



## Tactics of Politeness in Personal E-mails

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper presents an analysis of data collected on the topic of politeness in personal electronic mail messages. The electronic environment may have an impact on communication, and this consequently influences the way people adapt to each other's face during the interaction process. The researcher is interested in the language used by the e-mailers in their initial and follow up contacts with known individuals, such as their friends, families, and colleagues. In other words, we are interested in if and how these texts incorporate politeness features, positive and negative, in their language and what reasons are standing behind increasing or decreasing them. The study presents a literature relevant to politeness theory, the presentation of the nature and results of the analysis, a discussion and finally the findings. Due to the flexibility, speed, informality of the medium and less control over writing, editing, and sending messages, results show that personal e-mail environment enables users to employ more positive polite style, and direct request strategies on one hand, while the negative politeness strategies and indirect requests are kept to the minimum.*

**Key Words:** Politeness, discourse, in/direct request, conventionally indirect, e-mails

### **Introduction**

Politeness is an important concept in interpersonal and intercultural communication. Politeness phenomena are

universal manifestations of etiquette and social relationship (Lee 2002, 1-2). In folk theories, politeness concerns those factors of speech style which can be polite or impolite. A single speech style in one context is viewed as polite, while in another context is regarded as impolite. In philosophical theories, politeness is looked at as one aspect of convention which puts rules for regulating the appropriate way of speaking. In linguistics, politeness is determined by the factors of situation (Arndt and Janney 1985, 283). Linguistic politeness is the use of language to maintain face needs for a smooth interaction (Lee, *ibid*).

The concept of face results in a wide range of strategies applied in order to avoid face-threatening acts (FTA). FTA is any utterance that threatens another's face. A request threatens the other's face as it accesses into his/her freedom, energy and attention, as in "give me a pen". Criticism also encroaches the other's self desire of approval and self-respect. David (2006, in Thorat 2006, 60) mentions some speech acts used by interlocutors to enact face and bear FTAs: "*Directives, Insults, Derides, Amusement, Disapproval, and Warnings.*" Holtgraves and Yang (1992, 246) define politeness as "phrasing one's remarks so as to minimize face threat".

Maier (1991, 191) points out that "the greater the seriousness of FTAs, the more likely the speakers will use politeness strategies to minimize the threat to the addressee." Certain politeness cues are used to soften the effect of FTAs, such as tag questions, long utterances, hedges, please markers (Brown and Levinson 1987, 61). This phenomenon is called face saving act (Yule 1996, 61), referring to the kind of action needed to reduce the violation of face to the minimum, and preserve the stability as far as possible (Renkema 1993, 13).

In performing a FTA, certain degree of politeness is required especially when interacting with higher-ups in order to assure compliance from the addressee. Lack of politeness has been associated with some features such as direct strategies (e.g., imperatives), with the presence of intensifiers (e.g., *right now, badly + verb, terribly + adjective*) and aggravating moves (e.g., threats, criticism), and lack of mitigating features (Blum-Kulka 1987). On the other hand, politeness is associated with indirect strategies (Brown & Levinson 1978) and the use of mitigating devices, such as

syntactic and lexical modifiers, as well as the non-hearer oriented request perspective (e.g., *Can I/we* as opposed to *can you*) (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989). In addition, lack of politeness has also been related with hint which is defined the most indirect speech act (e.g. *it's cold in here*), because "they testify to a lack of [a speaker's] concern for pragmatic clarity" (Blum-Kulka 1987, 144), although they are regarded in other places as the second most polite form as in Brown & Levinson's (1978, 1987. Fraser and Nolen (1981, 96) argue that "no sentence is inherently polite or impolite . . . It is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are used that determines the judgment of politeness". In addition, direct requests can be typically seen as more polite" if they are considered appropriate for a given situation depending on role expectations as well as rights and obligations of interaction participants" (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006a, 85). (See Biesenbach-Lucas 2007)

Politeness theory has mainly been investigated in face-to-face communication, with some exceptions which have studied politeness in computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as e-mail, chat, video conferencing, blogs. Tanskanen's (1998) attempted to study politeness strategies used in a mailing list discussion group. This study found that many spoken language strategies were also found in the discussion group, including the use of hedges, stance markers and third person pronouns. Hiltz & Turoff (1993) studied computer conferencing and found that politeness was decreased in this type of communication. Al-Shalawi (2001) found that the concept of face as either positive or negative was not supported by the interpretation of the most of the politeness strategies in the study.

Of these few studies, there is nothing about politeness in personal e-mails. The present work aims at looking at how the e-mail writers use politeness with known recipients such as family, friends, and colleagues. In particular, the research intends to obtain insight into how the concepts of face and politeness are embedded within the personal e-mail language, how e-mails promote more direct or indirect request strategies, and how a preferred linguistic realization by e-mailers for different request types is achieved.

The present study hypothesizes that personal e-mails might be characterized by features that reflect greater informality, so that the e-mail texts would use comparatively more positive politeness features than the negative one, and such texts might exhibit indirectness in their requests rather than directness, perhaps in an attempt to save time and effort. Because "the growth of the use of the technological innovations has witnessed the development of conventions or practices unique to each discourse, for example the widespread use of 'smiley face' and 'frowny face' symbols in e-mails" (Hobbs 2003, 244), the investigation of personal e-discourse offers some benefits. First, it provides understanding into the ways in which the new technology is used in contemporary communication. Second, because e-mail has become a pervasive tool for communication, there might exist certain types of politeness strategies unique to private e-mail messages. An analysis of their forms in relation to situational factors such as distance and medium provides a better understanding of the politeness conventions in naturally produced personal e-mail messages as an evolving genre.

Due to privacy and ethical concerns, studies on personal e-mails are rare. The present study has tended to examine e-mail messages sent to the researcher himself and from some people who were willing to participate with their e-mails in this study. Brown and Levinson's seminal work (1978; reissued 1987) of politeness and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) levels of directness are the modals used in the analysis of 116 e-mails collected from the researcher's e-mail box. The size of the sample is approximately 8381 words. Every politeness feature is stated first with frequency, and relative frequency, and then followed by a discussion and conclusions.

## **Modal of Analysis**

Different degrees of politeness can be displayed by language choice. Linguistic politeness gained a background in Goffman's (1955; 1967) seminal work of "face". Brown and Levinson (1987) use Goffman's concept of "face" to set a theory of linguistic politeness. Face is defined as the "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (66). Face consists of two types of need. The first is the negative face

which is the desire not to be disturbed and unimpeded in one's action. The second is the positive face which is the desire to be approved of and appreciated by others. Holtgraves (2002), points out that the theory of politeness and "face" has provided an answer to different questions, such as 'Why people do not always speak in the clearest, most direct, and most efficient way possible'. It is a theory about the manner in which a person phrases "things" given an assessment of the social situation.

Three variables influence the degree to which the act is performed.

1. Social distance between participants (little or no distance, +D, -D)

2. Power Relation to each other (close or distance relation, +P or -P)

3. Weight of imposition (more or less weight, +W, or -W)

If S has less power than H, he/she tends to use the negative politeness strategies to reduce the threat to the H's negative face. If there is a high distance, negative politeness is on use, whereas positive politeness is used with low distance relation. However, interactants draw on different strategies of linguistic politeness.

### **I. Go off-record**

Participants may draw on this politeness strategy to minimize the threat and effects of FTAs and provide deniability with certainly a hint has been used. By this, the sender can easily insist on alternative interpretation (Duthler 2006).

### **II. Go badly on-record**

FTAs are performed, so that there is no ambiguity in the illocutionary act. Going on record means that the acts are direct and blunt because the participants do not attempt to mitigate the force of the FTAs thrust. This behavior is seen clearly in the imperative phrases. In addition, participants perform bald on record acts when they do not fear retribution from the addressee (Brown and Levinson 1987, 69). It occurs in situations in which the danger of threatening face is not serious as in offers and request "come in" or "sit down". In these examples, there is a kind of interest for both of the participants.

### III. Positive politeness addresses other's positive face wants.

A sender unambiguously performs a speech act while also employing redressive language so as to moderate its force. This refers to positive consistent of self-image "personality" claimed by interactants. The self-image would be appreciated, accepted and approved by the others (ibid, 61). This strategy concerns the connection and affinity between S and H, the desire to be respected, approved, evaluated as competent and fair by the subordinates (Duthler 2006). The S expects that s/he and the other share the same goal and common ground and they are being equal. The danger of using this strategy might be great when the H does not see the S as his equal or belong to his group, therefore takes offence.

Positive politeness can be seen in the following categories:

1. Notice hearer's admirable qualities or possessions, show interest, exaggerate, for example, "*Hey love your new palm-pilot, can I borrow it sometimes?*"
2. Use colloquial or slang to convey in-group membership, for example "*Most are damn hard, but this one should be a piece-of-cake.*"
3. Use ellipsis (omission) to communicate tacit understanding, for example "*(Do you) Mind if I join you?*"
4. Use first name or in-group name to insinuate familiarity, for example "*Hi Bud have you gotta minute?*"
5. Claim common view: assert knowledge of hearer's wants or that hearer has knowledge of speakers' wants, for example "*You know how the janitors don't like it when ...*"
6. Seek agreement, raise or presuppose common ground, common values, engage in small talk or joke, for example "*How about that game last night? Did the Ravens whip the parts off the Giants or what?*"
7. Give reasons, assert reflexivity by making activity seem reasonable to the hearer, for example "*I 'm really late for an important appointment, so...*"
- 8-Use inclusive terms, such as (*we, let's*) to include both the speaker and hearer in the activity, for example, "*We aren't feeling well, are we?*"

9. Assert reciprocal exchange or tit for tat, for example “*Do this favor and I’ll make it up to you.*”

10. Give something desired: gifts, sympathy, understanding, for example “*You look like you ‘ve’ had a rough week .*”

11. Be optimistic by using expressions such as “a little bit, for a second, or tag, the use of hope or will”, for example “*I just drop by for a minute to invite you*”, “*Tomorrow, you will come ,won’t you?*”

#### **IV. Negative politeness contends with other’s negative face wants.**

It refers to the basic claim to territories, personal preserves and rights to non-distraction (ibid). It concerns the desire for independence (the need to be left alone and self directed), the need to act freely unimpeded by others. Respect is indicated by negative politeness by showing that the speaker does not want to limit the Hearer’s freedom of action. Tactics of negative politeness are given below:

1. Be conventionally indirect, inquire into the hearer’s ability or willingness to comply. According to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper’s (1989) three levels of directness are suggested: direct, conventionally indirect, and hints. Indirectness is considered a negative politeness strategy to show respect for the addressee, while the direct is a positive strategy, and thus threatening the independence of the addressee. See table 1 below for directness levels:

2. Use of subjunctive, for example “*May we urge that this matter be given your immediate attention?*”

3. Use of lexical modifiers that minimize the impositions, such as:

**Please**

**downtoners:** *possibly, maybe, perhaps*

**understaters:** *just, a little, a minute*

**subjectivizers:** *I was wondering, I think/feel, I wanted to know*

**consultative devices:** *do you think, is there a chance*

**hedges:** *some, any, somehow*

4. Be apologetic. An apology is a social act aiming at maintaining good relations between the speaker and the addressee, for example *"I'm sorry to bother you, but . . ."*

5. Impersonalize the speaker and hearer by avoiding the pronouns "you" and "I" or by the use of passive. Four perspectives are possible and are associated with an effect on perceived politeness (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989); they are listed from least to most polite as in below:

**you (hearer)-perspective:** *Could you please give me some feedback...?*

**we (speaker/hearer)-perspective:** *Can we please meet to go over...?*

**I (speaker)-perspective:** *I was wondering if I could have an extension on...*

**Impersonal perspective:** *Is it possible to meet tomorrow afternoon?*

6. Use of syntactic modifiers. Syntactic and lexical devices add a mitigating effect on the imposition of the request and contribute to perceived politeness. The following predominant syntactic modification devices are found:

**Past tense**, such as *"I was wondering..."*, or, *"Could you..."*

**Progressive aspect**, such as *"I was wondering..."*, or *"I'm hoping..."*

**Embedding**, such as *"I would appreciate it if you could..."*, or *"Do you think I am on the right track?"*

7. Give deference by using honorifics: *"Sir, Mr., Ms., Dr."* and by using family names and titles.

8. Nominalize by changing verbs and adverbs into nouns or adjectives to reduce speakers' active participations, for example *"My asking you to leave is required by regulations."*

9. State that FTA as a general rule, for example *"Regulations require that I ask you to leave."*

10. Be pessimistic by expressing doubt, for example *"You wouldn't possibly / by chance lend me your lawn mower, could you?"*



11. Use of modals, such as "could, may, shall, might, etc." which have the effect of softening the idea being communicated.

Directness Levels	Request Strategies	Examples
<b>Direct</b>	Imperatives	Please extend the due date.
	Performatives	I feel I have to ask for an extension for a week.
	Want statements	I want to set up a meeting with you. I would like your suggestions.
	Need statements	I will need an extension.
	Expectation statements	I hope you'll give me the weekend to finish typing my work.
<b>Conventionally indirect</b>	Query preparatory (ability, willingness, permission)	Could I meet with you next Tuesday? Would you mind to take a look and give me some suggestion?
<b>Hints</b>	Strong hints/mild hints	Attached is a draft of my grammar lesson plan. I'm having a very difficult time in figuring out how to put these lesson materials together.

**Table No. 1: Directness Level from Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989)**

## Results and Discussion

It is found that politeness strategies are less formal and direct. Choosing direct over indirect forms might be seen as coercive or impolite. The most common politeness strategy is that of positive politeness. This strategy is used in personal e-mail for two reasons.

1. These strategies are usually seen in groups of friends, or where people in the given social situation know each other fairly well. E-mailers usually try to minimize the distance between them by expressing friendliness and solid interest in the reader's need to be respected (minimize the FTA). So it might be said that it is a strategy of bringing about close relationship.

2. As a relatively recent development, e-mail is not yet governed by clear conventions and expectations. Texts in

general are characterized by so much more casual language, abbreviations, and symbols.

In addition, it is observed that e-mailers use lexical modification, particularly *please*, and supportive moves such as apology, perhaps due to a lack of linguistic flexibility that would allow them to craftily select lexicon-syntactic modifiers.

Personal e-mails are segmented into components.

**A. Address Phrases:** Social distance and e-mail medium have some influence on the presence or absence of e-mail address phrases and the forms which they may take. Signing off or adding a closing to a message is also a way of doing deference or signaling respect and thus constructing the addressee as having status. It is noticed that the majority of address forms create a greater sense of solidarity; therefore, informal and show positive politeness.

The analysis shows that there is a considerable variation in the use of greetings. It is the nature of the medium which accounts for the liberties of style. They are arranged according to their frequency into the following:

- Absence of greetings
- Hi ,hey / Hi+first
- First name
- Hello + friend / first name ,Hello +sir
- Hello
- My Dearest ,My Dear + first name
- Dear + profession /title
- All
- Hugs

Moreover, it seems that most personal e-mail writers do not favour the use of complementary close in their e-mails which indicates a neglect of social protocol and formalities. For them, in this genre, there is an assumption that they are unnecessary in exchanges among individuals engaged in a common purpose. The sender indeed feels so much connected to recipient. Here are the signing off techniques:

- Absence of signing offs
- Love /Lots of love/With love
- All good wishes to you/Best wishes
- Love you much /love you/me
- Cheers

- Best /All the best
- Warm regards /regards
- Yours
- Very respectfully
- Fondly
- Yours truly
- May God bless you
- Hugs

E-mailers may leave out their names as a gesture of informality and familiarity as if saying “*I’m known to you.*” They may assume that the communication is ongoing-as in a face-to-face talk-so there is no need for anything that suggests a signing off, so a signature is not necessary assuming that the recipient knows the sender, his/her e-mail address, or phone number, etc. It also can be said that in the first e-mail (initiation), the signature is not used perhaps because the sender wants to show him/herself to be more friendly and casual in the relationship with the recipient. Below are the signature block techniques:

- End with no name
- End with an English name
- End with full name (English + surname)
- Abbreviated name

ASCII drawing or an abstract pattern into the signature is added by creative e-mail writers, such as Bill:-), or 🌹 Miss Anica 🌹. Producing an effective pattern is a public demonstration of one's artistic and computer skill.

## **B. Body**

### **I. Tactics of Positive Politeness**

It was found that the most commonly used positive politeness strategies are the following group of strategies, such as claiming common ground, including supposing or asserting shared interest/goal/view, seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement, the writer would introduce a topic or area as a trend or common interest to appeal to this group by using in-group markers.

The strategy of using in-group markers can be seen in the use of **ASCII**, or acronyms which represent a shared knowledge ground, the idea of being cooperators is also central to the politeness strategies found in the corpus. These

strategies involve both the sender and the recipient in the activity, by offering and promising, giving reasons, giving desired things and showing understanding. The sender often includes the reader in the writing by using inclusive “we” or “let’s.” This politeness strategy “calls upon the cooperative assumption and thereby redresses FTAs” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 132). Giving reasons as a politeness strategy is represented by an explanation justifying what the writer has done. Table 2 below indicates the indices and frequency of this strategy.

<b>Positive Politeness</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Notice hearer’s admirable qualities	45	14.56
Use colloquial or slang	64	20.71
Use ellipsis	80	25.89
Use first name	11	3.56
Claim common view	12	3.88
Seek agreement	20	6.47
Give reasons	14	4.53
Use inclusive terms	5	1.62
Assert reciprocal exchange	3	0.97
Give something desired	15	4.86
Be optimistic	40	12.95
Total	309	100

**Table No. 2: Indices of Positive Politeness in EM**

1- Notice hearer’s admirable qualities or possessions, show interest, exaggerate makes up 45 instances with 14.56% of the politeness total frequency, e.g.,

1. *I love getting letters from you they mean a lot.*
2. *I thoroughly enjoyed myself with you tonight.*

2- Use of colloquial or slang to convey in-group membership accounts for 64 instances with 20.71%, e.g.,

3. *The guys who attack her and her group really did a number on her.*<sup>1</sup>
4. *My chums call me Joe Smo*
5. *I am a totally mad, wacky girl !*

3-Use of ellipsis (omission) to communicate tacit understanding accounts for 80 occurrences with 25.89%, for example:

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<sup>1</sup> Examples with mistakes are written as they appear in the original e-mails.

6. *Hope your doing ok just wanted to say hi.*

7. *got to go.*

8. *hope you can make it out!*

4-Use of first name or in-group name to insinuate familiarity occurs 11 times comprising 3.56%, for example:

9. *Good job, Lance!*

10. *Yes David, Tony's right.*

5-Claim common view: assert knowledge of hearer's wants or that hearer has knowledge of speakers wants occurs 12 times making up 3.88%, for example:

11. *I know you said you were going to send me a pic*

12. *I know what you mean about school!*

6-Seek agreement, raise or presuppose common ground, common values, engage in small talk or joke are particular forms of face work which expresses solidarity and friendship rather than distance and antipathy. Humor is also linked to in-group references and shared experiences reinforcing a sense of common group identity. Therefore, using this strategy, e-mailers enter into a more informal relationship. This strategy makes up 20 instances (6.47%), e.g.,

13. *I like baseball also. do you?*

14. *I've got a joke to tell you:-Why did the monkey fall out of the tree? Answer:-*

*Because it was dead!!*

7-Give reasons, assert reflexivity by making the activity seem reasonable to the hearer, accounts for 14 instances with 4.53%, for example,

15. *It is been a long time that I didnt write you it is because I am very busy it is election time here.*

16. *I am unable to drive so I haven't gone to anyone with your passport info*

8-Using inclusive terms, such as (*we, let's*) to include both the speaker and hearer in the activity makes up 5 instances having (1.62%, for example,

17. *We really like it.*

18. *Good luck, and let us know how you get on!*

9-Asserting reciprocal exchange or tit for tat occurs only 3 times representing 0.97%, for example:

*19. We will most likely have to get married twice. Once how your people do it then how mine do it*

*20. Since I gave you a little description of myself and some of my interests, I would like to know a little about you and your interests.*

10-Giving something desired: gifts, sympathy, understanding, occurs 15 times (4.86%), for example,

*21. I suppose that it can be hard in Iraq at this time.*

*22. I miss you also and hope you are well.....and getting some rest.*

11-Optimism, by using expressions such as “a little bit, for a second, or tag, the use of *hope* or *will*”, represents 40 instances with 12.95%, for example:

*23. hope to here from you soon.*

*24. I will like to meet u someday, i pray that day comes.*

## **B. Tactics of Negative Politeness**

FTAs, such as, requests associated with direct strategies (e.g., want statements or imperatives), aggravating moves (e.g., threats, criticism, emphasis on urgency), with the contemporaneous lack of face mitigating features are unavoidable in e-mail texts. That is, e-mails may present a threat to the recipient's negative face (right to non-distraction, the desire to have his actions unimpeded by others, i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition). In order to soften these threats, it is expected that e-mailers use different strategies, especially samples of negative politeness.

However, the analysis shows the following results: the majority of politeness strategies used in the e-mails correspond to samples of positive politeness, whereas few are negative politeness mechanisms. In e-mail texts, the rules of communicative competence (make yourself clear and be polite) often diverge because politeness entails indirect communication. It seems that interactants of e-mail discourse are comfortable to lower the principle of politeness. This can be explained by the fact that the participants wish to establish a

close relationship based on enhancing group cohesion, solidarity and mutual friendship among themselves. This assumption would seem to be confirmed by the types of positive politeness strategies discussed above. E-mailers' desire to avoid misattribution may be compensated by being less polite, and more direct.

In addition, due to the very nature of the e-mail medium in which e-mail is typically written, the guise of isolation is outspoken and this allows e-mail sender to sometimes forget or ignore their audiences. This contributes to the loss of inhibition by the sender because the medium eliminates both social and geographic distance. Participants tend to be excessively blunt, and irresponsible by engaging in electronic "flaming". Due to the effect of the new medium of the e-mail, a minimum amount of syntactic and lexical modifications may be regarded as satisfactory for realizing requests perhaps in an attempt at message economy. For example, participants tend to use the hedge word *please* over other modification devices, presumably in an attempt to appear polite when other linguistic means are lacking. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that e-mailers can "take time to compose and edit their messages to be more formal, and linguistically complex" (Herring: 2002, 115), they are never quite certain what impression their message may leave, and are not able to follow uniform "standards of appropriateness . . . in order to communicate successfully" (Chen: 2006, 36). Consequently, the ratio of negative politeness decreases in e-mail texts. The negative politeness strategies are indicated with their frequencies in Table 3 below:

<b>Negative politeness</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Be conventionally indirect	6	7.32
Use subjunctive	0	0
Use of lexical modifiers	22	26.83
Apologize	12	14.63
Impersonalize	4	4.88
Use of Syntactic modifiers	21	25.61
Using honorifics	0	0
Nominalize	0	0
State that FTA	0	0
Be pessimistic	3	3.66
Use of Modals	14	17.07
Total	82	100

**Table No. 3: Indices of Negative Politeness in EM**

1-Be conventionally indirect, inquire into the hearer’s ability or willingness to comply (questioning rather than asserting). Indirectness accounts for 6 instances (8.82%). Because e-mails tend to be conversational, informal and used when a person is trying to juggle a lot of tasks and because there are no social consequences of using more direct request forms, e-mailers use more direct request strategies than indirect ones. In some cases, the impact of the direct strategy is softened through syntactic modifiers or mitigated through lexical modifiers. On the other hand, indirect requests are minimally modified through lexical politeness devices, especially, with *please*. The lack of an increase in lexical modifiers in indirect request can be explained by that fact that e-mailers may have felt that they are sufficiently polite precisely because of the nature of their indirectness. See Table 4 below:

Directness Level	Frequency	%
Direct	74	88.10
Indirect	6	7.14
Hint	4	4.76
Total	84	100

**Table No. 4: Directness Level in EM**

Hints or off record is the group of politeness strategies used to avoid the direct imposition of FTAs. Such strategies are not often used in e-mail texts perhaps because e-mail writers do not have much experience of how to produce situation-appropriate hints. The few cases of hints help users state indirect criticism or avoid the embarrassment when making uncomfortable requests. Some examples are given below. The first is direct on record, the second is direct, but of positive, the third is indirect request of negative politeness, and the fourth is hint (off-record).

25. *Write soon.*

26. *Please write soon.*

27. *Could you tell me more about where you live and your families.*

28. *I don't think that we can have a relationship.*

2-Lexical modifiers that minimize the impositions make up 22 instances (26.83%) of all the negative politeness cues. Lexical modifications are politeness cues because they convey an increased level of respect. Participants accommodate this type



of politeness in electronic mail to soften the use of FTAs and flagrant and hostile language “flaming.” Yet, these modifiers are kept to the minimum in this corpus. Some examples of such modifiers are given below:

29. *Please do not email me anymore*

30. *Just click (or copy and paste) this link and you'll be taken to my quiz.*

31. *If so, have you any info about cost?*

32. *I would like to know a little about you*

The word please is the most preferred lexical modifier over other modification devices which accounts for 12 examples (54.55%) of all the lexical modifiers in this corpus. It is most succinctly used in the formulaic, virtually automatic utterances that spring to the lips of interactants hundreds of times a day. However, e-mailers tend to use *please* in a way that marked the utterance as having requestive force rather than as a politeness marker. The hedges “some, any” come next with 5 frequencies (22.73%), then the understater “just” has 3 instances (13.64%). Other modifiers, such as “a little” and the consultative device “do you think . . .?” have one occurrence each (4.55%). See Table 5 for these frequencies.

Lexical modifiers	Frequency	%
Please	12	54.55
Any ,Some	5	22.73
Just	3	13.64
A little	1	4.55
Do you think	1	4.55
Total	22	100

**Table No. 5: Frequencies of Lexical Modifiers in EM**

3- Apology is represented by 12 instances (14.63%) of the total negative strategies. This is aimed at maintaining good relations between the sender and the recipient. Such a strategy softens the force of acts that are inherently threatening to the recipient’s negative face, thus avoiding placing the recipient in a one-down position when the sender takes the blame upon himself. In addition, because e-mails are conversation like, it is expected that they contain ritual expressions of apology. It is noticed that apologies in these texts are either informal preceded by double quantifier such as “*Many many apologies*” or casual as in the use of apologetic ‘sorry’ when e-mail writers

are likely to express direct apology. This option is usually realized by using the lexical item ‘sorry’ alone , or adding an intensifying adverb like “so, really” as in " *I am so sorry... I really am sorry...*" or double intensifier like 'truly truly' as in "*I am truly truly sorry . . .*".

4-Impersonalize the speaker and hearer by avoiding the pronouns “I” and “you” comprises 4 occurrences making up (4.88%) of the negative politeness. E-mailers form the majority of their requests from the expected perspective, that is “you” perspective which represents 52 occurrences (61.91%) of the perspective strategies. “I” perspective comes second with 26 frequency (30.95%), the “impersonal” has the third frequency with 4 occurrences (4.75%), the last one is “we” perspective which has only two occurrences (2.38%). See Table 6 for the frequency of this strategy:

Perspective strategies	Frequency	%
You	52	61.91
We	2	2.38
I	26	30.95
Impersonal	4	4.76
Total	105	100

**Table No. 6: Perspective Strategies in EM**

5-Be pessimistic by expressing doubt. This is used to reduce the possible effect of face damage, not often used in e-mails. It makes up 3 instances (3.66%). See the following examples.

33. *I do not know whether this would bother you or any of the people likely to read the material.*

34. *Indeed, I do not know whether the students would know some of the profane words—does this present the teacher with a problem?*

Syntactic Modifiers	Frequency	%
Embedding	19	90.48
Past tense	2	9.52
Progressive aspect	0	0
Total	21	100

**Table No.7: Syntactic Modifiers in EM**

6. Use of Syntactic modifiers. The total number of syntactic modifications is 21 frequency of occurrence (25.61 %) of the

total number of negative politeness devices in the corpus. The predominant syntactic modification devices are given in Table 7. E-mailers prefer the embedding not only with indirect strategies but also with direct ones over the other syntactic modifiers. This accounts for 19 instances (90.48%) of the syntactic modifications in this corpus. Past tense is not frequent having 2 occurrences, whereas the progressive does not appear in the material.

35. *Let us know how you get on! (embedding)*

36. *Could you tell me more about where you live and your families. (past & embedding)*

7. Use of modals. The use of modals in this corpus is not frequent making 14 occurrences (17.07%) of the negative politeness strategies the use rate is (16.67) of the total number of requests. The most frequent is “would”, then “can” and “could”. E-mailers prefer the use of concise and direct requests either on-record or with *please* markers to the modal auxiliaries due to the communication speed of the e-mail medium. For the frequency of modals, see Table 8 below:

Modals	Frequency in Requests
Would	8
Could	2
Can	4
No. of Modals	14
Use Rate %	16.67

**Table No. 8: Modals in EM**

## Conclusions

This paper has presented the results of politeness strategies in private e-mail communications. Due to the strategy of bringing about close relationship common in the more liberal, and speedy medium, the most commonly used politeness strategy is the positive politeness. Mechanisms of negative politeness are not common in this type of texts. E-mail writers do not show their pessimism with regard to the outcome of the request or their hesitation when making the request, or give deference by using honorifics: Sir, Mr., Ms., Dr., or use of nominalization, or state the FTA as a general rule, or employ of

subjunctive in requests, etc. Rather, personal e-mail texts include linguistic expressions that promote solidarity between sender and recipient which may be seen in the epistolary conventions such things as "*Hi, hey, hello*" and the informality of language. For the requests which may be inherently face threatening, e-mailers prefer directness over indirectness with their intimate recipients. They also select a more direct hearer request strategy (2<sup>nd</sup> person) by employing "bold on record" imperatives and sometimes unmitigated want/need statements. Yet, this does not necessarily show impoliteness; rather, as mentioned earlier, appropriateness of every practice is determined by situational factors and medium of communication. E-mailers are more lenient of the use of directness due to the flexibility of the medium which gives writers greater freedom in composing their texts.

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