POLITENESS IN LIBYAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS’ E-MAIL REQUESTS TOWARDS LECTURERS

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ABSTRACT
This study aimed to explore the politeness phenomenon in Libyan postgraduate students’ e-mail requests to their lecturers based at four top-ranked Malaysian universities: University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, and Universiti Utara Malaysia. The data consisted of 109 e-mail requests to faculty written by 20 Libyan postgraduate students who were studying in Malaysia. The data was analyzed by adopting Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theory which is considered as a plausible analytical framework to identify politeness strategies. The research method and design used in this study was essentially qualitative approach. The findings of the current study revealed that the Libyan postgraduate students applied mostly negative politeness strategies more than the other politeness strategies. This study argues that these e-mails which featuring a high level of directness, displayed a fundamental inadequacy in the use of politeness strategies, thus creating potentially a higher chance of pragmatic failure.

Keywords: E-mails, lecturers, Libyan postgraduate students, politeness strategies, requests

INTRODUCTION
In this study, the construct investigated is the e-mail of request. Requesting speech acts are one of the students’ main communicative purposes for using e-mail as they go about their academic business, to obtain feedback, to make appointments, to ask for extensions of time for assignment submission, etc. A request can be defined as a direct speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action or provide information that is for the limited interest of the speaker (Trosborg, 1995). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a request is one of the most face-threatening forms of speech act, especially in a student-lecturer context. This is because students who are in a low-power position are forced to make impositions on lecturers who have the power of control (Brown & Gilman, 1960). An ill-formed request can threaten and impose more heavily on a lecturer’s face. If the speech is produced with inappropriate linguistic structures and modifications, it might cause pragmatic failure between students and lecturers. As a result, there is usually a need for requesters to mitigate their message. To mitigate successfully, students have to use different politeness strategies types (positive, negative, bald on-record, and off-record) to reach their communicative goal.

Politeness plays an important role in interactions between interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. However, misunderstanding and deviation from social conventions in its use can be expected. In student-lecturer communication, politeness is an important issue, particularly in the context in which the current research is framed, because the interlocutors come from different cultures in situations where the English language is used as the lingua franca. For this reason, students need to be aware of politeness norms so that they can compose appropriate e-mails. Students should know how to compose an appropriate e-mail in order to
accomplish their goals and also to be aware of the impact of their e-mails upon their lecturers. To gain a better understanding of potential issues and the possibility of pragmatic failure in the student-lecturer exchanges, the current study set to identify Libyan students’ politeness strategies used in their e-mail requests to faculty. In addition, the participants of this study are students who can be expected to perform a high frequency of requests than other speech acts such as thanking, complaining, or apologizing. This frequency of use warrants a study of such discourse as it impinges on communication efficacy.

Lecturers have been known to complain about students, both native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English, sending inconsiderate requests, using impolite style, inappropriate salutations, unsuitable level of formality, misspelt words, inaccurate grammar and insufficient explanations on the use of abbreviations (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). As such, students have to know the appropriate way to compose e-mail requests to their lecturers and be mindful of how they affect the lecturers’ impression of them (Bolkun & Holmgren, 2012; Danielewicz, 2013; Jessmer & Anderson, 2001). Foreign students need to adjust to their new social and cultural surroundings, and effective communication entails pragmatic awareness of appropriate speech practices, especially when interacting with lecturers, who are important gatekeepers of the students’ request for academic success. Thus, it is imperative for students to show deference and respect towards lecturers through appropriate linguistic behavior, because of their dependent status in an academic setting.

An extensive search of the literature reveals that some gaps still persist regarding the speech act of requesting. Firstly, studies on how NNS students express their requests using e-mails as a medium of communication from a pragmatic perspective are scarce. Secondly, despite a rich literature on politeness, research on student-lecturer communication is still in its infancy (Al-Shalawi, 2001; Najeeb et al., 2012; Chejnova, 2014; Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016). Finally, while there are some studies studied on e-mail and the politeness of NNS students in academic settings, it needs to be reiterated that there have been no studies on the politeness of English e-mail requests from Libyan postgraduate students. This suggests a research gap which obviously needs to be bridged and obtained results will have implications for other cultural groups.

Thus, the current study sought to fill in a gap in literature regarding the study of speech acts of politeness. The study adopted a predominantly pragmatic perspective drawing upon Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory as the underlying framework to identify politeness strategies used in e-mail requests of Libyan postgraduate students studying in Malaysian universities. To be specific, this study endeavored to answer the following main research question:

1. How do Libyan postgraduate students deploy politeness strategies in their e-mail requests to faculty?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigators understand that politeness strategies are used differently by people from different cultures (Al-Shalawi, 2001; Chejnova, 2014; Najeeb, et al., 2012). Linguistic realizations differ from culture to culture and are used differently in different societies (Sifianou, 1992). For example, cultures such as that of Arabs, whose politeness structured by two concepts: religious faith and social conventions (Samarah, 2015), operate using negative and positive politeness strategies as a continuum rather than a dichotomous concept (Al-Shalawi, 2001; Najeeb et al.,
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2012). Similarly, Greek students preferred a range of negative and positive politeness strategies (Chejnova, 2014).

Al-Shalawi (2001) conducted a study attempted to explore the politeness strategies utilized to reduce the Saudi ESL students’ English disagreements within e-mails. The study also aimed to assess the usefulness of the framework by Brown and Levinson (1987). The data were natural e-mails collected for a period of three months. The findings revealed that strategies of positive and negative politeness were both used. The research proposed that these two strategies should be treated not as dichotomous concepts, but as a continuum between positive and negative strategies.

A study conducted by Bulut and Rababah (2007) investigated authentic e-mails written in English by Saudi females to their male professors. A total of 99 e-mails with different speech act performances were sent by 9 female Arab Saudi students to their NS speaker teachers. The results revealed that positive politeness was the preferred strategy, which was not suitable in the status-unequal context and could lead to pragmatic failure. Another study by Najeeb et al. (2012) analyzed Arab postgraduate students’ politeness strategies in their e-mails while they were pursuing higher education in Malaysia. The study revealed that direct strategies were preferred. Eighteen e-mails were sent by six Arab student participants from three different universities. The results showed that Arab students used various politeness strategies, including both negative and positive strategies. In particular, they tended to be more direct in making requests.

In Chejnova’s (2014) study of e-mails written by Czech students, the researcher explored verbal politeness makers in the forms of address and the frequency of internal or external modifications. Choice of politeness behaviors, following Brown and Levinson (1987), was the primary concern. The data (e-mail messages sent to the author) were collected from students who were majoring in the Czech language or teaching at primary level schools. A total of 260 e-mails was analyzed. Regarding the dimension of directness level, the CCSARP framework was adapted from the works of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), and Biesenbach-Lucas (2007). Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) categorization of internal and external mitigations was used to analyze the data. In addition, the researcher drew upon the work of Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) and Schauer (2009). Similar to findings from previous studies, Chejnova found that lexical modifiers were used less frequently. Moreover, syntactic modification was employed as a negative strategy to minimize the imposition of the request.

A recent study on politeness SMS messages is Eshghinejad and Moini’s (2016) study. They studied the politeness strategies employed by female and male message senders to determine if any difference exists between these two groups of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners when transmitting SMS messages to their superiors, considering that the social distance and the asymmetric power relationship existed among interlocutors. A dataset of 300 L2 (i.e. English) and L1 (i.e. Persian) letters was gathered. From data analysis, the study showed that there was no significant difference between male and female groups in the use of positive and negative politeness.

These studies have revealed similarities in using negative and positive politeness strategies with the implication that culture-specific differences might present challenges for students faced with interacting in cross-cultural communications. Among the different politeness strategies, only on-record politeness (positive and negative strategies) was studied. Thus, the present study extended the analysis to incorporate four strategies of politeness.
(negative, positive, bald on-record, and off-record) based on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework. Additionally, most of the studies were conducted in the context of NS and NNS speakers of English. However, this study investigated politeness strategies where both students and lecturers were NNS speakers of English.

METHODS

Subjects and E-mail Data
The participants in this study were 20 Libyan postgraduate students (9 males and 11 females), who were studying in the four internationally recognized universities in Malaysia, which are Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kembangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM); 5 students per university). The participants pursued various fields of studies other than linguistics and the reason for selecting these students was due to the fact that linguistic students ought to have pragmatic awareness regarding politeness. The participants were self-selected samples; that is, they volunteered to take part in this research.

The e-mail corpus consisted of 109 English e-mails addressed to lecturers during the years 2015 to 2016. Typo errors, grammatical mistakes, contracted forms, misspelling, and alike found in the e-mails were not changed and the focus of analysis was on original message contents.

Data Collection
The procedure used for collecting the data for analysis is similar to that used by Chen (2001). Libyan postgraduate students attending courses in the four selected Malaysian universities were requested to forward up to 10 of their e-mail requests that they had previously written and sent to their lecturers. In the early stages of the study, the researchers relied on a Facebook group called ‘Academic Affairs of the Libyan Students’ to communicate with the students. Then, students who were willing to participate contacted the researchers and signed a consent form assuring them that all identifying features and particulars would be kept strictly confidential. Prior to forwarding their e-mails, the students were instructed to send the researchers only English e-mails in which they requested their lectures either for an action, or information, or the like. Upon receiving e-mails, they were thoroughly checked to determine whether the content has at least one request head act and contains no confidential information. Head act is “the minimal unit which can realize a request” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 275). Overall, a total of 160 e-mails contributed by 20 Libyan postgraduate students (4 to 12 emails per student) were shortlisted and out of which 109, who met the needs of the study, were finally considered for analysis. As for data coding, all selected e-mails were anonymized, and a generic code such as, S1 UKM e-mail 1, S2 UUM e-mail 6, was assigned to identify the writer and the university where it originated.

Analytical Framework
This study adopted Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory to analyze pragmatic choices and how deference and solidarity are expressed. The theory emphasizes the concepts of face, face-threatening act, and modifications. According to the theory, politeness strategies are performed on-record with redressive action (i.e. positive and negative politeness) and without redressive action (i.e. bald on-record politeness). What follows presents a detailed description of each politeness strategy.
To go on-record without redressive action is a bald-on-record strategy that is used to perform a very direct speech act performance; it does not give much attention to social niceties and it is often realized through the use of imperatives. It is used often in emergencies or when there is a small threat to the hearer’s face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It can also be used when the speaker has control over the hearer, for example in a message from lecturer to student not from student to lecturer.

Redressive action using either a positive or a negative strategy are the second and third types of politeness strategy that can be used, respectively. Positive politeness strategies are utilized between interlocutors to minimize distance, and this can be done by being friendly or by maintaining a good relationship. There are fifteen sub-strategies listed under this strategy, which are: “notice, attend to hearer (H) (his interests, wants, needs, goods), exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H), intensify interest in H, use in-group identity markers, seek agreement, avoid disagreement, presuppose/ raise/ assert common ground, joke, assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants, offer, promise, be optimistic, include both S and H in the activity, give (or ask for) reasons, assume or assert reciprocity (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation) and give gifts to H” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 102).

Negative politeness strategies are used to preserve the face of the hearers. This is the most elaborated and conventionalized form of strategy use (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Indirectness is mainly associated with negative politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson list ten sub-strategies of negative strategy: “be conventionally indirect, question, hedge, be pessimistic, minimize the imposition, give deference, apologize, impersonalize S and H, state the FTA as a general rule, nominalize, and go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H” (1987, p. 131).

The off-record strategy involves the indirect use of language to remove the speaker from the possibility that the hearer will feel imposed upon. Brown and Levinson (1987) express fifteen off-record politeness strategies: “give hints, give association clues, presuppose, understate, overstate, use tautologies, use contradictions, be ironic, use metaphor, use rhetorical questions, be ambiguous, be vague, overgeneralize, displace and be incomplete by use ellipsis.” (p. 214).

**E-mail Analysis Procedure**

This study took mixed methods approach to explore the politeness phenomenon in the context of e-mail requests. To analyze the data qualitatively, content analysis (Carley, 1993) was run on the data to identify politeness strategies appeared in the e-mail requests of the selected Libyan postgraduate students. For example, in light of the positive politeness strategy, any feature that signalled the reason for sending the e-mail (i.e. because, since, as) was considered as ‘giving reason’ sub-strategy. ‘Being optimistic’ is another positive politeness sub-strategy that was identified when, for instance, the verb ‘hope’ was used in the students’ e-mail messages with the aim of getting help from their lecturer. Another illustration, which relates to negative politeness strategy, is ‘if-clauses’, which acted as hedges to minimize the imposition of the act. As for the quantitative phase of the study, frequencies of occurrence of the identified strategies were counted and tabulated in an Excel sheet.

To identify the politeness strategies, the head act of requests performed by the students was considered. As mentioned earlier, head act is the nucleus of the speech act, usually the most explicit utterance in the email, based on which the addressee understands the meaning of a message. Each head act was analyzed on a directness level to find out the request strategies.
based on the CCSARP framework (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). The head act can be performed alone or with supportive elements called modifications to mitigate it. Modifications are various linguistic elements (i.e., syntactic, lexical and phrasal devices), which play a role to soften the head act or the context where the head act is embedded (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). These head acts and modifications were then identified for the different politeness strategies. It should be noted that request strategies and modifications were beyond the scope of the present study and left for further studies.

In this study, to reduce the risk of randomness and demarcate the precision of the analytical approaches taken at an adequately high level of consensus, a consistent method was very central to data analysis. Therefore, analysis was improved through a channel of inter-coder agreement albeit the data was mainly analyzed by the researchers themselves. The emails were first coded sentence by sentence based on directness level and the politeness strategies and a sheet of analysis was appended to each one for systematic analysis. Two experts in the field were then recruited to act as coders: one was an applied linguist at Kafkas University, Turkey, and the other was a Ph.D. graduate, who had done her dissertation on politeness in academic lectures. They received a small sub-set of the data (20 emails; 10 per each) with a coding manual containing descriptions and instances. Once the corpus was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, the coders were contacted and together with the researchers went through the texts to identify any conflicting results. Despite minor inconsistencies, which were only in relation to the identification of politeness strategies and were even ironed out in discussion, the inter-coder agreement measured by Cohen’s kappa obtained value signalled a high reliability index of .87.

**FINDINGS**

*Politeness Strategies Used in the E-mail Requests*

The analysis and findings presented here was guided primarily by politeness strategy model of Brown and Levinson (1987) to give insights into the occurrence of the different types of strategy used in the e-mail requests. It is noteworthy that analysis of the 109 e-mails identified a total of 137 politeness strategies (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occurrence per e-mail</th>
<th>Number of e-mails</th>
<th>Politeness strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the analysis of on-record politeness strategies (bald on-record without redressive action, and positive and negative on-record with redressive action) and off-record strategies, the data showed that 113 number of on-record politeness strategies performed the request in a direct and unambiguous way either with or without redressive action. This gives (82.48%) of occurrence in the data. However, only 24 requests were made least indirectly (off-record strategy). This represents (17.52%) of the occurrence in the data. The next sub-sections report on the use analysis of sub-strategies for each of the four politeness strategies (Table 2).
Table 2: *Frequency analysis of on-record and off-record politeness strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politeness strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-record</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>82.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-record</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Negative Politeness Sub-strategies**

The total number of negative politeness appeared in the dataset was 70 cases. This strategy, representing the most prevalent politeness strategies, used to express requests made by the Libyan postgraduate students. Negative politeness was to be expected in e-mails from students to lecturers because these negative politeness sub-strategies were concerned with minimizing the particular force of the FTA. Table 3 below illustrates the negative politeness sub-strategies.

Table 3: *Frequency analysis of negative politeness sub-strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question and hedge</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be conventionally indirect</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the Hearer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimize imposition</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of negative politeness strategy</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis showed that 4 negative politeness sub-strategies were used repeatedly in the e-mails of the Libyan postgraduate students: that is, they were conventionally indirect, used questions and hedges, go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the Hearer, and minimizing the imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). What follows presents a detailed description of the negative politeness sub-strategies that appeared in e-mail requests in the present data.

**Question and hedge**

This sub-strategy was used to convey uncertainty as to whether the hearer was able to perform the action requested (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 136). In this sub-strategy, the students used mitigating expressions within the students-lecturers interactional constraints to lessen the impact of the request. The questions and hedges accounted for the highest use of on-record politeness strategies (46 occurrences), which represented questions (30 cases) and hedges (16 cases) of all requests identified in the data. Questions which asserted an assumption that the lecturer was unlikely to perform the act or to show uncertainty on the part of the student about the lecturer’s ability to perform the act, made up this category of negative politeness sub-strategies. Such questions appeared to be mitigated internally with modals like (have, can). The example below illustrates this sub-strategy:

Good evening Prof. (name)  
It's (student’s name)  
This is a new topic (project title)  
Is it good enough to be a topic for proposal. If not, **can I meet you tomorrow in your office?** What time?  
Thank you  

(S17, UUM, e-mail 90)
The student, in the example provided above, used the model *can* to carry additional connotation regarding his request for appointment because it is the lecturer that can decide on his request and set the appointment time.

Hedges were used in the form of modals, if clauses, and performatives in phrases like *if you don’t mind*. Below is a text example:

Dear: Dr
My name is (student’s name), and I am a student in faculty of science, UM, in department of chemistry. I am interested to do my project in Environment area. I hope you don’t mind my getting in touch and would very much appreciate it if I could meet you in person, or if convenient talk on the phone. I understand you are a very busy person so I'd appreciate any time you could give me.

With many thanks

(S15, UM, e-mail 78)

In the above sample, the student hedged the illocutionary force using expressions like *I hope you don’t mind* and *if I could meet you*. By doing so, the student presupposed that she had the permission of the lecturer to do the act (i.e., to register her project with this lecturer). These two sub-strategies were the standard way to perform an on-record polite request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that hedges and questions can enable “cooperation, informativeness, truthfulness, relevance and clarity which on many occasions need to be softened for reason of face” (p. 146).

*Be conventionally indirect*

The speaker is faced with an opposing tension between “the desire to give H an ‘out’ by being indirect, and the desire to go on-record” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 132). This means that the student performed the request by using certain conventional linguistic expressions that are unambiguous even if they are not be based on the literal meaning of the expression (Ruzickova, 2007).

Being conventionally indirect is an expected sub-strategy in student-lecturer communication since it acknowledges the imposition of the request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This sub-strategy registered 20 times of occurrence of on-record politeness strategies total number employed by the Libyan postgraduate students. Being conventionally indirect inquired on the lecturer’s possibility or ability to comply with the request by using the phrase *could you*, or *I would*. The following is an illustration of this sub-strategy.

Salam.
Dear Dr. (name)
We apologize from you, because we did not come at an appointment time. My friend (Student’s name) came late, because the bus came late.

**Could you please fix another appointment for us?**

thank you
Yours faithfully,
(students name)

(S2, UUM, e-mail 9)
In the above examples, the student used indirect speech with a degree of politeness to express the conventional indirect strategy *could you* and politeness marker *please* to make a request for an appointment and for feedback. The use of this sub-strategy would presumably minimize the imposition and encourage cooperation between student and lecturer.

*Go on-record as incurring a debt or as not indebted to H*

By employing this sub-strategy, the S can take care of any FTAs in a way that claims his indebtedness explicitly to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The speaker could also disclaim any indebtedness as a way of going on-record. This sub-strategy appeared three times of the total number of on-record politeness strategies found. The example below illustrates this sub-strategy.

Dear
I am planning to submit the attached paper to Q1/Q2 journals.
*I’d be very grateful for your comments and advice before I send it.*
Thanks

(S10, UKM, e-mail 53)

The example provided above indicated that the students expressed their gratitude in anticipation of the request. The analysis showed that the expressions like *I’d appreciate* or *I’d be grateful* used by the Libyan postgraduate students to show their appreciation in the event that the lecturer did comply with the request.

*Minimize the imposition*

This is a way to defuse the strength of the FTA by indicating that the imposition of the request is not great in itself, so this might pay deference to the H, indirectly (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This negative politeness sub-strategy accounted for only one case of the total number of on-record politeness strategies used in the dataset. See the text example provided below.

Assalamualikum Dr
Thank you Dr for your reply. Actually i have not discussed chapter five with the other supervisors. Any time you are free i will come to discuss about it together, **just let me know the suitable time for you.**
Thank you

(S8, UM, e-mail 40)

Minimizing imposition can be realized using certain words like *just* to minimize the imposition, as illustrated in the example (S8, UM, e-mail 40), where the student did to arrange an appointment. Positive sub-strategies minimize the negative impact on the hearer’s positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The next section presents data on the occurrence of the positive politeness sub-strategies.
Positive Politeness Sub-strategies
The analysis revealed that the second most prevalent strategy used was positive politeness. It constituted 26 times of the total number of on-record politeness strategies. It was also found that only 4 of 15 positive sub-strategies were positive politeness strategies. Table 4 summarizes the results of these sub-strategies occurred in the analyzed e-mail requests.

Table 4: Frequency analysis of positive politeness sub-strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give (or ask for) reasons</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be optimistic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include both Speaker and Hearer in the activity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Positive Politeness strategy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Give (or ask for) reasons
By employing this sub-strategy, Speaker and Hearer are cooperatively involved in the activity by giving reasons as to why the request is made (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Thus, giving a lecturer (in the present context) a reason to form a request was seen as a positive move. The findings showed that the giving (or asking for) reasons sub-strategy was the most often positive sub-strategy used by the Libyan postgraduate students. It was used 14 times of the total number of on-record politeness. The request was based on the notion that the lecturer would cooperate once he or she understood why the request was made. This sub-strategy is illustrated in the example below.

Hi Dr. (name),
How are you? I hope you are very fine.
Sorry if I bother you but I have a question and I want to know from you if you don't mind. I decided to travel to my country on June and I want to book a ticket from now so I wish to know the date of the final exam for (course code) because I want to travel after the date of the exam immediately.
Thanks to you and I am so happy to be one of your students.

(S5, UPM, e-mail 26)

In the data, the students used want and wish to show the reason for issuing their requests. Further, words like because and the preposition for showed what help is needed from the lecturers. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that speakers can assume cooperation by giving reasons because this implies “you can help me” (p. 128). The lecturer would be implicated as he processed the reason.

Be optimistic
Being optimistic is a way to make “S to assume that H wants S’s wants for S (or for S and H) and will help to obtain them.” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 126). By applying this strategy, a student assumed that the lecturer was likely to have the desire to satisfy the student’s wants. In other words, the lecturer’s wants and the student’s wants were assumed to be shared as they had mutual interest. The prime function of this cooperative strategy was to maintain a friendly stance. This politeness sub-strategy was used 8 times of the total number of on-record politeness strategies. Examples are provided below:
Dear sir,
good day, I am (student’s name), I hope take with you my project next semester, if you can. I prefer meet you, but someone tell me, you are not here. so, could you tell me, When I can meet with you?
thank you
yours sincerely,
(students name)

(S18, UM, e-mail 95)

In the example (S18UM 95), the participant of this e-mail expressed their requests using the optimistic expression I hope. This expression worked by reducing the force of their request, which implied cooperation between students and lecturers and that the request can be taken for granted. Thus, the principal function of ‘be optimistic’ sub-strategy was to capitalize on the perceived advantage that would be experienced by the lecturer and in the event would fulfill the student’s request.

**Promise**
A promise can also be used to redress the potential threat of request as the speaker shows his good intention in satisfying the hearer’s positive face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125). This sub-strategy was utilized two times of the total number of on-record politeness sub-strategies. An example of this sub-strategy is presented below.

Alsalamualicom
I apologize. This form has given me Dr. (name).
**I will come to you on Tuesday morning to the application form Cartridge**
Thank you very much
(Students’ name)

(S13, UM, e-mail 69)

In the example (S13, UM, e-mail 69), the student tried to show good intention in satisfying the lecturer’s positive face want by intensifying what kind of form (the application form Cartridge) his lecturer needed to look at.

**Include both speaker and hearer in the activity**
This sub-strategy is utilized while a speaker means either you or me when using the we form. It calls upon the activation of cooperative assumptions so that an FTA will be redressed (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The occurrence of this sub-strategy use was used in only twice of the total number of positive politeness sub-strategies. The following example represents the use of this sub-strategy in the e-mail data.

Salam,
Dear Dr. (name),
Firstly, I told you about my case "maybe I'll give birth during the final exam ", and you said that is better if I'll do the exam earlier, so I asked Dr. (FN) to know what will happen, she said if Dr. (FN) agree no problem but I have to get letter from you.
Secondly, We need outline or template to complete project report, please upload it.
Thank you very much
Respectfully yours,

(S3, UUM, e-mail 15)

The above example illustrated clearly how the student had included the lecturer in the action with the inclusive we, which actually meant I in reference. This sub-strategy was evident when the request incorporated the student and the lecturer together.

Bald on-record strategies, however, serve to meet any FTAs head on so that the student’s intentions are very clear. The following section discusses the occurrences of bald on-record politeness sub-strategies in the e-mail requests made by the Libyan postgraduate students.

**Bald On-record Politeness Sub-strategies**
The last on-record politeness strategy used by the Libyan postgraduate students was bald on-record politeness sub-strategies. This politeness strategy relied on the use of imperatives (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The strategy was used to alleviate the lecturer’s anxiety by preemptively inviting him or her to impinge on the student’s request. The imperative strategy was used 17 times out of the total on-record politeness strategies found in the e-mail requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This strategy seemed to threaten the lecturer’s dignity and, as such, it was not expected at all to appear in student-lecturer communication (Chejnova, 2014). It was considered to be inappropriate for use in an interaction in an academic context. Nonetheless, this strategy could be softened with the use of hedges or the politeness marker ‘please’. The presence of this strategy in the e-mails might indicate that the Libyan postgraduate students were not aware of the force of their impositions on the lecturers. The way how they used bald on-record slightly different in their e-mails is illustrated in the two examples below.

How are you?
Give me your comments about power point.
I think this is better
Thanks.

(S13, UM, e-mail 68)

Salam Dr.
Dr (name) ask me to send the abstract to you. Please help me to submit to Symposium Organizing Committee.
Attached file.
Thank you.

(S19, UKM, e-mail 103)
As can be seen in the above first example (S19, UKM, e-mail 103), imperative form was used baldly to explicitly express the request. This request was made without any redress. In the other example (S19, UKM, e-mail 103), the student used an imperative clause, help me, when asking for feedback. However, the student used the politeness marker please to reduce negative impact. Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that request with imperative can be mitigated by a ‘please’ marker. Although these imperative constructions appeared with the conventional politeness marker ‘please’, they can still be regarded as inappropriate constructions in student-lecturers’ interaction (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

The following section describes the occurrence of off-record politeness strategies in the Libyan postgraduate students’ e-mail requests to their lecturers.

**Off-record Politeness Sub-strategies**

Off-record politeness sub-strategies appeared to be the third most frequently used strategy. This strategy occurred only a total of 24 times of the total number of politeness strategies. Of the sub-strategies used, hints were used 10 times of the total number of off-record politeness sub-strategies, while giving clues of association was appeared 14 times of the total number of off politeness sub-strategies. The frequency of each sub-strategy of off-record politeness is reported in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hint</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give clues of association</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The non-conventional politeness strategy, which violated the norms of conversation because the maxim of manner was violated, was nevertheless able to imply a particular recommended course of action (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this case, the student left himself out by allowing for plausible deniability, so that he was not held responsible for the negative interpretation of the act. In the present data, off-record politeness strategy was accomplished by two sub-strategies: giving hints and clues of association. Below are examples to illustrate these two sub-strategies.

Hi doctor
    good evening
    first thing first, **for course notes I do not find it in the spectrum.**
    secondly, i cannot understand what we have to write about documentation in presentation project because every one of my group understand it by different way. **for me i understand that documentation is talking about how we will save the document of our company**
    I am waiting your answer
    thank you
    **greetings**

    (S16, UM, e-mail 86)
In the example (S16, UM, e-mail 86), the hint sub-strategy illustrated, which consisted of an attempt to highlight the act in association with reasons for wanting to pursue the act. In this example, the student stated her request indirectly by commenting that she did not understand what was required to complete the project set by the lecturer. This implied that the lecturer should explain the requirement for the presentation project. As can be seen from example (S11, UM, e-mail 60) below, the purpose was to ask the lecturer indirectly for feedback about the student’s work. However, the student had merely mentioned that he/she had attached the copy (of the assignment). The student also used the phrase for your kind consideration as a hint to motivate a positive action from the lecturer.

Dear Dr. (name)
It's me (student’s name).(matric number)
Here I attached the copy for your kind consideration.
Best regards,

(S11, UM, e-mail 60)

In brief, giving hints and clues of association were the two sub-strategies that occurred in the data under study.

DISCUSSION
The detailed analysis of authentic data produced interesting findings. The most frequently used on-record politeness strategy were negative politeness strategies. In order to safeguard the students’ own positive face and their lecturers’ negative face, the participants resorted to a variety of negative sub-strategies, which included “question and hedges, be conventionally indirect, go on-record as incurring a debt or as not indebting H, and minimize the imposition” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 131). Social distance between interlocutors appeared to be emphasized by means of the negative politeness strategy and sub-strategies. However, the integration of hedges, conventionally indirect strategies and questions could increase the politeness of such requests (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The most prevalent negative politeness sub-strategies were the use of hedges and questions. A possible explanation for the presence of such a high frequency of hedges could be that hedges used for this purpose are very much a part of the writers’ schema for mitigating and reducing loss of face. This claim can be justified by Jensen’s (2009) argument that hedges are rhetorical devices of modification. The use of hedges also expressed politeness and respect towards lecturers because they weaken the illocutionary force of an utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

By performing requests with negative politeness sub-strategies, the students hoped that their requests would be fulfilled without the lecturer feeling that they were obliged to do so. In the context of interaction between students and lecturers, students were expected to perform requests politely and possibly this led them to soften the tone of their e-mails.

The positive sub-strategies recorded were ‘be optimistic’, ‘include both S and H in the activity’, ‘give (or ask for) reasons’ and ‘promise’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Among the positive politeness sub-strategies; ‘give reasons’ strategy was the most used positive sub-strategy. This high level of preference indicates that the Libyan postgraduate students believed that giving reasons had a logical appeal that would motivate the lecturer’s cooperation. As Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) acknowledges, giving reasons was indeed a polite way to
underlie a request. However, unless the reasons or explanations for the necessity of granting the requestee’s request was clear, the lecturer may not wish to comply. Giving clear reasons encourages cooperation between interlocutors and increases the likelihood of the lecturer acting in a positive fashion. It is worth noting that giving reasons entailed an explicit explanation especially when the conjunction ‘because’ was used. E-mails that were based on positive politeness strategies thus enhance solidarity between interlocutors.

Off-record sub-strategies can be used as a request for action, such as giving feedback and fixing an appointment. This is in line with Krish and Salman’s (2016) study which reported that Arab students use the indirect strategy specifically for feedback. The Libyan postgraduate students probably opted for the indirect strategy considering the level of imposition that would be actualized by a direct request, which could threaten the lecturer’s negative face. Krish and Salman (2016) revealed that female students used hints which might refer to their attention to avoid direct confrontation with the recipients (i.e., teachers in their study). A student may even select to or not to make the request speech act in order to prevent face loss. However, this opaque strategy might require more effort in interpretation on the lecturer’s part to understand the illocutionary force of the request act. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that it is common among high social distance relationships; however, it is not a preferred strategy in some cultures like Malaysia, who do not use hints in their communication. This is supported by Khalib and Tayeh’s (2014) study when Malaysian students avoided using hints either with their lecturers or their peers.

**CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to investigate politeness strategies used in e-mail requests written by Libyan postgraduate students to lecturers in four selected Malaysians universities. In order to identify which politeness strategies were used in the students’ e-mail requests, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework was adopted to answer the research question. The findings revealed that negative politeness strategies were the most frequently used (identified 70 times) in the request head act of the present study. The second most commonly used strategy identified from the analysis was positive politeness, followed by the off-record, while the least occurrence in the data was the bald on-record politeness strategy.

The present work contributed to the growing body of politeness research in e-mail requests in academic settings, especially in the area of Arab pragmatic linguistics. It dealt with Libyan postgraduate students in Malaysia, who encountered a different culture, language and communication challenges, especially in terms of e-mail writing, during their studies at Malaysian universities.

This study has implications for the students, lecturers, decision makers, and educational syllabus designers to avoid pragmatic failure from occurring, and to facilitate effective communication across cultures. As Libyan students step into a new context to pursue their higher education, they might benefit from learning how to interact with people from different cultures and with higher power and status.

Research on pedagogical intervention has concentrated on the significance of instruction to students, essentially English NNS students, across different domains. In conjunction with different studies (Economidou-Kogetidis, 2011; Felix-Brasdefer’s 2011, 2015, Lazarescu, 2013), the current study places emphasis on the need for increasing awareness among language learners about the appropriate use of politeness strategies when they compose e-mail requests to their lecturers.
This study recommended a cross-cultural comparison between local Malaysian postgraduate students and the international postgraduate students could be carried out to determine how politeness strategies vary between the two groups. This contrastive work allows for more precise findings on cross-cultural and inter-language pragmatic features of these e-mails.

Ultimately, this study concentrated on the politeness strategies used within request events and excluded the opening and closing moves of the e-mails. However, further studies are needed to also consider politeness in the opening and closing, as well as forms of address used by Libyan students, for the purpose of achieving a complete picture of the politeness phenomenon.

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