Making Requests in Institutional E-mail Communication in Hong Kong: An Interlanguage and Intercultural Pragmatics Approach

PAN, Ping

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

ENGLISH (APPLIED ENGLISH LINGUISTICS)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

August 2010

Thesis/Assessment Committee

Prof. Gwendolyn Gong (Chair)

Prof. Jane Jackson (Thesis Supervisor)

Prof. Jette Hansen Edwards (Committee Member)

Prof. Cynthia Fong King Lee (External Examiner)

Abstract

The present study investigated the speech act realisation of requests in student-professor e-mail communication at a university in Hong Kong. This mixed-method study employed an electronic version of DCTs (Discourse Completion Tasks), stimulated recalls, and audience judgements to investigate the verbal behaviour of both native speakers of English and non-native speakers (Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese) who were students at the university.

An electronic DCT questionnaire, which was specially designed, pilot-tested, and refined, served as the chief instrument. Thirty students participated in the study and formed three cultural groups: ten native English-speaking American students (NS), ten Hong Kong Chinese learners of English (HKCLE) and ten Mainland Chinese learners of English (MLCLE). They completed the e-DCTs online and participated in stimulated recall sessions afterwards in which they were prompted to recall their thought processes while on task. Six American professors evaluated and commented on a random sample of the e-mails (30% of the corpus). The e-mail data were coded with a modified version of the CCSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Acts Realisation Patterns) manual; open-coding and thematic analysis were applied to the stimulated recalls and recipient feedback, with the aid of NVivo 8.

Concerning the interlanguage aspect of the requests, the major findings were: In making status-unequal requests to their professors, students from all three cohorts tended to be indirect in general. The two learners' groups demonstrated a fairly strong pragmalinguistic control in realising specific indirect requesting strategies with a variety of forms; they relied heavily on the conventionally indirect strategy of Query Preparatory (QP). By contrast, NSs exhibited greater flexibility in their strategy choices, which ranged from very direct to indirect. The CLEs were

particularly weak in employing certain syntactic devices as downgraders; to compensate, they made excessive use of lexical/phrasal modifiers and external mitigating moves to soften the requestive force.

MLCLEs were found to always be the least confident group in terms of their language use, as compared to the HKCLE group, which was the most confident. The measurements of power difference and social distance were rather approximate among the three cohorts. NSs were more apt to lessen the power distinction and stress the mutuality of 'showing respect', whereas CLEs were inclined to accentuate unequal power distributions, and emphasise the hierarchical asymmetry. Imposition degree was found to be the most dynamic of the three variables. The reasons for its use were multi-faceted, encompassing diverse affective, cognitive, and social factors.

The audience (American professors) perceived that the students were both direct and polite in making requests. The NSs were found to be the most polite and most satisfactory group in terms of their linguistic production. (Mis)matches were identified between the expectations of the e-mail writers and their receivers. Case analyses revealed disparity in student performance and variations in their developmental progress in terms of pragmalinguistic competence, sociopragmatic awareness, and intercultural communicative competence. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications are discussed. Finally, the thesis concludes with suggestions for future studies.

Abstract in Chinese

中文摘要

本研究採用混合研究法，使用電子版本的語篇填充測試(DCTs)，有提示回憶 (stimulated recalls)，以及觀眾判斷來研究在香港某大學英語爲母語以及英語爲非母語的學生 (香港與大陸的中國學生) 在與教授電子郵件溝通中的请求行爲。

三十位學生參與研究：十位英語爲母語的美國學生，十位英語爲非母語的香港學生，以及十位英語爲非母語的大陸學生。參與者通過在線的方式完成語篇填充任務，而後即刻回想完成任務時的思維過程。六位美國教授對隨機抽取的郵件樣本做出評估。電郵数据採用改編後的 CCSARP (跨文化語言行爲實現模型) 編碼手冊進行編碼，有提示回憶及觀眾反饋則借助於定性分析軟件 NVivo, 採用開放性譯碼及主題分析來編碼。

本研究的主要結果爲：整體而言，三組學生均趨向於以間接的方式向教授提出請求。兩組中国學生表現出很強的語用語言控制能力，可以以不同類型的語言形式來實現特定的間接策略。他們同時表現出對間接策略中探詢性策略很大程度的依賴。美國學生在策略選擇上則更富於靈活性，無論是直接的請求策略還是迂迴的間接策略。兩組中国學生在應用某些句法機制來調節請求行為的方面顯得尤爲薄弱。他們大量地使用詞彙或短語類的調節措施，并借助請求語外圍的輔助行爲語，以達到軟化請求力度的目的。大陸組的學生是三組中對語言使用最不自信的一組。三組參與者對於權利差異跟社會距離的判斷非常接近。研究中發現請求的困擾程度是三個變量中最活躍的；對這一變量的考量呈現出多面性。

參與評估的美國教授認爲學生在提出請求時普遍直接而且禮貌。美國學生是三組中語言產出最禮貌且最令人滿意的一組。研究中檢測出電子郵件發出者與接收者在各自預期上存在不吻合之處。通過個案分析，研究進一步展示出學生表現上的差異，以及各自在語用語言能力，社會語用意識，以及跨文化溝通能力發展程度上的偏差。根據研究結果，本論文探討了相關教學啓示，并爲後續研究提出了建議。

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Jane Jackson, for her informative guidance, continuous support, and constructive feedback in guiding me throughout all stages of the study. Without her patience and assistance, my dissertation cannot be what it is now. Her careful reading of each thesis chapter again and again, her timely feedback, and critical comments were the most valuable to my dissertation. More importantly, four years studying and gaining experience with her in this university allowed me the chances to learn what it is like to be an excellent teacher and researcher, who can be so well-organised, hard-working, and responsible. I will always cherish and benefit from this invaluable experience. Here my first and foremost thanks go to her for her help and contributions.

My deepest appreciation as well goes to my committee members Dr. Jette Hansen Edwards and Dr. Gwendolyn Gong, who have provided me with encouragement and stimulating advice on my research design and data collection methods from the early pilot study phase till the final stages of the research.

I am also grateful to Dr. Cynthia Lee, the external examiner, for her encouraging comments on the thesis, and especially her insightful suggestions for the revision.

I would like to thank Dr. Helen Woodfield in University of Bristol, UK, who introduced me to the pragmatics circle during my Master's degree study. Her expertise and recent work in interlanguage pragmatics inspired me to refine my own study with rigour and to sort out my data with cautiousness.

My appreciation extends to Dr. Peter Skehan and Dr. Gerald Nelson, from whom I obtained training on statistics. Their great sense of humour and wonderful teaching made the learning of statistics completely enjoyable.

I am appreciative of the research participants in my study, the graduate students in several departments of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), the international students from America, and the six American professors who generously served as evaluators for the data samples. My thanks also go the Office of Academic Links of CUHK for their help in providing access to the American students.

I would also wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to my dearest friends, Vily ZHANG and Yucai LIN, for their care and friendship, and being always available for my joy and depression, laughter and tears throughout my graduate study. Special thanks to Hongtao REN, who helped with the co-coding of the data, and offered very useful comments on the coding procedures.

Last but not least, I am heartily thankful to my family, my beloved mother and mother-in-law, and my brother, who have been enormously supportive and understanding during my stay in Hong Kong. I am particularly indebted to my husband. Had it not been for his unconditional love, tremendous support, and endless patience, it would have been impossible for me to complete this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the Study

As one of the places where institutional talk occurs, the university gives rise to many different kinds of interactional settings, including "large, teacher-fronted classes, seminars, and student-teacher conferences" (Williams, p. 37). It is in these locales that students are compelled to make careful linguistic choices in relation to the social and institutional context. In intercultural encounters in academic settings, non-native speaking students must pay particular attention to the pragmatic norms and cultural principles of the communication community where the English language is spoken. This can be challenging for even high proficiency students, as linguistic knowledge does not necessarily guarantee pragmatic success (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; He, 1993; Kasper & Rose, 1999).

Nowadays, it is common for students to communicate with professors via e-mails. This institutional discourse practice constitutes a unique, hybrid type of text. As noted by Bloch (2002), "using the appropriate form of language is important in establishing and maintaining relationships" (p. 124), as e-mail liaison extends the communication from inside to outside the classroom. E-mail communication entails not only "interactional" but also "transactional" situations (Brown & Yule, 1983); the former involves creating and sustaining social relations, while the latter involves exchanging information in order to get things done (Hedge, 2000, p. 264). Various speech acts can be performed through e-mails by students to their professors, such as greetings, making requests, asking for course-related information, expressing appreciation, offering apologies, making invitations, and so on. When sending an e-mail to a professor from another culture, whether with interactional or transactional goals in mind or a combination of both, students usually need to be very cautious in their choice of words and communication style. This can be very demanding for even the most proficient language learners for the following reasons.

Firstly, when writing academic e-mails, especially to people from another culture who have a higher social status, non-native students may worry about how to achieve their goals and maintain a harmonious relationship through the power of language.

Secondly, with limited exposure to the second language and never having lived in a country where that language is widely spoken, students may be unfamiliar with the appropriate social-cultural norms in that context and rely on those that are prevalent in their own cultures. This may lead to improper choice of wording and miscommunication. Foreign language learners may have reached an advanced level in terms of linguistic or grammatical proficiency, but can still be weak with regard to the application of appropriate socio-cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge in the corresponding context.

Hong Kong has long been described as a place where east meets west. As a prior colony under British rule for almost 100 years, Hong Kong has been taking 'pragmatic positions' (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), moving between the traditional culture of China and the modern cosmopolitan and international business practices. As Lee (2004a) states, "Hong Kong has more exposure to western culture than other parts of China, but traditional Chinese values and beliefs are practised there too, though in a setting that is historically unique" (p. 62).

In higher education, due to internationalisation policies, an increasing percentage of international students (including students from Mainland China) and academic staff are now studying and working here, resulting in more and more intercultural encounters. In an academic context and in intercultural communication, whether face-to-face, or by other means, English has become part of the students' routine life. E-mail, in particular, has become a widely accepted medium of interaction between university students and their professors due, in part to its advantage in allowing time to plan, edit and even proofread before sending the message. For non-native students, however, this may pose challenges and quite often they will be faced with dilemmas regarding appropriate language usage in intercultural exchanges.

Research exploring the difficulties and (un)certainties ESL/EFL learners experience in producing pragmatically appropriate speech acts is on the rise (e.g., Tanaka 1988, Robinson 1991, Cohen 1996); however, pragmatic studies of electronic communication in academia are still relatively few, as Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) observes, "so far, there is little research on student-faculty e-mail interaction that investigates how students realise communicative intent in this medium" (pp. 81-82). Few researchers have examined the potential barriers and uncertainties that non-native students may experience within such a context.

What's more, though sharing the same Chinese culture in a broad sense, sub-culture differences do exist between Hong Kong and Mainland China, especially considering the disparate political systems. Recent years have witnessed a growing number of postgraduate students from the Mainland who are studying in Hong Kong institutions of higher education. They are exposed to an institutional culture which may deviate from what they have experienced; they also are likely to encounter more professors from other cultures in Hong Kong. They soon discover the need to contact professors by e-mails an integral academic practice for graduate students. Unfortunately, research on academic e-mails in Hong Kong involving local and Mainland students as distinct cultural groups can rarely be found.

The speech act of request occurs frequently in the academic domain. Its high occurrence and face-threatening nature (Brown & Levinson, 1987) has made it "particularly interesting in a university context in which students have to negotiate a variety of both highly important and less important issues with fellow students and their professors on a regular basis" (Schauer, 2004, p. 257). Lee (2004a) also stressed that, "knowing how to make a request (both oral and written) politely and appropriately to people of different social ranks is crucial in effective communication, and the academic context is a real community that facilitates the practice" (p. 70). It is therefore worth probing this area due to the number of foreign professors working in Hong Kong, the high frequency of intercultural communication, and the extremely popular use of e-mail as a communication tool in academic settings.

To date, most pragmatics-oriented e-mail research has focused entirely on the messages stored in computers (e.g., Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Chen, 2001, Chang & Hsu, 1998; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2002, 2006), that is, the surface output, ignoring the internal thinking and composing process involved in formulating the messages. Consequently, the pragmatic perception of the learners has not yet been well considered. Pragmatic perception may play a decisive role in the e-mail writing process, since it is perception that could lead to the choice of some linguistic items instead of others. An exploration of pragmatic perception may help reveal the potential culture and value systems rooted in the learners' primary socialisation process that, at least, partly contribute to the formation of utterances.

Even more scarce are investigations into the perceptions of both the addressor and addressee and potential communication breakdowns. Concentrating merely on the pragmatic production of one side treats intercultural communication as if it is a monolithic and uni-directional process concerning only one party. Interactivity is missing in such exploration; cultural differences (e.g., values, communication styles, etc.) between the interlocutors are also largely ignored. After all, in the academic context of Hong Kong, expatriates need to adjust themselves to the local culture as well and may modify their expectations and behaviours accordingly. Embracing an intercultural perspective will undoubtedly enrich conventional experimental pragmatic studies, allowing deeper insights into the dynamics of communication that are socially, culturally, and interculturally conditioned.

1.2 Goal of the Study

The present research is an exploratory, cross-sectional, intercultural pragmatic study. It investigated both native and non-native English students' (Hong Kong and Mainland students) pragmalinguistic choices and sociopragmatic judgements in a university in Hong Kong. Both pragmatic production and perception were the research foci, with special attention on the internal cognitive processing and underlying cultural and contextual factors that may influence linguistic production. The study also examined the reaction of the target audience, with regard to the degree of politeness and appropriateness of the written output. This was intended to provide insight into (mis)matches between the expectations of the e-mail sender and the interpretations of the receiver that can result in miscommunication and intercultural misunderstanding.

1.3 Research Questions

This present research covers four major exploratory areas: pragmatic production, pragmatic perception, cognitive processing and audience judgements. It was guided by the following research questions:

Pragmatic production

1. What pragmalinguistic strategies do Native English-Speaking American Students (NS), Hong Kong Chinese Learners of English (HKCLE) and Mainland Chinese Learners of English (MLCLE) employ in electronic requests to American professors that are of an academic nature?

2. Are there any differences in the distribution of the pragmalinguistic strategies among these three groups?

Pragmatic perception

3. How certain are the senders about their choice of pragmalinguistic strategies as evidenced in the above research questions?

4. How do these three groups of students evaluate the sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance, and imposition degree of the situations?

Audience Judgement

5. How does the audience of the e-mails (American native English speaking professors) perceive the appropriateness and politeness of the messages?

6. Are there any mismatches in perception between the sender and potential receiver that could result in intercultural communication failures?

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. This first chapter presents an overview of the study: the research background, purpose, and research questions. Chapter Two introduces the theoretical framework underpinning the current research, documenting in detail the following areas: pragmatics, politeness theory, the cultural dimension of the study, the nature of e-mail communication, and empirical evidence in interlanguage pragmatics, intercultural pragmatics and e-mail pragmatic studies.

Chapter Three delineates the research methodology. It presents the instrumentation and piloting phases, the participants, data collection procedures in the main study, as well as the data coding and analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents the research findings of interlanguage pragmatic comparison and pragmalinguistic strategy distribution among the three cultural groups. Chapter Five describes the findings that draw on both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the stimulated recalls and audience judgements. The final chapter presents the conclusion of the study, the merits and limitations, the pedagogical implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A review of the literature is conducted in this chapter to provide a theoretical foundation and conceptual framework for this study. The research areas of pragmatics and politeness have been experiencing steady progress and refinements in the past forty years. Efforts have been made to define people's verbal behaviours and to interpret politeness from different angles: the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) and Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979), Politeness Principles and Grand Strategy Principles (Leech, 1983, 2005), FTA (Face-Threatening Acts) theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), politeness as socially acceptable behaviour (Meier, 1995; Watts, 2003, 2005) and politeness and face as management of rapport and SIPs (Sociopragmatic Interactional Principles) by Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2003, & 2005). A critical examination of these viewpoints facilitates a deeper understanding of current views about the cultural realisations of Chinese politeness and face values, the speech act of request and requestive strategies, and the salient features of e-mail discourse that constitute the major investigative spheres of the current study.

As the focus of the present study is requests in CMC (computer-mediated communication) by native and non-native English speakers in an academic context, pertinent studies are reviewed. Research regarding cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic investigation on requests given by ESL/EFL learners are also examined. Particular emphasis is put on non-native speakers' pragmalinguistic strategy preferences compared with those native speakers.

Interactions require more than one party; the voices of the interlocutors can shed light on what is going on in real communications. Interlanguage pragmatics research, however, does not adequately explore their perspectives as actual communicators. Intercultural pragmatics, a relatively new branch of pragmatics, may compensate with this flaw as it is interactive and involves interactants "who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and represent different cultures" (Kecskes, 2005, p. 361, see also 2.6.1). Consequently, this chapter discusses both theoretical and empirical evidence in this area, in conjunction with an exploration of the interconnection between pragmatics and intercultural communication. This is followed by a review related to features of e-mail discourse, pragmatic research on e-mails, and e-mail research on Chinese learners.

2.2 Pragmatics & Politeness Theories

2.2.1 Defining pragmatics

It is generally agreed that when talking about language use, one is referring to the realm of pragmatics. This is because "since the early 1980s, when it first became common to discuss pragmatics in general linguistics, the most common definitions of pragmatics were: meaning in use or meaning in context" (Thomas, 1995, pp. 1-2). While both are subfields of linguistics, the notion of pragmatics is distinguished from semantics, which is traditionally defined as the study of meaning (of words, phrases, sentences, and texts) (Richards & Schmidt, 1992, p. 478). As Leech (1983, pp. 5-6) states, both fields are concerned with meaning, but the difference between them can be traced to two different uses of the verb 'to mean':

What does X mean?

What did you mean by X?

These two sentences illustrate the boundary dispute between semantics and pragmatics is at the centre of distinguishing 'language' (langue) and 'language use' (parole) or division of labour between the sense of an utterance and its force by Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975).

Also concerned with meaning, pragmatics is "the study of speaker meaning; the study of contextual meaning; the study of how more gets communicated than is said; and the study of the expression of relative distance" (Yule, 1996, p. 3). Yule's idea, by and large, expresses the defining properties of pragmatics: meaning beyond literal sense, which is restrained by the context while reflecting the social relationship between the interlocutors. To be more specific, it addresses questions about how language is used in communication:

- How linguistic communicators choose the form of their utterances;
- How interpreters arrive at a representation of what is communicated;
- The role played by non-linguistic factors, including cognitive & social contexts – how do people's perceptions of contextual factors (e.g., who the interlocutors are, their role relationships, and what circumstances they are communicating in) influence the process of producing and interpreting language (Spencer-Oatey & Zegarac, 2002).

In accordance with the authors' theoretical orientations and audience, pragmatics has been defined in various ways. Among these, the definition offered by Crystal is appealing due to its usefulness for second language pedagogy, and hence, it has been widely quoted. It states that pragmatics is "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (Crystal, 1997, p. 301).

On the one hand, pragmatics is a branch of linguistics and inseparable from grammatically correct choices of language to express the meaning; while on the other hand, the language uttered or written is subject to sociocultural and other contextual factors; the intended meaning of the speaker may be beyond the expression itself and could be interpreted by the interactant in terms of his or her own estimation of all the possible factors. This explication corresponds to Leech (1983) as he focuses on pragmatics as interpersonal rhetoric – the way speakers and writers accomplish goals as social actors who do not just need to get things done but must attend to their interpersonal relationships with other participants at the same time.

2.2.2 Pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics

A question may arise as to how people could realise their goals and attend to interpersonal relationships while using language. Both Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) have attempted to map out the relevant territory for the study of how people achieve this, and divided pragmatics into two components: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.

Pragmalinguistics refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings. It is concerned with pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and a large range of linguistic forms which can intensify or soften communicative acts (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 2). Pragmalinguistic knowledge provides the linguistic tools for implementing sociopragmatic rules. Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, is described by Leech (1983) as "the sociological interface of pragmatics" (p. 10), referring to the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action. A speaker–hearer's sociopragmatic knowledge encompasses knowledge about social norms, cultural rules, conventional ways of acting and interpreting the actions of others, "world knowledge" of everyday processes and procedures, and language users' sense of what is appropriate and acceptable in human interaction and what is not. Speech communities differ in their assessment of speakers' and hearers' social distance and social power, their rights and obligations, and the degree of imposition involved in particular communicative acts (see Blum-Kulk, House, & Kasper, 1989; Olstain, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993, for review). As Kasper (1997) emphasises, the values of context factors are negotiable; they are subject to change through the dynamics of conversational interaction.

This subdivision may describe the relations of three subjects: linguistics, sociology, and pragmatics. The first two can be viewed as the two ends of a line, with pragmatics in between. As Thomas (1983) explains, pragmalinguistics is, in a sense, akin to grammar in that it consists of linguistic forms and their respective functions; while sociopragmatics is very much about social behaviour that is concerned "proper" in a particular context. Pragmalinguistic knowledge provides the linguistic tools for implementing sociopragmatic rules. Sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics are inseparable and intertwined in real-world language use, and both are needed in order for the users to communicate successfully in certain socio-cultural context.

2.2.3 From communicative competence to pragmatic competence

The notion of communicative competence was first introduced by the anthropologist and sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1972) as a reaction to Chomsky's (1965) account of competence as the knowledge of rules of grammar. For Hymes, the contextual appropriateness of language use was overlooked by Chomsky. Competence, according to Hymes (1972), should be extended to encompass both grammatical competence and knowledge of socio-cultural rules of appropriate language use, that is, both knowledge and the ability to use this underlying knowledge.

This proposition "typified the transformation in the study of language at that time from an interest in the language system in isolation to the study of language in use" (Barron, 2003, p. 8). Based on this shift, attempts were made by others to further develop the theoretical concept of communicative competence, including developing the notion of pragmatic competence. Canale and Swain (1980) put forward a three-competence framework, which was modified by Canale (1983) to include the following: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. The first originates from

Chomsky's formulation of linguistic competence and the second, sociolinguistic competence is based on Hymes' work, which concerns the individual's understanding of social relations and choices of language in relation to it. Discourse competence involves the ability to handle language beyond the level of sentence, to understand the rules of discourse, such as cohesion and coherence in both written and spoken texts. The last one, strategic competence, refers to the communication strategies employed to compensate for gaps in knowledge system or a lack of fluency, or strategies to enhance the effectiveness of communication (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Pragmatic competence was "essentially included in this model under sociolinguistic competence"; however, "it was not until Bachman (1990) that pragmatic competence came into its own" (Barron, 2003, p. 9). In Bachman's model (1990, p. 87), there are three key elements of communicative competence: language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms. Language competence is subdivided into organisational competence and pragmatic competence. Organisational competence comprises knowledge of linguistic units and the rules of joining them together at the levels of sentence (grammatical competence) and discourse (textual competence). Pragmatic competence, on the other hand, is broken down into illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence: Illocutionary competence is conceived of as knowledge of speech acts and language functions, and sociolinguistic competence is "the sensitivity to, or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context," and the ability to "perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context" (Bachman, 1990, p. 94). It is worth noting that strategic competence plays a central role in this framework, and this deviates from Canale and Swain's presentation. This element of competence carries out "a mediating role between meaning intentions, underlying competences (language competences and its subdivisions), background knowledge, and context of situation" (Skehan, 1998, p. 161). For this reason, the aforementioned language competence and concomitant competences are by nature knowledge-based, whereas the other two, namely strategic and psychophysiological competence are ability-based. In actual communications, they work dynamically in accordance with the contextual factors.

As Kasper notes (1997), Bachman's model makes clear that pragmatic competence is not extra or ornamental, like the icing on a cake. It is not subordinated to knowledge of grammar and text organisation but co-ordinated to formal linguistic and textual knowledge and interacts with organisational competence in complex ways. In order to communicate successfully in a target language, pragmatic competence in a L2 must be reasonably well developed. In particular, the distinction between illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence are in line with Leech's (1983) and Thomas' division of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. For adult non-native speakers, they can generally get a considerable amount of L2 pragmatic knowledge for free because some pragmatic knowledge is universal (such as knowledge of conversational routines, the internal structure of speech events, organisational principles of discourse, etc.) and other aspects may be successfully transferred from the learners' first language (L1) (e.g., If there is a corresponding form-function mapping between L1 and L2, and the forms can be used in corresponding L2 contexts with corresponding effects). Knowledge of this subsumes both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic types of information (Kasper, 1997, retrievable from http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW06/). In pragmatics studies, politeness can be a major theoretical component and has increasingly been the focus in the analysis of real-life language use. The next section presents the theories pertinent to politeness.

2.2.4 Nature of politeness

Politeness phenomenon is considered by Grundy (1995, 2008) as a means of characterising the use of language to communicate in an 'acceptable' manner and also a way of encoding distance between speakers and addressees. In the past thirty years or so within pragmatics there has been a great deal of interest in politeness, "to such an extent that politeness theory could almost be seen as a sub-discipline of pragmatics" (Thomas, 1995, p. 149).

2.2.4.1 From the Politeness Principle to Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP)

Among the most well-known contributors to politeness research, Lakoff (1972, 1973) rates politeness principles as having wide descriptive power in respect of language use and according to him, the following constitute rules of politeness:

1) Don't impose.

2) Give options.

3) Make the addressee feel good – be friendly.

In Leech's (1983) view, the principles of politeness are the major determinants of linguistic behaviour and interpersonal rhetoric. He sees politeness as crucial in explaining "why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean" and established the Politeness Principle (PP) to "rescue" the Cooperative Principle (CP) by explaining why speakers do not always observe the Gricean maxims (Thomas, 1995, p. 159). Over the years, along with the development of both general pragmatics and politeness theories, the influential works of Leech have also gone through the transformation from the earliest Politeness Principle (PP) to the latest Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP).

2.2.4.1.1 Politeness Principle in relation to Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle was proposed by Grice in his *Logic and Conversation* (1975) in order to explain the mechanisms by which people interpret the conversational implicature – how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning. He introduced four maxims in conversations: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. He also noted that there are many occasions when people fail to observe the maxims: flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, or suspending a maxim (Thomas, 1995, p. 64). Leech's PP can work as an explanative tool to sort out these non-observance phenomena. His PP is thus usually considered to be of the same status as the Gricean CP. The core of PP states that: Minimise (all things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs; Maximise (all things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs. It contains a series of maxims:

> **The Tact maxim:** Minimise the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other; maximise the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to other.
>
> **The Generosity maxim:** Minimise the expression of benefit to self; maximise the expression of cost to self.
>
> **The Approbation maxim:** Minimise the expression of beliefs which express dispraise of other; maximise the expression of beliefs which express approval of other.
>
> **The Modesty maxim**: Minimise praise of self; maximise dispraise of self.
>
> **The Agreement maxim:** Minimise the expression of disagreement between self and other; maximise the expression of agreement between self and other.

The Sympathy maxim: Minimise antipathy between self and other; maximise sympathy between self and other.

(Leech, 1983, pp. 131-139)

The following example illustrates how PP works when CP is not observed:

Example 1:

A So what do you think of Mark?

B His flatmate's a wonderful cook.

(Cited in Cutting, 2002, p. 39)

B does not say that she was not very impressed with Mark, but by not mentioning him in the reply and apparently saying something irrelevant, she implies it. This exchange falls into the category of 'flouting' of relations when speakers expect that the hearers will be able to imagine what the utterances did not say, and thereby make the connection between their utterance and the preceding one(s) (Grice, 1981). The non-observance may well be interpreted by the approbation maxim of PP, that is, the speaker is trying to minimise the expression of beliefs which express dispraise of the other.

Despite the usefulness of PP in explaining and understanding the conversation implicature, it has been criticised by many researchers (see, for example, Dillon et al. 1985; Thomas, 1986; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990). The flaw is that "there appears to be no motivated way of restricting the number of maxims and in theory… it would be possible to produce a new maxim to explain every tiny perceived irregularity in language use" (Thomas, 1995, p. 167). In both Leech's and Lakoff's approaches, what is missing is a conceptualization of linguistic utterances not just as actions, but, more importantly, as social actions (Watts, 2003). These arguments have given birth to subsequent theories that treat politeness in a more comprehensive way. Brown and Levinson's FTAs (face-threatening acts) theory or 'face-saving' theory (1978, 1987) has become the most influential one, which will be discussed in detail in 2.2.3.2.

2.2.4.1.2 Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP)

Owing to the many arguments against both PP and Brown and Levinson's FTA, especially those originating from the investigation of politeness in Eastern societies, Leech re-examined the issue of whether there is an East-West divide in politeness and proposed an overarching framework for studying this linguistic phenomenon in communication–Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP), which he described as a "common principle of politeness" (Leech, 2005, p. 1).

The GSP states that in order to be polite, a speaker communicates meanings which (a) place a high value on what relates to the other person (typically the addressee), (MAJOR CONSTRAINT) and (b) place a low value on what relates to the speaker (MINOR CONSTRAINT) (Leech, 2005, p. 1, emphasis in original).

According to Leech, the hearer-oriented constraint (a) is more powerful than the speaker-oriented constraint (b). It is assumed that GSP provides a very general explanation for communicative politeness phenomenon in Eastern languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korea, as well as in western languages such as English.

'Constraint' was used instead of 'maxim', in an attempt not to be misconstrued or to sound morally imperative (Leech, 2005). With GSP as a super-constraint, PP can be reformulated as four constraint pairs that display the asymmetry between the speaker and their communicating partners. The constraint pairs are, in effect, the variant manifestations of GSP, for instance, Generosity/Tact Constraint in the following exchanges: A observes the constraint of Tact by placing a low value on what relates to him/herself as a speaker and B observes the Generosity Constraint by giving a high value on what relates to the other side, A.

Example 2:

A: Could I help myself to a tiny sip of Sherry?

B: Of course, you can! Have as much as you like!

Apart from these four pairs, another pair of Sympathy/Feeling-reticence was introduced to help explain the general tendency in politeness of putting high value on other people's feelings in such speech acts as congratulations and condolences, while putting low value on one's own feelings. The most striking advancement of the GSP may lie in the fact that in relation to the sub-constraints, it is able to delineate linguistic politeness occurring in different languages and cultures, as has been shown by Leech in Japanese, Chinese, Korean and English with specific examples. By virtue of these exemplifications, he tries to convey that there is a common pragmatic and behavioural basis for the differing polite linguistic behaviour in different societies, so that "(for example) when Chinese speakers talk of *lǐmào* and English speakers talk of politeness they are not talking about totally unrelated phenomena" (Leech, 2005, p. 26). In other words, despite the widely-admitted differential Eastern and Western value orientations, there is not necessarily a East-West divide in politeness in that the differences are scalar instead of absolute, and while scales of politeness depend on scales of values, they can also be utilised to express differences in values.

Being a burgeoning framework, however, GSP is still in great need of further explorations and evidence from all sides to provide a strong theoretical account of politeness phenomenon. In addition, the ten pragmatic constraints listed by Leech are "simply important manifestations of the GSP" and may be "incomplete" (2005, p. 17), as he himself put it.

2.2.4.2 Politeness as management of face

2.2.4.2.1 Brown and Levinson's FTA (Face Threatening Acts) Theory

Brown and Levinson's FTA (face-threatening acts) theory or face-saving theory (1978, 1987) has remained the most seminal and influential starting point for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contrastive pragmatics (Leech, 2005), despite its Western bias and their affirmation of "pan-cultural interpretability of politeness phenomena" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 288).

Following Lakoff (1972, 1973) and Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson build their theory on the Gricean model of Cooperative Principle (CP). "Face" is the central notion of the theory, which was developed by Goffman (1967). With certain modifications, Brown and Levinson (1987) defined it as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in negative and positive face. Face can be damaged, maintained, or enhanced through interaction with others. An individual's positive face is reflected in his or her desire to be liked, approved of, respected, and appreciated by others. An individual's negative face is reflected in the desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have the freedom to act as one chooses.

Combined with Austin's Speech Act theory (1962), Brown and Levinson suggest that certain illocutionary acts are liable to damage or threaten another person's face and these acts are known as "face-threatening acts". This theory is explained by Thomas (1995) as follows:

> An illocutionary act has the potential to damage the hearer's positive face (by, for example, insulting H (hearer) or expressing disapproval of something which H holds dear), or H's negative face (an order, for example, will impinge upon H's freedom of action); or S's (speaker's) positive face (if S has to admit to having botched a job, for example) or S's negative face (if S is cornered into making an offer of help). In order to reduce the possibility of damage to H's face or to the S's own face, he or she may adopt certain strategies. The choice of strategy will be made on the basis of the S's assessment of the size of the FTA. The speaker can calculate the size of the FTA on the basis of the parameters of power (P), distance (D) and rating of imposition (R). These combined values determine the overall 'weightness' of the FTA which in turn influences the strategy used (p. 169).

The strategy types proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) are illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 FTA (Face Threatening Acts) Theory

greater

estimated risk of face-loss to address

I. Do the FTA → Go on record—on record without redressive action

I. Do the FTA → Go off record: addressing it to H's positive face;
addressing it to H's negative face;
using off-record politeness.

II. Do not perform FTA

lesser

According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), it is a universal characteristic across cultures that speakers should respect each other's expectations regarding self-image, take account of their feelings, and avoid FTAs. When FTAs are unavoidable, speakers can redress the threat with negative politeness that respects H's negative face. Or they can redress the FTA with positive politeness that attends the positive face or use off-record strategies by using hints, metaphors, vague or ambiguous expressions, ellipsis, etc. (Cutting, 2002, p. 45).

2.2.4.2.2 Contextual variables

Brown and Levinson (1987) developed the equation "Wx = D (S,H) + P(S,H) + Rx", (Where x is the FTA; W stands for weight of FTA; D, P, and R refer to distance, power and imposition degree respectively), to indicate the reasons interlocutors choose one communication strategy rather than another. Since then, a large number of empirical studies have provided considerable evidence for an association between language use and the variables of power, distance, and imposition degree of certain situations, so have the linguists who study requests (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Lim & Bowers, 1991, etc.). This section will discuss the variables of power, distance, and imposition in turn.

Power

The notion of power was first defined by Brown and Gilman (1972) as follows:

> One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behaviour (p. 255).

In sociolinguistic and pragmatic research, power is typically operationalised in terms of unequal role relations, such as teacher-student or employer-employee (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). French and Raven (1959) gave a classic characterisation of five bases of social power:

> Reward Power: One person has control over positive outcomes that another person desires.
>
> Coercive Power: One person has control over negative outcomes that another person wants to avoid.
>
> Expert Power: One person has some special knowledge or expertise that another wants or needs.
>
> Legitimate Power: One person has the right to prescribe or expect certain things of another person.
>
> Referent Power: One person has power over another because the other admires and wants to be like him/her in some respect. (pp. 150-167)

Psychological research indicates that power is a universal dimension of interpersonal relations which is relatively unitary in nature. Although there may be different types or sources of power, a person who has one type of power very often (but not invariably) also has other types of power (Spencer-Oatey, 1996). For instance, in an academic context, teachers typically have the first four of these types of power (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 33), but it is also possible that all these six types can be covered by the teacher's role. Teachers' reward power can be related to such things as lending books, giving suggestions for future careers, etc. Similarly, they may also influence the students in a reverse way, that is, through their coercive power. Teachers possess the knowledge students need to learn and can be the role model in this aspect; therefore, they also have expert power and referential power over the students. In some cultures, by virtue of their status, teachers can expect students to do some tasks for them (carry their books, clean the board, etc.), and hence, have legitimate power as well (Thomas, 1995, p. 127).

Social distance

The term *social distance* was seen by Leech (1983) as a composite of psychologically real factors (status, age, sex, degree of intimacy, etc.) which "together determine the overall degree of respectfulness" (p. 126) within a given speech situati .ı. Namely, if a person is close to someone (e.g., similar in terms of age, social class, sex, occupation, etc.), he or she may feel it is not as necessary to employ indirectness in, say, making a request than he or she would in making request of a stranger.

According to Fukushima (2003), however, among the three variables of power, social distance, and imposition, distance is the one which researchers of pragmatics seem to have given the most varied interpretations. Based on an examination of a series of pragmatic studies in which various labels were employed by different authors, Spencer-Oatey (1996, p. 7) identified the varying interpretations of distance as comprising one or more of the following (often overlapping) components:

(1) Social similarity/difference (e.g., Brown & Gilman, 1972 [1960])

(2) Frequency of contact (e.g., Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988)

(3) Length of acquaintance (e.g., Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988)

(4) Familiarity, or how well people know each other (e.g., Holmes, 1990)

(5) Sense of like-mindedness (e.g., Brown & Gilman, 1972 [1960])

(6) Positive/negative affect (e.g., Baxter, 1984)

As suggested by Spencer-Oatey (1996), "in many respects, illustrative role relationships can be extremely helpful, because we all have prototypical conceptions of the nature of given types of role relationships" (p. 5). In an academic context for example, distance between teacher and student is often understood as the closeness of the role-relationship between them, which could be subject to the first four categories of the above set of interpretations: first, social similarity/difference, i.e., whether people are similar or different in terms of age, social class, occupation, sex, ethnicity, beliefs and value systems; second, frequency of contact, i.e., how often people get in touch with each other; third, length of acquaintance, i.e., how long the two parties have known each other; and fourth, familiarity, or how well they know each other. These four factors working together may define what is meant by "distance" in that specific context and they are consequently considered the most relevant to the present study.

It merits attention, however, due to the dynamism of the interpersonal relationships, all the six categories could be actively in play. For example, the last one, "positive/negative affect" has aroused debate regarding whether "affect" should be separated from "distance" (Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988). In his cross-cultural pragmatics research project, Fukushima (2003) included "affect" into the consideration of the variable "social distance", which subsumed various kinds of relationships, one of which was friends-not friends. In the present study, this element of "affect" will not be treated as hugely relevant as the other four, in that the relationship is limited solely to "student-professor" in a university context where the student is considered one of the many in the course(s) that the teacher gives. It would therefore be unrealistic to define "affect" in a typical sense to be useful for the current study.

Spencer-Oatey (1996, p. 6) cautioned that people's understanding of "role relations" and their "prototypical conceptions" of them vary in different cultural contexts. For example, in her earlier study, she (1993) found that British and Chinese tutors and postgraduate students have rather differing conceptulisations of the typical degrees of power and distance of the tutor-postgraduate student relationship.

Additionally, Spencer-Oatey (1996, p. 7) further recommends that sometimes an exemplary clarification may be necessary for people to gain a full picture of what "distance" is like in a particular cultural context.

Size of imposition

Imposition can be a very important concept in performing requests since it is closely related to the idea of how great the request is. In terms of the degree of imposition, some linguists differ in the use of terminology. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) refer to the *small-great ranking* of imposition, whereas Baxter (1984) uses *not at all–a great deal of magnitude* of request, and Scollon and Scollon (2001) employ +/- for *weight* of imposition.

Another difference is in whether to include rights and obligations in imposition. In fact, rights and obligations can be taken as the decisive parameters of imposition, since "imposition will also be influenced by whether the requester has a right to make a certain request and whether the requestee has an obligation to pursue the request" (Fukushima, 2003, p. 88). That is, the degree of imposition of the requested act will be high if the requester does not have the right to make a certain request, and the requestee does not have the obligation to pursue it. The assignment of rights and obligations is then subject to power difference, as well as cultural and individual difference (Fukushima, 2003, p. 89). For example, in some cultures, doing certain tasks can be the student's obligation and the teacher's right, while this is not the case in others. This will inevitably affect the assessment of the size of imposition.

Aside from rights and obligations, imposition is also determined by such factors as time, effort, financial burden, and psychological burden (Fukushima, 2003). First, what is requested may be material or non-material and a value is attached to what is asked for. If it is something of high value, the financial burden on the hearer may be great and the degree of imposition may be high. Second, if the request necessitates considerable responsibility from the requestee, it may put psychological pressure on him or her, sometimes both financial and psychological burden. The request may then be more impositive. Third, if it is a non-material request that requires considerable time or efforts or both, the degree of imposition may also be high.

Situational reasonableness can be another factor that influences the degree of imposition (Fukushima, 2003). It could be less impositive if the request is situationally reasonable than if the request is not situationally reasonable. Hoppe-Graff et al. (1985, p. 90) divides the situations into standard and non-standard ones according to the frequency of occurrence: standard situations are often recurring situations and non-standard situations are uncommon or rarely occurring ones. This division can be linked with "reasonableness" in the sense that in standard situations there may be more situational reasonableness than in non-standard ones.

In the case of student-professor e-mail exchanges in a university context, for instance, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) notes that the power dimension across the messages between the students and the professor is stable – the professor (the e-mail recipient) is in position of relative authority over the student (the e-mail sender) by virtue of their institutional relationship; and second, the social distance dimension is also relatively stable and can be characterised as low since students and professors typically have frequent and regular interactions in the institutional context. What varies is the imposition of students' e-mail requests on the professor. It has to be borne in mind that this claim was made based on her study in a major university in America, the findings of which may not be easily applicable to other cultural contexts.

It is very important to note, however, that the sociopragmatic variables are not independent, as Watts, Ide, and Ehlich (2005, p. 9) argue. For example, the degree to which a social act is considered to be an imposition depends crucially on power and distance. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 78) also admit that the three factors interact with each other.

2.2.4.2.3 Critique of Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and Grice's (1975) theory of conversation, which posited a number of universal conversational principles led to widely accepted paradigms in the 1970s and 1980s (Watts, 2005). Since then, a flood of research has been inspired, in an attempt to investigate the extent to which politeness can be universal and the degree of the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in ways of speaking. Some of the most well-known studies include the CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns) that was carried out in the 1980s by Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, et al., the exploration of the "different cultures, different languages, different speech acts" between English and Polish by Wierzbicka (1985), and the comparison of the request strategies in British English and Japanese by Fukushima (1996).

This theory, however, has also been criticised for describing saving face as a universal politeness phenomenon and for taking cultural relativity for granted. Gu (1990), for instance, argues that the model is unsuited to Chinese usage, as politeness phenomenon still reflects to some degree the etymology of the word for *politeness*, one of whose constituent morphemes (*li*) denotes social order. Matsumoto (1989) also argues that in Japanese the structures associated with negative politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's model do not have a negative politeness function but instead are a social register. Wierzbicka (2003) raises the point that the sentence formula like *Can you pass the salt*? would be understood as a genuine question in some cultures, instead of a polite request, as it would be interpreted in languages like English or Spanish.

However, despite the fact that the FTA has been criticised as pointing out a tendency towards ethnocentrism, it is still popularly quoted and employed due to its undeniable advantages. Historically speaking, the theory of Brown and Levinson connects politeness with the social-cultural and other contextual factors, compensating for Lakoff (1972, 1973) and Leech's (1983) "maxims" by making the linguistic actions "social actions" and can help deal with many a politeness instance. In addition, its practicality in terms of analysis of speech act and contextual variables, earns its great value in politeness study.

2.2.4.3 Politeness as socially acceptable behaviour

Brown and Levinson's framework has given rise to the idea that politeness is inherent in certain speech acts, syntactic constructions, lexical items, prosodic contours, and pragmatic features (Meier, 1995). Some researchers, however, Kasper (1990) for instance, argue that strategies and means of politeness are not endowed with absolute politeness; neither a particular style nor particular syntactic constructions can be polite or impolite. This leads to the notion of politeness as *socially appropriate* or *acceptable*. Werkhofer (2003) maintains that appropriateness is a pre-condition of politeness behaviour. Craig, Tracy, and Spisak (1986, cited in Meier, 1995) are also concerned with appropriateness, finding it to be inherently confounded with politeness judgements.

According to Zimin (1981), politeness can only be judged relative to a particular context and to particular addressees' expectations, and, as such, is part of utterance meaning rather than sentence meaning. It is thus dynamic, relative, and negotiable. Viewing politeness as socially accepted behaviour hence allows the integration of context and the underlying cultural assumptions and also the possibility of over-politeness, a case of "an excessive amount of deference being shown in a situation that warrants less" (Meier, 1995, p. 352). In the meantime, it matches linguistic choices to the specific interactional context that may entail various social, contextual and cultural elements in play, such as the communicative orientations, expectations, beliefs, communicative styles of the interlocutors, the role relationship between them, the values held by each, so on and so forth.

In line with this perspective, Spencer-Oatey (2005) agrees that (im)politeness entails "the subjective judgements that people make about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour. In other words, it is not behaviour per se that is polite, politic (cf. Watts, 2003), or impolite; rather (im)politeness is an evaluative label that people attach to behaviour, as a result of their subjective judgements about social appropriateness" (p. 97). She considers (im)politeness as an umbrella term covering all kinds of evaluative meanings (e.g., warm, friendly, considerate, respectful, deferential, insolent, aggressive, rude), which can have positive, negative, or neutral connotations, and the judgements can impact upon people's perceptions of their social relationship and harmony.

A shift of attention in the field of pragmatics towards a more sociopragmatically-oriented investigation can be reflected in the aforementioned arguments. Greater importance seems to be attached to sociopragmatics and second and foreign language learners' sociopragmatic competence. According to Kasper and Rover (2005), such competence

> ...encompasses the knowledge of the relationships between communicative action and power, social distance, and the imposition associated with a past or future event (Brown & Levinson, 1987), knowledge of mutual rights and obligations, taboos, and conventional practices (Thomas, 1983), or quite generally, the social conditions and consequences of "what you do, when, and to whom" (Fraser, Rintell, & Walters, 1981) (p. 317).

Although computer-mediated communication (CMC) has received increasing scholarly attention over the last fifteen years, pragmatic constraints (sociopragmatic ones in particular), related to the cognitive, social, and cultural contexts for the production and understanding of messages are still underresearched (Bou-Franch, 2004). The notion of appropriateness is, therefore, highly relevant to pragmatic studies with a strong sociopragmatic orientation, especially in terms of perceptions of politeness by people from different cultures. In addition, according to Meier (1995), this focus can provide a functional basis of analysis, grounded in social interaction, and perhaps prevent seeking universals where there are none to be found.

2.2.4.4 Politeness as rapport management

Theorists generally agree that face is a universal phenomenon and everyone has the same fundamental face concerns. Taking the criticisms of Brown and Levinson's notions under consideration, Spencer-Oatey (2000) proposed a modified framework for conceptualising face and rapport, in which more attention is paid to the social and interpersonal aspects, and the management of harmonious/disharmonious relationship between people. This rapport management theory comprises two components: the management of face and the management of social rights, each of which can be subdivided into two interrelated aspects:

a. *Quality face*: concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of such personal qualities as competence, abilities, appearance, etc. and so is closely associated with our sense of personal self-esteem.
b. *Identity face*: concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles, and is closely associated with our sense of public worth.
c. *Equality rights*: we have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others, so that we are treated fairly; that we are not unduly imposed upon, unfairly ordered about, taken advantage of or exploited.
d. *Association rights*: we have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that we have with them. (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 14)

Different from FTA, this model incorporates a social and interdependent perspective to the management of relations, and draws a distinction between face needs and social rights. Thus, the concept of *negative face* in FTA is treated as a social right rather than a face need (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 15). Correspondingly, there exist rapport-threatening behaviours and specific speech act strategies to assist in managing people's face and sociality rights. It is worth noting that this approach gives remarkable prominence to culture and cultural differences that "can have a major impact on people's assessment of appropriate language use, and hence rapport-management outcomes" (p. 15). Five domains represent the underlying cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variations: contextual assessment norms, sociopragmatic conventions, pragmalinguistic conventions, fundamental cultural values and inventory of rapport-management strategies. As both a pragmaticist and intercultural theorist, Spencer-Oatey has for many years advocated the treatment of culture as an explanatory element in pragmatic studies. She maintains that this can deepen our understanding of language use across cultures, the idea of which is well developed in her subsequent work on sociopragmatic interactional principles (SIPs).

2.2.4.4.1 Sociopragmatic Interactional Principles (SIPs)

SIPs are defined and explained as

> …socioculturally-based principles, scalar in nature, that guide or influence people's productive and interpretive use of language. The principles are typically value-linked, so that in a given culture and/or situational context, there are norms or preferences regarding the implementation of the principles, and any failure to implement the principles as expected may result in mild to strong evaluative judgements. Preferences for different points on the scale will develop through the socialization process and through exposure to (and involvement in) natural interactions and these

preferences will frequently vary from context to context and from culture to culture." (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003, p. 1635)

SIPs stem from, and also reconceptualise the notion of PP. Leech (2005, p. 13) recognises SIPs as the specific realisations of the GSP and also the more modern view of PP. However, the key difference between them is "for maxims, one end of a dimension is typically 'more desirable' (e.g., agreement is said to be more desirable than disagreement), whereas for interactional principles, different points on the scale may be preferred in different circumstances" (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003, p. 1635).

SIPs are sociopragmatically-oriented and social-culturally rooted in that different societies and cultures breed different norms, values, and preferences, the knowledge of which can help manage people's face and rapport concerns, with all relevant social and contextual factors well embraced and balanced, such as the interactional rights and obligations, the power relationship, and social distance, relative to the task needs. SIPs share strong theoretical similarity with the view of politeness as socially appropriate behaviour, in the way that "no sentence is inherently polite or impolite" (Fraser & Nolen, 1981, p. 96), but is used under the constraint of the dynamic interplay of all sorts of social-cultural factors. Rapport management is thus an active process, so are people's perceptions of it.

2.2.4.4.2 Interrelationships of politeness, face, and rapport

With authentic discourse data, Spencer-Oatey (2005) further explored *rapport* and unpackaged people's judgements of *rapport* in actual interactions into three elements: behavioural expectations, face sensitivities, and interactional goals.

Above all, in line with the social mode of politeness, she takes politeness to be subjective judgements that people make about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Spencer-Oatey, 2005, p. 97). Politeness judgements derive mainly from people's behavioural expectations, which can be unravelled into contractual/legal agreements and requirements, role specifications, behavioural conventions & norms, and interactional principles, or SIPs.

Next, a review of the debates on face and relevant empirical evidence seems to point to the urgency of making a distinction between two fundamental types of face: face that is pan-situational and face that is situation-specific. These two are labelled as *respectability face* and *identity face* respectively by Spencer-Oatey (2005, p. 102, emphasis in original). The former entails the Chinese notion of *mianzi* and *lian*, and refers to the prestige, honour, or "good name" that a person or social group holds and claims within a broader community. It can be regarded as a composite measure that reflects the relative weights attributed to attributes such as biographical variables (e.g., age, sex), relational attributes (e.g., marriage ties), social status indicators (e.g., educational attainment, occupational status, wealth), formal title/position/rank, personal reputation (moral or amoral), and integrity (Ho, 1994, p. 276). The latter, on the other hand, is situational specific and therefore highly vulnerable; it is the very type of face that can be threatened or enhanced in specific interactional encounters – the one that is widely discussed in politeness research.

Borrowing work from social psychology on self-aspects, Spencer-Oatey (2005) proposes that people's claims to identity face are based on the positive social values that they associate with their various self-aspects. These self-aspects, according to Simon (2004, p. 45), are cognitive categories that serve to process and organise information about oneself, such as psychological characteristics or traits, physical features, roles, abilities, tastes, attitudes, behaviours, and explicit group or category membership. If these self-aspect sensitivities are challenged or undermined, people may perceive a threat to their face; conversely, if their sensitivities are ingratiated appropriately, people may perceive an enhancement of their identity face. These sensitivities can occur across a range of elements, including: bodily features and control (e.g., skin blemishes), possessions and belongings (material and affiliative), performance/skills (e.g., musical performance), social behaviour (e.g., gift giving), and verbal behaviour (e.g., wording of illocutionary acts, stylistic choice) (Spencer-Oatey, 2005, p.104). She also quotes the psychologist Schwartz's work on universal values (e.g., Schwarz, 1992; Schwarz et al., 2001, cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2005) to explicate the positive social values that people may claim for themselves and hence be sensitive to. Table 2.1 expounds the meanings of the ten value constructs identified by Schwarz, and some related face qualities identified by Spencer-Oatey (2005, p. 106).

Table 2.1 Schwartz's value constructs and their associated qualities

Value Construct	Explanation	Illustrative Associated Qualities
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	Wealthy, authoritative, high social status, dominant
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Capable, ambitious, intelligent, successful
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself	Fun-loving, sensuous
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life	Adventurous, stimulating, daring, enterprising
Self-direction	Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring	Independent, free, self-sufficient, unrestrained
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature	Understanding, tolerance, appreciative, peace-loving, considerate
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	Loyal, helpful, honest, forgiving, responsible, caring
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or	Humble, conservative, traditional

	religion provide the self	
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	Obedient, restrained, self-disciplined, polite
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, relationships, and of self	Protective, nationalistic

Spencer-Oatey (2005) reminds us that people are likely to vary in the importance they attach to the various qualities, both because of their personal value systems and the context. Their perceptions of the face qualities may be diverse and highly dependent on the dynamics of the specific interactional context. For instance, in certain situations, people may care more about the construct of *achievement*, while in others their focal face attention may be diverted to *benevolence*, or combination of other aspects.

Last but not least, interactional goals or wants is another vital facet that cannot be ignored. Communication normally contains not only "interactional", but also "transactional" situations, with the former involving establishing and maintaining social relations, while the latter involving exchanging information in order to get things done (Hedge, 2000, p. 264). Consequently, people's goals in interactions may be very concrete, and hence transactional, such as to fulfil a task, or relational, to keep or promote the relationship with the other part and so on. The two types of goals are very often interconnected. When the achievement of one goal causes an undesirable effect on the other, people will have to be very strategic in managing rapport.

Rapport management and people's perceptions of it can be a rather perplexing and dynamic process concerning the workings of both social and psychologically related components: behavioural expectations, face sensitivities, and interactional goals. The parsing of this is expected to facilitate the analysis of cross-cultural and cross-contextual similarities and differences in real life communications in future; however, as a means of theoretical interpretation, still more research is needed in this area to broaden knowledge on these concepts, as Spencer-Oatey (2005) herself realises.

2.2.4.5 Chinese politeness – value orientation, face, and politeness

Value orientations

The value orientations of the East and West differ in that they are rooted in different original philosophical beliefs. According to Kim (1994, pp. 25-26), in Western Europe and North America, liberalism became a dominant philosophy that delineates the conception of self and society; in East Asia, Confucianism became the dominant moral-political philosophy. To go further, liberal tradition focuses on individual rights and self-fulfilment, i.e., individualism; Confucianism promotes the collective and welfare and harmony as its ultimate goal, which yields collectivism.

Hofstede (1991) claims that the underlying values of individualism and collectivism cultures shape the meaning people give to their life-style, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. He defines individualism and collectivism as:

> Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his other immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. (p. 51)

In the status-unequal relationship between teachers and students in the university context, the influence of cultural I-C (Individualism-Collectivism) seems to be embodied in the way students and teachers rate *self*, *other*, and the power difference between them. Many researchers have analysed cultural differences in people's attitudes to authority. In some cultures, it is claimed that inequalities of authority and power are accepted as normal facts of life. If a person has a higher status or position than others, it is to be expected that this person will exercise authority openly and enjoy other privileges that go with power. In other cultures, however obvious it may be that differences of power exist in reality; there is a tendency to minimise the differences and reduce their effects. It is usually stated that differences in power and authority are accepted most readily in more collectivist cultures (see for example, Hofstede, 1994, pp. 54-57; Smith & Bond, 1993, pp. 39-40; Triandis, 1995, p. 46). This may be because a general orientation towards (or dependence on) the group is also likely to lead members to accept roles which are defined in terms of their position within that group, from the leader at the top of the hierarchy to the followers at the bottom. China, the birth place of Confucianism, has normally been taken as one typical collectivistic country. The underlying conventions, inner beliefs, and values of Chinese culture would therefore influence people's evaluation of the communicative encounters and accordingly the way they utilise strategies.

Face values in China

Spencer-Oatey (2000, p. 12) believes that face is a concept that is intuitively meaningful to people. It is concerned with people's sense of worth, dignity, and identity, and is associated with issues such as respect, honour, status, reputation, and competence. She stresses that face is a universal phenomenon and everyone has the same fundamental face concerns. However, culture can affect the relative sensitivity of different aspects of people's face, as well as which strategies are most appropriate for managing face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Gundykunst, 2000).

Face in Chinese culture plays a profound role in the established social code; the concept of *limao* originates from such a past when the larger social structure was always regarded as an extension of the family structure (Lee-Wong, 2000, pp. 21-22). According to Shih (1988), although the Chinese social structure has changed, this basic human principle is still deeply rooted in the Chinese mind and colours social life today. Hu (1944, cited in Watts, 2003) traces the historical outlines of the development of this notion from two terms *lien* and *mien* to the modern Chinese term which is closest to *mien*, namely *mianzi* (roughly translatable as *outer part*, *face*, *reputation and prestige*). His work has been extensively quoted and referred to by Chinese researchers working on politeness, such as Lee-Wong (2000), Gu (1990), Mao (1994), among others. As Lee-Wong (2000) further refines, "if one loves one's face, one should avoid face loss and attempt to maintain one's face; in looking after one's own face, it is imperative that one looks after *alter*'s face…face maintenance is essentially an act of balancing – the perception of self in relation to other" (p. 24). This act of balancing can be met by both sides showing consideration to one another and by being cooperative, so that each person can gain respect and be respected at the same time.

Gu & the Politeness Maxims of modern Chinese

Gu (1990) is one of the leading researchers of Chinese politeness. While questioning the "universality" of Brown and Levinson's FTA theory, he proposes a set of politeness maxims that can be more applicable to the politeness phenomenon of modern Chinese, which other researchers (e.g., Chen, 1993) have found very useful for analysing the speech act patterns of Chinese and English speakers. The maxims are:

1. THE SELF-DENIGRATION MAXIM
a. denigrate self
b. elevate other
2. THE ADDRESS MAXIM
a. address your interlocutor with an appropriate address term
3. THE TACT MAXIM (in impositives)
a. At the motivational level, minimise cost to other
b. At the conversational level, maximise benefit received
4. THE GENEROSITY MAXIM (in commissives)
a. At the motivational level, maximise benefit to other
b. At the conversational level, minimise cost to self

(Gu, 1990, pp. 245-255)

For Gu (1990), the first maxim absorbs the notions of respectfulness and modesty; the second maxim, the use of address terms also adheres to the Self-denigration Maxim. The last two maxims, in Chinese culture, are complementary and they are underpinned by the notions of attitudinal warmth and refinement. The following examples can help gain insight into the operations of these maxims:

Example 3:

A: 您貴姓？(nín guìxìng?) – Your precious name?

B: 鄙姓張。(bì xìng zhāng) – My worthless surname is Zhang.

Examples 4:

A: 若不嫌棄，請到寒舍來坐坐。(ruò bù xíanqì, qǐng dào hánshè lái zuò zuò) – If you do not mind or dislike it, please drop by my shabby house.

B: 怎么會嫌棄呢，很榮幸啊！就怕麻煩你。(zěnme hùi xiánqì ne, hěn róngxìng a! jiù pà máfán nǐ)

–How should I care? It's such an honour! I'm just worried that it may be too much trouble to you.

A: 不麻煩，不麻煩 (bù máfán, bù máfán)。

A: No trouble, no trouble.

Example 5:

學生： 王教授，您早啊！(xuéshēng: wáng jiàoshòu, nín zǎo a)

老師： 哦，早！(lǎoshī: wo, zǎo)

Literal translation:

Student: Professor Wang, You early! [nin = French *vous* or German *Sie*]

Teacher: Oh, early!

Free translation:

Student: Professor Wang, good morning!

Teacher: Hi, morning! (adapted from Gu, 1990)

In Example 3, A elevates B by treating B's name as a precious (貴 guì) surname while denigrating self by taking his/her own name as a worthless (鄙 bì) one. Maxim 1 and Maxim 2 cooperate perfectly well in this case. The second excerpt (Example 4) is a typical invitation in Chinese. The speaker purportedly locates the addressee in a very high position by describing his/her own house as a (寒舍 hánshè) shabby place; besides, the addressee has the full right to make the decision of whether to come or not and they can choose to come if they (若不嫌棄 ruò bù xíanqì) do not mind coming to a shabby place like this to lower their noble position. Aside from the working of Maxim 1, Maxim 3 and Maxim 4 are also taking a part, as can been seen in the following exchanges between B & A. As Gu (1987, 1990) argues, in Chinese culture, it is much easier to issue an invitation than to accept one. Issuing an invitation can be intrinsically polite since it manifests the inviter's observance of the Generosity Maxim, i.e., maximising benefit to other (at the motivational level). As for the invitee, however, s/he has to follow the Tact Maxim which requires the minimization of cost to the other. As a result, a direct acceptance of an invitation may not only "renders the invitee indebted to the inviter," but also "risks the invitee's face, for s/he might be seen as being greedy, if the inviter were in actual fact merely paying lip-service or issuing the invitation out of sheer consideration of formality" (Gu, 1990, p. 254).

Similarly for the last small dialogue, to demonstrate politeness and respect, the student (Example 5) employs the very formal form of address with the structure of *surname* + *title* together with the more respectful personal pronoun of *nin* (您). In the response of the professor, however, there is no calling of the student's name, or any address forms, but just one simple formulaic expression of greeting (早 zǎo) "morning". Again, the politeness maxims of 1 and 2 are playing key roles. In addition, the traditional teacher (professor)-student role relationship is evidently mirrored.

Another researcher who suggests a different approach to Chinese politeness is Shih (1988). Her FSAs (Face-Satisfying Acts) contain three general rules: 1. Do FSAs sincerely; 2. Don't do FTAs (Face-Threatening Acts); 3. If one cannot avoid performing an FTA, minimise it with redressive actions. These theories point to the fact that Brown and Levinson's notions are not universal. For instance, they may not be appropriate when talking about the politeness principles of communication in China as it has its own unique philosophical and value systems. For this reason, a more socio-culturally and contextually-oriented understanding of politeness is needed.

One of the research foci of the thesis is *requests*, a type of *speech act* that was defined by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979). Speech acts have a central place in the field of pragmatics; they are also the mostly widely examined area of study in interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper, 2006). The way in which a request is performed may be subject to different socio-cultural and contextual constraints, thereby affecting the level the politeness that it conveys. The next section reviews Speech Act Theory and the nature of requests.

2.3 Speech Act Theory and Request

2.3.1 Speech Act Theory

Austin (1962) defined speech acts as a minimal unit of discourse, that is, the actions performed by saying something. Speech act theory says that the action performed when an utterance is produced can be analysed on three different levels: locution–the actual words uttered; illocution–the force or intention behind the words and perlocution–the effect of illocution on the hearer. For example, there is one widely quoted sentence *It's hot in here!*; the sentence itself is the locution, meaning *I want some fresh air!* (illocution) and the perlocutionary effect might be that someone opens the window.

Searle (1979) attempted to formalize and systematize Austin's work by classifying speech acts in such macro-classes as declarations (e.g., I bet…, I declare…, I baptize…, etc.), representatives (e.g., describing, claiming, predicting, etc.), commissives (e.g., promising, offering, threatening, etc.), directives (e.g., commanding, requesting, inviting, etc.) and expressives (e.g., apologise, praising, etc.). He also proposed the Indirect Speech Act Theory: using an indirect speech act to communicate a different meaning from the apparent surface meaning, with the form and function not directly related. For example, *Would you mind getting me one*? has the function of a request and *Can I get you one while I'm there*? can be taken as an offer; that is, they are not direct speech acts which communicate the literal meaning that the words conventionally express. In a literal sense, both utterances have the interrogative forms, functioning as normal questions, which cannot convey the real intentions of the speakers.

Some speech acts, according to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 65), like praising and complimenting, can mostly enhance *face* while certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face wants of the addressee, such as orders, threats, etc. The following section will focus on one of the directives–request, the object of this research.

2.3.2 Defining request

Requests were classified by Searle (1979) as directive, the function of which is that the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something by means of what he says.

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, a request is a face-threatening act which involves risk to either the speaker's or the hearer's face.

Requests have been described by Searle (1969) in terms of felicity conditions and by Bach and Harnish (1979, p. 48) as a speech act expressing the speaker's desire that the hearer does something with the additional proviso that the hearer takes this expressed desire as the reason to act. The rules Searle (1969, p. 66) associates with request can help to understand the nature of this performative verb:

Preparatory: 1. H is able to do A. S believes that H is able to do A.

2. It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.

Sincerity: S wants H to do A.

Essential: Counts as an attempt to get H to do A.

Other researchers, such as Edmondson and House (1981), defined request as a ritual of human beings that is intended to achieve certain communicative balance:

> On the one hand, we have a need for contact with our fellow-men, which leads to a desire for cooperation, sharing and mutual responsibility; on the other hand, we have a need for privacy, which leads to a desire for possessions, private territory, a need to keep other people at bay. (p. 99)

The nature of requesting makes it a common but complex speech act. To realise this speech act, various strategies are employable.

2.3.3 Requestive strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that it is generally in every participant's best interest to maintain each other's face. Every language, therefore, provides a very wide range of linguistic options that can be used for managing face and each other's social rights: choice of morphology and syntax, choice of address and honorifics, choice of intonation and tone of voice, etc. Considerable attention has then been paid to the wording of speech acts and three types of features have been analysed in a wide range of studies: the selection of speech act components, the degree of directness/indirectness, and the type and amount of upgraders/downgraders (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 27).

The requestive strategies thus will be explored from these three features:

1) According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983), speech acts typically have a range of semantic formulae or components associated with them, which they call *speech act sets*. As for requests, there is normally a head act, which conveys the main illocutionary force of the set of utterances; before and after the head act (or both), there may be additional components (these additional components are often not essential, though). Some examples of requesting components are listed in Table 2.2 (based on Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Table 2.2 Request strategy–semantic components

a.	**Head act**
b.	**Alerter,** e.g. *Excuse me…*
c.	**Mitigating supportive move**
	c1. **Preparator,** e.g. *I'd like to ask you something…*
	c2. **Getting a precommitment,** e.g. *Could you do me a favour?*
	c3. **Grounder,** e.g. Judith, *I missed class yesterday.* Could I borrow your notes?
	c4. **Disarmer,** e.g. *I know you don't like to lend out your notes,* but could…
	c5. **Promise of reward,** e.g. Could you give me a lift home? *I'll give you something for the petrol.*
	c6. **Imposition downgrader,** e.g. Could you lend me that book, *if you're not using it at present?*
d.	**Aggravating supportive move**
	d1. **Insult,** e.g. *You've always been a dirty pig,* so clear up!
	d2. **Threat,** e.g. Move that car if you don't want a ticket!
	d3. **Moralizing,** e.g. If one shares a flat one should be prepared to pull one's weight in cleaning it, so get on with the washing up!

2) Directness/indirectness can be the second feature of requestive strategies. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 18) grouped the strategies on a scale of directness/indirectness, as is depicted in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Strategy types on a scale of directness/indirectness

Direct strategies
a. **Mood derivable**: utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force, e.g. *Leave me alone.*
b. **Performatives**: utterances in which illocutionary force is explicitly named, e.g. *I'm asking you to clean up the mess.*
c. **Hedged performatives**: utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions, e.g. *I would like to ask you to hand in your paper next week.*
d. **Obligation statements**: utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act, e.g. *You'll have to move the car.*
e. **Want statements**: utterances which state the speaker's desire that the hearer carries out the act, e.g. *I really wish you'd stop bothering me.*
Conventionally indirect strategies
f. **Suggestory formulae**: utterances which contain a suggestion to do something, e.g. *How about cleaning up?*
g. **Query preparatory**: utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g. ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language, e.g. *Could you clear up the kitchen, please? / Would you mind moving your car?*
Non-conventionally indirect strategies
h. **Strong hints**: utterances containing partial reference to object or elements needed for the implementation of the act, e.g. *You have left the kitchen in a right mess.*
i. **Mild hints**: utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context, e.g. *I am a nun* in response to a persistent hassler.

3) The third feature is the use of upgraders/downgraders, also called boosters/hedges or intensifiers/downtoners (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). The commonly used upgraders/downgraders (in one selected example) shown in Table 2.4 are also derived from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

Table 2.4 Types of downgraders/upgraders commonly associated with requests

Downgraders/ upgraders for requests – Example: *Can you tidy up your desk?*

Syntactic downgraders

a. **Negation of preparatory condition**, e.g. *You couldn't tidy up your desk, could you?*
b. **Aspect**, e.g. *I'm wondering if you could tidy up your desk?*
c. **Tense**, e.g. *I was wondering if you could tidy up your desk?*

Lexical and phrasal downgraders

a. **Politeness marker**, e.g. *Can you tidy up your mess, please?*
b. **Understater**, e.g. *Can you tidy up your desk a bit?*
c. **Hedge**, e.g. *Can you sort of tidy up your desk?*
d. **Subjectiviser**, e.g. *I wonder if you could tidy up your desk/ I'm afraid you're going to have to tidy up...*
e. **Downtoner**, e.g. *You know, you really need to tidy up...*
f. **Appealer**, e.g. *Tidy up your desk, will you?*

Upgraders

a. **Intensifier**, e.g. *Your desk is in a terrible mess.*
b. **Expletive**, e.g. *Tidy up your bloody desk!*
c. **Time intensifier**, e.g. *Tidy up your desk right now!*

Another source, the London-Lund Corpus, lists altogether seventeen types of exemplified requestive strategies. Holmes (1990), however, suggests that the number of strategies available to express a request is indeterminate since the speaker can always think of new ways of getting the hearer to do something. In spite of this, the generalisation by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) provides an effective theoretical framework for the analysis of speech act data and a fundamental reference for deeper scrutiny.

2.4 Cross-cultural Pragmatics and CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project)

2.4.1 CCSARP

In the 1980s, the issue of universality of politeness that was initially addressed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) provoked heated discussions among researchers in pragmatics. They were thereafter confronted with the basic challenge of "to what extent it is possible to determine the degree to which the rules that govern the use of language in context vary from culture to culture and from language to language" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 176). Since then, cross-cultural studies have flourished in order to resolve this issue. The cornerstone is Cross-cultural Study of Speech Act Realisation Patterns (CCSARP), a well-known team project that was conducted in the 1980s.

The goals of the project were to compare across languages the realisation patterns of two speech acts – requests and apologies. In particular, the researchers sought to establish the similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers' realisation patterns in these two acts in each of the eight languages (Australian English, American English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, and Hebrew) (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The study was designed to achieve reliable comparability both along the situational (sociopragmatic), cultural, and native/non-native axes (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 13).

Their investigation demonstrated that conventional indirectness was universally manifested in requests across English, French, Hebrew, and Spanish. In English politeness and indirectness are only associated with each other in the case of conventional indirectness, i.e., query preparatory, where clarity and indirectness can be most fully achieved (Blum-Kulka, 1987). The analysis also revealed a series of cross-linguistic differences, for example, the marked cross-cultural differences in the requesting behaviour in respect of level of directness and amount and type of request modifications. What's more, they found that all the languages studied vary their mode of speech act performance by situational factors. Interlanguage variations were also identified (illustrations are provided in 2.5).

One of the greatest contributions of CCSAPR is the development of the discourse completion test (DCT), consisting of incomplete discourse sequences that represent socially differentiated situations. Informants are asked to complete the dialogue by providing the speech act aimed at the given context, where the setting, the social distance between the interlocutors and their status relative to each other are specified (Blum-Kulka & Olstain, 1984, p. 198). From then on DCTs have been frequently featured in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic studies, leading to a growing body of empirical research in the field with fruitful results. In the meantime, various innovations, formats, and enhancing measures have also been employed to strengthen its authenticity and overall validity for data elicitation.

The other most outstanding contribution of the project is the detailed coding framework developed by Blum-Kulka et al. for analysing the speech act realisation patterns of requests and apologies. The framework facilitates a thorough analysis of politeness devices at both the syntactic and lexical level, and makes it possible to both quantitatively and qualitatively track the distribution of pragmalinguistic strategies appearing in the speech act performance and to compare the preferences of linguistic strategies employed by different linguistic and cultural groups, under dissimilar social constraints.

2.4.2 Cross-cultural pragmatic research into Chinese and English requests

Thomas (1983, p. 101) points out that as one is moving from the pragmalinguistic to the sociopragmatic end of the continuum, one is at the same time moving from what is language-specific to what is culture-specific. Thus, the linguistic choice of being polite is usually informed by the speaker's cultural norms and knowledge, and it varies from culture to culture. The complicated interplay of these interpersonal and cultural factors has attracted much attention from the study of requests (Lee, 2004a, 2004b). Studies that have been widely referred to are Blum-Kulka (1982), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986), House and Kasper (1987), Faerch and Kasper (1989) and so on. Faerch and Kasper (1989), in the CCSARP project, found that internal modification was an obligatory choice for English requests, while external modification was optional. Making use of both DCT and Likert-scale questions, Fukushima (2003) compared requests and responses to requests in British English and Japanese. The study was based on his PhD thesis completed in the UK for which he collected data from 121 undergraduate students enrolled in one UK and 133 in one Japanese university respectively. Employing a written questionnaire containing MCQs (multiple choice questions) with strategy choices, he found that Japanese participants tended to opt for more direct requesting strategies in some situations and conventionally indirect strategies in others, while British participants always opted for conventionally indirect strategies; Japanese students tended be more direct than British when giving requests, to maintain in-group acceptance and a harmonious relationship with other members.

Lee (2004b, p. 421) observes that recent research on requests by Chinese is mainly based on classical books and experimental data in English or Chinese written by Chinese learners of English. Very few compare requests made by Chinese users with the English-speaking counterparts or compare Chinese and English requests made by Chinese users. Even so, studies of requests implemented by Zhang (1995a, b), Lee-Wong (2000) and Zhan (1992) unveiled that the linguistic strategy choices of

Chinese learners are influenced by cultural and social variables. Through two role-plays and a detailed description of research findings, Zhang (1995a) discovered culture-specific conceptions and linguistic manifestations by the learners. In another study with a questionnaire, Zhang (1995b) found how the interaction between directness and politeness is influenced by factors such as power and familiarity between interactants, the degree of imposition, age and gender, directive goals, the requester's right to request and the level of obligation, and the likelihood of compliance. Lee-Wong's study (2000), which researched politeness and face value in Chinese culture, suggested that for the Chinese, there is no definite preference for indirect requests; rather, there seems to be a distinct preference for a level of directness in requests which English speakers would not find acceptable. However, Chinese speakers (especially non-PRC speakers) do use more query-preparatory in an asymmetrical situation (e.g., the academic context), due to the observation that "Institutional rules often act as deterrents to the occurrence of such face threatening acts in an asymmetrical role relationship" (p. 311).

In Hong Kong, Lee (2004b) investigated the request strategies of Cantonese learners of English (CLE) and native English speakers (NES) in academic communication by way of two versions of DCTs (including 6 requesting situations) – English and Chinese. Both cross-linguistic and interlanguage comparisons were made in this study, which showed that the CLE were able to make both direct and indirect requests as the native speakers did in all the situations studied; the CLE tended to make more hearer-dominant requests and adopted different strategies for Chinese and English requests. As far as the linguistic devices were concerned, the CLE demonstrated more limited linguistic competence than the NSE. The researcher concluded that "the CLE know how to make a request appropriately in Chinese and English, and are able to manage a range of strategies as the NSE" (Lee, 2004b, p. 420).

2.5 Interlangauge Pragmatics (ILP) on Speech Act Realisation of Request

2.5.1 Domains of ILP

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is the study of non-native speakers' use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 1996, p. 145). Its theoretical and empirical foundation is derived from general and especially cross-cultural pragmatics, and it involves the domains of pragmatic comprehension, production of linguistic action, pragmatic transfer, and communicative effect (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). ILP studies focusing on second language learning and acquisition may follow a longitudinal design or cross-sectional inquiry. Alternatively, they may combine the two (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 75). Those that concentrate on language use are, however, inclined to incorporate the "single moment" method (Cook, 1993; Rose, 2000; Kasper & Rose, 1999), and such studies "do not compare groups of learners at different cross-sectional levels to establish a series of developmental language states, but either lump all the learners together in one group, or separate them by first language or criteria other than chronological development" (Cook, 1993, p. 34). The two CCSARP-based studies by Faerch and Kasper (1989) and House and Kasper (1987) fall into this category.

2.5.2 Empirical evidence of ILP requests

Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of studies that centre on the language learners' knowledge of the pragmatic conventions of the target language and on how learners apply such knowledge in performing speech acts in that language. Research exploring the difficulties and certainties which some ESL/EFL learners experience in producing pragmatically appropriate speech acts are well documented (Cohen, 1996; Robinson, 1991; Tanaka, 1988). Learners have been found to differ in several ways from native speakers in their production of speech acts (Cohen, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, 2001): choice of speech acts, semantic formula, internal and external mitigations, content and form.

In the CCSAPR project, one specific interlanguage phenomenon of verbosity was identified: Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) found that learners' (learners of

Hebrew) requests were realised systematically by longer utterances than those of native speakers and this trend was manifested by the use of supportive moves. House and Kasper (1987) and Faerch and Kapser (1989) reported a similar trend among Danish and German learners of English. House and Kasper (1987) further showed that in specific situations, non-natives opted for higher level of directness in requests than native speakers and also used fewer syntactic downgraders.

In a methodologically-driven study, Sasaki (1998)[1] provided evidence of the limited range of internal modifications used in mitigating the speech acts production by Japanese university EFL learners when she simultaneously tried out the two data elicitation measures of production questionnaires and oral role-plays. The written DCT data uncovered a learner preference for query preparatory moves on two of the four situations studied but also indicated a relatively high percentage of want statements in the remaining two situations. Another methodologically-oriented study (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000)[2] examined the responses to two versions of a DCT

[1] Sasaki (1998) compares two popular measures of second language pragmatic competence: production questionnaires and role plays through the speech acts production by Japanese university EFL learners. Twelve Japanese university students representing three different English proficiency levels responded to both measures for the same four request and four refusal situations. Response length, range and content of the expressions, and native speaker evaluations of these responses were analysed. The production questionnaire and role play elicited somewhat different production samples from the students. Role plays induced longer responses, and a larger number and greater variety of strategies/formulas, than production questionnaires. These differences appear to be caused by the interactive nature of role plays. Students often switched strategies for the same situations across different methods. In addition, the correlation between the appropriateness scores of the two methods was not high enough to support the claim that they measured exactly the same trait. The author believes that low correlation probably resulted not only because the two methods produced different responses, but also because the role-play responses provided additional audio-visual information, which might have affected the raters' evaluations. The findings suggest that production questionnaire scores cannot be simply substituted for role play scores.

[2] Billmyer and Varghese (2000) investigate the effect of systematic modification to DCT situational prompts used to elicit request on the responses of native and non-native speakers of English. Modification included enhancing

(traditional DCT and DCT with enriched situational prompts) by 39 native speakers of American English and 49 ESL learners at mid-intermediate level of proficiency. The results indicated that the DCT enhancement did not affect the request strategy or amount of internal modification, but did help to generate more robust and elaborated responses; both groups evidenced preference for conventionally indirect requests in both versions, with native speaker group using such strategies in over 80% of the requests (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000, pp. 526-528).

With regard to the discourse marker of politeness, House (1989, p. 101) indicated that German learners of English used *please* slightly more often than English native speakers, possibly under the influence of their L1 requestive behaviours. Interestingly, the somewhat differing tendency seems to be reflected in the study done by Koike (1989), who reported on the pragmatic comprehension and production of beginning learners of Spanish. Three experiments were conducted at the University of Texas Austin to gather data on L2 learners' (adult American learners of Spanish) abilities to understand and produce three types of speech acts – apology, request, and command. Among them, the requests written by the 27 learners were analysed and compared to those produced in American English by 23 English

---

the situational prompts by adding information on a number of social and contextual variables considered relevant to the study. Results indicate that enhancement did not affect the request strategy or amount of internal mediation. However, enhancing situational prompts did produce significantly longer, more elaborated requests in both groups. The findings point to the importance of external modification of speech act production and the need for an instrument that can satisfactorily account for both variation and context. The study also has yielded implications for both teaching and testing in interlanguage pragmatics.

native speakers to check for the transferability of the L1 pragmatic forms. The results showed that the L1 requests used far more markers of politeness, which were not always carried over to the L2 situations.

Woodfield (2007) investigated status-unequal requests – requests to faculty for an extension in institutional context produced by 89 advanced mixed-L1 learners[3] and 87 British English native speaker students of undergraduate and postgraduate study in British higher education institutions. Data were elicited by a written DCT; significant differences were unveiled in three dimensions analysed: internal and external modification, and request perspectives. The study discovered learners' overuse of zero marking in internal modification and overuse of preparators in supportive moves. External modification patterns also differed qualitatively in learners' provision of detailed content and in native speakers' employment of interpersonal orientation moves. Native speakers used significantly more requests employing impersonal perspective and in association with a range of mitigating, elliptical and formulaic devices.

In a subsequent paper, Woodfield (2008) reported another study implemented in the UK, contrasting the interlanguage requesting behaviour of graduate student

[3] There were originally ninety five non-native speakers. Eighty three of the ESL learners were native speakers of Greek. The remaining twelve learners taking part in the study comprised three pairs of Japanese and three pairs of German learners who completed the task in pairs. The data elicited from these twelve learners formed part of an earlier study (Woodfield, 2004) in which a form of paired verbal report was employed in order to investigate the planning processes in written request production. Thus a total of 89 ESL learner responses were documented and analysed in the current study.

learners of English with those of British English graduate students via both written DCTs and verbal report. This time data were analysed for the level of directness, internal modification, and perspectives. A number of trends emerged from the findings. Similar to the British English group, the learners indicated an overall preference for conventional indirect strategies. The learners internally modified their requests less frequently overall as compared to the British group. They operated with a more restricted range of devices, and certain syntactic devices (aspect, tense) were altogether absent in the learner data. All groups exhibited a preference overall for the politeness marker when internally mitigating their requests. The learner groups evidenced a preference for hearer perspective over other perspectives, which was less obvious in the British group.

2.5.3 Use of stimulated recall in ILP research

Cognitive process, according to Gass and Mackey (2000, p. 23), refers to search and storage mechanisms, to inferential mechanisms or to retrieval processes, which are generally thought to operate at an unconscious level. Cognition can be the source of origin of problem-solving and decision-making in communicative events. Pragmalinguistic strategy choice, as part of learner strategy, can also be a cognitively oriented aspect of learning and communication (Cohen, 1998).

According to Ericsson and Simon (1993), "two forms of verbal reports can claim to being the closest reflection of the cognitive processes. Foremost are concurrent verbal reports – 'talk aloud' and 'think aloud' reports, where the cognitive processes, described as successive sates of heeded information, are verbalised directly...A second type of verbal report is the retrospective report", where "a durable (if partial) memory trace is laid down of the information heeded successively while completing a task. Just after the task is finished, this trace can be accessed from short term memory, at least in part, or retrieved from long term memory and verbalised" (p. 16).

Gass and Mackey (2000) refer to stimulated recalls as one of the introspective methods. Different from on-line reporting that "asks participants to say what is going through their minds as they are completing a task" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 77), stimulated recalls are "carried out with some degree of support" to explore learners' thought process or strategies by "asking learners to reflect on their thoughts after they have carried out a task" (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 25). The stimulus may serve as a reminder to assist the learners in retrieving what lies in their mind while performing the tasks.

The reliability of stimulated recalls has been criticised (e.g., Garner, 1988; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) for being an incomplete reflection of the actual internal processing. If care is exercised in stages of data collection and interpretation, this method nevertheless contains useful information concerning learner's mental processes which will not be satisfactorily accessed through extrospective observational studies (Matsumoto, 1993). Retrospective verbal report data can help provide the researchers with "added, in-depth insights into the participants" reasons for task response and thence presenting "behind the scenes information about the production of speech acts" (Cohen, 2004a, p. 307). When combined with other forms of data elicitation, verbal report data may shed light on "language learners' pragmatic knowledge and their choice and formulation of speech act strategies" (Woodfield, 2008, p. 44).

Use of verbal report in second language acquisition research is given substantial support by researchers like Ericsson and Simon (1987, 1993). In the circle of pragmatics, however, "descriptions of speech act realisations of native and non-native speakers abound in the cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics literature. Yet, what is lacking is an analysis of the cognitive processes involved in the production of speech acts" (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008, p. 1).

Recent years have seen increasing attention diverted to the internal cognitive process that functions behind the surface language production. Robinson (1991) investigated the interlanguage refusal of Japanese learners of American English using stimulated recalls, in connection with other two methods–DCTs and think aloud. As a result, the researcher was able to gain more insight into the sources of participants' pragmatic knowledge and the influence of sociocultural transfer on responses to the written task. Stimulated recall was also employed by Cohen and Olshtain (1993) in a study of speech acts realisations. By playing back videotapes for the subjects, the processes of non-native speakers assessing, planning, and executing utterances were recalled and recollected. The study found that in delivering the speech acts, half of the time respondents conducted only a general assessment of the utterances called for in the situation without planning specific vocabulary and grammatical structures. The participants often thought in two languages and sometimes in three languages (if trilingual). They utilised a series of different strategies in searching for language forms, and did not attend much to grammar nor to pronunciation.

Widjaja (1997) looked at the special case of date-refusals performed by Taiwanese and American female college students in English as a second vs. native language in status-equal communications. Retrospective interviews were carried out to get at thought processes and politeness strategy formulation. Woodfield (2004, 2008) filled the gap in ILP by incorporating native speakers in her verbal protocol research and focused on the paired concurrent verbal report, elicited in conjunction with written DCTs and retrospective interviews. The analysis of the data suggested that participants' attention may be directed to perceived deficiencies in the elicitation instrument, and they may respond to these deficiencies by recreating the task within an authentic speech event.

2.5.4 Other research methods in ILP

Apart from written DCTs and stimulated recalls, other methods that may be used in ILP research include multiple choice questions, oral role-plays, and Conversation Analysis (CA). The following sections discuss the values and pitfalls of each, especially in relation to the study of e-mail discourse.

Oral role-plays

As a valuable means of eliciting oral data, role-plays have gained wide recognition in pragmatics research and have been employed in a variety of studies on speech acts (e.g., Cohen & Olstain, 1993; Hassall, 2003; F'elix-Brasdefe, 2008). In role-play tasks, the respondents are asked to take on particular roles in specific situations that require the performance of a speech act. Kasper and Dahl (1991) distinguished between two types of role-plays, depending on the degree of freedom allowed to the participant in controlling the conversation: closed role-plays and open role-plays. As suggested by the names, the latter gives more opportunities to the respondents to interact with the interlocutors; the output may therefore cover multiple turns and organisational sequences. It is possible for researchers to "design contexts and roles that are likely to elicit specific speech events and communicative acts" (Kasper, 2000, p. 323). Through role specifications, researchers may observe how contextual factors, such as power, distance, and imposition influence the process of speech act realisation (Kasper, 2000).

In comparison with written DCTs, open role-plays share greater similarity with naturally occurring conversations, as they are online, real-time productions. The interactive nature could potentially extend oral exchanges and generate naturally longer, richer, and more complex discourse than the written single-turn responses in DCTs (Li, 2009). However, similar to written DCTs, role-plays have been criticised for providing information that is meta-linguistically driven, that is, the respondents perform in the way they believe they would in real-life communications rather than what they actually do. As Kasper (2000) noted, the context of the interactions within role-plays is often imagined and thus not real. Discrepancies would naturally occur between the performance in roles and in authentic discourse (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). In addition, there may be individual differences in terms of oral or 'acting' skills. On occasion, it may be difficult to judge whether the respondents' performance is a reflection of pragmatic (in)competence or other skills-related competence.

Moreover, in relation to the research focus of the present study – academic e-mails, role-plays may not be an ideal data-gathering tool, in light of the features of e-mail discourse that are discussed in Section 2.7. Mainly, the communicating media of e-mails are electronically-based, operated through a computer keyboard and the Internet. The e-mailer is permitted as much time as needed in composing and formatting a message. The overall creating process resembles traditional letter-writing with pen and paper. Normally, immediate feedback from the recipient is not available as in face-to-face interactions. Role-plays, for these reasons, cannot closely match e-mailing practice.

The choice of research methods is determined by the research purpose. As cautioned by Kasper (2000), "when conversational interaction and the sequencing of communicative action in conjunction with turn-taking is the research focus, an interactive procedure such as role-play needs to be chosen" (p. 325). However, if the purpose of an investigation is to learn about the types of strategies employed to implement a communicative act, other research instruments such as written DCTs can be a more effective means of data collection.

Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA), which has its origins in American sociology and was founded by Harvey Sacks (1992), "represents one of several perspectives on L2 learning as a social practice" and serves as a "distinctive epistemology and research methodology" (Kasper, 2006a, p. 83).

The objective of CA, according to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), is "to uncover the tacit reasoning procedures and sociolinguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organised sequences of interaction" (p. 14). The means to achieve these ends was to examine the turns and sequential organisation of the talk-in-interaction between the participants. Sequential analysis lies at the core of CA, as stated by Drew (2005), whereby researchers are able to examine naturally occurring discourse embedded within the context of social exchanges, rather than single, isolated sentences and utterances (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

Recently, Kasper (2006b) advocated the use of a discursive approach to speech act pragmatics, and specifically, a CA approach in speech act research. In comparison to other conventional means, she noted that CA possesses some unique, powerful advantages. In essence, rather than isolating speech acts from their "sequential habitat", the analytical practice in CA is "to adopt an emic, interlocutors' perspective by paying close attention to the meanings that the co-participants make relevant to each other through the details of their interactional conduct in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interaction" (Kasper, 2004, p. 126).

Till now, not many studies have adopted CA as the analytical framework for speech act investigations, especially in the area of requests. One of the few studies that has adopted this perspective was conducted by Kasper (2004). She sampled two sets of language proficiency interviews and probed repetitions in requesting behaviours that were realised in question forms (direct questions, e.g., *wh-* questions, and question substitutes, e.g., *can you VP*). Curl and Drew (2008) employed CA to investigate the distributional patterns of two different forms of request in ordinary telephone calls between family and friends and out-of-hours calls to the doctor: 1) request entailing modal verbs (e.g., *Can you…*) and 2) request prefaced by *I wonder if*. Workplace service requests and their non-granting responses were the research foci of Vinkhuyzen and Szymanski's (2006) CA-based exploration. They were interested in the request exchanges between customers and employees in a printing and copying company, and analysed the sequential placement and turn-taking in different types of requests (e.g., declarative requests, interrogative requests).

CA, undeniably, is most useful for examining communicative acts and speech behaviours. In actual application, CA necessitates the gathering of naturally occurring data from either ordinary conversations or institutional talk. Furthermore, CA also insists that data be analysed on a case-by-case basis, due to the belief that "social interaction is orderly on an individual action-by-action, case by case level" (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 52). The usual practice dictates that the primary data should be the conversations or other behaviours that participants produce with each other in real life; in other words, the interactions of all participants are taken into account in this analytical approach. In relation to the research aims of the current study, these features of CA would inevitably place constraints on the data collection and analysis process.

Although Iimuro (2006) utilised CA as an analytical approach to study e-mail requests, her purpose was fairly different from the present research. She focused on requests in e-mail interactions that were initiated by four Japanese graduate students in the US. In her research, she gathered e-mails from senders and recipients and examined requests and responses. Although there are merits to the use of CA in research such as Iimuro's (2006), it was not selected as the methodology for the current study for several reasons. The major concern was that with CA, it would be very difficult to make effective cross-cultural comparisons. To collect authentic e-mail messages that contain the target speech act within a reasonable period of time would be demanding in itself; it would be even more challenging to gather requests that are comparable in nature across the groups. In addition, the present study centred on the L2 learners' productions as compared to native English speakers rather than on-going exchanges (e.g., initiation-responses) between the interlocutors. This, however, does not imply that the recipients' viewpoints were taken for granted in the present research. Quite the opposite, they were examined from an intercultural pragmatic perspective.

2.6 Intercultural Pragmatics

2.6.1 Interface between pragmatics and intercultural communication

In his book *Understanding Pragmatics*, Jef Verschueren (1999) suggested a different way to decode this discipline. For him, pragmatics does not constitute an additional component of a theory of a language; rather it offers a different perspective to look at people's *use of language*, a form of *behaviour* or *social action* (p. 6, emphasis in original). In discussing pragmatics and its interdisciplinarity, he explained that this pragmatic perspective is "intended to give insight into *the link between language and human life in general*" and for this reason, pragmatics "is concerned with the full complexity of linguistic behaviour – *a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behaviour …*" (Verschueren, 2000, pp. 6-7, emphasis in original).

In line with this functional perspective, the field of pragmatics has split into several branches, including intercultural pragmatics which lays emphasis upon the interconnection between pragmatics and intercultural communication. Though both embracing *culture*, distinction can be made between cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural pragmatics in keeping with the differentiation between cross-cultural and intercultural communication. As Spencer-Oatey (2008, p. 6) explicates, "cross-cultural" refers to comparative data obtained independently from two different cultural groups; the term "intercultural" is used to refer to interactional data, that is, data obtained when members of two different cultural groups interact with each other.

Cross-cultural pragmatics is defined by Yule (1996) as "the study of different expectations among different communities regarding how meaning is constructed" (p. 138). Intercultural pragmatics, on the other hand, is a relatively new field of inquiry that is about how a language system is put to use in social encounters that "involve interactants who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and represent different cultures" (Kecskes, 2005, p. 361). Its intercultural domain is in agreement with the primary research goals of intercultural communication – "the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 39).

Moreover, when Mey (2001) described pragmatics as "the study of use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society" (p. 6), he also sought to raise awareness of the impact of culture on pragmatics and communication. Later in another article, he added, "culture is an integral part of society, and society, in its turn, is defined by its culture; the pragmatic study of language necessarily has an important cultural aspect" (Mey, 2004, p. 37). However, in the arena of applied linguistics, intercultural pragmatics is still a relatively new sub-discipline that has not yet been well represented, both in terms of width and depth. It was not until the year of 2004 that the first volume of the journal *Intercultural Pragmatics* was issued, with the aim of promoting "the understanding of intercultural competence by focusing on theoretical and applied pragmatics research that involves more than one language and culture or varieties of one language" (retrievable from http://www.degruyter.com/journals/intcultpragm/detailEn.cfm?sel=pi).

Effective intercultural communication requires a shared language and reciprocity between the communicators as two prerequisites, neither of which can be downplayed. As pointed out by Istvan Kecskes (2004), the chief editor of *Intercultural Pragmatics*, the intercultural view broadens the scope of research by connecting pragmatics with research of other fields and more importantly, brings a multilingual angle into the overwhelmingly monolingual research paradigms; the communicative process in these encounters is "synergistic" in the sense that the pragmatic norms of each participant are represented to some extent. In this process, the active interplay of language, culture, and communication could be vividly reflected: while the production and perception of non-native users of the language are revealed, the native recipients' feelings and perceptions could be equally evidenced, thus leading to the emergence of the potential intercultural clashes.

What's more, traditional cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic research are mostly unidirectional, revolving around the language users' production, perception, acquisition, and/or development of pragmatic competence. Unfortunately, they do not give enough prominence to the interlocutors' reaction to such production. The hearer or addressee is often either invisible or imaginary; accordingly, their perceptions and reactions tend to be excluded from the research scope. What is missing here is the *interactivity* and *interculturality*, which rely on the cultural norms, but are constructed interculturally within particular situations. Besides, the intercultural approach may also allow a careful assessment of the language users' pragmatic competence, sociopragmatic awareness, and intercultural communicative competence.

2.6.2 Intercultural communicative competence

In the last few decades, a variety of definitions and terms have been developed by speech communication specialists/interculturalists and L2 educators (Jackson, 2008), to account for the kind of "ability to step beyond one's own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds" (Sinicrope, Norris, & Wanatabe, 2007, p. 1). Though most often used interchangeably, intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) refer to somewhat dissimilar linguistic phenomenon. Byram (1997) makes a comparison between these two: IC refers to the skills and ability that individuals employ to interact in their native language with people from another culture. In contrast, ICC enables individuals to interact successfully across cultures while using a second language and focuses not solely on "the efficiency of information exchange," but "establishing and maintaining relationships" (Byram, 1997, p. 3). For Byram, ICC is inseparable from the concept of communicative competence and such a label helps maintain a close linkage with the contributions in foreign and second language teaching.

The recent definition given by Fantini (2007) is a rather comprehensive one: ICC is ". . . a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (p. 9). According to Fantini (2007), the notions "effective" and "appropriate" are equally important because they acknowledge both "etic" and "emic" perspectives--that of self and other. In fact, both constructs correspond to what Byram term as "efficiency of exchanges" and "establishing and maintaining relationships" in the above defining. Specifically, "effective" contains the insider's perception of the effectiveness of the intercultural encounter and their performance in it, and "appropriate" reflects the outsider's viewpoint, that is, how such behaviours are interpreted by people from the target culture.

Nowadays the importance of ICC is being increasingly recognised in professional and educational domains. As Rathje (2007) explains, "a variety of academic disciplines have so far laid claim to the concept and produced a number of models to describe intercultural competence and its development" (p. 255). In the realm of foreign language education, the work by Byram and his colleagues (Byram, 1997; Byram, Nicholas & Stevens, 2001) has been influential and also been treated as "a representative model of what elements the process of intercultural learning should aim to develop in learners" (O'Dowd, 2003, p. 120).

Relating intercultural competence to communication, Byram (1997) argues that an intercultural speaker, or intercultural mediator (Alfred, Byram, & Fleming, 2002) is someone who possesses the following linguistic abilities:

- *Linguistic competence:* the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language.
- *Sociolinguistic competence*: the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor – whether native speaker or not – meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor.
- *Discourse competence*: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes. (Byram, 1997, p. 48)

Apart from these essentially linguistically-driven aspects, in his model, Byram

(1997) includes another five components or *savoirs* that are culturally-oriented, that "may not necessarily be the outcome of learning directly related to language learning," but may be "already in the learner before language learning begins" (p. 49). They are:

- *Intercultural attitudes (savoir être)* – curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about others cultures and belief about one's own intercultural attitudes.
- *Knowledge (savoirs)* – of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and interlocutor's country.
- *Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre)*: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.
- *Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/ faire)*: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and to operate this knowledge in real-time communication.
- *Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager)*: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. (Byram et al., 2002, pp.12-13)

This framework, according to Kramsch (1998, pp. 27-30), connects foreign language education with cultural studies and places foreign language learners in a unique and privileged position to notice the gaps, analyse, reflect upon and interpret foreign cultural phenomena when in contact with foreign nationals. What's more, evidence of conceptual overlapping between ICC and pragmatic competence are revealed, not only in terms of the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways, but to understand that the choice of language forms is determined by the social and cultural setting, and the relationship between communication partners (Byram 1997; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Similar issues have been dealt with from different disciplinary points of view and assigned different foci. Once again, the significance of incorporating the intercultural dimension into pragmatic research is accentuated. Furthermore, Belz (2003) has noticed that "linguistically grounded analyses of ICC have been lacking in the literature to date" (p. 69). Hence, a growing number of researchers are advocating a greater amount of interchanges of conceptual frameworks and research findings between applied linguistic researchers and those working in other subjects such as cultural studies, communication studies, and so on (see for example, Kotthoff & Spencer-Oatey, 2007; Jackson, 2008).

2.6.3 Empirical studies of intercultural pragmatics

A brief search in the ProQuest thesis database reveals a lack of interculturally-oriented pragmatic projects, let alone those specially aimed at requests. This is a significant omission as research that incorporates such a perspective can provide us with valuable insights into the linguistic behaviour of interactants as well as their perceptions towards such behaviour. Also, these studies can lead to improvements in EAP (English for Academic Purpose) courses. The following study, which focused on compliments, can be one of the few that has paid attention to the intercultural pragmatic dimension.

Kryston-Morales (1997) investigated cross-linguistic and cross-cultural influences on the compliments and compliment responses of native Spanish speakers in English. Naturalistic data in the New York Metropolitan Area (in English) and in Puerto Rico (in Spanish) served as "baseline data" on how the speech act of complimenting is realised in the native and target language, and also as a basis for selection of situations. Open-ended DCTs were designed and administered to native New Yorkers in English and native Puerto Ricans in Spanish and English. A panel of bi-cultural experts were invited to rate the written English dialogues of the Puerto Rican ESL participants on a nativeness rating scale to determine their nativeness and acceptability of the conversations and compliments for English speakers. Interviews with local informants were also conducted to investigate whether the conversations were considered typical of each culture and to obtain additional information about complimenting behaviour in the particular culture. Results displayed a variety of similarities and differences in compliment speech act behaviour among the three groups. The Puerto Rico English data revealed instances of sociopragmatic failure and pragmalinguistic failure as the potential source of communication problems during intercultural interaction.

Kryston-Morales (1997) refers to her study as an intercultural pragmatics study, and includes cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contrasts as part of her investigation. She calls for the perceptual judgements from the people of the target culture and tries to track down the underlying communication failures. All these measures, together with the authentic-situation-selection, make this study a rather rigorous one.

As for e-mail discourse, a condensed overview of interculturally pertinent pragmatic research will be discussed in detail in 2.7.3. The electronic medium of communication is another focal aspect of the present research project and in the next section, the features of e-mail discourse and pragmatic studies on e-mails and particularly those embracing an intercultural perspective will be reviewed.

2.7 E-mail Discourse

2.7.1 Features of e-mail discourse

Since the appearance of the Internet, e-mail has played an important role in the professional and personal lives of its users. Academics who might previously before have only met at conferences can now interact on a daily, global basis. According to Bloch (2002), e-mail communication can be very important in academic contexts because of its potential for extending traditional social interactions and for some people, e-mail can replace the kinds of social interactions that in the past had only been possible in face-to-face contexts. As Baron (1998) has argued, e-mail is "an ideal tool for building and maintaining social relationships" (p. 155) and it has "both the informality of speech and the ability to facilitate communication at any time or space" (Bloch, 2002, p. 119).

Although electronic mails are asynchronous and do not require the co-presence of communicators, e-mail may better enhance hyperpersonal communication (Duthler, 2006). It is the asynchronous nature of e-mail that "allows users to take time to compose and edit their messages" and these messages can be "carefully edited, formal, and linguistically complex" (Herring, 2002, p. 115). As Duthler (2006) claims, "the control afforded by e-mail to plan, compose, edit, review, and execute helps enable hyperpersonal communication" (p. 505).

As a coin with two sides, compared with face-to-face interactions, e-mail is nonetheless much weaker in rectifying and removing the possible misunderstandings or conflicts immediately. It may even impose challenges on users, particularly in status-unequal communication due to the lack of paralinguistic cues such as vocal inflection, gestures, facial expressions, and a shared mental and physical context (Murray, 1995). In the student-teacher relationship, for example, the e-mail exchanges could be unexpectedly problematic. Although Crystal (2001) does not believe that the informality of e-mail should be a concern, Baron (2000) displays her worries that her students are too informal and casual in their e-mails.

Chen (2006) observes that there seem to be no fixed, standard e-mail writing rules for users to observe, native speakers included, especially since e-mail is a hybrid discourse inheriting features of both written and spoken language. On the one hand, e-mail users may feel liberated from the restrictions of traditional letter writing rules; on the other, they may struggle to produce an appropriate e-mail to meet the recipient's standards.

E-mail indeed has special features that cannot be neglected. Sproull and Kiesler (1991) found that the "rules" of e-mail use are not always different from those of traditional forms of communication; the nature of e-mail messages, particularly their ephemeral nature, can yield different relationships that are found in traditional memos and phone calls, although it is also considered as one kind of dialogic context communication. New forms of language can be created that may or may not be shared by both the writer and the reader. Or, to put it another way, the language of e-mail is unlike any other form of language, either written or oral. A very intriguing explication was once given by Baron (1998), who described the development of e-mail language as a process of creolization, by which a new language can be created from a mixture of established languages.

Differences in social status, such as between a student and a teacher can be a mitigating factor in the types of language that are produced. Besides, new forms of language can frequently evolve from the unsymmetrical interaction. For example, discourse intended to be only informative, can become a means of establishing authority or being persuasive (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Thus, on a whole, despite the disadvantages, e-mail communication can be a mixture of different styles of language, with multiple functions that can easily extend the communication.

2.7.2 Pragmatic research on e-mails

Owing to its unique function and wide usage in academic interactions, e-mails have been capturing the attention of more and more researchers in the arena of CMC (computer-mediated communication) during the past decade. Language use in composing e-mails, ways of realising speech acts, consideration of situational factors, etc. have become the focus of numerous studies. Chen (2001), for instance, analysed and compared how requests are made to professors in e-mails by Taiwanese overseas students and American students. She found that the two groups used different discourse strategies to structure their e-mail requests. Their choices of strategies also varied depending upon their perception of the power relation with the professor, the familiarity, the purpose, and the imposition level of the request. The non-native Taiwanese students adopted status-stating strategies to help them achieve their request goals: Their e-mails revealed deferential, rather than solidary relations with the professor and evidenced their perception of professor as an authoritative, higher-power role.

In the article "*At your earliest convenience: A study of written student requests to faculty*", Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) presented their findings of e-mail requests sent by native and non-native English speaking graduate students to the faculty in one American university. They identified differences between them in the content of the messages, the acknowledgment of degree of imposition, manner of presentation of time constraints, and explanations for the request. Non-native speakers were found to use fewer downgraders than native speakers.

Bou-Franch (2005) studied the discursive structure and politeness resources of electronic interaction in a Spanish academic setting, focusing particularly on the sociopragmatics of openings and closings in Spanish academic e-mails. A corpus of 60 electronic interactions was gathered, each comprising at least two messages, and amounting to a total of over 150 messages. He analysed the power and interpersonal relationships of co-participants and the social-institutional requirements of the communicative situations. The data showed that there were indeed changes in the framing phases of individual messages. A general tendency towards less formality and deference and more informality and solidarity was found in combination with a trend towards simplicity as regards number of moves and words.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2002, 2006) also examined native and non-native students sending e-mail messages to university staff to make requests. In a series of studies, she probed not only the choice of strategies, but also learners' negotiation skills and the influence of CCSARP coding scheme variations on the data analysis. In her study of 2005, she examined e-mail messages sent by American and international students to their professor, focusing on three major communication topics (facilitative, substantive, relational) and communication strategies (requesting, negotiating, reporting). The results indicated quantitative and qualitative differences in American and international students' e-mail topics and strategies, suggesting that American students demonstrated greater initiative and ability to adapt to the spatial and temporal remoteness between interlocutors in e-mail interaction, especially when using e-mail to solicit face-to-face appointments and input on projects. The findings also showed that messages from both groups of students contained substantial relational communication, perhaps in an attempt to compensate for the lack of visual and paralinguistic clues in the e-mail medium.

In a subsequent interlangauge pragmatic study, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) examined e-mail requests sent by native and non-native English speaking graduate students to faculty, which documented that far more requests were realised through direct strategies as well as hints than conventionally indirect strategies typically found in comparative speech act studies. Furthermore, politeness conventions in e-mail, a text-only medium with little guidance in the academic institutional hierarchy, appeared to be a work in progress, and native speakers demonstrated greater resources in creating e-polite messages to their professors than non-native speakers.

In the academic context of Hong Kong, Lee (2004a) conducted a naturalistic enquiry into written request strategies in e-mails sent by tertiary-level Chinese learners of English to their teachers. She reported results that confirmed some findings of research on request strategies in the Chinese language. Learners made direct requests to their teachers; they also used linguistic politeness devices that conform to the traditional teacher-student hierarchical relationship in Chinese culture, but tended to use requestive hints frequently.

All these studies have implications for research on written electronic communication, with a focus on speech act realisation between native and non-native speakers. Most importantly, they provided a variety of chances of carrying out further studies to add new visions to this relatively new area of research. In the following section, e-mail research that embraces an intercultural perspective will be reviewed, although the number of them is by no means large.

2.7.3 E-mail research with an intercultural pragmatic dimension

Within the academic domain, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) examined the effect of e-mail requests produced by both native and non-native graduate students on two faculty recipients of those messages in Indiana University. The requests were evaluated on the affective response they produced in the faculty recipient. They were also judged in the same way by the other, non-recipient author. The researchers observed pragmatic infelicities in non-native students' messages, caused largely by inappropriate mitigation and a lack of status-congruent language use, inappropriate assessment of the imposition of requests, and an emphasis on personal needs and unreasonable time frames rather than institutional demands. A similar study, by Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2001), with a larger pool of participants, i.e., professors assessing students' e-mail messages, arrived at comparable results: the lowest acceptability ratings were given to e-mail requests in which students made unreasonable demands on the faculty recipient, inappropriately assessed the level of request imposition, and did not observe status-congruence.

Chang and Hsu (1998) conducted a study entitled "*Requests on e-mail: A cross-cultural comparison*" in the US. They investigated differences in request e-mails written in English by Chinese learners of English and American English speakers. The results suggested that, while the learners treated e-mail communications like either formal letters or telephone conversations, native speakers regarded e-mail communication as closer to written memos. What's more, in e-mail request messages, Chinese senders emphasised facework and regarded information sequencing as a way to extend their politeness. In contrast, Americans preferred direct and concise messages.

It is noteworthy that the researchers also embraced an intercultural orientation and took the recipients' points of view into consideration. Six native English speakers who were frequent e-mail users adopted the role of e-mail receiver to evaluate the messages on a 7-point scale in terms of three dimensions: politeness, directness, and clarity. They were also asked to comment on messages which they judged as either strange, very impolite, very indirect, very unclear, or very polite. Some of the request samples written by the Chinese English learners were judged as very indirect and unclear. These "unnecessary detours" (Chang & Hsu, 1998, p. 136) could increase the degree of imposition as it would take the receiver more time to read the messages from the screen and there was a higher possibility for the receiver to be confused.

Also starting from an intercultural pragmatic perspective, Hendriks (2008) implemented two experimental studies that investigated the effect of (under)use of syntactic and lexical modifiers in e-mail requests written by Dutch learners. She reasoned that since research on L2 accented speech has shown that non-native speakers are often evaluated negatively in terms of their personality (Fayer & Krasinski, 1987, cited in Hendriks, 2008), the same effect might occur if learners formulate pragmatically accented requests. Her study is one of the few that takes the audience, or e-mail recipients into consideration; the analysis goes beyond the linguistic level and into the interpersonal level. In an on-line web survey, native speakers of English were asked to respond to items on a Likert scale that addressed the reasonableness and comprehensibility of the requests and their perceptions of the writer's personality. The results indicated that underuse of modifiers had a negative effect on respondents' evaluation of the personality of the writer, and an increase in modification affected the comprehensibility of e-mails negatively.

2.8 Summary

This review of the literature provides a theoretical framework for the present study. Pragmatic research into language learners' speech acts realisation in institutional e-mail contacts is still in the stage of infancy. In particular, very few researchers have examined the academic context of Hong Kong and included both Hong Kong and the Mainland learners of English as participants. In the past forty years, cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic research has been thriving in applied linguistics; however, e-mail communication with an intercultural pragmatic orientation as well as a comparative perspective has received scant attention. It is important to probe the pragmalinguistic choices, sociopragmatic awareness of learners in this context when they formulate academic e-mail requests. The findings can then inform the design of EAP courses in this context.

What's more, an integration of intercultural communication with pragmatics can facilitate the probing of the language users' pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence. Analysing the perceptions of the addressee can shed light on potential intercultural miscommunication. The use of stimulated recall should facilitate a deeper understanding of the workings of the politeness principles, cultural values, evaluation of contextual factors, the e-mode of communication, etc. that lie behind the surface linguistic output.

This chapter has reviewed the theories and empirical research that are most relevant to the present study. The following chapter will describe the methodology of this research: the design, participants, research instruments, data collection procedure, and modes of analysis.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and research methodology. To gather e-mails that elicit the requesting behaviours, an electronic DCT questionnaire was designed, pilot-tested, and employed as the chief instrument. As well as giving rise to the target pragmatic production, the e-DCT also served as the impetus for the subsequent stimulated recalls and audience judgements.

The chapter is organised as follows: An overview of the pilot study will be presented, with special attention paid to the process of authentication, validation, and implementation. Specific instrumentation and methodological issues revealed in this phase will be addressed. What follows are details of the main study from all facets, ranging from the selection of participants and data collection procedures to data coding and analysis.

3.2 Pilot Study

Ground work is an integral part of a research project. To ensure the practicality of the research methodology and strengthen the reliability of instruments, a pilot testing process can be essential, according to Johnston, Kasper, and Ross (1998), especially "when the collected material is inherently context-sensitive" (p. 157).

The pilot study started before the chief instrument was designed and subsumed the preparation, creation, and validation of the scenarios, and more importantly, the development and refinement of the elicitation instrument. The following flow chart shows the basic elements of the piloting process:

1. Validation of the academic situations
2. Design of the e-DCT questionnaire
   - Enhancement of the DCTs
   - Rating scales
3. Implementation of the pilot testing
4. Improvements of the instrument

The aim of the pilot study was to determine the effectiveness of the instrument to elicit messages that contain the target speech act, the feasibility of the research design, and the measures that can be taken to perfect the instrument and procedures for use in the main study.

3.2.1 Instrumentation

The e-DCT questionnaire was chosen as the major instrument for the following reasons. Firstly, most of the pragmatics-oriented e-mail research so far has adopted authentic e-mails as the main data, which is no doubt a great advantage as it facilitates a naturalistic form of enquiry into the phenomenon under investigation. However, it imposes constraints on the data collection procedure since the majority of the e-mails involve personal information, which may be confidential, and which people may be reluctant to disclose. As Herring (2002) stresses, due to ethical concerns and privacy issues, obtaining e-mails from people with full approval is not easy. More than that, there is no way to get access to the internal thinking, composing, and typing process involved in formulating the messages if the researcher only has access to the output that has been stored and accumulated in a computer.

Secondly, despite the limitations identified by scholars in the field (Golato, 2003; Kasper & Roever, 2005; Woodfield, 2008a) "regarding the authenticity of the responses and how representative such written data are to spontaneous, natural conversation, the DCT still remains a method which is frequently employed in pragmatic research" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, p. 81). What's more, when it comes to communicating via electronic means, the DCT possesses strong advantage for data-gathering. Written DCTs serve largely as the elicitation mechanism of oral interactions, but are criticised for lacking conversational characteristics such as turn-taking, paralinguistic features, non-verbal cues, etc., which may deviate from natural dialogues. This problem, however, is not a concern for the present study, as it focuses on e-mail interaction, which involves typing on the keyboard as means of output.

In addition, in his recent article, Rose (2009) argued that "asking whether an instrument (or procedure) is valid is not enough – the question is whether an instrument is valid for what purpose" (p. 2347). The choice of research instrument is rooted in the research purpose itself, and in this regard, the DCT "does provide information regarding respondents' knowledge and attitudes regarding the use of English requests" (Rose, 2009, p. 2347).

3.2.2 Validation of the academic situations

In preparation for the pilot study, eighteen scenarios were designed based on: 1) a review of the categories generalised from the e-mail corpus established by researchers such as Lee (2004a) who examined the requesting behaviours of Chinese learners of English at the tertiary level, Chen (2001), and Biesenbach-Lucas (2005, 2007) in American university contexts; 2) the researcher's own academic experience in a Hong Kong university and informal discussions with some local and Mainland graduate students in the same context. The scenarios cover a variety of requests of institutional encounters, such as asking for an appointment, borrowing books, or requests for an extension for an assignment, etc.

A validation questionnaire (Appendix 1) was drafted that incorporated all of the scenarios. It was then sent to 20 graduate students (including 8 Hong Kong students and 12 Mainland students) to obtain their judgements about the degree of authenticity of each situation. After evaluating each one, they were invited to offer explanations about the reasons behind their measurements and suggestions to improve the prompts. They were also asked to identify any element of the validation process that they found confusing.

Table 3.1 Summary of the situations for pilot study

Situations	Description
1	Making an appointment two weeks before the deadline
2	Asking for an assignment extension
3	Asking for guidance for an assignment
4	Borrowing a book
5	Asking for course information & suggested readings
6	Auditing a course
7	Asking for a reference letter
8	Asking for help with the proofreading
9	Meeting in the regular office hours
10	Rescheduling a meeting

Based on their input, ten most "authentic" situations were selected for use in the e-DCT questionnaire. A summary of the situations is provided in Table 3.1. In stimulated recall sessions, the native speaker informants were invited to offer further insights into the authenticity issue.

3.2.3 Design of the instrument – e-DCT questionnaire

An electronic DCT (see Appendix 2) questionnaire was devised for pilot study, containing the ten scenarios listed in Table 3.1. The instrument included four components: a. a brief demographic survey; b. production questionnaire of discourse completion tasks; c. Likert-scale questions for measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language use; and d. 5-point scale questions for weighing the size of imposition.

3.2.3.1 Enhancement of the DCTs

An e-mail format was utilised in the design (see Appendix 2 for a detailed layout). All of the prompts were intended to provide essential social and contextual information, as advocated by Billmyer and Varghese (2000), but at the same time not to overburden the participants. Previous research has drawn attention to the necessity of taking into account the specific constraints of social variables in academic status-unequal e-mail communications:

> First, the power dimension across messages is stable – the professor (the email recipient) is in position of relative authority over the student (the email sender) by virtue of their institutional relationship; and second, the social distance dimension is also relatively stable and can be characterised

> as low since students and professors typically have frequent and regular interactions in the institutional context. What varies is the imposition of students' email requests on the professor. (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, p. 65)

To clarify the particular image and identity of the "Professor" as the recipient, a description of *Professor X* and an illustration of the term *imposition* were provided in the instructions of the DCT questionnaire. This was also an attempt to reinforce the clarity and quality of the instrument and meanwhile control the other two relatively less active contextual variables: power and social distance in the domain of academia, as evidenced in the literature.

3.2.3.2 Rating scales

To elicit the participants' evaluative judgements of degree of confidence in the appropriacy of their requests, and the imposition degree of the encounters, scaled questions were devised, in part B and part C, immediately after "Part A. Email message" where e-mail writing is elicited (see also Appendix 2).

Rating scales were adopted as they are a useful tool to obtain a quantitative measure of the participants' perceptions. According to Kasper (2000), the most common method of obtaining metapragmatic assessments is by eliciting scaled category responses. In pragmatic studies, these evaluations can cover both pragmalinguistic scope "in knowing how appropriate, polite, deferential, and so forth, people assess strategies of communicative action and their linguistic realisations (usually in specific contexts)" and sociopragmatic scope in understanding "how people assess the values and weights of the contextual variables that influence strategic and linguistic choices, such as power, social distance, and the degree of imposition involved in a linguistic act" (Kasper, 2000, p. 331). Besides, they may function as an additional resource to more effectively interpret the written messages produced in the DCTs.

3.2.3.3 Rationale for stimulated recall

Scaled ratings may render some insights into the participants' pragmatic perception, but may not allow for a comprehensive picture as to how and why a particular strategy is chosen over others. Retrospective verbal report data may help deal with this weakness by providing the researchers with "added, in-depth insights" into the participants' reasons for task response and hence presenting "behind the scenes information about the production of speech acts" (Cohen, 2004a, p. 307). When combined with other forms of data elicitation, verbal report data may shed light on "language learners' pragmatic knowledge and their choice and formulation of speech act strategies" (Woodfield, 2008a, p. 44). What's more, studies that have investigated the cognitive processes of speech act production in interlanguage pragmatics research through verbal report are still relatively few and focused mostly on interlanguage refusals (Robinson, 1991; Cohen & Olstain, 1993; Widjaja, 1997; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). As far as interlanguage and intercultural e-mail requests are concerned, however, it is still an under-documented area that is worth wider examination and deeper exploration. It is believed that such learner-based data may throw light on what is happening inside the "magic box" that contribute to the external output (e.g., the focus of attention while on task, the planning, the executing of the speech acts, the sequencing of information, the evaluation of the situational elements, and the modification of wording).

One might ask why stimulated recall, other than concurrent reporting was applied to gain access to such data. Concurrent online reporting may have indeed been an option, but it is highly possible that in order to verbalise their thoughts at a certain point, the learners may have had to stop typing and focus solely on what they say. By so doing, they may have been lost from time to time, resulting in disconnections in the flow of thoughts. In the literature, this has been identified as a potential problem. As Ericsson and Simon (1993) remind us, if the participants are "under a heavy cognitive load, they tend to stop verbalising or they provide less complete verbalisations" (p. 242). Considering that concurrent reports place extra cognitive demands on the information processing system, it is likely that participants cease reporting because no space remains for this function, or because the participant forgets to report (Pang, 2006, p. 60). Furthermore, as stressed by Ericsson and Simon (1993) and Gass and Mackey (2000), concurrent think-alouds require that the participants be carefully trained. Due to the number of respondents involved in the main study (N=30) (see 3.3.1), and the types of languages they use for reporting (Mandarin Chinese, English, and code-mixing <e.g., English and Cantonese>) (see 3.3.4 for the procedures of the main study), it would be highly challenging for the researcher to provide all of them with a similar level of training and practice. Any variations in the briefings could lead to deviations in terms of the depth and quality of the recalls produced by the participants. As a consequence, stimulated recall can be more advantageous than on-line reporting in minimising the effects of interruption and the resultant data loss.

3.2.4 Implementation of the piloting

3.2.4.1 Participants

Eight graduate students participated in the pilot study: two Americans who are native English speakers (NS), three Mainland students (ML), and three Hong Kong locals (HK). Their profiles are summarised in Table 3.2 (Numbers 1 to 2 are NS; 3-5 are ML students; 6-8 are HK students.).

The participants were studying in a Hong Kong university at the time of the study, the same university where the main study took place. Most were registered in programmes related to language and linguistics; ML3 majored in Anthropology. All of the HK and ML students were using e-mails to communicate with professors in their daily lives. The three ML students had taken the TOEFL and/or IELTS before gaining admission into the university in Hong Kong; their scores were 600 (in paper-based TOEFL, the total score of which is 677), 7.5 and 7.5 in IELTS (with total score of 9) respectively. Two Hong Kong local students also took the IELTS, one of whom gained 8.0, while the other had only a vague impression of the score she attained – "7 or something."

3.2.4.2 Procedure

Data was collected individually from each participant, following these procedures. Once consent was obtained from an informant, I briefly explained the general process to him/her (by e-mail, phone, and/or face-to-face negotiation), highlighting the importance of the cohesiveness and compactness of the procedures. The informant would firstly suggest a date when it would be suitable for him/her to do the stimulated recall, on the basis of which I would propose a specific time to send the electronic DCTs and meanwhile fix the exact time for retrospective verbal reporting.

Secondly, the questionnaire was sent to each participant by e-mail. In the e-mail it was requested that the questionnaire be finished by typing on the keyboard, in one sitting and sending it back online immediately after completion. The participant was advised to read the instructions carefully and put him/herself into the scenarios as if they were in the real life situations.

Next, each participant was asked to inform me either by phone or by e-mail as soon as the questionnaire had been sent back. The time and venue for the following stimulated recall were then confirmed. I worked on the submitted DCTs, analysed them, and prepared a list of prompts to guide the stimulated recall session.

Last, two hardcopies of the completed questionnaires (with certain words and expressions highlighted) were printed out, one for the participant and the other for myself. Along with the questions prepared beforehand, these materials functioned as visual stimuli to prompt the informants to recall their thoughts while fulfilling the tasks. We both went through the messages one by one; the retrospections were recorded and transcribed nearly word for word with the assistance of Soundscriber, principally on a content basis.

Table 3.2 Profiles of the pilot study participants

No.	Nationality	L1	L2	Other languages	Gender	Age	Major	TOEFL score	IELTS score	Date of test	Length of residence in HK
NS1	USA	English	——	Mandarin	F	24-9	EL	——	——	——	18 mons
NS2	US citizen/HK permanent resident	English	Cantonese	Mandarin	M	40+	LG	——	——	——	19 yrs
ML3	P.R.China	Chinese	English	Wenzhou Dialect, French	F	24-9	AP	600/677	——	2006	2 yrs
ML4	Chinese	Mandarin, Cantonese, Chaozhou Dialect	English	——	M	24-9	AL	——	7.5	Apr-06	1.5 yrs
ML5	Chinese	Chinese	English	——	M	30-9	AL	——	7.5	Feb-04	5 mons
HK6	Chinese	Minnan Dialect	Mandarin	Cantonese English	F	24-9	AL	285/300	8	Forgot	12 yrs
HK7	Chinese	Cantonese	English	Mandarin	F	24-9	AL	——	7	Around 2003	26 yrs
HK8	Chinese	Cantonese	English	Japanese	M	24-9	AL	——	——	——	Over 20 yrs

(NB: L1 – first language; L2 – second language; F: female; M: male; EL: English literature; Lg: linguistics; Ap: anthropology; AL: applied linguistics.)

3.2.5 Analysis

In the pilot study, stimulated recall data operates as the most reliable resource for testing the instrumentation process and deciding the effectiveness of the e-DCT questionnaire. In analysing the qualitative data, open-coding (or initial coding, as stated by researchers such as Charmaz, 2006 and Saldaña, 2009) was applied; labels were placed on the themes that emerged, whether they had been identified in the guiding question scheme or not.

3.2.6 Implications for the main study

Problems were identified in the pilot-testing process, raising awareness of aspects to refine in terms of the instrument and implementation procedures in the main study.

3.2.6.1 Problems observed in the pilot study

3.2.6.1.1 Length of the questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 11 pages and covered demographic information, 10 DCTs and follow-up perceptive judgements. Unlike traditional DCTs that call for one or a few responses to produce a certain speech act, the electronic DCTs require the participants to write one e-mail following each scenario. Although the fundamental objective is requests, other speech acts such as expressions of appreciation and/or apology may be given to facilitate a request. In addition, multiple requests may appear in a single mail, acting as either a pre- or a post- request, to prepare for or further justify the reasonableness of bringing forward the main requesting act.

The length of the DCT responses ranged from 28 (HK7, situation 9) to 132 words (ML4, situation 8), with an average of 61.8 words. The time it took to complete the DCTs varied between half an hour and over two hours, with an average of 1.2 hours. On the whole, it was a time-consuming task for the informants, as one ML student pointed out,

> I got very tired when I went on to the fifth one, and I had to have some drink and listen to some music to relax myself, and to relieve some of my tiredness…Yes, I do think I need this much time. (ML6)[4]

Two other non-native participants (one HK and one ML student) behaved a bit impatiently when coming to the last situation, which was evidenced by either typos (e.g., "reschedule" for "rescheduling", "incontinence" for "inconvenience") or relatively simple structure. This inclination was further verified in the retrospective interviews:

> "…cause' it's the last one (laughing), you know, just finish it as quick as possible." (HK8)
>
> "'Inconvenience', sorry, cause' I rushed a bit at this point (laughing)." (ML5)

Fatigue has to be one of the concerns in designing and administering surveys. In

[4] For the Chinese learners groups (both HK and ML groups), the original discourse was made in Chinese, which was then transcribed and translated into English.

order to lower the cognitive burden on informants and enhance the quality of the data, the number of scenarios had to be deduced. As advised by the participants, who were all social science research students, six or eight would be an ideal number of encounters.

3.2.6.1.2 Selection of the scenarios

Living and studying in a similar context would never mean the same experiences and perceptions for everyone. Different people may hold differing opinions towards the academic encounters, the communicating partner, and this status-unequal type of e-mail interaction in general, particularly when regarding their personal background and prior experience. In the piloting process, the participants voiced interesting, also enlightening views that were not originally unveiled in the DCT validation.

Take situations 1 and 9, for instance; both were about making an appointment with the professor to discuss a future presentation, but with differing temporal references. A few participants suggested making both of them into one. ML3 stated: "I understand both situations in the same way. If in the first one, the time were scheduled, I would have made it even shorter."

Also, three situations (Situation 3, 8, and 10) were not found as representative as expected. Participants either reconstructed the task as a real-life communicative event, or they made a compromise even though they rejected the tasks personally. To illustrate, in the last scenario, *Rescheduling a meeting*, it was a "quite horrible thing" to HK8, and would be "very difficult since the professors here are very busy" in ML5's opinion.

Such task-reframing behaviours have virtually been addressed by Woodfield (2004) who contrasted data collection methods of written DCTs and verbal reporting. Once again it points to the importance of task authentication and instrument enhancement before application in the main study.

Almost all of the participants believed that most of the scenarios were authentic, in spite of their varying experiences. For Situation 6 *Auditing a course*, two of the HK students (HK7 & 8) believed that they would walk into the classroom and get face-to-face permission directly without writing any e-mail beforehand, whereas a few others commented that they had been used to e-mailing the professors prior to auditing. The manner in which students get in touch with professors may be diversified, which reiterates what HK5 mentioned, "I didn't realise that I need to e-mail the professor to get permission, but I saw people do it this way, and then I decided that I might need to follow them."

3.2.6.1.3 Elucidation of P. ɔfessor X and Imposition

In writing the messages, several participants were disposed to establish an image of a specific professor in their real academic life. In NS2's response, this tendency was explicitly addressed, "Well, what I did, to let you know, is, I thought of this professor as Professor XXX." ML4 put forward that, even for native professors, "the way I write to A, to B (both Chinese, also English and Chinese bilinguals), will be very different from the way I write to C (a foreign professor from the UK), you know, although they are all native speakers of English," which demonstrated the importance of further elaborations of the foreign identity of the professor. After all, in Hong Kong universities, there are both foreign and Chinese professors who have been enculturalized in different contexts. What's more, the image constructed of theprofessor by other informants may not be as stable as what NS2 has understood; the nature of the request varies in a number of ways so that different requests may have different demands in terms of the social-contextual variables. Even for the imagined *Professor X*, participants may have treated him/her somewhat differently within various situations. For instance, several of the respondents indicated that when asking for reference letters, the professor must be one that is a little closer to them than Professor X. Consequently, it became important to ask the participants in the main study to evaluate all three variables connected with this imagined professor:

power difference, social distance, and degree of imposition, with the aim of grasping the underlying contextual variance and attaining an all-around picture of the learners' pragmalinguistic performance.

Notwithstanding the illustration in the questionnaire, three informants (ML3 & 4, HK8) exhibited certain misunderstandings when assessing the degree of imposition in some of the situations. HK8 did not pay enough attention to the exemplification; after recognising his treatment of imposition as politeness degree of the language, he explained, "Oh, yeah, sorry it's the other way around, because the more imposing it is, the…the…the more imposing it is, I think it's more rude. Yeah, if it's less imposing, then I think it's more polite." This contrasted with ML3 and ML4, who maintained that imposition was not so much to do with the speech event as to how much pressure their language may have yielded to the professor. They considered imposition primarily from the angle or position of the professor other than the characteristics of the situations, so measures had to be taken to ease the understanding of this variable.

3.2.6.2 Modifications of the instruments

Based on the pilot testing, the electronic DCT needed to be improved in four areas:

a. Clarity about the attributes of *Professor X*, illustration of *Imposition*,

b. the number of the scenarios,

c. the categories of contextual variables, and

d. the layout.

To begin with, the "American native English speaker identity" of the professor needed to be reinforced. Next, two samples parsing the concept of *imposition* would be furnished and highlighted with an eye-catching colour. Then, scenario 1 (Making an appointment two weeks before the deadline) and 9 (Meeting in the regular office hours) would be incorporated into one; scenario 3 (Asking for guidance for the assignment), 8 (Asking for help with the proofreading) and 10 (Rescheduling a meeting) were to be deleted.

The likelihood of Scenarios 3, 8 and 10 were questioned by participants from all three cultural groups. While situations such as borrowing books and auditing courses were considered as *not very authentic* by respondents from certain groups, they were retained in the questionnaire for the main study. This was not to disregard the informants' views; the rationale was that culture and cultural influence might have contributed to such attitudinal difference, which has been recognised in the literature and would also be part of the exploration of the wider research. In fact, in her PhD study, Fukushima (2003) even went so far as to include authenticity judgement as part of the perception investigation, aiming to uncover the hidden impact of culture on learners' pragmatic production.

3.2.6.3 Improvement of the procedures

3.2.6.3.1 Question scheme for retrospection

Drawing on previous empirical pragmatic research using verbal reports (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Woodfield, 2008a), I constructed a question scheme for the retrospective interviews, which comprised three dominant parts, 12 questions: 1) Composing process of each individual e-mail; 2) Specific questions related to the linguistic production for each scenario; and 3) E-mails as a mode of communication in academic discourse (general views).

The scheme was employed in the pilot study and turned out to be useful and directional, although limitations were inevitably identified. It was understandable since the questions could be inexhaustive and the interviews might also be fairly flexible. A significant aspect, which had initially been ignored, was the language in the mind of learners for composing, planning, and formulating the messages; this was given saliency in the interviews with the last two informants. Additionally, questions about the construction of identity in cyberspace were not explicitly addressed, even though this could be another valuable issue of exploration. Both aspects were added to the scheme for the main study. Together with the reassessment of the scenario authenticity, the question scheme was updated to subsume 15 questions (see Appendix 3).

3.2.6.3.2 Cohesiveness of the procedures

It is of primary importance in this research to implement the procedures in a highly cohesive and compact way. The participants must send the questionnaire right after completion; the researcher needs to do the analysis instantly when the questionnaire arrives; the stimulated recall has to take place as soon after the questionnaire production as possible. With NS2, the questionnaire and the stimulated recall session were finished within one afternoon, which was an ideal situation. However, for the rest of the participants, due to their individual schedules, the long period of time spent in responding to the DCTs as well as the resulting exhaustion, most of the recalls were done the day after.

According to Cohen (1987), "Retrospection can be immediate (e.g., within, say, an hour of the event) or delayed (a few hours, days, or even weeks after the event)" (p. 84). The assumption is that the researcher needs to make sure that the participants still have a fresh memory of what they did before so as to recall as much information as they can. The shorter the interval between the completion of DCTs and the retrospective verbalisation, the better and the more responses can be likely drawn out. In the main study, the retrospection should be performed soon after the questionnaire completion and no later than the following day.

3.3 The Main Study

The pilot study proved to be useful, informed by which the main study was conducted with both care and meticulousness, to pursue the procedural coherence, and accordingly a heightened reliability. This section provides details about the process of the main study: the selection of participants, the modified instrument, procedures, coding and analysis methods.

3.3.1 Selection of the participants

35 informants participated in the main study and in the end 30 were sampled, comprising three cultural groups: the Mainland Chinese students (MLCLE), the Hong Kong local students (HKCLE), and American students (NS). They were all studying in this same university in Hong Kong at the time of the research. Their profiles are summarised in Table 3.3.

One of the criteria for sampling the CLE (Chinese learners of English) participants was that they needed to be advanced learners with a proficiency level of 7 or above in IELTS and/ or 600 or above (paper-based) or 100 or above in TOFEL (computer-based). This was to control for the variable of proficiency level since there have been studies showing that there can be relationship between pragmatic competence and linguistic proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda

Table 3.3 Profiles of the main study participants

NO.	Gender	Age	Nationality	Major	TOEFL	IELTS	Test Date	L1	L2	Others	Length of residence in HK
HK1	F	21-23	Chinese	MPhil in Literary Studies		7.5	Aug. 2008	Cantonese	English		21 years
HK2	F	24-29	HKSAR	Applied English Linguistics				Cantonese	English	Putonghua	25 years
HK3	F	21-23	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics				Cantonese	English	Putonghua /Spanish/Japanese	Since birth
HK4	F	21-23	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics				Cantonese	English		22 years
HK5	M	24-29	HK	Applied English Linguistics				Cantonese	English	Mandarin	24 years
HK6	F	24-29	HK(China)	Japanese Studies/Linguistics				Chinese	English	Japanese	17 years
HK7	F	24-29	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics				Cantonese	English		28 years
HK8	F	24-29	Hong Kong	English Literary Studies		8	Nov. 2005	Cantonese	English Mandarin	Italian Beginner German Intermediate	24 years
HK9	F	24-29	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics		7	2005	Cantonese	English	Mandarin	25 years
HK10	F	24-29	HK Chinese	Anthropology/Linguistics				Cantonese /Mandarin	English	French (reading) Siyi Cantonese (speaking&listening) Hokkien (working knowledge) Swedish (basic reading & writing)	23 years, born in HK
ML1	F	24-29	China	Applied English Linguistics	627		May 2006	Putonghua	English	Japanese	16 months
ML2	M	24-29	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics		8	Aug. 2007	Chinese	English		6 months

ML3	F	21-23	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics		7.5	June 2007	Mandarin	English	Cantonese/French	7-8 months
ML4	F	24-29	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics				Chinese	English		15 months
ML5	M	21-23	Chinese	MPhil in Literary Studies	111	8.5	28/07/08 14/07/08	Mandarin /Cantonese	English		8 months
ML6	M	30-39	Chinese	Anthropology/Linguistics	104		Oct. 2007	Chinese	English	Arabic	24 months
ML7	F	30-39	China	English Literary Studies	630		May 2004	Chinese	English	French/Latin	30 months
ML8	F	24-29	China	English Literary Studies	640		Aug. 2005	Chinese	English		12 months
ML9	M	30-39	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics		7.5	Feb. 2004	Chinese	English		6 months
ML10	M	24-29	Chinese	Applied English Linguistics		7.5	Apr. 2006	Mandarin Cantonese			18 months
NS1	M	21-23	US	Business Administration				English	Spanish		2 months
NS2	F	24-29	USA	MBA				English			3 months
NS3	F	21-23	USA	Communication				English		French in high school and university. Now in Level 1 Mandarin	3 months
NS4	F	24-29	USA	Law (Graduate Student)				English	Spanish	Portuguese/A tiny bit of Cantonese	2.5 months
NS5	M	21-23	American	Business Administration				English	Cantonese		3 months
NS6	M	21-23	American	Finance				English	French		7 months
NS7	M	21-23	American	Business				English			5 months
NS8	M	21-23	American	Environmental Studies				English	Spanish	Cantonese	5 months
NS9	F	21-23	American	Interdisciplinary Studies				English			2 months
NS10	F	24-29	USA	English Literature				English		Putonghua (not bilingually)	12 months

& Röver, 2001). What's more, research on advanced learners' pragmatic ability has generated a consistent finding that "high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, p. 686).

The ML group consisted of 5 males and 5 females, 7 of whom were in their 20s, with the remainder in their 30s. They majored in subjects related to English language and linguistics; though ML6 was doing his PhD study in Anthropology, he had obtained his master's degree in linguistics. The same situation applied to HK6 and HK10 in the Hong Kong group, both of whom were holders of MA degrees in linguistics. All the CLEs were graduate students with a background in linguistics or language studies and for MLs, a certain level in either the TOEFL or IELTs was compulsory admission into the university. As proved by the scores, ranging from 627 to 640 in paper-based TOEFL, 104-111 in computer-based TOEFL, and 7.5-8 in IELTS, their level of proficiency was high. Their length of stay in Hong Kong varied from 6 months to 30 months: 6-8 months (ML2, ML3, ML5, and ML9), 12-18 months (ML1, ML4, ML8, ML10), and 20 & above (ML6 & ML7).

A little different from the ML group, the local Hong Kong respondents were all in their 20s and 9 out 10 were females. HK6 moved to Hong Kong from Mainland China at the age of 7; she received 17 years of education in Hong Kong. All of the others had been living in Hong Kong since birth. Interestingly, when asked to indicate their nationality, 5 identified themselves as *Chinese*, with the other 5 laying some emphasis on the specificity of *Hong Kong* by stating either "Hong Kong", "HKSAR", "HK (China)", or just "Hong Kong Chinese."

As for the NS group, among the 10 American students, 9 were participating in an exchange programme, 8 for a semester and 1 was on a year-long exchange (NS6). NS10 was an exception; she was pursuing her MPhil degree in this university and her residence in Hong Kong was therefore the longest–12 months, as opposed to the majority who were staying for around 2 to 5 months. All of the participants were in their 20s; three of them, who were over 24, were graduate students in MBA, Law, and Literature respectively. Though the other seven were still doing their undergraduate studies (enrolled in different majors), they were in their final years (year 3 or 4) of their study; NS1 and NS9 were doing double majors and NS1 was in his fifth year of undergraduate study.

In the NS group, only those who were born, educated, and socialised in the American culture and society were selected as informants. Students with a second culture origin, such as those of Chinese and Vietnamese ethnicity, who were born in Hong Kong/ Mainland China or Vietnam, and immigrated to the US in their teens, were not included in the study. As cautioned by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009), the control of ethnicity is "important in order to avoid influences from other cultures and languages" (p. 88).

3.3.2 Profiles of the e-mail assessors

Six American professors, two females and four males, lecturing in the same university in Hong Kong, were invited to offer first-hand evaluations and comments on the e-mail productions of students that were randomly chosen. All of the professors had been teaching in Hong Kong for over ten years. They specialised in three different academic fields, with five affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and the other Business Administration. All were full professors, except for one, who was an associate professor at the time of the study. Table 3.4 displays the profiles of these professors.

As shown in the table, the six American professors were similar with regard to their age, professorship, and length of stay in Hong Kong. Residing in a culturally and linguistically different place can result in certain degrees of acculturation and socialisation into the host culture, which very likely would differ from individual to individual. The assessor's knowledge of Chinese culture, the students' learning culture and their communication styles (e.g., writing and speech styles) in particular, may have evolved over time. After years of residence they may have become more accommodating of the discourse of the local students. This level of accommodation may also vary according to personal experience and intercultural knowledge.

Table 3.4 Profiles of the assessors

No.	Gender	Age	Rank	Affiliation	Length of Stay in HK
Prof. 1	M	Between 50-60	Professor	Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Arts	Over 10 years
Prof. 2	F	Between 50-60	Professor	Department of Japanese Studies, Faculty of Arts	Over 10 years
Prof. 3	F	Between 50-60	Professor	Department of Music, Faculty of Arts	Over 10 years
Prof. 4	M	Between 50-60	Associate Professor	Department of English, Faculty of Arts	Over 10 years
Prof. 5	M	Between 50-60	Professor	Department of English, Faculty of Arts	Over 10 years
Prof. 6	M	Between 50-60	Professor	Department of Management, Faculty of Business Administration	Over 10 years

Students in Hong Kong universities have exposure to Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, British English, American English, Australian English, and sometimes other varieties of English (e.g., Singaporean English). The study chose American English as the research object for the following reasons.

Firstly, in the university where the present study was conducted, there are far more international students from the US opting for exchange programs to this university than other English-speaking countries. Also, each year, the majority of the students who go abroad from this university choose to go to North America. Consequently, American English is a prevalent variety within this context. Secondly, the American students who participated in the study are more used to communicating with American professors as they were all originally from American universities and 90% of them had not stayed for a long period of time in Hong Kong at the time of the study. If professors from other English-speaking contexts (e.g., Britain) were invited as audience, it would have added another layer of complexity to the variable of *culture* and possibly greater difficulty in interpreting the students' production. To choose American students as participants and American professors as the target audience facilitated a focused cross-cultural (American culture vs. Chinese culture) and intercultural comparison (American culture with Chinese culture). Lastly, to be consistent with the previous three considerations, in sampling the HK and ML students, only those who had had previous e-mail communications with American professors in this context were selected for the main study.

3.3.3 Instruments

Based on the findings of the pilot study, the e-DCT questionnaire was revised for the main study (Appendix 4). Six scenarios were included in the questionnaire: 1) asking for an appointment for presentation discussion; 2) asking for an assignment extension; 3) borrowing a book; 4) requesting for course information; 5) auditing a course; and 6) asking for a reference letter. Following the demographic survey, *Prof. X* was profiled with specifics of age, profession, native English-speaker identity and American identity, and contact history with the target e-mail producer. Participants were required to assess four parameters regarding pragmatic perception, all on a five-point scale, for the sake of consistency and also the neatness of the layout. Throughout the questionnaire, the blank sections that were reserved for participant production were coloured in light blue, thereby resembling the format of real-life e-mails.

Starting with warm-up questions based on the demographic information provided in the e-DCT questionnaire, in individual sessions, I invited each participant to share with me: 1) his/her prior study abroad and travel abroad experience (if any); 2) his/her reflections on the current stay in the new cultural context (if applicable); 3) their language learning experiences, and 4) their holistic feelings about having intercultural exchanges with people from differing backgrounds in general. The ameliorated question scheme (see Appendix 3) that guided the stimulated recalls covered three major aspects:

I. The writing process related to each of the 6 completed e-mail messages;

II. Specific questions about the 6 e-mail messages written by the interviewee;

III. E-mail as a mode of communication in academic discourse (general views).

This scheme served merely as a guide and the retrospections were by no means restricted; rather, they were highly open-ended, calling for spontaneous and unstructured responses.

3.3.4 Procedures

Bearing in mind the fundamentality of cohesion of the research phases, in the main study, data was collected on a one-on-one basis, sticking closely to the procedures exercised in the pilot study, as shown in 3.2.4.2. Instead of relying entirely on the two printouts of the completed questionnaires, a computer was also provided for the interviewees to provoke their memory retrieval and facilitate the verbalisation of thoughts. Multiple audio records were made for the retrospective interviews, the majority of which were conducted in very quiet settings like a language laboratory.

When carrying out the stimulated recalls, English was the language of reporting for the American students, and also the communicating medium between us; whereas for mainland students, Mandarin was employed as it is the mother tongue of both the participants and me. With regard to the local students, they were given choices before the retrospection started. English would be the language of the interview if they chose it to be. If not, they were encouraged to use primarily Mandarin for reporting; however, they were also informed that whenever necessary, they could mix their language with English, Cantonese, or both. In case challenges were encountered, native speakers of Cantonese were readily accessible in this context to lend a hand with the interpretations.

Following stage one – e-DCT completion and stage two – stimulated recalls, stage three revolved around the collection of the audience judgements. Nine respondents, three from each group, were randomly sampled; their e-DCT productions, marked anonymously, were submitted to the six American professors. Table 3.5 presents the codes of the students whose productions were evaluated.

Table 3.5 Codes of the participants selected for evaluation

Student No.	Participant Code in the Main study
Student 1	ML1, from the MLCLE group
Student 2	HK5, from the HKCLE group
Student 3	NS1, from the NS group
Student 4	HK10, from the HKCLE group
Student 5	ML2, from the MLCLE group
Student 6	NS3, from the NS group
Student 7	ML6, from the MLCLE group
Student 8	NS4, from the NS group
Student 9	HK1, from the HKCLE group

On top of each questionnaire, a letter of invitation was attached, briefly explaining to the professors the research purpose and foci and particularly in what way they would be helpful to the study. To ensure the smooth reading of the messages and eliminate any possible interference caused by the complexity of the original e-DCT design, instructions were provided duly at proper places throughout the samples. Both soft and hard versions were sent to the professors and they were requested to read through the e-mails, assess the level of directness, the degree of politeness, and their level of satisfaction with each individual message. At the end of each sample, they were invited to provide additional comments associated with the e-mail writer, the characteristics of specific messages, and the general expectations they hold of student e-mail requests in daily contact. An audience-judgement-sample is provided as Appendix 5.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

3.3.5.1 Analysis of e-mail messages

In total there were 180 (30 participants composing messages for 6 different scenarios) e-mail messages generated by the e-DCT questionnaire. They were uploaded to and systematically organised in NVivo 8 (Richards, 2002; Gibbs, 2002; Edhlund, 2008), a software for qualitative data analysis. NVivo 8 facilitates the coding, segmentation, categorisation, organisation, and connection of qualitative data. A coding manual, derived originally from the influential CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) coding scheme, was developed and adapted to the current research, embracing features that are inherently unique to e-mail discourse, such as occurrence of other types of speech acts, deferential expressions, formulaic closings, and so on. Also, recent work by Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2008), Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010), and CARLA (Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition) all contributed to the forming of this coding framework (see Appendix 6).

CCSARP has earned a high reputation and broad application in both cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics research in the past thirty years. With the aid of NVivo 8, the data are able to be neatly organised. More than that, considering the size of the data pool – 128 messages and the structured categorisation of the coding framework, the software facilitated the coding process in a more consistent and systematic way. The intra-coder reliability may thus be strengthened to a large degree, so the overall reliability. The messages were codified into various items of the manual and quantified; the numbers yielded were input to SPSS 16.0 for subsequent statistical analysis.

3.3.5.2 Inter-rater reliability

It is worth noting that factually in advance of applying the coding manual in the main study, it was already trialled twice by the author, first in the pilot phase, which was done manually, and next during the progress of the main study, when 70% of the data were coded via NVivo 8. The purpose was twofold: to further refine the coding scheme, and to gain familiarity with the manual so as to enhance intra-coder consistency. Therefore, during the whole research process three rounds of data analysis were carried out: 1) analysis of the messages generated in the pilot study, 80 in total; 2) coding 70% of the main study data facilitated with NVivo 8; 3) final processing of the entire data set with an inter-coder.

Inter-rater reliability was sought and the whole process encompassed the following stages. To begin with, a PhD student in applied linguistics was invited to code 30% of the data, including three full e-DCT questionnaires from each cultural group. The rater was first of all provided with the full coding scheme with illustrations and informed of the procedures and areas worth of special attention. The student was encouraged to ask any questions he had during his coding of the 9 questionnaires. Informal discussions were held, either face to face or by phone. The inter-rater reliability was only 0.808. Then, problems were identified and chiefly, the rater ignored the hierarchical structure between head acts and its modifiers and focused largely on the latter, while missing coding some of the head acts. Also, the rater would easily overlook certain codes because of his lack of familiarity with the coding manual and lack of coding practice of such a type, as he admittedly acknowledged. Based on the results, the author scheduled another formal meeting, in which a more focused training was given to the other rater. Both the researcher and the rater went through two more questionnaires together and jointly coded them.

Next, in view of the complexity of the coding scheme and its demand on the rater with regard to the pragmatic knowledge, another training session was set up, involving both a joint coding and a separate coding by the co-rater. Agreement was reached about arguable categories after discussions and referring to relevant resources, such as exemplifications provided in the CCSARP scheme and other research papers, grammar books, and so on. Afterwards another 10% of the data were left with the rater to be coded independently. In the end, the inter-rater reliability achieved 0.923.

3.3.5.3 Analysis of stimulated recalls

The stimulated recalls were transcribed with Soundscriber, nearly word for word, on a content basis. Soundscriber is a program that is designed to assist with transcription of digitised sound files. It contains features that are specific to transcription and help transcribe files continuously with various labour-saving functions (cf. http://www-personal.umich.edu/~ebreck/sscriber.html).

In like manner, the stimulated recall protocols were uploaded to NVivo 8, sorted out, and organised within the programme. In view of the qualitative, open-ended nature of the retrospection, open-coding was firstly employed, as it enables the breaking down of the data into discrete parts, a close examination of them and allows comparisons to be made for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Moreover, as advised by Charmaz (2006), "a detailed, line-by-line open coding is perhaps more suitable for interview transcripts…" (p. 82).

The fundamental coding route involves the following steps: 1) Examine the data thoroughly; 2) Make a tentative classification based on the retrospection guiding scheme; 3) Analyse a subset of the data; 4) Place labels on themes that emerge; 5) Codify the meaning units and locate them under corresponding categories and subcategories; 6) Seek out the underlying thematic patterns and the interrelationship between categorises. In this process, the more sophisticated coding, axial coding, is conducted along with step 4 and the steps followed. Axial coding involves a set of procedures "whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 96). It is usually implemented 'halfway through' by retrieving and comparing fragments assigned to a certain code and determining relationships between main categories and subcategories (Boeije, 2010). NVivo can aid these coding processes and organise "branch structures" in it.

NVivo 8 plays a significant role in segmenting the data, establishing the nodes (derived largely from the open-coding) and meanwhile building up tree structures in the interpretive process (axial coding). Boeije (2010, p. 94) classified interpretative analysis into two major types: one is oriented towards the themes and categories present in the data, and the other is oriented towards the cases, such as organisations, activities, events, situations, or participants. Both types were emergent in the analysis of the stimulated recalls; the first was code-based (or nodes, as labelled by NVivo) thematic analysis, consisting of both free and tree nodes; this took the major part of the coding. The second was situation-based analysis, with each scenario functioning as a free node, spreading out with (layers of) branch nodes. In the end, 21 free nodes and 14 parent (tree) nodes (which subsume sub-tree nodes) were set up in the NVivo database. To illustrate, Figure 3.1 presents a sample tree structure that was extracted from the coding system; it focused on the parent node *Situation 1*.

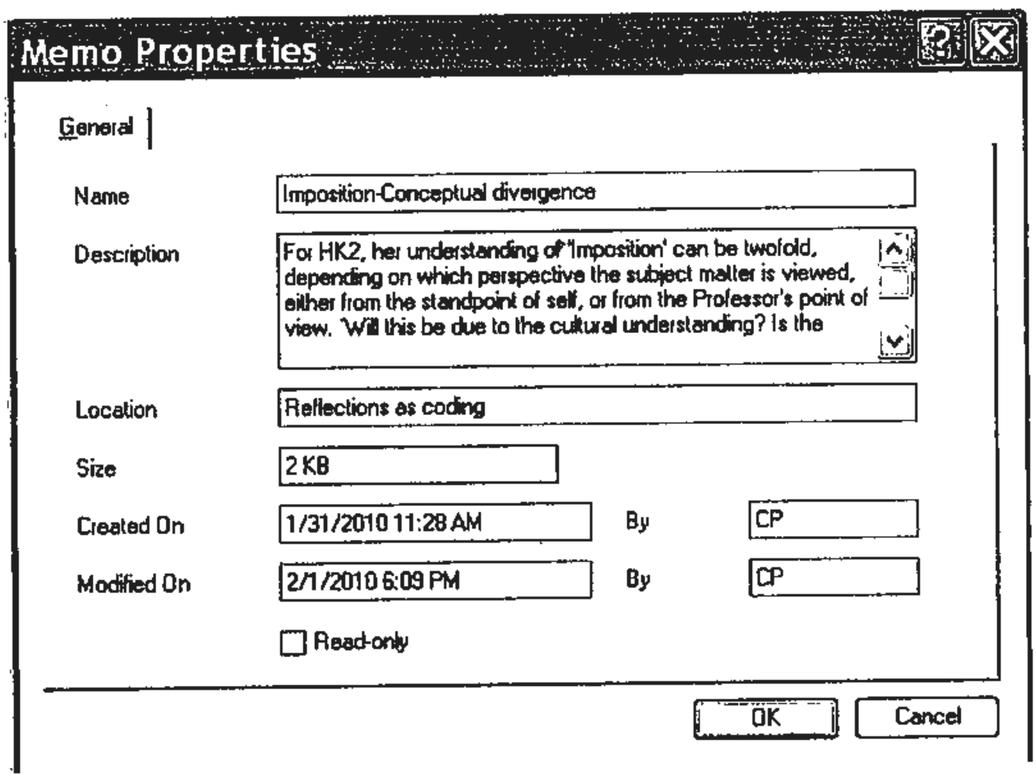
Following the suggestions by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Charmaz (2006), analytic memos were also kept in NVivo database from the initial coding to record the thoughts of the author and facilitate establishing linkages between nodes and theoretical works. Figure 3.2 demonstrate a sample of the memo.

There was, however, not a complete reliance on NVivo 8 and some qualitative data was analysed manually. For instance, the comments provided by the audience were summarised and classified under a plain word file, due to the condensed character of the data and also the smaller size of the dataset.

Figure 3.1 A sample of the tree structure established in NVivo 8

Situation 1
- Academic socialisation
- Certainty
- Closing
- **Composing process**
  - Planning
  - Intention
  - Attention
  - Rereading and editing
  - Readership
  - Picturisation
  - Organising and sequencing
  - Wording and linguistic choices
- Form of address
- Format
- Politeness
- Pragmalinguistic awareness
- Sociopragmatic awareness
- **Sociopragmatic variables**
  - Power
  - Social distance
  - Imposition
- Nature of the scenario
- Prior experience
- **Subject**
  - Principles
  - Capitalisation
- Thanks

Figure 3.2 A sample of an analytic memo



3.4 Summary

The focus of this chapter was the research design and research methodology. It firstly introduced the pilot-test, a crucial step for rationalising the choice of data-collection method and for instrument validation and refinement. The findings informed the main study in two major ways by: a. polishing the research instruments; b. rehearsing and improving the implementation procedures. The chapter delineated the concrete process employed in the main study, providing details about the research participants, research operation, and measures of data coding and analysis. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study from an interlanguage pragmatic perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: INTERLANGUAGE REQUESTS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presènts and discusses the findings of the study from an interlanguage pragmatic perspective. It describes and compares the pragmalinguisitc production and sociopragmatic perception in relation to cognitive processing in making academic e-mail requests by the three groups of students (native English-speaking American students, non-native Hong Kong students, and non-native Mainland students). In the process, the chapter addresses the following research questions:

Pragmatic production

1. What pragmalinguistic strategies do Native English-Speaking American Students (NS), Hong Kong Chinese Learners of English (HKCLE) and Mainland Chinese Learners of English (MLCLE) employ in electronic requests to American professors that are of an academic nature?

2. Are there any differences in the distribution of the pragmalinguistic strategies among these three groups?

Pragmatic perception

3. How certain are the senders about their choice of pragmalinguistic strategies as evidenced in the above research questions?

4. How do these three groups of students evaluate the sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance, and imposition degree of the situations?

4.2 Pragmatic Production–E-mails Responses

The e-DCT generated 180 e-mail messages, the word count of which ranged from 19 to 176, with an average of 70.77 words. They were coded with the adapted CCSAPR coding manual (see also 3.3.5), which is presented in Appendix 6. The requests elicited were coded and analysed with regard to the request perspectives, level of directness, internal and external modifications. The percentage frequencies of the emergent strategies categories were calculated; statistical analyses were conducted to make comparisons among the three groups so as to establish whether there were differences among them and, if so, whether they were statistically significant.

4.2.1 Request perspectives

According to Blum-Kulka, (1989), "Choice of perspective presents an important source of variation in requests" (p. 58). It is also one of the ways in which the speaker "signals his or her estimate of the degree of coerciveness required situationally" (Blum-Kulka, 1991, p. 266). Four types of request orientations are classified in the CCSARP project: hearer dominance, speaker dominance, speaker and hearer dominance, and impersonal. In composing a request, speakers/writers may choose to stress their own role as the agent, or as recipient, or they may emphasise the joint position of the requesting behaviour by using an inclusive *we*, or try to avoid this issue by adopting an impersonal orientation.

The request perspectives in the e-DCTs were coded following such a division and all four dimensions were identified. Table 4.1 presents the classification scheme, with examples extracted from the e-DCT corpus:

Table 4.1 Classification scheme of request perspectives

Request perspective	Description	Example
Hearer dominance	Request realised from the standpoint of the hearer	Could *you* kindly lend it to me for reference?
Speaker dominance	Request realised from the standpoint of the speaker	Is it okay if *I* go to see you during you office hours on Tue.?
Speaker and hearer dominance	Request realised from the viewpoint of both participants	If not, could *we* meet at some other point before the presentation?
Impersonal	Request realised by avoiding explicit mentioning of the agent(s)	Can *students* audit this course?

The quantified data were inputted into and analysed via SPSS 16.0. The frequency of each individual category was calculated and measured by the Chi-square Test for Independence, a chi-square test used when there are two nominal variables, each with several categories (Aron, Aron, & Coups, 2009). Chi-square was selected as it is used with nominal (category) data in the form of frequency counts, and "if a researcher has several samples of data which involve frequencies rather than scores, a statistical test designed for frequency data must be used" (Howitt & Cramer, 2008, p. 134-135). To be more specific, it is a test for independence of the relationship between variables instead of the samples and therefore, suitable for the present study. Chi-square tests were applied to the analysis of request perspectives, head acts, internal and external modifiers. The results are presented in this section (for request perspective) and the sections followed.

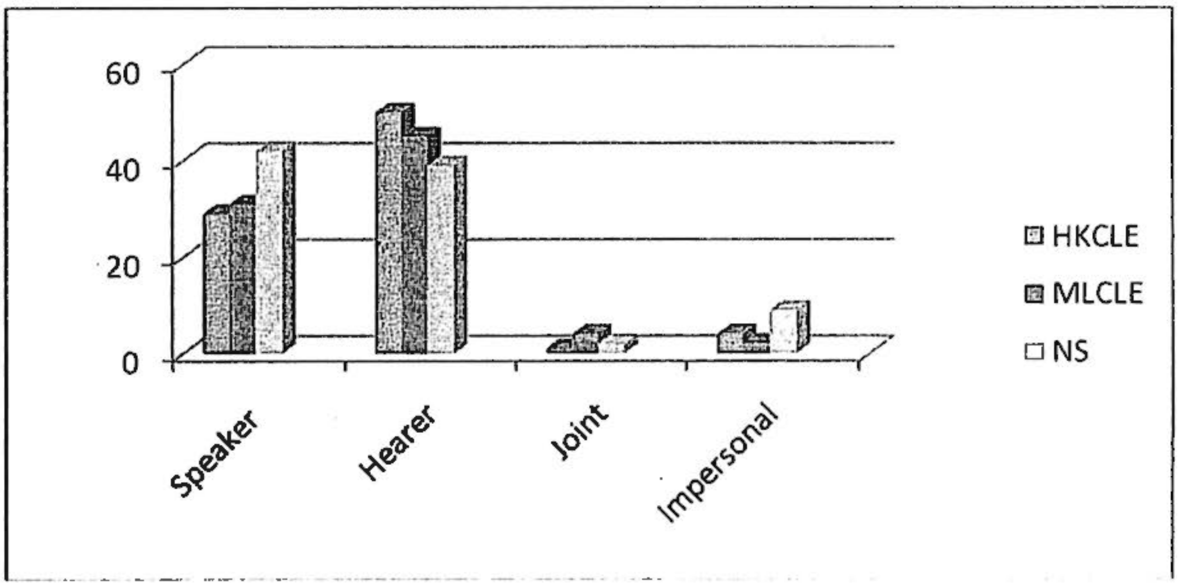
Table 4.2 Analysis of request perspectives

	Speaker	Hearer	Joint	Impersonal	Total
HKCLE	29/102 28.43%	50/134 37.31%	1/7 14.29%	4/15 26.67%	84
MLCLE	31/102 30.39%	45/134 33.58%	4/7 57.14%	2/15 13.33%	82
NS	42/102 41.18%	39/134 29.11%	2/7 28.57%	9/15 60.00%	92
Chi-square test results	χ^2=2.882 df=2 p=0.237	χ^2=1.358 df=2 p=0.507	χ^2=2.000 df=2 p=0.368	χ^2=5.200 df=2 p=0.074	N/A

Table 4.2 displays the findings regarding the request perspectives of the three groups. As indicated by the *p* value of each category, there was no statistically significant difference in all four perspectives, suggesting that in making those requests, the requesting orientations employed by the three groups point to a similar kind of tendency.

Figure 4.1 provides the bar chart illustration of the three groups' perspective distribution.

Figure 4.1 Analysis of request perspectives



According to Blum-Kulka (1989, p. 59), the choice of perspective affects social meaning, and avoidance to name the hearer as the actor can reduce the requesting form's level of coerciveness and, thereby, minimise the imposition of the request. In addition, as Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1987, p. 158) observe, a choice of joint perspective may serve to encode a sense of commonality and solidarity between interlocutors. To date, as Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) stress, with a few exceptions (Ellis, 1992, Blum-Kulka & Levenston, 1987, Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010), in the interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics circle, there seems to be a lack of sufficient empirical research on both native and non-native speakers' orientations in encoding requests of the target language. It is also for this reason that the current study examines this dimension.

Despite the statistical insignificance, it can be noted that the NS group employed a slightly higher percentage of speaker perspectives (41.2% NS vs. 28.4% HK/ 30.4% ML) and a lower percentage of hearer perspectives (28.2% NS vs. 39.1% HK/ 32.7% ML). It appears that the American students were somewhat more strategic in orienting their requesting behaviours as a way to index a lower degree of imposition, thereby a higher level of politeness. Interestingly, the HKCLE group performed consistently towards the opposite direction, as shown by the lowest frequency in speaker perspective (28.4%) and highest in hearer perspective (39.1%). Joint perspective was the least favourite orientation among all the groups. With regard to the impersonal perspective, the NS group exhibited a greater use of it than the other two cohorts (61.2% vs. 30:8%/ 8%), as evidenced also by the p value, 0.074, which is mildly significant at the .05 level.

In their study of "requests to faculty for an extension" by advanced mixed L1 learners and British English native speakers, Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) reported similar findings with respect to both joint and impersonal orientations. They, too, found no statistical difference in speaker dominance. Nevertheless, their learner group manifested a strong preference towards the hearer perspective, a tendency that differs from the current study. Although both HK and MLCLEs turned to hearer perspective more often than NSs (see Table 4.2), the difference was not significant statistically. There are many factors that may contribute to such a deviation, and the most remarkable ones can be: 1) the current study focuses on requests made in six different situations with various degrees of imposition, rather than solely on "an extension"; 2) the discursive features of e-mails may yield a large amount of occurrences of Mood Derivables, which are hearer-oriented, yet discourse-bounded. For example:

(1) *Please kindly tell me* the time that is convenient to you. (HK3, Situation 1)

(2) *Please kindly let me* know about your opinion. (ML5, Situation 6)

(3) *Please let me know* if and when we could meet to exchange the book. (NS3, Situation 3)

In fact, due to the nature of e-mails, in which multiple requests can co-occur, most of such Mood Derivables function as the post-requests before closing to consolidate the main request. Lee (2004b) also employed written DCTs to elicit requests in academic communication from both tertiary-level Cantonese learners of English (CLE) and Native English speakers (NES) who were at pre-university and university levels in Hong Kong. Both Chinese requests and English requests were produced by the CLE to make it possible for cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic comparisons. She identified request-perspective related findings and discovered that NSE displayed a more even distribution of both hearer- and speaker-dominant requests than the CLE. However, this exploration of request perspectives seemed to focus largely on the Preparatory Requests and did not examine all request types. Preparatory Request, also called Query Preparatory, is one typical kind of indirect strategy embodied in request head acts and section 4.2.2 delineates the findings of the head acts.

4.2.2 Head act–level of directness

A head act is the part of speech that conveys the main illocutionary force of the utterance; it is the core of the request sequence, which can be modified both internally and externally (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). It is also the head act that determines the level of directness of the request. The following adapted CCSARP scheme, ordered in accordance with the decreasing degree of directness, was applied to the present study for classifying the strategy type of the request heads.

However, due to the status-unequal, academic (student to professor) nature of the requests, direct strategies such as Obligation Statements, which state explicitly the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act, and Locution Derivable, by means of which the illocutionary intent is directly derivable from the literal meaning of the utterance, can rarely be found in students' production. In a like manner, the non-conventional indirect strategy of Mild Hint would be rather unsuitable to speak of the academic e-mail exchanges in general, due to the largely professional and institutional genre of discourse. Words with no reference to the actual request proper may involve guesswork from the addressees and hence not only affect the efficiency of communication, but even be improper when the recipient possesses a higher social status.

In the end, six types of head acts occurred: direct strategies of Mood Derivable, Performatives, Want Statements, conventionally indirect strategies of Suggestory Formulae, Query Preparatory, and unconventionally indirect strategies of Strong Hints. The coding scheme of the head acts is presented below in Table 4.3 with examples.

Table 4.3 Classification scheme of request head act

Head act	Description	Example
Direct strategies		

Mood derivable	Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force.	*Please take a look at the attached presentation plan when you have time.*
Performatives	Utterances in which illocutionary force is explicitly named.	*I'm writing to request for a deadline extension for MNG 1234.*
Hedged performatives	Utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions.	*I would like to ask you to present your paper a week earlier.*
Obligation statements	Utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act	*You'll have to move the car!*
Locution derivable	The illocutionary intent is directly derivable from the semantic meaning of the locution.	*You ought to/should submit your paper.*
Want statements	Utterances which state the speaker's desire that the event denoted in the proposition come about.	*I want to ask a favour from you to be one of my referees.*
Conventionally indirect strategies		
Suggestory formulae	Utterances which contain a suggestion to do something.	*Shall we meet sometimes next week, say Monday at 3 p.m. at your convenience?*
Query preparatory	Utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g., ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language.	*Would you please allow me an extension for one or two days?*
Non-conventionally indirect strategies		
Strong hints	Utterances containing partial reference to object or elements needed for the implementation of the act.	*I believe you may have a copy of it, but I am not sure if you are currently using it or not.*
Mild hints	Utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context.	*I am a nun* in response to a persistent hassler.

Bearing in mind the characteristics of the variables in association with the research purpose, the request head acts underwent similar coding and statistical procedures as mentioned above. Table 4.4 summarises the findings regarding the frequency distribution of the head act strategy choices among the three groups and the chi-square test results. Also, Figure 4.2 displays the frequency distributions by way of a bar chart.

As shown by Table 4.4, the range of strategies covered by the three groups was almost the same, except for the conventionally indirect strategy of Suggestory Formulae, which appeared in the NS group, although only once. Category by category, it reveals:

Firstly, the frequencies of the direct strategies of Mood Derivable and Want Statements were statistically different among the three cohorts, particularly Want Statements, with the p value 0.001, at a highly significant level of $p \leq .001$. Likewise, the former, Mood Derivable, gave rise to a p (0.01) significant at the .05 level. In contrast, the other type, the Performatives did not yield any marked differences. It is worth mentioning that the unmarked strategy of Performatives was substantially realised by the customary form of *I'm writing to ask...* in the current study (see examples 4 to 6). To some extent, this has become a routine opener in e-mails, and, consequently, it may have been treated as a popular form of usage for the majority of e-mail users. For example:

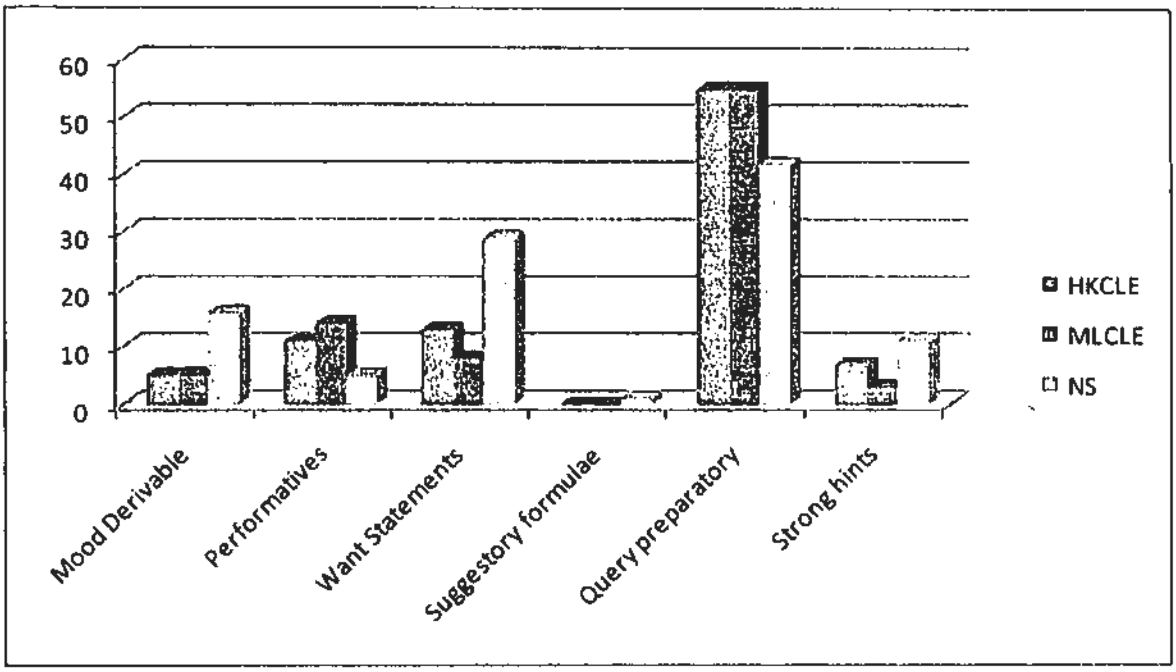
Table 4.4 Level of directness–analysis of head acts

	Direct strategies			Conventionally indirect strategies		Non-conventionally indirect strategies
	Mood Derivable	**Performatives**	**Want Statements**	**Suggestory formulae**	**Query preparatory**	**Strong hints**
HKCLE	5/26 19.23%	11/30 36.67%	13/50 26.00%	0.0	55/152 36.18%	7/21 33.33%
MLCLE	5/26 19.23%	14/30 46.67%	8/50 16.00%	0.0	55/152 36.18%	3/21 14.29%
NS	16/26 61.54%	5/30 16.66%	29/50 58.00%	1.0	42/152 27.64%	11/21 52.38%
Chi-square test results	χ^2=9.308 df=2 p=0.01*	χ^2=4.2 df=2 p=0.122	χ^2=14.44 df=2 p=0.001***	N/A	χ^2=2.224 df=2 p=0.328	χ^2=4.571 df=2 p=0.102

*p significant at $p \leq .05$

***p significant at $p \leq .001$

Figure 4.2 Level of directness – analysis of head acts



(4) *I am writing to ask for* an appointment to discuss my plan on the presentation. (HK 4, Situation 1)

(5) *I am writing to ask* whether we can meet later this week or next week. (ML7, Situation 1)

(6) *I am writing to schedule* an appointment with you to discuss our group's presentation for our selected subject. (NS2, Situation 1)

Secondly, the conventionally indirect strategy of Query Preparatory (QP) was the most preferred pragmalinguistic choice in making these requests and there was no marked variations among all three groups, as testified by both the *p* value (0.328) and frequencies (27.8% NS vs. 36.1% HK vs. 36.1% ML). Even so, relative to the non-native speaker groups, NS students employed fewer QPs. To exemplify, three

QP head acts that occurred in the same situation are listed here:

(7) If you are not using your copy for the moment, *would you mind* lending it to me? (HK1, Situation 3)

(8) *I am wondering if it is possible for me to* borrow your book for a couple of days if you are not using it currently. (ML4, Situation 3)

(9) *Would it be possible to* borrow the book from you and return it to you after the essay? (NS5, Situation 3)

Thirdly, as denoted by the *p* value, there was no marked contrast between the groups. Still, there is slender evidence showing that the NS group (52.4%) employed a relatively greater number of hints as compared to the HK group (33.3%), and particularly the ML group (14.3%). Hints were chiefly realised by partially referring to the requesting objects or events. In the present study most of them were reflected in a form of self-speculation or questions that students asked in relation to the requesting aim, as in the following examples:

(10) *I wonder if you have the book.* (HK2, Situation 3)

(11) *I heard from a friend of mine that your XXX course is very popular in the university, are you teaching it in this semester?* (ML 6, Situation 4)

(12) *I would love to take your elective course B, but cannot afford the unit space. What is your audit policy?* (NS3, Situation 5)

(13) *I believe you may have a copy of it, but I am not sure if you are currently using it or not.* (NS 10, Situation 3)

On account of the aforementioned findings, it is reasonable to reckon that in making status-unequal requests to their professors, students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, have the propensity to be indirect. Furthermore, NS students appear to be more capable of adding hints in their e-mails to tactfully achieve their purpose. They use direct strategies as well, but not as frequently as indirect strategy of QP, and when they do, NS students have a pronounced preference to direct strategies than the non-native Chinese students.

As discussed in 4.2.1, the substantial use of Mood Derivable was generated mostly to enhance the main request in the e-mail, either to strengthen the force of it, or to reduce the imposition. The significantly larger amount of use of it by the NS could perhaps suggest their more distinct inclination to employ dyadic or even multiple requests in a single e-mail, and to organise them in a certain manner. As for Want Statements, NS used it considerably more than the other two learners' groups. Seemingly, they tended to be much more explicit in expressing their wants or wishes when making these requests. Having said this, these requests were not simply presented in a plain manner; rather, they were polished with a range of syntactical and lexical measures, which will be further delineated in Section 4.2.3.

In the literature, there seems to be an inconsistency in terms of the empirical findings concerning the use of direct request strategies by both native English speakers and learners of English. In interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) area, direct strategies have been shown to be acquired earlier and used more often by learners with low proficiency levels (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Ellis, 1992; Trosborg, 1995). However, while Rose (2002) found that young Cantonese learners of English demonstrated a heightening preference for conventional indirectness along with increased proficiency; interestingly, Trosborg (1995) discovered that the use of direct requests increased with proficiency in her cross-sectional examination of Danish learners (that involve low, intermediate, and advanced level students) in EFL context.

Even though both the present study and the study by Sasaki (1998) found learner preference for conventional indirect strategies, the greater percentage of Want Statements by NS was in fact evidenced in learners' use in Sasaki's. The current study also deviated from that of Chang and Hsu (1998) who investigated academic requests in authentic e-mail messages by both Chinese and American students in an American university. They found a larger number of Want Statements employed by Chinese learners than American students in power-unequal requests. Yet, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007), who also focused on academic requests in authentic e-mails in American context, found that NS resorted largely to direct strategies in contrast to the non-native English students who were of Asian backgrounds with mixed L1. The American students also used hints to extend their requestive intentions. The present study, in this sense, corresponded with some of the findings in Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) with regard to direct strategy use, but not in a significant way. The similarities and differences with previous evidence could be attributed to such factors as learners' proficiency levels (e.g., the learners groups in the current study were graduate students at a more advanced level than those in Sasaki's), research instrumentation (e.g., different results yielded by elicitation methods and naturalistic enquiry), and research contexts (e.g., the regional differences and concomitant institutional cultural variance between Hong Kong and other places, and even within the US, such as Chang and Hsu's and Biesenbach-Lucas'). In general, for all groups, apart from the occurrence of Mood Derivables and Performatives largely due to the generic features of e-mail discourse, the frequency of the other type of direct strategy of Want Statements was in no way comparable to that of the indirect strategy QP.

The strategy of QP entails reference to preparatory conditions, e.g., the ability, willingness, etc. of the addressee in complying with the addressor's expressed intentions. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) discovered that conventional indirectness was universally manifested in requests across English, French, Hebrew, and Spanish.

Also, Blum-Kulka (1987) points out that indirectness does not necessarily imply politeness. She defines politeness as the interactional balance achieved between two needs: the need for pragmatic clarity and the need to avoid coerciveness, and in consequence, among all the request strategies for a head act, she believes that the balance of clarity and indirectness is most fully achieved in the case of QP. Trosborg (1995), too, detects that QP "involves more effective ways of requesting…(and) when employing a preparatory condition the requester also exhibits a protective orientation towards his/her own face in that he/she does not take compliance for granted (pp. 234-235). It is therefore not surprising to find out that all the groups turned to this level of directness to express both their requestive intention and a higher degree of politeness. More importantly, the non-native English speaking Chinese students in the current study have apparently developed a fairly strong pragmalinguistic control in determining specific indirect requesting strategies and in producing them into a variety of forms. They even surpassed American students in terms of the amount of QPs they employed.

This finding resonates with those in other ILP studies, such as the widely-cited investigations by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Trosborg (1995), Billmyer and Varghese (2000), Woodfield (2008b), Hendriks (2008). Conventionally indirect strategies have been identified as the most prominent strategies favoured by both native and non-native English speakers. Furthermore, some researchers have recorded an overuse of QPs by non-native English speakers (e.g., House & Kasper, 1987; Woodfield, 2008b; Pan, 2009) and, according to them, conventional QPs such as *could you VP* are heavily routinised in British English and may thus have gained acceptance among English users.

As advanced English learners, once they have internalised such types of forms, they may apply them with higher level of confidence and on a wider range of occasions. In the current study, too, the Chinese students seemed to rely more heavily on QPs than the American students, as shown in the amount of this strategy they employed.

In real life communications, it is very unusual that bare requests are given without refinements. The next section focuses on the request proper and analyses the internal syntactic and lexical/phrase modifications made by the three cohorts of students.

4.2.3 Internal modifications

4.2.3.1 Syntactic downgraders

According to Blum-Kulka (1989), internal modifiers are "elements within the request utterance proper (linked to the head act)" (p. 60). They may act either as downgraders, meant to soften the request or as upgraders, meant to intensify the coerciveness of a request. For downgraders, two major types have been distinguished: 1) syntactic downgraders, which "modify the head act internally by mitigating the positive force of the request by means of syntactic choices" (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 281), and 2) lexical/phrasal downgraders that "serve as optional additions to soften the impositive force of the request by modifying the head act internally through specific lexical and phrasal choices" (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 283). Table 4.5 presents the guiding scheme for this part of the coding; most examples were selected from the data pool.

In the list six of them had to be administered with particular care and attention in the coding process. As cautioned by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), with preparatory request strategies of *can/could I/you do P* type, the interrogative is unmarked and therefore should not be rated as a syntactic downgrader. Also, according to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 282), the durative aspect marker (or other

Table 4.5 Classification scheme of syntactic downgraders

Syntactic downgraders	Example
Interrogative	*Is there any way you might be able to send me an outline or suggested readings from last term?*
Negation	*Look, excuse me. I wonder if you* ***wouldn't*** *mind dropping me home?*
Subjunctive	*If you could give me any direction, I would really appreciate.*
Aspect	*I was wonder**ing** if I could arrange a time to come in and discuss it with you.*
Past tense	*I* ***was*** *hoping you* ***might*** *have some advice or how to go about doing this. /I wanted to ask for a postponement.*
Embedded if-clause	*I would really appreciate it* ***if*** *I could get an extension of 2 or 3 days.*
Past tense modal	***Could*** *you allow me one more day to submit my work?*

types of aspect) counts as mitigating only if it can be substituted by a simple form (e.g., *I am wondering* vs. *I wonder*). Similarly for the subjunctive, only optional subjunctive forms can be classified as downgraders, that is, when they are replaceable by indicatives (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 282). Further, past tense forms are coded as downgrading only if they are used with present time reference and thus can be substituted by present tense forms without changing the semantic meaning of the utterance (e.g. *I wanted to ask you*...vs. *I want to ask you*...) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 283). What's more, the past tense modal was added to the current coding list as a separate category, following Hendricks (2008), as such modals "function as mitigating devices in that they add an element of conditionality to a request, which gives the hearer an extra option (over non-conditional requests with present tense modals) to refrain from complying with the request" (p. 345).

The statistical results of the syntactic downgraders are shown in Table 4.6 and Figure 4.3. In general, NS group evidently modified their requests with a larger number of syntactic downgraders than either HK or ML group. A statistical difference was produced at the $p \leq .05$ level. Apart from the internal modifiers of Negation and Past Tense where zero marking occurred, all three groups covered the other five strategies with varying degrees. Statistical significance arose in three types, yet inconsistently between groups. The frequencies of Interrogatives resulted in a between-group difference, significant at $\leq .01$level; HK students used about twice as many interrogatives as NS students (53.3% HK vs. 26.7% NS), and even twice more than ML students (53.3% HK vs. 20% ML), while the frequencies of the last two groups were notably close. The other strategy type was Aspect, the use of which by the HK students was proportionally less than that by ML and NS students, with p significant at $\leq .05$ level. In fact, a closer examination reveals that for the most part it was the use of *I am wondering/I was wondering* that gave birth

Table 4.6 Internal modification: Syntactic downgraders

	Interrogative	Negation	Subjunctive	Aspect	Past tense	Past tense modal	If-clause	Total
HKCLE	32/60 53.33%	0 -	9/30 30.00%	2/24 8.33%	1	25/80 31.25%	23/91 25.27%	92/323 28.48%
MLCLE	12/60 20.00%	1 -	7/30 23.33%	10/24 41.67%	0	30/80 37.50%	39/91 42.86%	99/323 30.65%
NS	16/60 26.67%	0 -	14/30 46.67%	12/24 50.00%	22	25/80 31.25%	29/91 31.87%	132/323 24.47%
Chi-square test results	$\chi^2=11.2$ df=2 $p=0.004$**	N/A	$\chi^2=2.6$ df=2 $p=0.273$	$\chi^2=7$ df=2 $p=0.03$*	$\chi^2=40.261$ df=2 $p=0.000$***	$\chi^2=0.625$ df=2 $p=0.732$	$\chi^2=4.308$ df=2 $p=0.116$	$\chi^2=8.477$ df=2 $p=0.014$*

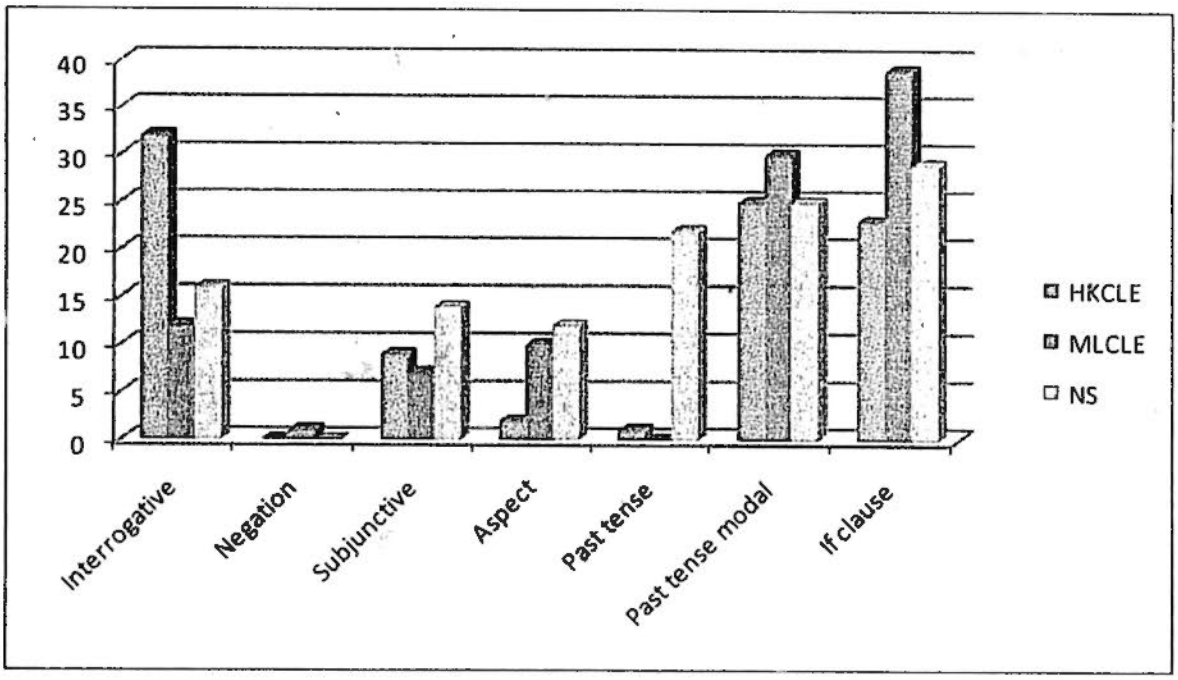
*p significant at $p \leq .05$

**p significant at $p \leq .01$

***p significant at $p \leq .001$

to the emergence of Aspect. In other words, compared to HK students, ML and NS students demonstrated a preference for *I am wondering/I was wondering*.

Figure 4.3 Internal modification: Syntactic downgraders



The third significant type was Past Tense, the statistical results of which were highly remarkable, with the *p* value significant at $\leq .001$ level. Except for one occurrence by a HK student, the use of the past tense was limited to the native speakers of English, as in the following examples (14) to (16).

(14) I *was wondering* if you *could* tell me a bit more about it and what readings and previous courses you *would* recommend to better prepare me for it? (NS3, Situation 4)

(15) I just *wanted to know* if this *was* still possible to do so and if so, who do I need to see? (NS6, Situation 5)

(16) My doctor says that I need to be on bed rest, so I *was hoping* that we *could* work out a new due date for my coursework. (NS4, Situation2)

Amazingly enough, the italicised expressions and their syntactic combinations in the examples above were basically missing in both the HK and ML data. It is true that they did use *I wonder* or *I am wondering*, but not *I was wondering*; in the same way, they would say *I am hoping* (which was not as frequent as *I am wondering*), but scarcely *I was hoping to* or *I wanted*. This is probably so far the most salient difference that has been identified in terms of the language choices between native and non-native writers. In the retrospective sessions, many of the HKCLE and MLCLE students seemed to have no awareness that past tense could be a powerful syntactic means to downgrade the imposition degree of a request internally. This lack of pragmalinguistic awareness can be noticed from the students' remarks, for instance, ML10 claimed, "I'm writing the e-mail right now, and 'I am wondering whether this would be ok' at this particular moment, so it should be the present tense, shouldn't it? I mean, why should I use past tense?"

The underuse of the past tense by the non-native English learners was also evident in several other studies. For example, Trosborg (1995, p. 247) reported a much less marked preference of this strategy by Danish learners of English as compared to the native English speakers. In her naturalistic enquiry of requests in academic e-mails, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) also documented the preference of past tense as syntactic modifiers by the Americans students, appearing in over 85% of their syntactic mitigating devices in requesting an appointment with their professors. She also found learners' use of past tense in other requesting situations, such as asking for feedback and asking for an extension, but largely because of her inclusion of modals (e.g., could, would) under the category of Past Tense. Past Tense Modals were equally evident in learners' data in the present study, as shown in Figure 4.3. Therefore, the findings in regard to past tense in this study are basically in agreement with those in Biesenbach-Lucas (2007).

The use of Past Tense was nearly absent in the interlanguage requests by German and Japanese advanced learners of English in comparison with British graduate students in Woodfield's (2008) study. She reasoned that "the pragmatic function of such syntactic devices may take time to acquire and learners may remain uncertain as to the effects on pragmatic clarity, resorting instead to lexical markings as islands of reliability in their pragmatic knowledge." (Woodfield, 2008b, p. 245). In fact, the reliance on the lexical/phrasal devices was also pro. ninent in the CLE data, which will be presented in detail in 4.2.3.2. Notably, the present study uncovered very approximate patterns with Woodfield (2008) in terms of the interlanguage use and acquisition of the syntactic modifiers by the advanced learners of English. It is reasonable to hypothesise that the CLE learners in the present study have not acquired the pragmatic function of the syntactic measure past tense, so it is not yet part of their pragmalinguistic repertoire.

Within the rest of the categories, Negation was by no means a popular strategy in this type of requests as it was employed only once by one ML student. This verified the prior research documentation as well. House (1989) found that both learners of English and native speakers used Negation only sparingly. Similar findings were revealed in Woodfield (2008). Schauer (2004), too, found a very limited use of this device by only native speakers. Negation is generally considered pragmatically marked and facilitative in downgrading the force of the request. Nevertheless, it could possibly add semantic ambiguity than declarative sentences. It may well be that in academic requests to people of a higher status, due to the inherent high-stakes nature of the requests, students (NS and learners alike) may choose to avoid Negation for the sake of semantic brevity and pragmatic clarity.

For Subjunctive Mood, however, regardless of the higher frequency of the NS group, as shown by the percentages (46.7% NS vs. 30% HK/ 23.3% ML), statistically speaking, the differences were not virtually significant. This appears at first a little unexpected, because, comparatively, the subjunctive mood can be a grammatical form with greater complexity, as it is syntactically more demanding. One might expect non-native English speakers to avoid such forms and limit themselves to the ones that they have more control of. A closer examination revealed that the realisation of Subjunctive Mood was predominantly achieved by what Schauer (2004) categorised as "Appreciative Embedding," a device that "positively reinforces the request internally as hopes and positive feelings are stated" (p. 263). It encompasses primarily such forms as "*It would be really nice if ...*", "*I'd be very thankful/grateful if...*", "*I'd appreciate it very much if...*" and so on.

In the examples below (Example 17, 18, and 19), the subjunctives acted, above all, as a way of expressing thanks prior to the request. It seemed that such appreciative forms had to a large extent become formulaic and mechanical. Once they started to be used in the academic e-mails, they tended to be conventionalised. Students would consequently keep using them as chunks, not being laboured with the need to process the internal grammatical structures. However, such assumption has to be made with caution. Although there was not a significant between-group difference in terms of the total frequency of this category, during the coding process, the dispersion of it was noticed to be rather impressive. It appeared in almost all the native-speaker data; that is, it was used by almost all the American participants. In contrast, only three Hong Kong students (HK3, HK5, and HK8) and four Mainland students (ML2, ML5, ML8, and ML10) employed such forms as the request head act. It seems to indicate that the degree of internalisation can vary from individual to individual. For some non-native students, their pragmalinguistic competence has yet to be fully developed; the use of the appreciative subjunctive is not yet part of their requesting resource that is readily accessible. For those who have, they would apply them to different kinds of situations with ease.

(17) I really understand that my lateness will indeed cause you inconvenience, but *I'd be* very thankful *if you could* kindly allow a later submission. (HK8, Situation 2)

(18) I *would* greatly appreciate it *if you could* write me a letter of recommendation. (ML8, Situation 6)

(19) *I'd be grateful* if you could recommend to me a few books that might be helpful for this course. (ML5, Situation3)

The last two classes of syntactic downgraders (Past Tense Modals and If-embedded Clauses) were distributed almost evenly among the three cohorts, although ML students evidenced a greater fondness of them (31.25% ML vs.

37.50% HK/ 31.25% NS for Past Tense Modals, and 42.86% ML vs. 25.27 % HK/ 31.87% NS for If-clauses), as indicated by the frequency distribution in Figure 4.3.

Hendriks (2008) reported a reliance on and an excessive use of past tense modals in making requests by Dutch learners of English who were at advanced and intermediate learners. Especially in the current study, it came as no surprise that non-native English speakers had developed a solid understanding of the pragmatic functions that past tense modals may possess. In the stimulated recalls that followed, most of the non-native speakers, HK and ML students alike, stated that in middle school, they had been taught that past tense modals can always be "more polite", "less imposing" than their present equivalents.

4.2.3.2 Lexical/phrasal downgraders

Similar to syntactical downgraders, lexical/phrasal modifiers are also targeted at internally softening the force of the request. Table 4.7 displays the coding scheme, containing eight codes in total, seven of which arose from the data elicited. Appealers, or tags, elements that "function to elicit a hearer signal" (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 285), were used by none of the participants in the study. This is not illogical, as such lexical items occur usually in a sentence-final position and may "signal turn availability" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285), which could be more commonplace in conversation or dialogical discourse.

Table 4.7 Classification scheme of lexical/phrasal downgraders

Lexical/phrasal downgraders	**Description**	**Example**
Consultative devices	The speaker seeks to involve the hearer and bids for his/her cooperation.	***Do you think I could*** *borrow it from you?*
Understaters	The speaker minimises the required action or object.	I wonder if we can *slightly* put off the meeting. /*Could you tidy up* ***a bit*** *before I start?*
Hedges	The speaker avoids specification regarding the request.	*I'll appreciate it very much if you can offer me* ***some*** *information and* ***some*** *preliminary readings of the course. /It would really help if you* ***did something*** *about the kitchen.*
Downtoner	The speaker modulates the impact of the request by signalling the possibility of non-compliance.	*I was wondering if you would be willing to…and give me any* ***possible*** *suggestions you may have for improvement. /Will you be able to* ***perhaps*** *drive me to the station?*
Politeness marker	An optional element added to a request to bid for cooperative behaviour.	***Please*** let us know which time slot works best for you.
Subjectiviser	Elements in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-à-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition,	***I'm afraid/I wonder*** *if you have any information available* (e.g., syllabus, reading list, etc.) about the course.

	thus lowing the assertive force of the request.	
Cajoler	Conventional speech items whose semantic content is of little transparent relevance to their discourse meaning; not commonly entering syntactic structures, but interspersed to increase, establish, or restore harmony between the interlocutors.	***You know,*** *you really need to do it. / May I know if you could give me some information about it,* ***let's say,*** *the course requirements and suggested readings?*
Appealer	Elements used by a speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to the hearer's benevolent understanding, occurring in a syntactically final position, e.g., tags.	*Tidy up your desk,* ***will you?***

The chi-square test was conducted for each individual lexical/phrasal choice. The results are shown in Table 4.8, together with the presentation of the frequency distribution of each cultural group in Figure 4.4. Overall, the ML students employed a significantly greater number of lexical/phrasal devices to internally modify their requests, as indicated by the p value 0.043, significant at $\leq .05$ level, whereas the other two groups demonstrated almost the same level of reliance on the lexical means. Compared with the NS students, both HK and ML respondents used a considerably larger amount of politeness markers and subjectivisers, with p significant at $\leq .05$ and $\leq .001$ level respectively.

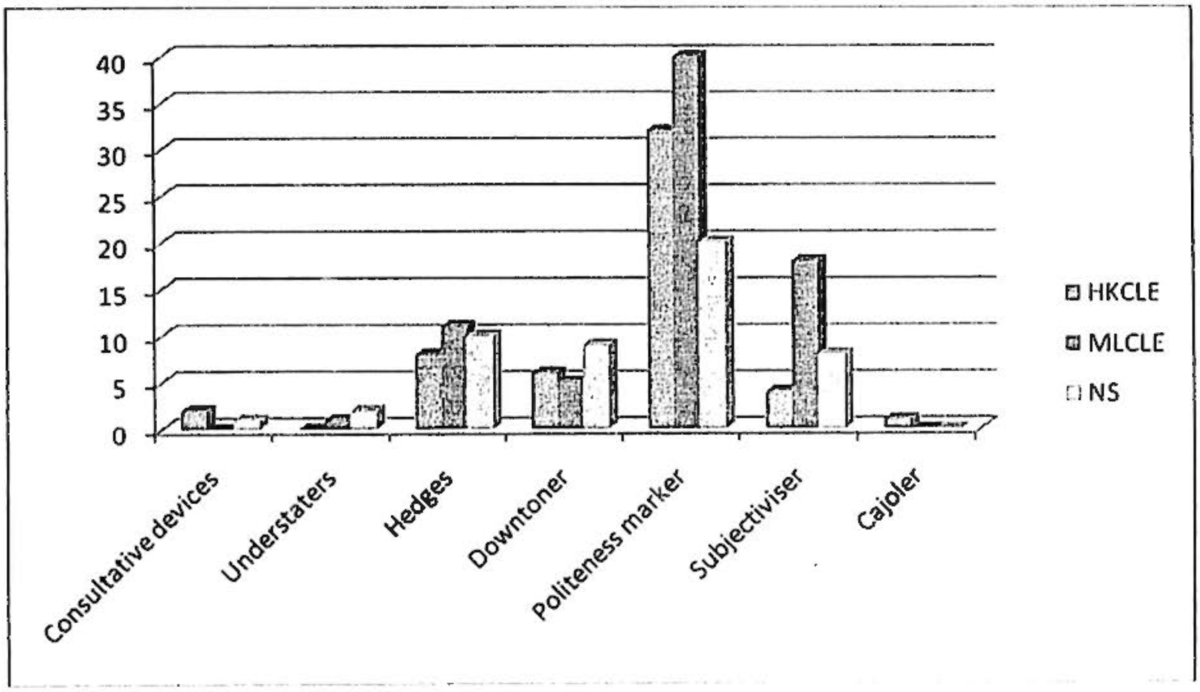
Table 4.8 Internal modification: Lexical/phrasal downgraders

	Consultative devices	Understaters	Hedges	Downtoner	Politeness marker	Subjectiviser	Cajoler	Total
HKCLE	2/3 66.7%	0/3 -	8/29 27.6%	6/20 30%	32/92 34.8%	4/30 13.3%	1 -	53
MLCLE	0/3 -	1/3 33.3%	11/29 37.9%	5/20 25%	40/92 43.5%	18/30 60%	0 -	75
NS	1/3 33.3%	2/3 66.7%	10/29 34.5%	9/20 45%	20/92 21.7%	8/30 26.7%	0 -	50
Chi-square test results	N/A	N/A	χ^2=0.483 df=2 p=0.785	χ^2=1.3 df=2 p=0.522	χ^2=6.609 df=2 p=0.037*	χ^2=10.4 df=2 p=0.006**	N/A	χ^2=6.281 df=2 p=0.043*

*p significant at $p \leq .05$

***p significant at $p \leq .001$

Figure 4.4 Internal modification: Lexical/phrasal downgraders



In Faerch and Kasper (1989) interlanguage preference for politeness markers was spotted in both learners of English and learners of German. Further evidence of this has been found in more recent studies (e.g., Hendriks, 2008; Woodfield, 2008b; Pan, 2009; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). As Faerch and Kasper (1989, p. 233) explained, politeness markers can have double functions, to indicate the illocutionary force and to mitigate the request in a transparent and more explicit manner. Clearly in the present study, non-native English students made more use of such markers than native students, a tendency that is in line with Faerch and Kasper's (1989) observation that, "learners tend to adhere to the conversational principle of clarity, choosing explicit, transparent, unambiguous means of expression…(the qualities of which can be) exactly fulfilled by the politeness markers… " (p. 233).

Subjectivisers, an internal lexical modifier lowering the assertive force of the request by the addresser explicitly expressing his/her subjective opinion as to the state of affairs referred to in the proposition (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), are encoded mostly via the means of *I wonder* and *I'm afraid*. The higher percentage of subjectivisers by ML students was also a reflection of the greater use of *I wonder* and its related forms in request head acts. (A brief search of the e-mail corpus demonstrates only 3 uses of *I'm afraid*, none of which appeared inside the request proper). Further, the distribution pattern of subjectivisers corresponded largely to that of the syntactic modifier if-clause, as both of them usually co-occur in *I wonder if*… and operate as the request proper. In some way, it seems to point to a stronger preference by the ML students than the other two groups for the conventional indirect request form of *I wonder if* and its tense and aspectual variations.

Consultative Devices, Understaters, and Cajolers were generally unmarked modifiers due to their either zero occurrence or very low frequency. Lexical means such as Cajolers (e.g., *you know,*) and Appealers (e.g., tag questions), although believed to be important interpersonal markers (cf. Trosborg, 1995), may not be as prevalent in written discourse as in spoken one. The latter was utterly missing in the present study. The professional communication context, in a way, could also determine the use or non-use of these devices. The same results can be found in others, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008, p. 120), for instance, who used written DCTs to elicit requests by advanced Greek learners of English.

The use of Hedges and Downtoners did not vary substantially among the three groups, as signified by the *p* values. As it seems to conceal a higher level of mastery of such pragmalinguistic strategies by the Chinese students, it also confirms the prior interlanguage evidence in researching advanced English learners' internal requesting modifications, such as Woodfield (2008b), Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008), and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2009).

4.2.4 Mitigating supportive moves – external modifications

External modification, or supportive mitigation, "can index politeness regardless of levels of directness" (Blum-Kulka, 2005 [1992], p. 266), because external modification does not affect the utterance used for realising the act, but rather the context in which it is embedded, and thus indirectly modifies the illocutionary force. This type of modification takes place in the form of supportive moves occurring either before or after the head act. As with internal modification, external modification might serve to either soften or emphasise the force of the whole request (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010).

The external mitigating strategies were coded in accordance with the scheme displayed in the Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Classification scheme of lexical/phrasal downgraders

Mitigating supportive moves	Description	Example
Discourse Orientation Moves	Opening discourse moves which serve an orientation function but do not necessarily mitigate or aggravate the request in any way (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010)	***"You know the seminar paper I'm supposed to be giving on the 29th ….***
Preparator/Checking on availability	The speaker checks if the precondition necessary for compliance holds true.	***Could you please tell me whether you will be free next Monday? If not…*** ***/Are you going in the direction of the town?*** *And if so, is it possible to join you?*
Getting a precommitment	The speaker attempts to obtain a precommitment.	***Will you do me a favour?*** *Could you perhaps lend me your notes for a few days?*
Grounder	The speaker gives reasons, explanations, or justifications for the request.	*I am writing to ask for an extension of the assignment* ***deadline because I feel suddenly ill today. /I missed class yesterday.***
Sweetener	By expressing exaggerated appreciation of the requestee's ability to comply with the request, the speaker lowers the imposition involved.	***I truly believe that your support will be of immense importance to my application.*** *As such, would you mind…* ***/You***

		have the most beautiful handwriting I've ever seen! *Would it be possible to borrow your notes for a few days?*
Disarmer	The speaker indicates awareness of a potential offense and thereby possible refusal.	***I know that it may be inappropriate to ask for an extension*** *as the deadline is drawing near…/Excuse me,* ***I hope you don't think I'm being forward,*** *but is there any chance of a lift home?*
Promise of reward	To increase the likelihood of the hearer's compliance with the speaker's request, a reward due to the fulfillment of the request is announced.	***I promise to take it seriously*** *(finish all the required readings and attend the discussion). /****I promise I won't keep it long****.*
Cost minimiser/Imposition downgrader	The requester indicates consideration of the imposition to the requestee involved in compliance with the request.	*I need it for my essay and was wondering if I could borrow your copy* ***if you aren't using it right now.***
Showing thanks	The requester expresses thanks to the hearer.	***Thanks*** *a lot for your help. /Your help will be highly* ***appreciated.***
Showing apologies	The requester shows apologies to the requestee for the possible cost caused.	***I'm awfully sorry*** *for the inconvenience caused. /****I'm very sorry*** *to have to ask you this, but…*

Newly added to the manual was the code Discourse Orientation Moves (DOM), borrowed from the latest publication of Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010). They developed this category specifically for their study of the academic "extension" requests made by the advanced learners of English and consequently, this code can be highly relevant to the present study.

Table 4.10 Mitigating supportive moves: External modifications (a)

	Discourse orientation moves	Preparator /Checking on availability	Getting a precommitment	Grounder	Sweetener
HKCLE	33/110 30%	9/35 25.7%	0/5 -	145/415 34.9%	17/75 22.7%
MLCLE	43/110 39.1%	11/35 31.4%	4/5 80%	125/415 30.2%	43/75 57.3%
NSCLE	34/110 30.9%	15/35 42.9%	1/5 20%	145/415 34.9%	15/75 20%
Chi-square test results	χ^2=1.655 df=2 p=0.437	χ^2=1.6 df=2 p=0.449	χ^2=5.2 df=2 p=0.074	χ^2=1.928 df=2 p=0.381	χ^2=19.52 df=2 p=0.000***

***p significant at p≤.001

Table 4.11 Mitigating supportive moves: External modifications (b)

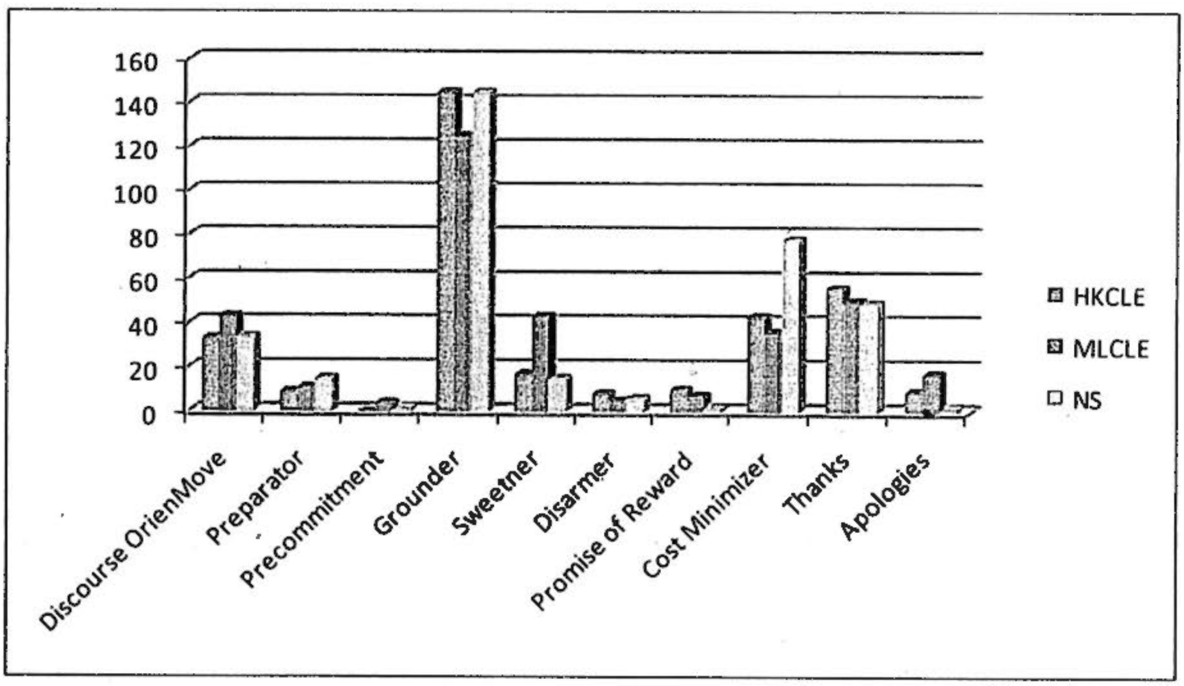
	Disarmer	Promise of reward	Cost minimiser	Thanks	Apologies
HKCLE	8/19 42.11%	10/19 52.63%	43/157 27.39%	56/155 36.13%	9/27 33.33%
MLCLE	5/19 26.32%	7/19 36.84%	36/157 22.93%	50/155 32.26%	17/27 62.97%
NS	6/19 31.57%	2/19 10.53%	78/157 49.68%	49/155 31.61%	1/27 3.70%
Chi-square test results	χ^2=0.737 df=2 p=0.692	χ^2=5.158 df=2 p=0.076	χ^2=19.35 df=2 p=0.000***	χ^2=0.555 df=2 p=0.758	χ^2=14.222 df=2 p=0.001**

***p significant at p≤.001

Discourse Orientation Moves, serve predominantly as opening remarks for the message, showing the direction of the speech. Sometimes they also serve to retrieve the shared background information for both the addresser and addressees. What's more, the other two speech acts, Thanks and Apologies were also embraced in the scheme as separate codes, in that their use can be rather strategic. They are interlinked with the core act of request and occur frequently in e-mail requests, operating as external measures to mitigate the illocutionary force by either showing appreciations or extending apologies.

The statistical results of the external modifiers are exhibited in Table 4.10 and Table 4.11, in tandem with Figure 5.5, showing the frequency distribution of each strategy per group.

Figure 4.5 Mitigating supportive moves: External modifications



As signalled by the bar chart, there were four external modifiers that were favoured by all three groups: DOM, Grounders, Cost Minimisers, and Showing Thanks. Statistically speaking, no significant differences were detected in the use of DOM, Grounders, and Thanks, suggesting that in making academic requests, students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, are inclined to provide background information to start their e-mail message and to supplement their request with explanations and justifications. Among these modifiers, Grounders were the most prevalent across the three groups. This finding further confirmed the evidence in other studies on interlanguage requests (e.g., Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001, and Félix-Brasdefer, 2007, to name a few). Schauer (2007) rated Grounders as a very basic and even core constituent of requesting behaviour, acquired relatively early by learners of English. The results in Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2010) study also revealed that the grounder was the most frequent supportive move, not only in native English requests but also in interlanguage requests.

Also, when making a request, showing thanks seems almost like a must, co-occurring with the request. For Cost Minimiser, however, though preferred by all three groups, was employed a lot more by NS students, as evidenced by the *p* value, significant at $\leq$.001 level. By using role-plays and naturally occurring data, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2003) examined high and low imposition requests by Japanese learners of English. They documented the scarcity of cost minimisers, which were used only by high proficiency participants, but none of the low proficiency students. The results indicated that the higher proficiency group of learners approximated more to the native English norms. As very advanced learners of English, the CLEs in the present study did use this strategy frequently, but still considerably less than the NS. Trosborg (1997), too, recorded a less preferred use of this strategy by her learner groups.

Statistical differences were also reflected in Sweeteners and Apologies, both of which were employed by ML students in a notably higher frequency than the other cohorts, with the p values significant at $\leq .001$ level. To be specific, it appears that to soften their requests, the ML students would express things that are positive and that they would perceive dear to the ear of the recipient, such as making compliments, and sometimes even flattering in an exaggerated way. The following sentences are examples containing these modifiers:

(20) Also I heard from a friend of mine that your globalization course is very popular in the university…(ML6, Situation 4)

(21) It is my great pleasure and good luck to be able to learn from you in the last two semesters----everybody knows you as an expert on XXX, an area I am working on…(ML10, Situation 6)

(22) I am very interested in your course of this semester for it is fun and thought-provoking...(ML2, Situation 4)

Similarly, relative to the other two groups, the ML students were much more inclined to extend apologies along with their requests, as seen by the *p* value significant at ≤.001. In contrast, NS students did not seem to find any need to say "sorry" in their requests. To put Showing Thanks and Showing Apologies together, the response from ML3 in the subsequent stimulated recall vividly sheds light on the rationale for this tendency:

> Sometimes I feel that I am too polite and I think that may be related to the cultural influence. I think it depends on how the professors would react...As for Chinese politeness, to be specific, I will try so hard to keep saying "sorry" and "thank you", you know, never get enough. One time, I wrote a letter of apology to one professor, I gave so many "sorry"s and it turned out that the professor didn't mind at all. (ML3)

It merits pointing out that the frequencies of Promise of Reward have led to a moderately significant result, with the *p* value 0.076, close to the .05 level. NS students gave fairly fewer Promise of Rewards than the other two groups (frequency: 10.53% NS vs. 52.63% HK/ 36.84% ML).

Compared to internal modification, non-native students in the present study seem to have displayed a stronger reliance on the use of external modifications (such as promise of reward, sweetener, showing apologies). With reference to this compensation strategy, Edmond and House (1991) described such overuse of supportive moves by language learners as the *waffle phenomenon*. Similar to grounders, those modifiers could be built up separately with syntactically simple sentence, without necessarily the idiomatic usage or native-like language. Besides, the Promise of Reward and Apologies occur usually after the request is given, as additional ways to soften the impositive force of the request. When sweeteners occurred, they were generally employed on purpose, in an attempt to enhance the positive face of the recipient, and thereby heighten the chance of successful realisation of the request. For example, in Situation 4, Student ML1 wrote, "Happily, I have found that you will also teach xxx course next semester," and she explained her intentions behind this choice of wording:

> Oh, yes, I'm actually trying to curry favour with the teacher and s/he must be happy to find out that this student is paying close attention to the courses s/he gives, and they must be happy with the student, too. It's also like flattering, you know, "I'm so excited to find that you are giving another course…". When the teacher hears words like this, I bet they'll say yes so long as it is possible. (Laughing) (ML 1)

So far, the above sections have summarised and discussed the pragmalinguistic choices and their distributions among the three groups of students. These strategies, however, are based on and constrained by sociopragmatic considerations. The next section presents and discusses the findings of the perceptual judgements made by the participants.

4.3 Pragmatic Perception

Right after each e-mail production, respondents were asked to measure their level of confidence in terms of the appropriateness of their language use, followed by the assessments of the three major sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance, and imposition degree. Two-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post-hoc tests were conducted via SPSS 16.0 to seek out the possible statistical differences of these measurements by the three cultural groups, under six difference situations.

The decision was underpinned by the following considerations: Firstly, the two-way ANOVA involves two independent variables (in the current study, both *cultural groups* and *situations*) and a single dependent variable and has the "potential to indicate the extent to which the two independent variables may combine to influence scores on the dependent variable" (Howitt & Cramer, 2008, p. 220). Secondly, it has the advantage of both testing the "main effect" of each independent variable and exploring the possibility of an "interaction effect" (Pallant, 2005, p. 229). Thirdly, post-hoc comparisons are necessary as a primary means to uncover the overall chance of which group stands out as significant (Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

4.3.1 Level of certainty in language appropriateness

The perceptual judgements of the participants' confidence in their language appropriacy were examined from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

4.3.1.1 Statistical results of the certainty measurement

The student informants were invited to offer their "Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in e-mail message" after composing each message. The prompt was further clarified with a follow-up question, "How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation?"

Table 4.12 Descriptive statistics of certainty in language appropriateness

	Cultural groups	**Situations**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**N**
Confidence/Certainty in language appropriateness	HKCLE Group	Situation 1	4.50	.527	10
		Situation 2	4.10	.876	10
		Situation 3	4.30	.675	10
		Situation 4	4.40	.699	10
		Situation 5	4.20	.632	10
		Situation 6	4.20	.789	10
		Total	4.28	.691	60
	MLCLE Group	Situation 1	4.20	.632	10
		Situation 2	3.60	.966	10
		Situation 3	3.70	.823	10
		Situation 4	3.90	.994	10
		Situation 5	3.50	.850	10
		Situation 6	3.60	.699	10
		Total	3.75	.836	60

	NS Group	Situation 1	4.50	.527	10
		Situation 2	3.80	.919	10
		Situation 3	4.00	.816	10
		Situation 4	4.30	.483	10
		Situation 5	3.80	.632	10
		Situation 6	3.90	.994	10
		Total	4.05	.769	60
	Total	Situation 1	4.40	.563	30
		Situation 2	3.83	.913	30
		Situation 3	4.00	.788	30
		Situation 4	4.20	.761	30
		Situation 5	3.83	.747	30
		Situation 6	3.90	.845	30
		Total	4.03	.794	180

Table 4.12 shows the descriptive statistics of certainty measurement by each cultural group in each situation. The total means of the groups (HKCLE: M=4.28, SD=0.691; MLCLE: M=3.75, SD=0.863; NS: M=4.05, SD=0.769) revealed that, overall, the participants were certain about their language production, with all values above 3.5. The HK group was the most confident group among the three, whereas the ML was the least.

Table 4.13 Two-way ANOVA of certainty in language appropriateness

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Confidence in language appropriateness

Source	**Type III Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Group	8.578	2	4.289	7.260	.001
Situations	7.828	5	1.566	2.650	.025
Group * Situations	.756	10	.076	.128	.999

The two-way ANOVA test result is presented in Table 4.13. Regarding the independent variable of *cultural groups*, there was significant (F=7.280, p=0.001) between-group variation in the level of confidence with respect to language appropriateness.

Table 4.14 Post-hoc tests of *cultural groups* on measurement of certainty

Multiple Comparisons

Confidence in language appropriateness
Tukey HSD

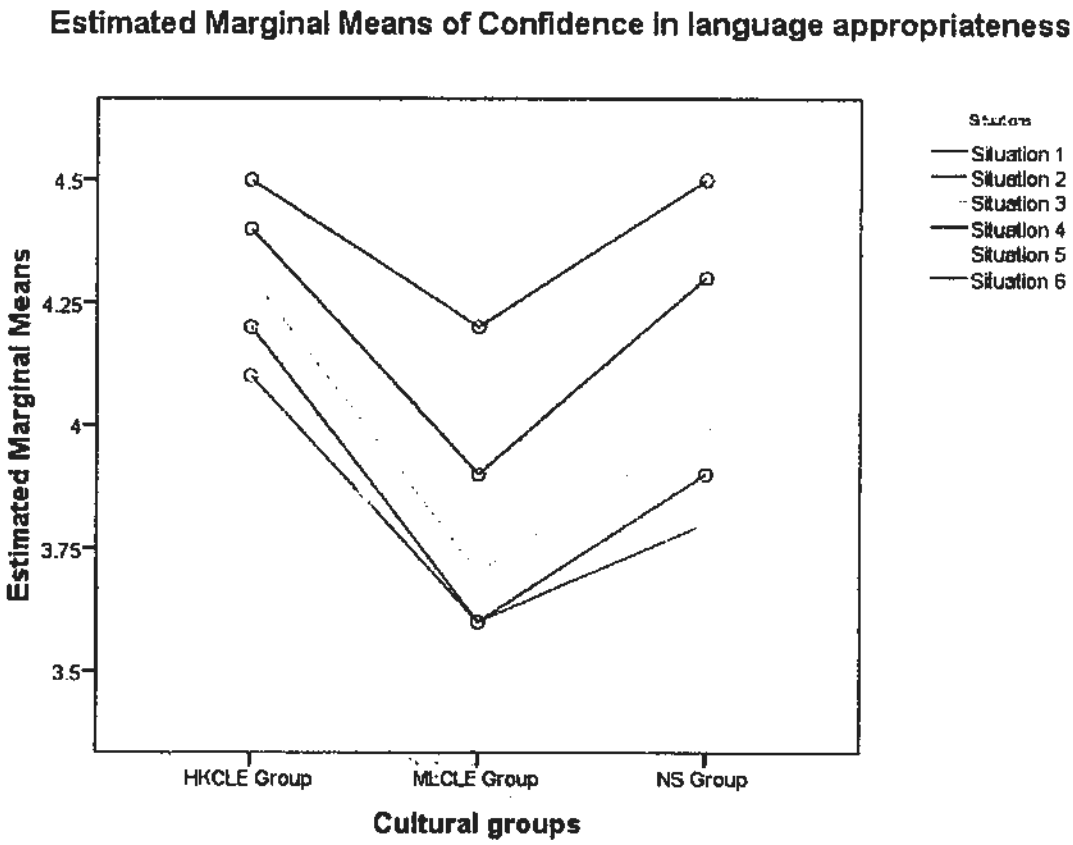
(I) Cultural groups	(J) Cultural groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HKCLE Group	MLCLE Group	.53*	.140	.001	.20	.87
	NS Group	.23	.140	.223	-.10	.57
MLCLE Group	HKCLE Group	-.53*	.140	.001	-.87	-.20
	NS Group	-.30	.140	.085	-.63	.03
NS Group	HKCLE Group	-.23	.140	.223	-.57	.10
	MLCLE Group	.30	.140	.085	-.03	.63

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test, as displayed in Table 4.14, indicated that the mean score for the HK group (M=4.28, SD=0.691) was significantly different from the ML group (M=3.75, SD=0.836). The significance, however, occurred only between the HKCLE and MLCLE groups (p significant at

0.05 level), but not between the NS group and the HK group, nor the NS and ML groups. The NS group did not differ significantly from the other two. As for the other independent variable 'situations', the between-group variation was equally significant (F=2.650, p=0.025, significant at the 0.05 level). The assessment of certainty varied along the situations; the confidence that students built on their language production changed throughout the six scenarios.

Figure 4.6 Two-way ANOVA of certainty in language appropriateness



Additionally, the two-way ANOVA test demonstrated that that there was no significant interaction effect between the two independent variables (F=0.128, p=

0.999). Namely, there was no significant difference in the effect of *cultural backgrounds* on the level of confidence for the *six situations* and no significant combined effect was engendered on the perceptual judgement of certainty.

To gain a deeper understanding of the workings of the variables, Figure 4.6 sets forth the profile plots of certainty measurements. It displays visually the shapes and distributions of the certainty measurements across groups and situations. As seen in the figure, the certainty patterns were consistently similar among the three groups throughout the six situations, reflecting the insignificant interaction effect of both independent variables functioning in tandem. The figure also displays the main effect of the *cultural backgrounds*: MLCLE students were always the least confident group in terms of their language use, no matter in which situation they were making the request. The situational effect can also be easily discerned: students felt the most confident in Situation 1, making an appointment with the professor, followed by Situation 4, asking for course information, and Situation 3, borrowing a book from the professor. With some overlapping, the certainty continued declining in the remaining situations, from Situation 6, requesting a letter of recommendation till Situation 5, asking for course auditing.

4.3.1.2 Insights from the stimulated recalls

Qualitative exploration in the stimulated recalls makes it possible to get in touch with the inner thoughts of the respondents while producing the e-mails and grading the pertinent variables. As far as *certainty* is concerned, it seems that the perception of certainty is far more complex than the literal measurements. Previous academic e-mail practice and personal experience likely influenced the students' measurement decisions. Situational elements and the potential outcomes of the proposed requests would also affect their perceptions about the linguistic output.

HK3 made the following comment, "Sometimes I feel, you know, to date I haven't at least made people pissed off, so I've kind of become very 'certain'" (HK3). For her, the judgement was not only based on the linguistic production, but inseparable from her prior interactional experience. In line with the statistical results which revealed no significant difference between either CLE (Chinese learners of English) group and the NS group in their level of certainty, sometimes it would be hard even for native English speakers to feel *very certain*, as NS1 explained,

> Err, I don't know, maybe I'm always thinking back in my mind that the message could have been written better, but I try my best for the time being; like I should, I'll keep my time as best as possible. I'm not gonna sit there for hours to write a three-sentence message; otherwise I would have checked *very certain*, but *certain* works for me, so... (NS 1)

However, such certainty is also deeply rooted in the situations and when asking for an assignment extension, NS6 did not feel as certain as in the other scenarios. He explained, "...you're asking something for him to do; he's doing you a favour and you can never be very certain about these things." (NS6)

NS7 also provided a detailed reflection on how his certainty fluctuated along with the characteristics of the situations. For example, he was less certain when in Situation 6, asking for a reference letter:

> I was kind of likening this professor X to the situation I had when I was asking for references, so in that way, I felt that, because I would only ask the teachers who would be a solid reference, or like a quality reference, then I felt, that's how I wrote this e-mail. So "a little certain", I guess it was like, you want to be polite and still send off the message, because it is a touchy subject and you don't want to say, "oh, you're so great" or like, "Your course is the best course in the world", you know, some people may like to flower it up, like "Oh I really enjoy your time, like that discussion that the class had last week helps me a lot and was excellent". Like yeah, you don't need to blow the sunshine up there, you know, so I try to keep it, so, "I like you; I think you are a solid reference and please kindly reference me to this institution", so that's why I was a little uncertain. In that theme base, I always feel a little, you never know, right, just the situation.

In academic e-mail liaisons, students would have expectations about the response from the professor, as a result of their knowledge of what is polite and appropriate for a specific context, their past experience, and level of socialisation into the communication community. Nonetheless, students can still be unsure of the outcomes of their e-mail request. From the comments made by ML3, another source of (un)certainty can be detected, which was aroused by the e-mail medium,

> I feel uncertain about this one (Situation2, asking for an extension),

> because I'm often not sure how to be appropriate when writing. You may find that I feel "very certain" in none of these situations. In fact, we've never learned how to write e-mails and we have no idea what kind of wording will not be insulting. (ML3)

Due to the delay of e-mail exchanges, the senders cannot always receive immediate feedback from the receivers. Having not enough clues of the potent reactions of the e-mail recipient can lead to a lower level of certainty, especially for non-native English speakers, who are at the same time faced with insecurities of their linguistic performance.

The statistical results in 4.3.1.1 indicated that the HK students were the most confident in terms of the appropriateness of the messages they wrote, as compared to the ML students, who were the least confident. As discussed above, linguistic production was not the only criteria for the certainty measurement. For Hong Kong graduate students, making e-mail requests to their professors seemed to have long become a routinised practice (since their undergraduate study) and even proceduralised. It could be that long-term exposure to the e-mail medium and also to intercultural encounters through this medium might have helped them to become more and more confident with their language choices. Or, perhaps because of the frequency and efficiency of e-mail interactions, they might at times sacrifice their concerns about the linguistic production for the achievement of the transactional goal. For example, as quoted earlier, HK3 stated that she "hadn't at least made people pissed off". Seemingly, not to annoy the professor was the bottom-line for her communication goal; "to well impress the others" or "to project a good image" did not appear to be the key aims in her requests. HK9 marked *very certain* for all the scenarios and she explained her choice in this way:

> "Coz that's the way I write in my actual e-mails to the professor. I always write like that and I don't think there is any problem with it."

HK9's words, "I don't think there is any problem with it", can also be a reflection of at least some of the Hong Kong students' limited level of metacognitive awareness. In fact, quite interestingly, in Chapter Five, the messages formulated by the HK group were not considered to be the most polite and satisfactory, irrespective of the students' strong and positive self-assessments. Metacognition, according to Flavell (1976), refers to "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them" (p. 232). It may play an important role in various cognitive activities related to language use. The biased self-evaluation by the HK students could mirror exactly what Kruger and Dunning (1999) described as inflated self perceptions. These psychologists pointed out that people who are incompetent my lack sufficient metacognitive ability to be sensitive and aware of their incompetence. A conceptual gap seems to exist here as the HK students over-estimated their linguistic performance and the actual acceptability of such performance. Additionally, it suggests the importance for students to be able to recognise the limitations of their abilities and the need for a deeper level of self awareness and enhanced metacognitive competence.

As for ML students, before coming to Hong Kong, they were not exposed to intercultural exchanges and academic e-mail communication in English as much as the HK or NS students. Accordingly, their measurement of the imposition degree of the situations differed in some way from the other two cohorts. (See 4.3.4 for a detailed discussion.) Their degree of socialisation into the academic community, along with inadequate cultural exposure and the concerns of wording may have aggravated their ambivalence and uncertainty about their e-mail production.

4.3.2 Measurement of power difference

This section presents and discusses the findings of the measurements of power difference, including both the statistical results and insights gained from the stimulated recalls.

4.3.2.1 Statistical results of the measurement of power difference

Statistical procedures were conducted to measure power difference, social distance, and imposition degree. This section is focused on power difference.

Table 4.15 Descriptive statistics of measurement of power difference

Dependent Variable: Power difference

Cultural groups	Situations	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
HKCLE Group	Situation 1	3.80	.789	10
	Situation 2	4.30	.483	10
	Situation 3	3.50	.707	10
	Situation 4	3.60	.699	10
	Situation 5	3.50	.850	10
	Situation 6	4.10	.876	10
	Total	3.80	.777	60
MLCLE Group	Situation 1	3.70	.823	10
	Situation 2	4.20	.632	10
	Situation 3	3.80	.919	10
	Situation 4	3.40	.966	10
	Situation 5	3.80	.632	10
	Situation 6	4.30	.823	10
	Total	3.87	.833	60
NS Group	Situation 1	3.60	.699	10
	Situation 2	4.10	.876	10
	Situation 3	3.20	1.135	10
	Situation 4	3.50	.850	10
	Situation 5	3.80	.789	10
	Situation 6	3.90	.994	10
	Total	3.68	.911	60
Total	Situation 1	3.70	.750	30
	Situation 2	4.20	.664	30
	Situation 3	3.50	.938	30
	Situation 4	3.50	.820	30
	Situation 5	3.70	.750	30
	Situation 6	4.10	.885	30
	Total	3.78	.841	180

In the e-DCT, the following question prompts the participants to assess their perception of the power: "How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)".

The responses obtained were analysed and Table 4.15 shows the descriptive statistics of power difference, the mean scaling of which ranged from 3.4 to 4.3. This suggests that professors, as represented by *Professor X* (see also Chapter Three, 3.2.6.1.3) in the study, were considered to be holding power, though not absolutely so, and the professor-student power difference was regarded as moderately great.

Table 4.16 Two-way ANOVA of measurement of power difference

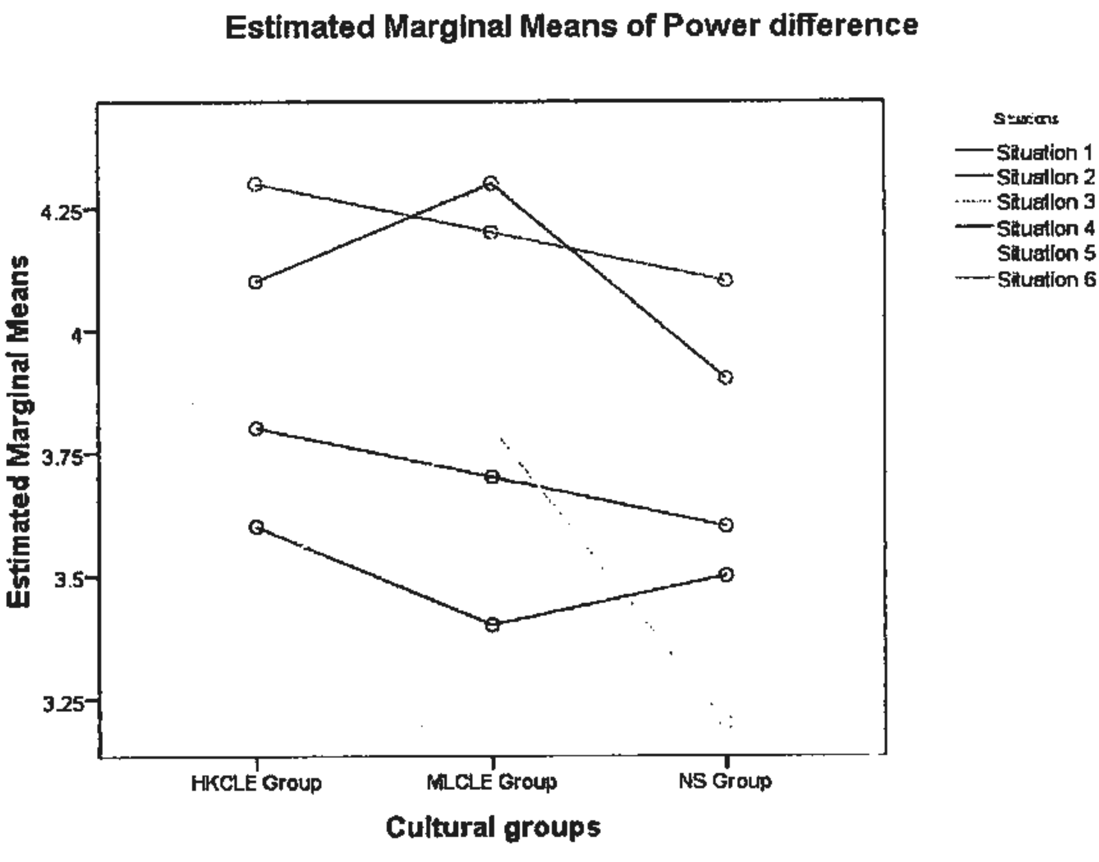
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Power difference

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group	1.033	2	.517	.766	.467
Situations	13.450	5	2.690	3.987	.002
Group * Situations	2.767	10	.277	.410	.940

Two-way ANOVA tests were run in SPSS 16.0. The results are shown in Table 4.16. As disclosed by F ratio, 0.766, p value 0.467, no statistically significant between-group difference was spotted in light of the independent variable of *cultural groups*. Consequently, the power difference measurement was not dissimilar among the three groups of students. However, *situational factors* yielded significant main effect on the dependent variable, as seen by F=3.987, p=0.002, significant at the .001 level, implying that the understanding of power relations was situation-sensitive and differed from one situation to another.

Figure 4.7 Two-way ANOVA of measurement of power difference



Nevertheless, Table 4.16 also revealed that there was no significant combined effect of the two independent variables on the measurement of power difference (F=0.410, p=0.940). That is to say, the effect of cultural backgrounds on the scaling

Table 4.17 Post-hoc tests of *situations* on measurement of power difference

Power difference Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

(I) Situations	(J) Situations	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Situation 1	Situation 2	-.50	.212	.178	-1.11	.11
	Situation 3	.20	.212	.935	-.41	.81
	Situation 4	.20	.212	.935	-.41	.81
	Situation 5	.00	.212	1.000	-.61	.61
	Situation 6	-.40	.212	.414	-1.01	.21
Situation 2	Situation 1	.50	.212	.178	-.11	1.11
	Situation 3	.70*	.212	.015	.09	1.31
	Situation 4	.70*	.212	.015	.09	1.31
	Situation 5	.50	.212	.178	-.11	1.11
	Situation 6	.10	.212	.997	-.51	.71
Situation 3	Situation 1	-.20	.212	.935	-.81	.41
	Situation 2	-.70*	.212	.015	-1.31	-.09
	Situation 4	.00	.212	1.000	-.61	.61
	Situation 5	-.20	.212	.935	-.81	.41
	Situation 6	-.60	.212	.058	-1.21	.01
Situation 4	Situation 1	-.20	.212	.935	-.81	.41
	Situation 2	-.70*	.212	.015	-1.31	-.09
	Situation 3	.00	.212	1.000	-.61	.61
	Situation 5	-.20	.212	.935	-.81	.41
	Situation 6	-.60	.212	.058	-1.21	.01
Situation 5	Situation 1	.00	.212	1.000	-.61	.61
	Situation 2	-.50	.212	.178	-1.11	.11
	Situation 3	.20	.212	.935	-.41	.81
	Situation 4	.20	.212	.935	-.41	.81
	Situation 6	-.40	.212	.414	-1.01	.21
Situation 6	Situation 1	.40	.212	.414	-.21	1.01
	Situation 2	-.10	.212	.997	-.71	.51
	Situation 3	.60	.212	.058	-.01	1.21
	Situation 4	.60	.212	.058	-.01	1.21
	Situation 5	.40	.212	.414	-.21	1.01

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

of power difference did not depend on situational factors. Figure 4.7 manifests the judgement patterns of power difference. To ease the interpretation, Table 4.17 is included, showing the post-hoc test results of situational effect on the measurement.

Significant differences, according to Table 4.17, happened between Situation 2 (asking for an assignment extension) and 3 (borrowing a book from the professor) (p=0.015), and Situation 2 and 4 (asking for course information) (p=0.015). In conjunction with Figure 4.7, it can be noted that the student-professor power difference was significantly larger when students made the extension request than when they asked for course information or to borrow books from the professor. Despite the situational sensitivity, the measurement paths did not diverge among the groups, due to the insignificant interaction effect of both independent variables.

4.3.2.2 Insights from the stimulated recalls

The qualitative data also demonstrated that the understanding of power would vary somewhat in different situations; more remarkably, there arose appealing cross-cultural differences in students' conceptualisations of this variable. In the retrospective interviews, when asked to express their opinions about student-professor power relations, NS1 used a metaphor to emphasise the close connection between power and social distance,

> It (the power) starts with social distance, how close we are, because we are not close, we are not far apart; that's going to make our student-professor relationship take the, you know, "I'm the earth; you are the moon; I admire you, but I can't touch you" sort of relationship, always like that. If there is a sort of social bond between us, maybe if we were closer, maybe it would start to switch the other way around,...but here because it's a normal situation...in this case, I'm doing an e-mail, and, it's like the moon-earth relationship: You are far away; I admire you, but I can't touch you. (NS1)

To further clarify his point, he shared an anecdote about his experience with one professor back in the United States,

> I've never, I've only taken one with, there was only one professor and he was a film professor back home. I've taken three classes under him and there was such a power distance between me and him, and like, it was a theatre filled with people and we would watch a movie after every lecture and he has such a presence in class; he was almost like a celebrity, like, you couldn't touch this guy. He would call you and make you feel so threatened by like, him asking me to answer a question in class, so there was a high power difference, as you can tell. There wasn't a close social relationship, but I loved the guy and I never asked him, I've never talked with him personally like one on one, but I would hear things from other people like, oh yes, he's also teaching this course, and this course, but he's the only professor that I've taken multiple courses underneath. (NS1)

In a vivid manner, this "moon-earth" elucidation seems to embody a type of power structure that is rooted in the social status of the professor, his/her academic authority and primarily the *expert power* (French & Raven, 1959). Yet, the power dimension never remains stable; rather, it can be quite active.

In some situations, the conceptualisation can be expanded to involve coercive power and reward power as well, such as in Situation 2 "Asking for an extension" and Situation 6 "Asking for a reference letter". Both are concerned with one person's control of the negative or positive outcomes that the other one avoids or desires (French & Raven, 1959). Participants may, accordingly, adjust their measurements of power to include such domains. For instance, HK2 explained in Situation 2, "Because my mark is controlled by him, the power should be higher in this situation". Likewise, in Situation 6, ML5 claimed, "The professor has the absolute right to reject you and s/he has a lot of control in this situation, but yet the reference request means so much to you and your future."

The traditional Chinese value of *Zun Shi Zhong Jiao*, to respect teachers and their teaching, in this case, seems to prevail in all the three cultural groups. "Showing respect to professors in university context" has seemingly become a universal phenomenon. Nonetheless, underneath the broadly similar view lie some subtle differences in terms of what "showing respect to teachers" means to the students.

According to NS3,

> They're respected, because they deserve to be respected; they've put so much work to become a professor at the college level, and at the same time though, we put so much work to become college students, but we, I mean, we respect them, and we are not exactly equal, like we're not completely levelled, but it's a mutual respect like they respect us, like in teaching us, they don't assume that we're lazy, or anything ill. They

have a level of expectation upon us as being college students, and we have a level of expectation upon them as being college professors. (NS3)

Agreeing with NS3, NS8 described his understanding in this way,

I feel like, you know, teachers and professors, although they, like, they definitely have their years of experience, their wisdom, you know, that's why they're teaching; that's good, but at the same time, they're also still bearing, like they're still doing research, and also you know, by interacting with others, you know, having to communicate, you know, what they learned; that's a learning process itself, so it's kind of like a mutual relationship. (NS8)

The key word *mutual* was located in both remarks. While acknowledging the unequal status between them as students and the professors, they were inclined to lessen the distinction by underscoring the reciprocity of conveying respect. As students at the college level and above, they, too, would hold the expectation that the teachers show respect to them as hardworking individuals and their devotion to their study.

Paying great emphasis on *respect* as well, the viewpoints expressed by the Chinese students, however, evidenced some disparity. In the following depiction, ML1 stated her opinion towards *teachers* in relation to her cultural values, which had a long-lasting effect on her stance and even prevented her from using such words as "Hi, how are you" to communicate with her professors in e-mails.

The teachers always have higher power than us, perhaps because for us

> Chinese students, we have this tradition of regarding teachers as figures of authority. You cannot possibly become friends with them; once a teacher, always a teacher, no matter what country they're from, how liberal the country might be. To write "Hi, how are you" to them, definitely no, I dare not. In my view a teacher is in a powerful status, though I am no longer as young as a child, it doesn't change his/her position in my mind. (ML1)

This may sound a little personal at first sight, but, on the whole, there was no intention of seeking a *mutual* relationship emerging in the Chinese students' recall protocols. Almost all of them admitted the very high social rank of professors in Hong Kong and the necessity for students to show respect and even be considerate to the teachers. For example, "I want to express that I am very polite; I am respectful to the teachers and I am considerate for them". (ML10)

This exploration reminds us of Hofstede's (1991) categorisation of the power distance value pattern, which indicates that small power distance cultures tend to value equal power distributions, equal rights and relations on the basis of performance, whereas people in large power distance cultures tend to accept unequal power distributions, hierarchical rights and asymmetrical role relations – "For large power distance cultures, respect for power hierarchy in any system is a fundamental way of life (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 63). To go further, Scollon and Scollon (2001) believe that contemporary Americans assert an extreme of independence from hierarchical relationships; the difference in egalitarianism and hierarchy between East Asians and Americans can be reflected in the choice of strategies of interpersonal politeness. It can therefore be summarised that despite the fact that professors are regarded having a high social status, deserving respect from students, American and Chinese students alike, their orientations towards this vertical power relationship differ in subtlety, influenced by their dissimilar cultural values. What's more, their perceptions of what it means to be polite and the way of expressing politeness varies across cultures (an issue that is explored in Chapter Five).

4.3.3 Measurement of social distance

4.3.3.1 Statistical results of the measurement of social distance

When scaling the social distance, the respondents were asked, "How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=*not at all close*) to 5(=*very close*)". The descriptive statistics of measurement of social distance is listed in Table 4.18. The scores of social distance revolved around the middle scale, 3. In general terms, students viewed the e-mail recipient *Professor X* as a professor they felt neither close to nor distanced from.

Table 4.18 Descriptive statistics of measurement of social distance

Dependent Variable: Social distance

Cultural groups	Situations	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
HKCLE Group	Situation 1	2.90	1.197	10
	Situation 2	2.30	1.160	10
	Situation 3	2.60	.843	10
	Situation 4	2.80	.919	10
	Situation 5	2.70	.823	10
	Situation 6	3.30	.949	10
	Total	2.77	.998	60
MLCLE Group	Situation 1	3.00	.667	10
	Situation 2	2.80	.789	10
	Situation 3	3.10	.568	10
	Situation 4	3.00	.667	10
	Situation 5	2.70	1.160	10
	Situation 6	3.20	.632	10
	Total	2.97	.758	60
NS Group	Situation 1	2.20	1.033	10
	Situation 2	2.20	.919	10
	Situation 3	3.00	.943	10
	Situation 4	2.80	.919	10
	Situation 5	2.30	1.059	10
	Situation 6	3.30	1.252	10
	Total	2.63	1.073	60
Total	Situation 1	2.70	1.022	30
	Situation 2	2.43	.971	30
	Situation 3	2.90	.803	30
	Situation 4	2.87	.819	30
	Situation 5	2.57	1.006	30
	Situation 6	3.27	.944	30
	Total	2.79	.957	180

Table 4.19 sets out the results of the two-way ANOVA, which discloses no significant between-group difference triggered by the independent variable of

cultural groups on the dependent variable, as manifested by the *F* ratio 1.921 and *p* value, 0.150. Irrespective of their differing cultural backgrounds, the participants evaluated the sociopragmatic variable of social distance in an indistinguishable way. By contrast, there was a statistically significant main effect for situations (F=2.938, p=0.014); the social distance fluctuated situationally.

Table 4.19 Two-way ANOVA of measurement of social distance

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Social distance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group	3.378	2	1.689	1.921	.150
Situations	12.911	5	2.582	2.938	.014
Group * Situations	5.289	10	.529	.602	.811

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test, as illustrated in Table 4.20, indicated that the mean score for Situation 2 was significantly different from Situation 6 (p=0.009) and the mean score for Situation 5 was significantly different from Situation 6 (p=0.049); the measurement of social distance was subjected to situational variations. Figure 4.8 helps shed light on the concrete shapes of the dependent variable along both independent variables.

Table 4.20 Post-hoc tests of *situations* on measurement of social distance

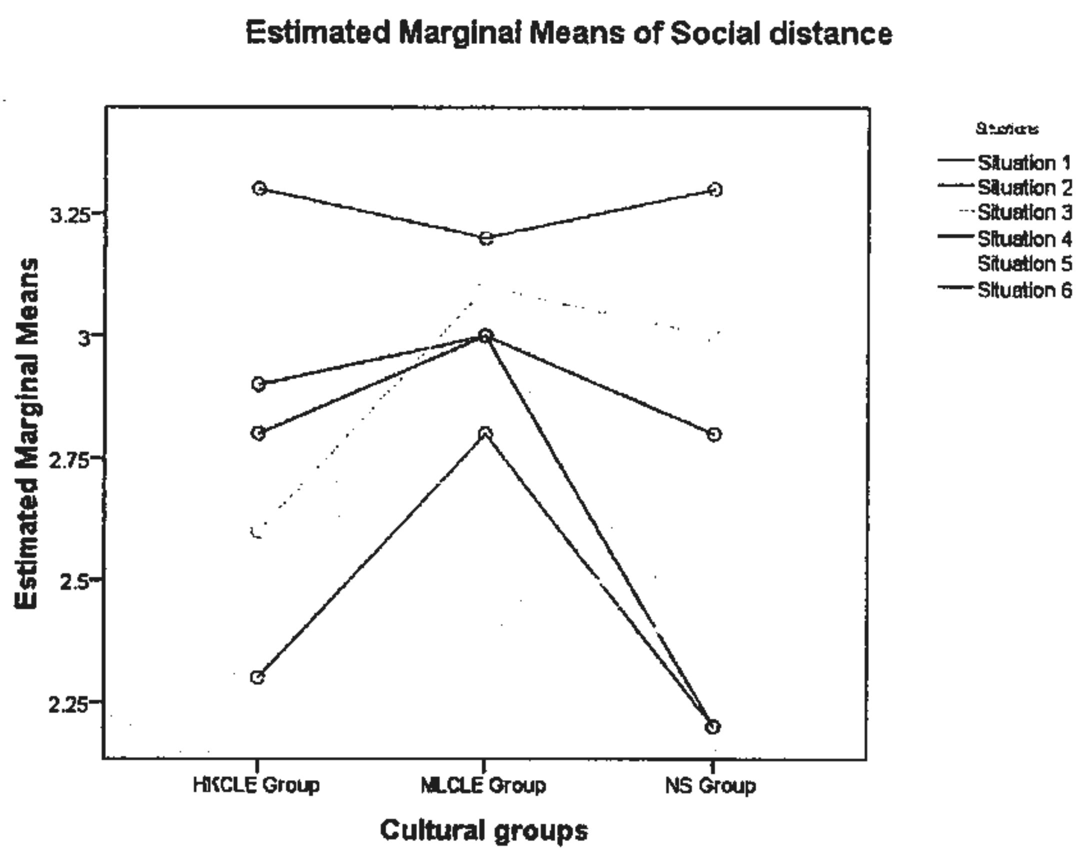
Social distance Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

(I) Situations	(J) Situations	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Situation 1	Situation 2	.27	.242	.880	-.43	.96
	Situation 3	-.20	.242	.962	-.90	.50
	Situation 4	-.17	.242	.983	-.86	.53
	Situation 5	.13	.242	.994	-.56	.83
	Situation 6	-.57	.242	.184	-1.26	.13
Situation 2	Situation 1	-.27	.242	.880	-.96	.43
	Situation 3	-.47	.242	.389	-1.16	.23
	Situation 4	-.43	.242	.475	-1.13	.26
	Situation 5	-.13	.242	.994	-.83	.56
	Situation 6	-.83*	.242	.009	-1.53	-.14
Situation 3	Situation 1	.20	.242	.962	-.50	.90
	Situation 2	.47	.242	.389	-.23	1.16
	Situation 4	.03	.242	1.000	-.66	.73
	Situation 5	.33	.242	.741	-.36	1.03
	Situation 6	-.37	.242	.655	-1.06	.33
Situation 4	Situation 1	.17	.242	.983	-.53	.86
	Situation 2	.43	.242	.475	-.26	1.13
	Situation 3	-.03	.242	1.000	-.73	.66
	Situation 5	.30	.242	.817	-.40	1.00
	Situation 6	-.40	.242	.565	-1.10	.30
Situation 5	Situation 1	-.13	.242	.994	-.83	.56
	Situation 2	.13	.242	.994	-.56	.83
	Situation 3	-.33	.242	.741	-1.03	.36
	Situation 4	-.30	.242	.817	-1.00	.40
	Situation 6	-.70*	.242	.049	-1.40	.00
Situation 6	Situation 1	.57	.242	.184	-.13	1.26
	Situation 2	.83*	.242	.009	.14	1.53
	Situation 3	.37	.242	.655	-.33	1.06
	Situation 4	.40	.242	.565	-.30	1.10
	Situation 5	.70*	.242	.049	.00	1.40

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The social distance was manifestly greater in Situation 2 (Asking for an assignment extension) than in Situation 6 (Requesting a letter of recommendation), suggesting that the latter request required a much closer relationship with the professor than the former. Likewise, the social distance was noticeably greater in Situation 6 than in Situation 5 (Asking for course auditing). To a large extent, a closer relationship with the professor was considered to be less crucial in asking for a reference letter than in requesting to be an auditor in one of the professor's courses.

Figure 4.8 Two-way ANOVA of measurement of social distance



Further, as shown in Table 4.19, the interaction effect of the two independent variables did not reach statistical significance (F =0.602, p=0.811). This indicated that there was no significant difference in the effect of *cultural backgrounds* on the measurements of social distance for all *six situations*. In fact, as illustrated in Figure 4.8, the values of social distance followed approximately the same path from Situation 1 to Situation 5. For Situation 6, asking for a reference letter from the professor, students unanimously believed that they should be closer to the professor than in the other scenarios.

4.3.3.2 Insights from the stimulated recalls

When the image of *Prof. X* was initially established in the rubric of the e-DCT questionnaire, four major theoretical constructs were taken into consideration (see also 2.2.4.2.2), following the suggestion by Spencer-Oatey (1996) of providing illustrative role relationships in the research design. They were: social similarity, frequency of contact, length of acquaintance, and familiarity (or, how well people know each), all of which were identified in literature. On this basis, *Prof. X* was described as "an American professor in your department, who is a native speaker of English." The student-professor relationship was specified as follows: "The professor has been teaching you in two courses in your programme, one core unit and one optional unit. Apart from the lectures, you do not have much face-to-face contact with him/her. Instead, E-mail is one of the chief channels for you to communicate with him/her and you use it quite often." The delineation basically covered all four dimensions listed above.

The insignificant statistical results across the cultural groups could be inseparable from the elucidation. Because of the specificity of the details provided about this target e-mail receiver, the students tended to base their decisions upon the information they obtained from the rubric. Almost unanimously, they considered this professor as someone they were moderately close to or distanced from.

For instance, both ML5 and ML8 extended analogous views of social distance that directed their measurements of this variable:

> Since I am an MPhil student and I've taken two courses with this professor, I think we should somehow be close, but it's still difficult to be very close, cause teacher are different from students and I've never seen any teacher who has no distance with the students. (ML5)

Also, ML8 pointed out, "As the setting is that the student and the professor do not contact each other very often, just in moderate amount. I figure it is neither distant nor close." A similar understanding can be easily detected from the NS protocols as well. NS2, for instance, scaled the social distance of all the situations as 3, except for Situation 1, where she measured it as 2. She explained,

> I think the social distance, because it said in the scenario that you really haven't interacted with your professor except for in class or through e-mail, so, usually that means to me like wow, I don't really know them very well on a personal level, so err, I would say that they're further apart from me, but you know, there have been situations where I've, you know, had more informal talks with my professors like out of class, you know, anything, or even just discussion over e-mail about whatever is covered in class, then I would rate the social distance closer (NS2).

In a way, *Prof. X* seemed to represent the kind of professors who are associated with the students mostly on the institutional level, but not on the "personal level". What's more, this social distance would vary along with the changing attributes of the situations and be closely related to the other sociopragmatic variable of power difference. ML4 expressed his views and said, "After all, s/he is Professor and I'm asking them for things that are mainly academically-related, so I don't think we could be very close."

The American student NS3 voiced her opinion about social distance in conjunction with both "power distance" and "situational factors":

> I feel like with the professor, regardless of how much familiarity you had with them, you're still not in a close relationship, coz it is still professor-student (relationship). Maybe if like, I think the only case where the social distance would be less between a professor and student is as if I was like, personally working with them on the research thing, but if it is just a general, I'm a student in his class, and he[5] is the

[5] The American students in the study recalled their thinking process in English. Unlike Chinese, in which the male and female pronouns share the same sound *Ta*, pronouns in English are gender-sensitive (*he, she, and it*). In the present study no explicit information was given about Prof. X's gender. In the recall protocols, the

> professor and no other like real contact rather than the occasional "oh, what do you think of my presentation topic", or "oh, what's your class on next semester", just those basic ones that I feel all the other students have it as well, then it is still like the high power, and we are not really close...in "borrowing the book", it's an academic book, but it's still like a personal request, it's not as much within the academic routine, it's like a closer relationship, like for the more personal request. (NS3)

It seems that the difference of the student-professor power status was rather predominant in considering the social distance. Although Prof. X was deemed as related to the students chiefly on the academic dimension, when it came to requests that were more of a personal nature, the social distance would accordingly diminish to a certain extent. In the last situation, asking for a reference letter, the majority of the students marked the social distance as the smallest, as is also shown in the statistical analysis. HK1 explained, "The social distance is basically stable, because it's with the same person, but we're closer in the last situation, because I should know him/her well to ask for them as my referees." HK4 added,

> Because I've had some e-mail encounters with this professor before, such as asking for meetings, assignment extension, course information and so on, I feel at this point, as I'm finishing my MPhil degree, I think all the way through the professor has come to know me better to write this recommendation letter for me.

HK4's words, in a sense, revealed a fairly appealing phenomenon related to

---

students referred to this individual as "this/the professor", "Professor X", "my professor", "he or she", or "he". NS3 used "he" most of the time but would turn to other labels occasionally. It is therefore unclear whether "he" and "his" were generic use or gender-embedded. This issue of gender is worthy of closer scrutiny and suggestions for future studies on this aspect are provided in Chapter Six.

research instrumentation, that is, the evolvement of the communication encounters and the continuation of the interactions in a "chronological" order, to borrow HK3's words. In fact, about 17% of the participants shared the same understanding while completing the DCTs.

4.3.4 Size of imposition

4.3.4.1 Statistical results of the measurement of social distance

Due to the nature and level of measurement of the variable, the scores of imposition degree underwent exactly the same statistical procedures as the previous three variables. Table 4.21 exhibits the descriptive statistics. Broadly speaking, the academic situations depicted in the current research were not treated as impositive in general, since none of the means reached as high as 4.

Table 4.22 presents the two-way ANOVA results of the evaluations of imposition degree. Judging from the F ratio, 3.030, and p value, 0.051, there was a statistically mild significance aroused by the independent variable *cultural groups*. To be specific, there was a mild main effect of the students' cultural backgrounds on their scaling of the imposition degree; the measurements varied moderately across the three groups.

Table 4.21 Descriptive statistics of measurement of imposition degree

Dependent Variable: Weighing of the size of imposition

Cultural groups	Situations	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
HKCLE Group	Situation 1	2.50	.972	10
	Situation 2	3.60	.966	10
	Situation 3	2.90	1.370	10
	Situation 4	2.00	.667	10
	Situation 5	2.20	1.476	10
	Situation 6	3.70	1.418	10
	Total	2.82	1.308	60
MLCLE Group	Situation 1	1.80	.789	10
	Situation 2	3.40	1.350	10
	Situation 3	3.50	.972	10
	Situation 4	2.70	1.252	10
	Situation 5	3.40	.966	10
	Situation 6	3.90	.994	10
	Total	3.12	1.236	60
NS Group	Situation 1	1.30	.483	10
	Situation 2	3.80	.919	10
	Situation 3	2.70	.949	10
	Situation 4	1.90	1.197	10
	Situation 5	2.50	1.080	10
	Situation 6	3.60	1.174	10
	Total	2.63	1.301	60
Total	Situation 1	1.87	.900	30
	Situation 2	3.60	1.070	30
	Situation 3	3.03	1.129	30
	Situation 4	2.20	1.095	30
	Situation 5	2.70	1.264	30
	Situation 6	3.73	1.172	30
	Total	2.86	1.291	180

Table 4.22 Two-way ANOVA of measurement of imposition degree

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Weighing of the size of imposition

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group	7.144	2	3.572	3.030	.051
Situations	83.644	5	16.729	14.189	.000
Group * Situations	16.456	10	1.646	1.396	.186

Table 4.23 Post-hoc tests of *cultural groups* on measurement of imposition degree

Multiple Comparisons

Weighing of the size of imposition

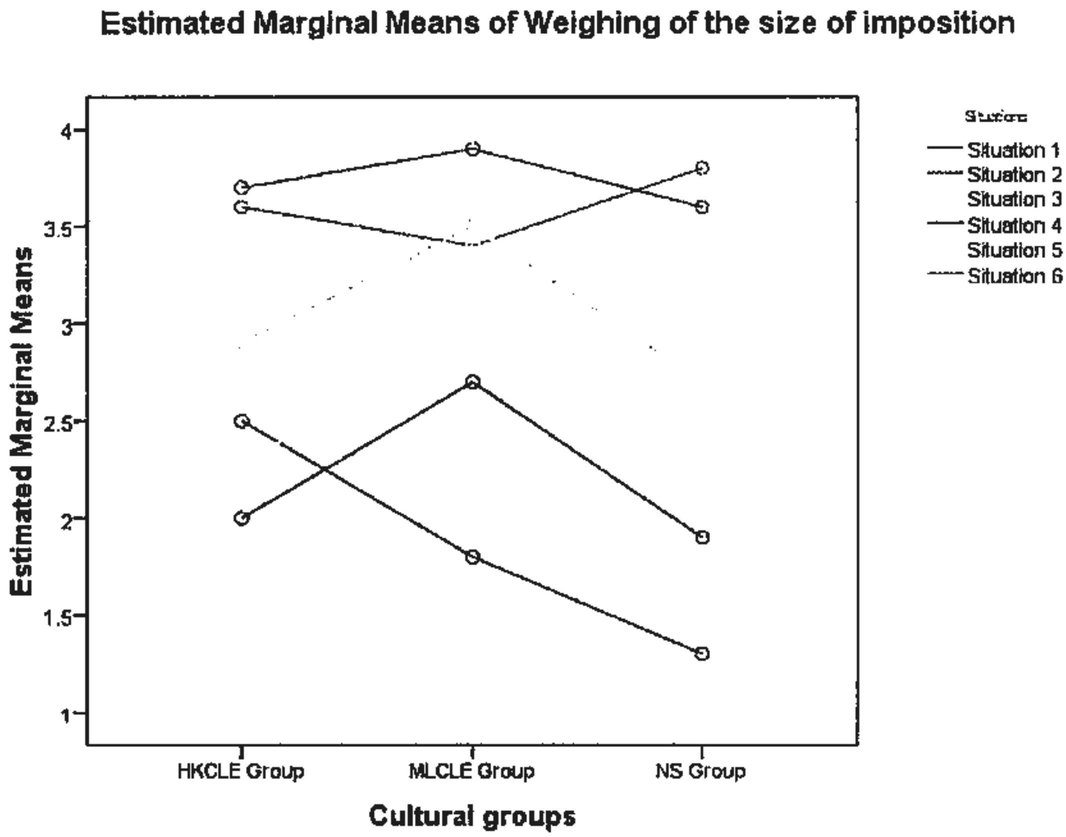
Tukey HSD

(I) Cultural groups	(J) Cultural groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HKCLE Group	MLCLE Group	-.30	.198	.287	-.77	.17
	NS Group	.18	.198	.625	-.29	.65
MLCLE Group	HKCLE Group	.30	.198	.287	-.17	.77
	NS Group	.48*	.198	.042	.01	.95
NS Group	HKCLE Group	-.18	.198	.625	-.65	.29
	MLCLE Group	-.48*	.198	.042	-.95	-.01

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Post-hoc tests, set out in Table 4.23, showed that the mean score of the MLCLE group was significantly different from that of the NS group (p=0.042, significant at 0.05 level). The HKCLE group did not differ significantly from either of the other two. Also in Figure 4.9, it can be observed that except for Situation 2, the sizes of impositions were weighed consistently larger by the MLCLE students than by the NS students.

Figure 4.9 Two-way ANOVA of measurement of imposition degree



As far as the independent variable of *situations* is concerned, according to Table 4.22, there was a statistically significant main effect on the weight of imposition size (F=14.189, p=0.000). Following this route, the measurements were considerably divergent among the six situations. Table 4.24 presents the post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test. Apart from Situation 4 (Asking for course information), there was a significant difference between Situation 1 (Making an

Table 4.24 Post-hoc tests of *situations* on measurement of imposition degree

Weighing the size of imposition Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

(I) Situations	(J) Situations	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Situation 1	Situation 2	-1.73*	.280	.000	-2.54	-.92
	Situation 3	-1.17*	.280	.001	-1.98	-.36
	Situation 4	-.33	.280	.842	-1.14	.48
	Situation 5	-.83*	.280	.039	-1.64	-.02
	Situation 6	-1.87*	.280	.000	-2.68	-1.06
Situation 2	Situation 1	1.73*	.280	.000	.92	2.54
	Situation 3	.57	.280	.335	-.24	1.38
	Situation 4	1.40*	.280	.000	.59	2.21
	Situation 5	.90*	.280	.020	.09	1.71
	Situation 6	-.13	.280	.997	-.94	.68
Situation 3	Situation 1	1.17*	.280	.001	.36	1.98
	Situation 2	-.57	.280	.335	-1.38	.24
	Situation 4	.83*	.280	.039	.02	1.64
	Situation 5	.33	.280	.842	-.48	1.14
	Situation 6	-.70	.280	.131	-1.51	.11
Situation 4	Situation 1	.33	.280	.842	-.48	1.14
	Situation 2	-1.40*	.280	.000	-2.21	-.59
	Situation 3	-.83*	.280	.039	-1.64	-.02
	Situation 5	-.50	.280	.479	-1.31	.31
	Situation 6	-1.53*	.280	.000	-2.34	-.72
Situation 5	Situation 1	.83*	.280	.039	.02	1.64
	Situation 2	-.90*	.280	.020	-1.71	-.09
	Situation 3	-.33	.280	.842	-1.14	.48
	Situation 4	.50	.280	.479	-.31	1.31
	Situation 6	-1.03*	.280	.004	-1.84	-.22
Situation 6	Situation 1	1.87*	.280	.000	1.06	2.68
	Situation 2	.13	.280	.997	-.68	.94
	Situation 3	.70	.280	.131	-.11	1.51
	Situation 4	1.53*	.280	.000	.72	2.34
	Situation 5	1.03*	.280	.004	.22	1.84

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

appointment) and the rest. Also, a significant difference was found in the following pairs: Situation 2 and Situation 4, Situation 2 and Situation 5, Situation 3 and Situation 4, Situation 4 and Situation 6, and Situation 5 and Situation 6. Apparently, the situational factors were quite dynamic, which is visually illustrated in Figure 4.9. Asking for a reference letter and asking for an assignment extension were always considered to involve a greater degree of imposition than requests for course information or an appointment. Similarly, requesting to borrow a book from the professor was deemed more imposing than asking for course information. Likewise, asking to audit a course was mostly rated more demanding than requesting a letter of recommendation or an assignment extension.

According to Table 4.22, the interaction effect of the two independent variables did not reach statistical significance (F=1.396, p=0.186). This indicated that the effect of the *cultural backgrounds* on the imposition scores did not depend on the other independent variable *situations*.

4.3.4.2 Insights from the stimulated recalls

Though mutually dependent and closely interrelated, the imposition degree was found to be the most active variable of the three. Both the measurements of power and social distance were greatly influenced by situational factors. This finding was in line with the observation of Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) about the greater stability of power and social distance in academic student-professor communications in an American context. This study appears to have uncovered some similarity in academic professor-student e-mail discourse in these two geographical contexts.

The retrospective protocol revealed that in considering the imposition degrees of the scenarios, students would generally focus on one or more specific aspects of a scenario, such as time demands (e.g., Asking for a meeting), degree of effort (e.g., Seeking for course information), and the financial and/ or psychological burden (e.g., Borrowing books from the professor) involved in the request. Other considerations were the distribution of rights and obligations (e.g., Asking for a reference letter), and, the reasonableness of the request (e.g., Requesting an assignment extension).

Scrutiny of the qualitative data, however, showed that the situation was more complex as multiple considerations could account for the measurements. In general terms, HK1 described how she considered the imposition degree:

> Normally, I'll consider how this request is going to affect me, and of course also the possible reaction of the professor, or, to be specific, whether this request will affect his/her impression of me and my marks in his/her course.

It seems that for HK1, the idea of imposition was not merely an objective calculation, nor a simple *small-big* issue. It was not only the cause, but also the effect of the request that were associated with the degree of imposition. The effect itself can also be twofold – academic effect (e.g., marks of the course) and the identity effect–how the image of the student would be influenced by a specific request.

For some, the power difference tended to be the consideration of priority. In ML3's measurements, no situation was scaled below 3 in its imposition degree. She explained,

> Since I am very conservative to some extent, when faced with the elders or teachers, especially when requesting something, I will be quite serious and careful. Take Scenario 1 for instance, it is required by the professor, and now I'm actually meeting this requirement, so it's not imposing; after all, it's also convenient for the professor if the students take the initiative to make the appointment, but since the professor needs to accommodate my time, it has become a kind of negotiation between us, and that's why I think the imposition should be in the middle.

ML3 regarded teachers and elders to be on the same social rank, which mirrored the cultural understanding of power relations that were discussed in 4.3.2.2. The request was reasonable, as it was "required" by the professor, who was obligated to meet with students for course-related issues. ML3 was apparently aware of this reasonableness. It was the idea that the professor, a person of a higher power, would have to negotiate and accommodate the time of the student that made her feel that the situation was still moderately imposing. This may explain the larger scaling of the imposition degree by the CLEs than the NSs.

What's more, the size of imposition could also be connected with the tone of the message that the student had written in, their language use, and their level of control of the situation as a whole. To be more specific, this level of control was rooted in the judgement of the urgency of the request and the rights that the student felt s/he was entitled to issue the request. HK2 explained,

> If my tone is strong, I'd feel it's imposing, coz I'm sort of forcing the professor to the corner; it's like, there's no room for them to say no to me. Also, I think it's related to my level of certainty, because the professor has the right to reject me, for all the situations, if the professor has more right to reject, then I will say, I will feel less certain, and I will feel less imposing. For example, from my point of view, it is a must for us to have a meeting; it's a must and I'm asking for a must, so that's why I think it's imposing...In Situation 4 (asking for course information), it really depends on my language use, because I sound quite nice; it seems to that I have eased the tone to make it less imposing.

It appears that imposition can be a rather complicated sociopragmatic variable that involves the consideration of diverse respects: situational features, other social-cultural variables, the tone and linguistic choices, and identity-related outcomes. The situational characteristics within a specific context were essentially the most dominant aspects to ponder, but the facets that students paid attention to seemed to be variant and sometimes even to be idiosyncratically dependent.

4.4 Summary

This chapter reported on and discussed the findings regarding pragmatic production and the perceptions of the students about making academic e-mail requests. The interlanguage requests of the HK and MLCLEs were analysed for request perspectives, head act, internal (lexical and syntactic) and external modifications, as compared to the requests made by the NS. No substantial differences were found in the use of request perspectives among the three groups of students. NS students, however, seemed to be slightly better at employing requesting perspectives as ways to minimise the degree of imposition and upgrade the level of politeness.

The participants, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, tended to be indirect in making requests to their professors and they all preferred the conventional strategy of QP. NS were found to be more flexible in their strategy choices, using both direct and indirect strategies and even the non-conventional indirect strategy to make requests in a strategic manner.

The CLEs (both HK and ML groups) in the study manifested a strong pragmalinguistic competence in terms of the range of choices covered in their requesting behaviours. They were, however, found to be less capable of modifying their requests with certain syntactic means (e.g., past tense). Instead, they relied more heavily on lexical/ phrasal modifiers and external mitigating devices, such as, to insert politeness markers (e.g., *please*), to add more justifications, to enhance the positive face of the recipient by including sweet words and even flattering, and, to show apologies and appreciations to the professors.

With regard to pragmatic perception, MLCLE students were found to be always the least confident group in terms of the appropriateness of their language use and the HKCLE students the most. Power and social distance were more stable relative to the imposition degree; the measurements of them were largely constrained by the imposition of a situation. The qualitative exploration unveiled the interwoven social, affective, and cognitive complexity underlying the quantitative measurements and the interconnections of the three variables in actual thinking and writing process. The next chapter addresses the recipients' viewpoints about the students' productions and discusses the findings from an intercultural pragmatic perspective.

CHAPTER FIVE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the findings of the study from an intercultural pragmatic perspective. It documents the quantitative analysis of the recipients' measurements of the students' e-mail productions that were randomly sampled. A more narrowed, qualitative analysis is presented subsequently, encompassing the exploration of four individual cases by triangulating different data sources and linking them with theoretical underpinnings. It aims to address research questions 6 and 7:

Audience Judgement

6. How does the audience of the e-mails (American native English speaking professors) perceive the appropriateness and politeness of the messages?

7. Are there any mismatches in perception between the sender and potential receiver that could result in intercultural communication failures?

5.2 The Audience Judgements

From amongst the e-DCT data pool, nine questionnaires were randomly chosen (30% of the e-mail data) and sent to six American professors working in the same university (see Table 3.4 for the profiles of the professors and Table 3.5 for the codes of the participants chosen for evaluation). The aim was for the professor to read these e-mails as if s/he was the target recipient Prof. X and then provide both quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the responses. In the e-mails, the names of the students, their cultural backgrounds, and any revealing information about their identity were hidden and/or modified. Quantitatively, each professor assessed each message in terms of three parameters: directness, politeness, and degree of satisfaction and, ultimately, 54 values were produced by each assessor for each parameter.

5.2.1 Quantitative analysis of the recipients' perceptual judgements

5.2.1.1 Overall picture

Given the number of values marked by each assessor, it appeared reasonable to have a quantitative calculation from the onset. The purpose was two-fold: to help gain a baseline understanding of the pattern of the recipients' perceptions, and to be a useful guide for the follow-up qualitative exploration.

Table 5.1 displays the descriptive statistics of the assessors' measurements. As indicated by the total mean of each category (Directness: *M*=4.06, *SD*=0.823; Politeness: *M*=3.81, *SD*=0.960; Satisfactory level: *M*=3.63, *SD*=1.107), the assessors felt that the students were direct in making e-mail requests in those six situations and were able to do so in a polite manner. Their level of satisfaction was limited to somewhere between *a little satisfied* and *satisfied*, implying that there existed areas that could be improved.

Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics of the recipients' judgements

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Directness	HKCLE	108	4.17	.704
	MLCLE	108	3.90	.842
	NS	108	4.12	.894
	Total	324	4.06	.823
Politeness	HKCLE	108	3.78	.868
	MLCLE	108	3.54	.990
	NS	108	4.12	.934
	Total	324	3.81	.960
Satisfactory level	HKCLE	108	3.66	1.078
	MLCLE	108	3.26	1.097
	NS	108	3.97	1.036
	Total	324	3.63	1.107

In order to find out whether the professors perceived differences in the writings composed by students of different cultural backgrounds, a one-way between-group analysis of variance was conducted, to explore the impact of the independent variable *cultural backgrounds* on the recipients' perceptions.

According to Howitt and Cramer (2008), one-way ANOVA can be used to compare two or more groups in terms of their mean scores on a dependent variable. The variation in the dependent variable (measurements of Directness, Politeness, and Satisfaction level respectively) is explained due to the effects of the independent variable(s) (student participants' cultural backgrounds) (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991, p. 30).

Table 5.2 presents the ANOVA results of all three dimensions: directness, politeness, and level of satisfaction. As shown in the table, significant differences were yielded in all three measures, at $p \leq .005$, $p \leq .001$ and $p \leq .001$respectively.

Table 5.2 One-way ANOVA of directness, politeness, & degree of satisfaction

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Directness	Between Groups	4.451	2	2.225	3.333	.037
	Within Groups	214.315	321	.668		
	Total	218.765	323			
Politeness	Between Groups	18.562	2	9.281	10.680	.000
	Within Groups	278.954	321	.869		
	Total	297.515	323			
Satisfactory level	Between Groups	27.574	2	13.787	12.027	.000
	Within Groups	367.981	321	1.146		
	Total	395.556	323			

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD tests were conducted to show which of the groups differed and stood out (Pallant, 2005); the results are presented in

Table 5.3. As far as directness is concerned, the table reveals that the mean score of the HKCLE group was significantly different from that of the MLCLE group, whereas the NS group did not differ significantly from either the HK or ML group. A cross-examination of this finding with the descriptive statistics shown in Table 5.1 suggests that the recipients viewed the HKCLE students as considerably more direct than the MLCLE students, whereas the NS group was in between in terms of directness.

With respect to politeness, the mean score of the NS group differed significantly from that of the HKCLE group. It was also significantly different from that of the MLCLE group. By referring this finding to the descriptive statistics in Table 5.1, it can be noticed that the professors rated the American students as the most polite, much more so than both the non-native speaking groups. For them, the politeness levels of the two Chinese groups were not that different.

The degree of satisfaction also differed significantly across the groups: between the HKCLE group and MLCLE group, also between the NS group and MLCLE group. That is to say, the mean score of the ML group was significantly different from those of the other two, whereas there was not such a significant difference between the NS and HK group. As such, the professors thought that the

American students were the most satisfactory group in terms of their linguistic production, followed by the local Hong Kong students, with the Mainland students the least satisfactory.

Table 5.3 Post-hoc tests of One-way ANOVA of directness, politeness & degree of satisfaction

Multiple Comparisons

Tukey HSD

Dependent Variable	(I) Cultural background	(J) Cultural background	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Directness	HKCLE	MLCLE	.269*	.111	.043	.01	.53
		NS	.046	.111	.909	-.22	.31
	MLCLE	HKCLE	-.269*	.111	.043	-.53	.00
		NS	-.222	.111	.114	-.48	.04
	NS	HKCLE	-.046	.111	.909	-.31	.22
		MLCLE	.222	.111	.114	-.04	.48
Politeness	HKCLE	MLCLE	.241	.127	.141	-.06	.54
		NS	-.343*	.127	.020	-.64	-.04
	MLCLE	HKCLE	-.241	.127	.141	-.54	.06
		NS	-.583*	.127	.000	-.88	-.28
	NS	HKCLE	.343*	.127	.020	.04	.64
		MLCLE	.583*	.127	.000	.28	.88
Satisfactory level	HKCLE	MLCLE	.398*	.146	.018	.06	.74
		NS	-.315	.146	.080	-.66	.03
	MLCLE	HKCLE	-.398*	.146	.018	-.74	-.06
		NS	-.713*	.146	.000	-1.06	-.37
	NS	HKCLE	.315	.146	.080	-.03	.66
		MLCLE	.713*	.146	.000	.37	1.06

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In one of the few studies that took the recipients' views into account, Chang and Hsu (1998) investigated e-mails written by the Chinese learners of English and native American English speakers, focusing on power-equal and power-unequal requests in an American context. They found that in the power-unequal situations, there was no difference in the level of politeness as perceived by the native English speakers who served as evaluators. This has clearly deviated from the findings of the present study, which documented significant differences in the level of politeness between the Chinese participants and the American students as judged by the audience; the American students were viewed as the most polite. Some of the request samples of the Chinese learners in Chang and Hsu (1998) were judged as very indirect and unclear. In this regard, similar findings have been found in the present study, especially in terms of the audience perceptions about the weakness in the Chinese learners' productions as compared to their American counterparts.

Thus far, the results presented unfolded a macro picture of the recipients' views. Questions may well arise as to whether the professors agreed with each other in their measurements and to what extent they were able to reach such consensus from all three angles. To gain more specifically information about this aspect, the following sections present findings of the measurements distributions by each assessor both across the groups and across the individuals assessed.

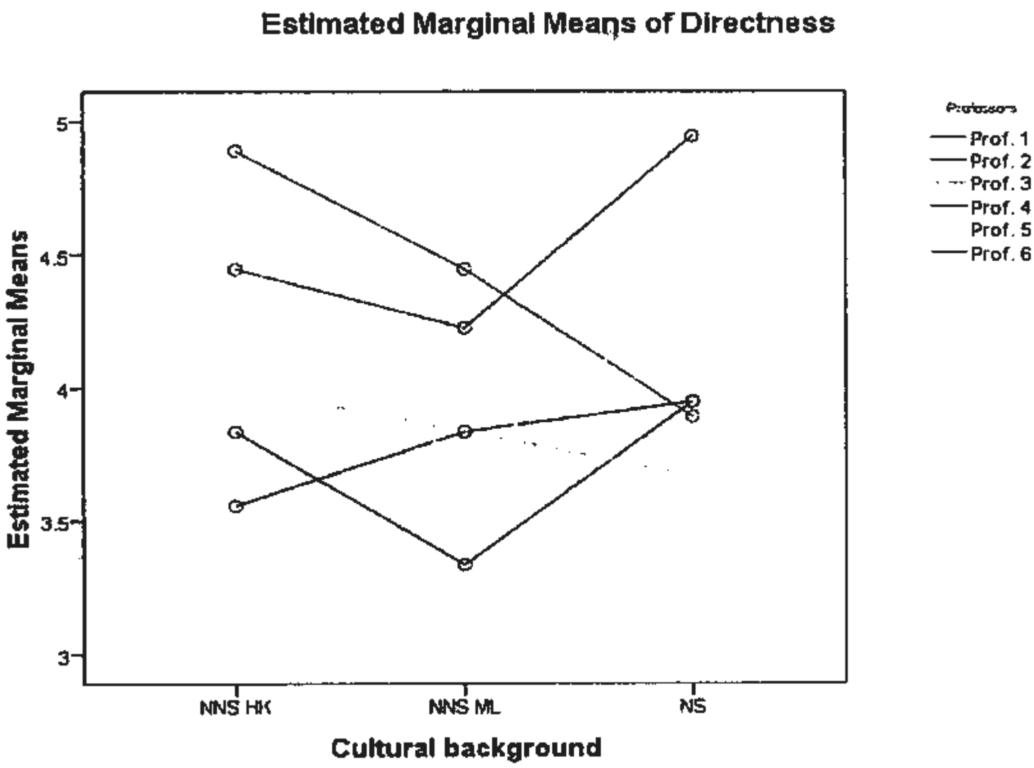
5.2.1.2 Measurements distributions across assessors

As displayed in the profiles of the judges (see Table 3.4), all six professors originally came from the US, but have stayed in Hong Kong for over ten years. Presumably, they would have varying degrees of familiarity with the host culture. To gain a more detailed understanding, the measurements of the three dimensions are investigated below in order, starting with directness.

Directness

Figure 5.1 was generated based on a two-way ANOVA test, with both *Professors* and *Cultural groups* as independent variables. It points to the similarity in the scoring patterns of *Directness* by three professors: Prof. 6, Prof. 5, and Prof. 1., who felt that the ML students were the most indirect and the NS students the most direct, slightly more so than the HK students. Prof. 2's assessment was similar to that of Prof. 3, but there was a distinct difference in terms of the intra-assessor variation. In a general sense, however, they both deemed the HK students to be the most direct group and the NS group the most indirect. Prof. 4 was the only one whose judgements differed from the others. Evidentially, there were deviations among these assessors, not only in terms of the magnitude of the values they gave, but also the shapes of these values. It could thus be assumed that half of the professors defined *Directness* in accordance with a similar kind of criteria; the other half, however, in spite of the rough agreement between two of the professors, understood this concept differently from their counterparts.

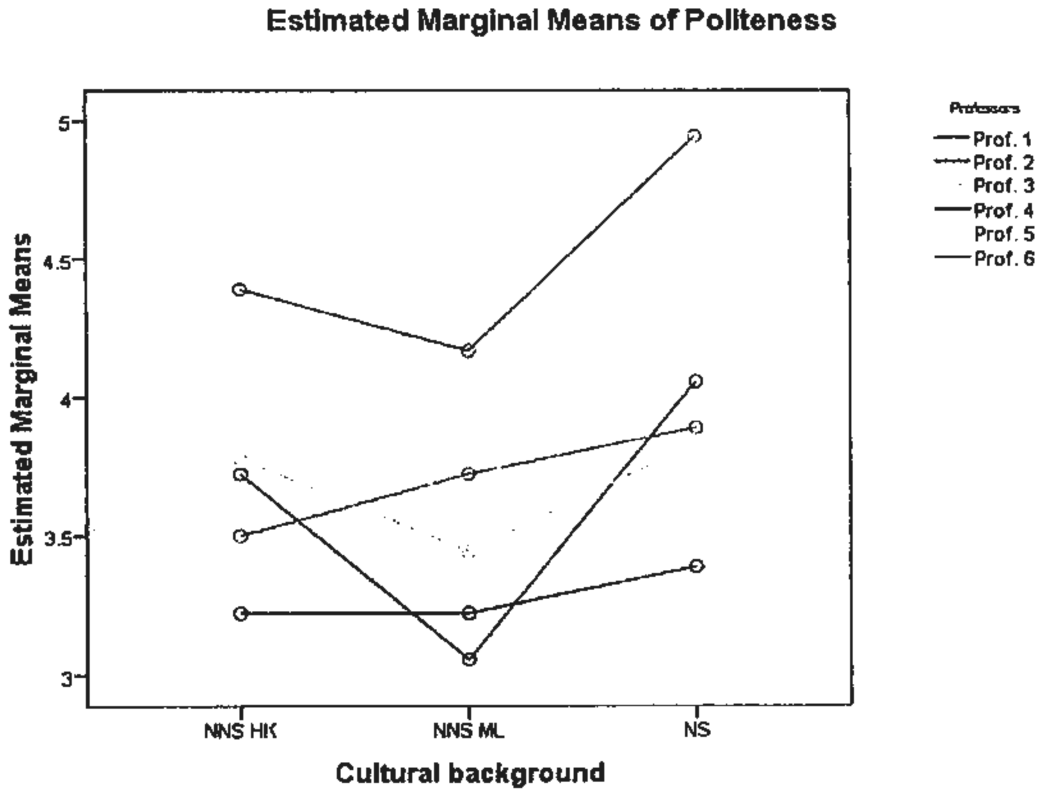
Figure 5.1 Distributions of the means of *Directness* measured by the professors



Politeness

Compared with directness, the evaluations of politeness led to a more consistent structure. Figure 5.2 exhibits the distribution of the means of *Politeness* as measured by the professors across the three cultural groups.

Figure 5.2 Distributions of the means of *Politeness* measured by professors

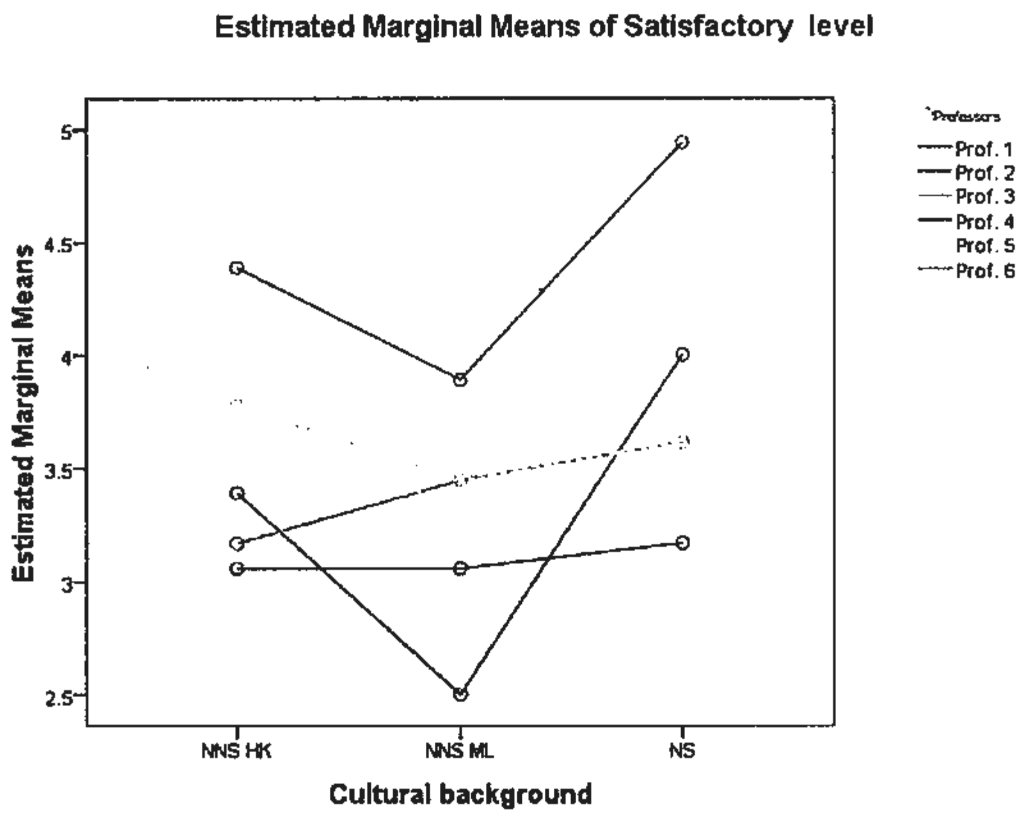


Five out of six of the judges (except for Prof. 2) ranked the NS students the most polite, followed by the HK students, and then the ML students. In particular, the markings of Prof. 6, Prof. 5, and Prof. 1 were exceptionally close to each other. More than that, it was striking that these three professors were the very three ones who scored *Directness* in a fairly similar fashion. With regard to the dimension of politeness measurement, Prof. 2 differed in that she deemed the ML students as generally more polite than the HK group, so polite that there was little difference between them and the NS group.

Level of satisfaction

As far the level of satisfaction is concerned, the results were as intriguing as those of *Directness*. Figure 5.3 shows the distribution of the means of the scores of *Satisfactory Level* given by the six professors for the three groups of participants.

Figure 5.3 Distributions of the means of *Satisfactory Level* measured by professors



As indicated by Figure 5.3, the scoring routes of Prof. 6, Prof. 5, and Prof. 1 were very similar to each other across the cultural groups. Once again, these three professors reached agreement in their judgements in terms of the general patterns.

On the whole, they were the most satisfied with the messages written by the NS students, followed by the HK students and finally the ML students. The measurements by the other three professors, however, appeared to be more intricate to interpret. Having approximately the same scoring for the NS and ML groups, Prof. 2 and Prof. 3 bore completely opposite perceptions regarding the production of the HK students. While the messages written by the HK group were the most favoured by Prof. 3, they were, however, the least favourable for Prof. 2. For Prof. 4, who also preferred the messages of the NS students, as most professors did, the differences among the three groups were not distinct. He rated all the messages a little above 3, suggesting that he was basically satisfied with those e-mails, but there was still much room for improvement, NS and Chinese students alike.

To summarise, while the parameter of *Politeness* yielded a rather consistent measuring pattern among the assessors, the other two, *Directness* and *Level of Satisfaction* gave rise to a more complex picture. As demonstrated in Diagram 5.3, only three out of six professors (Prof. 6, Prof. 5, and Prof. 1) agreed on these two dimensions with regard to their measuring sequence of the different cohorts of participants, that is, the NS group, followed by the HK group, and finally the ML group. Unlike Politeness, which aroused similar perceptual understanding among the assessors in terms of what could be termed as *polite* and *impolite*, when scaling

Directness and *Level of Satisfaction*, at least three of them evidenced deviations in considering these two variables. That is to say, the way they treated Directness could vary; also, they were (dis)satisfied with the messages for different reasons. Despite that, three professors, Prof. 6, Prof. 5, and Prof. 1 displayed a pattern of commonality. Next section centres on the quantitative results regarding individual differences of the students assessed.

5.2.1.3 Measurements dispersions within the students assessed

This part shifts from the evaluators to the students and investigates the dispersion of the evaluations within the students assessed. Table 5.4 charts the descriptive statistics of the recipients' judgements of each individual student under each parameter.

To begin with, all the students were believed to be direct in their messages by the professors, as shown by the means that ranged between 3.61 and 4.36. Student 6 (M=4.36, SD=0.639) (NS3 as shown in Table 3.5 in Chapter Three) was rated as the most direct, closely followed by Student 9 (HK1) (M=4.31, SD=0.710), as opposed to Student 7 (ML6), ranked as the most indirect (M=3.61, SD=0.871). Also, as indicated by the values of stand deviations, which were less than 1 point, there were not very large deviations within the assessors regarding these extreme cases.

Table 5.4 Descriptive statistics of the recipients' judgements for each student

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Directness	Student 1	36	4.06	.674
	Student 2	36	4.08	.770
	Student 3	36	3.81	1.037
	Student 4	36	4.11	.622
	Student 5	36	4.03	.910
	Student 6	36	4.36	.639
	Student 7	36	3.61	.871
	Student 8	36	4.19	.889
	Student 9	36	4.31	.710
	Total	324	4.06	.823
Politeness	Student 1	36	4.06	.715
	Student 2	36	3.56	.735
	Student 3	36	3.94	1.068
	Student 4	36	3.72	.849
	Student 5	36	3.81	.856
	Student 6	36	4.36	.798
	Student 7	36	2.75	.874
	Student 8	36	4.06	.893
	Student 9	36	4.06	.955
	Total	324	3.81	.960
Satisfaction level	Student 1	36	3.72	.882
	Student 2	36	3.22	1.124
	Student 3	36	3.69	1.064
	Student 4	36	3.67	.862
	Student 5	36	3.44	1.081
	Student 6	36	4.36	.798
	Student 7	36	2.61	1.022
	Student 8	36	3.86	1.125
	Student 9	36	4.08	1.079
	Total	324	3.63	1.107

Next, coinciding with the result of directness, Student 6 (NS3) (*M*=4.36, *SD*=0.798) was at the same time considered to be the most polite. A little less than Student 6, Student 1 (ML1) (*M*=4.06, *SD*=0.715), Student 8 (NS4) (*M*=4.06, *SD*=0.893), and Student 9 (HK1) (*M*=4.06, *SD*=0.955) were regarded as equally polite. But nonetheless, attention has to be paid to Student 9 because of the value of *SD*, 0.955, which was very much close to 1 point, suggesting a relatively more prominent divergence within the professors. Thus, while some professors thought of this student as fairly polite, others may not totally agree. In contrast with those four participants, Student 7 (ML6) (*M*=2.75, *SD*=0.874) stood out as the most impolite and the difference between him and others was conspicuous, as indicated by the means. Also, the professors seemed to unanimously believe that this student was impolite and even rude in some way. On the whole, the majority of the students were polite.

Lastly, in respect of the level of satisfaction, the messages produced by Student 6 (NS3) (*M*=4.36, *SD*=0.798) were, again, the most felicitous and the favourite of all the assessors. Next was Student 9 (HK1) (*M*=4.08, *SD*=1.079), but, due to the large standard deviation, it has to be interpreted with heed as the variations were remarkable among the recipients. In line with the above analysis of politeness, Student 7 (ML6) (*M*=2. 91, *SD*=1.022) produced the most undesirable messages, although the standard deviation pointed to the great individual variations within the markers. As for the rest of the students, their messages were generally well accepted by the recipients, but they were not as ideal as those presented by Student 6.

5.2.1.4 Relationship of directness, politeness, and level of satisfaction

So far Student 6 (NS3) turned out to be the one with the most outstanding performance; in the eyes of the recipients, her messages were the most direct, yet most polite and most acceptable. On the contrary, tremendously consistently, Student 7 (ML6) was the most indirect, least polite and least satisfactory in his writing of those e-mails. Student 9, also, HK1 from the HK group, figured as another remarkable case. Her messages were as direct as those of NS3 and she was deemed one of the three most polite students. Furthermore, her messages were the most appreciated ones as well, second only to those of NS3.

All three cases seemed to point to a linear, positive relationship of the three parameters and perhaps more impressive was the relationship between directness and politeness. Different cultures may hold different expectations of directness and concomitant politeness in a particular context. Higher level of indirectness does not necessarily contribute to greater politeness and vice visa, as the interpretation of politeness depends on many a different socio-cultural, contextual, and personal factor. After all, correlation does not equal causation.

Pearson correlation tests were implemented to examine the relationship of the three variables and the results were summarised in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Pearson correlation tests of Directness, Politeness, and Level of Satisfaction

Correlations

		Directness	**Politeness**	**Satisfactory level**
Directness	Pearson Correlation	1	.418**	.518**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	324	324	324
Politeness	Pearson Correlation	.418**	1	.812**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	324	324	324
Satisfactory level	Pearson Correlation	.518**	.812**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	324	324	324

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In accordance with the guidelines proposed by Cohen[6] (1998), there was a strong, positive correlation between directness and level of satisfaction (r=0.518), and a very large, positive correlation between politeness and level of satisfaction

[6] Cohen (1998) suggests the following guidelines for the interpretation of the correlation values.

r=.10 to .29 or r=-.10 to -.29 small
r=.30 to .49 or r=-.30 to -.49 medium
r=.50 to 1.0 or r=-.50 to -1.0 large

(r=0.812). Also, there was a positive, medium correlation between directness and politeness (r=0.418). These results further verified the preliminary assumptions derived from the analyses of individual cases, that is, the higher the level of directness, the greater the degree of politeness and level of satisfaction and vice versa. If a message was perceived to be direct, it tended to be thought of as polite and satisfactory; and if polite, then it would highly probably be considered as satisfactory.

As an electronic means of communication that is popular in institutional contexts, e-mails can first and foremost play an instrumental role in enhancing transactional exchanges. It may well be that "being direct" and "to the point" (e.g., by saving time of the receiver), and "showing politeness" are both gratifying features that are expected in academic e-mail requests, especially when taking into account the unequal power status of the senders and receivers.

5.3 Triangulation of the Students' Production, Cognition, and Recipients' Perception

Starting from aforementioned results, this section digs deeper into the thoughts of both parties to scrutinise interculturally what was virtually going on in the "magic box" leading to the (mis)match of expectations of both sides. In order to achieve this purpose, it was necessary to focus on specific cases that were carefully chosen and triangulate the e-mail production, the producers' thinking process, and the recipients' qualitative perceptual comments.

There were four major theoretical considerations behind this decision. Firstly, researchers have noted that "the issue of individual variation has been left out in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research on requests" (Yates, 2005, p. 67). Further, in her study of interlanguage pragmatic development in requests in a study-abroad context, Schauer (2004) considered the choice of certain pragmalinguistic modifiers to be simply a very individual matter. She further argued that "the personality of the individual played a more decisive, but as yet uninvestigated, role" (p. 267). Regarding this aspect, individual variations have been largely ignored in interlanguage and intercultural pragmatics studies.

Secondly, using a case study approach that focuses on one or a few instances "allows the researcher to deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations…(and) to grapple with relationships and social processes in a way that is denied to the survey approach" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 45). Next, explanatory cases, according to Yin (2003), explain how events happened and present data "bearing cause-effect" relationships (p. 5). Last but not least, through the process of triangulation, multiple methods, data sources, etc. can be drawn on to help shed light on how an "individual functions in real context" (van Lier, 2005, p. 195).

5.3.1 Selection of cases

The selection of cases was termed "purposeful sampling" by Patton (2002), with the goal "to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 46). He summarised fifteen sampling strategies which were divided into four major categories: strategies to select cases representing a key characteristic, strategies reflecting a conceptual rationale, emergent strategies, and strategy lacking a rationale. Based on the research questions of the current study and the findings derived from the quantitative analyses in Section 5.2, two sub-strategies of the first category were adopted: Extreme or deviant case (outlier) sampling and intensity sampling. The first one was to "learn from unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest", e.g., "outstanding successes/ notable failures" and the second centres on cases that "manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely", e.g., good/poor students; above/below average (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Miles and Huberman (1994) also recommended seeking out individuals who have the most to gain or loss by strengthening the interpretations of the findings.

The sampling procedures proceeded in the following order. To begin with, a certain proportion of the messages were selected, based on the situational elements and the findings of the audience assessments. In Chapter Four, the interlanguage pragmatic analyses of the pragmatic perceptions indicated that among the three situational factors, imposition tended be the most dynamic by virtue of the moderate statistical differences yielded among the three cultural groups. That being the case, three situations were chosen as the benchmark scenarios, one of which was regarded as low and the other two as high in imposition by the majority of the students. They were Situation 1 (Asking for an appointment), Situation 2 (Asking for an assignment extension), and Situation 6 (Requesting a letter of recommendation). In addition, since the messages produced by the NS students were judged as the most satisfying and Student 6's (NS3) were especially well-received, her messages in response to those situations were selected for analysis.

By contrast, the other extreme example, Student 7 (ML6) made another interesting case worth further exploration. His messages were rated uniformly negative: the most indirect, impolite, and unsatisfactory. Due to the intra-group variations, as an "outlier", Student 7 can by no means represent the other remembers of the ML group. As such, Student 1 (ML 1) was selected as a case of being "good" and "above average" via intensity sampling.

The second least satisfactory student was Student 2 (HK5); he was therefore picked out as one from the HK group to help gain insights into the potential weaknesses that the students might have in delivering an appropriate message. The e-mails they created for the three different scenarios were examined in combination with their attentional resources drawn on during the cognitive processing of e-mail formulations, and the impact of these messages on the recipients.

5.3.2 Sociopragmatic competence

The interlanguage pragmatic analyses in Chapter Four seem to point to the generally well-versed pragmalinguistic competence developed by the non-native English speakers of the current study, superficially with respect to the range of strategies employed. They were able to use strategies as diverse as the American students. However, they were found to be less proficient in applying certain syntactic internal modifiers, contributing in some way to the immense dependency on the lexical internal downgraders, and external modificational devices.

Relative to pragmalinguistic aspects of communication, however, sociopragmatic ones are deemed more complex to deal with because of value-laden social judgements that extend beyond the linguistic code (Thomas, 1983). Moreover, "sociopragmatic knowledge is often closely linked with pragmalinguistic knowledge, and typically needs to be combined with it for effective interpretation" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 96). For this reason, probing the cases will involve the investigation of sociopragmatic awareness as evidenced in their pragmalinguistic choices in response to the situational variations, and more importantly, their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as demonstrated in the process of the intercultural encounters, from both an emic and etic perspective.

The following sections report on the findings and discussion of the four cases after purposeful sampling: Case One–Student 6 (NS3), Case Two–Student 7 (ML6), Case Three–Student 2 (HK5), and Case Four–Student 1 (ML 1)

5.3.3 Case One–Student 6 (NS3)

Student 6, Kelly (pseudo name), was a twenty-one year old exchange student from California, US, in her last year of university. It took her "about half an hour" to finish the e-DCTs. E-mail was her chief means of communication with professors; she used it to "ask them to review an outline, make an appointment before it, and ask them outside the office hours about the mid-term, and for letters of recommendation" (interview). Below is the message that Kelly wrote for the first scenario:

Student 6 (NS3) Message 1

Situation 1

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment for later this week or next week.

> Hello Professor X,
>
> I have decided on my presentation topic for Communication Core Course. **I would really appreciate it if we could meet to discuss my topic and how it fits within the course material.** I am available to meet on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. **Please let me know if either of those days work for you.** Hope to hear back from you soon.
>
> Thank you,
> Kelly B(surname)

In the first situation, the participants were to make an appointment with Prof. X, which was required by the professor in the first place, to talk about their approaching presentation. Throughout the messages, Kelly addressed the professor with "Hello Professor X," because "dear" is "too formal" for her, and even outdated:

> I don't see anyone ever using it anymore, I mean, when you read older letters and stuff, yeah. I feel like it's not something that we use, that I, or even my generation use. Like me, "Hello", or just start with "Professor X", like no "dear", no.

The same form of address appeared in most of the NS messages, but in none of the CLE (both HK and ML groups) ones. Perhaps this can be identified as an absorbing difference of the institutional e-mail addressing practice between the academic context of the US and Hong Kong. In the latter, the form of address "Dear Professor XXX/ Prof. X" seemed to be more popular in academic e-mail writings to professors.

Kelly started her message by introducing the topic with a retrieved piece of information before issuing her request and closed it with a post-request emphasising the urgency of setting an exact time for the meeting, together with a follow-up formulaic expression, double-stressing this urgency. The message consisted of one condensed paragraph. Kelly intended it to be "short," because in her opinion, it would be "good to keep the message concise" and "professors might not have the time to finish it" if it were too long since they "are very busy, especially when they have so many students who might be requesting the same thing." Kelly aimed to avoid lengthy messages to show consideration for the recipient by reducing his/ her reading load.

The two requests were underlined in the message. The first, which was also the most important one, was located at the beginning of the body and expressed with an appreciative subjunctive form, realised by the conventional indirect request act of Query Preparatory (QP), with a joint requesting perspective "we". Both internal and external modifications were deployed within and outside the request proper, such as with an embedded if-clause, grounders, etc. She expanded the reasons given in the DCT prompt, and added "how it fits within the course material" as part of the justifications. This way, it may help increase the reasonableness of the request and convey a serious attitude of the student and her devotion towards the course work. While reading her messages, Kelly recalled,

> Because I wanted it to sound, not just, like "oh, I want to do this", which topic, and then I wanted, for meeting with them, I wanted to ask them, like I want to do this topic, do you think it will work with what we've studied in class. I don't want to just say, like, oh is this topic ok, coz then I also, I feel like when I pose it this way, that also gives me more ideas, like, oh yeah, you can bring like, it is really to this specific lecture that we had, or like, to this reading, because I'm already asking about in the context that we are studying.

Subsequent to the request, Kelly provided two time slots that she would be available for, "Monday and Wednesday afternoons." For her, proposing a specific time for the meeting was an effective way to enhance the communication and avoid "prolonging" the e-mail process for both her and the professor. As well as saving time, it made it easier for the professor to reply to the message with the provided time reference. Although Kelly took an active role in suggesting the time, a post-request "Please let me know if either of those days work for you" shifted the final decision to the professor.

> With some of my classes being so large, I feel like, if you, just like, say, "oh I can meet next week", then it's like too large of a scale; they don't have any idea, like they might suggest time, and I'll have class, I'll have work, instead of like, it's just prolonged e-mail process before we can find a date, so I put forward what time I'm free so that they can see whether they're free, and rather than them being like, "oh, I'm free Tuesday morning", and then I'm like, "oh I have classes on Tuesday morning", and "ok then what about Thursday," so if I put forward a few options for them, and then they can hopefully find a time that works, and that way, they'll respond like Wednesday afternoon, at 2 pm and that's it.

In his evaluative remarks, Prof. 6 commented that it was polite for Kelly to give the choice of days; the phrase "work for you" was particularly thoughtful. Clearly, the strategies, linguistic choices as well as the information structuring that Kelly employed met with the expectations of this professor and were welcomed by him. Among the 6 professors, only one of them, Prof. 1, seemed to be a little bothered by these slots, feeling they were a little too "tight". Most likely, as also reflected in the quantitative analysis, this could be more of an issue of individual preference than the incompetence of the student in making such a request.

The first scenario was very commonplace for Kelly as it bore little imposition and she felt *certain* about her language production. She did not choose *very certain* because she did not "like giving extreme answers"; as for the message itself, she thought it was actually "a good e-mail". "Good", coincidently, was the very word that Prof. 1 marked down as his response to this first e-mail. Even better, for Prof. 3, Kelly was "very polite, professional, and organised".

While this message was pretty much approved of by the recipients, Prof. 2 and Prof. 6 pointed out that it would be excellent if Kelly had specified which "topic" she had chosen for the presentation. If a concrete topic was supplied, it would probably be more informative and help the professor to get prepared for the meeting(s) afterwards. To be more objective, however, the blame should perhaps be attributed to the research instrument rather than the e-mail producer; after all, the information supplied in the DCT prompt was restricted in depth. While some participants may feel the urge to reconstruct the scenario with richer information based on their real-life experience (e.g., by providing a pseudo-topic), others may not have bothered to go beyond the task constraints (for task reconstruction, see Woodfield, 2008a).

Situation 2

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realise you will not be able to finish it by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension.

Student 6 (NS3) Message 2

Hello Professor X,
I really appreciate all the feedback you have given me on the paper. I have been working on it over the past couple weeks, but this week I am very sick. I hope you can understand that I may not be able to finish up this paper as strongly as I would like because of it. **<u>I'm wondering if it would be at all possible to get a paper extension of a few days?</u>** This would allow me to finish up the paper when I am feeling better and can focus on it clearly. **<u>Please let me know if this is acceptable.</u>** Hope to hear back from you soon.

Thank you,
Kelly B(surname)

Kelly's understanding of the second situation, asking for an assignment extension, was straightforward. The scenario called for a request that she believed was inherently imposing. She explained,

> From most of my experience, teachers don't accept late work. They really frowned at needing more time like they give you the prompts for paper at the very beginning of the semester, and then give you the deadline, and maybe, at the end of the semester, maybe like in the middle of the semester, but you have the prompts from the very beginning, so they expect you to, if not be working on it the whole time, at least to manage your time well…It's like delaying their grading process, and also may be unfair to others, like people may think, why do they get a few more days; I think we all should get a few more days.

Asking for an assignment extension was, for this reason, so demanding that she was not sure whether it would be "an ok request". Besides, compared with Situation 1, it was more of a personal favour to ask, in that "it doesn't affect him (the professor); it doesn't help him if I get a few more days; it'll only help me and it makes his grading harder coz they have to wait."

It did not come as surprising that these sociopragmatic considerations gave birth to distinct pragmalinguistic choices. Different from Message 1, where the request was made at the beginning, Kelly extended her appreciation to the professor regarding the feedback on her previous work, which, no doubt, was also another instance of scenario reconstruction. The request was arranged after a series of explanations, which included some additional information aside from "being sick": Kelly seemed to attempt to draw the recipient's attention to the fact that she had "been working on" the paper over the past few weeks and "being sick" was only one of the reasons for the extension. More importantly, she stressed that she would "focus on clearly" and submit "a strong paper" if granted the extension, a more significant incentive for her to make the request and perhaps also for the professor to grant it.

In the request itself, a conventional indirect request of QP was employed, similar to that in the first message, but in an entirely different form. It was polished with multiple modificational devices: aspect, an if-clause, past tense modal (*would*), a downtoner (*at all possible*), to name a few. With another persuasive sentence stating the underlying 'benefits' that this extension, if granted, would bring for her, Kelly stepped backwards and softened the tone by minimising the cost of the imposition, saying "if this is acceptable". In the end, the request seemed to have evolved into an enquiry of acceptability and possibility more than explicitly asking for things.

Kelly was aware of her wording and her pragmalinguistic sensitivity was manifestly strong: "I think it's more indirect, because rather than just being like, 'would it be possible to get a paper extension,' I'm like 'I'm wondering,' 'it would be,' 'at all possible.'"

To come up with this form, however, was not an easy task; regardless of her being a native speaker of English, she spent quite a while to formulate the request. She recounted,

> I worked on the "I'm wondering if it would be at all possible ..." sentence like a lot; like I don't know how to actually ask for this extension coz like I wasn't sure what would be polite, what would be too demanding, what would be most likely to get a "yes" also...It took me a few times writing it, like, no, no, no, that's bad, writing it, no, no, no. (Laughing).

Her initial choice was "I would like to ask for a paper extension," which was replaced by the question form "Is it possible that I can have a few more days," which, however, still sounded inadequate to her. After a few changes she ended up with "what was like a longer sentence" in her opinion – "I'm wondering if I could have a few more days," and she then decided to blend this structure with the other interrogative form, "Would it be possible that I have a few more days?" and "put all the things all together".

Fortunately, these efforts were all worthwhile, as Prof. 6 specifically underscored this request act and wrote "Polite" beside it. Prof. 1 commented that not only Message 2, but Message 2 to 4 by Kelly had all embodied the "ideal ways to phrase these requests." Message 2, in particular, was "really good" because "the student showed what she hoped to get":

> "I've been working on it over the past couple weeks…I hope you can understand that I may not be able to finish up this paper as strongly as I would like…because … I'm wondering if…" – she is asking in a very gentle way and very sincere. (Comments made by Prof. 1 about Kelly's second message).

From Kelly's standpoint, although she was content with her language, she was only *a little certain* about her message. This was mainly due to the high-stakes nature of the request, and her lack of confidence in the possible outcomes, that is, whether it could be adequate enough to achieve the purpose. The perceptions of the professors were all fairly positive, except for Prof. 2, who would have preferred Kelly to elaborate on "this week I am very sick." This repeats, in some way, what happened in Situation 1, that is, the dilemma of whether to further construct the message with the limited amount of background knowledge given, and the possibility of recipient variation, which corresponded with the findings in 5.2.1.2.

Situation 6

You wish to further your study and pursue a research degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter.

Student 6 (NS3) Message 6

> Hello Professor X,
>
> I have thoroughly enjoyed your classes that I have taken and feel I have learned a lot from them and from you. You have always been willing to meet with me in your own time to go over any concepts I didn't understand and answer any questions I had on the assignments. I am currently looking at graduate schools with programs very related to the courses I have taken under you. **<u>I would really appreciate if you could write a letter of recommendation for me.</u>** If it's possible, feel free to message me any questions about the program or we could even meet to discuss it further. Hope to hear back from you soon.
>
> Thank you,
> Kelly B(surname)

Measuring the imposition degree as 5, the highest, Kelly considered "asking the professor for a reference letter" another "huge" request to make, despite its regular occurrence in an academic context. She explained,

> Coz it is still a huge request for them (professors) to seriously write this letter about me and like there is a deadline, it's like, they'll have to take

> it out of their time of, like the course work, like, they're busy with their courses; I'm sure they're busy with their own research, projects, like going on, so like for them to add my letter on top of all their work, I feel like, this is so big a request.

Adding to it an extra layer of complication was the accentuated authoritative power of the professor in this situation and the impact of the grant of the request on the student. For Kelly, unlike other types of request, which were largely procedural and institutionally-oriented, asking for a reference letter involved a "personal favour" to ask. Kelly was mindful of the complexity of the scenario and the urgency to make her utmost efforts to phrase the request in a way that would be acceptable enough to accomplish the final goal.

> They have the complete control over the situation, like I present the request, and I may need it for graduate applications, but they can say no very easily and then I would be stuck, having to find another professor to write it, especially since in this situation, this professor is crucial, like a key professor to have a letter from, err, for the program I want to get into, so it's important that I get this specific professor's letter until they say no…

The basic sequence of the message followed a path of: Sweetner (compliment) → Sweetner (compliment) → Grounder (explanation) → Request → Post-request with Imposition Minimisers. On the surface, the message was filled with positive restatement of the shared background information and an expression of gratefulness by the student to the professor, as demonstrated by words such as "thoroughly enjoyed", "I have learned a lot", and "have always been willing to", etc. When reading between the lines, one can see that each one of the Sweetners was closely bonded with concrete academic matters, e.g., questions and concepts relating to the lessons that the teacher was giving, the enjoyment of the class by the student, instead of what is sometimes called "empty flattering". The request itself was grounded in the fact that the programs that she was applying for were "very related" to the courses she had taken with this professor. A sense of genuineness and sincerity was thereby conveyed through various linguistic means.

In the meantime, two major intentions were implied. Firstly, the letter written by this particular professor would count and add value to the application; secondly, the application was to a large degree motivated by the courses taught by the professor and inseparable from the teacher's support for her coursework, discussions and so on. Kelly recalled her organisation of the message:

> Well, I think it's good to start with why you specifically want them to write you a letter, rather than like any professor, so like, you have to say like, that's why I say I really enjoy the courses, like they've always been very helpful, like, I'm saying that they would be the best candidate to write me this letter of recommendation. I'm not just asking them because they're, like any professor. I'm asking them because they are this specific professor…Based off the other letters, like I'm taking a few courses, and he helped me with the paper and the presentation, and we had a lot of contact prior to me asking for this letter; I want them to know that they've been so helpful in me, like, going on this path to graduate school.

As far as the request act is concerned, another QP was used to convey both politeness and indirectness, which was realised by an embedded subjunctive appreciative form with both modals of "would" and "could" and one if-clause. The illocutionary meaning was expressed via the QP, after which, a succession of Imposition Minimisers were given to reduce the probable psychological burden caused by the request. First of all, the request was made on the condition that there was a possibility that the professor might lend a hand, but it may not be necessarily true. Secondly, if it were possible, the requester (Kelly) would be available for any questions that might arise to make things as easy as possible for the requestee: "If it's possible, feel free to message me any questions about the program or we could even meet to discuss it further."

Kelly made a comparison between "I was wondering if…" in Situation 2 and "I would appreciate if…" in the present one. She explained,

> Because the one where "I was wondering if it will be ok", I think that one was just because, because I was so uncertain that I would get an answer at all, like they would grant my request. They had something that I'm not right to do, so like, "oh, I was wondering whether it will be ok," like "maybe," "possibly," like a bunch of words, like hedging, kind of like, "please," yeah, "please," like, whereas this is like something this one is a favour. The last one was also a favour, but just I feel more of my responsibility to not get me into that situation, whereas this is the positive request because it's showing that I admire them so much, and admire their opinion of me so much, that I want them to write this letter.

Both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic awareness were evident in her remarks. From her point of view, words like "maybe," "possibly," "please" were helpful in refining the request. What's more, the linguistic choices differed when the attributes of the scenarios varied, so as to be in correspondence with the demands of the socio-contextual factors inherent in each different scenario.

All six professors were impressed with this message. Prof. 1 mentioned that the tone was "ideal" and Prof. 2 declared that this one was "generally better and more sophisticated writing with some justifications" as compared with the ones written by others. Prof. 3 was delighted that detailed information had been provided. For Prof. 4, although he found the wording "feel free to message me" a bit "awkward," he felt that the student was "overall very good in all aspects." Prof. 5 and Prof. 6 also considered this one to be "very polite" and "to the point."

Even so, Kelly was only *a little certain* about her production in this scenario. In a like manner with Message 1 and 2, Kelly's measurement of certainty did not have so much to do with her language as the impositive nature of the requests. She explained, "The language should be ok, but because the request is so big, I'm not sure, like, that's what they necessarily need to hear or to agree."

5.3.4 Case Two–Student 7 (ML6)

Student 7, Marco (Pseudo name), a second year postgraduate student from Mainland China, has been in Hong Kong for about 24 months at the time of the research. Although he had attended a month-long training program in Southeast Asia, where he had the opportunity to communicate with people from other cultures, he had no study-abroad or travel abroad experience in any English-speaking country. He talked about the "language shock" that he encountered at the beginning of his stay in Hong Kong and the improvement he had made in his "English language ability":

> Before I came here, I assumed that the language in this context would be Chinese, for both lecturing and daily communication, as in the Mainland. I was quite surprised when I found that all the courses I took were taught in English. The first year was very hard; I had to make all efforts to read, especially the areas that I wasn't familiar with. It's like a transformation for me, as one Chinese saying goes, "peeling off a layer of skin." I think I have been making huge progress in my English ability, be it reading, writing, or communication in general, progress in all aspects, I should say.

He used *Dr.* to address the professor in his e-mails, as he observed that this was the usual practice in this context. He said,

> Back in the Mainland, when meeting and talking with a professor, you have to be very cautious about the way you speak and showing your respect to the teacher. More attention is paid to formality and propriety and it's generally more reserved. In Hong Kong, I feel that the teachers

and students are more on an equal position when interactions happen. There is not really much hierarchical difference. You can call them Doctor, or Professor, or even by their first name, if they insist.

Rooted in an umbrella term "Chinese culture", the academic context in Hong Kong was differentiated from that of the Mainland for Marco, especially due to the cultural diversity of the professors and the unique student-professor relationship in this setting. He had been watching, comparing, and adjusting himself to the local academic environment, including the way that he wrote e-mails to professors. The following is the e-mail he wrote under the first situation.

Situation 1

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment for later this week or next week.

Student 7 (ML6) Message 1

Dear Dr. X

I am writing to ask when we shall talk about my presentation. I have decided to give a presentation on "Resistance after the Colonialism in South Africa" a book written Jean Comaroff. I'd like to take 15 minutes for the presentation with a PPT about 20 flashes.

Now that the presentation is on Thursday morning 10:00-10:15, I am available on Monday and Tuesday afternoons, **please let me know the time you are at office.**

Best

Marco (given name)

In the first message, which called for him to make an appointment with the professor, Marco brought about the request in the very first sentence, in an Explicit Performative. He then described in detail what his presentation was about, how long his presentation was probably going to take and how many slides he had prepared. In the second paragraph, drawing on the tightness of the presentation schedule, Marco proposed his own available time slots and closed the message with a direct post-request enquiring about the professor's accessibility. The organisation was in effect not that different from Kelly's. Two requests, one major act, and one post-act were employed in both of their messages. However, Kelly presented her request in a rather indirect fashion, embedded with appreciation, and a range of internal and external modifications, which were all missing in Marco's writing. Moreover, the way they presented the time slots and enquired about the professor's availability had differences in quality. This may echo the findings in Chapter Four on interlanguage pragmatics and Marco appeared to be less capable in retrieving, executing, and varying his pragmalinguistic strategies and placed more emphasis on providing the details and explanations.

According to Marco,

> "I am writing to..." is relatively more formal and I feel "can you" sounds distanced. By providing these details I aimed to get everything well-planned beforehand, such as what I was going to do about the presentation, what the topic was, how much time it would take. All I hoped for was nothing but a yes-no answer from the professor. I think it

was a kind of consideration for the professor, or sympathy, if I may say so, because as professor, they must be very busy and exhausted with lots of work and I don't want them to spend time and efforts for me, thinking and arranging everything for me. Besides, in this way, the professor would feel that I am actually quite rigorous and well-organised.

Despite his observation of the more "equal" type of power relations between the teacher and student in the local academic context, Marco scaled the power as 4, social distance as 3 and imposition 3 as well. The professor was rated "not very close, nor distant" from him, but as for imposition, he seemed to hesitate before making the decision:

> It may sound a little odd, but I think it's because of me being a Mainlander. If you asked a local Hong Kong student, s/he might have chosen 1. For them, teachers and students are more on the same level. Yet for me, even if I am aware of this kind of equality, it's hard to change my mindset. Somewhere in my brain, unconsciously, the prior framework is always there.

From a sociopragmatic perspective, Marco's pragmalinguistic choices did not satisfy his estimation of the sociopragmatic variables. Judging from his thought process, it is noteworthy that Marco regarded the professor as someone of a very high rank; so high that to even make a request that is required by the professor would need special attention. In his writing, too, Marco tried to be considerate of the professor and reduce the workload by planning things ahead. Having said this, was this letter well-embraced by the recipients? Unfortunately the answer is no.

Prof. 1 pointed out that "the student should not be telling the teacher when s/he is available and it's in appropriate." Prof. 3 underlined that "in Situation 1, the phrasing of the question 'writing to ask when' is awkward; it sounds impolite and a little too direct." A question mark was put at the same place by Prof. 2; she was so displeased that she remarked that the student "acts as if s/he is the boss." In addition, Prof. 4 pinpointed that "please let me know the time" was not polite and in this message, there was "too much unneeded detail."

Basically there was a mismatch between what Marco intended and how the message was interpreted. Prof. 1 stressed that the key to the first situation was efficiency: "If the student doesn't mention the time, I will have to write a lot and if he does, that may not be suitable, so there's also a balance here." In this way, it was not "offering time slots" that was problematic but the manner in which it was done. Presumably, a mix of sources: pragmalinguistic weakness, an insufficient level of details, the imbalanced degree of politeness and directness, as well as his underdeveloped sociopragmatic knowledge of the context might have all contributed to the communication breakdown. Another important reason could be intercultural disorientation, a phenomenon often discussed in studies of culture shock; it is defined as the behavioural confusion experienced by the sojourners in terms of the norms and rules that guide communication appropriateness and effectiveness (Ting-Toomy & Chung, 2005, p. 117). Marco was conscious of the existence of differences between the academic context of Hong Kong and that of the Mainland. However, perhaps due to a sense of insecurity, he felt more comfortable sticking to the Chinese norm of "showing consideration" to others by laying out details without taking enough care of the tone and flow of the message, especially the request formulation. Consequently, his "consideration" was not effectively communicated through linguistic means and the details he provided were not as relevant and helpful as expected. Such details also clashed with the principle of "efficiency" in this situation.

Fantini (2007) defined the concept of intercultural competence as "...a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (p. 9). He argued that the notions of being "effective" and "appropriate" are equally important because they acknowledge both "etic" and "emic" perspectives – that of self and other. As unveiled in Marco's case, the insider's view of his own performance in the intercultural encounter was in conflict with the interpretations of the outsider's (i.e., people from the target culture), in terms of how the e-mail was composed both effectively and appropriately. Intercultural miscommunication would thus arise under such a circumstance.

Student 7 (ML6) Message 2

Situation 2

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realise you will not be able to finish it by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension.

> Dear Dr. X
>
> I am sorry to say that I am unable to send my work to you on the due date, **can you please give me one more week?** Since last week I went to have hotpot with some friends, I was sick. Really sorry for this.
>
> Marco (given name)

The structure of the second message, which involved a request for an assignment extension, was somewhat different from the first one. Marco was *a little certain* about his writing, although the same kind of situation happened to him "quite often" and he did not treat the situation as overly impositive (He ticked 3 for the imposition degree).

The message began with an apology, followed by a direct explanation of the aim of the message. With a punctuation error, the request was issued immediately after, in a conventionalised indirect form of "can you please." Additional elaborations were supplied, detailing the precise difficulty that Marco had, which was preventing him from completing the assignment on time. Further, the message was closed with another intensified apology "really sorry."

From a cultural perspective, associated with his own socialisation process, Marco delineated why apologising was so important for him in this situation,

> I think it is a typical Chinese convention to apologise first, before putting forward your real purpose. You won't be that straightforward. I've also noticed that some people would say things directly, but it just doesn't work for me. I have to apologise first. I think it may have something to do with the way we were educated back in China. Some Chinese teachers are actually quite strict about this. Since we were kids, we have been taught to be well-disciplined, by the teachers in school and by our parents at home. The hierarchy became even more obvious in college, you know, you then had to be very humble, sort of like "shrinking yourself" and be modest. It wouldn't be a good thing if you made the teachers feel that you were making a display of your abilities, that is, *Feng Mang Bi Lou*.

The internal intercultural analysis was under way during his whole writing and reflecting process. Sensitive to the potential interference from Chinese culture, and the practicality of being "more direct", Marco exercised his agency by choosing not to. Such an inclination was, in fact, not unusual among the Mainland students in the study. For example, another student, ML3, pointed out in her retrospection: "As for Chinese politeness, to be specific, I will try so hard to keep saying 'sorry' and 'thank you', you know, never get enough."

While rereading his message in the recall session, Marco felt that "could you please" should be better, more indirect and polite; this was another popular chunk in his requesting repertoire. As for the explanation, "Since last week I went to have hotpot with some friends, I was sick," it was factually a real-life experience of Marco, labelled by him his "one and only" experience in Hong Kong. It occurred to him at the very moment of writing and he quoted this little story as a way of justification.

While presenting the "story", Marco was wary about the repercussions. In his mind he was trying to visualise how the professor would react when reading this:

> There was an image in my mind that the professor was reading my e-mail. He might be a little mad, like, "look at this naughty guy," but still had no choice but to agree. Here it's more like, when a kid does something wrong, you know, like me in this situation, the mistake has been made and there is nothing he can do, but stand in the corner, lowering his head and waiting for the punishment. The teacher had no idea of how to do with the kid but to accept the result.

The picturisation, in a way, conveyed vividly a conceptualisation that was discussed in Chapter Four with regard to the student-teacher power relations in Chinese culture. Marco depicted himself as a "naughty kid" who had done something that he was not supposed to have done, whereas the teacher was more of "an adult" possessing a higher social position. He even cast the professor in a protective role that sounded almost like a parental one. In written Chinese language, there are two words that have the same pronunciation, spelled alphabetically as *Shi Fu*, but different characters for the sound *Fu*, that is, 師父 and 師傅. They are synonymous in that they both refer to those who impart knowledge and skills. In the word 師父, the character 父 is the equivalent of *father* in Chinese. Metaphorically, it could be interpreted as: teachers are fathers. "Like father, like son" was another expression delivered by participant ML10. This helps uncover the internal value that Marco held about his position in contrast to the teacher's while making this high-stakes request. The power difference was enlarged in this situation, because as Marco added, "I did not handle my own business well, and obviously I was on the wrong side, so I tended to distance our status further."

Marco was primarily satisfied with his language because he believed that it could help him to reach a "dual-purpose": the teacher would not feel happy about it, but would not be unhappy, either, but they would grant you their acceptance of the request in any way. In the measurement, however, Marco was *a little certain* about his message, and he disclosed,

> I was hesitating, wondering how I should write, because you have to keep in mind the psychology of the teacher while receiving this letter and how s/he would deal with such kind of matters. It's a risky situation and you'd feel so worried after sending it, no matter how well you've written. It is all up to the teacher and more of an issue of the professor than the language.

Indeed, in interpersonal interactions as such, many different kinds of factors are interwoven, situational, cultural, and individual, which are all dynamic and subject to the context. But nonetheless, the question that arises is: Is language an issue or not?

And, would the recipients be willing to grant an extension as Marco assumed? Prof. 1 considered the excuse a very poor one for an extension as long as "a full week." He questioned the specificity contained in the message and was feeling uncomfortable with the vagueness of the reason: "In this situation, the students should mention providing the doctor's certificate. Also, what I care is that the student mentions when I can get the paper!" The "hot pot" excuse, unluckily, did not help justify the request; rather it made the whole situation even worse. Prof. 2 criticised the excuse, "It may be true but a poor reason for a delay of a week! It sounds like friends dominate life." In contrast to the first situation, Prof. 2 expected a more detailed explanation because "the more details they provide, the more specific and convincing for them to ask for a request." Additionally, Prof. 3 remarked that "it is not clear about how hotpot with friends is related to sickness"; Prof. 5 also revealed that he "didn't like the hotpot excuse."

With regard to the language, Prof. 3 commented, "The language is too informal. S/he should not omit 'I' in 'Really sorry for this.'" Prof. 4 noted that "the overall English standard/grammar is quite weak". Inevitably in this scenario, a higher level of formality with meticulous linguistic politeness was also anticipated, so as to increase the truthfulness of the explanation and more importantly the sincerity of being apologetic. Prof. 5 identified another pitfall, that is, "(the message) focused on what the student wanted/could do, but didn't ask me." Looking back at Kelly's production under the same situation, "self-centredness" and "writer-orientation" (Chen, 2001) seemed to be critical elements that differentiated the quality of their e-mails. Prudent about the potential burden that the request may cause to the professor, Kelly turned her request into an enquiry of possibility at the end of her message.

Accordingly, the politeness degree in Marco's message was affected negatively by this self-orientation. Prof. 6 indicated that the message was by no means polite and interestingly, he added, "No HK student would ever write this." It seemed that based on the years of life and work experience in Hong Kong, the encounters with the local Hong Kong students had left him with a rather positive impression in terms of linguistic politeness; or, at least in his estimation, Marco's e-mail was not typical.

Language is indeed an issue, and it is via the language that linguistic politeness can be encoded, as well as the personal image delivered to the addressee, e-mails in particular, because of the lack of non-verbal cues and immediate feedback from the interactants. In the studies by Hendriks (2008, 2010) that examined the effect of (under)use of syntactic and lexical modifiers in e-mail requests written by Dutch learners of English, it was found that the "accented speech" by non-native speakers were often evaluated negatively in relation to their personality; in the same way, the underuse of request modification in e-mails had a negative effect on participants' (native speakers of English) evaluation of the personality of the senders. In the actual e-mail communication, the role of linguistic politeness is fundamental in that the perception of the receiver would not be restricted to the surface level; very easily the (im)proper use of the language would ultimately lead to the evaluation of the sender as a person, but not solely his/her linguistic deficiency.

Different scenarios require different levels of specificity and efficiency; the pragmatic use of the language strategies would consequently be appropriately adjusted to achieve both the transactional goal–the efficiency of information exchange and the interpersonal goal–establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationship, the two key components of ICC (intercultural communicative competence), as defined by Byram (1997). Also as has been shown in Hendriks

(2008, 2010), the underdeveloped ICC would inevitably place the students in a disadvantaged position in institutional intercultural encounters.

Another aspect which might be associated with the image that Marco conveyed via his message, is linked to social identity. Rather than projecting himself as a mature, professional, independent student researcher which is desirable in an academic context, Marco downgraded his social status as a powerless figure, relying on the teacher to be the problem-solver. According to Byram (2003), becoming intercultural involves changes in social identity and attitudes. In Marco's message, he failed to demonstrate a performance that was in agreement with his student-researcher identity, which produced an unfavourable image of himself and resulted in negative reactions from the professors. In her studies, Chen (2001, 2006) discussed similar identity issues concerning the Taiwanese learners of English in academic e-mail communications. Her case study analyses displayed the association of language use with the change of identity and value choices. She thus emphasised the importance for L2 students to learn how to use appropriate discourse forms and strategies to demonstrate socio-culturally appreciated values, and to perform their desirable identities.

Student 7 (ML6) Message 6

Situation 6

You wish to further your study and pursue a research degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter

Dear Dr. X Thank you so much for the past two years, you really help me a lot. I am now applying a PhD programme in XXX University. I know you graduated from that University, also you have very good credit and reputation there, **please write a reference letter for me.** I should treat you a good meal, isn't that good? :) Marco (given name)

At first sight, there is much similarity between Message 6 by Marco and that of Kelly since both messages started with the writer expressing gratitude to the professor. The differences, however, lie in both quantity and quality. By all means the sentence "Thank you so much for the past two years, you really help me a lot" could not carry the same weight as what had been conveyed by Kelly, detailing how she was appreciative about how the professor had helped her in ways that had encouraged her to apply for programs related to the professor's expertise. Along with appreciation, the foundation for the subsequent request was established.

After introducing the schematic information of the PhD program application, Marco, too, explained for the request He wrote, "I know you graduated from that University, also you have very good credit and reputation there". In the retrospection, Marco mentioned that the depiction of Prof. X reminded him of an American professor he knew in real life; thus, he borrowed the real life scenario and placed it into the DCT. With another punctuation error (or perhaps typo), Marco gave a very direct request, an imperative Mood Derivable, modified with only one politeness marker *please*. Operating as a Promise of Reward, the sentence "I should treat you a good meal, isn't that good?" was written to finish the letter, together with a smiley face.

About the "dinner treatment," Marco explained, "I'm trying to be humorous, but of course it depends on the context. I mean, I wouldn't necessarily invite you for dinner, but I got my intention conveyed."

The perceptual measurements did not deviate from those in the other two, with the power difference ranked 4, social distance 3 and imposition degree 3 too. In his protocol, the word "Guanxi" was recurrent, but the literal translation of "relation" or "connection" seemed unable to fully encode the meaning entailed. To borrow the term from Anthropology, *social networking* could be a better presentation. When talking about his understanding of the sociopragmatic factors, Marco stated,

> Normally in this scenario, firstly, this professor should be the one who is capable of writing this letter for you. Secondly, it is related to the relationship between you and this professor, or "Guanxi". Your "Guanxi" was built up after a long-term exchanges and it's like what we say in Chinese, "Pave the road when it is still sunny". If your "Guanxi" is firm and strong, and s/he is willing to help, then things will become easy and there is no big deal, no matter how troublesome the request may be. Eastern or Western, it's the same, not to mention Hong Kong.

In the field of Anthropology, *Guanxi* is not an uncommon topic. According to Gold, Guthrie, and Wank (2002), it is generally agreed that *Guanxi* is specifically Chinese idiom of social networks, integrally linked to other building blocks of Chinese sociality such as ganqing (sentiment), renqing (human feelings), mianzi (face), and bao (reciprocity), but the views of it are shaped by institutional contexts and changing in the reform era in Mainland China (p. 4). Bearing both positive and negative connotations, *Guanxi*, as held by conventional wisdom among Chinese and foreigners, is "absolutely essential to successfully complete any task in virtually all spheres of social life," performing "a critical lubricating function in Mainland China, and also peripheral Chinese societies...," although most extreme in the former (Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002, pp. 3-4).

Marco sounded assertive in his own theory of *Guanxi* and even considered it applicable not only in Chinese culture but Western cultures as well. From the professors' angle, however, it was a totally different story. Prof. 1 claimed that he "doesn't like the student" and shared his personal experience in the local context, "I sometimes received e-mails from Mainland students who apply for programs here; they thought everything depends on *Guanxi*, but it doesn't work here." Prof. 4 was confused by the message, and felt it "a very strange e-mail" and "the tone sounded too familiar." Prof. 6 offered a comparatively harsher comment, "It's interesting that the very stupidity of it seems impolite–as if the student can't take the time to even appear smart." Even worse, the request was "abrupt" for Prof. 6 and he did not see any relevance of the detail provided. Unfortunately, Marco was treated as a "stupid" student because of what he composed in the e-mail–again, language is undeniably a "big issue." Moreover, both language and culture (e.g., culture-specific norms and ideologies) are crucial components in successful intercultural communications.

It is very likely that the perceptions by these professors about the oddity of the message originated from the two sentences "I know you graduated from that University, also you have very good credit and reputation there" and "I should treat you a good meal, isn't that good?" Words like these were intrinsically *Guanxi* -driven. Marco did not inform the professor of anything useful about his own academic ability, prior achievements, the programs and schools he applied for, etc., information that is of relevance and normally prerequisite in order for a professor to write a recommendation for the student. No wonder Prof. 3 emphasised that the student "is too informal and appears to be unfamiliar with English usage, with norms of university life, and culture. It is not appropriate to offer to that professor a meal in exchange for reference." She was uncomfortable with the request itself, too, and warned that, "it should be phrased as a request, rather than 'Please do something.'"

According to Lustig and Koester (2006), ICC may break down "when large and important cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently" (p. 52). Marco regarded the Chinese cultural value of *Guanxi* as the framework of reference and applied it to culturally different others. What's more, he was inclined to take the cultural dissimilarity for granted and minimise the differences.

In his ICC model, Byram (1997) identified five culturally-oriented components; the first one was *attitudes*. According to Byram (1997), to be defined interculturally competent, one must display not only positive attitudes towards "people who are perceived as different in respect of the cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviours they exhibit" (because "even positive prejudice can hinder mutual understanding"), but also attitudes of "curiosity and openness" (Byram, 1997, p.

34). Having lived in Hong Kong for already two years, Marco, did not display a gained openness or readiness to "interrogate the value systems and assumptions behind one's own cultural practices." He has also not developed "a readiness to engage with culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication in the corresponding contexts" (Byram, 1997, p. 51). To achieve a higher-level ICC necessitates more demanding and complex skills, as included in Byram's scheme; for Marco there is still a long way to go.

5.3.5 Case Three–Student 2 (HK5)

Student 2, Mike (pseudo name), a local Hong Kong student, was doing his second MPhil degree at the time of the research. He had never attended any study-abroad or international exchange program, but had travelled overseas (e.g., to England). He also had e-mail contact with friends from foreign countries, with English as the medium.

Student 2 (HK 5) Message 1

Situation 1

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment for later this week or next week.

Dear Prof. X,

I'm writing to set up an appointment with you regarding the presentation. I've already selected the topic and had a general plan about the topic. **I'm wondering if you would be free to meet me at your office at around 10 pm on Tuesday.**

Thank you very much for your attention. Looking forward to your reply.

Best wishes,
Mike

For Mike, all of the scenarios were very authentic and he considered Prof. X as a rather common type of professor in academia in Hong Kong. As such, it took him only 20 minutes to write these six messages. The first scenario, for instance, was almost like a "routine" since he had been sending similar messages since undergraduate study:

> We used to go to the professors to talk about our plans before starting to work on our assignment or project, so you just set up the meeting in the message and there wasn't really much to think about, you know, just start typing right away.

The message contains two requests, one direct performative introducing the purpose of the message at the outset, the other a QP, internally modified with syntactic devices such as subjectiviser-"I'm wondering", aspect, if-clause, and past-tense modal "would". A definite time slot was proposed in the request, but unfortunately with a severe typo "10pm", for the intended "10am". At the end of the message another speech act of thanking was provided together with a formulaic expression in correspondence "Looking forward to..."

Generally speaking, the message was concisely presented. Mike did not consider the appointment request to be in imposition; he was *certain* about his language, because he thought scarcely would one feel *very certain* in this type of communication:

> Because you are not completely sure how the professor would think about your writing. Perhaps I could have been more polite; I mean, personally I think it's ok and should work, but you don't exactly know what level of politeness the professor might have expected.

Mike explicated the elements that he was focused on during the writing,

> The most important about this situation is to be polite and direct, because professors are all very busy. They treasure their time and might not have to meet you, so what I need to do is to make clear what this letter is all about and then just look forward to their reply. If the letter is too long, they would feel bored, so just make it simple; besides other students may send the same kind of e-mails, too, you know, since we're all under the same situation. Thus, I figure the key point is to let them know your time so that they could just note it down, without bothering reading the other bits.

To help make the whole communication more efficient, Mike found it essential to inform the professor of his own availability–the more specific, the better. The emphasis on the efficiency of the message and the indicator of the value of time seemed to be accepted by most of the professors. For this e-mail, however, it was the linguistic aspects, especially the error that bothered the recipients. Prof. 1 found "10 pm" improper, "I would never meet a student at 10 pm in my office; this is completely inappropriate." Prof. 6 also noted that "10 pm" was "silly," but he believed that in actual communication this would be avoided. The attitude of Prof. 5 was more benevolent and he thought the message was "generally good," but with a few grammar mistakes.

In fact, in the scenario where the student requests to borrow a book from the professor, Mike made another grammatical error (misusing the words "borrow" and "lend"), which was detected by almost all the recipients. Prof. 1 treated this as "a fundamental English mistake"; similarly, Prof. 2 warned that students "should learn the difference between 'borrow' and 'lend'". At the postgraduate level, teachers would normally have high expectations of students' linguistic competence, particularly the use of grammatically correct language; mistakes as such would likely transmit a negative impression to the receiver. With humour, Prof. 6 clarified his point, "Poor English suggests laziness. Laziness suggests borrowed books are not to be returned. It could be factorial of politeness as well."

In retrospection, Mike was aware of the fact that because he typed fast, mistakes would occur easily and sometimes for longer e-mails, in order to avoid errors, he would type in a word file and then copy and paste it to the e-mail system.

With regard to directness and politeness, Prof. 5 included another comment, "The tone of Message 1 is a bit too direct and not that polite." This revealed another weak point latent in this message, which was also pragmatically-driven, coupled with the organisation of the discourse. Conventionally, the explicit performative was a highly direct form for making requests; to locate it at the very onset, the sentence "I'm writing to set up an appointment with you regarding the presentation" could probably convey an extra layer of illocutionary meaning, that is, "I am informing you that this is to set up.../ I am letting you know...," which were incompatible with the unequal social status of the addresser and addressee. The resultant sociopragmatic failure and the deficient structuring of the discourse, accompanied by the inattentive grammatical errors could have been responsible for the miscommunication in the first scenario.

Student 2 (HK 5) Message 2

Situation 2

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realise you will not be able to finish it by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension

Dear Prof. X,

I'm writing to ask for your permission to hand in my assignment later, because I'm feeling unwell. I'll give you the doctor's note.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Best wishes,
Mike

The second e-mail was short, comprising three major sentences, a request, a Cost Minimiser, and an expression of thanks. Similar to the first message, the request was put at the beginning, in a direct form of explicit performative, displaying the purpose straight away. Despite the length of the e-mail, Mike was *certain* about his writing and his language, believing it was "polite" because he had clearly presented his intention. He verbalised his focal consideration while writing this one:

> I have to explain to the professor that I'm feeling unwell and the assignment will have to be delayed for submission. The doctor's note is important and I need to mention that. Actually these two are the most important things you have to touch on in this situation.

In Mike's view, to ask for an assignment extension was not very much in imposition. He chose 3 in his measurement for the following reasons:

> I think this situation is neutral in terms of the imposition because it's quite procedural. The professor will definitely grant you the extension if you are really sick. It's more like, you are notifying them about the

whole event. I think normally there will be a policy about this, like, you'll have to provide the doctor's note to get the extension. Since I mentioned the note, which will prove the truthfulness of my sickness, I don't feel it necessary to add anything extra. I thought about the effects of this request. It won't affect the professor much because they can mark the others' papers first and leave mine till the end, but still, it would be unfair to the other students. If you get an extension, then you get more time for your paper, so based on these two aspects, I think it should be neutral.

The professors did not in fact comment much on this message. Although Prof. 2 was not very satisfied with it, she confirmed the usefulness of mentioning the doctor's certificate to support the request: "he at least offers a note suggesting he might really be ill." Other professors, Prof. 3, for example, emphasised that the student "should state when he thinks he can hand in the assignment." It appears that although the student held a strong reason and even proof, and, most likely, would achieve the goal of the message, the receiver might not be all that pleased with it. As Prof. 2 articulated, "It's like this student lives in another world!" Prof 6 noted, "this message is a good example showing directness is bad and in inverse power to politeness."

It is thus clear that in spite of the reasonableness of the request, in Mike's message, there was a lack of consideration, or empathy for the addressee. He brought about his request based on his own needs, while failed to demonstrate in detail the possible effect that this request may cause to the requestee. As displayed in Mike's thought processes while on task, he was factually mindful of this aspect, but considering the ground the request, he did not find the need to reflect his concern in the message.

It is unknown whether Mike would do the same in real life situations. The decisions are usually dependent on the specific social, contextual, and idiosyncratic variations. It might also be related to gender, that is, the tendency of males talking "report talk" as compared with females talking "rapport talk," as delineated by Tannen (2001). No matter what means it may be, the ends were by no means promising. The recipients perceived it to be too direct to be polite. In line with the comment of Prof. 6, this could also be a typical representation of achieving the transactional goal while losing the interpersonal goal.

Student 2 (HK 5) Message 6

Situation 6

You wish to further your study and pursue a research degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter.

Dear Prof. X,

I'm applying for a PhD programme in the US, and **I would like to ask for your help in writing a reference letter for me**. My research topic is on gendered discourse in computer-mediated communication. **I would be grateful if you could help me to completed the form I've attached to this email.**

Thank you very much. I'm looking forward to your reply.

Best wishes,
Mike

The last message involved a request for a letter of recommendation. As in the first situation, Mike issued two request acts. The first was a direct request expressing personal want, laid on in the first sentence, concomitant with a brief introduction of the background. The second was placed after another more detailed explanation, realised in a QP, modified with embedded appreciative structure, an if-clause, etc. In essence, the sequence resembled the previous two mails, especially Message one.

Relative to the other situations, Mike considered the imposition for this one to be higher:

> One the one hand, the professor would spend lots of time writing the letter for you and it has to be a valuable letter. On the other, it is also part of the obligation of the professor to write recommendations for their students, especially if the teacher is your adviser or supervisor.

There were several points about this situation that attracted his attention:

> The moment I saw the words "reference letter", I realised what this is about and what I have to take into consideration. Firstly, I will let them some information about the program I'm applying for and about my research. Next, I need to show them what I would like them to do, that is, to be the referee of my application. You have to make it explicit what they need to do to help you out. Since the imposition is higher, I figure I'd better be more formal.

It is true that the forms of the requests are pragmalinguistically more complicated, particularly the second QP. Aside from that, Mike extended his gratefulness both within the request proper (via the form of appreciative embedding) and outside it in the closing, "Thank you very much." Because the production was derived from the hypothetical situation, which is, no doubt, a methodological pitfall of the research, it would also impose challenges for the writer in terms of what and how much detailed information to provide. Despite this shortcoming, Mike maintained that the two key components were both present in his writing: the program information and his research topic. It was just that in his real life encounters, he would append more details and specifics to the e-mail in that "the more detail you lay out, the more sincere you sound, and more polite."

In all three scenarios, Mike displayed a good understanding of the attributes of the scenarios and a high degree of socialisation into the academic culture in this context. His considerations of the various facets of each scenario were not thoroughly questioned by the recipients. What was problematic, however, seemed to stem from his underdeveloped sociopragmatic competence and the lack of control of the balance of directness and politeness. The intercultural competence, particularly the sense of the others was equally weak. In Message 6, as Prof. 2 observed, it was all about "I" and "rather self-centred." Prof. 6 also assessed this message as "weak," commenting, "This is possibly not how this (or any) student would really ask for these favours. 'Thank you very much,' 'Looking forward to your reply,' are too distant (business correspondence) as phrases to be appreciated."

Apparently, conventionally polite words like *thank you* would become plain language if not well merged into the context it existed in. Even the fairly indirect request strategy of "I would appreciate it if you could..." would lose its effect of courtesy if it were not supplemented with sincerity. As in Situation 2, Mike overestimated the instrumental function of e-mails as communication medium, but undervalued its facilitative role of sustaining and even strengthening the interpersonal bonds.

5.3.6 Case Four–Student 1 (ML1)

The quantitative analysis earlier in this chapter exhibited individual variations within the research participants. Case Two (Marco, the Mainland student) and Case Three (Mike, a local Hong Kong student) can better represent themselves as individual illustrations than the group as a whole. Student 1 (ML1), Daisy (pseudo name) in the ML group and Student 9 (HK1), Cherry (pseudo name) in the HK group, for instance, had both produced messages that were judged to be polite and satisfactory.

Even though they were not favoured by all the professors in all aspects, some of their writings evoked remarkably affirmative and positive comments from the audience. To illustrate, this part probes the messages written by Daisy, who was sampled as one good, above average case by virtue of Patton's criteria (2002).

Student 1 (ML 1) Message 1

Situation 1

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment for later this week or next week.

Dear Prof. X, I am XXX, one of your MA students from MNG4500 course. Since I have decided the topic of the upcoming presentation and finished making a general plan about it, **<u>I wonder whether we may meet and talk about it at some time convenient for you.</u>** I am looking forward to seeing you soon. Have a nice day! Best wishes, Daisy

Daisy, a second year research student in her late 20s, had been in Hong Kong for about 16 months at the time of research; she had never been to any English-speaking country for travel or study purpose. In the first message, Daisy began with a self introduction, then an explanation, followed by a request, and, finally, formulaic language of "looking forward to" and daily wish of "Have a nice day." The request was an indirect QP, inserted with an if/ whether-clause, hedge (e.g., *at some time*) and external modifier (e.g., *convenient for you*).

In completing this message, Daisy had "a lot of thinking" in her mind,

> Actually if I'm writing to a close friend, I will go straight to the point without any opening remarks. Since the communication between the professor and me are mostly via e-mail, and we don't have much face-to-face contact, I felt it necessary to introduce myself...While writing, I would try and imagine the professor's reactions when reading my email. I would use the respectful words and try not to be imposing, but I also had to ask him/her to make the time to meet me. I think it's about my personality and I'm often considerate, you know, picturising what the other side would think and feel after reading my message, such as, whether they would feel I'm very rude, or whether they would feel certain expressions or words appropriate.

By reading her words, it can be discerned that Daisy gave careful thought to parse the socio-contextual variables and plan what words to use. She kept a strong sense of audienceship during her writing, trying to put herself into the other's shoes and imaging the probable reactions of the recipient. She was meanwhile thoughtful and considerate, attempting to "use the respectful words and try not to be imposing," and, to cater to the other's time. Not surprisingly, 4 out of 6 professors considered this message to be "very good" and "polite". Prof. 6 underlined the words *I wonder whether* and *at some time convenient*, remarking, "Very good – Allows teacher to set up meeting time or even do not meet."

Daisy was also cautious about cross-cultural differences:

> "American professor" did make me think a lot. Initially I thought I'd better write in a "freer" way, but then I had no idea of how. That's just not my style. The teachers always have higher power than us, perhaps because for us Chinese students, we have this tradition of treating teachers as figures of authority. You cannot possibly become friends with them; once a teacher, always a teacher, no matter what country they're from, how liberal the country might be. To write "Hi, how are you" to them, definitely no, I dare not. In my view a teacher is in a powerful status; though I am no longer as young as a kid, it doesn't change his/her position in my mind. Even if I have noticed that s/he is an American, it would still be the same. S/he is my professor, you know.

Daisy experienced some inner struggle about whether to adjust her communication style to a "freer way." Mindful of stereotypes, it was noticeable that she engaged herself in an on-going intercultural analysis, with openness to make adaptations in her communicating behaviours, the very embodiment of the constituent *attitudes* in Byram's (1997) ICC model. However, she was not ready for the changes, as she still had not grasped the "knowledge" of how to; moreover, she realised that traditional Chinese values regarding teacher-student status relationship were so strong that she "dare not" disobey such rituals.

In fact, unlike Marco's, under this circumstance, the mother culture had played a role in a different way. As a famous Chinese saying goes, *Li Duo Ren Bu Guai*–"Politeness costs nothing" or "You won't be blamed for being polite". In conjunction with the notion of "once a teacher, always a teacher," Daisy stepped back to the Chinese cultural framework and referred to it for guidance of her communication–"using respectful words" and "be considerate" and humble. Linguistic politeness, following such a direction, was abundant in her message, and Daisy was, indeed, deemed as polite by most of the professors. The message, too, was well accepted by the audience. It could perhaps be assumed that Chinese cultural norms could be facilitative at times, especially when the students have not processed the knowledge and skills, and/ or have not felt comfortable to apply this knowledge to interact successfully across cultures.

Student 1 (ML 1) Message 2

Situation 2

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realise you will not be able to finish it by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension.

Dear Prof. X,
I am XXX, one of your MA students from MNG4500 course. **I am writing this e-mail to you for asking for your kind permission of the extension of my first assignment because** I have been suffering from viral pneumonia for the whole week and it really seems a little bit difficult for me to finish this assignment by the dual date. I am so sorry for any inconvenience caused and I will try my best to finish it as soon as possible.
I am looking forward to your reply and have a nice day!

Best wishes,
Daisy

In planning for the written response to the second scenario, Daisy grasped the gist from the prompt and drafted in her mind the key aspects that she would have to pay special attention to when composing the content:

> As I read the scenario, I was thinking about the content, how to persuade the professor in a way that s/he can accept the request; how not to force them, and in the meantime tell them that I really cannot make the deadline; make them feel that I am telling the truth, not procrastinating. Also, I hope to tell in a sincere and convincing tone that I'm indeed sick.

Daisy's intention in this scenario comprised of several angles: to try and gain the request; to be careful about the tone – "not to force"; to rationalise the request with convincing justifications–"tell them that I really cannot make the deadline"; to convey a "sincere" and truthful attitude; and to avoid projecting a negative image of self being a procrastinator.

In the e-mail, after a very brief self-introduction, Daisy presented the request in a direct manner by using the explicit performative form of "I'm writing this e-mail to you for…" The requesting sentence constituted the major part of the e-mail body, subsuming a *Preparator* of asking for the recipient's permission to make the request, the request proper and details of explanations. Daisy then conveyed her apology intensely–"I am so sorry" and reduced the imposition degree by showing a *Promise of Reward*– "I will try my best to finish it as soon as possible". As usual, an e-mail formula – "I am looking forward to your reply", and a daily wish were supplied as the ending.

Daisy was mindful about her language choices in order to get her intention across. She considered "I'm writing to…" to be helpful in expressing the "urgent mood" of hers and the "wish for the professor's understanding." The sentence was "modified many times with different forms" in the writing process, but in the end, Daisy felt "this one was the best." She compared "I'm writing to" with "I wonder whether" that she had employed in the first situation:

> I feel it quite dry and dull to use "I wonder whether you can," kind of boring. With "I am writing to", my personal feelings are embedded in what I say. It's true that I am sick and I feel very unwell at the moment, but still I'm writing to you, you know, it's quite emotional. "I wonder whether you can" and "would you like to" are not as good as "I am writing this e-mail to you…" and I specifically chose this expression.

Differences can be spotted between the stance that Daisy took as the e-mail requester and that of Mike. Holding a strong reason to support his request, Mike formulated his message in a more procedurally and transactionally-oriented way; while for Daisy, to bring the message into a personal and "emotional" level was even more important. She was earnest to let the audience understand her "personal feelings" and honesty in telling the truth, because an assignment extension was such a "serious" matter that she would only ask when she was "sick in bed, or having to have a surgery and really have no energy to finish the work." She reiterated, "It must be serious and the whole idea must be detailed and convincing."

Despite the very high English proficiency of Daisy (627 in paper-based TOEFL), she was influenced by the Chinese language in both pragmalinguistic choices and the discourse structure of the message. She recalled her usage of "it really seems a little bit difficult for me to finish this assignment...":

> It sounds a little contradictory, doesn't it? This in fact allows them some leeway. It's like when we say it in Chinese, "Wo Zhen De Jue De Hao Xiang Hen Nan Wan Cheng – I really feel that it seems difficult to finish." If I say "it seems very difficult," it sounds rather compelling, so I try to soften the tone by saying "a little bit difficult". You see, now I'm speaking Chinese, and if we translate it into Chinese, you will feel the difference more easily and clearly, like "it seems very difficult for me to finish" and "it seems a little bit difficult" and the reader will feel more comfortable with the latter.

She felt that the words "really" and "a little bit" might sound contradictory semantically, but when formulating her justification, she was dominated by the Chinese way of expressions. Although the majority of the CLE students stated that they were thinking in English before and while they started typing, for Daisy, the first language (L1) would pop up occasionally and direct her choice of wording. She treated the use of "really", "seems", and "a little bit" as effective devices to mitigate the tone of the request, which she assumed would deduce the pressure of the request on the reader and ease their reading.

The role of L1 was also evident in the sequence of the sentences:

> I organised the message in this order on purpose, because, let me show you why by translating this sentence into Chinese, you see, "Because I'm sick, I'm writing this e-mail to ask for your permission…," and then the other sequence, "I'm writing to you, hoping to get your kind consideration, because I'm sick." In fact, it appears more sincere to list the reasons after presenting the goal. He will understand me more easily, you know, it's true that I am sick. If I were the teacher reading the message and if I saw the explanations right at the beginning, I would feel all that the student wanted was just to ask for leave. It's never my intention to force the teacher, you know, I'm always trying to be considerate and writing to them as kindly as possible. The two sequences are completely different for me. The second one is more polite and less imposing, without supposing that the teacher is obligated to grant the request.

Politeness varies across cultures (e.g., Wierzbicka, 2003); yet again, Chinese politeness was employed as the benchmark criteria and Daisy applied it to a different cultural context. Daisy's remarks also conveyed her view that the structure of an e-mail could also serve the purpose of being polite. Kirkpatrick (1991) studied request letters in Mandarin and found that native Chinese speakers prefer to place their requests toward the end of the message, and that Chinese requests generally conform to the schema of: salutation, preambles (facework), reasons, and then the request itself. In their study of e-mail requests in an American university, Chang and Hsu (1998) found that most of the e-mail request messages from the Chinese English learners followed the same schema, especially in the power-unequal messages to the professors.

It seems that Daisy's message only partially observed the sequence identified by the previous research. She provided a discourse orientation move at the beginning through a self-introduction; then before the request proper was issued, she asked for the "permission" of the requestee, a move that can be categorised as "preambles" (facework) in Kirkpatrick's (1991) schema. This modification can also reflect the "self-denigration maxim" in Gu's (1990) model of politeness maxims of modern Chinese. By "ask(ing) for permission," the addresser was denigrating herself and elevating the other; in the meantime, the student-teacher power difference was given prominence, an issued that was uncovered in Marco's case as well.

However, instead of spreading out the explanations in advance of the request, Daisy did the opposite. She believed that it sounded "more sincere to list the reasons after presenting the goal" so that the reader would not feel that the she was taking the request for granted just because of the reasons she had. Also, the request would not be abrupt; it would then allow the audience to be prepared for the ensuing request and to feel it more "comfortable" to read. As evidenced in her words, Daisy kept her mind open throughout the writing process, trying constantly to think of the position of the audience as she endeavoured to be "considerate" and "kind".

A typo appeared in the e-mail, "dual" for "due", which prompted Daisy to say "sorry" the moment she noticed it in the recall session. She stressed that she had always tried hard to erase errors in e-mails like this:

> I really hate myself for doing that. Very often I found mistakes after reading the message once or twice, but then I will still see errors when opening the "Sent" box and reading the messages from there.

From the audience's standpoint, Daisy's second message included both strong and weak points. Prof. 1 and Prof. 4 deemed this one to be "fine" and did not add any negative comments. Prof. 4 noted that one of the most important characteristics that he expected for such e-mail requests was that students should convey "what they are e-mailing about right way, but not in the 10^{th} line of the e-mail!" Consequently, in this regard, Daisy was strategic not to obey strictly the conventional Chinese way of information sequencing; instead, she determined to lay her intent at the head of the e-mail body. This "deductive approach" (Chen, 2006) was already recommended by some books on e-mail writing, that is, to place the most important information or the purpose at the beginning (e.g., Crystal, 2001; Flynn & Flynn, 2003) and regarded it to be an effective way to structure e-mails.

Apart from this evolving understanding of e-mail practice in academic liaison, Daisy also embraced a mighty sense of audience and intended to be "kind and considerate." She was *certain* about her language and confident in her politeness based on her linguistic choices:

> I used "kind permission", "I am so sorry for any inconvenience caused". I think it's quite polite. Also, "I will try my best", I told them that I would do my best to finish it as soon as possible. I think I added this "kind" deliberately, expressing my hope that the teacher would understand.

Nonetheless, the notions of politeness vary in accordance with the context. According to Chen (2006), "appropriateness is not a one-dimensional notion in status-unequal e-mail communication; it consists of an interplay of three kinds: language appropriateness, culture (including institutional culture and target language culture) appropriateness, and medium appropriateness" (p. 51). Daisy demonstrated an awareness of medium appropriateness and language appropriateness, but not an adequate awareness of politeness as determined by the institutional culture. Her understanding of the target language culture was weakened, too, due to the intervention of the L1 and Chinese culture.

Prof. 2 and Prof. 6 both highlighted these expressions in their evaluations: "kind permission," "so sorry for any inconvenience," "try my best to finish it as soon as possible," including the typo "dual." Prof. 5 remarked that this e-mail was "a bit flowery in language tone, 'asking for your kind permission', for example" and he did not "particularly like 'Have a nice day!' and 'Thank you so much for your nice help.'" Prof. 2, too, agreed with Prof. 5 that "Have a nice day" was "inappropriate in the work place." It appears that students may perceive that they are "humble and polite," but this may not correspond to the target norms of a different cultural context, as well as the expectations of the audience within it.

Prof. 6 further commented that there was "no suggestion for a quick deadline" and the message was even "a bit rude and also indirect". Prof. 1 considered that sometimes "politeness and directness are contradictory issues." In this scenario, Daisy's overly refined language seemed to have heightened the level of the indirectness, and therefore breached the principle of "efficiency, practicality, and specificity" deemed by Prof. 1 as the most important features indispensible in such professional discourse. As a result, the level of politeness was downgraded due to its inappropriacy relative to the sociopragmatic demands of the scenarios, and specifically, the expectations of the institutional and target language culture.

Student 1 (ML 1) Message 6

Situation 6

You wish to further your study and pursue a research degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter.

Dear Prof. X, I will finish my MPhil study here soon. Now I wish to pursue a PhD degree and further my study. As usual, the application procedure requires two reference letters from distinguished professors in my area. **So I wonder whether you may write a reference letter for me to support my application for the PhD programme.** Thank you so much for your kind help and sorry for any inconvenience caused. I am looking forward to your reply. Have a nice day! Best wishes, Daisy

In her last e-mail–asking for a letter of recommendation, Daisy, above all, released some background about the upcoming completion of her MPhil study as the opening remark, which was different from the other messages that featured a short self-introduction. Daisy regarded this request as a rather personal one and arranged it in this way on purpose:

By this way I can pleasantly tell them that I'm graduating. I can even

> say, "you know, I'll finish my MPhil study!" (with a rising and exciting tone) (Laughing), but then I felt that it wasn't so good, so I deleted it later on.

Somehow, in a like manner with the previous e-mail, Daisy attached great importance to the interpersonal dimension and the potential impact of her wording. Further details were provided in the lead-in of the message, depicting the specific situation that Daisy was faced with. A request was provided next, in a conventional indirect QP, realised by the subjective "I wonder whether..." form, in which an additional reason was given ("to support my application") to externally mitigate the request proper. As usual, Daisy extended both her thanks and apology to the professor right after the request, and closed the message with the chunk "I'm looking forward to your reply" and an emphatic expression of "Have a nice day!"

In the extension request, Daisy employed the more direct form of "I'm writing to...", which she considered to be unsuitable in the current situation:

> "I'm writing to..." would be too formal. By "I wonder whether", I am actually keeping some leeway for them. If they are not willing to write, it's fine. If s/he tells me that they are very busy recently, I can totally understand, but I'm just trying my luck to see if they can write this letter for me.

The choice of "I wonder whether" was also in correspondence with Daisy's understanding of the scenario and the overall "relaxing" mood that she deliberately conveyed in her message:

> It's very relaxing – "I will finish my MPhil study here soon." It's like, you know that I'm graduating soon. It is a very good and sweet thing to share with the teacher my joy of graduation, and I'm sure s/he will feel very pleased and warm. I would like the teacher to above all share with me my excitement and then tell them about my future plan, which is that I'm going to pursue my PhD degree. S/he must be very happy to hear that and must be supportive. Followed up is my introduction to them about the application procedure, which requires letters of recommendation. For that reason, "I wonder whether" they can help me with this.

Evidently, Daisy seemed to have a very fresh memory about her writing process, both in terms of the language choices and the organisation of the e-mail. She re-collected her train of thought effortlessly; also, the flow of the message sounded rather natural and smooth to her. Part of the reason was that as this message was "the most difficult letter" for Daisy, "even more difficult than the extension one," she "spent a long time" on these two sentences:

> "As usual, the application procedure requires two reference letters from distinguished professors in my area. So I wonder whether you may write a reference letter for me to support my application for the PhD programme." These two sentences took me a long while.

Unlike the extension request, which Daisy considered as largely negative, request for a reference letter was deemed more positive. Still, she encountered difficulty in finding the proper way of wording:

> But still I'm not sure how I should write; I ~~feel~~ like I'm making trouble for others. I thought for a long while in the middle part, about the cause and effect, having no idea of how to write, but the rest of it was all

formulaic.

In Daisy's viewpoint, to write a reference letter would bring "trouble" to the professor, as the professor would spend time and efforts for the sake of the student; to realise this request and gain the recommendation from the professor, however, would be vital for the student's future. Along with this dilemma, Daisy struggled about how she should write to balance the emergent "cause" and "effect." The imposition degree was measured as 3, which was in fact "higher" originally, as Daisy changed it after "synthesizing all the factors." Daisy believed that "all these social factors are interrelated," and to ask a professor to be her referee necessitated a relatively closer relationship than the other scenarios required. In connection with the intimate, "exciting" tone she had intentionally set up for the entire e-mail, Daisy diminished the social distance between her and the e-mail interlocutor as well as the imposition degree of the request:

> Actually I changed the imposition to 3, it was higher originally. I realised later on that I should be close to him/her in this situation, so after synthesizing all the factors, I marked 3. For me, now that I know him/her well, I'm not imposing them. S/he may still turn me down, but since we are close, I feel s/he would love to help me out. If s/he rejects me, it's because they have some special reasons, but not because they're unwilling to. Since s/he knows me, they will be very supportive.

To a large extent, Daisy's words unveiled her increasing knowledge of student-professor interaction and her level of socialisation into the communication community. Infused with some affective elements, Daisy's message was predominantly professional in tone. According to her, even if rejected by the professor, she would not take it personally, because she grasped the "unwritten rule" that often in the professional discourse, if a professor knows a student well in terms of the academic achievements, s/he would be "very supportive" if the student would like to pursue a further degree. In addition, this comparatively more "positive" request could project a promising image of the student to the e-mail communicator.

"Have a nice day" was deemed inappropriate for the institutional context by some of the audience. Daisy, however, personally "like(s) using this one" and uses it a lot in real life interactions. This usage could serve some functions for Daisy:

> I feel even if I'm writing to a very close professor in my department, I will still be very respectful and humble in the main body of the letter, but sometimes I do wonder, you know, have I gone too far? I'll thus try to adjust and soften my tone by presenting a kind of warm and cute greeting like this, so that the teacher may feel a little more comfortable and not so distanced from the student.

Daisy was unsure whether she was overly "respectful and humble" at times; to lessen the potential interference caused by her probably rigid observance of the Chinese rules of politeness (Gu, 1990), Daisy adopted "have a nice day" as a compensating strategy to relax the tone of the e-mail and to ease the tension aroused by the request. This option may not work equally well for different receivers under different situations, but it, at least, mirrored Daisy's sense of readership, and more significantly, her agentive choices and cultural awareness of the probable influence of Chinese culture on her e-mailing behaviours and possible intercultural differences.

Compared with the second message, this one was better-received by the professors. Quantitatively, the message was evaluated as direct (*M*=4.33, *SD*=0.516), polite (*M*=4.33, *SD*=0.516) and satisfactory (*M*=4.17, *SD*=0.753). For Prof. 4, Daisy's message demonstrated the characteristics that he would normally expect of e-mail request of this kind. In line with Prof. 4, Prof. 6 claimed that his impression of Daisy was "very high", because "the student is polite and seems interested in learning." What's more, in Daisy's e-mail, she had principally met with the expectations that Prof. 6 held for such request, which stated:

> Be clear and not too demanding of my time or resources, polite, demonstrating an interest in learning, not lying too crazily? (e.g., "I sent you outline last week. Didn't you get it?"). Good English is also appreciated as indicative of a hard working student. (Comments provided by Prof. 6)

Pragmatic competence and ICC are both developmental. It could be noticed from all three messages that Daisy was able to extend pragmatic clarity by expressing her purpose both directly and politely; she showed her empathy by trying to put herself in the professor's shoes and not be demanding; she tried to exhibit her sincerity by providing convincing reasons and justifications; she aimed to be considerate and kind to the professor and to talk in a "relaxing" and "sweet" manner; she was cautious about her linguistic choices and organisation of the sentences and aware of the underlying influence of her L1 and mother culture, as well as the possible intercultural differences.

Chinese language and Chinese culture, however, did occasionally arise and intervene with Daisy's planning, composing process and her use of language. She evidenced development in what Chen (2006) classified as medium appropriateness, language appropriateness, and institutional appropriateness, but in terms of the target culture appropriateness, Daisy seemed to be still at the initial stage of *attitudes*, as defined in Byram's (1997) ICC model. While there appeared "openness and curiosity" in Daisy's intercultural development, being able to interrogate her e-mailing behaviour in relation to her own cultural norms, she had not fostered the "readiness" to communicate in an interculturally appropriate way.

5.4 Summary

The chapter analysed and discussed the findings from an intercultural pragmatic perspective. The quantitative analysis of the recipients' perceptual judgements demonstrated that among the three cultural groups, the messages produced by the native English-speaking American students were regarded as the most polite and satisfactory by the American professors. The HK group was rated as the most direct group, considerably more direct than the ML group, although there was no significant difference between them and the American students. The analysis also pointed to a positive, linear correlation among directness, politeness, and the level of satisfaction. Under the general pattern, however, distinct individual variations were found both among the assessors and the assessed.

Guided by the quantitative results, a more in-depth, qualitative analysis was conducted. The results confirmed the findings of the quantitative analysis in respect of individual differences. Such differences were demonstrated in the students' paralinguistic performance, sociopragmatic competence, and intercultural communicative competence in terms of their pragmatic production, perception and the feedback of the recipients. The degree of socialisation into the communication community, the level of the (inter)cultural awareness, and pragmatic development varied from individual to individual. Some were quite advanced, while others were still encountering difficulty in making status-unequal requests politely, appropriately, and efficiently in this context. There appeared to be considerable room for further improvement in terms of the development of their intercultural awareness and sociopragmatic competence. The next chapter explores the implications of the findings and presents the conclusion of the thesis.

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION, IMPLICAITONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. It also discusses the pedagogical implications of the findings that were presented in Chapters Four and Five. The pitfalls of the research are addressed and suggestions are made for future studies in the field. As concluding remarks, a brief summary is presented in 6.5.

6.2 Summary of the Research

The research questions of the study involve three major domains: pragmatic production, pragmatic perception, and recipient perceptions. The findings relevant to each section are summarised in sequence:

6.2.1 Pragmatic production

Two research questions guided the investigation of students' pragmatic production of e-mail requests as elicited via the DCTs:

1. What pragmalinguistic strategies do Native English-Speaking American Students (NS), Hong Kong Chinese Learners of English (HKCLE) and

Mainland Chinese Learners of English (MLCLE) employ in electronic requests to American professors that are of an academic nature?

2. Are there any differences in the distribution of the pragmalinguistic strategies among these three groups?

To answer these two questions, the e-mail messages generated by the e-DCT instrument were analysed from an interlanguage pragmatic perspective, encompassing four angles: request perspectives, request head act (which determines the level of directness), internal (lexical and syntactic) modifications and external mitigating moves.

6.2.1.1 Request perspectives

The study found no substantial differences in the use of request perspectives among the three groups of students (NS, HKCLE, and MLCLE students). In the academic e-mail requests, those with a joint perspective (from both the speaker and hearer's perspectives), in particular, were found to be uncommon (e.g., Could *we* meet at some other point before the presentation?) NS students, however, seemed to be slightly better at adopting more self-oriented (e.g., Is it okay if I go to see you during you office hours on Tue.?) and impersonal requesting perspectives (e.g., Can students audit this course?), and fewer hearer-dominated ones (e.g., Could you kindly lend it to me for reference?), as ways to help lower down the degree of imposition and index a higher level of politeness.

Further interpretations:

The choice of perspective affects social meaning, and avoidance to name the hearer as the actor can reduce the requesting form's level of coerciveness and, thereby, minimise the imposition of the request (Blum-Kulka, 1989, p. 59). These findings of the present study are generally consistent with what has been documented in previous studies on interlanguage requests (e.g., Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010). The authentic e-mails studied by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) also uncovered a more direct hearer perspective by the non-native English students in requesting for an extension, which she believed could aggravate the requestive force rather than mitigating it. The discursive features of e-mails and the concomitant high occurrence of *Mood Derivables* as post-requests may have motivated the higher frequency of the hearer-orientated requests in the current study. In the interlanguage pragmatic and cross-cultural pragmatic areas, empirical research that embraces the investigation of request perspectives can still be insufficient. The current study adds evidence to this aspect, but more studies are needed in future to help shed light on the patterns of the interlangauge request perspectives.

6.2.1.2 Request head acts

A head act is the bearer of the force of a request and determiner of the level of directness it conveys. The study found that in making status-unequal requests to their professors, students, from all three groups, tended to be indirect in general. The two groups of CLE students demonstrated fairly strong pragmalinguistic control in choosing specific indirect requesting strategies and in producing them in a variety of forms. The conventionally indirect strategy of Query Preparatory (QP) was the most popular strategy for all participants, with the CLE students relying on it most heavily.

Equally favouring QPs, NS students, however, more frequently added hints to tactfully achieve their purpose. They also used direct strategies to express their request, and had a more marked preference for direct strategies than the non-native Chinese students. In all, they exhibited greater flexibility in their strategy choices, which varied in terms of degree of directness.

Further interpretations:

The widespread use of QPs by both native and non-native English students in the present study is in line with the investigations of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Trosborg (1995), Billmyer and Varghese (2000), Woodfield (2008b), and Hendriks (2008). Some researchers have recorded an overuse of QPs by non-native English speakers (e.g., House & Kasper, 1987; Woodfield, 2008b; Pan, 2009). The present study as well seems to point to an extensive reliance on this strategy by the CLEs. The most indirect strategy, *Hints*, was evident in the productions of all three groups, with greater frequency of use by the NS, but relative to other strategy types, they were much less prevalent. The restraints of professional discourse, the transaction-oriented requesting situations may somehow limit the use of *Hints*. It is also possible that an appropriate production of a hint that is well-embedded in the context might sometimes require idiomatic and native-like usage. Non-native English students might not have enough confidence to produce them and consequently resort to using the more direct forms instead.

The direct strategies have been shown to be acquired earlier and used more often by learners of low proficiency levels (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Ellis, 1992; Trosborg, 1995). There appears, however, inconsistency in the findings of the previous studies (see also 4.2.2). The present study deviated from Sasaki (1998) and Chang and Hsu (1998) as they indicated a larger number of direct requests employed by the learners of English than the native students. Nonetheless, the findings of the present study seem to agree with Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) to a large extent, who also documented the greater number of direct strategies used by the American students than the learners group. Although the range of strategies covered was similar across the groups, the ease and flexibility demonstrated by the American students seem to exhibit their greater sensitivity to situational factors. Specifically, they were more tentative in varying their strategy choices along with the imposition degrees of the situations, the reasonableness of the request, and the distribution of rights and obligations of the interlocutors under the situation.

An important methodological implication can be drawn from the discussions above and in 4.2.2. Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) showed in her study that far more requests were realised through direct strategies and hints than conventionally indirect strategies typically found in comparative speech act studies. She used authentic e-mail messages as the data source, investigating the requesting behaviours of the advanced learners of English and American English speakers in an academic context. Adopting a very similar research method to examine authentic e-mails in an American university by advanced English learners and American English speakers, Chang and Hsu's (1998) study yielded findings that were in agreement with some of the findings in ILP comparative studies. Despite some similar findings in the present study and Biesenbach-Lucas (2007), the demonstration of the rather frequent use of conventional indirect strategies (especially QPs) by both native and non-native English students was in accord with other ILP studies that employed elicitation methods such as DCTs and oral role-plays (e.g., Sasaki, 1998; Trosborg, 1995; Woofield, 2008; Hendriks, 2008). This raises a question about the methodology, that is, to what extent would method-variations (elicitation methods vs. naturalistic enquiry) lead to divergence in research findings? Holding the same type of naturalistic data gathering, with the shared commonality with regard to research context, proficiency levels of the research participants, deviations can still be noted between the results of Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) and Chang and Hsu (1998). Researchers, therefore, must pay particular attention to the impact of methodology that is used. Comparative studies can be conducted in the future that include both elicitation method and naturalistic method (if feasible) to see whether there is any method effect, and if so, in what way and what kind of effect it might have.

6.2.1.3 Internal modifications

Internal modifications consist of two major components: syntactic downgraders and lexical/phrasal modifications. Syntactically, on the whole, the NS group modified their requests with a greater number of downgraders than either the

HK or ML group. Specifically, the HK students used considerably more Interrogatives, whereas less Aspects (realised largely by *I am wondering/I was wondering*) than the other two groups. Past Tense was identified as the most salient gap of usage between the CLE and NS students. While the latter employed it as frequently as the other types, there was nearly a zero occurrence in the productions of the former. The use of subjunctive forms, realised often by the Appreciative Embedding (Schauer, 2004), pointed to developmental differences among the CLE students: There was an even dispersion within the NS group, but only a focused use, limited to certain participants in both the ML and HK groups. In line with prior findings in interlanguage pragmatic studies (e.g., Hendriks, 2008), a strong dependence on the Past Tense Modals and If-embedded Clauses was found in the e-mails of the MLCLE students in particular.

With regard to the lexical/phrasal modifiers, all three groups made use of a similar range of devices. Overall, in contrast to the other two cohorts, the ML students employed a significantly larger number of lexical/phrasal modifiers to internally modify their requests. Compared with the NS students, the CLE respondents displayed an excessive use of Politeness Markers and Subjectivisers, encoded chiefly by the use of *please* and *I wonder*, respectively. A cross-examination of the data revealed a strong preference for the conventional indirect request form of *I wonder if/whether*... and its tense and aspectual variations by the ML students. The CLEs displayed a higher level of mastery of these lexical/phrasal pragmalinguistic strategies, which confirmed some of the prior interlanguage evidence in previous investigations of advanced English learners' internal requesting modifications (e.g., Woodfield, 2008b; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009).

6.2.1.4 External modifications

External modifications mitigate the request head indirectly through the context in which it is located. Like the lexical modifications, the scope of external modifiers covered was similar across the groups. The results suggested that in making academic requests, students, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, were inclined to provide background information (Discourse Orientation Moves) to start their e-mail message, and to supplement their request with explanations and justifications (Grounders) together with "thanks." Relative to the other two groups, ML students presented a special inclination to employ Sweeteners and Apologies along with their requests. By contrast, NS students employed essentially more Cost Minimisers.

Generally speaking, CLEs, especially ML students, displayed an extensive use of external modifications (such as promise of reward, sweetener, showing apologies) to externally mitigate their request acts. The findings verified what Edmond and House (1991) labelled as the *waffle phenomenon*, denoting learners' over-reliance on external moves as compensation strategies to support their requests acts.

To sum up, in the current study, the non-native English speaking Chinese students were able to internally modify their requests with various syntactic and lexical modifiers, but their pragmalinguistic competence was not as fully developed as the American students. The CLEs were particularly weak in employing the syntactic devices of Past Tense and Appreciative Subjunctive Mood to downgrade the requestive force internally. To compensate, they tended to:

a) Ask questions (interrogatives) to make requests (especially the HK students);

b) Employ past tense modals and the clausal chunk *if/whether*...and lexical modifiers (Politeness Markers and Subjectivisers) and even use them excessively.

c) Rely more heavily on the external mitigating moves to support their requests, such as, to provide explanations, to promise rewards, to offer compliments and even flattering, and, to extend thanks and to apologise.

They were, however, not as effective in taking measures to minimise the cost of the request as the American students.

Further interpretations:

According to Faerch and Kasper (1989), the internal modification is an obligatory choice for English requests, while external modification can be optional. Hassall (2001) also noted that external modifiers in general tend to be syntactically less demanding and pragmalinguistically less complex, as "the addition of supportive moves will not generally result in more complex pragmalinguistic structures to be planned" (p. 274). Internal modification, syntactic modification in particular, would be more challenging for the learners of English to grasp, as it requires a degree of linguistic competence in the form of syntactic knowledge (e.g., knowledge of modals, tense and aspect), and lexical and phrasal knowledge (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999, p. 690). Studies done by Hassall (2001), Trosborg (1995), Kasper (1981), and Woodfield (2008) have all revealed an underrepresentation of the learners' use of internal devices relative to the native speakers. The present study provided further evidence of advanced English learners' weakness in using certain syntactic modificational devices (see also 4.2.3.1), and also point to their strength in applying lexical and external mitigating measures (see also 4.2.3.2).

There is a growing body of research focused on interlanguage request modification in recent years. The findings presented in the current study may facilitate understanding of this particular area and hopefully provide a stimulus for further research.

6.2.2 Pragmatic perception

Research questions three and four focused on the scrutiny of pragmatic perception of the student participants, which entailed the measurement of certainty in language production and three dominant sociopragmatic variables:

3. How certain are the senders about their choice of pragmalinguistic strategies as evidenced in the above research questions?

4. How do these three groups of students evaluate the sociopragmatic variables of power, social distance, and imposition degree of the situations?

6.2.2.1 Certainty

Among the three cohorts of participants, MLCLE students were found to always be the least confident group in terms of their language use. By contrast, the HKCLE group was the most confident, no matter in which situation they were making the request. The NS students were in-between the two. Their level of certainty varied in accordance with the situations; they felt most confident in–Situation 1, making an appointment with the professor and less so in the remaining ones, such as Situation 6, requesting a letter of recommendation and Situation 5, asking to audit a course.

Further, certainty of measurement turned out to be a phenomenon with complexity. The judgements could be based on the linguistic production, but inseparable from the students' prior interactional experience. It could also be rooted in the nature of the situations and related to the features of electronic media, such as the highly imposing nature of the scenario and the delay of e-mail exchanges.

6.2.2.2 Power difference

The measurements of power difference were found to be rather approximate among the three groups of students. Such measurements were also sensitive to the situations. Students, American and Chinese students alike, acknowledged the higher social status of professors as compared to theirs as students; "to respect teachers and their teaching" was likely to be a universal code in the university context. While recognising the difference in power, NS were apt to lessen the distinction and stress the mutuality and reciprocity of "showing respect". Chinese students (both HK and ML students), by contrast, tended to accentuate unequal power distributions, and emphasise the hierarchical and asymmetrical role relations, features established as typical for large power distance cultures by Hofstede (1991). Their orientations towards power difference shared macro commonality, but differed in subtlety.

6.2.2.3 Social distance

The evaluations of social distance were indistinguishable among the three groups of students. In general terms, no matter their cultural background, they regarded the e-mail recipient, Professor X, as one who they felt neither close to nor distanced from. In addition, the measurements of social distance fluctuated situationally; the power difference between the student and the professor was also dominant in the students' decision-making process.

6.2.2.4 Imposition degree

Imposition degree was discovered to be the most dynamic of the three variables. In their requests to Prof. X, concerns about the power difference and social distance were both conditioned and affected by situational factors. The academic situations depicted in the study were not considered to be impositive in general. In most of them, the imposition degrees were weighed consistently larger by the ML students than the NS students. Furthermore, these measurements were considerably divergent among the six situations. The degree of imposition was more than an objective calculation; rather, it could be multi-faceted, encompassing diverse affective, cognitive, and social factors: the situational features (time, efforts, financial/ psychological burden aroused), the concern about other social-cultural variables, self-evaluation of the tone and linguistic choices, and identity-related outcomes.

Further interpretations:

In contrast to pragmatic production, perception can be a largely under-documented area. In some of the previous studies with elicitation methods, the sociopragmatic variables tended to be embedded within the design of the situational prompts by the researcher (e.g., Lee, 2004b; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). The present study followed Fukushima (2003) and analysed the measurements as separate parts to gain insight into the producers of the e-mail requests while completing the tasks. Apart from the situationlly-attached sociopragmatic elements, the affect-oriented parameter of confidence/certainty of the language appropriateness was also included. This is also a contribution of the present study to ILP research. The study by Fukushima (2003) was a large-scale cross-cultural pragmatic one; the perceptual judgements were thus quantitatively-based. In the present study, the qualitative explorations behind the measurements provided insider views behind their productions, enabling a clearer picture of the students' sociopragmatic understanding.

6.2.3 Audience judgement

5. How does the audience of the e-mails (American native speaking professors) perceive the appropriateness and politeness of the messages?

6. Are there any mismatches in perception between the sender and potential receiver that could result in intercultural communication failures?

On the whole, the audience (American professors) perceived that the students were direct in making e-mail requests and were able to do so in a polite manner. While the professors were, by and large, satisfied with the messages that the students wrote, there appeared to be areas that could be further improved (e.g., level of details provided to support the request, measures taken to minimise the imposition, level of directness and politeness, sense of readership, etc.). The American students were regarded as the most polite and most satisfactory group in terms of their linguistic production, followed by the local Hong Kong students, with the Mainland students the least satisfactory. The study revealed a positive, linear correlation among directness, politeness, and the level of satisfaction. Individual variations, however, were found to be remarkable both among the assessors and the assessed.

Case analyses of four selected participants corroborated the findings in regard to individual differences (see 5.3.1 for the selection criteria). (Mis)matches were identified between the expectations of the e-mail writers and their receivers. Communication clashes often occurred when the messages produced by the students were not received in the way they were intended to be.

The four cases displayed rather divergent performances. For the case that gained the most positive judgements, she stood out because of her strategic pragmalinguistic choices, sociopragmatic competence, and concerns about the recipients. In contrast, the other extreme case, a ML student, was less capable of managing the level of directness and politeness through linguistic means. His inclination to minimise cultural differences and apply a Chinese cultural framework in his e-mails to the American professor was reflected in his poor linguistic production and the improper details provided. A lack of intercultural and sociopragmatic awareness was found to impede his message, and he was not crafting it in a way that is well acceptable to the professors.

The other case, a Hong Kong student, despite certain strong points, displayed a transaction-inspired communication style, downgrading the interpersonal dimension of e-mails. Sociopragmatic incompetence was evident as well as "self-centredness" and a lack of sense of readership. Another ML case demonstrated understanding of cross-cultural differences and an open attitude towards these differences, but a lack of readiness to embrace interculturality. Chinese language and culture influenced her production, but, at times, in a facilitative way.

All in all, the disparity in the students' performances unveiled variations in their socialisation degree into the communication community, and their developmental progress in terms of pragmalinguitic competence, sociopragmatic awareness, and intercultural communicative competence. Some were rather advanced, while others were still encountering difficulty in making status-unequal requests politely, appropriately, and efficiently in English to American professors in this context.

Further interpretations:

Sociopragmatic failure and pragmalinguistic failure were identified as the potential sources of miscommunication in Spanish learners of English in Kryston-Morales' study (1997). In the present study, these two pragmatic dimensions were also found to be potential factors that could lead to intercultural communication breakdowns. When suggesting future research based on her findings of academic e-mails, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) proposed that in order to triangulate the descriptions of e-politeness aspects present in the e-mail messages, university faculty should be surveyed to gather their impressions of various messages, similar to the studies of Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig's (1996) and Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2001). In this way, the findings could generate and "corroborate insights into what contributes to e-politeness (or lack thereof) in institutional discourse" (p. 76). Her comments, in a significant way, pointed out the insufficient attention paid to the recipient's point of view in actual communications in pragmatic studies. As reviewed in Chapter Two, such studies are indeed scant in the field.

The present study makes a contribution in this regard in that it incorporated the views of the communication partners who are culturally different from the student e-mail writers. It linked the theoretical works in pragmatic studies, cultural studies, and intercultural communication and looked at the production from an intercultural pragmatic perspective. This triangulation facilitates the understanding of pragmatic production from a culturally and interculturally sensitively manner and assists the assessment of the learners' pragmatic and intercultural pragmatic (in)competence.

According to Biesenbach-Lucas (2006), "so far, there is little research on student-faculty e-mail interaction that investigates how students realise communicative intent in this medium" (pp. 81-82). Language use in electronic media can be a burgeoning area of research. In institutional contexts, people have pressing needs to communicate (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005) and the context itself can, without doubt, provide an effective platform to observe and probe the participants' linguistic performance and their pragmatic, cultural, and other context-related considerations that give rise to their performance. The present study exemplifies this and serves as a trial investigation into such communication practice.

As Lee (2004b) observes, recent research on requests by Chinese is mainly based on classical books and experimental data in English or Chinese written by Chinese learners of English. Very few studies compare requests made by Chinese users with their English-speaking counterparts. The present study not only includes native English-speaking American students, but also sub-divides the Chinese students into Hong Kong and Mainland groups. The findings add to our understanding of the Chinese learners' requesting behaviours and their modificational preferences in FL (foreign language) contexts. The incorporation of three different cultural groups and the subsequent cross-cultural comparisons provide an innovative aspect that distinguishes this study from other ILP research. What's more, this research also provides direction for future intercultural pragmatic studies. Section 6.4 focuses on recommendations for further studies.

6.3 Pedagogical Implications

The study has pedagogical implications regarding the promotion of academic e-mail literacy in this context in the following major domains: interlanguage pragmatics, and intercultural pragmatics.

6.3.1 Interlanguage pragmatically informed implications

The core of the study involves requests in academic e-mail discourse, which reflects authentic communication needs of the interactants within the institutional community. In the instructional pragmatics research circle, studies have demonstrated that pragmatic routines and modifications can be teachable; pragmatic practices that are difficult for advanced learners to acquire without instruction are learnable through interventional measures (see Rose, 2005 for a review). The findings drawn from the advanced language learners in e-mail discourse raise awareness of the obstacles that learners may have in grasping pragmalinguistic knowledge and in applying it in proper contexts. Certain lexico-syntactical items and semantic formulae are shown to be mastered early and used with ease, such as past tense modal verbs, "I wonder if/whether" structure and its variants, hedges, to name a few. Others seem to be more challenging and take an extended period of time to acquire, such as past tense, and appreciation-embedded subjunctive forms. Findings as such could add insights into both learners' pragmatic development and pragmatics teaching in terms of the acquisitional difficulty of pragmalinguistic expressions and their sociopragmatic functions. Specifically, it could inform instructional pragmatics with respect to the sequence of the content of teaching and the organisation of pragmalinguistic items in textbooks. More importantly, it highlights the importance of integrating the cultural and contextual aspects into teaching materials on pragmatics.

Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) identified two major issues that can be problematic in the conventional approach adopted in many EAP (English for Academic Purposes) textbooks. Firstly, they typically present learners with lists of expressions and "explicit realisations of speech acts rather than subtle and indirect ones" (p. 39). Secondly, this approach usually neglects the social-cultural and contextual information of "when and for what purposes it is appropriate to make a speech act, and which expressions would be appropriate in a particular situation" (p. 39). By including both pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically-oriented tasks embedded with culture-specific knowledge, it could help raise learners' awareness of the appropriate language use that is shaped by the concrete social norms and cultural codes. This can then help them to use the speech realisation strategies to best effect.

Furthermore, the findings of the interlanguage request realisation strategies have, in effect, implications beyond the academic encounters. They can help inform the teaching of requesting behaviours in general by learners in ESL and EFL contexts. Kasper (1997) argues that "it is vital that teaching materials on L2 pragmatics are research-based" (p. 9). Empirical studies, such as the present one, can strengthen both teachers and learners' understanding of the interconnections of linguistic forms with their pragmatic functions, and especially their cultural meanings. Teachers can thus bring the research-driven activities to the classroom and encourage the students to observe, analyse, and reflect on their own performance to realise the gap and enhance their learning in an experiential way.

6.3.2 Intercultural pragmatically informed implications

To supplement the classroom setting, effective use of the Internet has also been recommended by experts in CMC (computer-mediated communication) (Belz & Thorne, 2006). The present study makes a contribution in this area. E-mails, as one of the most important CMC practices in academia, may involve interlocutors who have been socialised in different cultural environments. Incorporating this electronic media into language classrooms could help enhance the development of students' sociopragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence. It offers a way to "look beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts" (Warschauer & Kern, 2000, p.

15)

As shown in the present study, writing e-mails of a high-stakes nature to people of a higher power status could bear serious consequences for the students, especially when the e-mail they write contains speech acts that are inherently face-threatening, such as requests, apologies, complaints, etc.

Some of the NS and HK participants indicated that although they had had training in Netiquette in general communication courses, they did not find it useful. For example, NS6 pointed out directly, "The only thing I know about Netiquette is just commonsense". HK7 commented, "Some of the communication courses will have one or two chapters, one or two topics to briefly talk about the general rules, but real practice is more useful than learning of Netiquette." Students clearly regard academic e-mail writing as a process of learning, but neither the Netiquette training nor reference books could help them gain an understanding of what is expected to be culturally and situationally appropriate in a particular academic context. As Bisenbach-Lucas (2007) commented, books on e-mail Netiquette "provide little help to students who are looking for a· vice on composing e-mail messages to their professors, with whom they are in a hierarchical relationship" (p. 62).

Some of the books on e-mail writings tend to focus on the general writing guidelines, formatting, and content issues, but do not include elements designed to help e-mail writers become mindful of the cross-cultural differences and possible misunderstandings in intercultural e-exchanges. This has implications for the curriculum design of EAP programmes that are usually offered in universities to elevate students' academic English reading and writing skills and related communication competency. It could be beneficial to students of all levels (undergraduate and post-graduate students, international students, and students on exchange from other countries/cultures) if training in e-mail literacy can be included in the course syllabus. Students (new-comers, in particular) can then obtain useful guidance about institutional practices and be familiarised with the pragmatic norms (e.g., ways to perform speech acts) and cultural principles entailed in the e-mail medium in their academic context.

The current study, as well as prior research on academic e-mails (e.g., Chen, 2001, 2006), have shown the crucial role that e-mails can play in: 1) constructing a personal image and 2) building (or damaging) interpersonal relationships in student-professor interactions. E-mail literacy, hence, should be a critical element in students' academic training. Chen (2006) also advocates that "L2 learners be taught explicitly in the L2 classroom how to communicate appropriately with higher-ups via e-mail, due to the fact that those appropriateness rules are usually hidden and difficult to acquire" (p. 51). In actual practice, students can be encouraged to sample their own authentic e-mails that contain various kinds of speech acts and those that are sent to people of different power status and social distance. Teachers can then organise consciousness-raising activities and aid the students to analyse those messages, so that both linguistic and pragmatic deficiencies can be detected and examined. Through self-reflections and peer-reviews, the emergent intercultural successes and/ or failures can be openly discussed to evoke students' sociopragmatic and intercultural sensitivity.

6.4 Limitations of the Present Study and Suggestions for Future Research

6.4.1 Limitations of the study

There exist certain limitations in the study that have to be acknowledged. Above all, the major pitfall is related to the instrumentation of the study. Notwithstanding the careful pilot-testing and steps taken to refine the procedures, the data were elicited through the designed discourse tasks rather than produced under authentic situations. The pros and cons of employing DCTs in pragmatic studies have aroused numerous discussions throughout the years (see also 3.6.1); that being the case, it is undeniable that the metalinguistic nature of the DCT production would affect the validity of the research. As displayed in the discussions in Chapter Five, some students tended to reconstruct the scenario and provide rich details based on their real life experience; others, however, might feel reluctant to do so.

Next, due to the constraints of the data collection procedures, flaws arose regarding the sampling of the research participants. Because of the limited access to the target population (as the majority of the students who are native speakers of English in this Hong Kong university are exchange students in their undergraduate studies), the native English-speaking American students are composed of both advanced undergraduate and post-graduate students. The length of their stay in Hong Kong was similar, but their academic life experience was not exactly the same. This dissimilarity may therefore yield a different understanding about the structure of academic discourse and possibly the communication styles within this discourse. Another problem relates to the length of stay of the Mainland students, which was somewhat uneven among the group. Variations in the time spent in Hong Kong could result in different degrees of socialisation into the academic community and perhaps different levels of awareness of e-mail norms in this context.

Last but not least, owing to the controlled nature of the study, there were unavoidably variables that could not be fully taken into account, such as the gender and personality of *Prof. X*. The same problem exists in the audience group, i.e., the professors who evaluated the messages of the students. Despite their similarity in age, national identity, academic status, and years of residence in Hong Kong, they may hold idiosyncratic preferences about what can be termed as good or bad e-mails. Moreover, since all the professors in the study have been in Hong Kong for over 10 years, they would have become more accustomed to Hong Kong and PRC (People's Republic of China) discourse than those newly arrived American professors. As such, it is better to interpret the professors' perceptions with caution and avoid generalisability to the broader population in this context.

6.4.2 Recommendations for future research

Based on the research findings, the following suggestions are made, bearing in mind the limitations of the study:

Firstly, this study examined the internal and external modification strategies that were employed in all the request head acts. In subsequent studies it would be worthwhile to focus specifically on a certain type of head act, QP for instance, due to its frequent occurrence in requesting behaviours, and explore the combination of internal (both syntactical and lexical/phrasal) and external modifiers as ways to mitigate the requests. Recently, in her study of interlanguage request modification by Greek ESL university students (as compared to British English native speakers), Economidou-Kogetsidis's (2009) embraced this perspective in her investigation.

More research is needed to deepen our understanding of interlanguage requesting modificational behaviours.

Secondly, due to the dynamic and ever-changing nature of intercultural communication and the hardship in controlling certain variables in research instrumentation, as discussed in 6.4.1, future studies can look into the students' pragmatic development in student-professor e-mail requests (and/ or other speech acts) from a different methodological and theoretical perspective. Recent years have witnessed an epistemological shift in applied linguistic research; qualitative research methodologies have been gaining increasing prominence in the circle. The introduction of Dynamic Systems Theory (de Bot et al., 2007; de Bot, 2008) and Complex theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) into the field provide fresh possibilities to conduct research from a different theoretical standpoint. Language development is no longer treated as a linear, static process, but interwoven with inter- and intra-variability, under multiple influences. The recent study done by Taguchi (2010) adopted this perspective and looked at the pragmatic competence and development among Japanese learners of English.

Building on the current study, it would certainly be fruitful if longitudinal studies could be done with multiple qualitative research methods. The methods that can be employed may include: authentic e-mail messages sent and received by both students and professors, interviews with both sides, focused group discussions with students, and students' reflection journals, etc. In this way, the complex interactional process could be disclosed with rich data resources; the individual developmental journey might also be tracked, informed with both insider and outsider's viewpoints.

Thirdly, this study also brings up a call for research on EAP course design. Action research can be conducted by EAP teachers in their language classrooms. For example, they can have one group of students as experimental group and another as control group. Instructions can be given to the experimental group for a whole semester, focusing on the error analysis of the authentic e-mail exchanges between students and professors, in which pragmatics-oriented and culturally-oriented knowledge can be inserted. For the control group, no such instruction is provided. Comparisons can be made at the end of the semester to see whether there are developmental differences between the two groups of students in their linguistic appropriacy and intercultural sensitivity. Based on the findings, innovations could be made to the EAP curricula.

Fourthly, gender has become an important issue in pragmatic studies. Future research can incorporate this dimension into a study and compare the (dis)similarity of interlanguage requesting strategies that are employed by male and female students when writing e-mails to their professors. For example, do male and female students of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds compose e-mails differently? Similarly, gender differences among the recipients can also be probed, to see whether male professors and female professors view the messages differently. If differences are found in their judgements, the research could explore the reasons for them.

Fifthly, considering the diverse backgrounds of professors in Hong Kong, the way the students write to a Chinese professor in English may not be the same as the way to an American professor. Likewise, the perception of the Chinese professor about students' e-mail requests might also vary from that of the American professor. In this sense, it might be interesting to conduct studies that focus on the strategy choices of the students when writing to professors of different cultural backgrounds and/ or the perceptual judgements of these professors to the students' e-mail messages. Qualitative explorations (e.g., interviews, dairies) can be conducted to explore the intercultural adjustments made not only by students who are new to the context, but also expatriates from a different culture, who are undergoing an intercultural adaptation process in Hong Kong.

Sixthly, more research studies need to be carried out in different contexts. In discussing replicability of research, McDonough (1997) stated that "to repeat someone else's study in a new situation on the basis of an explicit and complete report is itself a useful activity and if the results are different, interest will be high" (p. 65). Therefore, it could be rewarding to have studies replicated in different contexts, for example, diverse study-abroad settings, where the students are faced with various challenges in learning and adjusting to the target language and cultural community. The results can then add another dimension of the relationship between context and second language learning.

Lastly, institutional e-mails serve as a communication platform where all kinds of speech acts may occur. Studies can be done to explore other speech acts such as academic advising, expressing opinions, compliments, apology, thanks, complaints, etc. between people of different social status (such as teacher-student, between colleagues, between administration staff and professors, etc.). E-mails in other institutional domains (e.g., business correspondence) would be another appealing area worth exploration.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has summarised and interpreted the findings of the study and discussed the pedagogical implications from two major perspectives. Based on the research findings and limitations, recommendations were made for further studies in the field.

To conclude, pragmatic competence tends to be much more difficult to acquire than grammatical competence; yet it bears critical consequences and is crucial for effective daily communications. L2 learners, even at very advanced levels, still face the challenge of employing pragmalinguistic strategies in a sociopragmatically and interculturally sound manner when making e-mail requests to people of a higher status (e.g., professors). In the academic context of Hong Kong, both Mainland students and American professors experience the intercultural adjustment process. Communication clashes often occur when the message that is sent by students is not received in the way that it was intended. Such breakdowns could be due to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic incompetence, lack of cultural understanding, and/or intercultural sensitivity.

It is hoped that this study has raised awareness of the complex interplay of linguistic, social, affective, and cultural components in the interactional process of academic e-mail requests. Directions for future studies were suggested, with the expectation that new visions can be added to the field to help inform classroom pedagogy for students in both ESL and EFL contexts and, ultimately, enhance their interlanguage and intercultural pragmatic development.

REFERENCES

Alred, G., Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (2002). *Intercultural experience and education*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Coups, E. J. (2009). *Statistics for psychology* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford, England: Calderon Press.

Bach, K., & Harnish, R. M. (1979). *Linguistic communication and speech acts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1999). Exploring the interlanguage of interlanguage pragmatics: A research agenda for acquisitional pragmatics. *Language Learning, 49*, 677-713.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). Evaluating the empirical evidence: Grounds for instruction in pragmatics. In G. Kasper & K. Rose, (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 13-32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Hartford, B. S. (Eds.). (2005). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Exploring institutional talk*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Baron, N. S. (1998). Letters by phone or speech by any other means: The linguistics of email. *Language and Communication, 18*, 133-170.

Baron, N. S. (2000). *Alphabet to email: How written English evolved and where it's heading*. New York: Routledge.

Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics: Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Baxter, L. A. (1984). An investigation of compliance gaining as politeness. *Human Communication Research, 10*(3), 427-456.

Belz, J. A. (2003). Linguistic perspectives on the development of intercultural competence in telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology, 7*(2), 68-99.

Belz, J. A., & Thorne, S. L., (Eds.) (2006). *Internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2002). Virtual office hours: Negotiation strategies in electronic conferencing. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 15*(2), 147-165.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2005). Communication topics and strategies in email consultation: Comparison between American and international university students. *Language Learning & Technology, 9*(2), 24-46.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2006). Making requests in e-mail: Do cyber-consultations entail directness? Toward conventions in a new medium. In K. Bardovi-Harlig, C. Félix-Brasdefer, & A. S. Omar (Eds.), *Pragmatics & language learning* (Vol. 11, pp. 81-108). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2007). Students writing emails to faculty: An examination of e-politeness among native and non-native speakers of English. *Language Learning & Technology, 11* (2), 59-81.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S., & Weasenforth, D. (2001). Institutional discourse in the real world: Professors' judgements of student requests. Paper presented at the Georgetown University Roundtable of Languages and Linguistics (GURT).

Billmyer, K., & Varghese, M. (2000). Investigating instrument-based pragmatic variability: Effects of enhancing discourse completion tests. *Applied Linguistics, 21*(4), 517-552.

Bloch, J. (2002). Student/teacher interaction via email: The social context of internet discourse. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 11*, 117-134.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics, 3*, 29-59.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1987). Indirectness and politeness: Same or different? *Journal of Pragmatics, 11*, 145-160.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1989). Playing it safe: The role of conventionality in indirectness. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp. 96-122). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1991). Interlanguage pragmatics: the case of requests. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M, Sharwood-Smith and M, Swain (Eds.), *Foreign/second language pedagogy research: A commemorative volume for Claus Faerch* (pp. 255–272). Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Blum-Kulka, S. (2005 [1992]). The metapragmatics of politeness in Israeli society. In R. J. Watts, S. Ide, & K. Ehlich (Eds.), *Politeness in language: Studies in its history, theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 255-280). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Blum-Kulka, S., & Levenston, E. A. (1987). Lexical-grammatical pragmatic indicators. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 9*(2), 155–170.

Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Request and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realisation patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics, 5*, 196-213.

Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1986). Too many words: Length of utterance and pragmatic failure. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 8*, 165-179.

Blum-Kulka, S., J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research.* London: Sage.

Bou-Franch, P. (2005, July). *The sociopragmatics of Spanish electronic interaction – A focus on openings and closings.* Paper presented at the 9th International Pragmatics Conference, Riva del Garda, Italy.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomenon. In E. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp. 56-289). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, R., & Gilman, A. (1972). Pronouns of power and solidarity. In P. Gigliogli (Ed.), *Language and social context* (pp. 252-282). Cambridge: MA: MIT Press.

Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., Nicholas, A., & Stevens, D. (2001). *Developing intercultural competence in practice.* Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2003). On being 'bicultural' and 'intercultural. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Intercultural experience and education* (pp. 50-66). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics 1*(1), 1-47.

Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and Communication* (pp. 2-27). New York: Longman.

Chang, Y., & Hsu, Y. (1998). Requests on e-mail: A cross-cultural comparison. *RELC Journal, 29*, 121-151.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London: Sage.

Chen, C. F. E. (2001, February). *Making e-mail requests to professors: Taiwanese vs. American students*. Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) 2001 Conference, St. Louis, USA.

Chen, C. F. E. (2006). The development of e-mail literacy: From writing to peers to writing to authority figures. *Language Learning & Technology, 10*(2), 35 -55.

Chen, R. (1993). Responding to compliments: A contrastive study of politeness strategies. *Journal of Pragmatics, 20*(1), 49-75.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cohen, A.D. (1987). Using verbal reports in research on language learning. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Introspection in Second Language Research* (pp. 82-95). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Cohen, A. D. (1996). Speech acts. In S. L. Mackay & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching* (pp. 383-420). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, A. D. (2004a). Assessing speech acts in a second language. In D. Boxer, & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Studying speaking to inform second language learning*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Cohen, A. D. (2005). Strategies for learning and performing L2 speech acts. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 2*(3), 275-301.

Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1993). The production of speech acts by EFL Learners. *TESOL Quarterly, 27*, 33 - 56.

Cohen, J. (1998). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioural sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrenece Erlbaum Associates.

Cook, V. (1993). *Linguistics and second language acquisition*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crandall, E., & Basturkmen, H. (2004). Evaluating pragmatics-focused materials. *English Language Teaching Journal, 58*(1), 38-49.

Crystal, D. (Ed.). (1997). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Curl, T. S., & Drew, P. (2008). Contingency and action: A comparison of two forms of requesting. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 42*(2), 129-153.

Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and discourse*. London and New York: Routledge.

de Bot, K. (2008). Second language development as a dynamic process. *Modern Language Journal, 92*, 166-178.

de Bot, K., Lowie, W., & Verspoor, M. (2007). A Dynamic Systems Theory approach to second language acquisition. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 10*(1), 51-55.

Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects* (3rd ed.). Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Dillon, G. L., Coleman L., Fahnestock, J., & Agar M. (1985). Review article. *Language, 61*(2), 446-460.

Drew, P. (2005). Foreword. In K. Richards & P. Seedhouse (Eds.), *Applying conversation analysis* (pp. xiv-xx). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Duthler, K. W. (2006). The politeness of requests made via email and voicemail: Support for the hyperpersonal model. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11*(2), 500-521.

Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2008). Internal and external mitigation in interlanguage request production: The case of Greek learners of English. *Journal of Politeness Research, 4*, 111-138.

Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2009). Interlanguage request modification: The use of lexical/phrasal downgraders and mitigating supportive moves. *Multilingua, 28*, 79-112.

Edhlund, B. M. (2008). *NVivo 8 essentials: The ultimate help when you work with qualitative analysis*. Stallarholmen, Sweden: Form & Kunskap AB.

Edmondson, W. J., & House, J. (1981). *Let's talk and talk about it: A pedagogic interactional grammar of English*. Munich: Urban and Schwarzenberg.

Edmondson, W. J., & House, J. (1991). Do learners talk too much? The waffle phenomenon in interlanguage pragmatics. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M, Sharwood-Smith, & M, Swain (Eds.), *Foreign/second language pedagogy research: A commemorative volume for Claus Faerch* (pp. 273-286). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Ellis, R. (1992). Learning to communicate in the classroom. A study of two language learners' requests. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 14*, 1-23.

Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1987). Verbal reports on thinking. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Introspection in second language research* (pp. 24-53). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1993). *Protocol analysis: Verbal reports as data (revised edition)*. Cambridge, MA: Bradford books/MIT Press.

Fantini, A. E. (2007). *Exploring and assessing intercultural competence.* St. Louis, MI: Centre for Social Development, Global Service Institute, Washington University in St Louis (CSD Research Report).

Færch, C., & Kasper, G. (1989). Internal and external modification in interlanguage request realisation. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp. 221-247). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2008). Perceptions of refusals to invitations: Exploring the minds of foreign language learners. *Language Awareness, 17*(3), 195-211.

Flavell, J. H. (1976). Metacognitive aspects of problem solving. In L. B. Resnick (Ed.), *The nature of intelligence* (pp. 231–236). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Flynn, N. & Flynn, T. (2003). *Writing effective e-mail: Improving your electronic communication.* Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications.

Fraser, B., Rintell, E., & Walters, J. (1980). An approach to conducting research on the acquisition of pragmatic competence in a second language. In D. Larsen-Freeman (Ed.), *Discourse analysis in second language research* (pp. 75-91). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Fraser, B., & Nolen, W. (1981). The association of deference with linguistic form. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 27*, 93-109.

Fraser, B. (1990). Perspectives on politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14* (2), 219-236.

French, J. R. P., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 150-167). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Fukushima, S. (1996). Request strategies in British English and Japanese. *Language Sciences, 18* (3-4), 671-688.

Fukushima, S. (2003). *Requests and culture: Politeness in British English and Japanese*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Garner, R. (1988). Verbal-report data on cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In C. E. Weinstein, E. T. Goetz, & P. A. Alexander (Eds.), *Learning and study strategies: Issues in assessment, instruction, and evaluation* (pp. 63-76). San Diego: Academic Press.

Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (2000). *Stimulated recall methodology in second language research*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gibbs, G. (2002). *Qualitative data analysis explorations with NVivo*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behaviour*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Gold, T., Guthrie, D. & Wank., D. (Eds.). (2002). *Social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of Guanxi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Golato, A. (2003) Studying compliment responses: A comparison of DCTs and recordings of naturally occurring talk. *Applied Linguistics, 24*(1): 90-121.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics* (Vol. 3, pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.

Grice, P. (1981). Presupposition and conversational implicature. In P. Cole (Ed.), *Radical pragmatics* (pp. 183–198). New York: Academic Press.

Grundy, P. (1995). *Doing pragmatics*. London, New York: E. Arnold.

Grundy, P. (2008). *Doing pragmatics* (3rd ed.). London: Hodder Education.

Gu, Y. (1987). *Towards a model of conversational rhetoric*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Lancaster University.

Gu, Y. (1990). Politeness phenomenon in modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14*(237-257).

Gudykunst, W. B. (2000). Methodological issues in conducting theory-based cross-cultural research. In H. Spencer-Oatey (Ed.), *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across culture* (pp. 293-315). London: Continuum.

Hartford, B. S., & Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1996). "At your earliest convenience": Written student requests to faculty. In L. F. Bouton (Ed.), *Pragmatics and language learning* (pp. 55-69). University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign: Division of English as an International Language.

Hassall, T. (2001). Modifying requests in a second language. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching (IRAL)*, 39, 259-283.

Hatch, E., & Lazaraton, A. (1991). *The research manual: Design and statistics for applied linguistics*. New York, NY: Newbury House.

He, A. (1993). Exploring modality in institutional interactions: Cases from academic counselling encounters. *Text, 13*, 503-528.

Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hendriks, B. (2008, January). *Does politeness matter? An experimental study of native speaker perceptions of non-native request modification in e-mails.* Paper presented at the 3rd International Symposium on Intercultural Communication and Pragmatics, Stellenbosch, South Africa..

Hendriks, B. (2010 forthcoming). An experimental study of native speaker perceptions of non-native request modification in e-mails in English. *Intercultural Pragmatics,* 7, 2.

Herring, S. C. (2002). Computer-mediated communication on the Internet. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology, 36*, 109-168.

Ho, D. Y.-F. (1994). Face dynamics: From conceptualization to measurement. In S. Ting-Toomey (Ed.), *The challenge of facework* (pp. 269-286). New York: State University of New York Press.

Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. (1994). Management scientists are human. *Management Science, 41*(4), 41-50.

Holmes, J. (1990). Apologies in New Zealand English. *Language in Society, 19*(1), 155-199.

Holtgraves, T., & Yang, J. (1990). Politeness as universal: Cross-cultural perceptions of request strategies and inferences based on their use. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(4), 719-729.

Holtgraves, T., & Yang, J. (1990). Politeness as universal: Cross-cultural perceptions of request strategies and inferences based on their use. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 59*(4), 719-729.

Hoppe-Graff, S., Herrmann, T., Winterhoff-Spurk, P., & Mangold, R. (1985). Speech and situation: A general model for the purpose of speech production In J. P. Forgas (Ed.), *Language and Social Situations* (pp. 81-95). New York: Springer-Verlag.

House, J. (1989). Politeness in English and German: The functions of please and bitte. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp. 96-122). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

House, J., & Kasper, G. (1987). Interlanguage pragmatics: Requesting in a foreign language. In W. Lörscher & R. Schulze (Eds.), *Perspectives on language in performance* (Vol. 2, pp. 1250–1288). Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Howitt, D., & Cramer, D. (2008). *Introduction to statistics in psychology* (4th ed.). Harlow, Essex, England: Person Education Limited.

Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation analysis: Principles, practices and applications*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Hymes, D. H. (1972). *Towards communicative competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Iimuro, A. (2006). Conversation analysis of e-mail requests by second language speakers. *Second Language Studies, 24*(2), 65-113.

Jackson, J. (2008). *Language, identity and study abroad: Sociocultural perspectives.* London: Equinox.

Johnston, B., Kasper, G., & Ross, S. (1998). Effect of rejoinders in production questionnaires. *Applied Linguistics, 19*, 157-182.

Kasper, G. (1990). Linguistic politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14*, 193-218.

Kasper, G. (1996). Introduction: Interlanguage pragmatics in SLA. *Studies of Second Language Acquisition, 18*, 145-148.

Kasper, G. (1997). *Can pragmatic competence be taught?* Honolulu: Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of Hawaii (available online: http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW06/).

Kasper, G. (2000). Data collection in pragmatic research. In Spencer-Oatey, H. (Ed.), *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across culture* (pp. 316-341). London: Continuum.

Kasper, G. (2004). Speech acts in (inter)action: Repeated questions. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 1*, 105-114.

Kasper, G. (2006a). Speech acts in interaction: Towards discursive pragmatics. In K. Bardovi-Harlig, C. Félix-Brasdefer, & A. Omar (Eds.), *Pragmatics and language learning, Vol. 11* (pp. 281-314). Honolulu, HI: National Foreign Language Resource Centre.

Kasper, G. (2006b). Beyond repair: Conversation analysis as an approach to SLA. *AILA Review, 19*, 83-99.

Kasper, G. & Dahl, M. (1991). Research methods in interlanguage pragmatics. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 13*, 215-247.

Kasper, G., & Blum-Kulka, S. (Eds.). (1993). *Interlanguage pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (1999). Pragmatics and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 19*, 81–104.

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (2001). Pragmatics in language teaching. In K. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 1-10). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Kasper, G., & Roever, C. (2005). Pragmatics in second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 317-334). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kecskes, I. (2004). Lexical merging, conceptual blending, and cultural crossing. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 1*(1), 1–26.

Kecskes, I., Davidson, D. E., & Brecht, R. (2005). The foreign language perspective. *Intercultural Pragmatics. 2*(4), 361–368.

Kim, U. (1994). Individualism and collectivism: Conceptual clarification and elaboration. In U. Kim, H. C. Triandis, C. Kagitcibasi, S. C. Choi, & G. Yoon (Eds.), *Individualism and collectivism: Theory, method and applications* (pp. 19-40). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kirkpatrick, A. (1991). Information sequencing in Mandarin in letters of request. *Anthropological Linguistics, 33*(2), 183－203.

Kobayashi, H, & Rinnert, C. (2003). Coping with high imposition requests: High vs. low proficiency EFL students in Japan. In A. M. Flor, E.U. Juan, & A. F. Guerra, (Eds.), *Pragmatic competence and foreign language teaching* (pp. 161-183). Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, Castello de la Plana.

Koike, D. A. (1989). Pragmatic competence and adult L2 acquisition: Speech acts in interlanguage. *The Modern Language Journal*, *73*(3), 279-289.

Kotthoff, H., & Spencer-Oatey, H. (Eds.) (2007). *Handbook of intercultural communication.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(6), 1121-1134.

Kryston-Morales, C. (1997). *The production of compliments and responses in English by native Spanish speakers in Puerto Rico: An intercultural pragmatics study.* Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, New York University, New York.

Kramsch, C. (1998) *Language and culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lakoff, R. (1972). Language in context. *Language, 48*, 907-927.

Lakoff, R. (1973). *The logic of politeness; or, minding your P's and Q's.* Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex systems and applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lee, C. F. K. (2004a). Written requests in e-mails sent by adult Chinese learners of English. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 4*(1), 58-72.

Lee, C. F. K. (2004b, December). *Request strategy and second language acquisition.* Paper presented at the CLaSIC 2004, Singapore, National University of Singapore.

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.

Leech, G. N. (2005). Politeness: Is there an East-West divide? *Journal of Foreign Languages, 6*, 3-31.

Lee-Wong, S. M. (2000). *Politeness and face in Chinese culture*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Li, C. (2009). *Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic and discourse transfer in the discourse of L2 requests.* Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of

Hong Kong.
Lim, T. S., & Bowers, J. (1991). Facework: Solidarity, approbation, and tact. *Human Communication Research, 17*(3), 415-450.
Lim, T. S., & Bowers, J. (1991). Facework: Solidarity, approbation, and tact. *Human Communication Research, 17*(3), 415-450.
Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2006). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Mao, L. R. (1994). Beyond politeness theory: *Face* revisited and renewed. *Journal of Pragmatics, 21*(5), 451-486.

Matsumoto, K. (1993). Verbal-report data and introspective methods in second language research: State of the art. *RELC Journal, 24*(1), 32-60.

Matsumoto, Y. (1989). Politeness and conversational universals: Observations from Japanese. *Multilingua, 8*, 207-221.

Meier, A. J. (1996). Defining politeness: Universality in appropriateness. *Language Sciences, 17*(4), 345-356.

Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An introduction.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Mey, J. L. (2004). Between culture and pragmatics: Scylla and Charybdis? The precarious condition of intercultural pragmatics. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 1*(1), 27-48.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morson, G. S., & Emerson, C. (1990). *Michael Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Murray, D. E. (1995). *Knowledge machines: Language and information in a technological society.* New York: Longman.

Nisbett, R., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review, 84*, 231-259.

Niezgoda, K., & Röver, C. (2001). Pragmatic and grammatical awareness: A function of the learning environment? In K. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 63-79). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Dowd, R. (2003). Understanding the "other side": Intercultural learning in a Spanish-English e-mail exchange. *Language Learning & Technology*, 7(2), 118-144.

Olshtain, E. (1989). Apologies across languages. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp.

155-173). New York: Ablex.

Olshtain, E., & Cohen, A. D. (1983). Apology: A speech-act set. In N. Wolfson & E. Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 36-55). Rowley: Newbury House.

Rathje, S. (2007). Intercultural competence: The status and future of a controversial concept. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *7*(4), 254-266.

Pallant, J. (2005). *SPSS survival manual* (2nd ed.). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Pan, P. (2009, July). *A cross-cultural comparison of requests in student-professor e-mail exchanges: A mixed-method approach.* Paper presented at the 11th International Pragmatics Conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Pang, F. S. M. (2006). *Strategy use in advanced EFL readers: Identifying and characterizing the patterns of reading strategies employed by tertiary EFL students.* Unpublished PhD thesis, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (Eds.) (1992) *Longman dictionary of language teaching & applied linguistics*. London: Longman.

Richards, L. (2002). *NVivo: Using NVivo in qualitative research.* Melbourne: QSR International.

Robinson, M. (1991). Introspective methodology in interlanguage pragmatics research. In G. Kasper (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Japanese as a native and target language* (Vol. Tech. Rep. No. 3, pp. 27-82). Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.

Rose, K. R. (2000). An exploratory cross-sectional study of interlanguage pragmatic development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *22*, 27-67.

Rose, K. R. (2005). On the effects of instruction in second language pragmatics. *System*, *33*(3), 385-399.

Rose, K. R. (2009). Interlanguage pragmatic development in Hong Kong, phase 2. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *41*(11), 2345-2364.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation.* Oxford, England: Blackwell.

Saldaña, J. (2009).*The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sasaki, M. (1998). Investigating EFL students' production of speech acts: A comparison of production questionnaires and role plays. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30*, 457-484.

Schauer, G. A. (2004). May you speak louder maybe? Interlanguage pragmatic development in requests. In S. Foster-Cohen, M. Sharwood Smith, A. Sorace, & M. Ota (Eds.), *EUROSLA Yearbook* (pp. 253-273). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Schauer, G. A. (2007). Finding the right words in the study abroad context: The development of German learners' use of external modifiers in English. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 4*(2), 193-220.

Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2001). *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach* (2nd ed.). Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.

Searle, J. (1969). Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shih, Y. H. (1988). *Conversational politeness and foreign language teaching*. Taipei: Crane.

Simon, B. (2004). *Identity in modern society: A social psychological perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sinicope, C., Norris, J., & Watanabe, Y. (2007). Understanding and assessing intercultural competence: A summary of theory, research, and practice. Technical Report for the Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project (available online: http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation/publications.htm).

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Slugoski, B. R., & Turnbull, W. (1988). Cruel to be kind and kind to be cruel: Sarcasm, banter and social relations. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 7*(2), 101-121.

Smith, P. B., & Bond, M. H. (1993). *Social psychology across cultures*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (1996). Reconsidering power and distance. *Journal of Pragmatics, 26*(1), 1-24.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (Ed.). (2000). *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across culture*. London: Continuum.

Spencer Oatey, H. (2005). (Im)politeness, face and perceptions of rapport: Unpackaging their bases and interrelationships. *Journal of Pragmatics research, 1*(1), 113-137.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (Ed.). (2008). Culturally speaking: Culture, communication and politeness theory (2nd ed.). London: Continuum.

Spencer Oatey, H., & Jiang, W. (2003). Explaining cross-cultural pragmatic findings: Moving from Politeness Maxims to Sociopragmatic Interactional

Principles (SIPS). *Journal of Pragmatics, 35*, 1633-1650.
Spencer-Oatey, H., & Zegarac, V. (2002). Pragmatics. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 74-91). London: Arnold.
Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P (2009). *Intercultural interaction: A multidisciplinary approach to intercultural communication.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Mcmillion.
Sproull, L., & Kiessler, S. (1991). *Connections: New ways of working in the networked organization.* Boston: MIT Press.
Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory, procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Taguchi, N. (2010, March). *Pragmatic development from a dynamic, complex systems perspective.* Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) 2010 Conference, Atlanta, USA.
Takahashi, T., & Beebe, L. M. (1993). Cross-linguistic influence in the speech act of correction. In G. Kasper & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics* (pp. 138-157). New York: Oxford University Press.
Tanaka, N. (1988). Politeness: Some problems for Japanese speakers of English. *JALT Journal, 9*, 81-102.
Tannen, D. (2001). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics, 4*(2), 91-112.
Thomas, J. (1986). *The dynamics of discourse: A pragmatic analysis of confrontational interaction.* Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Lancaster University.
Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics.* Harlow, Essex: Longman.
Ting-Toomey, S., & Chung, L. C. (2005). *Understanding intercultural communication.* New York: Oxford University Press.
Ting-Toomey, S., & Kurogi, A. (1998). Facework competence in intercultural conflict: An updated face-negotiation theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 22*(2), 187-225.
Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism.* Boulder, Co: Westview.
Trosborg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
van Lier, L. (2005). Case study. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 195-208). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Verschueren, J. (1999) *Understanding pragmatics.* London and New York: Arnold

Publishers.

Vinkhuyzen, E., & Szymanski, M. H. (2005). Would you like to do it yourself? Service requests and their non-granting responses. In K. Richards & P. Seedhouse (Eds.), *Applying conversation analysis* (pp. 91-123). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Warschauer, M., & Kern, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Network-based language teaching: Concepts and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watts, R. J., Ide, S., & Ehlich, K. (2005). Introduction. In R. J. Watts, S. Ide, & K. Ehlich (Eds.), *Politeness in language: Studies in its history, theory and practice* (pp. 1-20). Berlin: Mouton de Grouyter.

Werkhofer, K. (2005). Traditional and modern Views: The social constitution and the power of politeness. In R. J. Watts, S. Ide, & K. Ehlich (Eds.), *Politeness in language* (pp. 155-202). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. (2001). *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Widjaja, C. S. (1997). A study of date refusals: Taiwanese females vs. American females. *University of Hawaii Working Papers in ESL, 15*(2), 1-43.

Wierzbicka, A. (1985b). Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts. *Journal of Pragmatics, 9*, 145-178.

Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction* (2nd ed.). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Williams, J. (2005). Writing centre interaction: Institutional discourse and the role of peer tutors. In K. Bardovi-Harlig & B. S. Hartford (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics: Exploring institutional talk* (pp. 37-66). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Woodfield, H. (2004). *Requests in English: A study of ESL and native speaker responses to written discourse completion tasks.* Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bristol.

Woodfield, H. (2007, April). *Interlanguage requests in English: Some evidence from an empirical study.* Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) 2007 Conference, Costa Mesa, USA.

Woodfield, H. (2008a). Problematising discourse completion tasks: Voices from verbal report. *Evaluation and Research in Education, 21*(1), 43-69.

Woodfield, H. (2008b). Interlanguage requests in English: a contrastive study. In M. Püetz & J. N. Aertselaer (Eds.), *Contrastive pragmatics: Interlanguage and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 231-264). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Woodfield, H., & Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2010). 'I just need more time': A study of native and non-native students' requests to faculty for an extension. *Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, *29*(1), 77–118.

Yates, L. (2005). Negotiating an institutional identity: Individual differences in NS and NNS teacher directives. In K. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, S. (Eds.), *Interlanguage pragmatics: Exploring institutional talk* (pp. 67-98). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Applications of case study research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zhan, K. (1992). *The strategies of politeness in the Chinese language*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California.

Zhang, Y. (1995a). Indirectness in Chinese requesting. In G. Kasper (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Chinese as native and target language* (pp. 69-118). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Zhang, Y. (1995b). Strategies in Chinese requesting In G. Kasper (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Chinese as native and target language* (pp. 23-68). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Zimin, S. (1981). Sex and politeness: Factors in first- and second-language Use. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 27, 35-58.

Appendix 1

Validation of the DCTs (Discourse Completion Tasks)

Directions for validators:
Please read the following scenarios. Do they seem authentic to you in the academic contexts you are in, that is, how likely is it that you think they will happen? Why and why not? Please circle your answers and give your explanations where applicable. Thank you very much for your participation!

Situation 1
You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment with the professor for later this week or next week.
___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 2
You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. You left the work until late and you now wish to ask the professor to have a meeting with you right away since the next day would be the day for presentation. You then write an e-mail to the professor to make this request.
___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 3
You are going to do a presentation for one of the courses you take. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. You have made an appointment already, but then you realize that you need more time

to get prepared and cannot meet him/her as previously decided. Hence, you use e-mail to contact the professor and ask if you can reschedule the meeting.
___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 4

You just finished the draft of your assignment and now hope to receive some feedback from your professor before the submission. You plan to write an e-mail to the professor, with your draft attached.
___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 5

You revised your assignment after receiving written feedback from the professor. But after that you still feel a little insecure about the work you have done. You feel it necessary to e-mail the professor, asking him to take a look at your revised version and offer more feedback.
___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 6

You have written half of your paper. As your write, you keep reading relevant materials and these give birth to some new ideas. You want to integrate them into your writing but you are not so sure how to do this. You decide to attach both your work in progress and two related readings to one e-mail and send them to the professor. You wish the professor to look through all the attachments and respond.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 7

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realize you may not finish the assignment by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for extension.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 8

You did not submit your assignment on time. It is now after the deadline and you intend to e-mail the professor to ask for an extension. You will not attach your work to the e-mail.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 9

You did not submit your assignment on time. It is now after the deadline and you plan to e-mail the professor to ask for an extension, with your late work attached.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.

Explanation:

Situation 10

One of the courses you take requires you to complete a fieldwork assignment. You now finished the fieldwork and have a huge amount of data, but feel totally confused about what to focus on and how to start writing up the paper. You turn to the professor and e-mail him/her to offer some guidance about the assignment.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 11

You are writing your essay and in great need of a particular book. However, there is not a copy of it in the library. You know your professor has one but you are not sure whether he/she may be using it at that time. You know this professor very well and have been his/her research assistant for quite a long time. You then make a request to borrow it from your professor.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 12

You felt very unwell and asked for leave last week and missed your professor's lecture. However, you need the class handouts very much in order to do some review. You then write to your professor to ask whether s/he can bring some extra copies to class for you this week.

___I am very cert~in that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 13

You are interested in one of the courses given by Prof. X. You hope to take it next semester and want to know more about it. You then write an e-mail to Prof. X and ask for the course information and suggested readings. You have known Prof. X. for quite a while and are currently taking another course with him/her this semester.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.

Explanation:

Situation 14

In your programme, you have both core and optional units. You are now very interested in auditing one of the optional units that you did not originally choose to follow. The unit is given by a professor you do not know well. You decide to send him/her an email to enquire whether you can audit his/her course.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.

Explanation:

Situation 15

After finishing your MPhil programme, you plan to go on with your study and pursue a PhD degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You have obtained one and for the other one, you hope that Professor X, who is the head of your department, and well known in the academic circle, can write it for you. You then decide to write an e-mail to request a reference letter.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.

Explanation:

Situation 16

You wrote one paper and intend to submit it to one conference. You need someone to do the final proofreading for you and you think Dr. X may help with it, as s/he is a native speaker of English and teaches a the course in academic writing. Dr. X is quite young and works as an assistant professor in the department.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 17

You are going to do a presentation for one of the courses you take. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss of the presentation. You then e-mail the professor to make an appointment during his/her regular office hours.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Situation 18

You are going to do a presentation for one of the courses you take. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. You then e-mail the professor to make an appointment in a time that is not within the professor's regular office hours.

___I am very certain that this is authentic.
___Very likely.
___Likely.
___Unlikely.
___Very unlikely.
___I am certain this is not authentic.
Explanation:

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for the pilot study–Electronic DCT (Discourse Completion Test)

Part I. Personal information

Please complete the following form by filling in or ticking (✓) relevant information where applicable.

Name (Optional):					
Gender:	Male:		Female:		
Age:	17-20	21-23	24-29	30-39	40+
Nationality:					
Major of study:					
TOEFL/IELTS Score (if applicable):					
Date of TOEFL/IELTS test:					
Languages spoken	First language: Second language: Other languages:				
Length of residence in Hong Kong:					
Phone:					
E-mail address:					

Part II. E-DCT

Instructions:

There are 10 scenarios in the following questionnaire; all of them take place in academic contexts. Imagine that all the interactions are between you and your professor X, a native English-speaking professor in your department. The professor has been teaching you in two courses in your programme, one core unit and one optional unit. Apart from the lectures, you do not have much face-to-face contact with him/her. Instead, E-mail is one of the chief channels for you to communicate with him/her and you use it quite often.

This questionnaire consists of three parts:

In **part A**, please read the situation and write an e-mail to the professor.

In **part B**, please indicate how certain you are about the appropriateness of the language of your e-mail by following the directions provided.

In **part C**, please follow the directions to indicate how imposing you think the situation is on your professor. For example, asking the professor to lend you one of his/her books to photocopy one chapter and returning it right way may be considered less imposing than asking him/her to lend you the book and keep it for two weeks

Thanks you very much for your participation!

Situation 1

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment with the professor for later this week or next week.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 2

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realize you will not be able to finish the assignment by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

<table>
<tr><td>Draft</td><td>Save</td><td>Attach</td><td>Spelling</td><td>Receipt</td><td>Sign</td><td>Encrypt</td><td colspan="2">Send</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">To: ◆Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk</td><td>Add Cc</td><td>Add Bcc</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">From:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Subject:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Copy to: ◆choose later</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9"></td></tr>
</table>

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 3

One of the courses you take requires you to complete a fieldwork assignment. You have finished the fieldwork and have a huge amount of data, but feel totally confused about what to focus on and how to start writing up the paper. You e-mail the professor to request some guidance about the assignment.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt		Send
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 4

You are writing your essay and in great need of a particular book. However, there isn't a copy of it in the library. You know your professor has one but you are not sure whether he/she may be using it at that time. You then make a request to borrow it from your professor.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

<table>
<tr><td>Draft</td><td>Save</td><td>Attach</td><td>Spelling</td><td>Receipt</td><td>Sign</td><td>Encrypt</td><td colspan="2">Send</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk</td><td>Add Cc</td><td>Add Bcc</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">From:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Subject:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Copy to: ♦choose later</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9"></td></tr>
</table>

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 5

You are interested in one of the courses offered by Professor X. You hope to take it next semester and want to know more about it. You then write an e-mail to him/her and ask for the course information and suggested readings. You are currently taking another course with him/her this semester.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt		Send
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 6

It is the third week of the semester and you are now very interested in auditing one of the optional courses that you did not originally select. The course is given by Professor X. You decide to send him/her an e-mail to enquire whether you can audit this course.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

<table>
<tr><td>Draft</td><td>Save</td><td>Attach</td><td>Spelling</td><td>Receipt</td><td>Sign</td><td>Encrypt</td><td colspan="2">Send</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk</td><td>Add Cc</td><td>Add Bcc</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">From:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Subject:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Copy to: ♦choose later</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">

</td></tr>
</table>

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 7

After finishing your MPhil programme, you wish to pursue a PhD degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

<table>
<tr><td>Draft</td><td>Save</td><td>Attach</td><td>Spelling</td><td>Receipt</td><td>Sign</td><td>Encrypt</td><td colspan="2">Send</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk</td><td>Add Cc</td><td>Add Bcc</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">From:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Subject:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Copy to: ♦choose later</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9"></td></tr>
</table>

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 8

You wrote a 20-page paper and intend to submit it to a journal. You now need someone to do the final proofreading. Professor X is a native speaker of English in your department and once taught a course in academic writing. You decide to e-mail and ask for his/her help with the proofreading.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt		Send
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 9

You are going to do a presentation for one of your courses in two weeks. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. You then e-mail the professor to make an appointment during his/her regular office hours.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt		Send
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 10

You are going to do a presentation for one of your courses next week. The professor of this course requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. You have already made an appointment for tomorrow, but then you realize that you need more time to get prepared. You e-mail the professor and ask if you can reschedule the meeting.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt		Send
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Weighing of the degree of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high)

1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3

Question Scheme for Retrospective Stimulated Recall

(Main Study)

I. Warming-up questions based on the demographic survey on the e-DCT, with special attention lent to prior study abroad and travel abroad experience, reflections on the current stay in the new cultural context (if applicable), and language learning experience.

II. The writing process related to each of the10 completed e-mail messages (Now let's look at each message together.)

1. Did you plan before you wrote? If so, in what way, and for how long?

2. What did you hope to accomplish by writing this e-mail?

3. What factors did you consider before, while and after writing the e-mail? (Such as power relationship/social distance/imposition degree...)

4. Among these factors, which were most important to you? Why?

5. What language or languages were you using for planning, composing and formulating the message?

6. Before sending the e-mail, did you re-read it again? If so, did you make any modifications? And what did you change?

7. After sending the e-mail did you think of anything that you wished you had changed? If yes, what and why?

8. To what degree do you think the situation is authentic? (That is, it will happen in the real life?)

III. Specific questions about the 6 e-mail messages written by the interviewee

9. Why did you choose to phrase your message in this way? (Highlight the source of particular vocabulary, phrases, syntactic structures, discourse markers etc., both linguistic & non-linguistic).
   ---Do you often use these elements in e-mails?
   ---Where did you learn and acquire these items?

---Did you consider other options? If yes, what are they? And why did you choose that one instead of others?

10. Why did you choose to structure/order your e-mail this way? (e.g., Why did you put this part at the beginning, instead of the middle, or the end? (Or, why did you put this information in that particular section of the e-mail?) (Highlight specific parts in the message.)

IV. E-mail as a mode of communication in academic discourse (general views)

11. What do you think about the role of grammar in e-mail writing? To be specific, do you think you pay attention to grammar when writing e-mails? Does it depend on who you are sending them to? Please be specific.

12. How do you feel about this electronic mode of communication? Compared to FTF (face-to-face) communication, which do you prefer to communicate with professors? Why? Have you always felt this way?

13. How do you see the roles of 'professor' and 'student' as communicators in this type of intercultural e-communication? Do you feel e-mail can play a role in identity construction? Or, do you think the way you portray yourself in e-mail is different from that in real life?

14. Are you aware of any cultural factors or rules of politeness that you may need to observe? Do you feel that your mother tongue and culture facilitates or interferes with your communication? Please give specific examples.

15. How often and for what purposes do you write e-mails in a university context? Can you think of any specific examples? (+ probes related to aims, audience, focus, content, structure of these messages)

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 4

Production Questionnaire – Electronic DCT (Discourse Completion Test)

Part I. Personal information

Please complete the following form by filling in or ticking (✓) relevant information where applicable.

Name (Optional):	
Gender:	Male: Female:
Age:	17-20 21-23 24-29 30-39 40+
Nationality:	
Major of study:	
TOEFL/IELTS Score (if applicable):	
Date of TOEFL/IELTS test:	
Languages spoken	First language: Second language: Other languages:
Length of residence in Hong Kong:	
Phone:	
E-mail address:	

Part II. E-DCT

Instructions:

There are 6 scenarios in the following questionnaire; all of them take place in academic contexts. Imagine that all the interactions are between you and your **professor X, an American professor in your department, who is a native speaker of English. The professor has been teaching you in two courses in your programme, one core unit and one optional unit. Apart from the lectures, you do not have much face-to-face contact with him/her. Instead, E-mail is one of the chief channels for you to communicate with him/her and you use it quite often.**

This questionnaire consists of three parts:

In **part A**, please read the situation and write an e-mail to the professor.

In **part B**, please indicate how certain you are about the appropriateness of the language of your e-mail.

In **part C-E**, please indicate how great the status difference is between you and your professor; how close you are; and how imposing you think the request is on your professor. **For example, asking someone to show you the time may be less in imposition than asking him/her for 100 dollars. Equally, asking a professor to review a full-length article you've written may be considered more of an imposition than asking him/her to review an abstract you've written.**

Thank you very much for your participation!

Situation 1

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment for later this week or next week.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

<table>
<tr><td>Draft</td><td>Save</td><td>Attach</td><td>Spelling</td><td>Receipt</td><td>Sign</td><td>Encrypt</td><td colspan="2">Send</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk
(Prof. X: Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)</td><td>Add
Cc</td><td>Add
Bcc</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">From:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Subject:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Copy to: ♦choose later</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9"></td></tr>
</table>

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Scaling the power difference

How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Part D: Assessing the social distance

How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=not at all close) to 5(=very close).

1	2	3	4	5

Part E: Weighing the size of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 2

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realize you will not be able to finish it by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦ Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk (**Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦ choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Scaling the power difference

How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Part D: Assessing the social distance

How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=not at all close) to 5(=very close).

1	2	3	4	5

Part E: Weighing the size of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 3

You are writing your essay and in great need of a particular book. However, there isn't a copy of it in the library. You know your professor has one. You are not sure whether s/he may be using it but you make a request to borrow it from your professor.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk **(Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Scaling the power difference

How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Part D: Assessing the social distance

How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=not at all close) to 5(=very close).

1	2	3	4	5

Part E: Weighing the size of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 4

You are interested in one of the courses offered by Professor X, who is teaching another course that you are taking this semester. You hope to take it next semester and want to know more about it. You write an e-mail to him/her and ask for the course information and suggested readings.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk **(Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Scaling the power difference

How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Part D: Assessing the social distance

How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=not at all close) to 5(=very close).

1	2	3	4	5

Part E: Weighing the size of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 5

It is the third week of the semester and you are now very interested in auditing an elective course given by Professor X. You decide to send him/her an e-mail to enquire whether you can audit this course.

Part A: Email message

(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk (**Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Scaling the power difference

How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Part D: Assessing the social distance

How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=not at all close) to 5(=very close).

1	2	3	4	5

Part E: Weighing the size of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 6

After finishing your MPhil programme, you wish to pursue a PhD degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter.

Part A: Email message

<u>(Please type into the blank space the information for 'From', 'Subject' and the e-mail message you are going to send, thank you!)</u>

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk **(Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From:								
Subject:								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Part B: Measurement of confidence in appropriateness of language usage in email message.

How certain are you that your use of language is appropriate for the situation? Please measure your certainty on the following scale by ticking (√) your answer.

Not at all certain	Uncertain	A little certain	Certain	Very certain

Part C: Scaling the power difference

How big is the power, or status difference between the professor and you? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Part D: Assessing the social distance

How close is the relationship between the professor and you in this situation? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=not at all close) to 5(=very close).

1	2	3	4	5

Part E: Weighing the size of imposition.

How big an imposition is this request on the professor? Please tick your answer on the scale, ranging from 1(=low) to 5(=high).

1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 5–Sample of audience Judgement

Dear Professor,

I am a PhD student in Applied English Linguistics at CUHK. My area of research is e-mail discourse between students (native and non-native English-speakers) and their American Professors. Graduate students from various departments have provided their responses to e-mail prompts. I have enclosed sample e-mail requests that have been written by 9 students (The following is by **Student 1**). I would appreciate it if you would read each and rate them according to the scales provided (Please complete Parts A, B & C after each e-mail request). Your answers will offer valuable insight into the perceptions of professors about e-mail requests they receive from students. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will ONLY be used for research purposes. Should you have any enquiries about the procedure or my research, please feel free to contact me at: cathypan2003@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Cathy Pan
PhD Candidate
Department of English
CUHK
Phone: 67360716
E-mail: cathypan2003@yahoo.com

PROMPTS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AND RESPONSES FROM STUDENT 1

For all prompts, the students were given the following profile for Professor X: **"Professor X is an American professor in your department, who is a native speaker of English. The professor has been teaching you in two courses in your programme, one core unit and one optional unit. Apart from the lectures, you do not have much face-to-face contact with him/her. Instead, E-mail is one of the chief channels for you to communicate with him/her and you use it quite often."**

Situation 1 (Prompt provided to student)

You are going to do a presentation in one of your courses in two weeks. The professor requires that students meet him/her beforehand to discuss the presentation. Now that you have selected the topic and made a general plan, you decide to write an e-mail to make an appointment for later this week or next week.

E-mail message (written by student)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk (**Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From: xxx@yahoo.com								
Subject: To make an appointment with you								
Copy to: ♦choose later								
Dear Prof. X, I am XXX, one of your MA students from ENG4512 course. Since I have decided the topic of the upcoming presentation and finished making a general plan about it, I wonder whether we may meet and talk about it at some time convenient for you. I am looking forward to seeing you soon. Have a nice day! Best wishes, xxx								

Part A: Measurement of directness of language usage in email message, using the scale 1 = very indirect to 5 = very direct.

1	2	3	4	5

Part B: Scaling the degree of politeness, using the scale: 1 = very impolite to 5 (=very polite).

1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Rating the degree of satisfaction of the received email, using the scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory.

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 2 (Prompt provided to student)

You are writing your assignment and the deadline is close. However, you feel very unwell and realize you will not be able to finish it by the due date. You decide to e-mail the professor and ask for an extension.

E-mail message (written by student)

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk **(Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From: xxx@yahoo.com								
Subject: To ask for the extension of Assignment One								
Copy to: ♦choose later								
Dear Prof. X, I am XXX, one of your MA students from ENG4512 course. I am writing this e-mail to you for asking for your kind permission of the extension of my first assignment because I have been suffering from viral pneumonia for the whole week and it really seems a little bit difficult for me to finish this assignment by the dual date. I am so sorry for any inconvenience caused and I will try my best to finish it as soon as possible. I am looking forward to your reply and have a nice day! Best wishes, XXX								

Part A: Measurement of directness of language usage in email message, using the scale 1 = very indirect to 5 = very direct.

1	2	3	4	5

Part B: Scaling the degree of politeness, using the scale: 1 = very impolite to 5 =very polite.

1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Rating the degree of satisfaction of the received email, using the scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory.

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 3 (Prompt provided to student)

You are writing your essay and in great need of a particular book. However, there isn't a copy of it in the library. You know your professor has one. You are not sure whether s/he may be using it but you make a request to borrow it from your professor.

Email message written by student

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk (**Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From: xxx@yahoo.com								
Subject: For the book titled as *xxxxxxxx*								
Copy to: ♦choose later								
Dear Prof. X, I am XXX, one of your MA students from ENG4512 course. I am writing this e-mail to you for asking for your kind help. The problem is that I couldn't find the copy of the book titled as xxxxxx in the library, but I am really in great need of this book when composing the essay of our course. Would you kindly lend your book to me and I will return it to you as soon as possible. Sorry for any inconvenience caused and thank you so much for your nice help. I am looking forward to your reply and have a nice day! Best wishes, xxx								

Part A: Measurement of directness of language usage in email message, using the scale 1 = very indirect to 5 = very direct.

1	2	3	4	5

Part B: Scaling the degree of politeness, using the scale: 1 = very impolite to 5 =very polite.

1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Rating the degree of satisfaction of the received email, using the scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory.

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 4 (Prompt provided to student)

You are interested in one of the courses offered by Professor X, who is teaching another course that you are taking this semester. You hope to take it next semester and want to know more about it. You write an e-mail to him/her and ask for the course information and suggested readings.

Email message written by student

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk **(Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From: xxx@yahoo.com								
Subject: To ask for the course information								
Copy to: ♦choose later								

Dear Prof. X,

I am XXX, one of your MA students from ENG4512 course. Happily, I have found that you will also teach xxx course next semester. I wonder whether you may kindly share some course information with me and give me some good suggestions about the reading materials of this course, for this course is what I am so interested in and plan to take next semester.

Thank you so much for your help and I am looking forward to your reply.

Best wishes,

xxx

Part A: Measurement of directness of language usage in email message, using the scale 1 = very indirect to 5 = very direct.

1	2	3	4	5

Part B: Scaling the degree of politeness, using the scale: 1 = very impolite to 5 =very polite.

1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Rating the degree of satisfaction of the received email, using the scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory.

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 5 (Prompt provided to student)

It is the third week of the semester and you are now very interested in auditing an elective course given by Professor X. You decide to send him/her an e-mail to enquire whether you can audit this course.

Email message written by student

<table>
<tr><td>Draft</td><td>Save</td><td>Attach</td><td>Spelling</td><td>Receipt</td><td>Sign</td><td>Encrypt</td><td colspan="2">Send</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk
(Prof. X: Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)</td><td>Add
Cc</td><td>Add
Bcc</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">From: xxx@yahoo.com</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Subject: To apply for auditing ENG3210 course</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Copy to: ♦choose later</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Dear Prof. X,
I am XXX, one of your students from ENG4512 course. I wonder whether it is still possible for me to apply for auditing your XXX course now. I know it is a little bit late now to start auditing this course, but I do hope that you may give me your permission because I am very interested in this course which will be very helpful for my own research. Sorry for any inconvenience caused and I am looking forward to your kind permission.

Best wishes,
xxx</td></tr>
</table>

Part A: Measurement of directness of language usage in email message, using the scale 1 = very indirect to 5 = very direct.

1	2	3	4	5

Part B: Scaling the degree of politeness, using the scale: 1 = very impolite to 5 =very polite.

1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Rating the degree of satisfaction of the received email, using the scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory.

1	2	3	4	5

Situation 6 (Prompt provided to student)

After finishing your MPhil programme, you wish to pursue a PhD degree. The application procedure requires that you have reference letters from two distinguished professors in your area. You decide to send an e-mail to Professor X to request a reference letter.

Email message written by student

Draft	Save	Attach	Spelling	Receipt	Sign	Encrypt	Send	
To: ♦Professor X@cuhk.edu.hk **(Prof. X:** Mid-40s, native English speaker from North America)							Add Cc	Add Bcc
From: xxx@yahoo.com								
Subject: To ask for your help								
Copy to: ♦choose later								
Dear Prof. X, I will finish my MPhil study here soon. Now I wish to pursue a PhD degree and further my study. As usual, the application procedure requires two reference letters from distinguished professors in my area. So I wonder whether you may write a reference letter for me to support my application for the PhD programme. Thank you so much for your kind help and sorry for any inconvenience caused. I am looking forward to your reply. Have a nice day! Best wishes, xxx								

Part A: Measurement of directness of language usage in email message, using the scale 1 = very indirect to 5 = very direct.

1	2	3	4	5

Part B: Scaling the degree of politeness, using the scale: 1 = very impolite to 5 =very polite.

1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Rating the degree of satisfaction of the received email, using the scale: 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory.

1	2	3	4	5

Thank you very much for evaluating the e-mail requests. I would appreciate it if you would provide additional information about the e-mails (Q1-3):

1. **What is your overall impression of this <u>Student 1</u> who wrote these e-mails?**

2. **Are there any specific messages you would like to comment on?**

3. **Generally speaking, what characteristics of an e-mail request do you expect to be embodied in the message from a student?**

Appendix 6

E-mail Coding Scheme

(Based on and adapted from CCSARP coding manual by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989, referring also to Spencer Oatey, 2000, 2002, and the website of CARLA http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/requests/strategies.html)
(The majority of the examples were extracted from the actual data generated by the electronic DCT.)

I. Request Perspectives

- ✧ **Hearer dominance:** Could *you* kindly lend it to me for reference?
- ✧ **Speaker dominance**: Is it okay if *I* go to see you during you office hours on Tue.?
- ✧ **Speaker and hearer dominance:** If not, could *we* meet at some other point before the presentation?
- ✧ **Impersonal:** Can *students* audit this course?

II. Request Segments

1. **Attention Getter/Alerter** (address terms, etc.):

- ✧ **Greeting:** *How are you?*
- ✧ **Attention-getter:** *Hi/Hey! /Excuse me.*
- ✧ **Title:** (occupation title or role) *Professor XX, Dr. XX*
- ✧ **Name:** (surname or first name) *Danni*

2. **Head Act** (core of the request sequence, which can be modified, the request proper that conveys the main illocutionary force of the utterance):

Direct strategies:

a. **Mood derivable:** utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force, e.g. *Please take a look at the attached presentation plan when you have time.*
b. **Performatives:** utterances in which illocutionary force is explicitly named, e.g. *I'm writing to request for a deadline extension for MNG 1234.*
c. **Hedged performatives:** utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions, e.g. *I would like to ask if you would be available for a discussion of the presentation later this week or next week.*
d. **Obligation statements:** utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act, e.g. *You'll have to move the car!*
e. **Locution derivable:** The illocutionary intent is directly derivable from the semantic meaning of the locution. *E.g., You ought to/should submit your paper.*
f. **Want statements:** utterances which state the speaker's desire that the event denoted in the proposition come about, e.g. *I want to ask a favor from you to be one of my referees.*

Conventionally indirect strategies

g. **Suggestory formulae:** utterances which contain a suggestion to do something, e.g. *Shall we meet sometimes next week, say Monday at 3 p.m. at your convenience?*

h. **Query preparatory:** utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g. ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language, e.g. *Would you please allow me an extension for one or two days?*

Non-conventionally indirect strategies

i. **Strong hints:** utterances containing partial reference to object or elements needed for the implementation of the act, e.g. *I believe you may have a copy of it, but I am not sure if you are currently using it or not.*

j. **Mild hints**: utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context, e.g. *I am a nun* in response to a persistent hassler.

3. Modifications of Head Act

3.1 Internal Modifications

A. Downgraders

Syntactic downgraders (Modifying the head act internally by mitigating the impositive force of the request by means of syntactic choices)

- **Interrogative**[1] *Is there any way you might be able to send me an outline or suggested readings from last term?*
- **Negation** *Look, excuse me. I wonder if you* ***wouldn't*** *mind dropping me home?*
- **Subjunctive** *If you could give me any direction, I would really appreciate.*
- **Aspect**[2] *I was wondering if I could arrange a time to come in and discuss it with you.*
- **Past tense**[3] *I* ***was*** *hoping you* ***might*** *have some advice or how to go about doing this. /I* ***wanted*** *to ask for a postponement.*
- **Embedded 'if' clause** *I would really appreciate it* ***if*** *I could get an extension of 2 or 3 days.*
- **Past tense modal**[4] ***Could*** *you allow me one more day to submit my work?*

Lexical/phrasal downgraders (Serving as optional additions to soften the impositive force of the request by modifying the head act internally through specific lexical and phrasal choices)

---

[1] According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 281), with preparatory request strategies of the *can I/you do P* type, the interrogative is unmarked and therefore should not be coded as a syntactic downgrader.

[2] Also according to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 282), the durative aspect marker (or other types of aspect) counts as mitigating only if it can be substituted by a simple form (e.g. 'I am wondering' vs. 'I wonder')

[3] Past tense forms are coded as downgrading only if they are used with present time reference and thus can be substituted by present tense forms without changing the semantic meaning of the utterance (e.g. 'I wanted to ask you…' vs. 'I want to ask you…')

[4] Past tense modal is added, following Hendricks (2008), as such modals "function as mitigating devices in that they add an element of conditionality to a request, which gives the hearer an extra option (over non-conditional requests with present tense modals) to refrain from complying with the request" (p. 345).

- ✧ **Consultative devices** (The speaker seeks to involve the hearer and bids for his/her cooperation.)

  E.g. ***Do you think I could** borrow it from you?*
- ✧ **Understaters** (The speaker minimizes the required action or object)

  E.g. I wonder if we can *slightly* put off the meeting. /*Could you tidy up **a bit** before I start?*
  - **a. Hedges** (The speaker avoids specification regarding the request.)

    E.g. I'll appreciate it very much if you can offer me *some* information and *some* preliminary readings of the course. /*It would really help if you **did something** about the kitchen.*
  - **b. Downtoner** (The speaker modulates the impact of the request by signaling the possibility of non-compliance.)

    E.g. I was wondering if you would be willing to...and give me any ***possible*** suggestions you may have for improvement. /*Will you be able to **perhaps** drive me to the station*?
  - **c. Politeness marker** E.g. ***Please*** let us know which time slot works best for you.
- ✧ **Subjectivizer** (Elements in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-à-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowing the assertive force of the request)

  E.g. ***I'm afraid/I wonder*** *if you have any information available* (e.g. syllabus, reading list, etc.) about the course. /With your help ***I think*** I can obtain this.
- ✧ **Cajoler** (Conventional speech items whose semantic content is of little transparent relevance to their discourse meaning; not commonly entering syntactic structures, but interspersed to increase, establish, or restore harmony between the interlocutors) E.g. ***You know,** you really need to do it.* / May I know if you could give me some information about it, ***let's say***, the course requirements and suggested readings?
- ✧ **Appealer** (Elements used by a speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to the hearer's benevolent understanding, occurring in a syntactically final position, e.g. tags) E.g. *Tidy up your desk, **will you?***

B. <u>Upgraders</u>

- ✧ **Intensifiers** (The speaker over-represents the reality.)

  E.g. *Clean up this mess, it's **disgusting.***
- ✧ **Expletives** (The speaker explicitly expresses negative emotional attitudes.)

  E.g. *You still haven't cleaned up that **bloody** mess!*
- ✧ **Time intensifier**

  E.g. *Please let me know at your **earliest** convenience if I can audit your course.* /*Tidy up your desk **right now!***
- ✧ **Determination marker** (Elements indicating a heightened degrée of determination on the part of the speaker)

  E.g. I would like *very much* to sit in your course. /I would ***really*** like to take your course.

- ✧ **Orthographic/suprasegmental emphasis**
  E.g. Dear Prof. X- / ☺

3.2 External Modifications (Supportive Moves, before or after Head Act): Mitigating supportive move

- ✧ **Discourse Orientation Moves** (Opening discourse moves which serve an orientation function but do not necessarily mitigate or aggravate the request in any way (Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009))
  E.g. ***"You know the seminar paper I'm supposed to be giving on the 29th …."***
- ✧ **Preparator/Checking on availability** (The speaker checks if the precondition necessary for compliance holds true.)
  E.g. ***Could you please tell me whether you will be free next Monday?*** *If not… /**Are you going in the direction of the town?** And if so, is it possible to join you?*
- ✧ **Getting a precommitment** (The speaker attempts to obtain a precommitment.)
  E.g. ***Will you do me a favor?*** *Could you perhaps lend me your notes for a few days?*
- ✧ **Grounder** (The speaker gives reasons, explanations, or justifications for the request.)
  E.g. *I am writing to ask for an extension of the assignment deadline **because I feel suddenly ill today. /I missed class yesterday.***
- ✧ **Sweetener** (By expressing exaggerated appreciation of the requestee's ability to comply with the request, the speaker lowers the imposition involved.)
  E.g. ***I truly believe that your support will be of immense importance to my application.*** *As such, would you mind…/**You have the most beautiful handwriting I've ever seen!** Would it be possible to borrow your notes for a few days?*
- ✧ **Disarmer** (The speaker indicates awareness of a potential offense and thereby possible refusal.)
  E.g. ***I know that it may be inappropriate to ask for an extension*** *as the deadline is drawing near…/Excuse me, **I hope you don't think I'm being forward,** but is there any chance of a lift home?*
- ✧ **Promise of reward** (To increase the likelihood of the hearer's compliance with the speaker's request, a reward due to the fulfillment of the request is announced.)
  E.g. ***I promise to take it seriously*** *(finish all the required readings and attend the discussion). /**I promise I won't keep it long**. /Could you give me a lift home? **I'll give you something for petrol.***
- ✧ **Cost minimizer/Imposition downgrader** (The speaker indicates consideration of the imposition to the requestee involved in compliance with the request.)
  E.g. *I need it for my essay and was wondering if I could borrow your copy **if you aren't using it right now.** /Pardon me, but could you give a lift, **if you're going my way,** as I just missed the bus and there isn't another one for an hour.*

Showing thanks
E.g. ***Thanks*** *a lot for your help. /Your help will be highly* ***appreciated****.*

Showing apologies
E.g. ***I'm awfully sorry*** *for the inconvenience caused. /**I'm very sorry** to have to ask you this, but…*

Formulaic e-mail closing
E.g. *Looking forward to your reply!*

Showing humour
E.g. *Hopefully you would be able to make up at least one nice thing to say about me.*

Expressing wishes or seasonal wishes
E.g. *Have a good day!*

Deferential expressions
E.g. *Sincerely*