

CONTRASTING ASIAN POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN BUSINESS EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS: CHINA, HONGKONG AND THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

The study of politeness has become one of the most interesting topics being explored in the field of contrastive writing. This attention is brought by the very basic notion that politeness is culturally defined that varies from one context to another. The present study aims to determine the different and frequently used politeness strategies in business emails from China, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Following the politeness framework of Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Sudhof, Jurafsky, Leskovec, and Potts (2013), it was found that, generally, the three countries frequently used the *please (start)* politeness strategy in electronic communications. However, differences were reflected as China and Hong Kong showed the use of gratitude and deference strategies which did not appear in the samples from the Philippines. While in the Philippines, hedging expression appeared in the form of *I suggest* which seems to reflect a democratic approach. Such a strategy, which is absent in the data from China and Hong Kong, can be understood as the avoidance of giving a precise propositional content and leaving an option open to the addressee. Thus, this study asserts that politeness strategies in business communications exist. Variations may be evident, but one thing is for sure, politeness is universally observed even in virtual cross-cultural or intercultural engagements.

Keywords: Politeness, Business Communications, China, Hong Kong, the Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The global economy has become increasingly interdependent and globalized, and the business organizations are confronted with a critical challenge of having the ability and competence of functioning effectively across cultural boundaries. The challenges are even greater when people from the business world realize that the competence they function in their own culture may not be seen as such in a foreign or cross-cultural

context. The work started by Robert Kaplan in 1966 on contrastive rhetoric hypothesis was a breakthrough research that has become a major influence in creating global understanding of different cultures in international interaction and communication. Though there are still professionals in the field of language who challenge or tweak the hypothesis made by Kaplan, one cannot deny that the contrastive rhetoric phenomenon has

allowed language learners and teachers, and communication participants all over the world, to recognize that writing styles differ from one culture to another. It also has contributed to foster understanding in the international arena among different nationalities.

The conception of intercultural communication which was emphasized by Ulla Connor on her book in 1996 has developed from the study of classroom paragraph and essay writings to the study of sophisticated writings in various genres. One of these is on business writing. Business in this modern world has been performed beyond borders of countries termed as *intercultural business*. Researchers in business communication, linguistics and social sciences have become increasingly interested in examining intercultural business communication.

However, intercultural communication is not an easy thing to do as it poses challenges to the people who are involved in the communication process. Intercultural communication is an interaction between people of different backgrounds-linguistically, culturally, socially, and religiously-who come together in a speech domain. The ability to use the language is one thing, while the ability to communicate successfully with

people from diverse backgrounds is another. One will find that there are different unique expectations and norms from each and every culture. The challenge is greater in the context of virtual communication where participants do not see each other. In this ultra-modern age, business is done through virtual communication which popularly uses electronic mails or known as email. One of the variations in any communication interaction is the use of polite language. But what is politeness? Why is it important in global communication interaction?

The conception of politeness among different cultures is one of the key issues in enhancing intercultural understanding. It has economic, political and social bases which determines its usage from one country to another different. Politeness seems to become an interesting discussion in the research area of cross-cultural pragmatics because of the variations in the different circumstances. In the work of Huang (2014), he maintains that:

Politeness can be defined as any behavior including verbal behavior of an interlocutor to maintain his or her face and that of the individuals he or she is interaction with. As pointed out by Brown (forthcoming), different aspects of this behavior are captured by terms

such as ‘manners’, ‘courtesy’, ‘tact’, ‘deference’, ‘sensitivity’, ‘poise’, ‘rapport’, ‘urbanity,’ ‘civility’, and ‘graciousness’ (p. 142-143).

The issues surrounding intercultural business communication and politeness inspired the researcher to examine the different politeness strategies used by three (3) countries in Asia through business email communications; and to draw implications in relation to cross-cultural communication and understanding. Specifically, the study would like to answer the following questions:

1. What are the different politeness strategies used in the business emails from the following countries:
 - a. China;
 - b. Hong Kong; and
 - c. Philippines?
2. What can be implied from the politeness strategies employed in different Asian countries?

This present investigation also draws on the *face-saving model* of Brown and Levinson (1987 as cited in Huang, 2014). The basic notion of face pertains to individual’s self-esteem which is important and should be preserved in intercultural communicative interactions (Mendoza & Berowa, 2017; Berowa & Mendoza, 2017; Berowa, 2020; H. Abbas & Berowa, 2022). In their framework, face consists of two related aspects. One is *negative face*, or the

rights to territories, freedom of action and freedom from imposition - wanting your actions not to be constrained or inhibited by others. The other is *positive face*, the positive consistent self-image that people have and their desire to be appreciated and approved of by at least some other people. The rational actions people take to preserve both kinds of face, for themselves and the people they interact with, add up to politeness. Face-threatening acts (FTAs) are acts that infringe on the hearers' need to maintain his/her self-esteem, and be respected. Politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with these FTAs.

In the study of Mousavi and Samar (2012), Coulmas’ politeness framework was distinguished between the common sense meaning of politeness and its theoretical concept. For *common sense notion*, *politeness* refers to the assessment of behavior in everyday life of the members of the speech community based on the community’s social values and norm. While on the *theoretical notion* of *politeness*, it is concerned with the general conditions and the behavioral and linguistic means of realizing politeness. That is to say that a theoretical notion of politeness must strive to be culturally neutral and suitable to uncover universal mechanisms of

linguistic politeness differentiation. Also, it was maintained that politeness is always a dimension of dialogic contextualized speech, not attributable directly either to the speaker or the speech itself. They further explain that Coulmas introduced a couple of strategies, employed by speakers of a language, which can implicate politeness. Among these strategies are *indirectness* and *the use of long speech* and *elaborate words, syntactic devices*, (e.g. informal expressions, abbreviations, etc.), *address and reference*.

In 2013, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Sudhof, Jurafsky, Leskovec, and Potts proposed a framework to automatically classify politeness. The model included the politeness strategy and sample language markers for its identification as illustrated in Table 1. Those strategies from 1-5 are considered as *Positive politeness*, while those strategies used from 6-20 are considered as *Negative politeness*. This model of Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. (2013) for politeness strategies and language markers was used in the analysis for the present inquiry.

Table 1.

Politeness strategies and markers framework

Politeness Strategy	Language Marker
1. Gratitude	<i>I really appreciate...</i>
2. Deference	<i>Nice work so far...</i>
3. Greeting	<i>Hey, I just tried to...</i>
4. Positive lexicon	<i>Wow!/This is a great way to deal..</i>
5. Negative lexicon	<i>If you're going to accuse me...</i>
6. Apologizing	<i>Sorry ...</i>
7. Please (not start)	<i>Could you please...</i>
8. Please start	<i>Please do not remove warnings...</i>
9. Indirect (btw)	<i>By the way, where did you find...</i>
10. Direct question	<i>What is your native language...?</i>
11. Direct start	<i>So can you retrieve it or not?</i>
12. Counterfactual modal	<i>Could/Would you...</i>
13. Indicative modal	<i>Can/Will you...</i>
14. 1 st Person start	<i>I have just put the article...</i>
15. 1 st person plural	<i>Could we find a less complex name..</i>
16. 1 st person	<i>It is my view that...</i>
17. 2 nd person	<i>But what's the source you have in mind?</i>
18. 2 nd person start	<i>You've reverted yourself...</i>
19. Hedges	<i>I suggest...</i>
20. Factuality	<i>In fact...</i>

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

The study of politeness has become one of the most interesting topics being explored in the field of contrastive writing. This attention is brought by the very basic notion that politeness is culturally defined that varies from one context to another. Some of these investigations are discussed in the present study to provide better insights on the politeness studies in the different forms of communication. The related studies are discussed according to classification: politeness in writing, including the different communication media on business writing, and politeness in oral communication.

Fotouhi and Ziyaei (2015) investigated on the role of politeness strategies in writing emails. The study compared the politeness strategies used by 25 participants in writing emails to close friends and to strangers. It involved two features of language in the emails which include how people use politeness strategies when discussing taboo topic in the domain of emails, and the use of speech act to explore politeness in different registers. The research included the politeness strategies used in the emails written by 25 students of the language

learning institute. It looked into the relationship of the use of politeness strategies to the communicators and the degree of intimacy.

The study found that the Brown and Levinson's framework for politeness does not accurately predict how politeness will be used in emails. Though some of the framework's prediction was correct, most of the results contradict on what was expected for the face to face interaction. It was discovered that email utilizes a unique set of politeness strategies which include high levels of negative politeness strategies. However, this negative politeness strategies decrease in situations where there is a decline on the intimacy which cannot be found in face to face interactions.

In Pakistan, a study was explored to investigate the politeness strategies used in Pakistani business letters which were written in English. This research of Gillani in 2014 made use of quantitative and qualitative approach. The data was gathered from the specialized corpus of the Pakistani Business English Letters (PBEL) which has been compiled from business communication. The PBEL was composed

of 1000 Pakistani business letters collected both government and semi-government institutions including universities, private companies, and factories to name a few in 2011. The study examined the differences between Pakistani and American ways of using politeness strategies in external parts of the business letters, specifically the opening and the closing of the letter. For the framework of the study, the Brown and Levinson 1987 model of politeness was adapted in the research. The software ANTCOnc 3.2.4 was used as a tool to determine the frequency of politeness strategies used in Pakistani business letter.

The study found that Pakistani business letters have different politeness strategies than American letters. Pakistani use salutations with the generic address form like “dear sir” while Americans use specific names. In addition, the closing strategy of the Pakistani writers tends to be submissive to the readers or to the authority while Americans are less submissive. These differences were linked to the cultural values and the social norms of both countries. Pakistani seems to be more polite in their writing attitude than the Americans.

Another investigation on the politeness employed in emails was done by

Sara Lindgren in 2014. It explored the communication between people whose first languages are different in business context. This is termed as Business English as a Lingua Franca or the BELF. It tried to examine the politeness strategies in BELF email messages and the interaction between them. Politeness strategies in email correspondence are very important which are seen in the formality in greetings and closings, and the directness in requests. The study utilized 46 emails which were categorized as internal or external correspondence based on the answers of the research questions. The categories labeled to the emails aimed to discover whether communication differs depending on who receives it.

It was found that the internal and external correspondence was very similar to each other and the level of formality depends on the sender. Additionally, it was discovered that greetings and closing were mainly informal, and the requests were direct for both internal and external correspondence. It was asserted that, generally, emails are impolite, but with the development of emails, the need for politeness has changed. And this made the author believed that the emails she reviewed are polite.

In written genre, a study on the politeness strategies was conducted by Hammouda in 2013. In this study, it investigated the effectiveness of the politeness strategies used by French-speaking undergraduate students in their job application letters written in English. A combination of move-based lexicogrammatical analysis and qualitative method were used to describe the devices used by the students to express politeness in the acts of requesting and thanking in job application letter endings, and to evaluate whether or not the strategies they chose were indeed polite. The result of the study revealed that French students lack familiarity with the peculiarities of expressing positive face in English, such as showing interest, being optimistic, proposing to help, and the concomitant equal but adequately respectful writer persona hindered their attempts to be polite, and caused them to transgress expectations of negative face (giving deference and being indirect). It was also found that, surprisingly, small number of students used French rules for managing negative face, perhaps due to the classroom feedback about politeness strategies and expectations in English over the course of the semester. The author of the study

remarked that results underscore the fact that teaching politeness devices or grammar alone is far from sufficient to help non-native English students improve their effectiveness in writing. He added that writing feedback must be multimodal which include oral, written, visual and behavioral. The study indeed contributes to research on writing feedback using intercultural rhetoric research.

Another was made by Mousavi and Samar (2012) on the politeness and intimacy used in 511 commercial emails from four Asian countries, namely China, Pakistan, India, and Iran. The emails were analyzed in a mixed-method design and focused on the two features of politeness and intimacy. The result of the study showed that Iranians use the most polite style in their business letters, while Chinese use the most intimate discourse. While Indians, they were found to be the least polite and intimate in their business letters. Pakistanis' use of polite and intimate style is not as noticeable as that of Iranians and Chinese.

Politeness also can be seen in the gender perspective. This was the investigation performed by Bacha, Bahous and Diab (2012) on the gender and politeness in a foreign language academic

context in Lebanon. The examination was on the underlying factors that can provide understanding in the differences of using politeness strategies among students and teachers. The researchers see the conception of politeness in this study as operationally defined based on the different strategies or behaviors performed by the students inside the classroom. The data were drawn from the reactions of the students when placed in different situations. The study made use of survey and discourse completion test to evaluate the degree of politeness in an L1 Arabic context indicated in certain context. The study found that misunderstandings and impoliteness are culturally defined rather than impoliteness per se on the part of the students. It was then recommended that program coordinators and teachers must address this concern in English as a foreign language classroom.

Business letter play an important role in business activities and a vital factor in the fast development of international trade and business. Zhang in 2011 examined on the politeness principle in the translation of business letters. The translation in business letters appears to be a very critical factor in the success of communication. Business letters, which are

formal in nature, also observe politeness principle strictly to uphold and to boost relationship with business partners. It is but important to consider the role of translation both in English and Chinese politeness principles. In the study of Zhang, it was found that understanding politeness is pragmatic by nature. It needs pragmatic translation of business letters to achieve politeness equivalence in translation. He maintained that a well-translated business letter both conveys the necessary messages concerning business activities and also maintain and enhance business relations. It also minimizes disputes and conflicts in business transactions and contributes to the smooth development of the international trade.

The study of Gocheco in 2009 on the use of politeness marker *Po* in television-mediated political campaign advertisements in the Philippines is found to be relevant in this present investigation. She asserted that in the Philippine context, the use of *po* may serve to show deference for elders in society, to show deference for other reasons such as status in society, and to add formality informulaic social expressions like the Tagalog expression of thanks, ‘*Salamat po*’ [Thank you,(Ma’am/Sir)] or self introductions.

Most importantly, the use of the politeness marker *po* fulfills two functions: mitigation and deference. In addition, the politeness marker *po* is a unique linguistic expression in the Tagalog language that serves as a valuable tool in persuading the electorate, as it establishes solidarity through the cultural propriety of politeness and modesty.

Still in 2009, Eva Ogiermann conducted a study on the politeness and indirectness across cultures. It was focused on the comparison of English, German, Polish and Russian requests. The objective of the study was to show the different interpretations of indirectness and politeness across cultures. The study concentrated on the difference between direct requests which are important to Polish and Russian, and the traditional indirect requests which are frequently used in English and German. It was also shown in the study that languages possess culture-specific inclination for syntactic and lexical down graders modifying the illocutionary force of the request thereby reducing the threat to the hearer's face. The data were gathered through discourse completion task and constitute responses to a scenario frequently used in previous request studies

so that the results can be compared with those established for other languages.

The results of the study revealed that in all four languages investigated, requests can be realized at different levels of directness and their illocutionary force can be downgraded by mean of internal and lexical modification. Additionally, the level of sub strategies, their linguistic realizations, restrictions on their applicability and frequency of use mirrored cross-cultural differences.

In Thailand, an interesting study was conducted by Ora-Ong Chakorn (2006) on the persuasive and politeness strategies in cross cultural letter of request in the Thai business context. The focus is on the contrastive analysis of 80 authentic letters of request written in English by Thai speakers and native English speakers. The corpus consists of 38 Thai letters and 42 non-Thai letters. The cross-cultural variation was investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively from the perspectives of contrastive text linguistic and pragmatic. The contrastive text linguistics was used to examine the rhetorical structures in letters of request, and their linguistic realizations. From the pragmatic perspective, the analytical focus

was on persuasive strategies, some of which are culture bound.

The over-all investigation manifests the diversity in language use which distinguishes Thai-style business requests from western-style ones. What Hinds (1999) call a quasi-inductive style of writing or delayed introduction of purpose is a unique hedging strategy found exclusively in the Thai letters. The non-Thai requests tend to be more direct, often involving a “baldly on record” strategy. In contrast in a similarly formal context, the Thai request letters typically use more negative politeness in that they include more indirect, deferential, and self-effacing strategies. According to Aristotelian concept of persuasive rhetoric, the Thai letters generally use a combination of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. Whereas the non Thai letters tend to predominantly use a strong *logos*. These three rhetorical appeals can be regarded as persuasive strategies. The finding revealed some culture-specific differences in persuasive strategies used in Thai and non-Thai letters of request.

Liao in 2000 also investigated cross cultural emailing politeness for Taiwanese students. The researcher gathered the writing done by his students with international e-pals in English as a foreign

language since 1996. After examining the emails of his students and their international e-pals, he was able to generate seven email politeness rules for Taiwanese-Chinese students. First, offer counter answers in the context for any questions that were asked. Second, answer all the questions asked by e-pals. Third, talk about the same topic as the e-pals. Fourth, talk about something new to facilitate e-pal’s reply. Do not ask question to which your e-pal has given the answer, and do not make-up stories which are the sixth and the seventh respectively.

Hyland (2005), on his study on the hedges in academic writing, examined some of the contextual factors which define the ways writers say what they believe, and want others to accept. The objective was to show that the expressions of doubt and possibilities are central to the negotiation claims, and that what counts as effective persuasion is influenced by different epistemological assumptions and permissible criteria of justification. For Hyland for example, hedges were used based on his awareness of the need to temper personal conviction with the community practice. The success of persuading claims is a consequence of managing appropriately once personal

commitment. The study found that there were different ways of using hedges from the interviews gathered from professional academics.

Wagner (n.d.) also conducted a study on the politeness strategies used in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It was an ethnographic investigation to determine the naturally occurring apologies and politeness strategies. It used the modified version of Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project Coding Manual for Apologies and a corpus of two hundred (200) naturally occurring apology events, the basic strategies and sub-strategies used by members of the Cuernavaca speech community to apologize for a wide range of offenses were identified and discussed. Both positive- and negative-politeness strategies within the apology acts were noted. Finally, the findings from this sample were compared with the findings of previously conducted studies on apologizing and politeness in other varieties of Spanish. Results from this investigation dispel Brown and Levinson's claim that negative politeness is the universally preferred approach for doing facework, and it is advocated that additional investigations of (FTAs) and

politeness using culturally-sensitive models of interaction be used.

On the other hand, there were also studies on the use of politeness in oral communication. In the Asian context, politeness is seen as an important element in social interactions. A research authored by Gan, David and Dumanig in 2015 investigated on politeness strategies and address forms used by Filipino domestic helpers in addressing their Malaysian employers. The research focused on the politeness as seen in the use of address forms. Twenty (20) Filipino domestic helpers participated in an interview. The findings show that Filipino domestic helpers use certain patterns when communicating with their Malaysian employers. It shows that the use of Title (T), Title and First Name (TFN), Title and Last Name (TLN), and First Name (FN) are used as politeness strategies. It reveals that role relationship, social distance and age influence to such use of address forms. Moreover, the findings also reveal that the address forms used by the Filipino domestic helpers are influenced by the Filipino, Malaysian and Western cultures.

David and Dumanig in 2011 looked into the social capital and politeness strategies in fostering ethnic relations in

Malaysia and the Philippines. In the study, it was evident that politeness as a discourse strategy is highly valued among Malaysian ethnic groups whether Malays, Chinese or Indians. The similarities of the cultural and social values among the Malays, Chinese and Indians for instance, the use of address terms, non-verbal signs and discourse norms in interaction as politeness strategies within their ethnic groups or across the major ethnic groups foster better and harmonious relationships. Similarly, in the Philippines different ethnic groups from the various regions of the country are able to share the same culture and values when interacting with one another. Learning different terms of address, non-verbal features in communication and discourse styles from other ethnic groups helps in fostering better relationship.

Another inquiry was explored in the Chinese and Japanese environment. Tao (2010) studied the politeness in Chinese and Japanese communication which aimed to examine the politeness features from the perspective of modern Chinese and Japanese societies. This study was expected to provide interesting aspect on the differences in human relations in the neighboring cultures which can cause friction and irritation when people of these

cultures interact. The investigation utilized questionnaire as an instrument to survey university students who are Chinese and Japanese. And after getting the results, the data was analyzed from the gender's viewpoint. The study found that, generally, there were differences in the norms, conventions, and beliefs of the two societies. While Japanese university students provide high regard on their relationships with superiors and older members of the school or workplace, Chinese students provide greater importance to relationships with older members of the society and with strangers. Japanese appears to be less comfortable when they do not express politeness in situations where it is expected. It was concluded that differences between these two cultures help readers better understand the cultural and linguistic uniqueness in intercultural or cross cultural communication.

There have been a number of researches that investigated politeness in the different context but most of the studies are either description only of a certain context, or contrasting only between two groups. It can also be observed that most of the studies lean more on the traditional form of communication. This could imply

that the new trends of cross-cultural interactions are not yet explored.

METHODS

The data for this study were gathered from the business email communications in the different countries in Asia of a transportation company comprising a cargo container shipping line which has been successfully operating in the Philippines. In order to gather the data for this investigation, the researcher communicated to the branch manager to explain the purpose of this present research and to ask for permission to have an access to their business email exchanges. The researcher was very fortunate that the branch manager agreed to participate in this study.

The researcher gathered ten (10) business email samples, with the total of thirty (30) samples, from each of the

following countries: China, Hong Kong and the Philippines. The researcher thoroughly evaluated each of the samples to identify the politeness language markers using the guidelines provided by Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. (2013), and to discover the general politeness strategies used. After identifying the different politeness language markers utilized from the samples, the researcher performed frequency count to discover the occurrence of each marker and its equivalent percentage. The frequency count was also used to identify the most evident politeness marker in the Asian context by adding all the occurrences of the different markers from the countries identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the thorough examination to identify the politeness strategies as used in the thirty (30) business emails, the various politeness strategies were found. Based on the data presented in Table 2, the politeness strategy *please (start)* was frequently used in China. It occurred five (5) times in the

ten (10) business emails reviewed which is equivalent to 35.7%. As already argued, “*please*” is an important feature of politeness markers which adds courteousness in the utterance. An example is the sentence, “*Please* find attached our updated...” If the marker *please* will be

omitted, it can lead to a completely impolite sentence.

Table 2.

Politeness strategies in business emails from China

Politeness Marker	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Please (start)</i>	5	35.7%
<i>Please (not start)</i>	3	21.4%
<i>Gratitude</i>	3	21.4%
<i>Counter Factual/Modal</i>	2	14.3%
<i>Apologizing</i>	1	7.2%

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The next frequently used politeness strategy found was the *please (not start)* with three (3) occurrences, the same as *thanks* which also appeared three (3) times. Each of these politeness markers generated 21.4%. Examples on how these markers were used in the samples are shown in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 1

“If have any inquiry, *please* feel free to contact us.”

Excerpt 2

“*Thanks* to confirm payment center for sector...”

Another politeness marker which were found from the sample in China was the *could/would you* that was reflected in two (2) events, which is equivalent to 14.3%, and *sorry* was used once which garnered 7.2%. These markers were found in the sentences as follows.

Excerpt 3

“*Sorry* for late reply.”

Excerpt 4

“*Would* you please double check.”

Over-all, the *please (start)* is the most preferred politeness marker in China.

Table 3.

Politeness markers in business emails from Hong Kong

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Please (start)</i>	6	40.0%
<i>Please (not start)</i>	3	20.0%
<i>Deference</i>	3	20.0%
<i>Apologizing</i>	2	13.3%
<i>Counter Factual/Modal</i>	1	6.7%

Table 3 presents the politeness markers found in the email samples from Hong Kong. The results closely resembles with that of the politeness markers found in China. Although, in the case of Hong Kong, both *please (start)* and *please (not start)* have the same frequency of use along with the politeness markers *appreciate* and *kindly*. Each of these markers occurred three (3) times which is equivalent to 20.0%. The following sentences contain these leading markers which show how they were utilized in the different context.

Excerpt 6

“Please note the base allocation has been regenerated for...”

Excerpt 7

“Attached please find the...”

Excerpt 8

“On questions..., appreciate if...”

Excerpt 9

“Kindly do a review for...”

Table 4.

Politeness markers in business emails from the Philippines

Politeness Marker	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Please (start)</i>	13	76.4%
<i>Please (not start)</i>	3	17.7%
<i>Hedges</i>	1	5.9%

It was also found that there was an expression of apology *sorry* that appeared twice (2) which comprised 13.2% of the entire data reflected in the samples taken from Hong Kong. Additionally, there was a presence of the counterfactual modal *could/would* which comprised 6.7% from the total number of markers. The following sentences show how these two politeness expressions were used.

Excerpt 10

“Sorry to inform you that we are still facing hiccups in setting up of payment centre and this is beyond my hands now.”

Excerpt 11

“Could you advise the match code...”

Generally, in the context of Hong Kong business emails, the politeness markers *please (start)*, *please (not start)*, *appreciate*, and *kindly* were evident.

As observed, the marker *please (start)* dominated the politeness expressions found in the context of the Philippines. It occurred in eight (8) events which is equivalent to 47.0% from the total number of markers in the samples reviewed. This result further establishes again, which is generally claimed, on the very strong preference of the *please (start)* as an expression of politeness. This marker was reflected on the following sentences.

Excerpt 12

“Please find attached final loading list for your shipment...”

Excerpt 13

“Please see attached file for the deployment kit...”

The next frequently used marker was the *kindly* which occurred five (5) times in the data reviewed or equivalent to 29.4%. The said expression was reflected in the Table 5.

Preferred politeness markers by three Asian countries

Politeness Marker	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Please (start)</i>	24	53.3%
<i>Please (not start)</i>	9	20.0%
<i>Deference</i>	3	6.7%
<i>Gratitude</i>	3	6.7%
<i>Counter Factual/Modal</i>	3	6.7%
<i>Apologizing</i>	2	4.4%
<i>Hedges</i>	1	2.2%

From the data collected from the business emails for this investigation, the over-all result found that *please (start)* tends to be the most preferred politeness strategy in the three countries included in this study: China, Hong Kong and the Philippines. This politeness marker reflected sixteen (16) occurrences out of forty-five (45) expressions which is equivalent to 35.6% of the over-all percentage. It is then followed

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sentence, “*Kindly* see attached file and send us your...”

The next frequently used politeness marker was the *please (not start)* that was reflected in three (3) events equivalent to 17.7%. Example is the sentence, “If you have any concerns, *please* do not hesitate to call us.”

And, surprisingly, there was a presence of hedges as in *I suggest*, with the equivalent percentage of 5.9%, that was not found in China and Hong Kong. It was used in the sentence, “*I suggest* to follow this email (the one I attached), the one that I am requesting space from steering which I am copying you also.”

In the Philippines, therefore, the use of *please (start)* is the most preferred way of expressing politeness.

by *please (not start)* with 20% and *kindly* with 17.7%. The politeness markers *appreciate, thanks, could/would you* got 6.7% each, followed by *sorry* with 4.4%, and *I suggest* with 2.2%.

Based on the results presented, the strong preference towards *please (start)* does not come as a surprise since *please* is said to be the most obvious marker in English language. The use of this marker is very important in the context of international business as it functions as softening device to the propositional content of the utterance. The author perceives that the use of *please (start)* in all countries function as the performative hedges in which, as Goheco (2009) claimed, mitigate the message that follows as the use of *please* refines illocutionary force. It functions to provide deference and to avoid making direct utterance to make it more acceptable for the addressee. This linguistic marker is very important especially in cross-cultural or intercultural communication to signal a friendly tone. It is worth noting that this marker is called *introductory* as it occurs before the real message.

It is also noticeable that in China and Hong Kong, there were expressions of gratitude *thanks* and *appreciate*, while these expressions were absent in the email samples from the Philippines. These two

countries have shown the same values as it assumed that people in both countries are Chinese. Furthermore, it seems to reflect their culture of providing gratitude to any endeavor. In addition to that observation, it is interesting to note that the presence *I suggest* was only found in the Philippines. This marker is understood as the avoidance of giving a precise propositional content and leaving an option open to the addressee to impose her/his own intent. This means that the speaker is not imposing anything. This appears to mirror the democratic culture of the Filipinos where everyone has the prerogative to decide on their own, and the freedom on what one chooses to do.

Generally, it can be deduced that the use of politeness markers is universal and is valued even in virtual business transactions just like email communications. Furthermore, the negative politeness was the most frequent strategy used in the cross-cultural communication investigated. Moreover, the results contrast the study of Lindgren in 2014 who claimed that emails are impolite, and that the need for politeness has changed. In the present study, it is very evident that politeness is still very noticeable in business correspondence in the Asian context. Furthermore, the findings does not conform to the argument presented by Danescu et al. (2013) that the expression of

gratitude marked as *I really appreciate* is the most frequently politeness strategy. However, the findings conform to the

CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to investigate the different politeness markers used in the business emails from the following countries: China, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Additionally, it aimed to discover the frequently used politeness marker/s in each of the three (3) Asian countries included in the study. For the analysis, it made use of the guidelines provided by Danescu-Niculescu-Mizi et al. (2013qw) on their classification of politeness markers. It was found that, generally, the three countries frequently used the *please (start)* politeness marker in the international business email communications. It was also found that the use of negative politeness strategy, based on the politeness theory articulated by Brown and Levinson (1987), dominated in the study. In the context of business, negative politeness strategy is frequently used to mitigate social threats brought by the potential feeling of unwillingness to comply in business requests on the part of the addressee.

The study concludes that *please (start)* is the established way of expressing

universal claim that *please* is the most popular form of politeness expression.

politeness in the Asian context, and the negative politeness strategy is dominant in business transactions through email. However, differences are reflected as China and Hong Kong showed the culture of gratitude in using *appreciate* and *thanks* which did not appear in the samples from the Philippines. Although, in the Philippines, hedging expression appeared in the form of *I suggest* that reflects the democratic culture of the Filipinos. This can be understood as the avoidance of giving a precise propositional content and leaving an option open to the addressee to impose her/his own intent. . The use of hedges was absent in the contexts of China and Hong Kong.

Moreover, this study asserts that expressions of politeness are still present in business email communications as opposed to what Lindgren (2014) claimed in her study. Politeness is still highly valued even in virtual cross-cultural or intercultural engagements.

From the conclusions provided, the author believes that it is very important for people coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to understand that

politeness markers vary from one country to another. And though variations are evident, one thing is for sure, politeness expressions in the different forms of communication exist.

This study can be a very good source for English language teachers to create appropriate approach in teaching writing and in choosing business textbook materials. It is obvious that culture and language are inseparable, and understanding what people say requires a comprehensive knowledge of the cultural contexts and cultural mechanisms working within those contexts. Appropriate knowledge of the culture of the target language is a must for the learners. Teachers should utilize appropriate learning instructions that can bring cultural and pragmatic points into the learners' attention. Politeness strategies as the main aspect of cross-cultural communication and as the significant factor in intercultural business communication should be explained and addressed by the teachers, and also the teachers need to teach how, when, and why

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these politeness strategies can be appropriately used.

In addition, material and textbook developers must comprehensively include in their materials and textbooks an appropriate amount of cultural knowledge of the target language. This is more vital for ESP textbooks and material designers as the ESP learners need to develop a communicative competence in cross-cultural business contexts. The task of textbook and material developers is very demanding and challenging as they should write textbooks and materials that are highly rich in both language and cultural aspects, and can explicitly address the needs of its learners. The results of this study can help them develop materials that can portray the complex nature of cross-cultural communication.

To end, the findings generated in this paper are insights for learners, teachers, and researchers which recommend further inquiry on the politeness markers in the different genres of writing and speaking in various linguistic situations.

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