообщение категория вежливости, достижение взаимопонимания, компьютерная коммуникация.