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Politeness Strategies and Discourse Features of ESL Grade 7 Students' Emails

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Abstract: The lack of pragmatic knowledge of email structure and little awareness of politeness strategies in email conventions that affects one's presentation of self through language use usually make students perceived negatively when they communicate with their teachers. In this mixed methods study, 96 Grade 7 male students from convenience sampling produced 327 emails after receiving a brief module about pragmatic implications and formal structure in emails and the teacher's instruction and demonstration in email conventions. The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) and Politeness and Face Theories were applied to examine the structure, language features, and politeness strategies of these emails and to explore how the students' pragmatic competence and identities were reflected through their communicative language use. Results showed that despite the simplified (a)synchronous sessions and joint construction, there were variations in how students wrote apologies, requests, invitations, and excuse letters. Most emails contained downtoners, and the politeness marker "po" was mostly used to soften impositions while "God bless" was utilized as a salutation. Although pragmalinguistic competence was observed, institutional power, rank, and distance were not much considered, which led to a vague sociopragmatic competence. This implies the need for explicit instructions about email politeness and the integration of pragmatics-based pedagogical interventions in teaching certain written content and formats.

Keywords: *Discourse analysis, email politeness, ESL, pragmatic competence.*

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Introduction

Linguistic politeness covers patterns and strategies perceived as socially appropriate to the ongoing interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It can be used as a requesting strategy where receivers of an utterance will more likely comply if the requestor is polite (Chen, 2001). However, request behavior may force recipients to do an action unwillingly if they are expected to grant what is asked (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In the academe, email has served as a convenient and flexible means of communication (Baron, 2000) between students and teachers. Apart from possessing both pragmatic and social functions, it characterizes a mixed contact system of four dimensions: social dynamics, format, grammar, and style (Baron, 1998, 2000). Since it possessed both the qualities of conversational and written language (Chen, 2001), it became a non-standard hybrid discourse (Alcón-Soler, 2013) where there is no single rule about the construction of emails because of varied social, cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic factors. For example, students using casual expressions for informal opening and ending emails in a speech-like conversation may indicate that they have difficulty finding suitable linguistic expressions, or they do not recognize the proper language and contextual customs for formal written communication (Al-Ali & Sahaneh, 2008). Furthermore, the teachers have a higher institutional rank and status, making their social distance far from the students.

Regarding email content, unawareness of the impact of word choice and unfamiliarity with the differences among communication mediums (oral or written) and communicative modality pose challenges to the students' communicative and pragmatic competence and politeness strategies (Baron, 1998). The lack of paralinguistic cues, which constitute metamesages for relaying social meaning, makes the message structure and wording a pivotal source of email interpretation (Chen, 2006; Murray, 1995).

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However, despite email being a common mode of interaction between students and teachers, the students' unfamiliarity with email etiquette adversely affects how they communicate their purpose and intended response to their teachers, specifically when they make requests, apologies, and invitations (Nguyen et al., 2015). Language politeness often reflects social roles, societal values, and power structures (Xafizovna, 2021; Ye, 2019). In the Philippine context, it is often exhibited through indirectness and usage of honorifics to demonstrate deference to the elderly and authority figures (Seráfica, 2022; Tuplano, 2018). Although there were studies that explored the email politeness by Filipino college students, (AlAfnan & Dela Cruz-Rudio, 2023; Briones & Liwanag, 2023), there has been little research on the ones by high school students, particularly in Grade 7. Based on the English basic education curriculum in the country, letter writing of this kind is taught in elementary under writing skills but is only reinforced in grade 7, both of which focus on teaching request and personal intention as content and the conventional formal structure. Nonetheless, no email politeness, pragmatic elements, and apology and invitation content are incorporated into these lessons. Therefore, explicit pragmatic instruction in constructing emails with politeness strategies is considered in language classrooms because teaching pragmatics implicitly does not fully substantiate the required level of awareness in noticing important details in what is being taught (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Schmidt, 1993, 2001).

Literature Review

Various studies about emails examined how native speakers (NS), such as Americans, Canadians, British, and Australians, and non-native speakers (NNS) from English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries in Asia and Europe university students struggle in applying politeness strategies and pragmatic competence in writing emails, specifically when requests are asked from professors and if linguistic conventions in content and structure are observed. Hence, this study is informed by research on politeness strategies, writing practices of higher education students, and email literacy and etiquette. In this section, a comprehensive encapsulation of previous findings will be mentioned before the research gap to where this study can contribute is identified.

In terms of politeness strategies, the differences in practices and email structures of native and non-native speakers of English have been identified. For instance, Chang and Hsu (1998) observed that Chinese students treated email communication as either formal epistolary or telephone conversations, whereas Americans regarded it as closer to written memorandums. The former exhibits their politeness through information sequencing while the latter does through the wording of their request. The choice of linguistic forms and pragmatic moves were also distinguished. Facework (how to keep the speaker's dignity of "face" and the "face" of others in an interaction) was prioritized by Chinese students, in contrast with how concise messages were emphasized by Americans. These echoed Kirkpatrick's (1991) point about how notions of direct and indirect politeness and strategies are also clear and culturally bound. In Ford's (2006) research on the pragmatic use of NNS (ESL university learners) and NS in Hawaii, he also discovered the differences between NS and NNS in politeness, perlocution (persuading and convincing), and pragmatic strategies in content and structure. NNS were inclined to produce very polite emails (overused politeness markers like "please") but with low perlocutionary effect. The NS structured their requests in a "preparator – request statement – grounder" sequence, in which politeness strategies and orthographic (all capital letters and exclamation points) and message upgraders (time intensifiers and repetition-of-request strategy) were absent. On the contrary, NNS employed "preparator – grounder – request question" and wrote many upgraders both in their email title and content to insist on the urgency and importance of their request. In sum, these studies suggest that NS and NNS have varied ways of constructing their emails based on what is deemed conventional by their cultural community.

The affective response from the recipients is influenced by their interpretation of the intention of email authors, such as what they must understand or do. In one study, (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996) investigated mixed NS and NNS email requests to faculty. The positive affect was based on the institutional explanations (academic context) valued by the faculty, whereas the negative affect was a consequence of the students' appeals and conveying an obligation that must be done by the faculty. The differences in the time references and constraints, degree of imposition, and elaboration for the requests were apparent between the two groups, such as when NNS focused on individual requests and urgent time needs. In a cross-cultural study of Al-Ali and Sahaneh (2008) about the generic features of request emails, he compared the corpora of American and Jordanian undergraduate students. He discovered that Americans preferred "request + apologize" while Jordanians followed "apologize + request". The requesting move of NS was found initially before their justification as a negotiation, which was the opposite of the NNS who avoided instant requesting. Similarly, Alcón-Soler's (2013) research about the application of request mitigators, degree of imposition, and social distance analyzed email requests of British and International English speakers from three different state schools in England. The results showed that email requests were as imposing, nor did they see their relationship with their teachers as distant. However, NS depended on greetings to display social distance, which was non-existent from NNS. Moreover, softeners and more syntactic and disarmers (lessened the possible threat and offense of requests) mitigators were utilized by NS when they deemed their request as more demanding. NNS only heavily relied on the modal verb "could" with the use of grounder or the justification of their demand, concluding that they lacked pragmalinguistic knowledge to diminish their imposition. Hence, how students use their linguistic repertoire and recognize power, rank, and distance in the academic context determines how they communicate their intentions to their teachers.

Email literacy studies emphasized power distance (PD) in formality levels since it is anchored with sociocultural factors. The study of Bjørge (2007) investigated emails by graduate and PhD students from low PD countries based on Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimension of PD. Evidently, there was still a prevalence of formal greetings and complimentary close. The variations in the choices of address to the recipients and how they handled rapport management were ascribed to the individual level of English language proficiency, cultural background, and possible transfer of L1 conventions. Although Bou-Franch's (2006, 2011) studies did not contain request and conversation emails written in English (Spanish participants), it was noteworthy to mention her findings. In Bou-Franch's study (2006) of solidarity and deference email discourse, the PD between the students and the researcher featured rapport-sensitive requests due to more politeness patterns and other-oriented moves in the emails. The students were aware of how respect plays a crucial role in the realization of their demands from the researcher. Therefore, the students provided grounders, lessened imposition, and maintained social distance by utilizing hedging particles and pronouns of solidarity and display of gratitude. Contrastingly, Bou-Franch (2011) noted in another study that opening and closing sequences are institutional restrictions, yet emails are still more associated with informality which leads to the optional insertion of the two sequences. Interestingly, encounters of equal powers were more deference-oriented than unequal ones which demonstrated expected-suggested patterns. It underscored Waldvogel's (2007) description of the "business first, people second" email style. Thus, language use and purpose shape power dynamics in emails.

Finally, pragmalinguistic competence is equally significant as sociopragmatic in performing speech acts that are asynchronously expressed. In her interlanguage research, Chen (2001) examined emails by Taiwanese and American students. Social identity was initially established by Taiwanese students through status-stating to help them attain their "request goals" from the professor. Additionally, deference was mainly expressed, as the higher-power role of the professor was acknowledged due to the fact that Taiwan is a high PD country. This was found in their gift-giving strategies, such as compliments and showing appreciation to enhance the professor's "face" or dignity. This contrasted with their American counterparts who showed solidarity-oriented emails or constructed an "in-group" correspondence with the professor. Another prominent NNS structure found was the delayed request strategy wherein facework was designated before the actual statement of the demand. This was exhibited in the inclusion of personal narratives rather than transactional negotiations. Thus, the more polite the sender is, the more likely it is that the recipient complies with the appeal. In Zhu's (2012) study of EFL Chinese students' pragmatic competence, he explored whether social distance, rank of imposition, and power influenced the requestive strategies. Inadequate pragmalinguistic knowledge and sociopragmatic competence were exhibited by both English and non-English majors, especially in their few lexical modifiers (downtoners, hedgers, and understaters). Nevertheless, a hearer-dominance or other-oriented perspective was displayed by both groups. In the end, he stressed his similar findings with Biesbach-Lucas (2007) and argued that there could be no impetus to assert that English majors and those with higher English proficiency had a higher pragmalinguistic competence. This is due to a lack of appropriate and strategic linguistic forms and limited mitigation devices to soften their politeness, unlike the NS.

Overall, it is evident from the previous studies that due to cultural differences, NS tended to be direct and to possess greater resources in constructing polite emails, while NNS are more indirect in their sequence but more direct in linguistic forms (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Chang & Hsu, 1998). However, both showed a lack of mitigation strategies and focused on their personal needs. Word choice, modification (lexico-syntactic), and following the email sequence (opening - content - ending) also influence how professors perceive students' identity and language skills (pragmatic competence and politeness strategies.) Students are viewed as preposterous (Stephens et al., 2009) and impolite when they omit openings and endings (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007), ignore power distance (PD) and social distance (SD) by being informal in rapport management (Bjørge, 2007), and exhibit pragmatic failure due to inappropriate politeness strategies to perform speech acts as someone who wants or expects another person to do an action.

In addition, student-teacher power, distance, and rank relationships are barely recognized by some tertiary students, which indicates their inadequate pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. This impedes them to achieve their communicative goals (Chen, 2006). Alternatively, hierarchical status variance is acknowledged, but little attention is given to the manner of writing the email. If this is considered, there is an assurance that students are mindful of the professor's time, effort, and resources in reading their emails and responding to their academic needs (Krulatz & Park, 2016; Nguyen, 2019). Not being able to shift from one discourse type to another may also hinder students, particularly when awareness of the accepted and expected polite moves in email or even the preferred style of communicating with faculty is not demonstrated (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). For instance, similar speech acts for requests and apologies were utilized despite possessing distinct structures (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). A student's request will need an attention-getter line, a request proper, a reason that supports the demand, an elaboration of why it must be granted, and other parts that will not pressure or force the teacher to perform the desired act of the sender. To add, the student should not give the imperative because it violates email etiquette that is rooted in social and academic norms. Despite adding softeners like "please" and modal verbs that reduce the requestive force, the coercive tone is still not modified by these words (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). In sum, the identified struggles of students when writing emails to their teachers are pragmatic choices and cultural norms, formal and informal writing conventions (word choice and order, mechanics, punctuation marks, and grammar), opening and closing lines, terms of addressing the teacher, subject line composition,

and directness (Krulatz & Park, 2016). These are all classified under the interplay of linguistic resources and ability, pragmatic competence, and politeness strategies.

In more recent studies of emails by Asian university students, it was discovered that positive strategies were common in request emails, whereas negative strategies were frequent in refusals for Thais (Liu et al., 2025). Moreover, their rhetorical move structures were influenced by their language input, pragmatic transfer, social distance, and individual backgrounds. In a Philippine study during the pandemic, Briones and Liwanag (2023) concluded that justifying actions that are deemed unfavorable to the professors and are done to receive favorable replies from them are the most demonstrated positive strategies by students. Meanwhile, establishing a sense of empathy and inclusivity was the most common from the professor's end. Negative strategies were also evident in the emails from professors to avoid impositions, although these were more practiced in the student-initiated emails. Interestingly, the use of emoticons with the hierarchical and linguistic politeness markers was noted. In a comparative study between Filipino and Malaysian undergraduates (AlAfnan & Dela Cruz-Rudio, 2023), the former preferred indirect positive and negative strategies and constructed longer requests and appeals by producing more justifications and politeness moves in general compared to the latter. Their Malaysian counterparts applied more direct strategies of interrogative and imperative through mitigation markers and request expressions. Nonetheless, both groups used positive politeness to facilitate solidarity with their professors by expressing their goodwill and explanations for their requests. Lastly, in a study that examined the email etiquettes of Filipino accountancy students from the perspectives of several faculty members (Claridad et al., 2023), the teacher respondents mentioned that put more emphasis on the proper conveyance of messages and observed grammar articulation. Apart from gaining a positive merit in the teacher's perception, a conventional email served as a tool to gauge a student's competency. Some faculty disclosed that they ignored the emails of the students who did not observe proper email etiquette as a disciplinary action to reprimand them, while others considered this as an opportunity to teach them how to properly communicate with a teacher via email by presenting samples to guide them.

The development of email literacy (Chen, 2006) that encompasses pragmatic competence and CLA is a crucial issue in language education. Previous research found that explicit pragmatic instruction bears positive effects in writing emails. It is more effective in fostering the ability to construct polite requests and other messages than implicitly teaching email netiquette (Al-Ali & Sahaneh, 2008; Alcón-Soler, 2013; Chen, 2001, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Ford, 2006; Krulatz & Park, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2015) since many pragmatic and politeness concepts are not easily transferable from L1 to L2 (Kasper, 1992). Nonetheless, email politeness at the non-collegiate level was less explored in this area. It also appears that there was not much research on the emails of Filipino students who cannot be simply categorized as L2 English speakers or ESL learners because many Filipinos have already acquired or learned English at an early age. Many Filipinos often consider English as their L1 and will have advanced proficiency. Lastly, only request emails were analyzed in the previous studies. In reality, students also communicate to faculty members for other academic and non-academic reasons, such as apologizing for unwanted behavior, being late or absent, and inviting teachers to organizational events. Hence, this research navigated on apology, invitation, and request emails written by ESL high school students.

As COVID-19 compelled schools to shift into a fully online modality, emails were utilized more often than ever, even at earlier school levels. This allowed any student to communicate with teachers through email. Nonetheless, little awareness of politeness strategies in email conventions and a lack of appropriate presentation of themselves through language use seemed to be exhibited by many students. Reasons for limited exposure to English emails and formal letters, inadequate lessons, exercises, and teachers' feedback about formal writing resembling an email, and academic performance may be factors to such email outputs, but this may not always be the case in other English classrooms. Hence, their seeming lack of pragmatic knowledge of what and how to write an email mostly causes them to be perceived negatively regarding their language use and deference toward their teachers. This case is more evident in ESL and EFL learners since their L1 may have its politeness discourse. Moreover, their culture and urgency of needs possibly regulate their expression of themselves.

In the Philippine context, English is sometimes considered the L1 of many students in terms of the L1 definition of "the most comfortable language" that language speakers use and not the sequence of language acquisition. This is attributed to the students' dominant, if not complete, usage of English at home and in other settings for interaction, such as school and the online community. Besides this, in most cases of young learners from certain institutions, talking in English is natural because of their socioeconomic and financial status, which further provides them with more opportunities and resources to use and develop their English proficiency. However, this may not be similar to writing in English, specifically in formal situations, like emails and communicating with their teachers or school authorities. In the context of the cooperating school, no email writing is taught in Grade 7 and is only reinforced in Grade 8, unlike in the national curriculum in English. Furthermore, many studies explored politeness in emails at the tertiary level by NS and NNS, including the Philippines. Yet, little is known about the effect of explicit instruction on politeness strategies in emailing teachers and in developing students' pragmatic knowledge, specifically at the high school level and the emailing competence of Grade 7 students for particular reasons. Therefore, this study attempted to analyze the general structure and politeness strategies of request, apology, and invitation emails written by male Grade 7 students which can also account for how they present themselves through their language use. In particular, the research questions are:

1. What are the degrees of directness and politeness of the rhetoric language applied by the Grade 7 students?

2. What are the politeness and linguistic features of their email discourse?

Theoretical Framework

The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) was applied to examine the students' structure, language features, and politeness strategies in their emails. It enumerated three major levels of directness when making requests. First, direct explicit is an imperative that outright reveals the act or considers the act as done. Second, conventionally indirect is an act with contextual preconditions and usage of modal verbs that helped mitigate the threat on the recipient's negative "face." Third, non-conventional indirect is utilized with open-ended indirect hints or contextual clues, usually with grounders (a partial reference to the elements needed to perform the act) needed for the recipient to agree to the sender's request. Under these three levels are sublevels or categories to detail the scale of the speech acts' directness and indirectness in terms of lexico-syntactic, pragmalinguistic, and sociopragmatic components. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of Politeness Strategies in Apologies, Requests, and Invitations (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984)

Apologies	Request Strategies / Invitations	Request Expressions
1. Explanation	1. Mood derivable	9. Preparator
2. Expression	2. Explicit performative (performative)	10. Grounder
3. Offer of repair	3. Want statement	11. Disarmer
4. Promise of forbearance	4. Hedged performative (modals, "hope")	12. Expander
	5. Obligation	13. Promise
	6. Suggestory formula	14. Imposition minimizer
	7. Query preparatory	15. Apologies
	8. Hints	

To expound on the results, the politeness and face theories (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1982) were used to explore how the students' pragmatic competence and identities were reflected through their communicative language use and considerations of the recipient. According to politeness theory, each individual possesses a positive face and a negative face (Goffman, 1982). The positive face stresses solidarity and reflects the desire to be connected to a particular group and be appreciated or feel good by being approved of by others. The negative face prioritizes deference and concerns the need to be independent and free from impositions and to protect personal rights. In relation to this, the face theory encompasses face-threatening acts (FTAs) that represent damage or threat to another person's face. On the contrary, we perform face-saving acts (FSAs) to lessen the likelihood of FTAs. These are associated with the sociological variables influencing the politeness degrees and strategies are power, distance, and rank (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2005).

Four politeness strategies are arranged from least to most polite. First, "bald-on record" is the most direct because the speaker and the listener know each other well. Second, "positive politeness" aims to reduce the threat to the positive face. It stresses solidarity and decreases social distance. Third, "negative politeness" is characterized by hedging, yes-no questions, and the use of modals and politeness markers (please / kindly). Fourth, "off-record" is the most indirect because the request is vague or not mentioned but implied. More politeness is recommended and expected when there is greater perceived hierarchical power (Van Dijk, 1989) and more social distance between the participants. In every interaction, we consider the speaker/sender's face and the listener/receiver's face. Thus, politeness in linguistics does not teach the literal definition and action of respect, but rather how not to enforce imposition and threaten faces while maintaining conventional appropriateness, especially when people are requested or expected to do something that they do not want to do or is not convenient. These four politeness strategies were used to identify the most prevalent email approaches of the students when they perform communicative acts through emails to their teachers.

Methodology

Research Design

This is a mixed methods study that gathered the profile of the participants from a convenience sampling and involved collecting the content of their emails. The process of data examination through the identification of the patterns and strategies utilized as politeness moves, tabulation with justified observations, and examination of the results through connections with previous findings were also conducted.

Participants

The participants of the study were 96 male Grade 7 students in an all-boy private school in the Philippines. They had attended online classes for two years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (grades 5-6). While the majority are Philippine-born, two are Koreans, and one participant has lived in the United Kingdom for six years. Most have been studying at the said institution since grade school and demonstrate more language proficiency in English than Filipino. Some claim that English is their L1 since English is their home language and main medium in communicating with others outside their household (e.g., online community, classmates, and the like). Therefore, they regard English as the language they are most comfortable with in interacting with others.

They were chosen as the participants because they were the students of one of the researchers, which made communication easier with them and their parents or guardian(s) regarding the informed consent of the research. Prior to the first day of data gathering, the researcher explained to the students the objectives and the significance of their two sessions in learning about email politeness. The parents were emailed to share with them what was discussed with the students along with the permission to include the email outputs of their sons for the study and possible public access to the research. Hence, both students and parents or guardian(s) were informed about the study and how data privacy (according to the institution's research ethics and protocols) would be practiced throughout the research procedures. For instance, after the emails were collected and before they were analyzed, the students' names were removed for anonymity. This was done by sending the Google Forms of the informed consent to the students which contained the research details based on the guidelines given by the research ethics office of the institution. Although all parents who replied to the researcher granted their consent, those who did not respond were considered "denied permission" to use their sons' works. Hence, these were not included in the data.

Another basis of this research was their teacher's observation of the need for the students to develop their email constructions as displayed from the emails she had received from them since the start of the school year. Despite the evident communicative proficiency in English of the students, it does not directly transfer to their academic writing skills and pragmatic competence in the same language.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering happened in two days. The first procedure occurred as an independent study where the students checked the simplified lesson material by the researcher about email conventions based on Nguyen et al.'s (2015) article. Hence, no direct discussion or guidance from the teacher was done. This brief module consisted of the following parts:

- Reasons for learning conventions and appropriate language use in institutional emails;
- How email politeness goes beyond writing skills because of pragmatic elements, particularly respect, social rank and distance, and cultural influences;
- Email structure;
- Types of rhetorical moves (framing moves for opening and closing, content moves for direct and indirect requests, mitigating moves for supporting details and reasons, and aggravator moves which must be avoided);
- Sample teacher's feedback on an email's request that showed the pragmatic infelicities of the rhetorical moves used in the content, and
- Analysis of inappropriate and appropriate sample emails.

Examples of well-constructed emails were also included for the participants to have models to follow. At the end of the module, they were tasked to write three emails in English: requesting to extend a deadline, apologizing for misconduct or misbehavior, and inviting the teacher to an organization's activity. They must accomplish the task within their one-hour onsite session. Although there was no direct guidance from the researcher, they could still approach her for clarification. Only a few students were excused to submit beyond the session's time.

The second procedure occurred online. The teacher presented the same lesson material while emphasizing the reasons why students should observe email conventions and polite language toward teachers. General oral feedback was mentioned while samples of both appropriate and inappropriate emails were dissected with the students to direct their attention to the conventions they need to observe, as well as the infelicities they need to avoid, particularly the expressions that impose actions. The students were also asked how to rectify certain word choices in the email and how certain lines, specifically those that contain the speech acts and rhetorical moves, affect the recipient's interpretation to heighten their awareness about email pragmatics. Finally, a joint construction was conducted for each speech act (request, apology, and invitation) by demonstrating sample lines for each email part and eliciting suggestions from the students on how to complete the email content.

After the teacher's feedback and guidance through the email analyses and joint construction, they were asked to rewrite or develop their previous emails: either they used a previous or a new one. Questions were quickly answered, but the

online mode may have affected several outputs due to intermittent connection and possible inattentiveness of some students. Thus, it was expected that not everyone could send three re-casted emails for two reasons: they did not see the need to improve it, or they did not follow the instructions. A total of 327 emails were collected after the second session.

Data Analysis Procedure

The emails were encoded on Google Slides and Sheets and were grouped accordingly: section, student, email type (request, apology, and invitation), and construction time (without and with guidance.) Individually, two of the researchers analyzed each email by identifying the present politeness strategies in each email type and categorizing these rhetorical moves under the 19 sublevels of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). The columns listed the email number while the rows served as the labels and count for request, apology, and invitation strategies. A tally of strategies was also done to determine the most often utilized strategy sublevels per speech act before and after the teacher's feedback. Other features of the email content and remarks about language use were noted (e.g., too many intensifier words, very direct, email was detailed, and the like). After the respective analysis, the two researchers compared their results and comprehensively discussed each email finding, specifically the classifications of strategies and discourse features, until one Google Sheets was made to summarize their collaborative evaluation. The computed Cohen's Kappa inter-rater reliability between the two researchers was 0.9095 which is considered as near perfect agreement.

To answer RQ 1, the three levels of directness by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) were used to classify each student's emails. The researchers solely focused on how the students constructed their apologies, invitations, and requests. This was done to both emails constructed without (Day 1: pre-feedback) and with (Day 2: post-feedback) the teacher's guidance. To answer RQ 2, the 19 sublevels of politeness strategies (4 apologies, 8 request strategies/invitations, and 7 request expressions) were used to label each part that carried the three speech acts and those that served as significant components of the email content and structure. Afterward, an overall analysis was conducted to determine the rhetoric manner, linguistic moves, and inferences about the students' pragmatic knowledge and language use, which was accompanied by explanations based on the Politeness and Face Theories (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1982).

Findings/Results

This section answered inquiries about the degrees of directness and politeness of the rhetoric language in the emails of Grade 7 students to their teachers. Apart from this, the politeness and linguistic features of their email discourse were analyzed.

Degrees of Directness and Politeness

In both pre- and post-feedback, the students were conventionally indirect (CI) in their requests for deadline extensions and invitations, commonly phrasing their statements as questions and using modals. In contrast, most students were directly explicit (DE) in their apologies, usually stating "I apologize..." and "I am sorry...". Apologies are FTAs to the speaker's positive face, yet they can also be threatening to the listener's negative face, as the sender includes a statement expecting the recipient's forgiveness, even considering the act already done. Only a few were non-conventionally indirect (NCI) in all emails since prior to doing the email writing, they had a lecture on email conventions and how time was a precious commodity and were encouraged to state their reason clearly yet politely for writing the email. These are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Levels of Directness and Politeness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) in the Three Speech Acts

Speech Act	Directness Level	Without Guidance	With Guidance
Apology	Direct explicit	64%	73%
	Conventionally indirect	36%	18%
	Non-conventionally indirect	0%	9%
Invitation	Direct explicit	23%	32%
	Conventionally indirect	70%	40%
	Non-conventionally indirect	7%	28%
Request	Direct explicit	16%	10%
	Conventionally indirect	83%	70%
	Non-conventionally indirect	1%	20%

The chi-square statistic for the directness levels in apology was 12.99 with a p-value of .001514, indicating a significant result of $p < .05$. In the invitation, the chi-square was 22.25 with a p-value of .000015, showing that the result is significant at $p < .05$. Lastly, for the request, the chi-square was 19.68 with the p-value of .000053, denoting a significant result at $p < .05$. These signify that the teacher's feedback and discussion of email politeness strategies and the joint construction with the student's active participation are deemed important to recognize not only the language conventions and appropriate rhetorical moves in institutional emails but also to heighten their pragmatic awareness for each kind of speech act. For instance, being directly explicit in apologies and invitations is necessary for them to convey their intended

message to the recipient. However, such directness is recommended to be minimized when the students are the ones who ask for favors from their teachers to avoid negative impressions. Moreover, being conventionally indirect is not always necessary, especially when reasons or justifications provided have been extended to “too much information” than what is relevant to the email matter.

The following excerpts are shown to distinguish the varying politeness degrees in emails:

Direct explicit (DE)

Request: “I ask for the deadline to be moved to a later date.” “Thank you in advance for considering my request.”

Apology: “I [want to] apologize for my misbehavior.” “I know that I made a mistake, so I am sorry...”

Invitation: “Come and join us...” “I [want to] invite you to our annual event...” “I am inviting you...”

Conventionally indirect (CI)

Request: “I would like to ask for the deadline to be moved to a later date.” “I was wondering if I can...”

Apology: “I would like to apologize for misbehaving in class.” “I hope that you are able to forgive me.”

Invitation: “Would you like to join our organization’s event?” “I hope that you can join us.” “It would be amazing if you are available...”

Non-conventionally indirect (NCI)

Request: “There was a power outage.” “I had no sufficient time for the task.”

Apology: “I did not mean to do it.” “I did not know that I commit a violation.”

Invitation: “We have an event next week.” “Do you like (inserts an interest)?”

Sample expressions or rhetorical moves present in the emails:

Explanation: “We had a lot of assignments due on the same day...”

Expression: “The inconvenience caused by my rowdiness was shameful...”

Offer of repair: “I can submit my homework tomorrow with assured quality, and I can accept score deductions...”

Promise of forbearance: “I promise not to misbehave in your class next time.”

Explicit performative: “I apologize with my mischievous behavior...”

Want statement: “Our class wants you to attend...”

Hedged performative: “We hope to see you in the event.”

Obligation: “You must come to the program because you are the...”

Suggestory formula: “If you confirm your attendance today, you will get a chance to...”

Query preparatory: “Would you mind moving the quiz next week?”

Hints: “We heard that you like cats, and our event happens to have...”

Preparators: “This week, many student organizations are getting ready for the fund-drive for our partner communities...”

Grounders: “I am the current organization head of...and we are doing this event for...”

Disarmer: “It is just alright if you cannot grant this request.”

Expander: “There were too many tasks due within the same day, and some of them have more assessment weights. I’m also failing two of those subjects that’s why I needed to finish them first.”

Promise: “I promise that you will enjoy the performances!”

Imposition minimizer: “We understand if you will not be free this weekend given that teachers are also busy during this school event.”

Apologies: “My classmates and I are apologizing for the short notice of this request.”

The majority of the students employed bald-on record and negative politeness strategies. For the bald-on record, the demands were straight to the point, hinting at a sense of urgency and assurance that the recipient would grant their request. It could also be the result of transferring their speaking manner to writing and heeding the teacher’s advice that not all teachers have the luxury of time to read lengthy emails. Thus, they must not be indirect and should include the details that the recipient might inquire about. Another reason would be the close familiarity of the students with the teacher who was their English teacher and, in one section, their class adviser. As for the negative politeness, the students tried to lessen the coercive force of their requests by adding politeness markers including hedging words and modal verbs. Most of the requests, whether in apology or invitation, were constructed to be answered by yes or no. Nevertheless, due to the presence of bald-on records, the teacher possessed limited freedom in making a decision that would break the students’ expectations since the sense of obligation was also implied.

Most emails contained downtoners, or words or phrases that reduce the imposition of the sender’s favor or action. Moreover, the politeness marker “po” was mostly used to soften impositions while “God bless” was utilized as a salutation. Although pragmalinguistic competence was observed in most emails in both pre- and post-feedback constructions, institutional power, rank, and distance were not much considered, which led to a vague sociopragmatic competence.

Discussion

Features of of Email Discourse and Politeness Strategies

1. Apology

All students expressed their apologies, but not many provided explanations for their (mis)behavior and promised not to do the deed again, while a handful offered repair. Most used intensifiers in their apology through repetition (“I am sorry for...Sorry again.”) and the use of the subjunct adverbials “so,” “really,” “very,” “sincerely,” and “absolutely”. Many students utilized a direct request strategy as a closing, stating “Please forgive me...” and “I hope you...”.

Post-feedback, only a few students included an offer of repair for their “wrongful” actions. According to Leech (1983), an apology is an attempt to recreate the imbalance between the speaker and the hearer caused by the offense. Offers of repair or promise might be viewed as downgraders because the speaker asks for forgiveness.

Apologies are an admission of wrongdoing and a request for forgiveness, yet Emails 23 and 27 were framed in such a way that had a high imposition on the recipient to forgive the sender. The syntactic downgrader “if it is ok” was an afterthought to the clause “I would really appreciate it”. Meanwhile, Email 27 was more FTA than Email 23 because of the sender’s declaration that he would change and do better, so the teacher must heed.

With guidance, students mainly used intensifiers and downtoners to minimize the FT on the recipient. Line 2 seemed to imply that the sender was apologizing on behalf of his classmates. He also codeswitched by using the word “makulit”, the Filipino term for “mischievous”. This could be influenced by her using the word “makulit” instead of naughty or mischievous because of the subtle distinction of how this Filipino word captures a specific kind of conduct and behavior. See the table below for the email excerpts.

Without guidance	With guidance
- “I hope you could forgive me. I would really appreciate it if it is ok.” [Email 23] - “I hope you can accept this for I will change and do better for me and the class.” [Email 27]	¹Hi Ma’am m——, ²I apologise for my classmates giving you a very hard time when we run around and being very makulit (mischievous) when we had a mini salo salo (feast). ³Please find the heart to forgive us. ⁴your student, J—— [Email 4]

Specifically, Email 22 below could account for the student’s awareness of the gravity of his misconduct that could not be simply overlooked.

Hello po Ms. B—,

“From the bottom of my heart, I apologize for acting up in class yesterday. I thought it would be humorous to my classmates and didn’t realize the severity of my actions and the situation. I am not asking for your forgiveness, however I hope that I will be able to become a better person in your class.”

Your Student,

T— O— [Email 22]

The differences in the students' rhetorical moves in apologies can be accounted for by several factors. First, given that the task of writing an apology is an imaginative situation, there may be a lack of authenticity from a student-initiated email. This is due to the nature of the school addressing such situations immediately through the student's class adviser and/or guidance counselor who will then meet the student to talk to them directly. Moreover, most students were likely to send an informal "sorry" through a chat to a teacher instead of an email. Second, the socioeconomic status of the participants may not have allowed them to see the gravity of several of their disciplinary actions, and would often treat them as dismissible because of the minimal sanctions based on the student handbook and how the school administrators will resolve conflicts instantly. Third, they were not exposed to formal language yet and were not yet taught how to consider their audience in a purposive kind of writing, making it difficult for them to adapt their linguistic choice to their social alignment (Lasan, 2016) and discourse goal.

2. Invitation

Most student invitations utilized syntactic downgraders and appealed to the recipient's positive face by mentioning the prospect of the recipient having fun at the said event or highlighting her talent/s. For the guided activity, they commonly used the if clause as a syntactic downgrader and explicitly stated that she might refuse. Several students used exclamation points to reduce tension and to maintain a positive mood regardless of the teacher's decision. This somehow lessened the formal tone since they must value both expression and structure in writing an email to a non-equal counterpart. The informal term "wanna" (want to) was used in Email 16 found in the second example under "with guidance". The indirect approach of most students echoed Geranco's (2023) findings where Filipino high school students favor indirect language as a sign of showing respect and shared respect-based communication to their teachers and other authority figures for maintaining social harmony.

Without guidance	With guidance
- "Of course you don't need to attend but I would appreciate a small amount of time having fun with our teachers in —." [Email 4]	- "It is alright if you decline as long as I am informed." [Email 7]
- "I know you might be busy but I just know that you will enjoy it." [Email 2]	- "If you wanna come, you can come! but if you don't wanna come it's alright!" [Email 16]
- "The class and I saw you dance recently, and I was amazed with your skill!" [Email 14]	- "If you can go then that is great news since you know a lot about Booktok. If you aren't able to make it then it's okay!" [Email 21]

Email 24 below was a distinctive invitation in the guided activity as the sender used emoticons, "po", and "God bless" as downgraders. Since politeness is deeply intertwined with Filipino cultural norms (Ravago et al., 2024), address terms, like the "po" and "opo" honorifics (Velasco, 2023) and mitigation of request or refusal phrases to soften coercion or impact of the action through modals and "maybe" (Boccagni et al., 2020) were evident when addressing someone in a position of power (Colin-Jones & Colin-Jones, 2006). While emoticons could convey a sender's feelings or how they wanted their statement to be received and have pragmatic functions (Li & Yang, 2018), they were still considered informal since there was an imbalance between the participants, like the use of "po", the use of "God bless" was the sender's attempt to minimize imposition by invoking similar religious beliefs since both the sender and the recipient were connected with a Catholic educational institution which generally has Catholic stakeholders. Still, given the Philippine context, "God bless" was a common salutation to wish for someone's welfare not only on occasions but also in ending a conversational exchange. This particular student also shared that his dream was to be a priest. Lastly, there was still an evident unawareness that contractions and deductions (clipped word "org" for organization) must not be utilized in formal avenues of communication.

Wonderful Morning, Ma'am M—! [emoticon]
I am (name of the student) from (section) and a member of the Ateneo Liturgical Ministry org. Are you available to do the Prayers of the Faithful for the Montserrat Titular Feast Mass po? My org is inviting teachers from Montserrat Cluster as readers for the Mass in the Kostka Chapel. Since I am the only Montserrati member of the ALM, the org moderators told me to ask a few teachers from Montserrat if they are okay with doing the readings for the Mass so I thought about asking you po.
Thank you very much and God bless!
Your student,
(name of the student) [emoticon][Email 24]

Noticeable among some emails were the non-specification of the organizations and vague information about the events. Furthermore, clipped terms (org for organization; mod for moderator) and improper format in capitalization diminish the formality. Meanwhile, Email 3 stood out among the rest as the politest invitation as it was more carefully framed and

constructed compared with the others. Despite Line 6 being a direct request, the imposition was minimized by Line 7. There were a few instances where grounders preceded the requests. Email 7 was unnecessarily long due to expanders. It could be interpreted as the sender being too eager to explain what the event was all about in the hopes that she would accept the invitation. Nonetheless, several offered the option to refuse, whereas others used the hedged performative as a request strategy. Another noted move from invitations was compliments and small talk to boost one's positive face and to build rapport (Colin-Jones & Colin-Jones, 2006; Tenedero, 2022) for ease of conveying the students' message. This aligns with how Filipinos incorporate euphemisms, compliments, appealing to someone's interest, and the likes as part of their politeness strategies (Ravago et al., 2024).

Without guidance	With guidance
- "I would really like you to join because I feel like you would be a really great org mod. I thank you for your time and consideration." [Email 4]	Good day, Ms. M—!
- "I would like to see you in the audience!" [Email 10]	I hope you are doing well.
- "Is it ok if I would like to invite you to an Org? It would be really fun if you were there..." [Email 23]	I am inviting you to an org event for the math club, I understand that it will be hard for you to attend this event since you are very busy checking quizzes, summative assessments and assignments, so please feel free to reply to this email.
¹ Dear ma'am B—,	
² I hope all is well with you.	
³ I hope this letter finds you in great health.	
⁴ The school is going to celebrate a Halloween party on October 28 2022.	This event is called the Tower of Hanoi, this event will take place on November 9 2022 at 10:20 AM.
⁵ We would like to invite you to attend our activity in our Glee club organization.	You can find us on the 2nd floor of the MST lobby, on the right of the stairs. This event was made possible by Mr. A— B. D—.
⁶ We will be waiting for your presence.	
⁷ We hope you will be able to attend the program.	
⁸ Looking forward to having a memorable celebration with you.	This event is made up of a game called Tower of Hanoi, this game is about 3-7 discs and a wooden board with 3 sticks, you basically have to move every disc from the left to the right and you can't put a bigger disc on top of the smaller disc. Thank you for taking your time in reading this email Ms. M—!
⁹ Thank you for your time consideration	
¹⁰ Respectfully yours,	
J— L— B— [Email 3]	Sincerely, Your student A— D— [Email 7]

It was noted that the teacher advised them to be detailed in their invitation and to include answers to the invitation's WH-questions. Yet, there were still some that composed a general invite, which could be interpreted as merely finishing the assigned task (see Email 10). Meanwhile, Email 20 increased a negative FTA, as he specified that she needed to provide a reason why she could not attend. For the guided activity, they wrote implicit invitations (see Email 23) to minimize the negative FTA. Many omitted syntactic downgraders and even employed sweeteners as lexical and syntactic downgraders, like "favorite teacher," "thank you for the opportunity," and "We hope you can talk about your pet cats..." Particularly, Email 19 implied that the recipient was knowledgeable about cats. Doing so not only minimized the imposition, but it might also increase the possibility of the recipient accepting the invitation since it appealed to the positive face. See the table below for the email excerpts.

Without guidance	With guidance
- <i>"I would like to invite you to an org activity I have, I would like to invite you to this org activity because I think it would be fun to invite you to this..." [Email 10]</i> - <i>"I hope you may attend, but if you cannot, please reply to this email with an optional reason on why you cannot make it..." [Email 20]</i>	- <i>"We hope you can talk about your pet cats and how to take care of them, so we can know more about cats" [Email 19]</i> - <i>"I have received news from my Org Moderator that we will be having an important activity next session related to teachers. According to my Moderator, we will be inviting our favorite teachers to play with us in an elimination tournament!" [Email 20]</i> - <i>"We have planned this event because we want to showcase what we have learned in the past few months. If you have a guest, please feel free to bring them..." [Email 23]</i>

3. Request

For the exercise without the teacher's guidance, despite having read the email conventions lecture, some students failed to "acknowledge their own lower institutional status and the faculty's higher institutional status" (Nguyen, 2019). They also addressed the recipient with her first name (Ma'am —) rather than her last name (Ms. —). However, one student wrote "Mrs." when she was not married. This could be interpreted as somewhat disrespectful, as some teachers are particular about how the students address them. For the deadline extension request, most of them employed direct request strategies and provided grounders to mitigate the impact of their request to their teacher. Interestingly, some included "po", a politeness marker in Filipino.

Several attempted to minimize imposition by utilizing lexical and syntactic downgraders on their requests, particularly distancing elements (e.g., "I was wondering..."), hedging devices such as if clauses, and downtoners (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). In doing so, they were implying that the recipient could refuse to grant their request. However, the reiteration of their reasons, placed either before or after these downgraders, reduced the effect the minimizing of imposition might have achieved (see Emails 3, 7, and 14 in the table below under "without guidance").

Meanwhile, in the guided task, they retained their syntactic downgraders while others phrased their requests as queries. Interestingly, only one student apologized in advance for the inconvenience his request might have caused the recipient, which showed pragmalinguistic awareness. Furthermore, some promised that the event of them asking for an extension would not happen again, which could be inferred as an FTA, implying that the recipient should comply. (See Email 2 in "with guidance").

Without guidance	With guidance
- <i>"I hope you can consider this request po." [Email 9]</i> - <i>"May you extend it po since I have a vacation to attend?" [Email 11]</i> - <i>"I am experiencing a technical problem with the homework you sent po." [Email 24]</i> - <i>"It's okay if you don't extend it, I'm just asking for extra time since I was absent a week ago." [Email 3]</i> - <i>"...if you don't mind I would wish that you would extend my deadline for the 'creative writing'. I sadly was not able to do it since my internet service provider had some issues." [Email 7]</i> - <i>"Recently, I have been on a vacation with my family and I was not able to do my tasks during that time. If it is ok with you, may I ask for a deadline extension for the Homework about the book we are reading for class?" [Email 14]</i>	- <i>"... I was wondering if you could extend the deadline of an assignment as I will be unable to answer it on the given deadline. I am very sorry if you feel as if this notice is too short and I wholeheartedly understand if you are unable to extend it." [Email 1]</i> - <i>"... The next time this happens I will know to do it before doing anything else so I wouldn't become late." [Email 2]</i>

Email 21 of the guided activity was unnecessarily long, and it contained more than one request despite the sender trying to mitigate the imposition in some parts. There were four direct request strategies in this email, namely, Lines 2, 4, 5, and 7. Despite the length, the sender did not mention the grounder.

¹Hello po ma'am M---! It's J--- from Grimaltos.

²I want to request a talent show on Friday next week.

³The event next week has been confirmed to happen so that means we have lots of time to create our own event during homeroom time.

⁴I would like to have a system where it is kind of like America's Got Talent.

⁵If you have free time tomorrow, can you help us class officers to prepare for this?

⁶Student A and Student B are on board, so we have all agreed to have a meeting to discuss this tomorrow or on Wednesday.

⁷I know that this event may not be possible, but we want to talk about the main representatives for the event as well as how it is going to work.

⁸We all truly know that you are very busy working as a teacher, and the talent show may not even be possible due to the school guidelines and other issues.

⁹If you have any questions, just ask us during the future meeting,

¹⁰We will be waiting for you!

¹¹Best regards, J---! [Email 21]

In the material, it was emphasized that time was a precious commodity, so being clear and direct was important. However, a few students still did not employ proper framing and request modification devices nor observed brevity. For instance, Email 22 was too upfront and was particularly FT to the recipient. The grounder "Since I don't really like this type of music" could have been worded differently to at least minimize the negative FTA, though the next sentence implied that he was aware of his potentially offensive remark. This may be one manifestation of how students struggle to shift their language tone and formality that are largely influenced by their informal peer interactions (Ishihara & Cohen, 2015; Iwasaki, 2011), whom they engage in oral and written conversations with even after school hours, unlike in the case of their limited communication with their teachers.

"I would like to ask if I can listen to my own music while waiting for class to start. Since I don't really like this type of music. I hope you don't get offended by what I said. Because I am totally fine if you won't allow me to listen to my own music." [Email 22]

Some students were too direct when providing grounders, going as far as employing upgraders as a modification device (see Email 8.) By using the lexical upgraders "unreasonable," "more reasonable," and "at least consider," the recipient might misconstrue that the sender was subtly implying that she was inconsiderate. Ultimately, the students should remember that the recipient was their teacher; thus, framing is crucial. For instance, some emails (see Emails 10 and 12) appeared that the students were on equal footing with her.

"I find this to be an unreasonable time limit for this homework. I hope you will read this and at least consider extending the deadline to a more reasonable deadline." [Email 8]

"I request an extension of the deadline for the homework you assigned..." [Email 10]

"I noticed the deadline for a recent assignment was made earlier than the amount of time it takes for you to do it. It seems short in my opinion so I am requesting that you extend it..." [Email 12]

Email 27 below was a special case for both independent and guided tasks, as he composed a strongly worded email despite the activities being a simulation. Instead of the sender attempting to mitigate the impact of the request, he amplified it by using upgraders. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), upgraders are used to aggravate the request. When they are used, as shown below, they make the sender "sound" demanding instead of making a request and complaining instead of simply providing a reason for the request. Further, the use of exclamation points instead reflects the sender's strong emotion. After the feedback session, the sender revised his request. While this email did not sound as direct and somewhat disrespectful as the previous one, it still did not meet some guidelines provided in the email conventions lecture, specifically on what constitutes a formal email as the sender did not properly address the sender, did not include an opening, used contractions, and ignored proper mechanics. This could have been influenced by his individual background where he shared that his interactions with his immediate environment are mostly direct conveyance of what one wants to say and based on their interpretation of the matter. Moreover, he was born and raised in an ENL country until he transferred to his current school, which aligns with the direct politeness strategies of NS cultures.

Without guidance	With guidance
<i>Good morning ma'am!</i>	<i>Good morning ma'am</i>
Grounder 1 <i>With all due respect, I think the deadline is a bit too tight for the schedule,</i>	Direct RS 1 <i>can you please consider this request ma'am?</i>
Direct RS 1 <i>and I'd like the deadline to be extended;</i>	Grounder <i>The schedule's been quite tight lately and I don't think I'll be able to complete this task in time.</i>
Grounder 2 <i>I do not believe that you or the Department has made an inappropriate decision with the deadline and that I am in an unfortunate position to be unable to complete the task.</i>	Direct RS 2 <i>Thank you ma'am for your consideration. [Email 27]</i>
Direct RS 2 <i>Thank you for considering this request!</i>	
<i>Have a great day ahead! [Email 27]</i>	

The role of language proficiency in terms of linguistic output was evident with minimal typographical errors and grammatical inconsistencies. It is noteworthy to mention that most of the participants have been enrolled in the cooperating school, which uses English as their main medium of instruction throughout the grade levels in basic education. Their English curricula also somehow differ in several content and order from the national curriculum from the Department of Education. Ultimately, the school environment dominantly utilizes English in all modes of communication. In the writing skills aspect, the students seemed to either strictly follow the patterns from the appropriate emails or tried incorporating their writing style with slight changes in typical email content. However, the latter still inevitably showed the influence of their speaking or conversational manner of interaction, which made a few informal tones in their emails.

Email Structure

1. Apology

Email 3 below is one of the many examples that used the pattern “salutation–expression of apology–explanation–offer of repair–closing”. He took responsibility for placating the recipient. Moreover, he particularly expressed a trait of self-deficiency (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) by admitting that he was “so ashamed and embarrassed” with his reaction, thus, threatening his own positive face.

“I am writing to ask for your forgiveness for my actions this morning. If you do not remember, today I was messing around and distracting my classmates. I am so ashamed and embarrassed with how I reacted to the situation. I am so sorry. My intentions were not to disrupt the whole learning session. And to make up for it, I will do extra work on the homework given to us this week. Once again, I am so sorry.” [Email 3]

The pattern “salutation–expression–promise–closing” was also observed in several emails that offered a commitment to not repeat the same mistakes or misconduct instead of proposing courses of action for improved behavior and/or performance. In the case of high school students, avoiding conflict and maintaining harmony are observed in the academe as part of following Filipino norms and minimizing gender differences (Geranco, 2023).

2. Invitation

Most invitations followed the pattern “salutation–opening–request–grounder–closing”. Some students introduced themselves, and many provided grounders and even expanders (additional information) on their invitations. The invitations were framed as hedged performative, commonly using the phrase “I would like...”

3. Request

Most students introduced themselves and included closings and provided their grounders first before stating their main request. Hence, the pattern of “salutation – opening – grounder – request – closing” from NNS. Also, a student used the suggestory formula by trying to frame the request as beneficial to the rest of the class (see Email 7 below).

“... I think that it would be best for a lot of students because since they have a lot of work to do extending this would be best.” [Email 7]

It was noted that many students used the native speaker (NS) pattern salutation – opening – request – grounder – closing. However, the sender of Email 15 might have unknowingly aggravated the event, further threatening the recipient's negative face. His grounder appeared more as an excuse than a valid reason.

"I would like to discuss extending the homework that you sent, because it's very hard to do, and I may not have a lot of time to do it. If you can, could you extend the deadline for it?..." [Email 15]

It is noted that since the majority of the participants speak in English and are more exposed to English language inputs than Filipino, even certain cultural and language norms have been transferred to them. Furthermore, the participants' efforts to follow email conventions and understand sociopragmatic elements in emails were observed. This demonstrated their attempt to conform with what they learned from the brief module and the discussion with their teacher's guidance and feedback, specifically in terms of showing adaptability and combining traditional and modern politeness norms (Llorica & Sosas, 2022). Modern politeness norms in email for the contemporary student may include the use of emoticons or emojis and other ways of greeting as substitutes for the usual opening and closing salutations.

Conclusion

Based on the data used, it was evident that most of the students were aware of politeness in their emails. These behaviors may or may not have been affected by the guidance of the teacher. While some students used words to show politeness ("po", "God bless", and downgraders), others were more direct in requesting and not aware of or did not acknowledge their institutional status. They knew that they should maintain politeness in writing to their teachers, but they were not yet adequately informed of the intricacies of email etiquette. Due to this, they mainly applied bald-on record and negative politeness strategies.

In apologies, all followed this format: salutation – opening – expression – promise. Occasionally, explanations of their actions were included and, rarely, offered repair before the promise. In invitations, as most senders thanked the recipient as part of the closing, it raised the negative FTA since they expected a positive response from the recipient. In requests, with and without the teacher's feedback, the majority constructed a salutation–opening–grounder–request–closing pattern, but a good number followed a request–grounder fashion. Since time is a "precious commodity", the students did well in instantly stating the reason for their emails/requests.

It was noteworthy to mention that several students were more mindful of their word choice, tone, and formal approach. They also exhibited a more evident communicative and pragmatic competence by acknowledging that they are on an unequal footing with the teacher and should not impose their personal needs. No grammar and mechanics errors were found in their email, and their content was well-constructed, which would not hint that they were still in high school. It was inferred that the produced emails may have been influenced by two important factors: how the students viewed the teacher and the comments made about how they could address her, the absence of introduction, and the semi-formal conversation-like tone of the students' emails. In addition, one may assume that teachings and discipline imparted by one's family had a direct role in their (underlying) behavior. Thus, even if they were not taught to be polite when corresponding with their teachers, their instincts to do so automatically worked and influenced how they wrote. It is also important to note that students who have attended leadership workshops or have been class officers have more exposure to this formal situation. Hence, they were more inclined to demonstrate politeness to others.

Overall, this research supports the need for explicit and continuous pragmatic instruction as early as in the basic education. Pragmatic instructions given to students cannot be an overnight change. They need to be reinforced with consistent practice to be rooted in the discipline of students. Sociopragmatic elements, such as politeness and certain norms in specific text genres and modes of communication, can be integrated with other macro-skills. For example, besides teaching email structure and content patterns, this English writing lesson can incorporate activities where students should consider how their word choice and speech act (request, apology, and invitation) will be perceived by their target recipient. In elementary, letter writing is addressed to friends or families, whereas in high school, the recipients vary from industrial to business-related receivers. However, this kind of context may not still be authentic for high school students who are too young to imagine themselves working for companies or negotiating deals for their own businesses. In addition, writing and collaborative tasks, such as analyzing well-written and faulty emails and joint construction can make the students more conscious of how they compose their emails and how they present themselves and their intended action(s) in this type of communication. Lastly, teachers who receive student-initiated emails can guide the student sender about proper email etiquette and/or conventions if they see workable areas of improvement, which can be a helpful direct learning opportunity for the latter.

Recommendations

The current study is conducted on data from a class activity where the students were given instructions and acted in an artificial situation between the teacher and student. It is suggested to collect emails that are naturally sent to the teachers instead of concocted ones from a task and imaginary situations. In terms of instructional strategies, the teaching of purposive writing with audience consideration can be introduced in email writing. In this regard, a lesson with Aristotle's three fundamental persuasive techniques (ethos, pathos, and logos) can be incorporated, especially since these rhetorical

appeals can blend and exhibit one's sociopragmatic and linguistic resources. Authentic situations, such as organizing school events, communicating with faculty and administrators, and reaching out to other stakeholders of the school community can be maximized to practice email literacy and etiquette. To describe, several private institutions at the high school level conduct partnerships with small businesses, local governments, and other intra- and inter-school organizations where many events are mostly student-led. These can open opportunities for the students to utilize email as a means of formal, official, and effective communication for varied communicative goals, such as requests, invitations, negotiations, and persuasions. Ultimately, if school resources and availability allow, students and teachers can participate in certain "National Email / Letter Day(s)" where email politeness and etiquette can be a workshop activity.

With more authentic practice and guided feedback for improved email politeness and literacy, it is highly recommended that lessons about email construction beyond writing skills be reinforced not only within academic sessions but also in extracurricular activities and as means of official communication with institutional figures. Instead of treating it as an isolated lesson under writing, email construction with sociopragmatic competence goals can be taught across high school levels. This is suggested because many students are active student-leaders who initiate and prepare school-wide activities, cascade information to different school stakeholders, and actively make connections to people and organizations outside of their own institution. Email construction and politeness lessons can be adapted based on the common communicative interactions and purposes of students for specific timeframes or occasions (e.g., fund drives, Foundation Day, admission tests, etc.) in their grade level or academic calendar. With this, email studies can be conducted to see the longitudinal effects of explicit email instruction with sociopragmatic awareness, authentic purposes, and most importantly, feedback from teachers and other possible recipients, like peers and working professionals.

Furthermore, politeness strategies used by teachers with their supervisors and other stakeholders of the academic community (e.g., parents and school administrators) can be explored, as the power relationship and other sociological variables are somehow parallel. Another area to investigate is the emails written by Deaf students. It is noted that Deaf people are blunt and can be very direct even to those of higher authority. Comparing pragmatics and politeness strategies between hearing people and the Deaf in emails is a new area that is worth looking into.

Limitations

This study is limited to the context of the participants in a particular institution and grade level. Moreover, the emails were deemed tailor-fitted for the purpose of the topic and task, which may have influenced the content and structure in both non-guided and guided email writings. The results may vary in other situations, specifically for other grade levels and English-language using locales.

Ethics Statements

This study that involved human participants was reviewed and approved by the research ethics office of the cooperating institution. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study and an assent form was sent to their guardians via email. Hence, the guardians' consent was also gathered.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest from any of the authors.

Generative AI Statement

No AI has been used for or by this study.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Bernardino: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing, editing/reviewing, supervision. Guarin: Conceptualization, analysis, writing, editing/reviewing. Ablaza: Writing, editing/reviewing.

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