Towards a Practical Approach for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Email Communication

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By

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Abstract

Though relatively new, email is becoming increasingly prevalent in both our personal and professional lives. Yet the underlying processes of email communication are often poorly understood, especially as far as politeness is concerned. Deprived of the wealth of prosodic and non-verbal features which can add supplementary support to politeness, email presents many communication challenges to users. Differing cultural value systems create differing expectations of politeness. Differing cultural discourse styles create differing ways to embed politeness within the language. Uncertainty remains over expectations of politeness as well as appropriate ways to incorporate it in email language. No guidelines currently exist which can offer a politeness protocol for our email messages.

Importantly, politeness in email communication, especially in intercultural contexts, has generally escaped the attention of politeness researchers. A review of the literature revealed further deficiencies in politeness research. Differing debates surrounding politeness highlighted a lack of consensus by researchers as to a simple explanation and definition of this complex phenomenon. Many uncertainties still linger around this abstract notion which defies simple interpretation and analysis. Opinions of everyday email writers and how they best convey politeness in their intercultural messages have not been sought by researchers to date. This lack of research is surprising given the rapid increase in use of the medium which allows users to instantly and easily cross cultural borders at minimal cost. Further, the literature also revealed a lack of instruments which could be used for the purposes of operationalising and assessing politeness in written texts, especially email texts.

The challenges presented in this study, therefore, were many. Simplifying and reducing the complexity surrounding politeness formed the initial challenge. Adopting principally an inductive methodological approach, this study sought the perceptions and opinions on politeness in email from a large sample of academic and general staff members at an Australian university. Using mainly qualitative methods, the researcher tried to understand the nature of politeness in email from the viewpoint of the participants themselves. Perceptions were gathered by two data-eliciting
instruments, a questionnaire and a follow-up interview. As this study had an intercultural dimension, opinions were also sought from academics living overseas and who spoke English as a second language. As such, a smaller group of Korean academics living and working at various universities in South Korea formed the second group of participants.

The researcher also collected and analysed data from a third source. Authentic intercultural email threads were analysed to complement data already obtained and to reveal further aspects of the topic not evident from the questionnaire and interview. These analyses allowed the researcher to match participants’ views gained in the first two instruments with the reality in the email texts. However, devising a systematic means for locating and assessing written politeness proved difficult. There were no tools available to guide this process. A streamlined, inclusive and practical tool was needed, not only for this study but also for politeness research in general.

Consequently, an email politeness assessment instrument, The Tool-Kit, was developed during the course of this research project. It was developed as a response to the uncertainty of participants themselves about politeness and how best to convey it in email. The elements in The Tool-Kit were based on the data obtained from the participants from both Australia and Korea, as well as from certain theoretical constructs from the literature. What the participants considered important for polite email language and construction was vital to the inductive nature of this study and to the creation of The Tool-Kit. Suggestions from academic colleagues, gathered over the four-year duration of the research, also influenced the construction of the instrument, which serves two important purposes. Firstly, it provides a systematic means of analysing written email texts in order to identify levels of politeness used. The Tool-Kit can thus help to identify problem areas in the use of politeness. As such, it fills a considerable gap in the literature. The second important purpose is that it can provide a set of guidelines to help people make their email language more polite.

The Tool-Kit was piloted in this study. It was used systematically to analyse two authentic intercultural email threads for politeness levels. It was also used to observe how these levels changed over the duration of the thread. The threads were interactive email dialogues between academic staff members in Australia, Korea and Hong Kong.
Results obtained from the initial use of *The Tool-Kit* provided further insight into politeness not available without the aid of this instrument.

Overall, the study highlighted the importance of politeness within email language, especially in intercultural contexts. It demonstrated that many people expect polite language in their email communication. However, the study revealed much uncertainty as to how to write polite emails such that offences and misunderstandings are avoided. Recommendations as a result of the findings of this study are offered, as well as ways to refine and develop *The Tool-Kit* for further research projects.
Candidate’s Statement of Originality

I declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the work contained in this thesis is my own work except where it is acknowledged as such in the text. Furthermore, the material has not been submitted in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed:

Margaret Murphy

Date:
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Supporting Publications


Conference Presentations


Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Email has many advantages for communication. It offers a low cost, easy-to-use communication channel, which spans temporal and spatial boundaries instantly. Via email, communication can be achieved either within one’s own country or across national boundaries. Other cultures are now only a mouse click away. Consequently, email communication has become very popular over the last 20 years or so. This popularity has influenced our preferred choice of communication media. For example, there has been a shift from conventional letter writing and telephone to email communication in the business world (Gimenez, 2000; Ulijn & Campbell, 2001) and in the educational world (Pincas, 2001; Rice, 1997). Universities are increasingly using email to respond to overseas electronic inquiries and to initiate new overseas contacts. Consequently, new and distant educational partnerships, once considered too remote, are now emerging, due in part to email technology (Rice, 1997; Xu, 1996).

Email communication, however, is distinctive and differs in important ways from other more established communication media such as face-to-face communication and telephone, for example. The lack of social context and the lack of linguistic and paralinguistic cues in email are forcing users to contend with uncertain guidelines for communication within unspecified social parameters. Cultural and social issues, such as how polite to be, how best to present oneself, how best to address someone of a higher or lower status and so on, are just some of the concerns which currently confront email users. Such issues are magnified when negotiating interculturally, as value and belief systems and expectations of politeness may differ across cultures. For example, some cultures may place a higher importance than others on social status and language reflecting social status, such as the use of correct titles. In other cultures where social status is not so important, the absence of such language may not be offensive. In email communication, particularly in intercultural contexts, expectations of politeness from both sender and receiver are often unspecified or unknown, leaving the sender uncertain as to how to formulate appropriate politeness expressions to an
unknown and unseen receiver. The aim of this study then is to shed new light on the use of politeness and how best to convey it in intercultural email contexts.

A review of the literature began the process of realising this aim. The three bodies of literature relevant to the topic of this study are linguistic politeness, intercultural communication and email communication. After considerable reading in these three relevant literature bodies, five significant gaps were revealed, which this study seeks to address. Each gap is outlined and explained below.

**Gap 1: There is little consensus on how politeness is conceptualised in the literature.**

Considerable research has been conducted into linguistic politeness in the last 30 years. Despite the avid attention focussed on politeness research, mystery and confusion still surround this complex and abstract notion. In the literature, many different and often competing conceptualisations of politeness abound (Eelen, 2001). To date, there has been little consensus among researchers about the nature of politeness (Fraser, 1990a, p. 219; Locher & Watts, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2000a, p. 2). However, while many competing conceptualisations of politeness further our academic understandings, the lack of consensus among the researchers clouds our ability to apply these understandings to everyday interactions. This study aims to synthesise the various competing concepts of politeness in a way that allows application in everyday email interactions.

**Gap 2: There is increased divergence between ordinary speakers’ intuitive knowledge of politeness and the complex conceptualisations of politeness and technical language in the canonical literature.**

The many different and competing conceptualisations of politeness are often complex and difficult to understand. For example, concepts in the politeness literature such as *face threatening acts, softening mechanism, disambiguation, hedges on illocutionary force*, are not easily understood by people without knowledge of the academic field of politeness. Moreover, the language behind these complex concepts is often complicated as well. For example, such terms as *face, negative politeness strategy, anoint, redress, off-record, flout, approbation, maxims*, abound in the literature.
The complex language and conceptualisations may not be shared by ordinary speakers in everyday language who have their own intuitive thoughts and perceptions about politeness. There is evidence to suggest that there is a divergence between these two perspectives of politeness, which appears to be increasing (Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2003). Allowing a gap to develop between ordinary speakers’ knowledge of politeness and theoretical constructs developed in the literature can create confusion about what is encompassed by the notion of politeness (Haugh, 2003).

As a result, there has been a call for politeness research to take into account native speaker assessments of politeness and to make them the basis of a bottom-up approach (Locher & Watts, 2005). Such an approach would reduce the theoretical top-down driven approach to politeness evident in the literature. It would also redress the divergence between ordinary speakers’ understanding and the complex and often abstract theoretical conceptualisations in the literature.

The aim of this study then, is to adopt such a bottom-up approach which considers native speakers’ perceptions of politeness as the basis. It also aims to consider and include non-native speakers’ perceptions of politeness. In so doing, the study aims to reduce some of the complexities inherent in expressing politeness by describing it in a language easily understood by people with limited knowledge of linguistic politeness.

**Gap 3: Minimal research on politeness in email communication has been conducted to date.**

A considerable amount of research on politeness has occurred in the last 30 years since it became a topic of interest in sociocultural linguistics. Most of this research, however, has centred on verbal interaction in a face-to-face mode (Pilegaard, 1997). Minimal research has been conducted on politeness expressions in written texts (Pilegaard, 1997; Suh, 1999) and even less so in email communication (see Lee, 2004, as an exception to this). While there has been much research into various facets of human to computer communication (Holmes, 1994; Ma, 1996; Mak & Yeung, 1999; Pincas, 2001; Simmons, 1994), little emphasis has been given to the social and cultural aspects of communicating via computers (Biggiero, 2003; Crystal, 2001; Ross, 2001; Simmons, 1994; Wilkie, Jack & Littlewood, 2005). This is especially the case with email where the vast amount of research has neglected to address important
social and cultural aspects of the medium, especially the use of politeness expressions (Bunz & Cambell, 2002; Simmons, 1994; Wilkie et al., 2005). It is not even apparent in current research whether politeness is indeed important in email communication. Furthermore, inclusion of intercultural components within email communication research still eludes scholarly attention (Chen, 1998; Ma, 1996, p. 176; Ross, 2001; Ulijn, Lincke & Karakaya, 2001). This study, then, attempts to bridge this gap by looking closely at the various social and cultural aspects that may affect the use of politeness in human-computer communication.

**Gap 4: There is no instrument to locate and assess politeness in email texts.**

There does not exist any instrument for identifying politeness expressions in email language. As a result, research into linguistic politeness in email texts risks being subjective and may lack validity. Each analysis may bring different results as perceptions of politeness norms can vary greatly (Eelen, 2001). There is even disagreement between native speakers as to whether a particular example is actually polite or not (Eelen, 2001; Locher & Watts, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2000a). Using an instrument to isolate politeness expressions could contribute to a systematic approach to linguistic politeness research. As well, having a systematic tool for detecting politeness expressions in email texts would make isolating the different components of politeness a more manageable task. This process of isolating politeness components has eluded researchers to date (Eelen, 2001), especially in email politeness (Simmons, 1994). This study aims to redress this significant absence by the construction of an instrument which is sensitive to the various expressions of politeness in email communication and can isolate and identify them, thereby providing a more systematic means of analysis.

**Gap 5: There is no instrument for teaching politeness in pedagogical settings.**

Confusion surrounding the language and conceptual bases of politeness may explain the lack of instruments for both locating politeness as indicated above and for the teaching of linguistic politeness. Notions of politeness and their pragmatic considerations have received attention in the domain of second language pedagogy (Haugh, 2003). However, no tools exist which can act as aids in the teaching of such an abstract and complex phenomenon as politeness, especially in an intercultural
context. This study aims to create an instrument which could not only assess politeness expressions in email communication, but could also be used as a valuable aid in the teaching of intercultural politeness.

The next section explains the practical approach this study has taken to achieve these aims and thus to close those five gaps.

1.2 Aim of Thesis: A Practical Approach

The main aim of this thesis was to understand politeness in intercultural email communication and to identify ways to assess its use through a practical approach. The following three research questions provided the starting point for such an approach. The first research question, focussing on politeness, was the primary and most important one. Two other research questions, also connected to politeness, were considered secondary in this study. An explanation of each research question is given in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, p. 64.

**Research Questions:**

Q1: How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?
Q2: Does email allow social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?
Q3: What are the characteristics of email technology that may pose barriers to polite email communication?

The following concept map, Figure 1.1, shows the position of these research questions in relation to the major steps involved in the overall process.
Figure 1.1: Overview of thesis

Figure 1.1 shows the sequential and interlocking steps of the process of this thesis. After a comprehensive reading of the relevant literature (Step 1), the researcher formulated and crafted the research questions (Step 2). These questions sought to gather information which could address the gaps evident in the literature at the time of this study. From the research questions, the data eliciting instruments of questionnaire and interview were also crafted (Step 3). These instruments were individually tailored so that the necessary data for addressing the research questions could be gathered. Decision on the choice of participants and sampling procedures involved was then necessary (Step 4). As this study focussed on politeness in email communication in an
academic context, participants from a university setting were chosen. Choosing further participants outside Australia was also necessary, due to the intercultural nature of this study. Questionnaires were then distributed and interviews conducted with the sample of participants both inside and outside Australia. Data from these two instruments were then collected (Step 5). From this data set, the researcher embarked on the process of data analysis (Step 6). This involved reducing, collating, coding and thematising data in an iterative way which would represent as closely as possible the participants’ own views and perceptions on the topic of this study. An analysis of their written email texts then allowed comparison and cross-checking with those views and perceptions (Step 7). Triangulation of data thus took place. These views, perceptions and realities elicited from the questionnaire, interview and email texts, were then combined with certain theoretical constructs from the literature (Step 8). An instrument was thus created which could then be used to identify and assess politeness in email texts (Step 9). The instrument (named The Tool-Kit) was then applied in the systematic analysis of the original email texts (Step 10).

The chapter structure of the thesis also follows Figure 1.1 as indicated in the following section. To assist the reader, an overview of the focus and content of the remaining chapters now follows.

1.3 Chapter Format of Thesis

Chapter 2 outlines current theory in the three relevant bodies of literature. This chapter also cites results of recent and relevant empirical research in tangential fields to position this study within an overall context.

Chapter 3 explains the methods involved in the data collection and analysis. It outlines the importance of the inductive approach of this study. The primary and two secondary research questions are then briefly discussed as well as how they came to form the basis of the two main data eliciting sources, the questionnaire and interview. An initial email politeness assessment tool (hereafter abbreviated to EPA 1), used to analyse email texts for politeness levels, is also outlined and discussed. There is explanation as well on the choice of participants both from Australia and Korea and the sampling procedures involved. Two software packages, Statistical Packages for
the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Leximancer, used for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, are then discussed. Assumptions and limitations of the study are outlined next, as well as problems encountered in the course of this study. Lastly, there is a section on researcher reflexivity.

Chapter 4 outlines all results elicited from the three data sources: the questionnaire, interview and an analysis of email texts. These results are listed according to the sections of the questionnaire which elicited both quantitative and qualitative data. The sections are: Politeness, Social Status, Choice of Words, Relationships via Email and Email Technology. There is an explanation of the results of analyses from the two software packages, SPSS and Leximancer, and how these results supplemented and complemented the researcher’s own analyses.

Chapter 5 discusses the participants’ views and perceptions on the topic of this study. It outlines important findings from the data obtained from the three instruments: questionnaire, interview and analysis of email texts. Discussion and analysis of empirical results give further explanation to the findings. The views and perceptions elicited from participants both in Australia and Korea are discussed according to the themes of the research questions: politeness, relationships via email (and choice of words) and email technology.

Chapter 6 explains the practical approach this study has taken for assessing politeness in intercultural email communication. In the first part of this chapter, it is shown how previous data obtained from many sources over the duration of this study formed the conceptual framework of the thesis. The second part of the chapter discusses the practical instrument which arose from that framework. The instrument, called The Tool-Kit, is used to assess politeness in email texts in a practical way. In this chapter it is demonstrated how the new instrument speaks to the main findings revealed in the previous chapter and how it also addresses the five gaps in the literature listed in this introductory chapter.

Chapter 7 outlines a pilot testing of the new instrument. The same email threads used for analysis by the first initial instrument (EPA 1) are now used by The Tool-Kit (EPA 2). It is shown how and why the second stage is more efficient than the first stage. Two authentic email threads are analysed on an initial trial basis. This chapter
explains how *The Tool-Kit* is used to serve the purposes of identifying and assessing levels of politeness in the language across a series of intercultural emails.

Chapter 8 summarises and discusses the main findings of this study. It highlights important aspects on the topic of politeness in intercultural email communication. Future developments of *The Tool-Kit* are suggested as well as possible ways to incorporate this instrument in further research. Recommendations to email software developers are then discussed. Proposed workshop presentations are also outlined. Lastly, the chapter summarises how this study has addressed the five gaps in the literature listed at the outset and how new knowledge and methods of analysis have been achieved.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, summarises current theories in politeness, culture and email communication. It analyses and synthesises current empirical findings with theory relevant to the topic of this study.
Chapter 2: Current Theories in Politeness, Culture and Email Communication

2.1 Introduction

This review analyses and synthesises current and seminal research in three large bodies of literature relevant to this thesis. The first body, linguistic politeness, draws on the many and various ways researchers have studied politeness, mainly in face-to-face contexts, over the last 30 years or so. It highlights the differences and lack of consensus among these researchers as they attempt to compete with often different conceptualisations of politeness. The oft-cited work of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) is also highlighted in this review. Their politeness theory, however celebrated and prominent in the field, has not been applied to the domain of email communication to date.

The second body relevant to this study is the literature on intercultural communication. A vast amount of research has also been conducted here, again mainly in verbal interaction modes. Cultural theory and cultural communication patterns and their effect on the use of politeness indicators have received much attention among researchers over many decades. Many uncertainties, however, still linger around this complex and abstract area which defies simple interpretation and analysis.

The final body of literature relevant to this thesis is email communication research. Here also a large amount of research has been conducted, mainly in single cultural environments. Communication in intercultural contexts has largely escaped the attention of email researchers to date. Despite the focus of research on email communication generally, many uncertainties surround communication via this medium. Even though email continues to play an increasingly dominant role in both our professional and personal lives, its underlying processes of communication are often poorly understood. No protocols currently exist which can guide us in our attempts to communicate efficiently and politely to others, especially with those in
other cultures. We are only beginning to understand the social, cultural and politeness implications of the medium of email.

This review, then, considers and combines current and seminal theories from all three bodies of work. The chapter begins with the literature of politeness theory and the different angles that various researchers take on it. Discussion on the specific nature of politeness, such as how it is viewed, where it resides, how it is classified, why we use it and which strategies convey it, takes place. The important role of face in politeness is then considered. A detailed discussion of politeness and face according to current research is important for this literature review, as the primary focus of the thesis seeks to understand better these complex phenomena. Next, there is explanation and discussion of cultural theory and its impact on both communication patterns generally and the use of politeness indicators in particular. As the topic of this thesis also involves a study of email communication across cultures, a detailed knowledge of the ways in which culture shapes the use of politeness patterns is a necessary component. Limitations, however, are provided as a caution against the use of cultural theory to explain certain communication patterns. Email communication research is then discussed. Characteristics of email such as its discourse genre, its hybrid nature, its lack of context and so on, are outlined according to latest research. Some of these characteristics may be impacting on a user’s ability to incorporate politeness indicators within the language. Importantly, theories of social presence in email communication and their connection to the relationship-building capacity of the medium are also discussed. Next, recent empirical politeness research in written texts, both conventional letters and computer-mediated communication (CMC) media, including email, are summarised and analysed. This is followed by a section which outlines potential problems when issues to do with politeness, culture and email communication intersect. Lastly, the culture of English as an international email language is explained from diverse points of view.

The scope of the literature in these three bodies is extremely vast. This review considers many but select publications relevant to the topic. It therefore is not a fully comprehensive review of all relevant literature and does not claim any measure of exhaustiveness.
2.2 Politeness

[On his proposal for an English Academy] The Work of this Society shou’d be to encourage Polite Learning, to polish and refine the English Tongue, and advance the so much neglected Faculty of Correct Language, to establish Purity and Propriety of Stile and to purge it from all the Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectation have introduc’d, and all those innovations in Speech, if I may call them such, which some Dogmatic Writers have the Confidence to foster upon their Native Language, as if their Authority were sufficient to make their own Fancy legitimate.

Daniel Defoe, 1697, 'Of Academies' in An Essay upon Projects

2.2.1 Politeness Theories

Over the last 30 years or so, politeness theory has enjoyed a privileged position on the forefront of many academic disciplines including pragmatics, sociolinguistics and social psychology (Pilegaard, 1997; Watts, 2003). During this time, there has been an enormous amount of research conducted on politeness in both inter- and intra-cultural mainly face-to-face contexts. Despite this strong focus, there appears to be a lack of consistency amongst researchers about the conceptual meaning, definition, and classification of linguistic politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990, p. 219; Locher & Watts, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2000a; Watts, 2003). According to many researchers, politeness is a complex phenomenon defying simple definition and classification. Research into politeness has not achieved conceptual clarity and often remains vague (Bryam, 1997, p. 3). Some researchers refer to it as confusing (Spencer-Oatey, 2000a, p. 2) and as a puzzle (Watts, 2003, p. 251).

One reason for the apparent confusion appears to lie in different interpretations of the scope of politeness research. Some researchers claim that politeness should be studied under a linguistic umbrella only (Meier, 1995; Thomas, 1995), with analyses conducted on the language of polite expressions only. By contrast, others believe that politeness research should involve a study of the underlying psychological reasons why politeness expressions are uttered and expected (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Fasold, 1990, p.161; Fraser 1990). Placing the study of politeness in the realm of psychology extensively broadens the scope and makes more complex the parameters of politeness research.
2.2.2 What is politeness?

There are many definitions of politeness in the literature, while many publications on politeness avoid a definition of the term. In their seminal work, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*, Brown and Levinson (1987) did not offer any definition of politeness in the entire book (Fraser, 1990). Many theories, by contrast, contain their own private definitions of politeness (Eelen, 2001). For example, politeness, according to Simmons (1994), is defined as “acting so as to take account of the feelings of others” (p. 3). Lakoff (1989, 1990), often described as the “mother of modern politeness theory” (Eelen, 2001), defines politeness as “a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimising the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange” (1990, p. 34). Watts (2003), drawing on the work of the 17th century French philosopher, Abbé de Bellegarde (1696), gives these definitions of politeness which capture its inherent complexity:

1: Politeness is the ideal union between the character of an individual and his external actions (e.g. the language which that individual uses).
2: Politeness is the ability to please others through one’s external actions (e.g. through one’s language usage).
3: Politeness is the natural attribute of a ‘good’ character.
4: Politeness is a socially acquired state of mind that is adjudged to have reached a state of being ‘polished’ and of thereby being in conformity with a set of socially accepted forms of behaviour. (p. 39)

In the literature, different definitions of politeness abound and the language used to describe it is often complex and technical.

2.2.3 How is Politeness Viewed?

The following section lists some of the different ways politeness is viewed according to current research. They include politeness as 1: a mechanism, 2: a function, 3: an approach and 4: a system. They are discussed next.
1: Politeness as a mechanism

Many researchers use the word *mechanism* in relation to politeness. For example, politeness is often described as a face-saving mechanism (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Chen, 2001; Garcia, 1989; Lakoff, 1990; Thomas, 1995) as well as a mechanism for managing face (Goffman, 1971; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). Eelen (2001) views politeness as a connecting mechanism, connecting language and its users to the social reality around them. In creating such a connection, the inner workings of morality in society are thus exposed (Eelen, 2001). Gu (1990) views politeness as a mechanism for connecting to moral societal norms, while Blum-Kulka (1997) sees politeness as a mechanism connecting language with culture and cultural values. Nyowe (1992) conceptualises politeness as a mechanism to view aspects of face through the language used. Politeness, he asserts, also provides a viewing mechanism to further understand social norms or what is expected of you in society. Fasold (1990, p. 160) sees politeness as a mechanism to understand the various strategies for interactional behaviour, while Spencer-Oatey (2000b) describes politeness as a mechanism for managing rapport between two people in any communication act.

For these researchers, politeness then takes on the role of a lens through which the viewer has immediate access to hitherto obscure, even hidden, aspects of social reality such as value systems, morality and human character.

2: Politeness as a function

Other researchers conceptualise politeness as a *function*. Various functions of politeness listed in the literature include: a function to maintain smooth communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987); a function to avoid conflict (Lakoff, 1990; Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992); a function to allow social intercourse to run smoothly (Watts, 2003); and politeness as a function to provide a framework of standardised strategies (Janney & Arndt, 1992). For these researchers, politeness embodies a means to achieve certain goals. It has a functional role.
3: Politeness as an approach

Other researchers view politeness through the word *approach*. For example, Fraser (1990) looks at politeness under the four approaches of social norms, conversational maxims, conversational contracts and face. Craig, Tracy and Spisak (1986) assert that a particular politeness approach can be assessed through the apparently simple task of making a request. Other researchers claim that politeness involves an interactional approach (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Maier, 1992), whereby it can be negotiated or approached between speakers in any communication act. For these researchers, politeness viewed as an approach, becomes the means by which something else is achieved.

4: Politeness as a system

Some researchers refer to politeness as a *system*, entire of itself. According to Lakoff (1990), there are three politeness systems: distance, deference and camaraderie. Distance politeness is associated with formal etiquette, courtesy and rules of deportment. Deference politeness gives power to the other person in any communication act to decide direction and meaning of conversation. Camaraderie politeness, a modern interpretation, promotes interaction, connection and good fellowship. It asserts that openness is the greatest sign of courtesy (p. 38) and promotes such behaviour as immediate first naming and touching. Each culture prioritises one of these systems, for example, European cultures tend to emphasise distancing politeness, Asian cultures deferential politeness, while American and Australian cultures tend to emphasise camaraderie politeness (Eelen, 2001; Lakoff, 1990). Closely related to these three politeness systems are the three discourse systems of Scollon and Scollon (1995), who assert that politeness is weaved into and determined by the patterns of three discourse systems: a solidarity system whereby both communicators are equal in status as well as being socially close; a deferential system of discourse whereby communicators are equal in status but are not socially close; and a hierarchic discourse system in which communicators are neither equal in status nor socially close. Levels of politeness are determined by the type of discourse system in place in the interaction (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).
2.2.4 Where does Politeness Reside?

In this section, discussion on where politeness resides also shows little consensus among researchers. There is much debate and differing opinions in the literature on where politeness is situated. Some of the areas include 1: within the language, 2: within a set of rules or maxims, 3: on a continuum between clarity and indirectness, and 4: within the bounds of social appropriateness. These are discussed next.

1: Within the language

Meier (1995, 1997) claims that politeness resides in the language of certain speech acts, for example, giving apologies and thanking and in lexical items such as please and thank you, but cautions that politeness should not be equated with them. Watts (2003, p. 169) states that politeness is embedded linguistically in:

- certain speech acts, for example, apologising, complimenting,
- lexical items, for example, please and thank you,
- syntactic construction, for example, minimising imposition with hedging and modal verbs, for example, Would you be able to spare one minute to help me?
- ritualised expressions of salutation and leave-taking, for example, Good morning, Dear, best wishes, bye,
- terms of address, for example, deferential titles such as Professor,
- boosters and solidarity markers such as of course, you know and so on.

Some researchers believe that the more grammatically complex the language and structure, the more polite it is considered (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Thomas, 1995), while Fraser (1990, p. 221) asserts that a higher degree of formality implies greater politeness.

2: Within a set of rules or maxims

Other researchers consider politeness to be placed within a set of rules or maxims. These rules must be followed if polite behaviour is to be achieved. Following on from the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975), in which a set of four rules was devised to allow for meaningful conversation (Fasold, 1990), Fraser (1990) outlined a
conversational-contract view of politeness. Upon entering a conversation, he asserts, each communicator brings to that encounter a set of rules, rights and obligations that determine the expectations both of self and of the other. The contract is not static but can be revised as the negotiation continues. Staying within the terms of the conversation contract is the politeness norm, while going outside it is considered impolite. Extending these conversational rules of clarity, Lakoff (1973, 1989) proposed two further rules of pragmatic competence: make yourself clear and be polite. The latter rule was further divided into three subset rules: do not impose, make the hearer feel good (be friendly) and give the hearer options (Fraser, 1990). Drawing further on the work of Grice’s cooperative principle, Leech (1983) proposed a set of politeness maxims which suggest another level to conversational interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Fasold, 1990). These maxims of tact, generosity, approbation and modesty (Leech, 1983) are ones in which the speaker maximises the benefit to the other at the expense of the self.

3: On a continuum between clarity and indirectness

Lakoff (1989, 1990) and Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that politeness resides and oscillates on a continuum of communication that has, at one end, information exchange where clarity predominates and indirectness at the other end where politeness predominates. Clarity may be defined as the likelihood of an utterance making one’s intention clear and explicit (Kim, 2005, p. 98). At the politeness end, avoiding offending the hearer takes priority as the building of interpersonal relationships is paramount in the communication. Verbal strategies here become more indirect and require more effort to formulate on the part of the speaker; some clarity may be lost in the process (Bond, Žegarac, & Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Lakoff, 1990; Saville-Troike, 2003). There may be implications here, however, for email communication. Due to its low context nature, email communication may not suit the use of indirect language. The inability to incorporate indirect verbal strategies may have implications for politeness and communication preferences of certain cultures. This will be discussed further in Sections 2.2 and 2.3.2.

At the other end of the continuum, information exchange, clarity is prized. Here, the content of the message becomes direct with minimal concerns for face, as an
avoidance of misunderstandings is considered the most important consideration in the communication exchange. Clarity is best achieved with more direct communication (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Lakoff, 1990). Email may promote directness of communication due to the speed and ease of message exchange. This may not suit the communication and politeness preferences of certain cultures (Crystal, 2001).

4: Within the bounds of social appropriateness

Other researchers say politeness resides within the bounds of social appropriateness where individuals address expectations of self and other about what is the right thing to do in a social interaction (Bou-Franch & Garces-Conejos, 2003; Maier, 1992). Politeness, within the parameters of interactional behaviour, enables the participants to manage relationships (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b) and dialogues, which are often governed by emotions (Janney & Arndt, 1992, 1993; Leech, 1983). Through its focus on ethical aspects of social interaction, politeness can expose the diverse moral dimensions of social relationships and appropriateness (Eelen, 2001).

With so many different ways of understanding and interpreting politeness, conceptual clarity in the literature is lacking. These differing concepts and interpretations are often written in scientific and technical language (Eelen, 2001), and can cause confusion. Moreover, conceptualisation of politeness in the canonical literature and the scientific language used to describe it appear to be increasingly removed from everyday speakers’ own intuitive knowledge and language of politeness (Eelen, 2001; Haugh, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005). Watts (2003) refers to this distinction as the gap between first and second order politeness, where first order politeness refers to everyday intuitive perceptions of politeness and polite language, while second order politeness refers to the theoretical constructs symbolising forms of polite social and language behaviour (Watts, 2003; Watts et al., 1992).

Such confusion and diversion does not promote or advance a full understanding of the complex phenomenon of politeness (Haugh, 2003). In an effort to address this increasing divergence between academic conceptualisations and everyday speakers’ own intuitive knowledge of politeness, some researchers have called for consideration of native speaker assessments of politeness for future politeness research (Locher &
Confusion and uncertainty in the literature on the classification of politeness within a language system is also apparent.

### 2.2.5 Where is Politeness classified within a Language System?

Added to the absence of clear definitions and consensus of conceptualisations in the literature, there is also a lack of consensus by researchers on the classification of politeness. Some researchers, for example, place politeness into the fields of semantics (Leech, 1983; Lustig & Koester, 1999), pragmatics (Bachman, 1990; Eelen, 2001; Haugh, 2003; Holmes, 2000; Thomas, 1995), sociolinguistics (Fasold, 1990; Simmons, 1994; Wierzbicka, 1991), social psychology (Holtgraves, 1997; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990) and other related fields. There is also a lack of consensus by researchers on which type of communicative competence includes the concept of politeness. One of the first linguists to link the connection between language and its context was Dell Hymes (1964), who proposed that there needs to be an understanding of language in different sociolinguistic contexts to be able to use language appropriately for the type of context and the current socio-cultural norms. Consequently, he developed the notion of sociolinguistic appropriateness—the socio-cultural factors in a speech situation. Following on from the work of Hymes, Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) developed their model of communicative competence. This model had an emphasis on knowledge and performance skills which were both considered necessary for communicative competence. The four components of the model are grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Politeness, according to Canale and Swain, lies in the components of discourse and sociolinguistic competence. According to Canale, discourse competence (1983) included knowledge of discourse such as the rules of conversation and text, of turn taking, maintenance of coherence, appropriate speech acts and the use of politeness and so on. Sociolinguistic competence involved knowledge of the socio-cultural rules in interaction, knowledge of customs and taboos, socio-cultural specific speech acts and use of politeness and so on.

Following on from Canale’s model, Bachman (1990) devised a framework for communicative language ability. He explained that all communicative competence theories recognise that the ability to use language involves both knowledge of the
language and the capacity for implementing or using this knowledge. His framework comprises two main areas: organisation competence, which involves language structure and the rules of discourse, and secondly pragmatic competence, which has to do with the context of situation and appropriateness of utterances. Knowledge of both communicators’ intentions and the characteristics of the context of language determine the appropriateness of the utterances (Byram, 1997).

Where does politeness fit into these models and frameworks? There is a lack of agreement among linguistic researchers concerning the classification of politeness. There is general consensus, however, within the literature that politeness forms part of the broad area of pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990; Byram, 1997; Eelen, 2001; Thomas, 1995), as politeness is concerned with social relationships and is dependent on the context. Pragmatic competence in email communication however may be altered due to the lack of context and other factors. This may affect politeness patterns and the application of some general principles of pragmatics (Fraser, 1983; Levinson, 1983). This will be discussed further in Section 2.5.

Perhaps due to the lack of consensus among researchers over the differing and competing conceptualizations of politeness in the literature, there exists no instrument, at the time of this research, which could be used for the purposes of assessing politeness, especially in written texts. Such an instrument would have the benefit of aiding operationalisation of abstract politeness terms, and would assist generally in furthering our understanding of this complex phenomenon. In pedagogical settings such an instrument would also help to develop learners’ pragmatic competence, which necessarily includes a politeness component (Thomas, 1995).

2.2.6 Why do we use Politeness?

There are many reasons in the literature why polite linguistic behaviour occurs. For example, some researchers speak of politeness as an instrument to:

- save face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Goffman, 1971);
- achieve personal goals (Simmons, 1994);
- avoid conflict (Lakoff, 1989, 1990);
• preserve status (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Watts, 2003);
• show respect (Lustig & Koester, 1999; p. 329; Thomas, 1995);
• wield power (Watts, 2003);
• enhance one’s own status (Watts et al., 1992);
• ensure the social intercourse runs smoothly (Gumperz, 1972, cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987; Watts et al., 1992);
• validate a conversational contract (Fraser, 1990);
• show or give the appearance of showing consideration of other (Watts, 2003);
• manage rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b);
• display adequate proficiency in the accepted standards of social etiquette (Watts et al., 1992);
• gain entry to elite society (Watts et al., 1992); and
• understand human relations (Gumperz, 1972, cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Many of the reasons listed above involve different aspects of face, such as saving face, risk to face and management of face. These aspects are considered so important in the literature to the concept of politeness and are allied so closely to it, that discussion of these aspects must be considered in any review of politeness literature.

Face

“They've got to save face - Saving face is the strongest motive in the world”
James Galsworthy (1928) Swan Song

Face may be defined as “the positive social value a person claims for him/herself” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). It is a complex construct incorporating ideas and feelings about identity, about the nature of the social persona and about honour, virtue and shame (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It may be linked to religious concepts (Mao, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Face, including its component wants and needs, is fundamental to the identity of every individual regardless of culture and must be constantly attended to in interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face may be further defined as having two distinct, paradoxical aspects. They are negative face or the want of every “competent adult member” that his/her actions be unimpeded by others, and
positive face or the want of every member that his/her wants, that is, knowledge, goals and values, be desirable to at least some others (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). These two aspects to face, these authors say, though susceptible to cultural variation and elaboration, embody two valid social needs that transcend cultural boundaries (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61) and must be projected simultaneously in any communication (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 38). It is in the interest of every member of a speech community to satisfy, at least partially, the wants of others, as it is in doing so that their own face needs are partially met (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 1994). How these wants and needs of self and others are considered and satisfied in personal interaction is by the enactment of facework (Holtgraves, 1992). Facework, or impression management interaction (Goffman, 1961, 1967, 1971), may be described as the process of realising linguistic strategies in order to manage threats to face (Ting-Toomey, 1994). The way an individual chooses linguistic strategies to manage threats to face is not just a matter of practical choice according to the dictates of grammar and syntax, but also a matter of the negotiation of face of the participants (Holtgraves, 1992; Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 40).

Face and Politeness

Consequently, all communication must be carefully negotiated to respect face. Threats to face, such as requesting a service, are managed by various forms of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1988). Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) maintain that some linguistic acts are intrinsically threatening to face and they thus require softening (1987, p. 24) by the use of politeness strategies. Politeness strategies, then, may be described as tools which can lessen damage to face. These tools can also be used for social control (Holmes, 2000). Some politeness strategies are used as social accelerators to minimise the social distance between people or as social brakes to increase the social distance between them (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holmes, 2000, 2003). Email communication however is creating challenges for us to consider ways to use the tools of politeness effectively in order to lessen damage to face and to regulate social distance.
2.2.7 What are Politeness Strategies?

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are three main sets of politeness strategies: positive politeness or a basic expression of solidarity; negative politeness or the expression of restraint, and off-record politeness or the avoidance of possible face-threatening impositions (p. 2). Positive politeness strategies are designed to improve the threat to face, either self or other, but they also have a wider perspective in that they show acceptance and liking of the other, for example, by including, by appreciating and by sharing similar opinions¹.

Some examples of positive politeness strategies taken from the literature (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Garcia, 1989; Holmes, 2003; Sifianou, 1997; Watts, 2003) include:

- expressions of familiarity;
- expressions of cooperation;
- using first/nick names;
- showing interest, approval, sympathy;
- attending to receiver’s wants, needs and person; and
- giving compliments.

Other positive politeness strategies include wordy explanations intended to minimise the bad effects of a face-threatening act such as a request or complaint (Clyne, 1994, p. 190). Negative politeness strategies, by contrast, are designed only to minimise the face threat in some way. They allow the other person freedom of action and the right to unimpeded upon. Essentially avoidance based, negative politeness strategies are characterised by self-effacement, formality and restraint. Examples of negative politeness strategies taken from the literature (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Garcia, 1989; Holmes, 2003; Sifianou, 1997; Watts, 2003) include:

- being indirect;

¹ Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) derived their terms, positive and negative politeness, from Durkheim (1976) who studied the way religions influence the social behaviours of man. In religious dictum, there are certain things that you cannot do (negative), and there are certain things you must do (positive) in order to accept the cult (sacred) into your social interactivity. Thus, positive and negative behaviours are sacred. They pertain to a cult like status. Sacredness is the cause which gives the positive and negative behaviours birth (p. 317).
• using formal language;
• using impersonalising mechanisms such as the passive voice;
• hedging; and
• using deference, for example, use of full titles and formal names.

These strategies are softening mechanisms that can give the other person a face-saving line of escape in a potentially face-threatening communication act (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Some researchers recommend that people in intercultural dialogues use negative politeness strategies, as there are inherent dangers of assumption in using positive politeness strategies across cultures (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Thomas, 1995; Watts, 2003). Some negative politeness strategies, such as hedging and implicatures, however, are not suited to the medium of email (Rice, 1997).

The third set of politeness strategies, called off-record strategies, is used to avoid potentially face-threatening acts. Off-record strategies violate Gricean maxims (Grice, 1975). Some examples of off-record strategies include:

• hinting;
• understating;
• using metaphors and ellipsis; and
• being vague and over-generalising.

The off-record strategies cannot easily be conveyed, however, in email communication due to the lack of contextual, linguistic and paralinguistic cues (Baron, 1998, 2001). These factors may impact on the use of politeness which may have implications for some cultures. There are many strategies for politeness that can be employed in any communication act. If the communication is cross-cultural, some strategies are prioritised over others.

From the preceding discussion, it can be seen that the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) has been very influential in politeness research. However, this theory has received much criticism from researchers since their seminal work appeared in the late 1980s. Some of the criticisms are discussed below.
2.2.8 Criticisms of Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory

Some of the criticisms focus on the apparent Western emphasis in their theory and its corresponding lack of ability to be applied to other non-Western settings. Other criticisms focus on the labeling aspects to politeness. Some of the criticisms are:

- There is an absence of definition of politeness in their theory (Fraser, 1990, p. 219);
- Their notion of face only accounts for the Western notion of individual face and does not include a group notion of face, prevalent in some cultures (Chen, 2001; Mao, 1994; Nyowe, 1992);
- The accepted connection between face and politeness is problematic for some researchers who make the distinction between face work and politeness where politeness is over and above face work (Watts et al., 1992);
- The emphasis in their theory on negative politeness which may not be appropriate in other cultures (Chen, 2001; Mao, 1994);
- The culturally biased notion that indirectness equates with politeness. This may not be the case in some cultures (Meier, 1995; Sifianou, 1997; Wierzbicka, 1991);
- The division of politeness into positive and negative remains problematic. Some researchers claim that distinction is dubious (Chen, 2001; Garcia, 1989; Sifianou, 1997);
- The labelling of some utterances as polite is also not acceptable to some researchers who claim that there is no general consensus over what is a polite utterance. What is considered polite changes over a range of contexts (Locher & Watts, 2005);
- The lack of emphasis on impoliteness in their theory does not induce analytical coherency (Culpeper, 1996);
- There are difficulties in estimating power and social dimensions due to many different contextual variables (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b);
- There is emphasis in their theory on the speaker for politeness and face work with little reference to the hearer (Chen, 2001; Meier, 1995);
• There is also emphasis on politeness as being beneficial for the hearer. Some researchers claim that politeness is used for the benefit of the speaker at the expense of the hearer (Watts, 2003; Watts et al., 1992);
• Their claim that social interaction is a continuous monitoring of face threats and devising of strategies to counter those threats. Other researchers say that social interaction also includes other elements such as simple pleasure (Nyowe, 1992; Watts, 2003);
• Their theory and model have mainly been limited to spoken language (Maier, 1992).

As can be seen from many of the criticisms mentioned above, many interpersonal and cultural aspects need to be taken into consideration for the study of politeness. As this study focuses primarily on Australia, an English speaking country, the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), also from a similar English speaking country, has been the focus due to its theoretical relevance. Like Brown and Levinson’s work (1987), this study, conducted in an English speaking country, is essentially looking at aspects of politeness from a Western perspective. In the following section, cultural aspects to politeness are discussed.

2.2.9 What part does Culture play in Politeness?

Politeness is universal to every language and every culture (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, the strategies one chooses to convey politeness are not universal. Every culture develops a set of overarching strategies on the importance, timing and place of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005). These strategies stem from the belief and value system of that culture and may be different from the next (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Strategies of politeness are influenced by three culturally bound factors:

• the power difference between speaker/hearer;
• the social distance between speaker/hearer; and
• the weight of the request being asked (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005; Watts, 2003).
The way each culture interprets these three factors may differ from one culture to the next (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). These factors determine the type and level of politeness strategies to be used, if any are used at all (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The sum total of these factors also assesses the level of danger to face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As cultures assess each factor differently, the assessments of face threat in any communication may also differ, requiring different politeness strategies sensitive to each cultural interpretation (Ji, 1999). It is misunderstanding of cultural assessments of social distance, impositions and relative power rights and obligations that leads to differences in assessments of face issues and politeness strategies used. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 36) and Ji (1999, p. 1062) call for the accumulation of more detailed data about how speakers of different cultures assess face issues and interpret politeness strategies. They recognise that more research must be conducted on cultural specifications to politeness and face, for example, to assess what kinds of acts threaten face to what extent and in which cultures, what sorts of persons have special rights to face-protection and what kinds of personal style are appreciated in some cultures over others. However, the culturally-bound factors listed above which determine levels of politeness used may not be easily assessed on email. Power and social distances between sender and receiver are often not apparent in email communication (Ross, 2001). The appropriate use of politeness indicators as a result may become troublesome. Primarily applied to the context of spoken communication, the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) has not been applied to the medium of email to date. This study, then, affords a detailed analysis of their seminal work in relation to the increasingly popular medium of email communication.

Culture impacts on the use of politeness indicators in many ways (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Ji, 1999). For example, in many cultures in Asia, deferential strategies are common (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 176). In other cultures where individual orientation is evident, as in Australia, for example (Hofstede, 1997), much emphasis is given to tact. Tact, which has been described as the most important kind of politeness in English speaking cultures, is evidence of the importance of individual rights and wants in these cultures (Leech, 1983, p. 107). Other cultures consider the use of indirectness in speech strategies as offering greater politeness, such as in the use of passive voice, impersonal pronouns or metaphors (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 29), or the use of degree adverbs and hedges (Bond et al., 2000, p. 67).
Indirect Communication

Indirectness can be a primary linguistic mechanism for politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves, 1997; Lakoff, 1990; Sifianou, 1997). Many researchers consider that the more indirect the communication, the more polite it is (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hara & Kim, 2004; Holtgraves, 1997; Sifianou, 1997), although this claim is disputed by others (Meier, 1995; Wierzbicka, 1991). Indirect communication may be described as communication which is non-assertive and non-argumentative (Bond et al., 2000; Watts, 2003). It releases little information explicitly (Ma, 1996). In indirect communication, people do not say what is on their minds, as it relies more on suggestion, hinting and concerns for non-imposition (Bond et al., 2000; Hara & Kim, 2004; Holtgraves, 1997; Nelson, Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002; Sifianou, 1997).

People in some cultures, for example Asia, may be more indirect in their communication because they tend to assume greater distance between unacquainted people than do people in other cultures (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Sifianou, 1997). Some distance cultures, Europe for example (Lakoff, 1990), weave remoteness into their language, that is, they choose words not rich in emotional connotations to lessen the danger of confrontation, whereas people in some other cultures tend to be more circuitous in their language, as in Korea for example, and are more likely to speak indirectly and to look for indirect meanings than say Americans or Australians (Hara & Kim, 2004, p. 3; Holtgraves, 1997, p. 624; Nelson et al., 2002).

Politeness strategies or the way certain individuals or national cultures choose to soften the impact of threats to face or to control social distances between interlocutors, form part of the discourse style of that individual or nation. Every culture, and indeed every individual, has his or her own written discourse style, illustrating its rhetorical structure (Clyne, 1994). The structure of a text or the way thought patterns logically progress through it, is culturally determined (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Cultural traits as well as face negotiation strategies combine to construct certain discourse styles and patterns. Email discourse styles, however, may or may not reflect the standard print-based written styles of a certain culture. To understand structures of politeness and how and when they are used, it is necessary to look closely at a culture’s discourse style and communication patterns.
2.3 Cultural Theory and Cultural Communication Patterns

2.3.1 What is culture?

Many definitions are found in the literature on the meaning of culture. The common thread in all is that culture is about membership of a group, with a shared system of meanings that is learned (Hall, 1976a; Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1997) and which is constantly changing (Sarbaugh, 1988, p. 26). Individuality or inherited genetic tendencies are not part of cultural makeup (Hall 1976a; Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1997). Nor can one attribute rightness or wrongness to cultural behaviour (Hoeklin, 1995). Hofstede, (1983, p. 76) defines culture as “a collective mental programming”. He suggests that culture is like “software of the mind or the operating system that allows humans to share and make sense of experience” (Hofstede, 1991, cited in Ulijn & Campbell, 2001, p. 77). Others (Gumperz, 1972; Meagher & Castanos, 1996; Rodrigues, 1997) describe culture in an anthropological and social sense, citing cultural groups as those whose members share attitudes, values, thought patterns, frames of reference and daily activities. Still others add a further dimension (Hall, 1959, p. 43; Hymes, 1964). They see culture as a different way of conceiving the underlying assumptions about the family and the state, the economic system, and even of man himself.

Patterns of communication and values are deeply rooted in culture (Kim, 2005; Ulijn et al., 2001). Communication and culture reciprocally influence each other (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 327; Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida, & Ogawa, 2005; Sarbaugh, 1988). The theory of linguistic determinism (Whorf, 1956) holds that culture frames language and language frames culture (thought). The theory attests that we think according to our language, which in turn is according to our culture. Language is not a neutral vehicle, as our thinking is affected by categories and words available in our language (Hofstede, 1984a, p. 27). Hall (1976a, p. 74) expands the theory to include rhythms which he says are culture-specific and are expressed through language and body movement. He talks of the “eloquent language of culture” and how it speaks in so many ways, for example, how we communicate in silence and how we communicate our concepts of time and space. The various ways in which time and space are interpreted by a culture have consequences for human behaviour (Hofstede,
Differences in ways of thinking about time, rhythm and space are more diverse for languages that are structurally apart, as in English and Chinese, for example (Hall, 1976a, 1976b, 1984).

Some researchers believe that culture determines our thinking patterns and the way we solve our problems (Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Pincas, 2001; Sarbaugh, 1988). They argue that the educational philosophy of our culture will determine whether we acquire, at one end of the continuum, a constructivist or critical thinking approach to problem-solving, or at the other end an instructivist or reproductive and non-analytical thinking pattern. For example, Hoeklin (1995, p. 85) and Hofstede and Bond (1988) contrast the American thinking pattern with the Japanese. The former, they say, is characterised by specific, analytical, step-by-step approaches to problem-solving. Japan, by contrast, exhibits synthetic, relational thinking and adopts a holistic approach to problem-solving. Pincas (2001) extrapolates such different thinking patterns onto computer mediated communication [hereafter abbreviated to CMC] media. For example, she says that textual attributes of email such as openers, closing, polite expressions, rules of deference, politeness in acknowledging others’ messages and ways of referring back to previous messages are due to cross-cultural styles of learning and how they differ. Social constructs such as power and distance, for example, affect our linguistic choice in culturally different ways (Pincas, 2001). Our cultural bias will in turn determine how we interpret the meaning of constructs such as power and distance and politeness markers and so on (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hall, 1976a; McLaren, 1998; Rodrigues, 1997, Wood, 1997).

However vague our understanding of culture (Gumperz, 1972) and the lack of appropriate language used to describe it (Hofstede, 1997, p. 77), there is some consensus among researchers (Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1997) that there exist structures or patterns in the variety of cultural differences between nations. However, Hall (1959, p. 48) notes that even though we try to separate ourselves from our own culture in an effort to understand it, culture controls our thinking and behaviour in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside our awareness and therefore beyond our conscious control. Culture’s grip on us, it seems, is complete (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, p. 19).
As mentioned in the previous section, this study takes a Western perspective when looking at aspects to do with politeness. In the same way, the study also looks at culture and its impact on communication patterns with the same Western perspective and perhaps bias. Culture’s grip, therefore, extends to the way culture as well as politeness is perceived and to the parameters of this study in general. This issue is further explored in the section on reflexivity (see Chapter 3, Section 3.8, p. 96).

2.3.2 Differing Cultural Value and Communication Systems

Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1997) argues that modern cultures do have dominant national character traits. Moreover, he claims there is a structure or pattern in the variety of these cultural differences, thus there is a basis for mutual understanding. According to this researcher, however, it is important to distinguish between culture at a national level and cultural traits at an individual level. That is, the mental programming of members of the same culture do tend to contain common components (Hofstede, 1984a, p. 29), but in attempting to explain a cultural trait, we should not generalise to every individual within that cultural group (Hofstede, 1983, p. 78). Hofstede (1980, p. 45) cautions that in describing national cultures we refer to the common elements within each culture but we are not describing individuals. National culture, he says, is a kind of average pattern of beliefs and values around which individuals in the country vary (1983, p. 78). Globalisation or converging of regional and national borders does not mean the beginning of a universal or homogenising of culture, according to Hofstede (1997), who believes instead that the deep roots of national culture make it likely that differences will survive for a long time. Importantly, he argues that even though there is a lack of suitable language to describe culture (1983, p. 77), there is a correlation between national character traits and language used (Hofstede, 1997). Clyne (1994) asserts that even though there is a shift to English language worldwide, it is possible that cultural values and their manifestations in communication styles are more tenacious and will carry over to the second language (p. 206). It remains to be seen, however, how cultural values and their manifestations will carry over to email communication, especially if the communication involves English as a second language. A review of the literature reveals this significant gap.
From Hofstede’s (1997) empirical studies, four cultural dichotomies were distilled from the data; three of these were considered relevant to this study and have thus been used as frames of reference. Another commonly used dichotomy in cross-cultural studies, “low and high contexts” (Hall, 1976a, 1976b, 1984), was also used in the analytical framework, as well as attitudes to time in those contexts. The five dichotomies of culture-related values used as frames of reference in this study are thus:

1: Individualism and Collectivism;
2: Power Distance;
3: Uncertainty Avoidance;
4: Low/High Contexts; and
5: Attitudes to Time in Low/High Context Cultures.

The following sections explain what each dichotomy means in terms of human values and behaviour patterns and how those value and behaviour patterns are realised linguistically, especially in the areas of face management and politeness. Some limitations of the dichotomies are then outlined.

1: Individualism and Collectivism

The individualism-collectivism dichotomy has been an integral part of cross-cultural communication research for some decades (Gudykunst, 1997; Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hofstede, Pederson, & Hofstede, 2002; Kim, 1995, Kim, 2005; Rodrigues, 1997). The central thesis of the dichotomy is the attribution of certain cultural values to certain cultural groupings on the basis of how an individual sees him/herself in relation to others around him/her. Individualistic cultures, for example, emphasise autonomy and independence, self-determination and protection of self-interests (Gudykunst, 1997; Gudykunst et al., 2005). Independent values, which tend to disconnect the individual from the social context, prevail within these cultures, for example, the values of competition, modernity, uniqueness and wealth. These independent values tend to separate the individuals from the social context (Kim, 2005; Okazaki & Rivas, 2002, p. 383). Collectivist cultures, by contrast, display interdependent values (Gudykunst et al., 2005). These values tend to connect people with their social contexts, for example the values of courtesy, tradition, family, social status, conformity and so on. Collectivistic cultures emphasise interconnection, conformity to group norms,
relational harmony and protection of in-group interests (Hofstede, 1997; Kim, 1995, 2005). As described by Okazaki and Rivas (2002) and others, the core meaning of individualism is giving priority to personal goals over the goals of the group. In their research, these authors conducted an on-line marketing analysis of 20 multinational corporations’ web sites (Okazaki & Rivas, 2002). The advertisements on the web sites were studied for cultural content. It was found that the traditional Eastern and Western cultural dimensions were reflected in the advertisements of their respective web pages. That is, Asian advertising messages demonstrated collectivist concepts, for example, family, tradition, group membership, social harmony and so on. Individualist concepts were evident in the advertisements on the web pages of Western countries, for example, independence, competition, adventure, obvious wealth and so on. These authors caution that international advertising planners and producers should take into account appropriate cultural values, which, they say, are inherent in the respective local and national markets (p. 388).

These two opposed concepts of individualism and collectivism exist in all cultures (Hofstede et al., 2002). One, however, tends to predominate (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 332; Kim, 2005). Hoeklin (1995), in her book Managing Cultural Differences, describes all Asia Pacific societies as collectivist and all Western societies as individualistic (p. 40). Research on the ethnography of language focusses on the distinctive patterns of communication and rules of communication used within specific speech communities or communities of practice. A speech community is defined as a group of people who share knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech (Hymes, 1964). This study is concerned with describing the extent to which cultural characteristics, like individualism and collectivism, shape the communication and politeness patterns of the people within those cultures, that is, those who share the same speech community (Kim, 1995). The study is especially concerned with the ways those communication and politeness patterns are then realised on email communication.

2: Power Distance

Power distance is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”
People from high power distance cultures accept that power differences are naturally part of society and as such, superiors consider their subordinates to be different from themselves and vice versa (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 332). In Asia, where most relationships are hierarchical (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 81), there exists a greater cultural acceptance of inequality (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), due in part to the central Confucian philosophy which states that unequal relationships between people promote the stability of a given society (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Rodrigues, 1997). The link between the interpersonal communication practices laid down by the ancient Confucian philosophy and current communication practices in Asia is close (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 82). In these cultures, the acceptance of inequality may be reflected linguistically in their use of formal titles and indirect questioning (Hofstede, 1997). Typical communication strategies of people from high power distance cultures are the correct use of titles, formal language, minimal use of modals, attitudinal expressions and material processes.

By contrast, people from low power distance cultures are less likely to accept such a hierarchical imbalance. There is therefore, less evidence of deference to people in higher status positions. When people from two different systems interact, misunderstanding is likely to arise, unless one or both understand the other person’s power distance orientation (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 333). Typical communication styles and strategies of low power distance cultures include, for example, the use of informal language to people in higher status positions, minimal use of titles for addressing, higher use of attitudinal expressions and inclusive language.

Little research has been conducted to date to assess whether the typical communication strategies of both high and low power distance cultures mentioned above, such as the use of titles and formal language, apply equally to email and face-to-face communication. However, one study (Lee, 2004) analysed the requests written by Chinese learners of English from a corpus of 600 emails. It was found that learners used direct requests when communicating with their teachers. They used linguistic politeness devices that conformed to the traditional teacher-student hierarchical relationship in Chinese culture. It was emphasised in this study that hierarchy leads to politeness (p. 61) and that making a request is perhaps more complex in Asian
cultures as these cultures emphasise hierarchy (p. 59). Politeness, the author asserts, should not be breached in interactions in these cultures.

3: Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance may be described as the extent to which individuals are able to tolerate ambiguous situations (Gudykunst, 1988; Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hofstede, 1984a). Both high and low levels of uncertainty avoidance exist in all cultures and in all individuals, but one tends to predominate in certain situations. In high avoidance cultures there is a need for structure, formal rules and regulations (Gudykunst, 1988). Within these cultures, there is often a low tolerance for people and groups who deviate from the formal structures. Such structures, rules, conventions and religions are in place in these cultures to protect people from the unpredictability of future events and human behaviour (Hofstede et al., 2002). In low avoidance cultures, on the other hand, there is an acceptance of a more relativist stance and an understanding that human behaviour is unpredictable. There is greater tolerance for different ways of thinking, behaving and communicating. People from low avoidance cultures, for example, may be more likely to adapt to different email styles and practices. In high avoidance cultures by contrast, there may be resistance to change and flexibility in email language and style, even if the electronic exchange takes place over some time. Uncertainty avoidance has a large impact on communication style (Clyne, 1994, p. 186; Gudykunst, 1988), and it also has the most direct bearing on the choice of communication medium (Straub, 1994, p. 26). Straub posits that cultural values play an important role in the predisposition towards, and selection of, electronic communications media. In his empirical research project, American and Japanese airline workers were asked about their preferences for communication media. It was found that the Japanese workers in Japan did not use email as extensively as their American counterparts. The author suggested that the high uncertainty avoidance level in Japanese society (Hofstede, 1997) and the low context character of email led Japanese people to choose information-rich, socially-present media to deal with a wider range of tasks than Americans (Straub, 1994, p. 26).

Some high uncertainty avoidance cultures use language which is highly ritualistic and often excessively polite when communicating with someone from a different social group (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 333). Here, communication rules develop for situations
where uncertainty exists. Often the use of “apology” is evidence of a high level of uncertainty avoidance as the “apology” can exhibit pessimism and a fear of failure (Clyne, 1994). Desire for confirmation and clarification in negotiation are also evidence of ways to avoid uncertainty (Clyne, 1994, p. 182). In other cultures where there is a greater tolerance for ambiguity, requests for clarification and elaboration are less common (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

This is opposed to say Asian countries where there is a tolerance for ambiguity and requests for clarification and elaboration are rare. Tolerance for ambiguity lies at the centre of the “circular” discourse structure (Clyne, 1994, p. 184) which is often attributed to Asian communication styles and the thinking patterns of “spiral logic” (Kim, Hearn, Hatcher, & Weber, 1999). This type of discourse structure only hints at the main point and keeps coming back to elaborate on it. Tolerance for ambiguity also relates to the “indirectness” tendency in the pragmatics of some Asian languages (Bond et al., 2000). The core value of harmony of Asian countries leads to a concern for saving face, both one’s own and others. The core value of preserving harmony may be translated linguistically as indirect communication, deference strategies and avoidance of direct confrontation, including the word no. This contrasts with other cultures’ concept of “truth”, as in Australia for example, where intentions and meanings are exhibited clearly (Kim et al., 1999) and direct communication is often preferred. A lack of certain discourse styles may also be attributed to cultural values systems. Some cultures operate better in oral mode and may not have as many written genres as other written based cultures (Stevens, 2001). In certain cultures, where there is a history of information control, such as Russia for example, voluntary expression of information may not be the norm. The recipient is often not motivated to respond to a request and must sometimes be cajoled or even bribed to part with information (Stevens, 2001).

4: Low and High Context Cultures

Hall (1976a, 1984, p. 30) posited that low context and high context cultures exist along a communication continuum. Low context communication is defined by Hall (1976a) as “communication in which the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (in the words) (p. 101). By contrast, high context communication is “communication in which most of the information is either in the physical context or
internalised in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” (Hall, 1976a, p. 100).

Low context cultures tend to exchange information primarily on the basis of direct, explicit communication centred on precise, straightforward words. By contrast, high context cultures tend to exchange information primarily on the basis of implicit indirect communication centred on shared experiences built up over time (context) with less use of direct verbal communication. All cultures exhibit both low and high context communication but usually one or other predominates (Hall, 1976a, 1976b, 1984). Typical communication styles and strategies of low context cultures include explicit communication, use of direct questions, individual orientation, distinct time pressure for negotiation and so on. By contrast, communication styles and strategies typical of high context cultures include implicit, indirect communication and spiral logic (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Differences in communication strategies were observed in an empirical study by Kim, Hearn, Hatcher and Weber (1999). These authors elicited and analysed the perceptions of email practices of both Australia and Korean workers. The Australian workers, from an engineering company in Australia, were communicating with Korean workers in an affiliated company in Korea. The study found that social and cultural issues in both countries shaped the way the people used language in their email communication. The findings also confirmed that the Australian business people displayed low context characteristics in their email practice such as line logic, direct verbal interaction with intentions and meaning exhibited clearly. By contrast, the Korean business people displayed high context characteristics including indirect verbal interaction and spiral logic. The Koreans followed norms of formality and structure in their email style whereas the Australians, in general, used more informal, friendly language. In this empirical research however, methodological constraint was evident in that data were elicited from one instrument only. There was no analysis of actual email texts. These researchers called for more research to be conducted in online intercultural interaction.

People from low context cultures, as in Australia, America and Western Europe for example, may experience greater comfort with the use of electronic communications
than people from high context cultures such as China or Japan (Pincas, 2001; Ross, 2001; Straub, 1994). This may be due, in part, to the fact that non-verbal cues, an important component of high context communication, are not part of electronic communication.

In a further study exploring the effects of culture and personal pronoun use in email communication patterns, a large sample of Anglo, Latin and Nordic university students took part in a simulated buyer/seller role-play via email (Ulijn, Lincke, & Karakaya, 2001). In this study, it was shown how pronouns and their use closely associate with two important dimensions of social life, power and solidarity (Brown & Gilman, 2003). A linguistic analysis of the personal pronoun use in their email texts revealed that both sellers and buyers had problems with empathy and rapport, because of their limited use of second person pronouns (you, your, yours). The findings also demonstrated an excessive use of exclusive first person pronouns (I, my, mine, we, our, ours) in their email negotiations, as the potential sellers/buyers volunteered self-disclosure statements, a fact which, according to the authors, contradicts the dictates of a win-win negotiation strategy (p. 134). In another empirical study (Ulijn & St. Amant, 2000), students from cultures as distinct as the Netherlands and China were asked to interpret a negotiation process on videotape (without the use of email). The study focussed on the issues of questions and silence in the negotiation process and found that the students reacted to both according to their respective cultures. For example, it was shown that, for the Dutch students, there was a need for open directness with minimal tolerance for silence, and conversely, a need for harmony and silence for the Chinese students.

Cultural values also impact on how individuals within that culture view suitable processes of communication for different media. One recent empirical study, for example, has observed some cross-cultural differences in patterns of electronic discussion (Hanna & de Nooy, 2004). These authors attest that even though culture is being transferred into cyberspace at an increasing rate, cultural values do not map easily onto electronic discussion. In this study, French nationals viewed the discussion forum in the study as a site for debate or to formulate arguments and to defend ideas, whereas the British nationals viewed the discussion forum as an avenue for casual chat. In a further study, Itakura (2003) cautioned that communication via email may
create cultural stereotypes or reinforce existing beliefs. This author argues that we must therefore be aware of the strong impact of our words on email so as not to reinforce cultural assumptions (p. 46).

Communication patterns of different cultures may also contain certain cultural attitudes to time and time management (Hall, 1976b, 1984).

5: Attitudes to Time in Low/High Context Cultures

Hall (1976a, 1976b) maps certain cultures’ attitudes to time onto the same continuum of low and high context cultures. He uses the continuum once more to explain the way certain cultures respond to the concept of time. Polychronic attitudes to time are situated at the “high context” end of the continuum. Characteristics of polychronic attitudes include: doing many tasks at once, changing plans often, having strong tendencies to build life-long friendships, viewing schedules as estimates not as commitments, seeing time as spiral and basing promptness on relationships only. By contrast at the other end of the continuum are, he says, low context cultures, which tend to exhibit monochronic attitudes to time. Characteristics of monochronic attitudes include doing one task only at a time, emphasising promptness, adhering to set plans, being accustomed to short-term relationships, seeing time as linear, being results-oriented and viewing time as a precious, finite commodity not to be wasted. Hall (1976b) says that these attitudes to time influence the way we negotiate, make commitments, establish routines, create our social organisations and conduct our personal relationships.

Examples of monochronic cultures are Australia and America where there are often compartmentalised attitudes towards time, where punctuality is paramount and where urgency and deadlines are commonplace in negotiations (Hofstede et al., 2002). Polychronic cultures, such as many Asian, Latin American and African cultures, promote personal relationships and networking. A lengthy perspective is desirable. In China, for example, the notion exists that patience is the key to all good negotiations (Ulijn & Campbell, 1999).

Little research has been conducted so far to assess whether and to what extent such attitudes towards time transfer to the domain of email negotiation. Email, an
asynchronous medium, allows time for reflection and to formulate replies. In some educational studies (Vogel, van Genuchten, Lou, Verveen, van Eekout, & Adams, 2001; Ziegahn, 2001), it has been shown that the asynchronous nature of email encourages student reflection on their own cultural positions and those of others. The same asynchronous nature of email was found to facilitate face-saving in another study of on-line communication between Chinese and American university students (Tu, 2001). In this study, it was found that email communication allowed the Chinese students time to manipulate their self-images and thus facilitate face-saving. Through deliberate language design over time, they were able to create a better impression of themselves and thus save face by demonstrating respect for the receiver through their email messages.

Cultural values and their manifestations in communication styles are tenacious (Clyne, 1994, p. 206). They are often carried over from the native language to the second language. Added to this is the resistance in people to adopt the discourse structures and interactional strategies used by the native speakers of the language they are currently using (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 182). Understanding and tolerating one another’s culturally diverse discourse patterns and pragmatic interactional strategies is important for polite email communication (Thorne, 2003). Having a passive command of as many email discourse and interactional styles as possible may promote more effective and polite intercultural email communication (Clyne, 1994, p. 176; Crystal, 2001; Kalaja & Leppanen, 1991; Thorne, 2003).

Although there is much literature on the relationship between cultural values and language patterns of their members, as shown above, there are limitations in trying to establish links between the two. Cross-cultural research inherently involves many variables, some even unknown, which may skew or alter empirically based results. Included below are some limitations which are often neglected in the relevant literature and which, in the opinion of the researcher, cast doubt on the apparent link between cultural values systems and communication patterns.
2.3.3 Limitations of the Cultural Dimensions

The cultural dimensions listed above exist in all individuals and in all cultures to a greater or lesser degree. Every communicative event therefore, may attract a different degree of cultural value and therefore different linguistic strategies. For example, the cultural value of individualism predominates in the way many Americans deal with strangers, but the cultural value of collectivism predominates in their ways of describing national actions and events (Gudykunst et al., 2005). It is not apparent that one can determine an individual’s communication patterns by looking at his/her cultural communication patterns and the converse may be true as well. Another variable in the formation of communication patterns is personality orientation. An individual’s personality orientation mediates to some degree the influence of cultural values on communication (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 335).

It is also open to interpretation which language patterns are accurate examples of cultural values. It is not clear to the researcher which language patterns are accurate examples of the cultural values of individualism, for example, or low power distance or high uncertainty avoidance, or whether it is even possible to formulate patterns in language due to cultural values. Cultural values and global communication patterns reciprocally influence each other (Baron, 1998; Crystal, 2001). Although some researchers maintain that cultural values are resistant and slow to change (Clyne, 1994; Hofstede, 1980, p. 53), communication technologies, including email, may contribute to a cross-fertilisation of communication practices and may lead to potential universal patterns of communication. Furthermore, multiculturalism may be another variable which may distort cultural values systems and communication patterns. Many modern societies are becoming more multicultural, thereby creating less likelihood of establishing typical communication habits, expressed by a “typical” member of that culture. Finally, similarities and differences in communication patterns across cultures cannot be fully understood using one dimension of cultural variability only (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 334). Each dimension influences specific types of communication behaviour, but combinations of dimensions are often necessary to explain certain types of communication.
It is important to recognise the many cultural and politeness meanings in rhetorical styles across international language and discourse communities. The use of English as an international email language has brought with it many cultural values and communication styles carried over from other languages and cultures (Clyne, 1994, p. 206; Saville-Troike, 2003). The culturally sensitive email negotiator, therefore, must be aware of different rhetorical and politeness patterns and their inherent potential cultural meanings (Kachru, 1996, cited in Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 182). These different patterns may underlie cultural and ethnic stereotyping (Thomas, 1983). Such an awareness may eliminate in some way simplistic and ungenerous interpretations of people whose linguistic and politeness behaviour is superficially different from one’s own. This process is desirable both pedagogically and politically (Thomas, 1983).

Empirical research on politeness patterns within cultural values and communication systems has to date been based mainly in spoken environments. It is important therefore, that it now be applied to online media such as email. The next section, Email Communication Research, will discuss how those different cultural communication patterns play out in the medium of email, especially in relation to politeness.

### 2.4 Email Communication Research

In this section, there will be discussion of current email research in the literature. First, a short history is given, followed by discussion of the various characteristics of email. Next, there is debate on the important theory of social presence and how it affects relationship-building in email communication. Results from recent empirical research are then outlined, with discussion firstly on politeness in conventional written texts. This is followed by the limited research on politeness in CMC media, including email communication.

#### 2.4.1 Background

In the last 20 years or so, there has been an exponential rise of email communication within and among universities worldwide (Hilton & Kameda, 1999; Lee, 1994). In a
world becoming increasingly electronically networked, many tertiary education institutions are now able to offer their courses on-line to any student anywhere in the world. Geographic location need no longer be a constraining factor for students and universities. In addition, universities are increasingly using email to organise such intercultural programs as international student exchanges, off-shore course developments and general collaborative courses among universities worldwide (Hilton & Kameda, 1999). Consequently, new and distant educational partnerships, once considered too remote, are now emerging, due in part to email technology (Pincas, 2001; Rogers & Albritton, 1995; Xu, 1996).

In the past, however, most research has centred on the physical aspects of email such as the technical, organisational, ergonomic and commercial components (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1986; Simmons, 1994). Social and cultural considerations and how they impact on the user have not received much attention in email research (Baron, 1998, 2001; Ma, 1996, p. 173; Simmons, 1994). Task outcome rather than the communication process itself has been the primary focus of telecommunication research (Biggiero, 2003; Fang, 1998; Holmes, 1994; Short et al., 1986).

Now, as a result of the growing importance of email communication, it is being recognised that the social and psychological aspects of the user-interface are important and need to be identified and researched (Dandi, 2003; Walther, 1997). Issues such as politeness, self-presentation, relationship formation, status differences and online etiquette are important considerations for email communication, especially in intercultural contexts (Ma, 1996; Simmons, 1994). The use of politeness indicators in email has received almost no attention in the literature to date, especially in intercultural contexts (Bunz & Campbell, 2002; Mak & Yeung, 1999; St Amant, 2002). As a result, there are no prescriptive protocols on how to manage politeness issues in email communication (Dandi, 2003; Kiesler, 1984, p. 1125, cited in Ferrara, Brunner & Whittlemore, 1991, p. 9; Kim et al., 1999; Ma, 1996, p. 176) or how to manage the interpersonal dynamics of the medium (Walther, 1997).

2.4.2 Email Research

What is email?
Rice, Grant, Schmitz and Torobin (1990), cited in Holmes (1994), offer this definition of email: “the entry, storage, processing and reception, from one computer account to one or more other computer accounts, of digitized text” (p. 455). Fang (1998) refers to email as using computer text-processing and communication tools to provide a high-speed information exchange. Other researchers resist defining such a changing phenomenon as email. They view the development of email communication as something continually evolving with its users and relevant technological developments (Holmes, 1994).

**Features of email genre and discourse**

At present, there are no stylistic protocols for the writing of email messages, which could define the norms governing the use of this medium (Crystal, 2001; Gains, 1999, p. 82). The discourse style of email is still in its infancy (Crystal, 2001, p 127). Email practices are constantly evolving as users continue to develop their own discourse protocols, often by trial and error (Baron, 1998, p. 160; Collot & Bellmore, 1996). Demanding on our writing abilities to avoid misunderstanding, email is still essentially a limited symbolic representation system (Xu, 1996, p. 7). Generally, users are influenced in their email practice by the behaviour of the correspondents in their own network (Crystal, 2001, p. 107).

However, researchers have noticed some features common in current email style. Unlike conventional mail forms such as personal or business letters, email messages read more like memos or notes (Fang, 1998; Lan, 2000a). There is also a breaking down or blurring of the conventional mail forms (Collot & Bellmore, 1996; Gains, 1999; Rice, 1997), especially in email message salutations and closing. An appearance of informality seems to be the norm (Baron, 1998, 2001; Crystal, 2001). A consequence of informal email style is that the messages are becoming briefer and more direct than conventional messages (Holmes, 1994, p. 456; Lan, 2000a, 2000b). As well, some unique written styles and symbols are now becoming accepted as part of the informal style of email (Collot & Bellmore, 1996; Wilkins, 1991). Among the commonly used styles and symbols are: capitalised words (for shouting); :-) (for a smile); 1-) (for tired); :-( (for a frown); :-O (for surprise). Some email acronyms are: BTW (by the way); OTOH (on the other hand); OIC (Oh, I see); FYI (for your
information); and ASAP (as soon as possible). Email allows the users to engage in a more conversational style (Lan, 2000b; Wilkins, 1991).

However, some researchers caution against the apparent high levels of informality in email discourse (Biggerio, 2003; Crystal, 2001, p. 128). Such informality may not be acceptable to some cultures as their preferred way of negotiating via email (Baron, 2001; Crystal, 2001). Crystal (2001, p. 107) argues that the contemporary bias towards informality needs to be kept in perspective. When email users from one speech network interact electronically with those of another with different conventions, culture shock can result (Baron, 1998, p. 160). Consequently, email users need to determine the protocol expectations of their distant interlocutors as much as possible. Cultural differences in email communicative practice exist as well as differences in message content (Hanna & de Nooy, 2004). However, at present, there is little guidance on appropriate or differing email genre and discourse, especially for those in other cultures (Crystal, 2001; Gains, 1999; Kim et al, 1999).

**Email language--a hybrid**

The hybrid nature of email language may be more similar to spoken language (Hale & Scanlon, 1999; James, 2001; Moran & Hawisher, 1998; Yates, 1996, p. 37) for both lexical density and in terms of the range of vocabulary used. According to Yates’ (1996) empirical research conducted in a monocultural environment, email has much lower use of third person pronouns and makes greater proportional use of first and second person pronouns than either speech or writing. Baron (1998, p. 149) linguistically measured “involvement” by the use of first and second person pronouns, contractions and modal auxiliary verbs. The use of first names, which is often another involvement strategy, is quite common in email even with people you have never met (Baron, 1998, p. 147).

As well, the use of modals (with the exception of epistemic possibility) in email communication is significantly higher than in either speech or writing (Ulijn et al., 2001; Yates, 1996, p. 43). This fact may be attributable to a lack of context or defined semiotic field in email discourse, whereby not only must the text carry the social situation, it must also carry the sender’s and receiver’s relationship to the social situation (James, 2001; Lee, 1994; Yates, 1996).
Lack of Context

Constraints normally considered potential barriers in face-to-face communication, such as race, disability, accent, physical appearance and age, are greatly diminished in email. The absence of presence, context, and linguistic and paralinguistic cues, apparent in face-to-face communication, may pose a barrier in email communication (Baron, 2001; Biggiero, 2003; Garton & Wellman, 1994; Wallace, 2002). This lack of personal contact and verbal prompts may produce a sense of anonymity which may contribute to uninhibited speech (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). As well, the lack of context in email may also coerce users to be more direct, as there is no recourse to other sources within the context of situation to boost meaning (Wallace, 2002). Words are all we have so it is important that we make each word work hard at carrying the exact meaning we want.

Some Characteristics of Email

Some researchers believe that email communication has an equalising effect on the social, economic and intellectual status of email users (Dandi, 2003; Moran & Hawisher, 1998; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Wallace, 2002). Some see email communication as promoting egalitarian discussion and the power relationships between hierarchically diverse people as more equalised (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002; Ma, 1996; Moran & Hawisher, 1998; Ulijn, & Campbell, 1999; Wallace, 2002).

Email research to date suggests that it leads to greater self-disclosure than face-to-face communication (Garton & Wellman, 1994; Ma, 1996; Moran & Hawisher, 1998; Walther, 1992, 1997; Wilkins, 1991). As users often do not know their speaking partner and perhaps will never meet them, there is a certain feeling of anonymity and low risk associated with email communication. As a consequence, a “worry-free” attitude can develop, in which users say more about themselves than would otherwise be the case in face-to-face encounters (Spinuzzi, 1994, p. 215). Email also leads to greater self-absorption due, in part, to the fact that one’s communicating partner is out of view. This promotes self-oriented messages as opposed to other-oriented messages (Spinuzzi, 1994; Sussman, Golden & Beauclair, 1991).
Email communication can be highly relational (Wilkins, 1991, p. 72). According to Walther (1992, 1997), people become friendlier in email than in face-to-face interaction. But the process of establishing and maintaining relationships is slower in email due to the greater amount of time needed to communicate, the absence of non-verbal and vocal cues, the greater time needed to reach resolutions and the lack of familiar contextual cues. Research conducted by Walther (1997) found that people communicating via email who have never seen and will never see each other, communicate with more affection, like each other more, think they look better and work harder than people working under the same conditions in face-to-face interactions (p. 365).

Text Features of Email Communication which Remain Uncertain

Researchers have identified some text features of email communication which remain uncertain (Ferrara et al., 1991). These need some clarification especially in intercultural contexts if misunderstandings are to be avoided (Baron, 1998, 2001; Crystal, 2001; Gains, 1999; Ross, 2001). Some of these text features include:

- **Acknowledgement of previous email** – how do different cultures refer to previous emails and which anaphoric devices do they use?
- **Feedback expressions** - how do different cultures respond to requests and do they use/expect standardised replies or not?
- **Status of questions** – are answers to some questions expected or not?
- **Screen structure or layout of text** – are bullet points, for example, and screenfuls of unbroken text acceptable to some cultures?
- **Message openers and closings** – how do different cultures begin and end their email communication?
- **Levels of formality** – do all cultures accept high levels of informality, which is often cited as a characteristic of email discourse (Crystal, 2001, p. 128)?
- **Message lengths** – what is an appropriate length for the body of the message according to some cultures and is “scrolling” or “single screenviews” acceptable practice? Tu (2001, p. 55) says that Chinese students prefer short messages. According to this author, anything over two screens is too long and could have a negative impact on the quality of the on-line interaction participants.
• **Dialogic strategies** – how do certain cultures interact via email and what do they consider acceptable as a time frame for reply? Many Asian students, for example, do not like non-response to their email requests nor do they like to receive a response more than one day later from the initial request (Tu, 2001, p. 55).

• **Clarification methods** – how do certain cultures clarify or repair uncertainties or miscommunications often evident in email communication?

Many aspects such as the ones listed above need to be considered if polite and successful email negotiations across cultures can occur. Developing online relationships via email often involves consideration of these and other factors. Current research has endeavoured to assess whether and to what extent the medium of email allows social presence to develop between users, thereby creating online relationships. How users themselves can facilitate this process has also been a focus for research. These areas are now discussed.

### 2.4.3 Social Presence in Email Communication

Social presence theory (Short et al., 1986) is associated with the process of understanding how relationships are formed and maintained in email communication (Dandi, 2003; Fang, 1998; Kalaja & Leppanen, 1991; Lee, 1994; Ma, 1996; Tu, 2001). This is now discussed along with the related theory of media richness.

**Social Presence Theory**

Social presence is the degree to which a medium is perceived as conveying the presence of the communicating participants (Short et al., 1986), or the degree to which a user feels access to “the intelligence, intentions, and sensory impressions of another” (Tu, 2001, p. 47). Media differ in social presence or the degree to which a medium permits users to experience others as being psychologically present (Straub, 1994). The full condition of co-presence, that is, people communicating face-to-face in the same space, is considered as the communication situation which is richest in stimuli. In particular, Short et al. (1986, p. 72) argue that social presence fundamentally relates to two social psychology concepts: intimacy and immediacy. Filling in semantic differential scales such as unsociable-sociable, insensitive-sensitive, cold-warm, and impersonal-personal assesses the quality of the social
presence when evaluating a medium (Short et al., 1986). Social presence of a medium has been linked in a directly proportionate way to social influence. That is, the higher the social presence of a communication medium, the higher the influence of the communication within the medium (Dandi, 2003). As well, the social presence of a medium is an indicator of satisfaction within a CMC environment (Hale & Scanlon, 1999). Email is likely to be used more if it was felt to convey more interpersonal or social presence (Tu, 2001, p. 46). One recent study found that the degree of social presence impacts on learning, interpersonal relationships and satisfaction of the medium (Tu, 2001, p. 49). In this study, it was found that the degree of social presence in email could be cultivated using various communication strategies, such as showing concern for the receiver by offering “ice-breaking” warm greetings, friendly comments and personal responses to requests and so on (Tu, 2001, p. 57). Online privacy is also an important factor for the level of social presence. Feelings of privacy should be considered in attempting to achieve a high level of social presence. In the same study, it was found that Chinese students, for example, did not like their messages forwarded on to others due to the need to save face (Tu, 2001). Emoticons and paralanguage were not necessary to these Chinese students, who felt that they could detect the mood and emotions of the writer just by the language (p. 54). Even the colour of text influenced the Chinese students. Emails transmitted in red text carried a serious and intense meaning to the students who felt they were being warned or corrected and were thus losing face if they received such a message (p. 52). Importantly, it was also found that the level of interactivity of the email learning tasks influenced the level of social presence felt by the Chinese students and a high level of interactivity often led to fewer communication barriers in the learning process (Liang & McQueen, 1999).

**Media richness theory**

The media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) proposes that communication media vary in their capacity to reduce ambiguity and process rich information. Media richness is gauged by the extent to which media are able to “overcome different frames of reference or clarify ambiguous issues to change understanding in a timely manner” (Daft & Lengel, 1986, p. 560). It is based on the medium’s capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and senses involved, personalisation and language variety (Lee, 1994; Sherblom, 1988). Communication transactions that can
overcome different frames of referencing or clarify ambiguous issues in a timely manner are considered rich (Lee, 1994).

**Email - a rich or lean medium?**

According to a study of media appropriateness using social presence theory to compare traditional and new communication technologies, Ross (2001) found the overall ranking of media richness from highest to lowest was face-to-face, telephone, desktop video and videoconferencing, voice mail and email. Lee (1994) states that, while many consider email a lean medium, it can become rich. Email, he says, lacks the capability for immediate feedback, uses only a single channel, filters out significant cues from the sender, tends to be impersonal and incurs a reduction in language variety (Lee, 1994; Sherblom, 1988, p. 41). However, in a further study (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997), the authors point out that the methodologies used in the past to conclude that email is a lean medium, were all positivist in nature. By adopting more interpretivist and critical research methods, the authors, in their findings, state that the users consider email a rich medium when it is placed within its own organisational and social contexts. It is necessary, they say, to understand the “lifeworld” of the users in order to understand how they arrive at their interpretations of the social meanings of email communication.

Below is a discussion of recent research which attempts to understand the “lifeworld” of users in the area of politeness in written texts. Research in written conventional texts is outlined first, followed by politeness research in all CMC media including email. As can be seen from this discussion, certain constraints in the research methodologies of some studies are evident.

**2.4.4 Empirical Politeness Research in Written Texts**

The role of verbal politeness in written texts has so far received only scant attention (Maier, 1992; Pilegaard, 1997). Research projects showing empirical results are outlined below. Results of recent research in politeness within conventional letters are given first for comparison purposes with politeness in electronic media discussed later.
Politeness in Conventional Letters

In a study by Maier (1992), the language used to express politeness in business letters of a large sample of native and non-native English speakers was analysed. The politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), which has not been much used for analysis of written texts in the past (Maier, 1992), was used for analysis in this study. The author found that in non-native speakers, the language used to express politeness tended to be less formal and more direct than that of the native speakers. Results show that the most striking difference between the native and non-native speakers was in style (p. 194). Some non-native speakers gave the impression of being too casual, too desperate, too personal, or too detached. English discourse style according to this author is grounded in positive (solidarity) politeness which assumes a low degree of distance between speakers. The author cautions that business letters have not at this point (1992) been evaluated in terms of politeness for either native or non-native speakers (p. 192). Analysis of written texts was the only research method used in this study.

Pilegaard (1997) also states that few studies have applied politeness theories to studies of written language. After analysing 323 conventional business letters from the UK, this researcher found that the relative amount of positive politeness drops during the course of business negotiations, while that of negative politeness increases. This study also found that negative politeness becomes more important as the business relationship evolves and mutual independence is established. Moreover, positive politeness is relegated to a peripheral position if the business relationship descends into conflict (p. 233). Requests in the business letters were found to include mainly negative politeness strategies (p. 235). In a further study (Suh, 1999), the author assessed the differences between Korean ESL (English as a Second Language) learners and native speakers in the use of politeness strategies. It was found that the Korean learners were not always able to use politeness strategies in a similar manner to the native speakers. These findings may have implications for the teaching of politeness strategies in requests in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Korea. In this study, only one instrument was used to quantitatively determine the data from simulated situations. Other data-eliciting instruments which would complement those
results and help to achieve a more complete portrait of the lifeworlds of the writers, were not used in the above studies.

The next section looks at the results of empirical research of politeness in computer mediated communication (CMC), including email.

**Politeness in CMC Media, including Email Communication**

To date, research to assess the level and types of politeness strategies used in email communication is limited, especially in intercultural contexts. As mentioned previously, no instrument existed at the time of this research which could be used for the purposes of locating, defining and assessing politeness in email texts. Below is a synthesis of the politeness research in several areas of CMC to date, including telephone and email. This research shows that there is a general diminished or altered regard for the normal conventions of politeness usually evident in other written types of communication (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002; Simmons, 1994).

**A Reduction in Politeness Levels**

The apparent directness and frequent brevity of email communication may lead users to alter, diminish or dispense with some politeness indicators (Lee, 2004; Simmons, 1994). In his study, Simmons (1994) analysed the language of American users of a Bulletin Board System (BBS) over a six-week period for politeness indicators. It was found that the language was often acrimonious and “flaming” sometimes resulted. Other contributing factors leading generally to the altering or reduction in politeness conventions may include the relatively anonymous nature of email, uninhibited language behaviour, a tendency for self-disclosure and self-orientation (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Positive politeness strategies may be altered or diminished within email as users opt for transactional information exchange only (Bunz & Cambell, 2002; Kalaja & Leppanen, 1991; Thorne, 2003). Negative politeness strategies, preferred in some cultures to convey politeness, may not suit the medium, due in part to the apparently direct style of communication and the lack of social context cues (Lee, 2004).
In a study undertaken to assess response quality of email customer service in a sample of Australian businesses, Heuchan, Murphy, Neale and Liu (2001) operationalised a polite, quality business email reply as having the following characteristics:

- it answered the query;
- it addressed the customer by name;
- it opened with ‘Dear…’;
- it provided additional information;
- it closed with ‘yours sincerely’, ‘best regards’ etcetera; and
- it included the employee’s name, position and the name and contact details of the organisation.

The use of contrasting politeness strategies in automated human-computer telephone dialogues was analysed in a recent study by Wilkie, Jack and Littlewood (2005). In this study, it was found that people’s interactions with computers are fundamentally social and that human users have a subconscious tendency to apply deeply rooted social rules to interactions with computers in the same way as they do when interacting with other fellow human beings (p. 48). These researchers also stated that little prior work has been undertaken to investigate how relevant politeness is to human-computer dialogues and called for more research in this area (p. 47). The fundamental social nature of human to computer interaction is supported by another study (Herring, 1996). In this study, email messages in two listserv discussion groups were analysed. The results showed that men and women use email, in general, to exchange opinions, beliefs, understandings and judgements in social interaction, with the pure exchange of information taking a second place. Differences in the way men and women develop interpersonal relationships via email were hypothesized in this study with the findings that women, in general, value interpersonal relationships and seek to develop them online, whereas men, while appearing to be exchanging information are, on closer analysis, really exchanging opinions and evaluations in their email messages (p.104).

Politeness indicators in personal email messages in a monocultural environment were analysed in a study by Bunz and Cambell (2002). These authors looked at politeness indicators in personal email messages from a sample of American students and found
that email recipients were capable of detecting politeness indicators and consciously or not, accommodated this politeness by including similar politeness indicators in their responses. It also found that the demographics and the amount of email writing experience of the sender had no significant influence on politeness accommodation in email. Issues to do with interactivity in CMC were assessed in a study by Herring (2004). According to this author, CMC has a reputation as a medium which is incoherent interactionally, due to the limitations for turn-taking and reference. This study found two reasons to account for the popularity of CMC, despite its incoherent nature interactionally. They were the ability of users to adapt to the medium and the advantages of loosened coherence for heightened interactivity and language play. Some empirical studies offer strategies for raising levels of politeness in email communication. These are now discussed.

**Strategies to raise levels of politeness**

Some studies have offered strategies to raise levels of politeness in email communication and to facilitate online cooperation generally. For example, Mak and Yeung (1999), in their empirical study of an international email community in the three areas of rapport building, collaboration and interactive competence, found that self-introduction was a significant rapport-building device (p. 321). The study also showed that communication which adhered to the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975) facilitated collaboration online. Using anaphoric references to previous messages to provide a context for further discussion was also found to be sound evidence of interactive competence (Chun, 1994).

Suggestions for strategies to facilitate on-line courses via email were outlined as well in a study by Williams, Watkins, Daley, Courtney, Davis and Dymock (2001, p. 164). Some of these strategies included sending out an advance email which includes a welcome and expression of the desired outcome of the negotiation, establishing some cultural norms for the negotiation, and using icebreakers to allow people time to talk about themselves at the outset of negotiations. These strategies, they say, counteract the effect of linguistic and cultural context cues misunderstandings. In another study of educational tandem tasks in on-line seminars between British and Spanish students, Truscott and Morley (2001) found that it was not enough to know similarities and differences between cultures, but rather how to react positively in a foreign situation.
That is, the authors say, it is necessary to understand the motives of why someone from another culture would act or write in a particular way and importantly how to adapt to that new way.

Unless the sender has an understanding of the different ways certain cultures convey politeness, successful intercultural email communication cannot be assured (Mak & Yeung, 1999; Ross, 2001). In face-to-face contact, people have access to immediate linguistic and paralinguistic cues to adjust strategies for politeness. Via email, however, one cannot easily adjust to the frames of politeness expectations of the sender, due to the lack of shared contexts of communication, the lack of body language cues and few, if any, clarification or repair devices (Baron, 1998, 2001).

There follows discussion of some potential pitfalls, according to the researcher, that may occur when politeness, culture and email communication collide. A typology of the possible problems at this intersection is then listed.

2.5 Possible Problems at the Intersection of Politeness, Culture and Email Communication

As this literature review has shown, there are many areas where problems may occur in intercultural email communication, especially concerning politeness (St. Amant, 2002). These problems need to be addressed if misunderstandings and offences are to be avoided. Below is a summary of problems that may occur, according to the literature, when people from different cultures try to negotiate via email. They are listed under the five headings: 1: Politeness; 2: Relationship-building; 3: The low context nature of email; 4: Email discourse style; and 5: Email technology. In other words, common characteristics of email communication discussed previously in this chapter have been mapped onto several cultural communication patterns also discussed previously, which together may produce these potential pitfalls.

1: Politeness

- *Email communication tends to dispense with, or reduce, politeness strategies as senders may opt for transactional information exchange only.*
**Possible Problem:** All cultures have different ways to express politeness and use different forms of politeness to soften or avoid a potentially face-threatening act (Lakoff, 1990). Politeness expressions depend on the social distance between speakers, the power distance between them and the gravity of the request that is being asked (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These aspects require knowledge of the social context and cultural norms, which may be absent in email.

- *Use of address terms on email is not as conventional as in older, more established forms of communication such as conventional letters.*

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures consider inappropriate terms of address in email communication to be impolite. In these cultures, inappropriate or incomplete terms of address in the email message may threaten the receiver’s face in some way (Crystal, 2001).

- *Some positive politeness strategies are not suited to email communication.*

**Possible Problem:** Some positive politeness strategies, important in some cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Garcia, 1989), such as seeking agreement, showing sympathy and/or wordy explanations, are not easily expressed in email communication (Ross, 2001).

- *Some negative politeness strategies, for example, hedges and impersonalising mechanisms, are not suited to email communication.*

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures prefer the use of negative politeness strategies to convey politeness and to reduce damage to face (Garcia, 1989).

- *The use of off-record politeness strategies such as hinting, being vague, overgeneralising, using metaphors or understating does not suit the medium of email.*

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures consider the use of such off-record politeness strategies to be polite and necessary to avoid any potential face threat either to self or other (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

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Email communication tends to be direct.

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures prefer indirect communication, especially to unknown recipients, as indirectness is perceived in those cultures as being more polite (Hara & Kim, 2004; Ma, 1996; Sifianou, 1997). On the other hand, some cultures consider direct communication to be more polite (Ma, 1996; Nelson et al., 2002; Wierzbecka, 1991).

In email communication it is not immediately apparent which forms of social etiquette are appropriate at any given time.

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures are able to adapt to this uncertainty more than others (Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hofstede, 1997).

2: Relationship-Building

Email communication tends to be uninhibited largely due to its anonymous nature.

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures prefer building relationships over time. People in those cultures prefer humility in relationships and may feel uncomfortable with such (apparent) self-disclosure. People from some cultures may not be comfortable with over-friendly and frank language behaviour, often prevalent in email communication (Saville-Troike, 2003).

Email appears to be a status equalising medium which allows one to easily approach others of higher status.

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures do not like hierarchies to be abolished (Huang, 2000). People in those cultures may feel uncomfortable with certain status equalising effects of email (Lee, 2004). Other cultures, by contrast, consider formal language and emphasis on power divisions within social groups to be undesirable or even unacceptable (Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hofstede, 1997).

Email communication tends to be brief.

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures prefer attention given to face-building language before consideration of message content (Campbell, 1998).
cultures, such face-building language is a necessary part of relationship-building (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003).

3: Low Context Nature of Email

- *Email has a low context character in which the words convey all meaning.*
  *Email essentially reduces human interaction to words.*
  **Possible Problem:** Some cultures are high context in their communication patterns. For example, some people like to refer to background information, social context, and linguistic and paralinguistic cues to enhance communication meaning (Hall, 1976a, 1984). People from high context cultures may not feel satisfied with the limited ability of email to express feelings and affective reasoning. On the other hand, people from a low context culture may feel more satisfied with the ability of email to describe details and communicate in a linear progression (Ma, 1996; Ross, 2001).

- *Email does not easily allow the conventions of pragmatics to apply.*
  **Possible Problem:** In some cultures, meaning is often derived from implications and presuppositions dependent on context, cultural knowledge and current social norms (Fraser, 1983; Ross, 2001; Thomas, 1995).

4: Email Discourse Style

- *Email discourse style is highly creative. There is an absence of prescriptive protocols.*
  **Possible Problem:** Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance such as certain Asian cultures require structures and rules regulating speech patterns and discourse styles and may feel uncomfortable without such structures (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002).

- *Email communication tends to be informal.*
  **Possible Problem:** Some cultures prefer more formal communication especially when receiver is unknown (Crystal, 2001). Some cultures may feel uncomfortable using and receiving informal language (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b).
• *Email allows users to develop unique and creative forms of self-expression.*

**Possible Problem:** Some collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1997) discourage unique personal writing styles. In these cultures individual writing styles are not encouraged and some people may feel uncomfortable with the loose conventions within email (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

5: Email Technology

• *Email messages can be forwarded on and copied easily without the consent of the sender.*

**Possible Problem:** Some cultures prefer private communication and do not like messages sent on or copied which may provoke a face-threatening situation (Tu, 2001).

• *Email text does not easily allow for accents in foreign names.*

**Possible Problem:** Names without proper accents may be offensive to some cultures (Pincas, 2001; Tu, 2001).

• *Email text can be written in different colours and fonts.*

**Possible Problem:** Certain cultures have different interpretations of text colours, for example Chinese students do not like to see their names in red as it may indicate loss of face or embarrassment (Tu, 2001).

Overall, many problems may occur at the intersection of politeness and intercultural email communication. Issues such as the ones above need to be addressed if more polite intercultural email communication is the aim. Non-native speakers of English may also face other difficulties, as English continues to become the main email language worldwide (Crystal, 2001; Moran & Hawisher, 1998). In the final section of this chapter, the shift to English as the main email language worldwide is discussed (Crystal, 2001; Moran & Hawisher, 1998). The culture of English as an international email language is outlined from diverse points of view from the literature. This has many implications for non-native speakers when they write emails in English.
2.6 The Culture of English as an International Email Language

As English is now generally accepted as the “lingua franca” in the medium of international email negotiation (Baron, 1998, 2001; Crystal, 2001; Kachru, 1996; Moran & Hawisher, 1998), there appears a division in the minds of researchers as to how this lingua franca of email English will develop. On one hand, some see the use of English worldwide in the medium of email as a form of cultural imperialism (Munshi & McKie, 2001; Ulijn & Campbell, 2001), where the cultural values of the West are forced onto non-Western others. Differences in cultural values may be recognised but only in relation to the assumed centrality of the dominant, western Anglo cultures. The shift to English language is thus seen by some as creating a gated community, serving the interests of Western, Anglo-speaking cultures (Moran & Hawisher, 1998; Ulijn & Campbell, 2001). These authors say that until the medium of email includes all voices and cultures, it will not be as diverse, rich and democratic as it should be (Moran & Hawisher, 1998, p. 99).

Consequently, the use of English in intercultural email communication may put non-Western people at a disadvantage and create a gap between West and non-West cultures (Munshi & McKie, 2001; Ulijn & Campbell, 2001). The use of CMC in general, including email, tends to favour people from Western cultures because of its low context nature (Pincas, 2001; Ma, 1996; Straub, 1994). People from non-English speaking cultures are disadvantaged within email, even in small ways such as the inability of English speaking email writers to put accents on foreign names in an email text (Moran & Hawisher, 1998). Non-English speaking cultures, these authors argue, are expected to develop standard English literacy, including its component cultural literacy, as well as computer literacy (Pincas, 2001, p. 40).

On the other hand, some researchers believe that new communication technologies such as email will force all users to adapt both linguistically and culturally to the needs of culturally distinct and diverse audiences (Baron, 1998, 2001; Crystal, 2001; Ulijn & Campbell, 2001, p. 78). According to these authors, English as the standard email language will evolve into a kind of international English, the values and beliefs of which belong to no specific cultural area (Pincas, 2001). International email
English will become the property of all those non-native writers of email who have a culture other than Anglo-Saxon (Ulijn & Campbell, 2001). This international language, not yet fully developed, will not be standard English but rather a flexible language system, free from idioms and colloquialisms, which will allow grammar and vocabulary to vary according to the native language of the different users (McLaren, 1998, p. 541; Pincas, 2001).

However, whichever path email English takes in the future, people still need to have an understanding of other cultures, their politeness systems, values and belief systems and discourse structures in order to achieve truly polite intercultural email communication.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This review has highlighted current and seminal research in three large bodies of literature: linguistic politeness; intercultural communication; and email communication. It has focussed solely on literature written in English and it has been viewed from a Western perspective. This chapter has shown that, according to that Western view, there are many complex social and cultural issues which impact on how users communicate via email. These issues need to be addressed if successful and polite intercultural email communication is the aim. This review has also exposed many gaps in the literature. Politeness, as evidenced from the literature, is a complex phenomenon. Many different and competing conceptualisations of it are evident, with little consensus among researchers (Gap 1, see Chapter 1, p. 2). Moreover, the language used to describe these complex conceptualisations is technical and often poorly understood by everyday speakers who have their own intuitive knowledge of politeness. Consequently, a divergence between these two knowledge bases appears apparent and is, moreover, increasing (Gap 2, see Chapter 1, p. 2). This divergence can only hinder a more complete understanding of politeness.

Despite the large amount of research conducted in linguistic politeness in the last 30 years or so, the domain of email communication, especially in intercultural contexts, has largely escaped the attention of politeness researchers to date (Gap 3, see Chapter 1, p. 3). Perhaps a result of this dearth, to date there exists no instrument which could
be used for the purposes of locating, defining and assessing politeness in email texts (Gap 4, see Chapter 1, p. 4). As a consequence, no instrument exists which could also be used for the purposes of teaching linguistic politeness in pedagogical settings (Gap 5, see Chapter 1, p. 5). Such instruction would be beneficial for developing pragmatic competence in second language learners, an area traditionally fraught with difficulties in both teaching and learning.

This literature review has also highlighted the role of email in its capacity to create social presence between users. High levels of social presence in any medium can lead to greater use and more efficient communications. Our understanding of the ways in which the medium of email impacts on our communication is only in its infancy. Until such time as we know how to raise social presence levels and overcome certain barriers, as discussed in this chapter, polite intercultural email communication may be hindered in some way.

This chapter has also outlined the current empirical research in the field and exposed many limitations and methodological constraints. Summarising recent limited empirical research in the area of politeness in email communication, these factors became apparent:

- Paucity of research on politeness in email, especially in intercultural contexts;
- Evidence of methodological constraints in existing empirical research, for example, single data collection instruments, a lack of triangulation of data analysis;
- Lack of politeness research in natural work-based settings (not contrived);
- Lack of authentic work-based linguistic material for analysis;
- Little evidence of operationalisation of politeness terms;
- Lack of politeness concepts written in everyday language;
- Little evidence of definition and operationalisation of cultural terms;
- Lack of instruments to locate, define and assess politeness in written email texts.

This study then will be shown to address not only the five gaps in the literature but also the deficiencies, listed above, apparent in recent empirical research. The next
chapter, Chapter 3, will explain the research methods involved in data-eliciting instrument development, participant choice, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis. It will also outline the importance of an inductive approach to the philosophy of this study. The primary and two secondary research questions are discussed as well as how they came to form the basis of the three data-eliciting sources in this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the literature review, most research on politeness has focused on spoken language (Fraser, 1990; Watts, 2003). Little research has been conducted in the area of politeness in written communication (Maier, 1992; Pilegaard, 1997), and even less in email communication (Bunz & Cambell, 2002). To the researcher’s knowledge, no empirical research to date has been conducted on politeness within the context of intercultural email communication. Consequently, no prior studies within the field have signposted directions as to appropriate methodologies for future research. As a result, there were many challenges in developing instruments for eliciting and analysing data which could investigate politeness more specifically within the parameters of email communication, especially in intercultural contexts.

This chapter will explain those challenges and the methods ultimately used for data collection and analysis. Discussion of the research questions will begin the chapter, followed by an outline of the importance of an inductive approach in this study. Next is an explanation about the choice of participants both from Australia and Korea and the sampling procedures involved. Discussion of the three instruments is then given as well as data analysis procedures used in this study. Two software packages, SPSS and Leximancer, used for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, are then discussed. Assumptions and limitations of the study as well as problems encountered are outlined next, followed by a section on researcher reflexivity.

3.2 Research Questions

Three research questions, all relating to politeness, informed the construction of the data collecting instruments. Initially mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, p. 5, the three research questions are now more fully explained.
Primary research question

**Q: How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?**

The researcher used data derived from the three instruments of questionnaire, semi-structured interview and analysis of written email texts. The data were given by a sample group of academics and general staff at an Australian university and also by a smaller sample group of academics from universities in Seoul, South Korea. The data were used to assess how the concept of politeness was embedded within their email language.

Secondary research questions

**Q: Does email allow social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?**

Social presence may be defined as the degree to which a user feels access to the intelligence, intentions, and sensory impressions of another (Tu, 2001). Importantly, elevated levels of social presence can lead to relationship formation and politeness in email communication (Bays, 1998; Dandi, 2003). Consequently, the researcher was interested in finding out whether and to what extent social presence occurred in the email communication of the participants in this study. The researcher was also interested in the choice of words that the participants used in their email messages and if and how these words changed once a relationship was established. The study used data from the three sources to determine levels of social presence and language change.

**Q: What are the characteristics of email technology that may pose barriers to polite email communication?**

Through analysis of data obtained from the three sources from both the Australian and Korean participants, this study attempted to locate those aspects of email technology which are currently hindering more polite email communication. Certain barriers such as unspecified time parameters for responding to emails may be preventing users from communicating as freely and politely as in face-to-face environments.
These questions formed the basis for the development of the data-eliciting instruments. Arriving at answers to those questions through data elicited from these instruments, created the main research objectives.

Other research objectives included:

- To reduce some of the uncertainty surrounding the concept of politeness;
- To understand the cultural implications of politeness;
- To create a tool which could identify and assess politeness in email communication;
- To advise university staff members, both in Australia and Korea, how to incorporate politeness in their intercultural email communication.

3.3 Research Methodology

The subject of this research involved an understanding of current research in three areas: linguistic politeness; intercultural communication; and email communication. The intersection of these three areas revealed an area in need of research. Figure 3.1 shows how this study is positioned at this intersection. It highlights the interconnectedness of the major fields of research in this study:

![Figure 3.1: Intersection of fields of research in this study](image)
Partially shaded areas at dual intersections in Figure 3.1 indicate overlaps of those two areas. For example, the area between Politeness and Email indicates politeness within intra-cultural contexts while the black and white patterned area at the centred intersection of all three bodies represents linguistic politeness within the context of intercultural email communication.

3.3.1 Inductive and Deductive Research

An inductive research approach was the primary method used in this study. Inductive research may be described as the process of making conclusions from the specific and concrete to the general and abstract (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 464; Wolcott, 2001). However, deductive inquiry as a secondary and supplementary research method was also used in this study. Deductive research may be described as the process of establishing logical conclusions from general and abstract to specific and concrete phenomena (Michel, 1999; Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 462). The following sections will explain the dual approach.

Inductive Research

A descriptive approach was taken in this study because there were no previous studies in the field to guide direction. The conspicuous lack of theory and previous research on the topic merited such exploratory inquiry, based on descriptions (Travers, 2001). Using qualitative methods, the researcher tried to understand the nature of intercultural email communication from the viewpoint of the participants themselves. By describing the events surrounding the way the participants went about writing and interpreting their intercultural emails, the researcher aimed to shed new light on the topic within the framework of existing theories, through the eyes of those being studied. The objective was to help other people in the field understand their own politeness and language behaviour by seeing things through the perspective provided in this study (Wolcott, 2001, p.120). Provided with rich description and explanation in such a way, the reader is thus more able to identify with participants, language and events and thus transfer findings (Merriam, 1988). An aim of this research was to present the study so well contextualised that the reader might share the same basis for making judgements as the researcher, thereby sharing some responsibility (Wolcott, 2001, p, 124).
Inductive research was also considered a methodology likely to yield important results due to the subjectivity of the research area. As there was a likelihood of many and varied personalised viewpoints in such a complex research area, it was necessary to collect rich data in the field in an effort to explain what was going on and to locate some general threads of “truth” in the study (Merriam & Simpson, 1989; Sarantakos, 1998b). From these threads, patterns were established to understand better the participants’ viewpoints on politeness within their language both in their own language production and in their interpretation of incoming language. From these patterns, conclusions and tentative explanations were drawn. These conclusions and explanations gathered from the field were also shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and backgrounds (Creswell, 2003), which are explained in the section on Reflexivity (see Section 3.8, p. 96).

Deductive Research

As well as conducting a descriptive study, this research also aimed, as a secondary concern, to shed further light on existing theory discussed in the literature in Chapter 2. By locating this study within the framework of existing theory, it is hoped that new insights can be gained from the different perspective this study provides. Certain politeness, cultural and email communication theories were not being tested in a quantitative way using hypotheses, however. Rather, this study is providing a new lens through which the reader can view and evaluate these existing theories from alternative angles.

3.4 Design of the Study

In order to understand better the notion of politeness in intercultural email communication, it was necessary to create instruments which would freely elicit the participants’ viewpoints and perceptions. In previous research in this field, gaps or limitations in the methods of data collection were evident. Few studies, for example, had employed more than one data collection instrument. Employing a single method of data collection can produce limited or biased results in an investigation and does little to enhance the scientific rigour of the research (Denzin, 1992, 1997). The design of this study was based on the assumption that collecting data from several sources provided a fuller understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2003).
The main data collection instrument was a detailed questionnaire (see Appendices 1 & 2). This was followed by a second phase of semi-structured interviews from which supplementary opinions were collected from a smaller group within the larger group of questionnaire participants (see Appendix 3). The third and final phase of data collection involved an analysis of actual intercultural email threads between academics in Australia, Hong Kong and Korea (see Appendices 4 & 5). The final phase allowed the researcher to match participants’ perceptions of the topic gained in the first two instruments with the reality in the email texts. The design of the three data collecting instruments is now discussed, after a description of which participants were chosen to complete the questionnaire and why.

3.4.1 Participants and Sampling Procedures

There were three groups of participants in this study:

Group 1 – Australian Questionnaire Participants

As the topic of this study concerned intercultural email communication within an Australian university context, participants were chosen within that context. The first group of participants included academics, as they were considered likely to communicate via email to people in different cultures on work-related issues. The decision was also made to include in the first group some general staff members at an Australian university as well as academics, as many general staff members have regular overseas email communication as part of their work practices, for example, to foreign students wanting to study in Australia and so on.

As the intention was to obtain the opinions of a cross-section of both Australian academic and general staff members, care was taken to sample participants for the first group across all three major academic areas: Arts/Education, Business/Law, and Health/Science, including general staff in various university administrative positions, for example Office of the Vice Chancellor, including the International Office, Information Services and so on. Anecdotal evidence suggested that staff working in some disciplines may have different interpretations of how intercultural emails should be written than other disciplines. Moreover, having a cross-section of people from such varied backgrounds could give a more insightful portrait of politeness and how it
was incorporated by staff members at the Australian university in their email communication. Consequently, by choosing participants from the university as a whole, the study had a richer data-base for more comprehensive data analysis and interpretation.

The sampling method used to choose the necessary participants from the first group was random (Brown, 1988, p. 235). All the participants had an equal, calculable and non-zero probability to be included in the sample (Sarantakos, 1998a). It was important in the sample selection process to have an initial sample large enough to yield an adequate number of completed questionnaires for analysis. Because the return rate for completed questionnaires usually hovers around the 25% to 33% mark (Merriam, 2002), it was decided to have a sample size of approximately 300 academic and general staff. It was felt that this number would yield enough data (up to approximately 100 completed questionnaires from a possible 300), considered necessary for a valid and worthwhile study.

From the complete list of full-time academic and general staff members currently working at the Australian university (a number over 2,000), the researcher used the “lottery method” (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 141) to choose the initial sample of participants. To ensure that this study included equal representation of participants from all three major areas listed above, cluster sampling was used. Cluster sampling involves selecting participants within certain areas or clusters, which form the whole (Creswell, 2003). Each cluster sample (Arts/Business, Health/Science, Business/Law, including general staff areas) had an equal number of representatives (approximately 100 in each). It was envisaged that these staff members would be likely to be currently using email for international and intercultural negotiation, for example, to fellow academics overseas, potential international students, visiting scholars and so on. However, there was no way for the researcher to know if the intended participants were, in fact, currently using email for intercultural negotiation. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity necessary in this study precluded such gathering of information. Furthermore, ascertaining such prior information from staff members would invalidate the principles of random sampling (Sarantakos, 1998a) and thus be inappropriate for this study.
Group 2 - Korean Questionnaire Participants

As this study had an intercultural focus, it was also decided to seek the opinions of academics who were non-native speakers of English for their opinions on the topic of this study. As such, a small group of 16 Korean academics living and working at various universities in South Korea formed the participants of Group 2. These participants used email to communicate in English to other English speaking academics in other cultures as part of their work practices in Korea. They were invited to complete the main data gathering instrument, the questionnaire (see Appendix 2), which was modified to make it more Korean-friendly, as will be discussed later. It was important to obtain the opinions of non-native English speaking participants on the topic of intercultural email communication, as their input to the study facilitated a broader, more culturally inclusive data-base. Their comments and insights provided a valuable extension to the data available in this study. Lessons could thus be learnt on ways to further improve politeness in intercultural email communication as seen from their Korean perspective.

Group 3 – Australian and Korean Interview participants

All participants both in Australia and Korea who completed the initial questionnaire were invited to participate in the next stage of the research process. Their interest in further participation in the interview stage was shown by having ticked the appropriate box at the end of the questionnaire (see Appendices 1 & 2). Depending on the number of participants who indicated their willingness to continue, a small group was chosen for in-depth interviews conducted both in Australia and in Korea by the researcher (12 Australian and 8 Korean participants formed the interview group). Here the researcher strove to understand the “why” and “how” of answers given in the questionnaire, in a holistic way, in an effort to understand and explain their social realities as they applied to politeness in intercultural email communication (Eisenhardt, 1989; Peshkin & Glesne, 1992).

Ethical Clearance

A copy of the Ethical Clearance notification, obtained by the researcher from the Australian university ethics committee at the outset to the fieldwork of this study, was
sent to the Australian participants as well as the Korean participants. It was important to communicate to these overseas participants as well as those in Australia that the study had fulfilled certain stringent legal and ethical requirements considered necessary by the university and that consequently its implementation was fully endorsed.

3.4.2 Instrument 1: Questionnaire

The major data collection instrument was a questionnaire entitled *Intercultural Email Communication Questionnaire* (see Appendix 1). This questionnaire comprised the first phase of data collection. It was used to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data from all participants about the topic of this study. The rationale for the design of the questionnaire was to provide information which could satisfactorily address the primary and the two secondary and related research questions. Consequently, all items in the questionnaire, individually crafted by the researcher, linked as much as possible to these questions.

Sources for the Content of the Questionnaire

The content of all items in the questionnaire was derived from a synthesis of data from three sources which are explained below. These sources were:

1: The literature in the relevant bodies;
2: The focus group; and
3: Professional opinions from academic colleagues.

1: The Literature

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many different conceptualisations of politeness in the literature. It was therefore difficult, but nonetheless important, to try to include as wide a scope as possible of differing politeness concepts in the design of the questionnaire. Also important was to simplify these concepts and their descriptive language in an effort to reduce the divergence between ordinary speakers’ knowledge of politeness and the complex conceptualisations and technical language in the literature. It was imperative, however, that the input from the literature did not dictate the philosophical ethos of the questionnaire. Collecting views and perceptions from
other sources as well as future respondents was considered the main objective, so care was taken to tailor all items towards this aim.

2: The Focus Group

As this was an inductive research project, it was important to include input from the people who use emails for intercultural email communication in their work practices (Krueger, 1994). University staff who use email to communicate overseas have vital and accurate knowledge on the topic. Their opinions are very valuable to assist in locating any existing or potential problems associated with the language of intercultural email communication. Consequently, a focus group was formed at the Australian university in August, 2003, when academics and general staff members were invited to share with the researcher their thoughts and suggestions on the topic of this study. Many uncertainties concerning appropriate politeness protocol were voiced by the members at the meeting. Careful note was made of their concerns and other input which, in turn, guided further the formation of questionnaire items. For example, several group members voiced their uncertainty about the correct name order for their overseas email partners. This uncertainty was then translated into a questionnaire item.

3: Professional Opinions from Academic Colleagues

Professional opinions, in the form of comments and suggestions, were volunteered to the researcher by academic staff colleagues in the development of the questionnaire. Comments such as the difficulties currently being experienced were carefully noted in the researcher’s field notes book since the beginning of this study in 2002 and the one and a half years prior to questionnaire construction. All such information was later retrieved for use in the construction phase of the questionnaire.

The Process of Construction of the Questionnaire

The actual construction of the questionnaire was complex for a number of reasons. As mentioned previously, the aim of the questionnaire was to elicit information about very complex concepts, which had to be written in simple language. It was difficult, for example, to reduce to a few simple words such complex constructs as face or
politeness or status. Although most of the participants were academics, few had linguistic or language-related backgrounds. It is easy for a researcher trained in linguistics to think that academics would write and think in a linguistic metalinguage. What was not considered, however, was that most of the participants would not have had contact with such linguistic metalanguage and as well had probably not been in the habit of thinking about their own language use. For example, one question was originally written as: *Do you think you project your identity differently towards the receiver during the course of an email thread?* Most people probably have not thought about how they present their identity online or even what their identity is. As well, most people are probably not familiar with the term “email thread”. Language choice, therefore, had to be simple and easily understood by those without any knowledge of linguistic or technological terminology. As well, the design of the questionnaire had to be simple and brief for the participants to feel comfortable in answering. User-friendliness in filling-out procedure was an important consideration.

Originally, the design of the questionnaire followed themes that were identified to be major in the study: polite language; cultural awareness; adaptation; email technology. On closer inspection however, these major themes were too abstract, too general and did not “sit right” with the research questions. For example, the section entitled “cultural awareness” could potentially apply to all the research questions. It was too vague and far-reaching. A more preferable solution was to have each section in the questionnaire aligned as much as possible with the research questions. This process led to a summary entitled “Questionnaire Aspects”, which reduced the complexity of the study into the most simple, irreducible and understandable concepts and located accurately what the researcher was trying to establish. In short, it helped to crystallise complex concepts thereby giving the researcher a clear conceptual base. The six aspects for the design of the questionnaire were:

1: **Politeness aspects**: minimising risk to face;
2: **Face aspects**: establishing identity;
3: **Relational aspects**: establishing social presence;
4: **Communication style aspects**: establishing language patterns;
5: **Social aspects**: establishing power relations;
6: **Email technology aspects**: establishing barriers to email communication.
Pooling together data from the three sources mentioned above and mapping that data onto the conceptual base afforded by the six aspects, the final version of the questionnaire was constructed. It was now a professional document, which mapped important ingredients from the literature, the focus group and input from academic colleagues onto a sound conceptual base.

**Sections of the Questionnaire**

The final version of the questionnaire incorporated several sections which aligned with the six aspects listed above. The last section in the questionnaire, “Email Service”, was eventually left out of the study as it was considered to have not enough relevance to the research questions. The remaining six sections and their connection to the research questions are listed below, followed by a brief explanation of each one.

- **Section A: Background Information** *(incorporating demographic aspects)*
- **Section B: Politeness** *(incorporating politeness and face aspects)*
- **Section C: Social Status** *(incorporating politeness and social aspects)*
- **Section D: Choice of Words** *(incorporating communication style aspects)*
- **Section E: Relationships** *(incorporating social presence aspects)*
- **Section F: Email Technology** *(incorporating email barrier aspects)*

Each section elicits both quantitative and qualitative data, including examples of forced-choice answers (Likert scale, Frequency scale, Multiple Choice, Yes/No answers) as well as open-ended questions and space for additional comments. The cover page of the questionnaire describes the nature of the questionnaire, to whom it is being sent, why the study is being conducted and what the study aims to achieve. Further information on the cover page includes such issues as confidentiality and concerns as well as the contact details of the researcher (see Appendix 1).

Each section of the questionnaire is now explained.

**Section A: Background Information**
In the first section of the questionnaire, there are 12 questions covering participants’ demographic background, for example their language and cultural background, their length of experience in writing intercultural emails, their area of academic discipline, age group, gender and so on. In a study such as this where intercultural communication is the central tenet, it was important for the researcher to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the participants’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Section B: Politeness

In this section participants were asked to comment on their perceptions of politeness and how it affected the way they went about writing their emails to overseas receivers whom they did not know. In particular, the researcher was interested in looking at how the participants used politeness with unknown overseas receivers compared to the way they used politeness with known receivers in Australia/Korea. The participants were also asked to comment on how their politeness perceptions influenced the way they interpreted their incoming emails from overseas.

Section C: Social Status

In this section, participants were asked to comment on the effect of social status on their email communication with unknown overseas recipients. The researcher was interested in finding out how, if at all, the variable of social status affected language production and politeness on email.

Data obtained in Section B: Politeness and Section C: Social Status addressed the Primary research question:
Q1: How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?

Section D: Choice of Words

In this section, participants were asked to comment on how they went about choosing the words for their intercultural emails and whether they used different wording to email receivers in non-English speaking backgrounds compared to receivers in other English speaking backgrounds. The researcher was trying to ascertain whether concepts of clarity and directness had any bearing on the way in which the
participants chose their words and/or interpreted the words in their incoming intercultural emails.

Section E: Relationships

In this section, the researcher was interested in finding out whether and to what extent social presence develops in overseas email exchanges. Elevated levels of social presence can lead to relationship formation in email communication (Bays, 1998, Dandi, 2003; Tu, 2001). Attempts at forming relationships online can be considered polite in some cultures (Bunz & Cambell, 2002). The participants were asked to comment on a recent particular email thread conducted in a back and forth manner that they had had over some time with someone unknown from another culture, English speaking or non-English speaking. The participants were asked to consider what happens to their own and the language style of their communicating partner. They were also asked to comment on any events or changes in the dialogue that they considered unusual or unexpected.

Data obtained in Section D: Choice of Words and Section E: Relationships addressed the first of two Secondary research questions:

Q2: Does email allow social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?

6: Section F: Email Technology

In the final section, the researcher was seeking information to assess the suitability of email as an intercultural communication medium. In particular, the researcher was interested in finding out those aspects of email technology which were currently hindering more polite email communication. As well, those aspects which were preventing users from communicating as they normally would in face-to-face environments were also sought. The participants were asked to comment on any potential problems about the medium that they considered would pose barriers to successful and polite email communication.
Data obtained in Section F: Email Technology addressed the other

**Secondary research question:**

Q3: *What are the characteristics of email technology that may pose barriers to polite email communication?*

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**Questionnaire Data Collection for the Australian participants**

A total of 286 questionnaires were sent out to academics and general staff at the Australian university during the months of October/November, 2003. Of this figure, 180 were sent out by internal mail and 106 were hand delivered to participants. The decision was made to hand deliver some questionnaires throughout the university, as this method of data collection, although very time consuming, returns a good percentage completion rate (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 302). Of those questionnaires that were hand delivered, a 95% completion rate was obtained. This method of data collection also gave the researcher a chance to connect personally with potential participants, hand over the questionnaire, explain any anomalies, answer any queries and importantly, jot down in the field-notes book any comments made by the participants concerning the topic of study. Of the questionnaires that were sent to the participants online, care was taken to ensure a personalised greeting at the outset to each email message. Although more time consuming than sending a generic email, it was felt that a personalised email would yield a higher rate of completed questionnaires, as it is easy for busy academics to dismiss standardised emails requesting information.

Personalising emails and hand delivering the questionnaires were methods employed by the researcher to combat non-response of questionnaires. Non-response means a loss of valuable sources of information and affects the degree of representativeness of the study (Brown, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sarantakos, 1998a). Other methods used in this study to ensure as high a success rate as possible for the return of the completed questionnaires included having a short, sincere, professional covering letter succinctly outlining the rationale and principles of the study, providing convenient means of returning completed questionnaires, having a friendly and professional manner and so on. These strategies for maximum data collection proved effective. From the original dissemination of 286, a total of 122 completed
questionnaires were returned over the period December, 2003 to February, 2004, showing a successful completion return rate of 42.6%.

Issues of confidentiality arose during collection of data and the researcher took steps to ensure such confidentiality in a professional manner (Merriam, 2002; Travers, 2001). These included keeping the complete dataset locked in the researcher’s office, using a coding system to further protect anonymous participants, ensuring password protected hard drives to store all electronic data and so on.

The Korean Questionnaire

The version of the questionnaire for the Korean participants was altered slightly to include more Korean friendly language and a more culturally appropriate format. The minor changes implemented in the questionnaire were completed by the researcher with the help of two native speaking Korean academics, one working in Seoul and the other currently working at the Australian university. Some of the changes included simpler language constructions comprising fewer words used in the covering letter and throughout all sections. Some language was changed altogether, for example, the term “affiliation”, which is common in Korean official documents, was used instead of “place of work”. As well, examples were given in the qualitative questions in order to make it easier for the participants to align and even choose their answers. Key concepts were simplified and emboldened for ease of understanding, for example “There are no names written in this research”. The Likert scale was abbreviated to a continuum using the terms strongly disagree and strongly agree only (instead of writing all the components in between, for example, disagree, uncertain, agree). These devices were implemented so as not to inundate the Korean academics with complicated syntax and unnecessary lexis, as these participants’ first language was not English. A copy of both the Australian and Korean versions of the questionnaire can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

Questionnaire Data Collection for the Korean participants

As well as the 122 Australian academic and general staff, a smaller cohort of 16 academics living in Korea also completed the questionnaire. These Korean academics
worked at various universities in South Korea. All had a good command of the English language and used email to negotiate for work purposes with English speakers overseas. Of those 16 participants, 8 completed their online questionnaires sent from Australia and the remaining 8 completed a hard copy version given to them in person by the researcher while in Korea during the month of November, 2004.

It is a limitation of this study that the number of Australian and Korean questionnaire participants was so different in size (122 Australian questionnaires to 16 Korean questionnaires). Effort was made to ensure some similarity in sample size. However, despite many attempts, it was difficult for the researcher to obtain more than 16 completed Korean questionnaires. Consequently, results derived from the Korean questionnaires should be treated as preliminary and with caution. Drawing conclusions about similarities and differences, therefore, between the Australian and Korean results can only be tentative. The limitation of differences in questionnaire sample size, however, was offset to some extent by the similarity of numbers for the in-depth interviews. This is discussed in the section on interviews (see Section 3.4.3).

**Advantages and limitations of a Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was used in this study because a self-responding questionnaire is an efficient and useful instrument to collect data (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 224). Obtaining qualitative data was paramount in this descriptive study so some questions were open-ended and “comments” sections were included. A means was thus provided whereby the participants were not confined to the dictates of the questionnaire (Sarantakos, 1998a). As well, an open-ended questionnaire is less threatening and less frustrating to culturally different groups of respondents (Merriam & Simpson, 1989, p. 131). Importantly, information that may not be anticipated by the researcher is more likely to be given if an open-ended format is provided (Merriam & Simpson, 1989, p. 130).

A limitation of questionnaires is that often the respondent may not answer a question due to a lack of knowledge or an ambiguously drafted question (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 241). The questionnaire was pilot tested several times in an effort to detect unclear items or potential ambiguities. Several academic colleagues of the researcher, who were experienced in questionnaire design and construction, reviewed the format and
language as well as ease of use of the questionnaire. The necessary adjustments were made according to these important peer reviews and member checks.

Another limitation of questionnaires is that the respondents are indicating their perceptions only of politeness. In the questionnaire, the respondents may not necessarily be revealing their actual behaviours and ways of incorporating politeness within their intercultural emails. The researcher must be aware that a data-eliciting instrument such as a questionnaire may only reveal what the respondent perceives about the topic, not what is his/her actual practice. This limitation is offset to some extent by triangulation of data from other sources, such as analyses of the email threads (see Chapter 7, Sections 7.4.5 and 7.5.5). Triangulation of the data-set, therefore, provided some insight into just how close perceptions and practice intersect, if at all.

3.4.3 Instrument 2: Interview

In-depth interviews, conducted by the researcher with a sample of the questionnaire participants from both Australia and Korea, formed the second phase of data collection. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with the Australian participants at their place of work and a total of 8 interviews were conducted with the Korean participants face-to-face in Korea. As mentioned previously, these participants expressed their willingness to participate in the interview when completing the questionnaire.

Sampling Procedures

The interview participants were chosen from the larger group of questionnaire participants. Choosing a smaller sample population from the original larger population is called multi-stage sampling (Sarantakos, 1998b, p. 51). The Australian questionnaire participants who indicated a willingness to be involved in the second stage of the research were pooled together. There were 43 participants in this pool. After several weeks had elapsed to allow the researcher time to reflect on answers given in the questionnaire and to connect data with existing theory, a small number (12 participants) from that pool was chosen for in-depth interviews. Due to time constraints in Korea however, the researcher was not able to wait a few weeks after
questionnaire collection before conducting interviews. A total of 8 Korean participants indicated their willingness to be interviewed so they were all interviewed by the researcher in Korea. The process of reviewing the Korean questionnaires, however, still remained the same but was completed in a shorter period of time. As well, several of the Korean participants had returned their questionnaires online so the researcher had sufficient time to assess their responses before travelling to Korea.

The researcher was guided by existing answers given in the questionnaire to choose the Australian interview participants. For example, questionnaire participants who indicated multiple strong agreements or strong disagreements on the questionnaire or who alluded to problems in their email communication in the open comments section, were considered for interview selection. The researcher was guided by the emerging hypotheses that were surfacing from initial observation of the questionnaire. If certain questionnaire participants indicated difficulties with, for example, politeness strategies, then they were likely to be included for possible selection. Theoretical sampling was thus taking place (Brown, 1988; Merriam, 2002). Participants, who, in the opinion of the researcher, were thought to serve the purposes of the study, that is, to locate, understand and explain politeness in intercultural email communication, were chosen for case study purposes. That is, the researcher strove to select “information-rich cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 169) which gave the researcher valuable information about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. In this way the researcher was employing purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Importantly, the researcher used the strategy of “maximum variation” (Merriam 2002, p. 31), whereby dissonant examples were included within the interview group of participants. In other words, participants with different and varied demographic backgrounds such as different disciplines at the university, as well as different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, were considered for possible inclusion. In this way theoretical flexibility was retained (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 533) and the resultant cross-case analyses yielded more abundant insights. External validity was therefore enhanced.
Interview Data collection

The interviews, audio-taped for later transcription, were conducted with the chosen participants from both Australia and Korea over a period of time at their places of work and at times suitable to them. The same interview questions were used for the Korean participants in Korea as those used for the Australian participants in Australia (see Appendix 3). It was not considered necessary to alter the interview questions for the Korean participants as was done in the questionnaire because the researcher was able to adjust questions to a more culturally appropriate format during the course of the face-to-face interviews. The researcher was also able to explain certain terms and concepts to the Korean participants as the need arose during the interview, unlike the questionnaire which was a written document. The delivery of questions in the interview was also different for the Korean participants. In Korea, the researcher spoke more slowly to the interviewees, as English was not their native language. Consideration was given to these participants as they spoke in English, their second or sometimes third language.

One of the aims of the interviews was to allow all the interview participants to elaborate and expand on answers given in the questionnaire. It was important, therefore, that the interview format complemented the questionnaire so that the participants experienced a conceptual flow-on effect to maintain continuity of thought. The topic of this study and how it related to each interview participant was explained in detail at the outset to each interview. This explanation was for the benefit of the interviewees so that they could refocus and reposition themselves according to the important concepts in this study. The eight interview sections therefore corresponded roughly to the six questionnaire sections as seen in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1: Alignment of interview concepts to questionnaire format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Sections</th>
<th>Interview Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Background Information</td>
<td>1: Ice-breaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Politeness</td>
<td>2: Politeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Social Status</td>
<td>3: Formality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Choice of Words</td>
<td>4: Titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Relationships</td>
<td>5: Directness/Indirectness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Email Technology</td>
<td>6: Time Issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7: ‘Not knowing’ Issues
8: Relationship Role in Email

The choice of the interview questions within those sections incorporated the most interesting or important results from the questionnaire. For example, many questionnaire participants alluded to the “Zone of Uncertainty” in their intercultural email communication, which according to them, included both uncertainty about correct communication procedure and as well, uncertainty generated by the software of email itself, such as not knowing if their sent email had been received or not. Considering this questionnaire finding important to the aim of the study, the researcher thus explored this concern further in the interview by including a section on ‘Not knowing’ Issues.

For each section, one or two questions were asked, for example, for Section 4: Titles, the two questions were:

- Q1: How important do you think using ‘correct titles’ is in overseas email negotiation generally? and
- Q2: What procedure do you use for addressing the person you don’t know in your emails?

For Section 6: Time Issues, the two questions were:

- Q1: What are the main problems concerning ‘time’ that you have experienced within your email negotiation? and
- Q2: How do you deal with them?

For Section 7: ‘Not knowing’ Issues, the single question was:

- Q1: In your opinion, what is it about email communication that causes uncertainties and/or problems?
For Section 8: **Relationship role in Email**, the single question was:

- Q1: *What are the best strategies you’ve found to improve relations with an unknown receiver overseas via email?*

The complete list of interview questions can be seen in Appendix 3.

**Advantages of the Interview**

A personal interview was chosen to collect data from a small selection of questionnaire participants because it allows greater flexibility in asking questions (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 266). This also allows exploration of the issues in detail in an active process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 127). More specifically, a personal interview allows the researcher to gain knowledge of the participants’ social, attitudinal, cultural and linguistic worlds (Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 100). Creating the right context in which the interviewee feels comfortable enough to volunteer information is essential in personal interviews (Sarantakos, 1998a). The researcher strove to create this context by showing genuine interest, assuring confidentiality and not being judgemental. These are important elements of building rapport and mutual understanding (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). A general easy-to-answer question was asked at the outset to the interview to break the ice and allowed more focused questions thereafter. The purpose of the ice-breaker question, Q1: *‘Do you like using email for negotiating with people overseas?’* was to create a non-threatening context whereby further information from the interviewee was volunteered. The researcher strove to create a context in which issues were allowed to emerge naturally and in an unimpeded way. Careful note was made of what was *not* said as well as that which was expressed. The delivery of the questions was flexible and the researcher strove not to introduce new ideas or to impart opinions or bias to the interviewee in any way.

**Limitations of the Interview**

Agar and Hobbs (1982) have suggested that within interviews there is difficulty knowing how much of what is said is a reflection of the culture, how much is the participant’s personal impression and how much is due to the interview itself. Personal interviews risk being subjective, whereby the researcher’s own thoughts and
biases may cloud those of the participant (Miller & Glassner, 1997) and thus present limitations. This may be offset in some way by the researcher having a similar professional background to most of the participants (the researcher is a part-time academic staff member at the same university), a fact which enables entry into the participants’ worlds easier (Sarantakos, 1998b, p. 44). As well, a similar background promotes trust, mutual understanding and cooperation and therefore bias and distortion are reduced (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992; Travers, 2001).

As with questionnaires, interviews also involve issues of perception versus practice and as such may present limitations. The process of interviews, like the questionnaire process, may only reveal what the participant perceives about the topic, not what is his/her actual practice. Some participants may present a different reality in the interview compared to the reality of the language in their email texts. For example, a participant may indicate, in the interview, a preference for the use of correct titles. An examination of email threads however, may reveal diminished use of titles. The potential limitations of interview are offset to some extent by triangulation of data from other sources such as results from questionnaire and analyses of the email threads. Triangulation therefore provides some insight into just how closely perceptions and practice intersect, if at all.

Another limitation of interviews and indeed of this study, is that the researcher was working alone in all stages. Limited time, money and resources precluded the researcher from engaging the services of multiple researchers. Having multiple researchers would foster divergent perspectives and would thus strengthen grounding (Eisenhardt, 1989). The opinions and views of the supervisors in this research project, however, provided some offset to this limitation. Their input provided alternative and at times divergent perspectives to this study thereby strengthening many aspects.

The interview participants both in Korea and Australia were asked, at the completion of the interview, if any copies of their recent email threads could be given to the researcher for the purposes of linguistic analysis to establish how they embed politeness indicators in their email language. The interviewees were assured that the information recorded in the email threads would be treated in the strictest confidence and would be known only to the researcher.
3.4.4 Instrument 3: Email Threads

Permission was sought from the Australian interview participants to view some of their intercultural email threads used for negotiation purposes as part of their work at the Australian university. An email thread may be defined as a series of emails going back and forth between sender and receiver over a certain period of time for the purposes of negotiation. Possible email threads could be used, for example, for organising collaborative academic international exchanges or liaising with foreign student bodies for possible enrolment at the Australian university.

Permission was also sought from the Korean participants to access some of their email texts for discourse and content analysis but the researcher was unsuccessful in obtaining such relevant texts. It is a limitation of this study that no such email texts emanating from Korea were used for analysis. Further, no interviews were conducted with Korean email writers. This limitation is offset to some extent by Email Thread 2 (see Chapter 7, Section 7.5, p. 267) which includes authentic emails written by a Korean academic. Further research which collects email threads emanating from other countries would complement and extend results of this study.

Only two intercultural email threads were obtained from the Australian interviewees. This shows the difficulty in obtaining this type of data which could contain potentially sensitive and private information. Discourse analysis was conducted on these texts which were used for the purposes of academic negotiation in the recent past.
Discourse analysis refers to any of the many approaches of analysing stretches of language (discourse) with the purpose of providing a systematic means of relating form and function within and across those stretches of language (text) (Hornberger, 1994; Lakoff, 2001; Martin, 2001). Analyses of the content of email texts, both sent and received, would provide further insight into the use of politeness indicators. Importantly, an analysis would also allow the researcher to match participants’ perceptions with the reality in the email texts. The researcher would thus be able to cross-check results with data obtained from the other two data collection instruments for the purposes of triangulation. Using such multiple data collection methods strengthens the grounding of theory by triangulation of evidence (Denzin, 1992, 1997).
As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, no instrument was available in the literature at the
time of this research to systematically analyse emails texts for the purposes of locating
and assessing politeness indicators. Nor was any instrument available to assist in
operationalising and therefore clarifying politeness into conceptually visible, concrete
and manageable components. The researcher, then, faced the daunting task of
developing a way to deal with these deficiencies. An initial analytical instrument,
(email politeness assessment instrument or EPA 1), synthesised from several relevant
theories, was therefore developed. New to scholarly research, this instrument
represented a way of breaking down email texts for the purposes of politeness analysis
(see Appendix 4). Although blunt, this initial instrument enabled the researcher to
begin the process of analysis of email texts for the detection of politeness indicators.
Certain relevant theories of politeness which had not before been applied to email
texts (for example, Brown & Levinson, 1987; Crystal, 2001; Culpeper, 1996; Fasold,
1990; Fraser, 1990; Heylighen & Dewaele, 1995; Lakoff, 1990; Mak & Yeung, 1999;
Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Watts, 2003), formed the content. This instrument thus
became a template which could then be used for analysing each of the emails in a
thread under nine categories:

1: Face Threatening Acts (or FTAs);
2: Positive Politeness Strategies;
3: Negative Politeness Strategies;
4: Friendship-building Strategies;
5: Formality;
6: Informality;
7: Directness;
8: Indirectness; and
9: Impoliteness Indicators.

Many of the items in the email texts were counted manually which then began the
process of analysis. For example, under the heading of formality, items indicating
levels of formality such as nouns, adjectives, articles and prepositions (Heylighen &
Dewaele, 1995) were counted manually. Under the heading of positive politeness
(Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1995), all linguistic structures in the
email which showed solidarity and involvement were counted as positive politeness
strategies. Under the heading of impoliteness, items such as complaints, disagreements, threats and warnings, considered to be factors of impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996), were also counted. Using this initial instrument, the researcher thus embarked on the first step in the process of identifying and assessing politeness within an email communication context. Although crude, this initial instrument was nevertheless a start in an important area new to scholarly research.

Many problems, however, surfaced during the use of the initial instrument and relevant documents. The process of analysis was time consuming and laborious as each email in the thread was analysed in turn according to many variables. The first analysis produced a word document comprising 24 pages. This document, entitled *Results of Initial Analysis using EPA 1*, can be seen in Appendix 5. It soon became apparent that a more streamlined and efficient way of analysis for the purposes of identifying and quantifying politeness indicators was needed. The lengthy process also revealed that the initial framework was missing input from an important source: the participants in this study. What the Australia and Korean participants were saying about politeness was equally important as theoretical constructs from the literature. The participants’ viewpoints were vital to the philosophical inductive nature of this research and needed to be included. The idea, then, to develop a more streamlined and practical instrument, which would be based on the research data provided by the participants in the two diverse cultures of Australia and Korea and suggestions from academic colleagues as well as input from theory bases in the literature, was born. This thesis explains how such an instrument would therefore assist in addressing the five gaps current in the literature mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

All data collected by the researcher in the form of questionnaires, interview transcripts, email threads and field notes were recast into a form that would be meaningful. The data also had to protect the identity of the participants themselves. Because this study involved both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, the data that come from each lent themselves to different analyses. That is, data analysis techniques ranged from simple numerical ones to subtle and sensitive interpretative
methods (McDonough & McDonough, 1991, p. 187). Quantitative data analysis from
the questionnaire sought causes and relationships statistically (Brown, 1988).

Qualitative data analysis, on the other hand, lends itself to discovering meanings and
patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990), moving from the specific
observation to the general. Data from the questionnaires, interviews and email threads
were analysed by searching for themes, patterns, and interpretations. Essentially, this
involved finding generalisations, justifications, repeated phrases and topics and
lengthy explanations (McDonough & McDonough, 1991, p. 187). Data from one
research instrument were integrated and analysed together with data collected from
another instrument to enhance validity. If the same theme recurred in more than one
instrument, then its validity was enhanced. Triangulation of data analysis thus
broadened and deepened the interpretative base of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000;

3.5.1 Analysis of Questionnaire and Interview Data including
Software Packages: SPSS and Leximancer

Questionnaire and Interview

Two software packages were used for questionnaire and interview data entry, analysis
and display in this study. For the quantitative data, SPSS was used while all
qualitative data was analysed with the software package, Leximancer (Smith, 2002).

Quantitative data analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences - SPSS

All quantitative data, in the form of Yes/No answers, Likert and Frequency scales,
from the 122 Australian and 16 Korean questionnaires, were entered into the
spreadsheets of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences -Version 12.0.1 (SPSS).
SPSS is a quantitative statistical software application which enables the user to
manage, analyse, manipulate and display data in graphical formats. After data entry,
variables are defined and recorded for each question. After this process, the statistics
are run which show the following calculations: the frequency, percentage, valid
percentage and cumulative percentage, missing percentage and total for all data entered. The frequency shows the actual number of participants, the percentage shows those numbers as a percentage, the valid percentage incorporates the missing values or those participants who did not respond to that particular question and the cumulative percent shows each percentage added cumulatively to form 100%. For example, the variable *Gender*, which corresponded to the first quantitative question in Section 1: *Background Information*, revealed the percentage statistics of male and female participants who completed the questionnaire. The variable: *Lack of politeness* corresponded to the question 2 in Section 2 of the questionnaire: *In your opinion, do you ever notice a lack of politeness in the emails you receive from overseas?* From all the Yes/No answers that were entered into the software, a statistical analysis showing the frequencies, percentages, missing values and total and so on for that question was performed. This process was repeated with data from the Likert and Frequency scales in Sections E, F, and G of the questionnaire, where for each item in the scale of *strongly disagree, agree, never, often, always* and so on, calculations were conducted in the same way. As the software allowed all results to be displayed graphically, the researcher was able to detect patterns in the data, which would not have been apparent without the aid of the software. The displays are discussed in Chapter 4.

An additional facet of the software that proved useful in this study was the cross-tabulation function. This function allows two different groups of entered data to be listed side by side, highlighting comparisons and differences. As a result, descriptive statistics of Australian and Korean percentage figures were able to be compared for each questionnaire item and differences and similarities between the two groups became immediately apparent. Use of the software in this manner was beneficial as it enabled and expanded further avenues of data observation and interpretation.

It is important to note that the validity and reliability of results obtained from statistical analysis of a software package depends largely on the quality of the entered data (Michell, 1999). Data from all Australian and Korean questionnaires, entered manually into this software, underwent the process of “data cleaning” approximately two months after the initial entry. This process, which involves rechecking entered numbers one by one, bolsters reliability of results and adds to scientific rigour (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher chose a random sample of
every fifth questionnaire to be checked manually in the spreadsheets of the software. Any incorrect entries were removed or “cleaned” and the correct number added.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The data that were collected from the questionnaire open-ended comments sections, the transcriptions of the interviews, as well as email threads, were analysed qualitatively. The process of qualitative data analysis followed procedures outlined in Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 50). Essentially, this involved the researcher scanning transcriptions for broad themes, which could be linked to one or more of the research questions. Continuous identifying, revising, discarding and adding various themes in a cyclical pattern, enabled the researcher to implement a coding system which developed from an initial descriptive base through to inferential coding and finally to a deep structure of conceptual coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). Further scrutinising, revising and synthesising of the dataset allowed a firm, conceptual and uniform coding system to emerge.

**Leximancer**

The software package *Leximancer* (Smith, 2002), was also used for qualitative text analysis. *Leximancer* is a data-mining tool, which analyses the content of textual documents and computes the frequency of terms used in the documents. As such, it is free from researcher bias. This software generates a non-selective exploration of samples of text. Upon entering the qualitative data to the software, *Leximancer* computes the frequency with which each term is used, after discarding text items of no research relevance (such as *a*, *the* and *and*). The result is a bird’s eye view of the material showing a ranked listing of the most iterated concepts extracted from the text and how they are related. By providing such a novel lens, the software enabled the researcher to view all data and the subsequent results from a different perspective, one that would not have been apparent without the aid of this software.

It was considered important in this study to complement and confirm the results from the researcher’s own qualitative analyses with the results from a software analysing device for the same data. Dual methods of data analyses strengthen results as different interpretations are afforded (Wolcott, 2001). Importantly, the human activity of data
analysis, involving intuition, emotion, past experience and so on of the researcher, is tested against the objective bias-free nature of the software product.

Courteous and professional consultations between the Australian and Korean participants and researcher were conducted throughout all stages of the research. During these consultations or “member checks” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31), participants were given the opportunity, from summary documents provided, to peruse potential analyses and reports for the purposes of verification and alteration. This was done to ensure face, content and construct validity (Sarantakos, 1998a, p. 79). For the Korean participants, the process of member checking was done online whereby summary documents were sent to the Korean participants in the form of an email attachment. By participating in such member checks and peer reviews, the participants and researcher were contributing to the intrinsically self-correcting and ethical nature of research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Travis, 2001).

All data analyses ended when theoretical saturation was evident, that is, when the analysis appeared to have “run its course” (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Upon saturation, all of the incidents were readily classified and sufficient numbers of “regularities” emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 62). Each development in the iterative process of analysis bore smaller and smaller results until finally no new evidence was gained through further analysis.

### 3.5.2 Enfolding the Literature

All findings resulting from the data analyses were cross-checked and compared with findings from the current body of relevant literature. Importantly, the researcher compared evidence obtained from analysing data with both conflicting and similar literature. Comparison with conflicting literature builds internal validity, raises theoretical level and sharpens construct definitions (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 544), while comparison with similar literature sharpens generalisability, improves construct definition and raises theoretical level (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 544).
3.6 Assumptions and Limitations of Study

Four main assumptions and limitations, listed below, may have affected the study in some way.

Firstly, aspects of several theory bases, especially those of Brown and Levinson (1987), were used in this study. Their applications were intended for face-to-face communication. To the researcher’s knowledge, they have never before been applied to email communication. It is an assumption of this study that these theories can be applied to intercultural email communication.

Secondly, no email threads were provided by the Korean participants. This limitation also meant that there were no follow-up interviews with the writers of email threads to get their opinions on the politeness indicators in the language of their email threads. However, Email Thread 2 (see Chapter 7, Section 7.5, p. 267), given to the researcher by an Australian participant, allowed an observation and analysis of authentic emails written by a Korean academic.

Thirdly, no interviews were conducted with the writers of the email threads used in this study for discourse and content analysis. Follow-up interviews with the writers would have provided more insight into the language used and how notions of politeness were interpreted. Such information would have amplified or confirmed the researcher’s own analyses. This limitation, however, may have provided an opportunity for the researcher to assess the language more objectively, unfettered by different opinions from others.

Finally, this study has essentially adopted an “etic” perspective (Moran, 2001). An etic perspective involves people outside a culture using their own criteria to explain another culture. It provides a framework to describe, analyse and explain a culture from the outside (Moran, 2001, p.79). The results of this study could be further expanded with a more emic perspective (Moran, 2001), whereby members of the Korean culture explain key concepts such as politeness in their own language. The Korean language was not used in this study, as it was out of the scope of limited resources of one researcher. Moreover, the data collecting instruments were not
culturally neutral, in that they were created by an Anglo-Saxon Western researcher. This limitation is acknowledged with the wish that this research become the starting point for a more culturally diverse input on issues to do with politeness in intercultural email communication. It is hoped that Korean researchers add to and expand on the results of this study incorporating their own cultural viewpoints.

3.7 Problems Encountered in Study

There were several difficulties in conducting research in such a complex and abstract field with so many variables. The problems are listed below.

- The researcher had no prior experience in intercultural email communication and therefore had no real understanding of the potential pitfalls. Although a lack of experience in the field can bring important objectivity to a study (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992), it was difficult to pinpoint and conceptualise the complex and often hidden issues surrounding politeness in email communication, especially in intercultural contexts.

- Consequently, designing the major data collection instrument, the questionnaire, was troublesome. Reducing complex concepts in a way that was understandable to people with no linguistic background was a challenging and sometimes daunting task. Added to this challenge was the confusion in the literature surrounding the notion of politeness, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

- A lack of instruments to locate and assess politeness indicators evident in the literature created difficulties for analysis.

- A difference in questionnaire cohort size for the Australian and the Korean participants was disappointing. Logistically, it was difficult for the researcher to obtain more Korean questionnaire participants, despite continued efforts to ensure similar numbers. Consequently, the research into Korean questionnaire results is considered to be a pilot study. Analyses, therefore, of the Korean questionnaires should be treated as preliminary.
• It was also difficult to get suitable email threads between Australia and Korea for the purposes of discourse and content analysis. The sensitive and private nature of email communication between academics was one reason why it was so hard to obtain suitable threads.

3.8 Reflexivity

Nowadays, there is a move towards researchers stating their own position in relation to the topic being studied. That is, they are being called to clarify and articulate their assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to their study (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). This strategy is sometimes called “researcher’s position” and includes the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher and the “human as instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183, cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 26). In making the researcher’s own personal position transparent as such, the reader is better able to piece together the researcher’s interpretations of the data and the findings in general.

**Researcher’s background, assumptions, worldview and theoretical orientation.**

My professional background includes language teaching both at secondary and tertiary level. More recently, I have developed an interest in the use of technology in language teaching in particular and in education in general. The use of technology can have wonderful benefits for education and language learning if used in pedagogically appropriate ways (Murphy, 2000; Murphy & Poyatos Matas, 2001). In the same way, technology can also have wonderful benefits as a communication channel connecting people of all countries in the world. Not only can this electronic communication channel reap benefits in education and business worlds, but it can afford advantages in personal communication as well.

I am keen to learn more about this new electronic communication channel. It is exciting to be part of this new era of electronic communication that has far-reaching effects for connecting and uniting people of all cultures across the globe. I believe that my study will contribute to such intercultural connections. To date, I have had no personal experience in sending and/or receiving intercultural email for negotiation purposes. In this way, I have no preconceived theories or judgements concerning this
topic. Having prior experience in intercultural email communication may disable the study in some way (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992).

Politeness is such an important social requirement according to many people. In my opinion, there are two broad reasons why people use politeness. These reasons roughly follow Watts’s (2003) first order and second order politeness. One reason politeness is used is to keep established social hierarchy in place. Politeness here is used in an ideological or controlling sense whereby those who are privileged in society can be differentiated from others less fortunate. The use of correct titles is important here. This reason corresponds with first order politeness (Watts, 2003). The second reason why politeness is used, in my opinion, is to promote solidarity and rapport. Here the use of politeness is concerned with preserving mutually shared considerations of others. It is one not so ritualised by correct protocol. Relationship-building language and language which shows an interest in and consideration for others, is important here. This corresponds to second order politeness (Watts, 2003). I believe that language, which promotes friendship and consideration of others, is superior to language designed to separate people into subtle hierarchies.

My own social and cultural position is such that I am a white Anglo-Saxon Australian mature age female who comes from a middle-class background. I was born into an era in which societal order, social class divisions, and correct protocol in personal behaviour were important constructs. In my modern era, values such as cultivating pleasant personal manners and appearance and staying in the one job for life were prized. In the current post-modern era, values such as these are undergoing change. Attitudes to politeness are changing as well. My journey through this thesis led me to question my attitudes to politeness and what it meant to me. It is hoped that through this thesis the reader, too, will question the concept of politeness and how best to use language to express it in a way that reflects values important to the individual.

I understand that my own personal values, assumptions, worldview and theoretical position, such as those mentioned above, may influence aspects of this study. Subjectivity can, if correctly treated, give strength, originality and personal perspective to any study (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992, p. 100). However, if treated incorrectly, subjectivity can also skew data and generally disable a study. I understand
that I must be aware of my own values, assumptions, worldview and theoretical orientations and endeavour not to impose them on the participants and/or the data analyses. In this way I, as an effective researcher, try to see what is not being shown, hear what is not being said, detect what is being made less of than could be made and temper as necessary the subjectivity which is steering the direction of this study (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992).

In an effort to bring some objectivity to this study, while still incorporating the benefits of a subjective perspective, I remained constantly vigilant during the entire course of the study to my own values, assumptions, worldview and theoretical position. In this way, data gained and data analysed reflect as much as possible the views of the participants without undue influence from researcher subjectivity.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted, through a methodological framework, how the data were obtained and collected in the field-work of this study. The research questions as well as the underlying philosophical nature of this mainly inductive study and its principles were also discussed. The chapter then explained which participants were chosen for data collection and why. Methods for analysis of the three data collection instruments, the questionnaire, the interview and the email threads, were also discussed. The process of employing the two software packages, SPSS and Leximancer, for data analysis and display was explained as well as the benefits of their use. Assumptions, limitations and problems encountered during the course of this study were also discussed. Lastly, personal reflections of the researcher on the topic of this study followed. In giving a comprehensive explanation of the methodological approach, sampling procedures, data collection and methods of analysis including software products, it is hoped that the researcher provided for the reader an adequate “audit trail” (Merriam, 2002, p. 210). From this audit trail or transparency of method, the reader may trace the steps of the research from completion back to beginning and thus be in a better position to make informed judgements as to the validity, reliability and value of the study.
The next chapter, Chapter 4, will give the results of data elicited from the multiple sources of questionnaire, interview and email texts, outlined in this chapter.
Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of two main data-eliciting instruments, questionnaire and interview, from both the Australian and Korean groups, are presented according to the following sections:

- Background Information;
- Politeness;
- Social Status;
- Choice of Words;
- Relationships;
- Email Technology.

Results from the email text analysis will be given following the results from the questionnaire and interview. Results from the analysis of sections, Politeness and Social Status, will answer the primary research question: *How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?* Results from the analysis of sections, Choice of Words and Relationships, will answer the first of two secondary research questions: *Does email allow social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?* Results from the analysis of the section, Email Technology, will answer the other secondary research question: *What are the characteristics of email technology that may pose barriers to polite email communication?*

A total of 286 questionnaires were sent out to academics and general staff at the Australian university during the months of October/November, 2003. Of this figure, 180 were sent out by internal mail and 106 were hand delivered to participants. Obtaining the opinions of a cross section of academic and general staff at the Australian university was the intention in this study, so care was taken to sample participants across all three major academic groups (Arts/Education, Business/Law
and Health/Science) as well as general staff in various University Administration positions (for example, Office of the Vice Chancellor, including the International Office and the Institute for Higher Education, Information Services, and the Institute of Business and Technology and Human Resources). A total of 122 completed questionnaires were returned showing a completed return rate of 42.6%.

In addition to this main cohort of 122 Australian academic and general staff, a smaller cohort of 16 Korean academics was included in analyses for this study as well. These Korean academics work at various universities in South Korea. All had a good command of the English language and used email to negotiate for work purposes with English speakers overseas. The original questionnaire, used for the Australian participants, was changed slightly to provide more Korean friendly language and format (see Section 3.4.2 in Chapter 3, p. 79).

For all questionnaire results, a quantitative overview is given first followed by a qualitative summary. In the quantitative overview, the figures given are the valid percentages. Valid percentages are calculated from the number of those participants who answered the question only. The non-responding percentages for all items in the questionnaire were generally low, varying between 0% and 10% and thus were not considered for comment. For the interview and email text analysis results, qualitative overviews are given only.

All tables in the chapter include those themes which show a significant response rate from the participants. A software package Leximancer (Smith, 2002) was also used for text analysis and the results from these analyses are shown throughout this chapter.

4.2 Background Information

Australian participants
The demographic results show that the mean age of the Australian university participants was 45 years. There was a roughly equal proportion of males (53.3%) to females (46.7%). The participants have worked at their university for an average of 10 years and 83.6% of them were native speakers of English (examples of other native
languages included Spanish and Cantonese). 80.3% received part or all of their education in Australia. Other countries where participants had received parts or all of their education included UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Spain, South Africa, Venezuela, Mauritius and some Asian countries.

Most of the participants have been using email as part of their work practices for eight years or less. 63.6% said that they had negotiated with people overseas by email in the last 12 months for such things as conference participation, joint writing of academic papers, forging professional links, expanding foreign student intake and so on. Figure 4.1 shows where the participants worked at the Australian university (where QIBT is the Institute of Business and Technology and VC is the office of the Vice Chancellor).

![Graph showing place of employment within the university](image)

[n=122] Figure 4.1: Place of employment within the university

**Korean participants**

The demographic results of the Korean cohort showed a similar mean age (45 years). All, except one, were native Korean speakers with English as their second language, and all worked in an academic capacity at various universities in South Korea. The one exception was an American national who has been working and living in South Korea for the last 10 years. Some of the universities where the participants worked included Chonnan National University, Pukyong National University, University of Seoul, Ewha Women’s University, Korea National University of Education, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and Gyeongju University.
The gender distribution was roughly equal, similar to the Australian cohort (56% males and 44% females). Most of the Korean participants were educated in both Korea and overseas (America being cited as the most common other place for education attainment). The average time that the Korean participants had been writing emails overseas as part of their work practices was 9.5 years while 87.5% said they had used email to negotiate with unknown people overseas for similar reasons to Australian participants.

4.3 Politeness

Participants were asked to comment on their perceptions of politeness and how it affected the way they went about writing their emails to overseas receivers whom they did not know. In particular, the researcher was interested in looking at how the participants used politeness with unknown overseas receivers compared to the way they used politeness with known receivers in Australia/Korea. The participants were also asked to comment on how politeness perceptions influenced the way they interpreted their incoming emails from overseas. Information gained contributed to answering the primary research question: How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?

4.3.1 Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 (Section B)</th>
<th>Do you think you express politeness differently in your email communication with unknown receivers overseas compared to your email communications with people you know in Australia/Korea?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Australian point of view**

In this question, there was a roughly equal division of people who expressed politeness differently when comparing known receivers in Australia with unknown receivers overseas. 53.8% of participants said that they did express politeness differently when sending an email to an unknown overseas receiver while 46.2% said they did not. From the receiver’s point of view, however, there is no data to suggest that he/she agreed that the email received was, in fact, polite. There remained the
possibility that even though the sender may think he/she is sending a polite email, the receiver might not agree.

The overwhelming response to how Australian participants expressed politeness differently was in the formality of their writing. In other words, participants said that they expressed politeness in their overseas communications through being more formal. Other ways of expressing politeness included “using proper titles”, “showing more attention to clarity”, “using formal greetings and goodbyes”, “avoiding colloquialisms” and “giving attention to please and thank-you”. It is interesting to note that the themes are diverse for the ways in which participants express politeness differently (25 themes were identified). This may highlight the personal and subjective nature of linguistic politeness.

Korean point of view
53.3% of participants said that they did express politeness differently to unknown receivers overseas while 46.7% said that they did not. This was a very similar result to the Australian cohort and may suggest that the desire to express politeness differently to unknown receivers overseas does not depend on one’s cultural background. However, the ways that the politeness is expressed differs from culture to culture, according to this study. The ways that the Korean participants expressed politeness differently included “using formality”, “using formal titles”, “using polite closing remarks” and “using conventional letter protocol”. One participant, however, felt freer in addressing non-Korean people by their first names and writing more informally generally, compared to writing to Korean people, which according to this male participant, demanded more formality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 (Section B)</th>
<th>In your opinion, do you ever perceive a lack of politeness in the emails you receive from overseas?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Australian point of view
27.5% of participants replied that they did perceive a lack of politeness in the emails that they received from overseas while 72.5% said that they did not. Those who indicated that they did perceive a lack of politeness cited reasons such as “short and
abrupt language”, “direct and assertive language”, “poor English”, “arrogant tone”, “lack of formality”, “incorrect use of titles” and “inappropriate register”.

Korean point of view
43.8% of Korean participants said that they did perceive a lack of politeness in incoming emails while 56.2% said that they did not. This figure (43.8%) is considerably higher than the number of Australian participants (27.5%) who perceived a lack of politeness in their incoming emails. Nearly one half of all the Korean participants felt that the emails they received from overseas were impolite. Importantly, these data suggest room for improvement in email writing in general and the inclusion of politeness indicators in particular. This may also caution people from Australia who write emails to Korean academics to be particularly careful with politeness indicators in their language. Those Korean participants who indicated that they did perceive a lack of politeness cited reasons such as “no formal titles” or “no titles at all”, “addressing by first name only on the first email contact”, “not enough face-saving expressions used”, “too business-like”, “no opening and closing of message” and “lack of interest in communication partner”.

The Australian and Korean participants’ reasons for perceived lack of politeness are shown in Table 4.1. The number column (No.) for this and all other tables indicates the number of participants who cited each item.

Table 4.1: Reasons for perceived lack of politeness in overseas emails received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Korean Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short and abrupt language</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lack of appropriate title</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and assertive language</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lack of interest in other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor English</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lack of face-saving language</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant tone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of opening and closing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 shows that in general the Australian reasons for perceived lack of politeness include issues of language tone while those of the Korean participants include aspects of language style.
### Australian point of view

The answers to this question seem to highlight the personal and subjective nature of linguistic politeness. There was a wide spread of responses and many themes were identified (52 themes) with 22 of the themes identified having only one response. This indicates a definite lack of consensus among the participants. Email writers have personal ways of expressing and interpreting politeness, which would make formulating potential standardised protocols difficult. Results in Table 4.2 indicate how politeness is shown in overseas email communication according to some of the Australian participants in this study.

#### Table 4.2: *I convey politeness by* ................................. (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing formality</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using correct names and titles</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using more ‘please’ and ‘thank you’</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using formal greetings and closings</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using conventional written letter protocol</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering assistance for further queries</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering friendly greetings generally</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using respectful endings e.g., ‘kindest regards’, ‘yours sincerely’ etc</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using careful wording</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering more explanations and in more detail</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiring after the reader</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using appropriate greetings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 4.2, it can be seen that the Australian participants convey politeness in many ways including being formal as well as using friendly language. The Korean participants, by contrast, do not include the use of friendly language to convey politeness as is further illustrated below.
Korean point of view

The ways in which the Korean participants conveyed politeness in their overseas emails are shown in the following Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: I convey politeness by…………………………..(Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using correct address and title</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using polite sentence construction e.g., modals and indirect language</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using formal language and format</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying ‘thank-you’</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding colloquialisms and contractions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using indirect language</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative data from the questionnaire were also analysed by the software package, *Leximancer*. The use of this analytical software allowed different perspectives of the same data, enabling more rigorous and strengthened analyses.

4.3.2 Analysis by *Leximancer*

The software package *Leximancer* (Smith, 2002), was used for qualitative text analysis. *Leximancer* is a data-mining tool, which analyses the content of textual documents and computes the frequency of terms used in the documents. As such, it is free from researcher bias (Smith, 2002). This software generates a non-selective exploration of samples of text. Upon entering the qualitative data to the software, *Leximancer* computes the frequency with which each term is used, after discarding text items of no research relevance (such as *a*, *the* and *and*). The result is a bird’s eye view of the material showing a ranked listing of the most iterated concepts extracted from the text and how they are related.

In this study, *Leximancer* was used for text analysis for the first three sections of the questionnaire: Politeness, Social Status and Choice of Words. In the last two sections (Relationships via Email and Email Technology), insufficient qualitative data resulted in the software not being able to give reliable results. The Australian results for the first section on Politeness are shown in Table 4.4:
In Table 4.4, the Absolute Count refers to the actual frequency of occurrences of the concept extracted from the text, while the Relative Count refers to the percentage of each concept relative to the most frequent concept (in this case, formal). This ranked list shows that from all the qualitative data or comments provided by the participants in the first section of the questionnaire on Politeness, these major concepts have surfaced. From this data it can be seen that “formality” is the most used concept among participants. The best way to show politeness, according to the Australian participants, is through formality in email communication. Titles are also an important concept in politeness. Care in writing intercultural emails is obviously a consideration for the Australian participants as evidenced by the concept “careful”. Another prevalent concept, “dear”, shows that according to the participants it is important to begin intercultural email communication with “dear”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Absolute Count</th>
<th>Relative Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>formal</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>language</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>titles</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>polite</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>email</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>words</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>careful</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>people</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dear</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tend</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>style</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>correct</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>think</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>salutations</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>unknown</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>person</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In analysing the Korean data, the software did not produce such reliable results. This was due to the smaller number of participants compared to the Australian cohort. However, the following result was obtained showing a ranked listing of the most iterated concepts and how they were related. Politeness in email, according to Korean participants, is shown in the Table 4.5:

Table 4.5: Politeness in Email according to Korean participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Absolute Count</th>
<th>Relative Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>titles</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>addressing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expression</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polite</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differently</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>letter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 shows that the use of titles in email communication is a very important politeness consideration according to the Korean participants. Moreover, the correct use of titles has much more importance for the Korean than the Australian participants. In Table 4.5, the correct use of titles has a relative count of 100%, compared with the relative count of 60.4% in the Australian data. Formality in language is also a high priority for the Korean participants as is the choice of expressions used for closing the email message.

Importantly, the results from both tables strengthen the original analyses as they highlight key concepts in a systematic way. In providing a window from such a bird’s eye perspective, the software gave an alternative way to view the data. The results confirmed the researcher’s own original analyses of the politeness data discussed.
4.3.3 Overview of Politeness: Questionnaire

As the two cohorts are so different in size (Australia: n=122; Korea: n=16), it is not appropriate to compare the two sets of results. Similar numbers, however, for both Australia and Korea were obtained in the follow-up interviews. This will be discussed in Section 4.3.4. A general reflection on the two sets of questionnaire results seems to converge on concepts of “correct addressing” or “titles” and “formality of writing” as the overarching principles of polite email communication according to both Korean and Australian participants. Some differences, however, appeared between the two sets of participants:

1: The use of correct titles was a much more important politeness construct for the Koreans than for the Australians. (It was ranked the most important Korean politeness indicator, according to the software.) As indicators of impoliteness, the Australian participants listed certain language tones such as arrogance and abruptness, rather than omission of politeness protocols such as incorrect use of titles;

2: The inclusion of face-saving and/or face-building language within the email texts was considered more important for politeness for the Korean participants than for the Australian participants;

3: The Australian data suggested that politeness is conveyed through friendliness and helpful attitudes in the language whereas the Korean data did not emphasise such personal ways to convey politeness. Rather, politeness for the Koreans was more an issue of adherence to correct formal protocol. This point will be discussed further.

4.3.4 Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Australian and 8 Korean participants after the researcher had collated all data from the questionnaires. Enough time had elapsed for the researcher to consider answers given in the questionnaires in order both to formulate the interview questions and to choose suitable interview
participants. Consideration was given to include a cross section of participants for the interviews from all tertiary groups for the Australian participants. All Korean participants who indicated their willingness to be interviewed were interviewed. These participants came from a cross section of different universities and faculties in Korea, as mentioned in Section 4.2: Background Information, p. 101.

In Australia, a total of 12 face-to-face interviews (9 male and 3 female) took place at the interviewee’s place of work and at a suitably convenient time. In Korea, a total of 8 interviews with Korean academics (4 for each gender) were conducted by the researcher. Half this number were completed in face-to-face mode in Korea, at the interviewee’s place of work, while the remaining half were conducted online between Australia and Korea.

Results
The complete list of interview questions was used for both the Australian and Korean interviewees (see Appendix 3). For the purposes of clarity, all boxes containing the interview questions in this chapter are non-shaded while those containing the questionnaire items are shaded. The relevant interview question for the section on Politeness was:

| Question 2 Interview | How important do you think politeness is in overseas email writing generally? How do you incorporate politeness in your overseas emails? |

Australian point of view
The Australia participants voiced quite strongly their belief in the importance of politeness in intercultural email communication. They indicated that they showed politeness in their email writing styles, in such aspects as clarity, thoroughness and simplicity. The Australian participants though, did not exhibit much consensus over what constituted the most polite writing style. Aspects of writing considered to convey politeness included clarity, directness, thoroughness, straightforwardness, conciseness, avoidance of slang, colloquialisms and double meanings, use of correct grammar, accents and spellings of names and places, and being able to craft the language to give a professional and friendly tone.
It is interesting to note that the use of the correct title was not such an important indicator of politeness according to the Australian participants, who also said that establishing a personal rapport with the receiver via email was more important for conveying politeness. These sentiments confirmed questionnaire results. Moreover, as with the results of politeness in the questionnaire, there was much difference of opinion on what constituted politeness. From the data, it appeared that consensus on the meaning of politeness was lacking. Everyone had his/her own interpretation of linguistic politeness.

**Korean point of view**

The Korean participants in the interview also agreed that politeness was important in intercultural email communication. They said they showed politeness through the use of correct titles, polite expressions, formality of language, simple, direct language and the “echo approach”. The echo approach involves emulating the style and tone of one’s communicating partner. Results can be seen in Table 4.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Ways</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Korean Ways</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adopting a clear writing style</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Using the correct title</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to establish a personal rapport</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Using direct communication including simple language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the greeting ‘Dear’</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Using polite expressions including modals e.g., <em>would you like</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the full title</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Considering the receiver</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signing off respectively</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Giving receiver time to respond</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These interview results to some extent endorse the corresponding questionnaire results. The summary below highlights the main points from the two sets of data.

**4.3.5 Summary of Politeness**

In contrasting the two sets of data, it is interesting to note that Australian participants considered a clear writing style as the best way to show politeness as opposed to the Korean participants who considered formality of language and the use of correct titles.
to be the appropriate conveyors of politeness. For the Koreans, the use of correct titles was a very important element in their concept of politeness. This result confirms and strengthens the results of the questionnaire, where the Korean participants indicated that the use of the correct title was a major consideration for conveying politeness (the concept of titles was the highest scoring ranked concept in the Leximancer graph by a factor of almost 100%). For the Australians, however, the adherence to correct titles was not as important for politeness as adopting a clear writing style and trying to establish a personal rapport with the receiver. These results concur with the questionnaire in which the Australian participants indicated that the way they expressed politeness in their overseas communication was through formality of writing and establishing friendliness and helpful attitudes in the language.

The researcher’s impression from analysing Politeness data from questionnaire and interview (Q2) above, was that the Australian participants placed more emphasis on the interactional role of email in conveying politeness. The Australian participants attempted to raise the levels of social presence in their online communication to enable relationships to develop. In other words, they considered that politeness involved getting to know and being friendly with your communicating partner more so than the Korean participants. This point will be followed up in Chapter 5, Section 5.5, p. 191.

4.4 Social Status

Participants were asked to comment on the effect of social status on their email communication with unknown overseas recipients. The researcher was interested in finding out how, if at all, the variable of social status affected language production and politeness on email. Information gained in this section as well as the first section will contribute to answering the primary research question: How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?
4.4.1 Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 (Section C)</th>
<th>In general, are you aware of differences in social status between you and your overseas receiver in your email communications? If YES, how does it influence what and how you write?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Australian point of view**

In the first question, 40.8% of participants said that they were aware of differences in social status in their overseas emails, while 59.2% said that they were not. Again there was a lack of consensus in the participants’ answers as to how social status influenced how they wrote their emails. Some ways that an awareness of differences in social status changed their writing was to “use the relevant title”, “use formal salutations and closings”, “flatter higher status colleagues” and “use more politeness, the higher the status”. Other participants said that status differences did not influence what or how they wrote.

**Korean point of view**

In the first question, 75% of Korean participants said that they were aware of differences in social status in their emails to non-Korean speaking people. This figure of 75% is a large increase on the Australian percentage (40.8%) and suggests that the Korean participants are much more aware of social status than the Australian cohort. Importantly, this data cautions people from Australia who write emails to Korean academics to be particularly careful of social status indicators in their email messages, such as the use of titles and respectful language. According to the Korean participants, formality of writing, use of correct titles and more complex sentence construction were ways to respect social status differences.

When asked to comment on their preference for formality or informality in intercultural email communication, 65.8% of all Australian participants indicated that they prefer to present themselves formally rather than informally to unknown overseas receivers. The figure closely parallels with the Korean where 68.8% of Korean participants preferred to present themselves formally. The following table lists different ways in which the participants show preference for formality and informality in their overseas email communication.
Table 4.7: I show my preference for formality in my intercultural emails by.............

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Ways</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Korean Ways</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing and signing off formally</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Using full titles both for self and other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding colloquialisms and slang</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Using more complex syntax</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using full titles</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Using modals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a signature block</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Avoiding contractions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a friendly and polite tone</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Using conventional letter format</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>including paragraphing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a conventional letter format</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Using a signature block</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a separate question for the Korean participants, the participants were asked to give their preferred form of address. 43.75% of participants listed Professor or Doctor as their preferred form of address, while 6.25% preferred their first name. 25% said that it depended on the relationship or cultural group of email receiver.

In both the Australian and Korean questionnaires, the participants were also asked to comment on whether their email partners overseas had presented themselves in an unusual way on the email. In particular, the researcher was interested in finding out if their overseas email partners had presented themselves in a way that was surprising, confusing or annoying according to the participants in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4 (Section C)</th>
<th>In your email communication with people from overseas, do you find that the way they present themselves to be surprising/confusing/annoying?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian point of view</td>
<td>27.5% of the participants indicated that they did find the different ways their overseas email partners presented themselves to be surprising, confusing or annoying (including sometimes), while 72.5% said that they did not. Again, there was little consensus from the Australian participants as to why they found their email partners to be surprising or confusing or annoying. Table 4.8 lists some of their reasons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8: Reasons why overseas email partners are perceived as surprising/confusing/annoying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They use confusing language and sentence construction</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They use overly formal and apologetic language</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They use overly obsequious and deferential language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They create confusion as to what is being requested</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are demanding email partners</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korean point of view

Only 6.3% of Korean participants did find the different ways their overseas email partners presented themselves to be surprising, confusing or annoying, while 93.7% did not. Whereas the Australian participants cited language tone and construction as the main reasons for surprise, the Korean participants again listed the incorrect use of titles as the main reason why their overseas email partners seemed to be surprising.

4.4.2 Analysis by Leximancer

The software package Leximancer was again used to identify key themes from all the qualitative data given in the second section of the questionnaire: Social Status. Its use was also to verify or otherwise the researcher’s own analysis. In analysing the Korean data, the software did not produce such reliable results. This was again due to the smaller number of participants compared to the Australian cohort. However, the software displayed the following major concepts for the Australian data in Table 4.9 and for the Korean data in Table 4.10.
Table 4.9: Social Status in Email according to Australian participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Absolute Count</th>
<th>Relative Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>formal</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>title</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>address</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sign</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>names</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overseas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>signature</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c’quialism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoid</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10: Social Status in Email according to Korean participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Absolute Count</th>
<th>Relative Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emails</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rel’ships</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Australian graph confirms the researcher’s own analysis by listing such major concepts as formality, titles, full (sentences) and the avoidance of certain linguistic elements such as colloquialism and informal language. The absence of the concept
“title” from the Korean graph represents a deviation from the researcher’s own analysis where it was found that an important way Korean academics deal with social status issues is by use of correct titles. Differences in social status are also accommodated through the use of formal language, according to both groups of participants. This result confirms the researcher’s own analysis discussed previously in Section 4.4.1. p.114.

4.4.3 Overview of Social Status: Questionnaire

There appear to be differences in data from Australia and Korea over the concept of social status. The Korean participants are much more aware of social status in their intercultural emails than the Australians. The main ways that the Korean participants show this awareness is through the use of titles and formality of language. The Australians also prefer formality of language and style but the issue of titles is not so important for them. These emerging trends from the Australia data suggest that an awareness of social status affects three areas:

1: The content of email messages;
2: The email writing process; and
3: The email medium itself.

These emerging trends are tabulated in Table 4.11, as well as illustrative examples of participants’ answers. Those Australian participants’ answers which are the most indicative of the theme and also which are representative in their scope have been taken as examples. In all examples of participants’ answers, the letter indicates the country (A= Australia, K= Korea) and the associated number denotes the identification of the participant. For example, \((A54)\) signifies that the Australian participant number 54 said this, while \((K12)\) indicates that the Korean participant number 12 said these words.
Table 4.11: *How an awareness of social status affects...*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 What I write on email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>If I am accorded higher status, I use informal, friendlier language.</em> (A 54)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>With higher status recipients, I use formal titles, salutations and closings.</em> (A45)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 How I write an email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I take an egalitarian stance when writing emails.</em> (A17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Age is a factor – if the recipient is older I write in a more polite way.</em> (A87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 My understanding of the email medium itself:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I am mindful of the lack of context in email.</em> (A67)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Often social status is unknown on email.</em> (A60)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 4.11, social status affects many aspects to email communication. These aspects were also echoed in the corresponding interview questions, as can be seen in the following section.

### 4.4.4 Interview

The relevant interview questions for the concept of **Social Status** were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 Interview</th>
<th>How important do you think ‘formality’ (or ‘informality’) is in overseas email writing generally? How do you incorporate formality (or ‘informality’) in your emails?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 Interview</td>
<td>How important do you think using ‘correct titles’ is in overseas email communication generally? What procedure do you use for addressing the person you don’t know in your emails?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Australian point of view**

In question 3 of the interview, there was a consensus that formality was important, especially in the initial contact and to certain cultures over others. There was also an awareness among the participants that even though it is not so important in Australia, formality is important in other cultures. The themes that were extracted from the
interview transcripts were that the level of formality in the participants’ email language was affected by different cultures and relationships. The ways in which the Australian participants showed formality was in the writing style generally, and in the use of greetings, titles and sign-offs. Some participants adopted an informal approach regardless, as can be seen in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: How I show formality in my intercultural emails……………….. (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Formality and writing style</td>
<td><em>I use the same formality as a letter. (A3)</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>I use the ‘echo approach’ - I try to emulate the style of my communicating partner. (A12)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formality and culture</td>
<td><em>I adapt the formality according to the culture e.g., Indian versus American - the former is more formal than the latter. (A7)</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Formality is important in intercultural emails because of different views of respect. (A9)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Formality and Social Presence</td>
<td><em>I try to personalise each standard email at the beginning. (A12)</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Status dictates language style rather than cultural background. (A2)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Informality</td>
<td><em>I prefer people addressing me in an informal way. (A8)</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>I adopt a balance between formal and informal. (A10)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td><em>I use the ‘echo approach’. (A12)</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korean point of view

In the Korean data on the issue of formality, there appeared to be a strong link between formality and politeness. In other words, the Korean participants saw those two concepts as more strongly related to one another compared to the Australians. The Korean participants showed formality through the use of titles and suitable language construction. There was some consensus that one needs to be more formal when writing to Asians (even between Asians) than when writing to Western cultures, including Australia, as seen in Table 4.13.
Table 4.13: How I show formality in my intercultural emails………………..(Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Formality and suitable language construction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write in full sentences, use correct punctuation, and appropriate use of words and expressions for the written mode. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It depends on whether you know the person – I use formal expressions to people I don’t know and vice versa. (K7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Formality and the use of titles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formality is given mostly with careful titles and full sentences. (K6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I also put my title, full name and other job related information at the bottom (signature block). (K3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Formality equates with politeness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politeness is a central part of being formal – because of this, formality is important. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equates formality with politeness. (K2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Formality and Asians</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write more formally to Asians. (K1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am less formal writing to non-Asians. (K4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I’m crossing the cultural divide I try to keep the respect level up. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In answer to the question on the use of correct titles generally and their procedure for addressing unknown people overseas, the Australian participants displayed general consensus that using the full professional titles was important, especially in the initial contact. After that, for some participants, the echo approach applied. This approach involved the participants repeating back such elements in the received email as tone, style, level of formality, titles used and so on. There was some confusion about the correct name order in Asian and Latin countries according to the Australian participants.

The Korean participants volunteered much data on the topic of titles and their responses contain more data than the Australian interviewees’ responses, despite a smaller sample size. Clearly, titles is an important concept for Koreans and they have a lot of opinions on it. The use of titles may be culturally related and it seems from the data that their use in Korea is more important than in Australia.
4.4.5 Summary of Social Status

Because the two cohorts are so different in size: Australia: (questionnaire: n=122, interview: n=12); Korea: (questionnaire: n=16, interview: n=8), it is not appropriate to compare the two sets of results. A general reflection on the two sets, however, showed overwhelmingly that the Korean participants were much more aware of status than the Australian participants. Some of the ways that status can be addressed, according to the Korean participants, is through the use of correct titles, formal language and complex syntax.

It appeared from the results that the way to address status differences in intercultural email communication was through formality of writing. Nearly two thirds of all participants in this study, from both Australia and Korea, indicated a preference for formality when asked how they address status issues in their intercultural email communication. According to the participants, formality can be displayed in many ways, including adopting conventional letter protocol, avoiding contractions and colloquialisms, formally addressing the receiver, formally signing off and so on. Importantly, the Korean participants saw a much stronger link between formality and politeness than the Australian participants. One Korean participant equated formality with politeness.

For both Australian and Korean participants, there was evidence of uncertainty over the correct protocol to address differences in social status between the sender and receiver in intercultural email communication. Many interviewees alluded to the fact that there were no international email politeness guidelines for people to follow. One of the aims of this study is the formation of such a politeness protocol, which, it is hoped, will aid email negotiation in intercultural contexts from a social and cultural perspective.

4.5 Choice of Words

Participants were asked to comment on how they went about choosing the words for their intercultural emails and whether they used different wording to email receivers
in non-English speaking backgrounds compared to receivers in other English speaking backgrounds. The researcher was trying to ascertain whether the concepts of clarity and directness had any bearing on the way in which the participants chose their words and/or interpreted the words in their incoming intercultural emails.

Results from the analysis of concepts, Choice of Words and the next concept, Relationships via Email, will answer the first secondary research question: Does email allow social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?

4.5.1 Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 (Section D)</th>
<th>Do you find that you use different wording in your overseas email communications?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Australian point of view**

52.5% of Australian participants said that they *did* use different wording in their overseas email communications while 47.5% said that they did not. Of those who indicated that they used different words, the following themes were identified, shown in Table 4.14, along with examples from the data.
Table 4.14: When writing to overseas people on email, I use .......................... (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> More formalised language, that is, correct punctuation, correct grammar, correct titles. Examples: Yes, I take more formal care in correct spelling and punctuation. (A35) I am much more careful about grammar. I use simpler forms of expression and except when I know the recipient is fluent I avoid slang. (A46)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> More simplified language, that is, smaller range of vocabulary, explicit language, clear and simple words. Examples: I try to use wording which is simple, clear, unambiguous, especially to non-native English speakers. (A97) (I use) Simpler phrases, no jargon. (A 44)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> Avoidance of certain language structures, that is, fewer or no colloquialisms, assumptions, humour, contractions and descriptive words. Examples: I spell out everything in full – no contractions or abbreviations and avoid where possible words with multiple meanings. (A91) (I use) No abbreviations, explain processes more clearly. (I) Make no assumptions. (A54)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> More language which accommodates cultural values Examples: (My) communication with Chinese (based on my limited experience) would be formal and flowery. (A67) If (the email is) a foreign language, I use more signals to the rhetorical structures in my message, (that is), linking words like ‘therefore’, ‘so’ etc. I cut back on descriptive things, use shorter words. (A73)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> Other Example: I proof read everything – even ask another person to check. (A83)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korean point of view

In question 1, 31.2% of the Korean participants said that they did use different words in their emails to non-Korean speaking people compared to the emails to Korean people, while 68.8% said that they did. Those who used different words, said that they had a preference for words which portrayed clarity and formality (with no contractions).
Question 2  
(Section D)  
Do you find that you use different wording in your overseas email communications to native speakers of English than to non-native speakers of English? If YES, in what way?

Australian point of view

53.8% of Australian participants said that they used different wording to native speakers of English compared to non-native speakers while 46.2% said that they did not. Of those who indicated that they used different wording to native speakers, the following themes were identified in Table 4.15, along with examples from the data.

Table 4.15: When writing to non-native speakers of English, I ............ (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Simplify my language</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) ..keep the non-native speaker email simple but</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>careful to make sure they are never patronising.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) ensure some redundancy. (A2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Avoid certain elements such as humour, colloquialisms, assumptions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language – e.g., no parenthetical inclusions, no assumptions about the knowledge of the university. (A56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I might use more complex language, jokes or allusions with native speakers that I would avoid with non-native speakers. (A47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Adopt a more formal style</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more careful, less ambiguous and confusing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) tend to explain far more fully. (A95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It may depend on other factors such as status and more importantly the level of acquaintance with the recipient. (A113)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 4.15 that email writers are considering many factors when choosing their words in intercultural email communication. The data indicates that writing email messages to unknown overseas receivers is not a simple task. The next question considers how the participants view the important issue of directness in email communication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Do you find that you write things in a more direct way in your overseas email communications? If YES, in what way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian point of view</strong></td>
<td>35.0% of participants said that they <em>did</em> write in a more direct way in their overseas communications while 65.0% said that they did not. The responses gained from this question follow the broad themes listed in the previous question. That is, those participants who found that they wrote their emails in a more direct way did so by simplifying elements in their written style, for example, by the use of simple words, by avoiding certain constructs such as humour and by adapting their language in some way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Korean point of view</strong></td>
<td>75.0% of Korean participants said that they wrote their emails in a <em>direct</em> way (to be contrasted with the Australian data which showed 35.0% of participants who preferred direct email style). According to this data, Korean academics are more direct in email communication than Australian academics and by a large margin. This result does not coincide with current cultural theory. They still like to put requests in indirect language, however. One participant summed up the general feeling: <em>The aim is to be direct in clarity but indirect in Asian politeness.</em> <em>(K11)</em> These points of directness and indirectness of email language will be taken up further in the next chapter. The next question relates to clarity in email language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Do you change your wording to make sure it is clear to overseas receivers? If YES, in what way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian point of view</strong></td>
<td>66.4 % of participants said that they <em>did</em> change their wording to make sure it was clear to overseas receivers while 33.6% said that they did not. The responses gained from this question follow the broad themes listed in the previous question. That is, those participants who found that they wrote their emails in a more direct way did so by simplifying elements to their written style, for example by the use of simple words,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by avoiding certain constructs such as humour and by adapting their language in some way.

**Korean point of view**
In this question, 62.5% of participants said that they *did* change their words to make sure they were clear to non-Korean speaking people, while 31.2% said that they did not (6.3% indicated “sometimes”). The ways that wording was changed to ensure clarity included choosing words which made the meaning clear (5 responses), words which were simple and less confusing (3 responses) and words which were authentic (1 response). The next question elicits data on how the participants react to the way their overseas email partners write to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5 (Section D)</th>
<th>Are you ever surprised, confused, annoyed at the way overseas receivers write emails back to you? If YES, in what way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Australian point of view**
22.7% said that they *were* surprised at the way overseas receivers wrote emails back to them, while 77.3% said that they were not. Of those participants who indicated surprise, confusion or annoyance with incoming emails, the following themes were identified with examples from the data. They are shown in Table 4.16.
Table 4.16: I find these reasons why my overseas emails are surprising/ confusing /annoying…… (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Language problems</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every non-native speaker uses elements of their own native syntax, sometimes this produces funny results. (A31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude at first glance but must be appreciated that English is their second or third language. (A46)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cultural or personality issues</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US academics, with one or two exceptions, are often very brief and terse. (A22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes they can be unreasonable and demanding – I always counteract this by referring politely to University Policy. (A56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Different email writing styles</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes emails are blunt and lack tact. (A22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, the abrupt and demanding nature of emails. (A81)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often confusing, due to different structures of institutions’ terminology. (A101)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korean point of view

In this question, 37.5% said that they were surprised at the way non-Koreans wrote emails back to them while 62.5% said that they were not. The figure (37.5%) is quite high compared to the Australian data (22.7%) and may suggest room for improvement for Australian academics in writing emails to Korea. The following reasons were given in Table 4.17, as to why the Korean participants were surprised:

Table 4.17: I find these reasons why my overseas emails are surprising/ confusing /annoying……(Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 General misunderstanding of message</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Emails too brief</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Criticism from overseas receiver</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Receiver becoming too informal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Response ‘too kind’</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2 Analysis by *Leximancer*

The software package *Leximancer* (Smith, 2002), was again used to identify key themes from all the qualitative data by way of comments and suggestions given in the third section of the questionnaire: Choice of Words. Its use was also to verify or otherwise the researcher’s own analysis. In analysing the Korean data, the software did not produce such reliable results. This was again due to the smaller number of participants compared to the Australian cohort. However, the software displayed these major concepts for Australian data in Table 4.18 and for Korean data in Table 4.19 (Table 4.18 is discussed further and displayed in a different format in Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2, p. 200).

**Table 4.18: Choice of Words according to Australia participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Absolute Count</th>
<th>Relative Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>avoid</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speakers</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-native</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>message</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confusing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emails</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simpler</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overseas</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c’tractions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shorter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.19: Choice of Words according to Korean participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Absolute Count</th>
<th>Relative Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>words</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>straight</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>message</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emails</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Korean</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tend</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speakers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the software show that for the Australian participants, avoidance of certain words remains uppermost in their minds, for example, avoidance of complex words, contractions or colloquialisms. For the Korean participants, the concept of formality continues to influence their choice of words in intercultural emails. Creating a straightforward message is the result of using formal language and style according to the Korean participants.

4.5.3 Overview of Choice of Words: Questionnaire

The ways that the Australian participants choose their words for intercultural email communication are to simplify language, avoid certain elements such as colloquialisms and modify conventional writing style in some way. The Korean participants listed similar modifications to their language when writing emails to people overseas. The difference between the two, however, was in the directness of language. According to the data, the Korean participants like to “get straight to the point” of the message and use more direct style of communication compared to Australians. For the Koreans there was a preference for words which caused less confusion and an absence of contractions. If the level of formality falls below a certain point, then this constitutes impoliteness according to the Korean participants.
4.5.4 Interview

The relevant interview questions for the concept of **Choice of Words** were:

| Question 5 Interview | In your opinion, how important is directness or indirectness in intercultural email negotiations generally? How do you incorporate directness/indirectness in your emails? |

**Australian point of view**

From the data, it can be seen that direct language is more popular on email as there is a general feeling from the participants that indirectness conveys less clarity, although there seems to be some confusion by the Australian participants about whether to be direct on email and thus have a clearer, more straightforward message which will not cause confusion, or whether to use more indirect language so as to appear more polite. It seems from the data that the key is striking a balance between the two, to create a clear and, at the same time, polite message. According to the participants, requests can be direct but tend to be more indirect on email. The general consensus though, seems to gravitate towards direct language use in intercultural email negotiation except for the language function of requests where indirect language is more common. These points will be discussed further in Chapter 5, p. 181. The Australian results are now shown in Table 4.20.
Table 4.20: When writing intercultural emails, I use.........................  (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Direct language</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email medium only works for direct communication. (A3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to be clear and concise, although if you are too direct it can be taken as impolite. (A3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Indirect language</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards English speaking cultures, I can be indirect, I can allude and hint. Towards non-English speaking cultures I am clear and direct. (A4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The more indirect you are, the less clear the message. (A7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 A balance between direct and indirect language</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is striking a balance between length and clarity and purpose. (A1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails should not be waffly but they should not be too brief. (A9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Different language for requests</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For requests, I use indirect, hedging, minimising language e.g., This would help if you were able to do that. (A6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I am taking the initiative (requesting something of somebody), I tend to be more Australian, that is, direct – a 6 or 7 on a scale of indirectness 1 to directness 10. (A12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Other</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncomfortable with email writers who use allusive or politically conscious language. (A3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Australian participants there seems some uncertainty over the issue of direct/indirect language on email. This uncertainty is also felt by the Korean participants, as the following results indicate.

**Korean point of view**

There is a general consensus from the Korean participants that people in Asian cultures still require indirect language in email communication and expect some evidence of it, although there was roughly an equal division of Korean participants who preferred direct to indirect language. There are initial indications to show that the low context nature of email is having an effect on the communication patterns of a high context culture like Korea. Because email is so quick and convenient, some participants are finding that they are dispensing with “small talk” or “face building” language that is usually associated with Korean (and other Asian cultures’).
communication patterns and which is often displayed in other communication media. There is more of this subject in the next chapter. The Korean results are shown in Table 4.21.

Table 4.21: When writing intercultural emails, I use…………………………..(Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Direct language</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being direct takes less time – that is, being indirect is too time consuming. (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directness tends to be more easily understood. (K 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Indirect language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use indirect and very polite expression for those I do not know well. (K4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness is the aim but it has to be balanced between communicability and clarity in terms of the level of English proficiency of the receiver. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Language influenced by Asian cultures</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When corresponding to others in Asia, I use less direct language. But with people in western countries, I get to the main point quickly. (K7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness is typically perceived as more polite when you’re dealing with Asian cultures (including Indian culture). (K2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But it is a different case when requesting when I would say why I am writing the letter. (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.5 Summary of Choice of Words

Many participants in this study indicated a desire to choose their words carefully for intercultural email communication to ensure clarity of meaning. However, it appears from the results that the challenge is to know how to strike a balance between clarity and politeness. In other words, there appears to be uncertainty as to how to strike that balance between being direct on email and thus have a clearer, more straightforward message which will not cause confusion, or using more indirect language so as to appear more polite. Many Australian participants indicated that they understood the problems faced by their non-native English speaking email partners when receiving email language whose meaning was not clear.
Surprisingly, in the questionnaire, a large percentage of Korean participants (75%) indicated a preference for direct language in their intercultural emails. This contradicted findings in the interview, where the use of direct language was seen as impolite by some Korean participants as it did not include a face building component. The general consensus from both groups of participants though, was the preference for requests to be written in indirect language.

In the interview, some of the Korean participants said that they did not like brief texts, which they saw as impolite. However, in answer to questions of word choice in the questionnaire, some of the Korean participants said that they preferred brevity in emails. This was another contradiction of findings.

### 4.6 Relationships via Email

In this section, data was sought to find out whether and to what extent relationships develop via overseas email exchanges. The researcher was interested in finding out if the participants attempted to raise levels of social presence in their email communication to enable relationships to develop. In particular, the participants were asked to comment on a recent email thread conducted in a back and forth manner that they had had over some time with someone initially unknown from another culture, English speaking or non-English speaking. The participants were asked to consider what happens to their own and their communicating partner’s language style, and to comment on any events or changes in the dialogue that they considered unusual or unexpected.

Results from the analysis of Relationships via Email, along with the previous section Choice of Words, will answer the secondary research question: *Does email allow social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?*
4.6.1 Questionnaire

In the corresponding section for Relationships via Email, the participants were asked to comment on a recent overseas email exchange. Questions relating to language and language change over the duration of the exchange were asked.

**Question 1**
(Section E)
Please recall one example of a series of emails sent back and forth to someone from overseas in a developing dialogue over time. During the course of this email dialogue:

**Australian and Korean points of view**

Some low percentages for both Australian and Korean participants were evident in several of the items for this section. The percentages for neutral were somewhat high, especially for the Korean participants, which may indicate uncertainty or doubt about the feelings or adaptability of the overseas partner in the communication process. The following Table 4.22 shows both the Australian and Korean results for this section in the questionnaire. These results are tabled together for comparison purposes, where A%= Australian participants, K%= Korean participants and agree= a percentage of the total percentages from the Strongly Agree and Agree figures. Neutral percentages indicate those participants who neither agreed nor disagreed with an item.

**Table 4.22: During the course of an extended email exchange…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Relationships via Email</th>
<th>% A agree</th>
<th>% A neutral</th>
<th>% K agree</th>
<th>% K neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My language style changed</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I adapted to the style of my email partner</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I felt more at ease in the communication process at the end than at the beginning</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My email partner’s language style changed</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I thought my email partner felt more at ease in the communication process at the end than at the beginning</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The communication was successful</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternatively, these results can be seen in graphic form in Figure 4.2.
The above results, generally similar for both groups, indicate that even though most participants from both Australia and Korea consider their email communication successful, there remains some doubt as to the extent of adaptation email styles that are culturally different. This may be reflected in the level of ease felt by the participants at the end of their overseas email exchanges (58.3% Australian and 56.3% Korean). Korean and Australian results show a similar low percentage of participants who adapted to the language style of their overseas partner during the course of an extended email thread (43.8% and 35.9% respectively).

4.6.2 Overview of Relationships via Email: Questionnaire

The figures above would suggest room for improvement for overseas writers generally in adapting to various email styles and language structures to ensure more intercultural cooperation and smoother relationship formation. The high percentage of neutral (especially with the Korean participants) may indicate uncertainty or doubt in the minds of the participants about relationship formation in the email communication process. Email may not be providing enough clues to the sender to indicate such personal issues as ease or discomfort or adaptability of the receiver, during the course of the communication process. In other words, the level of social presence of the
medium may not be high enough to allow email partners to become sensitive to personal attributes of the culturally different other. This point will be discussed further in the next chapter.

4.6.3 Interview

The relevant interview question for the concept of Relationships via Email was:

| Question 8 Interview | What are the best strategies you’ve found to improve relations with unknown receivers overseas via email? |

Australian point of view

Some (nine) of the Australian participants indicated that a face-to-face meeting with your communicating partner is necessary before you can continue to build the relationship via email. According to those participants, email alone is not enough to develop raised levels of social presence or good relationships online. However, there was also a general feeling or apprehension by a few participants about whether, in fact, one can or needs to develop (good) relationships via email. Some participants suggested that email has only a transactional rather than an interactional role in intercultural communication. Other participants suggested that developing good relationships via email involves respect and consideration of other. This can be shown in a number of ways, for example, responding quickly to an email request, showing eagerness, attending to receiver’s needs, including local cultural knowledge in the email, including something in the receiver’s native language, including humour and not being patronising. These and other strategies are shown in Table 4.23.
Table 4.23: I find these strategies effective in developing good relationships via email (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Engaging/Helpful Language</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to get the balance between simplifying language to NESBs (non-English speaking background people) and being patronising. Sometimes if someone is being over helpful I feel a bit insulted. (A11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a chatty style, low key and I am not officious. (A7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Promptness/Attentiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think carefully about prioritising my emails – those that need to be answered straight away, those less urgent but important, those that can wait a few days, etc – and this relates to politeness. (A9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I respond quickly – a concession to show the receiver that I took their situation seriously and I am keen to find a solution. (A4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ‘Echo Approach’</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to get into the same wavelength (pragmatically and politeness wise) as my communicating partners. (A12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to use the ‘echo approach’. (A2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Clarity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I think that) relationships will develop only if clarity is developed. (A1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(By) Writing clearly, writing reasonably brief, spelling things out in full sentences and not too much e-speak. (A8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Awareness of Subtexts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(One) must be aware of possible sub-texts in emails – may lead to people inventing sub-texts which weren’t there in the first place. (A2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can embed in a sub-text by what you don’t say in an email. (A5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Addition of Local Cultural Knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give the receiver local cultural knowledge e.g., I tell receiver what a wonderful place they are coming to (if you are intending to come to Australia) – I make it sound fantastic -to make them eager. (A6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to say something in their language. (A8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Thanking/Appreciation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I express my appreciation in anticipation and I thank them before they’ve responded because I think this psychologically helps. (A3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Impression Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are seen as representatives of this organisation (____ University) so we must put our best face forward. (A11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Addition of Humour</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes include a bit of humour. (A9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4.23, it is evident that the Australian participants have many diverse strategies that can contribute to relationship formation. In other words, the ways to establish relationships or raise levels of social presence via email can take many different forms according to the participants. This closely parallels with the concept of politeness in intercultural email communication, which also takes many forms according to the participants.

Korean point of view

In this interview question, the Korean participants cited finding some commonalities as the most important way to improve email relationships. This can include giving some information (personal) about the sender and offering suggestions that may coincide with receiver’s interests. There is also a feeling that the negotiation must be mutually beneficial to both, for if either correspondent feels that it is a one-way benefit then that will not be conducive to good relationships. Prompt replies as well as showing a willingness to be helpful are other strategies used by the Korean as well as the Australian participants, to develop good email relationships. Korean results are shown in Table 4.24.
Table 4.24: I find these strategies effective in developing good relationships via email (Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Finding Commonalities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell them where I am coming from personally and professionally so that they can find something they like and respond back – it’s ‘kinda’ like clubbing – looking for Mr/Ms Wonderful. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find commonalities is another – I try to emphasise the common things the person and I might have e.g., academic background, common interest – I find that a good strategy. (K4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Replying Promptly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best strategy is to try to answer all the questions they’re asking and I try to answer as soon as possible. (K4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A quick response makes a good relationship, because people appreciate that. (K1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Showing a Willingness to Help</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best strategy is to try to be kind rather than polite. If you show them that you are willing to help them you can get full cooperation from them. (K7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best strategy is to try to answer all the questions they’re asking and I try to answer as soon as possible. (K2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Showing Politeness Generally</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be polite is a good strategy. (K4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be polite all the time. (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Making my Email Language Formal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) let my recipient know my sincerity and politeness by sending several formal emails. (K1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to write longer emails including background information about me that they want and make it well paragraphed. (K6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve been appreciated because of my emailing ability. (K3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.4 Summary of Relationships via Email

In the questionnaire, results indicated a need for some improvement in adapting to culturally different others. As well, the high percentage of neutral with both the Australian and particularly the Korean participants indicated uncertainty or doubt about the feelings or adaptability of the overseas partner in the communication process. Importantly, these results suggest the level of social presence of the medium
may not be high enough to allow email partners to become sensitive to personal attributes of the culturally different other. However, most participants in this study had their own strategies for raising levels of social presence to enable online relationships to develop.

Such strategies included showing respect and consideration in the language. Some examples of the way the Australian participants showed respect and consideration included using:

- Culture specific humour;
- Any humour;
- Respectful endings such as ‘best wishes, thank you’;
- Some personal anecdotes;
- Additional information (e.g., web pages);
- Some personal information;
- Mutual encouragement.

According to the Australian participants, the use of such strategies allowed the relationship to become warmer, more personal, more informal and more relaxed.

The Korean strategies to develop effective online relationships included citing commonalities, replying promptly and using formal language. For the Korean participants, there appeared to be less of an emphasis on interpersonal relationship building as there did with the Australian participants. This finding confirmed results in Section 4.3.5 Summary of Politeness, p. 112, where it was found that the Australian participants placed more of an emphasis on the interactional role of email in conveying politeness than the Korean participants.

**Humour**

It is relevant to note that there was no mention of the concept of humour in Korean answers in the interview and questionnaire. According to this study, the addition of humour is not an important consideration for the Korean participants. This may indicate though, the difficulty of incorporating humour into cross-cultural emails.
written in a second language. By contrast, the Australia participants often brought to the attention of the researcher the concept of humour and the difficulty of incorporating it into intercultural email negotiation. The addition of humour, although difficult, was seen as a beneficial strategy to improve relationships via email, according to many of the Australian participants.

4.7 Email Technology

The researcher was seeking information to assess the suitability of email as an intercultural communication medium. The participants were asked if they thought that email allowed them to successfully achieve certain aspects of personal communication via email. As well, the participants were asked to comment on any potential problems about the medium that they considered would pose barriers to polite intercultural communication.

The results from the analysis of the Email Technology section of the questionnaire will help to address the last research question: *What are the characteristics of email technology that may pose barriers to polite intercultural email communication?*

4.7.1 Questionnaire

In this section, the participants were asked to comment on the extent to which they felt the technology of email allowed expression of different types of personal communication, as seen in the following section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 (Section F)</th>
<th>When communicating to someone overseas as part of my work, I find that email allows me to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Australian and Korean points of view**

Korean results for all items in this section were generally higher than the Australian results. Both groups of participants reported that email was a good medium for expressing well understood messages and standard data but not, however, for more personal communication tasks. They indicated that messages such as conveying ideas,
which are less reliant on contextual factors such as mood, nuance, body language, silence, tone and inflection of voice, are more suitable for email. However, a richer medium than email may be needed for more ambiguous or personal communication tasks, according to the participants. This is in line with current email research and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Table 4.25 shows comparative results.

Table 4.25: *In my intercultural communication, email allows me to…*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>% A agree</th>
<th>% A neutral</th>
<th>% K agree</th>
<th>% K neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Express ideas clearly</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Express personal feelings</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Resolve delicate issues</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Resolve conflict (<em>change misunderstandings</em>)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Get to know the person I am writing to</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feel comfortable with the person I am writing to</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Edit work before sending</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 3 in the table above was left out of the Korean questionnaire (as indicated by N/A) as the language (resolve delicate issues) was considered too abstract for the Korean participants. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.2, p. 79, some changes and omissions, such as this one, were made to the Korean version of the questionnaire. This was done so as not to inundate the Korean academics with complicated syntax and unnecessary lexis, as these participants’ first language was not English. The results in Table 4.25 can be seen in comparative graphic form in Figure 4.3.
From these figures it can be seen that the Korean participants have more confidence in the ability of email to allow more communication tasks than the Australian participants. A high percentage for both groups considers that email allows a clear expression of ideas and affords an editing function.

Participants were also asked about any potential problems that were being experienced when using email to communicate across cultures. The problems mentioned from both the Australian (%A) and Korean participants (%K) are shown in Table 4.26.

Table 4.26: When communicating overseas via email, I don't know

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>% A agree</th>
<th>% A neutral</th>
<th>% K agree</th>
<th>% K neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Which form of address to use</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How much information to give</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How to reply to a difficult request</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What to do when no reply comes</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How to improve misunderstandings</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If an offence has occurred</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Which questions to answer</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How to improve an offence</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages of the those participants who consider issues such as not knowing which form of address to use, how much information to give, how to reply to a difficult request and what to do when no reply comes and so on, to be problems, are illustrated in Figure 4.4, where the Australian and Korean data are compared and
The comparative table included in Figure 4.4 shows that there are many areas causing potential problems for the participants. In many categories, Australian participants appear more uncertain, especially in the areas of potential offences and misunderstandings. Approximately 70% of both Australian and Korean participants are not sure which form of address to use in email communication. As well, over 60% are not sure what to do if there is no reply to their email request and a large percentage do not know how much information to give in their email negotiations. Moreover, it can be seen in Table 4.26 that there is a high percentage of both Australian and Korean participants who are unsure about whether offences and misunderstandings have occurred and as well how to improve them once they have occurred. Importantly, this may indicate that the participants may not be aware of these potential misunderstandings and offences. In other words, misunderstandings and offences may already be occurring and the email participants may not be aware of them and therefore cannot take any action to remedy the misunderstandings and offences.

When asked to comment on the concerns or limitations of using email to communicate to overseas receivers, five themes were identified in the Australian participants’ answers, as shown in Table 4.27.
Table 4.27: When communicating overseas, I find these limitations about email………

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Miscommunications can arise in email</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email is a ‘flat medium’ – (it is) easy to miscommunicate. (A61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(There are) Misinterpretations regarding etiquette and expectations. (A26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Email complemented with phone or face-to-face produces better results</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes written interchange about complex ideas can become hard to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handle and it seems as if oral or face-to-face ‘nutting out’ would work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better. (A2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes it would be easier to use phone when you need continuous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and immediate feedback. (A119)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Time is an important issue with email</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLuhan said the medium is the message. This medium carries a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>message of ‘now’ = I want a reply now. Often (increasingly so) replies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take time. The expectation of immediacy results in emotions being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stirred when replies are not swift. It also leads to inappropriate actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= e.g., last minute emails of news items. (A74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(There are) Long delays in obtaining a reply – for whatever reason.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Email has limitations due to the technology itself</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely. I have had enormous difficulty getting emails to southern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil, where I am trying to build relationships, but I seem to have to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>route my messages through an intermediary in the QLD Dept of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education! I can’t reach these people directly. (A15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of facilities (e.g., Solomon Islands, East Timor, Tualu) little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding of email facilities overseas. (A53)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 There are ‘Not Knowing’ issues in email</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I don’t know how to distinguish between foreign first and last</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>names. (A3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(It is) Difficult to know if a lack of response signals that someone is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not replying on purpose or simply mulling over the issues you have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raised (may also have simply forgotten or not read your email). (A10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Other</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, none at all – I love the quick turnaround of overseas emails</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compared to the mail system of yesteryear! (A103)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these results it can be seen that there are still certain elements to email communication that are not known to its users. The sender can never be sure, for example, if the email has been received in the first place and, then, how his/her email
will be received by the unknown receiver. If that sent email is not answered, it can further complicate issues. The receiver may choose not to reply, to reply after a long period of time or may not have even received the original email message due to a change of email address or other technology related problems. All of these factors may be unknown to the original sender who is left hanging in the communication process.

4.7.2 Overview of Email Technology: Questionnaire

A fuller description of this section is given in the next chapter; however, these initial patterns are emerging from the questionnaire data:

- Miscommunications on email are caused from many factors including social and cultural factors as well as technological ones;
- There are many facets to email communication which remain unknown to users, for example, why an email interchange ceases;
- The level of social presence of email may not be as high as some studies suggest;
- Email may not be as rich a medium as some studies suggest;
- Time remains an important construct in email communication.

4.7.3 Interview

The relevant interview questions for the section on Email Technology were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 Interview</th>
<th>Do you like using email for negotiating with people overseas?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 6 Interview</td>
<td>What are the main problems concerning ‘time’ that you have experienced within your email negotiations? How do you deal with them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7 Interview</td>
<td>In your opinion, what is it about email communication that causes uncertainties and/or problems?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of each of these three interview questions are given in order.
**Australian point of view**

The Australian interview participants listed many reasons why they liked using email which were then grouped into the following five reasons.

**Table 4.28: I like email because of these factors................................. (Australia)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Ease of Use Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(It) allows one to cut and paste. (A11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can easily choose tone to suit message. (A6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Changing Writing Patterns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Email) gives a history of one negotiation (which is) useful. (A9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Email) forces writer to be precise. (A2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Social Presence Indicators</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Email) is not as intrusive as the phone. (A7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Email) is more effective when complemented with face-to-face. (A6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Time Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t have to think about time delays. (A10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(You) can answer day or night. (A2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) can be sure it’s going directly to the individual. (A7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I) don’t dislike it – can take it or leave it. (A11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting that nearly all participants gave different answers to this question and all seem to be valid advantages of email. Email seems to have many advantages to the participants and appears very popular. According to the Australian participants, email is easy and quick to use, it allows flexibility in writing style and it also holds personal appeals. Even though the researcher was able to group answers into these broad five concepts, there was not much consensus within each concept. This may indicate that many people see different reasons for liking the email medium.
Korean point of view

The Korean interviewees listed three reasons why they liked the email medium (see Table 4.29). They indicated mainly that it was convenient to use and that it gave them a chance to review their English, which was not their native language.

Table 4.29: I like email because of these factors………………………………… (Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Convenience</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Email tends to be something where we often feel like we can just zip it up and hit the send button and it can be short, quick, fast and we don’t have to think about it too much.</em> (K2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It is easy to access.</em> (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chance to review language</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Asynchronous communication is more convenient as it allows me to think about what I’m going to say.</em> (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(There is) more chance to review text and amend as appropriate.</em> (K7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I have to use it whether I like it or not.</em> (K4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I prefer face-to-face communication much more.</em> (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Email is also a popular medium of communication among the Korean participants. It has many factors of convenience such as speed, ease of use, low cost and others according to their answers. From the data it appears that there is more consensus with the Korean than the Australian cohorts on the reasons why they like the medium. For non-native speakers, email gives the user a chance to review thought processes and language construction, a fact not mentioned by the Australian participants. The asynchronous nature of email allows the non-native speaker time to amend and edit language before sending off the message, a fact which may facilitate intercultural communication. It is interesting to note the Korean participants did not mention the social presence indicators of email or the personal appeal of the medium as did the Australians. This interview finding confirms data obtained from the questionnaire where the Korean participants did not consider the interpersonal aspects of intercultural email communication as much as the Australian participants. This issue will be further discussed in the next chapter.
Even though it was not directly asked in the interview, many of the Australian interviewees volunteered reasons during the course of the interview as to why they did not like using email for intercultural negotiation. Unlike the Australian cohort, the Korean participants did not volunteer many reasons for disliking email or acknowledge any limitations. The reasons given why the Australian participants did not like using email are that it does have limitations as a communication medium and that it is contributing to language degeneration, as can be seen in Table 4.30.

**Table 4.30: I do not like email because of these factors………………….. (Australia)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Negative Social Presence Indicators</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Email) can create a zone of uncertainty about the correct way to communicate.</em> (A12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Email) is sort of seductive ... addictive.</em> (A7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Limitations of the Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(It has no context which would help reduce misunderstandings.</em> (A10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(It is) hard to negotiate something sensitive.</em> (A1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Language Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Email) is contributing to sloppy language – language degeneration.</em> (A6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Email) can encourage blunt, abrupt language.</em> (A8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Too many people copying to too many people too much correspondence.</em> (A4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are still quite a lot of limitations to email according to the Australian participants. The very things that they like about email such as the speed, convenience, low cost and others may be causing the limitations as people overuse the medium. The email overload may be creating extra work and resultant stress for many academic and general staff members at universities. The ease of use in email appears to be speeding up the communication processes, which may, in turn, be causing further anxiety. For the Koreans, time issues, uncertainty regarding delivery and the fact that one can appear unintentionally rude and abrupt on intercultural email are the only indications given as to why they do not like using email for intercultural negotiation.
Question 6 Interview

What are the main problems concerning ‘time’ that you have experienced within your email negotiations? How do you deal with them?

Australian point of view

The Australian interview participants listed many problems concerning time in their email negotiations which were then grouped into the following four main problems, as shown in Table 4.31.

**Table 4.31: In my opinion, email…………………………………………………………. (Australia)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Speeds up expectations of reply times</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I like people to acknowledge that they have received an (important) email even if they haven’t time, at that point, to reply. (A5)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sometimes people overseas expect an answer within 5 minutes of receiving email, as if you’ve got nothing else to do with your life. (A12)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Speeds up communication</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Email is speeding up the whole communication process and also our anxiety level has been raised as we try to cope with it. There is a subconscious issue of speed with email. (A11)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We’re all pressed for time, it takes longer to type things than to say things. (A6)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Wastes time</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The email must be worth the recipient’s time to read. (A10)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Always consider why you are writing emails so you don’t waste receiver’s time. (A3)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Other</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(There is the) problem of pure volume of emails. (A4)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Email is a great servant and a terrible master. (A8)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Australian participants, email seems to equate with speed of communication and replying. It can be so quick at times that it almost appears to be a real time interactive (synchronous) medium. The speed, though, may be contributing to email overload, creating work overload for busy academics. The lack of control over email volume, therefore, may be contributing to anxiety. There is also some uncertainty
about reply times and protocol procedures to email requests that satisfy both politeness issues and comfort level issues for busy academics.

**Korean point of view**
The Korean participants expressed similar thoughts to the Australians on the issue of time, except that they did not see email as wasting time, rather as consuming time, as seen in Table 4.32.

**Table 4.32:** *In my opinion, email................................................................. (Korea)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> Speeds up expectations of replying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I get upset when I don’t get an immediate response particularly when I ask them to let me know as soon as possible.</em> (K3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I write an email to the applicant to reply ASAP but I don’t like using that (expression). (K4)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> Is time consuming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I find myself reading and rereading emails more and more and saving it and saying ‘I’ll look at it again tomorrow’ – this delays the whole process.</em> (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Some days I have more than 100 emails to reply to and it’s using up my time.</em> (K1)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There are too many aspects to time in email.</em> (K2)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Email communication can be so time consuming for busy academics that one Korean participant referred to email writing as her primary job while academic teaching her secondary job. The lack of protocol for how and when to reply to email requests is causing concern and creating uncertainty for the Korean participants.

**Question 7 Interview**
In your opinion, what is it about email communication that causes uncertainties and/or problems?

**Australian point of view**
The Australian interview participants listed many uncertainties in email communication. These were then grouped into the following four areas: technology based; language based; interaction based; and other. Results are shown in Table 4.33.
### Table 4.33: I find these uncertainties about email communication .......... (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncertainties</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Technology based uncertainty</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain about whether the other end received my original email. (A6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s no ‘pop-up’ system that alerts you if the email hasn’t been received. (A9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Language based uncertainty</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms are a problem if you don’t know what they mean. (A11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m never quite sure that I have got the subtext right. (A10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Interaction based uncertainty</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t want to appear rude by emailing again and saying ‘please respond’. (A7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not getting a response that you have asked for, so you ask yourself: did I remember to send the original? Did I press the right button? Or are they just slack? Has my response been lost in cyberspace? (A8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email is creating a degeneration of language. (A1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am sometimes in this zone of uncertainty of not knowing what the heck is going on and it is frustrating. (A12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three main areas of confusion in email communication lie in technology based issues such as the mechanics of email software. There are also user (or language) based issues such as the pragmatics of the language and interactivity based issues such as not knowing how to maintain a rhythmic flow to information exchange. The “zone of uncertainty”, listed in Other in Table 4.33, is a recurring theme found in much of the data of this study. It refers to the virtual space surrounding an email user where the correct way to communicate is not apparent, nor are written protocols available. Language degeneration, listed in Other, is discussed further in Chapter 5, p. 201.

**Korean point of view**

The Korean participants expressed similar thoughts to the Australians on the issue of uncertainties except that they did not rate the technology based uncertainties as high as the Australians. This may be due to superior infrastructure of email technology in Korea where computer “crashings” and “freezings” may be more infrequent than in Australia, or it may be that they do not use email as much as the Australian.
participants. The Korean participants’ main areas of uncertainty were in the misunderstandings embedded in the language in incoming emails and as well, uncertainty about how to clarify these misunderstandings. Included here were misunderstandings such as perceived subtexts which were not intended but which could cause offence. Other misunderstandings cited were receivers skipping over issues in the email which the sender considers important. Uncertainty over correct title use was also given in answer to this question.

4.7.4 Summary of Email Technology

The results of both the questionnaire and the interview confirm that, according to the participants, there are many advantages to email technology. Many people see different reasons for liking the medium, such as ease of use, speed and low cost. It is also a good medium for intercultural communication in that information is stored and can be accessed at a time suitable to the receiver. For non-native English speakers, the asynchronous nature of email allows the sender to edit and review language before sending, and the receiver to translate and interpret the language in the received email. This can remove some of the anxiety associated with face-to-face intercultural communication, where responding quickly in another language is often expected.

However, there are also many disadvantages to email when used interculturally. Miscommunications can and do arise, according to the participants. The zone of uncertainty is creating confusion for many participants in this study. Culturally appropriate language construction, correct language interpretation, interactivity protocols and culturally appropriate politeness procedures are just some of the issues confronting intercultural email users. As well, due to the low level of social presence of email and the lack of context cues, users may not even be aware that misunderstandings are occurring. In some cases it may even be worse as the email users may not be aware that offences have resulted, much less how to clarify the misunderstandings. These issues highlighting potential barriers will be discussed further in Chapter 5, Section 5.6, p. 202.
4.8 Email Threads

The third instrument in this study was discourse analysis of email texts for the purposes of assessing politeness levels. Having three instruments for analysis in this study was important, as perceptions of politeness derived from the questionnaire and interview could be matched with the reality in actual email texts. The resultant use of multiple methods, as in this study, can overcome weaknesses and potential biases often apparent when a single method of data collection and analysis has been used (Sarantakos, 1998a). As mentioned in Chapter 2, previous research in the area of intercultural email communication revealed a lack of studies employing more than one data collection instrument (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7, p. 61). Having multiple data sources and multiple instruments for analysis thus strengthens and broadens the interpretative base of any study (Denzin, 1997; Merriam, 2002; Travis, 2001)

As mentioned in the Introductory chapter (p. 4) and the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3, Section 3.4.4, p. 87), there were no instruments in the literature at the time of this study which could be used to analyse written texts, especially email texts, for the purposes of assessing politeness levels. Consequently, an initial instrument, *Email Politeness Assessment Instrument 1* (or EPA 1) was created intuitively by the researcher in this study as a way of dealing with this deficiency; it can be seen in Appendix 4. This instrument borrowed and combined elements from the literature to analyse email texts using nine criteria. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter (Section 3.4.4, p. 87), many problems surfaced during the use of the initial instrument. The process of analysis was difficult, time consuming and laborious as each email in the thread was analysed in turn according to the nine criteria. Subjectivity also became a potential problem in the initial use of the instrument.

In this section, there will be brief summary of the context of two authentic email threads which occurred between academics in Australia, Hong Kong and Korea. Following the discussion of the context of the email thread, there will be a brief synopsis of the main points of the results using EPA1. Full results of the analysis using the instrument are included in a lengthy document entitled *Results of Initial*
Both threads were used for actual intercultural academic professional exchanges. A thread may be described as the process of sending and receiving of emails in a continuous dialogue in order to negotiate an event or to exchange information, over a certain period of time. Both threads were undertaken by academics at the Australian university.

4.8.1 Email Thread 1: Australia and Hong Kong

Context

The first email thread involved an exchange between an Australian academic and an educational administrator in Hong Kong. The exchange of six emails took place over a period of one week in 2004. The purpose of the exchange was to organise the establishment of a joint educational project between the two universities, which was to be set up in Hong Kong. The secondary purpose of the exchange was to finalise arrangements for the Australian academic to join his email correspondent in Hong Kong, for further discussion. There is more description on the context of this email thread in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.4.1, p. 244).

Main points of the results

In this thread, there were many politeness strategies used by the Australian academic. This may be due to the fact that the Australian academic made several requests, which were couched in indirect language. There were also many examples of relationship-building language from the Australian academic in the thread. The use of such relationship-building language aimed to sustain online interpersonal relationships and develop collaboration between two culturally different parties. The emails from the Hong Kong end were more transactional in nature, that is, their purpose was to deliver information only and there were fewer attempts to develop interpersonal relationships via the email messages. Results show these inconsistencies:

- Terms of address changed as the email progressed;
- There was inconsistency in choice of titles and signatures;
• Differences in relationship building roles between the two cultures were apparent;
• A request from the Australian academic was ignored;
• Lexical variations and ellipsis occurred in the text, indicating a more informal style;
• Length of texts varied to a great extent.

In summary, there seemed to be more politeness indicators and relationship-building language from the Australian academic in this thread. This may be due to the nature of the requests in the language. There were indications that the use of relationship-building language was not echoed back from the Hong Kong recipient. Uncertainty about interactivity was evident in the thread, as an important request made by the Australian academic was not attended to throughout the thread. A fuller description, interpretation and analysis, with examples from the text, can be seen in Chapter 7 (Section 7.4, p. 244).

4.8.2 Email Thread 2: Australia and Korea

Context
The second email thread involved an exchange of eight emails between Korea and Australia, which took place over a period of five weeks beginning in May, 2003. It involved an exchange between two male academics. The Korean academic, a PhD, was organising, through the emails, an international conference and the Australian academic, a Professor, had been asked to give a keynote speech at the conference. The email exchange involved finalising the speaking arrangements at the conference, which was to be held in Korea. There is more description on the context of this email thread in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.5.1, p. 267).

Main points of the results

The negotiation was not entirely successful due to several factors, which did not enhance the face of either correspondent. Consequently, there were several misunderstandings in the thread and as well, important relationship-building strategies
were not evident. As a result, damage to face on both sides occurred due to the lack of general politeness indicators. The results of the analysis show that:

- Requests were sometimes written in direct language;
- Requests from the sender were sometimes ignored by the receiver;
- The use of titles from both sides was not consistent or adequate. Sometimes the use of titles was ignored altogether;
- Sometimes long delays in responding were apparent;
- A mutually convenient time rhythm for sending and responding was not established;
- Interactivity, or knowing how to weave and include points made previously in the history of the negotiation, was lacking to some extent;
- Time pressures or deadlines were given without consideration of receiver’s time;
- There were also instances of negative attitudinal predicates in the language;
- Letters of invitation were incorrectly attached or not attached at all.

Overall, the general feeling after analysing this email thread was that both correspondents were experiencing uncertainty in the communication process, and that they did not know how to successfully and politely go about their negotiation via email. Uncertainty as to the correct protocol in the intercultural email process is a recurring theme in this study as evidenced in all three instruments. A full analysis of this email thread is given in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.5, p. 267).

4.8.3 Summary of the Email Threads

An analysis of the two email threads indicates confusion or uncertainty in many areas. Firstly, there was confusion about the correct politeness protocol, especially title and signature use. Secondly, mutually acceptable levels of face-building and relationship-building language by culturally different participants, was not evident in the texts. Thirdly, there appeared confusion over whether all requests in emails should be answered, as some requests in the email threads were ignored by the receiver. Lastly, a mutually acceptable interaction procedure was not evident in the texts. This
included some participants not knowing how to weave points made previously in the history of the negotiation, into the current text, or not knowing when to send and expect replies and so on. Establishing a mutually convenient time frame for sending and replying was not established in the threads.

Requests worded directly, as was sometimes the case in the threads, was not consistent with the findings from the other two instruments, where most participants indicated that politeness involved couching requests in indirect language. The blunt and sometimes abrupt language in some of the texts in the threads was also not consistent with the findings of the other instruments where such language was considered impolite. The variation concerning the correct use of titles in the threads confirms results from the questionnaire and interview, where the majority of all participants were not sure on the correct protocol for addressing the overseas receiver.

The threads did confirm the Australian participants’ preference for relationship-building language to indicate politeness, as examples of this can be seen in the texts. The lack of relationship-building language from the Korean and the Hong Kong end also confirmed previous results where relationship-building language was not considered such an important part of politeness, according to the Korean participants.

After the use of the initial email politeness assessment instrument, it became apparent to the researcher that a more streamlined and efficient way of analysis for the purposes of identifying and quantifying politeness indicators was needed. The lengthy analytical process (as seen in Appendix 5) also revealed that the initial framework was missing input from an important source: the participants in this study. What the Australia and Korean participants were saying about politeness was equally important as theoretical constructs from the literature. The idea, then, to develop a more streamlined and practical instrument, which would be based on the research data provided by the participants in the two diverse cultures of Australia and Korea and suggestions from academic colleagues as well as input from theory bases in the literature, was born. Chapter 6 will explain how such a streamlined, inclusive and practical instrument came into existence.
4.9 Other Findings

A common theme that surfaced indirectly from data results was the participants’ perceptions of culture and how that related to their email communication. Comments on cultural perceptions were freely volunteered by the Australian and Korean participants. Below is a brief summary of the thematic groupings of their cultural perceptions along with some examples from each instrument.

Cultural Perceptions
The general consensus from the participants’ cultural perceptions was that Australians generally have a direct communication style. The Australian participants seem to be aware of the need for a respectful approach when dealing with people from Asian and Latin cultures. There is room for potential offence in some cultures if factors such as hierarchy and respectful tone are not considered. The Australian participants’ comments on cultural perceptions were grouped into five general themes. They are listed below in Table 4.34, along with several examples from the transcripts.
Australian point of view

Table 4.34: My cultural perceptions are………………………………. (Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Australia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia tends to be a less formal society than some other Western societies e.g., Canada where university students hold their academic professors in a different relationship than we have here. (A45)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The typical Australian manner of writing is very direct and abrupt compared to what Brazilians write. (A89)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Western cultures generally</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the USA or Canada, their equivalent of ‘Hi’ is ‘Hey’. (A55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish girls are very demanding – (they) must have Women’s Lib type things in that country. (A41)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Asian cultures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They (from Sri Lanka) tend to be impersonal, cold, formal and commonly there is a failure to address us…. My response to that is ‘thanks but no thanks’. (A33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of how important honorific and respectful approach is in Asia. (78)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Latin cultures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Latin cultures if you call someone Professor instead of Doctor they will get offended. (A101)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilians write as though they are obsequious and humble servants. (A33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Other cultures generally</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offence will be taken in some cultures but not others as we all are changing in different speeds to the direct nature of email communication. (A14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I know a few words in their language I use them in the email to show interest and caring and connectivity and also make a comment about the weather there etc. (A56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korean point of view

The Korean participants’ perceptions on culture were also forthcoming. Their perceptions were grouped into two areas: perceptions relating to Asian cultures and those relating to Western cultures. It appears that formality, use of titles and indirectness of communication and their close relationship to politeness is a characteristic of Asian communication. The Korean participants also see that these communication characteristics are not so important to people in Western cultures. Results are shown in Table 4.35.
Table 4.35: My cultural perceptions are…………………………………………… (Korea)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Relating to Asian cultures, including my own Korean culture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to use direct language but since I’m an oriental person I often use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indirect expressions in my email. (K6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean people think it important to begin email messages with several</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comments unrelated to point of message. (K1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is definitely important in addressing to use one’s title a lot in Korea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Japan – you can’t go wrong if you say ‘professor’ in every sentence even</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if you’re saying something almost insulting. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politeness is extremely important in my culture (Korea). (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Relating to Western cultures</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I notice that many foreigners don’t mind or even offer to be addressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without any title, but most Asian people like to be addressed by their title. (K5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some American professors I know tend to feel honoured when you speak to them less directly. (K8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has displayed the results from the instruments of questionnaire, interview and analysis of email texts according to the main concepts in this study. It showed that there was a definite lack of consensus on the interpretation of linguistic politeness in this study. It also revealed many facets to politeness according to the Australian and Korean participants including clarity of expression, formality of style, inclusion of appropriate politeness indicators, indirectness of language, use of correct titles, avoidance of certain linguistic elements, use of language to establish personal rapport with the receiver and showing respect and consideration for culturally different others. However, differences existed between the Australian and Korean interpretations of politeness found in the study. The Australian participants placed much more of an emphasis on interpersonal relationship-building than the Korean participants. This was illustrated in all the data collection instruments. The Korean participants, by contrast, indicated that formality of language and the correct use of titles were more important ways to convey politeness via email. These results were confirmed in the email threads where the Australian respondents included more relationship-building language than their overseas partners. Differences in the awareness of social status
were apparent as well. The Korean participants indicated a much greater awareness of social status and differences in social status, than the Australian participants.

The key to the correct choice of words lay in striking a balance between clarity and politeness, according to many participants. However, they voiced their uncertainty about how to strike this balance between being direct and thus having a clearer message, which would not cause confusion, or using more indirect language so as to appear more polite. The results of the analysis of the email threads illustrated the uncertainty and confusion especially concerning the notion of directness of language in intercultural emails. In the email threads, direct and indirect language appeared interchangeable and inconsistent. Most Australian and Korean participants in the study preferred direct language generally although there was consensus from both cohorts that requests should be written indirectly.

The apparent low context nature of email communication is creating a zone of uncertainty for many participants in this study. Uncertainty as to how to correctly use language, appropriate to certain cultural norms and politeness systems, was evident throughout each section and each instrument of this study. Confusion in knowing appropriate interactivity protocols for establishing and maintaining continuity in email threads, was also voiced by the participants.

The software Leximancer was used for analysis of qualitative data in this study. It illustrated by way of ranked graphs the major concepts of the participants’ perceptions. Results of the software confirmed, for the most part, the researcher’s own analyses.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, discusses in more detail the participants’ views and perceptions gained from this chapter. It will analyse and discuss these views in the context of the research questions. Similarities and differences between the two data sources of questionnaire and interview and the two cultures will be examined. Cross-references to the literature will also be made to further amplify and confirm or otherwise, the analyses.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Participants’ Views

5.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to understand politeness and ways to assess it in intercultural email communication. In particular, the study aimed to shed new light on how politeness indicators were realised through the language. Secondary purposes of the study were to ascertain levels of social presence in email communication and whether increased levels led to greater politeness. Identifying any existing barriers within the technology of email that could inhibit polite email communication was also an important aim.

In this chapter, there is discussion and analysis of empirical results obtained from the two main data sources: the questionnaire and interview. The views and opinions elicited from participants both in Australia and Korea are discussed, analysed and linked to the literature. It will be shown how these findings and results ultimately lead to the conceptual development of the framework discussed in the next chapter. All discussion and analysis of results in this chapter follow the research question themes:

Section 1: Politeness in Email;
Section 2: Social presence aspects of Email and Choice of Words;
Section 3: Barriers for Politeness in Email Technology.

As the Australian cohort was the primary focus of this study and was much larger in size than the Korean cohort, discussion and analysis of results obtained from this group of participants will occur first, followed by a brief discussion of the Korean results. The chapter will then include discussion and analysis of ‘Other Findings’ that surfaced during the course of the study which were not part of the intended study, but were considered too important to exclude.

All quotations from the participants in this chapter are identified by the country (A=Australia, K=Korea), the instrument (Q=questionnaire, Int=interview), and by the
participant’s number. For example, (AQ49) after a quotation signifies Australian participant number 49 said these words in the questionnaire and (KInt4) signifies that Korean participant number 4 said these words in the interview.

5.2 Politeness: The Australian Participants’ Views

The analyses of all Australian data from the questionnaire and interview on the concept of Politeness are now discussed. These data will address the primary research question: How is the concept of politeness embedded in intercultural email communication?

After conceptual analysis of all data, the Australian participants’ views were grouped into the following interconnecting themes:

- Importance of Politeness;
- Lack of Consensus;
- What is Face?;
- Politeness Strategies;
- Classification of Politeness;
- Uncertainty;
- Impoliteness;
- Offences;
- Lack of Context;
- Status and Titles;
- Formality of Writing;
- Direct and Indirect Language.

The discussion begins with how importantly the participants viewed politeness.

Importance of Politeness

Politeness in email communication is very important according to many of the Australian participants who volunteered their thoughts on this subject. In the interview, many participants voiced emphatically their belief in the importance of
politeness in their overseas email writing, an observation confirmed by the analysis generated by the software package *Leximancer* (Smith, 2002). Figure 5.1 illustrates the strength of the importance of politeness according to the participants.

Figure 5.1 below, shows the placement on the grid of the main concepts extracted from the interview transcripts on the question of *politeness*. The most commonly cited concepts by the participants are those in darker print, for example *politeness* itself, while those concepts less commonly cited are in lighter print, for example *lot*. The more frequently two concepts co-occur, the shorter the distance between them: for example, *politeness* and *important* are two concepts that have been often used in the same context by the participants. This is a clear illustration of how strong the participants see the connection between politeness and its importance. By contrast, *politeness* and *lot* have less contextual similarity.

![Figure 5.1: Politeness and importance](image)

**Lack of Consensus**

Although the Australian participants voiced their belief in the importance of politeness in intercultural email communication, there was a definite lack of consensus in their opinions on the meaning of politeness. Politeness is subjective according to these participants, and most had a different interpretation. Some of the
different perspectives of politeness according to the participants included clarity of expression, formality of style, indirectness of language, use of correct titles, avoidance of certain linguistic elements such as jargon, use of language to establish personal rapport with receiver and showing respect and consideration for culturally different other and so on. Results from both the interview and the questionnaire confirmed this lack of consensus.

What is politeness?

The lack of consensus among the participants is echoed in the literature where there is a general lack of consistency on what “politeness” is (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990, p. 219; Locher & Watts, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2000a; Watts, 2003). Some researchers even refer to politeness as “confusing” (Spencer-Oatey, 2000a, p. 2) and as a “puzzle” (Watts, 2003, p. 251). Not only is there a lack of consistency in the literature on what politeness is, there is also a lack of consistency in why we use politeness. The results from this study confirm both of those inconsistencies. There was a lack of consensus among the Australian participants on the meaning and role of politeness. They also expressed many reasons for wanting to include politeness in their intercultural email communication. These reasons coincided with those of researchers who speak of politeness as an instrument to:

- save face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Goffman, 1971);
- achieve personal goals (Simmons, 1994);
- avoid conflict (Lakoff, 1989, 1990);
- preserve status (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Watts, 2003);
- show respect (Lustig & Koester, 1999; p. 329; Thomas, 1995);
- wield power (Watts, 2003);
- enhance one’s own status (Watts et al., 1992);
- ensure the social intercourse runs smoothly (Gumperz, 1972, cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987; Watts et al., 1992);
- validate a conversational contract (Fraser, 1990);
- show or give the appearance of showing consideration of other (Watts, 2003);
- manage rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b);
display adequate proficiency in the accepted standards of social etiquette (Watts et al., 1992); gain entry to elite society (Watts et al., 1992); and understand human relations (Gumperz, 1972, cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The results from this study indicate that the Australian participants embrace many of these reasons for wanting to include politeness in their email communication. Although many theoretical bases were used in the analysis of all data in this study, the theoretical base of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) was perhaps the most important. This theory posits that politeness is used to save the face of both sender and receiver when there is a potential threat to face. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two types of politeness strategies, positive and negative. The use of such politeness strategies enhances the face of both the sender and the receiver in any communication act.

It is worth noting that the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) was originally intended for face-to-face communication and has never been tested in the medium of email in English to date. It is an assumption on the part of the researcher that parts of this theory can, in fact, be applied to email communication.

Positive Politeness Strategies

As mentioned in Chapter 2, positive politeness strategies appeal to one’s positive face or the desire to be liked, appreciated and understood (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Some examples of positive politeness strategies include sharing similar opinions, showing approval and appreciation of other and so on. In the study it was found that such comments are effective according to the participants. Such comments as I look forward to seeing you soon…Thank you for your last email…. Your city is very beautiful. I visited it last year, enhance the face of the receiver and support more successful negotiation.

According to the Australian participants, positive politeness strategies are important and show an acceptance of the receiver. They should be included in intercultural
email language. However, negative politeness strategies were considered important as well and they will be discussed next.

**Negative Politeness Strategies**

Negative politeness strategies, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), appeal to one’s negative face or the desire to be unimpeded and not to be imposed upon. Examples of negative politeness strategies include apologies for interfering, linguistic deference, hedges, being vague, understating, hinting, impersonalising mechanisms such as the passive voice and any other softening mechanisms that give the other person a face-saving line of escape (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to the literature, negative politeness strategies may not suit the nature of email discourse due in part to the apparent direct style of communication and the lack of social context cues (Ma, 1996; Simmons, 1994; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). For example, negative politeness strategies such as hinting, being vague and understating, are not easily expressed in email, due to the lack of context. Referring to previous email communication remains the only way to supplement intended meaning.

However, results from this study indicate that some negative politeness strategies are important in establishing politeness in intercultural email communication. Examples of negative politeness that were considered important according to the Australian participants were the use of the passive voice, the use of deferential language and especially the use of indirect language. There is more on the subject of negative politeness in the form of indirect language later in the chapter.

The use of positive and negative politeness strategies was an important way to reflect face aspects both for sender and receiver (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1961, 1967, 1971). However, the amount of importance attached to each type of politeness strategies differed according to culture. The Australian participants seemed to place more importance on positive politeness strategies than the Korean participants. There is evidence from both data sources that the Australian participants considered these strategies more important than negative politeness strategies in creating polite email communication.
Even though the Australia participants preferred the use of positive politeness strategies, many researchers advise the use of negative politeness strategies, if there is doubt about which type of politeness to use in intercultural contexts (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wood & Kroger, 1991). These researchers say that where there is uncertainty, greater weight should be given to such negative politeness strategies as indirect language and deference for example, than to relationship-building language such as the use of first names, in intercultural contexts (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

The absence of both positive and negative politeness strategies in the emails from non-English speaking people was also noted in the study. Many of the Australian participants however, understood the difficulties faced by their overseas email partners in trying to include politeness. They said that the absence of politeness strategies in their incoming overseas email communication, although off-putting, could nevertheless be explained by other factors. Some of these factors could include second language difficulties, cultural differences in their email styles, their overseas partners’ inexperience with email technology, and busy time schedules for everyone. This comment from one Australian participant summed up the feeling:

*Occasionally it is difficult to determine whether a terse email (especially from NESB – a non-English speaking background respondent) is a product of e-speak, or a lack of consideration. (AQ54)*

In general, the Australian participants seemed to be more forgiving to their overseas email partners than the Korean participants. The Korean participants did not cite cultural difference as much as the Australian participants as the reasons for a lack of politeness.

The results of this study also confirm that politeness can be embedded in certain linguistic structures (Meier, 1995, 1997; Watts, 2003). For example, some of the Australian participants said that politeness could be embedded in email messages such as in the use of the full address, for example *Dear Professor*, or in lexical items such as *please* and *thank-you*, or in suitable formulaic expressions such as *Many thanks for your last email*, or in respectful expressions of salutations and leave taking such as *Best wishes, I look forward to hearing from you*, or in appropriate sentential structures containing modal verbs such as *would you consider… may I ask you to consider…* or in the choice of function such as *complimenting or expressing appreciation* and so on.
However, the participants also said that politeness could be conveyed by *avoiding* certain linguistic elements. An avoidance of jargon, abbreviations, colloquialisms, and culturally specific information in the intercultural emails was an indication of politeness according to many participants. This avoidance of certain linguistic elements is not highlighted in the literature where there is more emphasis on what politeness *is* rather than what it is not. Some of the Australian participants indicated that politeness was also conveyed if humour was left out of the email message. Others, by contrast, said that to include humour was a relationship-building strategy and therefore, a strategy of positive politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) (see Section 5.7, p. 206 for more on Humour).

**Classification of Politeness**

Added to the absence of clear definitions of politeness, there is also a lack of consensus by the Australian participants on the classification of politeness. As mentioned in Chapter 2, different researchers place politeness into various linguistic fields, for example, semantics (Leech, 1983; Lustig & Koester, 1999), pragmatics (Bachman, 1990; Eelen, 2001; Haugh, 2003; Holmes, 2000; Thomas, 1995), sociolinguistics (Fasold, 1990; Simmons, 1994; Wierzecka, 1991), social psychology (Holtgraves, 1997; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990) and other related fields. Like the researchers in the literature, the Australian participants displayed a lack of consensus on which component of communicative competence linguistic politeness forms part. There was general consensus, however, that politeness forms part of the broad area of pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990), as politeness is concerned with social relationships and is dependent on the context. But, from the results of this study, it appears that politeness also forms part of organisational (Bachman, 1990) competence, or grammatical (Canale, 1983) competence. According to the participants, politeness involved controlling the formal structure of language including the addition of polite lexical items such as *please* and *thank-you* and producing grammatically correct sentences. Importantly, the participants also placed politeness into the category of interactive competence (Kramsch, 1983, cited in Chun, 1994). Adjusting one’s language to clarify one’s intentions in order to avoid misunderstandings constitutes politeness according to the participants. Managing discourse through maintaining coherence is part of interactive competence (Kramsch,

The lack of consensus in the literature on the meaning of politeness and confusion surrounding the classification of politeness is reflected in the absence of tools on how to assess linguistic politeness. At the time of this study, no instrument existed which could identify and assess politeness in any communication medium.

Even though the Australian participants were aware of the importance of politeness and that a lack of consensus on the meaning of politeness was revealed, the study also found that the participants were not sure how to incorporate politeness. Uncertainty about politeness was evident from the questionnaire and interview and will be discussed next.

**Uncertainty**

Many participants indicated to the researcher in both the data sources that they were not sure of the correct protocol, or of the right way to politely communicate to people whom they had never met before and who often came from a different culture. Additionally, they expressed their desire to create the right impressions with their communicating partner overseas, but were not sure how to go about it. In the questionnaire, over 70% of the Australian participants did not know which form of address to use in their email communication, and in the interview many participants made comments that “they had no answers” on this issue. As well, participants said they were aware of the importance of politeness within the language, but they were not sure how to incorporate these concepts in a way that was acceptable to the culturally different email partner. There was also confusion concerning a mutually satisfactory level of face-building and relationship-building language within the email texts. As well, confusion about other non-linguistic politeness aspects such as time and interaction was expressed by many participants. The establishment of a mutually convenient time rhythm, (that is, the time interval between messages) was one such area of confusion.
Many participants alluded to the fact that there were no current protocols or
guidelines in polite email communication for them to follow. Little recognition or
advice is given in email guides as to cultural and social differences between people
who write on email (Crystal, 2001). Differences in ages, personalities, professions,
and cultural and linguistic backgrounds need to be taken into account when
considering suitable language style for email communication (Crystal, 2001, p. 106).
Guidelines on appropriate politeness procedures in the form of a framework will be
discussed later in the chapter.

Synthesising results from both data sources, it appears that the participants were
aware that other cultures have different accounts of politeness, but they were not sure
how to go about incorporating the appropriate level and type of politeness in their
email communication. This is a recurring theme in the study and an important finding.

**Impoliteness**

Because of the uncertainty and difficulty of incorporating politeness into email
communication, a lack of politeness or impoliteness may be a consequence. In the
questionnaire, nearly one third of all Australian participants felt that the emails they
received from overseas were impolite and nearly one half of the Korean participants
thought that the emails they received from overseas were impolite. From the evidence
it appears that there is much room for improvement in the way academics and general
staff at universities handle politeness in their email communication. Some of the
reasons for perceived impoliteness according to the Australian participants, included
misusing titles, using jargon, using abbreviations and language unsuitable to
receiver’s culture, using direct language and showing no consideration for receiver’s
time or culture.

Delayed replies and unanswered requests, examples of non-linguistic impoliteness,
were also issues in the study. In both data sources, concern at the potential problems
of having to reply speedily to an email and what to do with unanswered requests were
brought to the attention of the researcher. In the interviews for example, many
participants voiced their concern about time and the lack of interaction in their email
negotiations. One participant summed up the general feeling:
Not getting a response is a problem for me. I (then) ask myself: Did I remember to send the original? Did I press the right button? Or are they just slack? Has my response been lost in cyberspace? (AInt 9)

In the questionnaire, 60% of participants said that they did not know what to do when their request was not replied to. As well, over 61% of participants said that they did not know how to reply to a difficult request. Confusion and uncertainty were apparent from the results of this study in knowing how to negotiate effectively via email such that both outgoing and incoming requests were processed in a manner that was satisfactory to both parties.

Requests not being answered satisfactorily and taking considerable time to reply to email requests were important considerations for politeness according to the participants as shown in both data sources. Suggestions from the researchers’ academic colleagues confirmed these interpretations and results. Because certain non-linguistic politeness issues were considered so important in email communication according to many participants in this study, they were included in the content of the framework for assessing politeness. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 6, Section 6.3, p. 221.

Results from the analysis of this study thus confirmed recent research, which shows that politeness indicators are diminished or altered in email discourse (Bunz & Cambell, 2002; Ma, 1996; Simmons, 1994; Walther, 1992). A potential consequence of diminished politeness in email discourse may result in diminished regard for face risk management (Goffman, 1967). When politeness indicators are diminished or altered, email may be seen as an information transaction medium, rather than an interaction based communication system supporting interpersonal relations (Harrison, 2004). In other words, email may be used by some people to transmit information only to the receiver rather than trying to establish social relationships with the addition of politeness indicators. The results of this study confirm that the Australian participants placed more emphasis on the interactional role of email in conveying politeness. In other words, they considered that politeness involved getting to know and being friendly with your communicating partner more than the Korean participants. This may be an indication of the differences between Australian and
Korean conceptualisations of politeness. There is further discussion on the role of building relationships in email communication in Section 5.5, p. 191.

**Offences**

The acknowledged existence of impoliteness in email communication, according to many participants, indicates that offences may be a likely consequence. Worse, the participants may not be aware that such offences are occurring and thus cannot do anything to repair an unfavourable communication situation. In the questionnaire, nearly 50% of all Australian participants agreed that they did not know if an offence had occurred and just less than one half of all participants said that they did not know how to rectify an offence once it had occurred. Over 50% of the participants also agreed that they did not know how to resolve a possible breakdown in communication in their email negotiations, if such breakdowns arose as a result of an offence. The large percentages of “neutral” or “unsure” figures from the participants for these important issues of offences and communication breakdowns indicated a definite lack of awareness and uncertainty as to what to do to improve the situation (see Chapter 4, Section 4.7.1, Table 4.26, p.144 for a summary). This study highlights that these important issues still remain unresolved within email communication.

**Lack of context**

Many of the confusions listed so far on the uncertainties on correctly addressing the issue of politeness and dealing with possible offences in email communication are exacerbated by the nature of email itself. We cannot see or hear our communicating partner and we do not know any of the social or cultural factors surrounding the communication from the other’s point of view. Knowledge of these factors and being able to read the non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues help us to position our receivers and to adjust our language and politeness indicators accordingly.

The lack of social context cues such as certain body language messages, apparent in face-to-face communication, may pose a barrier in email communication (Garton & Wellman, 1994; Holmes, 1994). In face-to-face contact people have immediate feedback, through body language cues, word choice and voice intonation and so on, which allows them to adjust strategies for any necessary face-saving or face-building work during the course of the interaction. Via email however, the writer cannot adjust
immediately the “frames of expectations”, due to the lack of shared contexts of communication and a difficulty in clarifying or repairing breakdowns in communication (Baron, 1998, 2001). This makes conveying politeness difficult. In written email texts, the linguistic expressions of politeness are the only vehicles of politeness. Deprived of the wealth of prosodic and non-verbal features which add important supplementary aspects to politeness, the sender of the email has recourse to verbal means of politeness only (Lee, 2004; Pilegaard, 1997). Additionally, the decontextualised nature of email moreover, may hinder the writer in knowing how to express politeness in the message, especially if the communicating partner is unknown and culturally different. It is often not apparent what forms of social etiquette are appropriate at any given time in intercultural email communication (Ma, 1996, p. 176).

Because of the lack of context in email communication, we often do not know three important variables which, according to Brown and Levinson, (1987), have a major bearing on the amount of politeness used in any interaction. Often we do not know the difference in status between the overseas email receiver and ourselves and, further, that person’s attitude to difference in status. If the email contains a request, it is difficult to know the extent of the imposition of the request for the recipient. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the sum of the status (power) distance between the communicators, the social distance between them and the weight of the request will determine the intensity of politeness used. All cultures though, have different ways of assessing each of those three factors (Lee, 2004; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). For example, some cultures place different emphases on such far-reaching social concepts as hierarchy versus equality, individual harmony versus social harmony and the nature of the public person versus the private person, which ultimately affect the degree of directness in the communication patterns of that culture (Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005). The end result is that misunderstandings may occur in email communication as the different cultures assess these concepts differently and use politeness indicators appropriate to how they see the threat to the face of the other. However, this level of politeness may not be at odds with the expectations of the overseas receiver.
Many researchers have indicated that the amount of politeness needed is incrementally linked to status and social differences between the communicators and whether or not the message contains a face-threatening speech act (Bou-Franch & Garces-Conejos, 2003; Fasold, 1990; Lakoff, 1989; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b). Requests and orders, for example, can easily threaten one’s face because they can affect autonomy, freedom of choice, and freedom from imposition (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b, p.17). They are also sensitive to power distribution (Yli-Jokipii, 1998, p. 126).

Greater politeness is usually associated with more face-threatening speech acts, higher speaker status and greater interpersonal distance (Holtgraves, 1997, p. 641). However, each culture assesses the variables of status, interpersonal distance and the weight of the request differently (Lee, 2004). Due to its lack of context, email has limited ability to allow a full understanding of the different ways these variables are expressed (Lee, 2004; Ma, 1996; Simmons, 1994).

The Australian participants voiced their concern at not knowing these three important variables in their email communication. Many participants indicated that if they knew how the culture of their email partner viewed such social issues as status, social distance and basic principles of negotiation, they would then be able to match the politeness indicators accordingly. In other words, many Australian participants indicated that if they knew the parameters of relationship-building with their unseen and unknown overseas email partner, how importantly the receivers viewed their professional position, how much of an obligation the request was in the other culture, then appropriate politeness strategies would be more easily embedded. Via email, it is not always easy to assess how friendly or distant to appear, how much respect should be conveyed or how to ask for favours from someone unknown of a different status from a different culture. There was evidence from the Australian participants of a willingness to learn these aspects, but they were not sure how to go about it.

Some Australian participants also shared with the researcher the fact that many overseas email partners did not easily and completely communicate with them due to the difference in status and the fact that those of lower status could not ask direct questions using email to someone of a higher status in another country. Some also said that they were not aware of the status position of the intended receiver so could not adjust their politeness levels accordingly. Some said that if someone of a lower
status from another culture wrote to them via email with less deference than they were used to, for example, omission of their correct title, then that was considered impolite and offence often resulted.

**Status and Titles**

The issues of status and in particular an awareness of differences in social status were important considerations for the Australian participants. In the questionnaire, it was found that over 40% of all participants were aware of the social status differences in their email communication and adjusted their language accordingly. The use of titles was important for the Australian participants both for addressing their overseas email partners and in how they themselves like to be addressed in their incoming emails. This point was confirmed by use of the software package *Leximancer* (Smith, 2002), which analysed all the qualitative data in the questionnaire (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, Table 4.9, p.117). It showed that the concept “titles” was the third most iterated concept in the data. Although important, the use of titles as an indication of politeness was not nearly as important for the Australian participants as it was for the Korean participants. This was evident even with the small number in the Korean cohort. The difference in the attitudes to titles and awareness of social status between the two cohorts was marked. According to the Australian participants the use of titles, although important, did not rate as highly as using formal language and including a friendly helpful attitude in the language. The Australian participants considered formality of language to convey politeness but according to them the use of titles was not a major component of formal language.

The Australian participants’ relatively low emphasis on correct titles as a politeness indicator compared to the Korean participants may indicate a different conceptualisation of politeness. This may be explained by contemporary cultural theory (Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1997, 2002). A cultural dimension important for possibly explaining the Korean and Australian difference in attitude to titles is the power distance dimension. Power distance, or the extent to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally, differs from culture to culture (Clyne, 1994; Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1997, 2002; Kim et al., 1999; Mead, 1990; St Amant, 2002). Certain cultures like Australia for example, have a low power distance and
others such as Korea have a high power distance (Hofstede, 1997, 2002; Kim et al., 1999). In high power distance cultures, hierarchies of power are accepted and even expected by the people in those cultures. In general, the people in high power distance cultures do not feel comfortable in approaching people in more powerful positions without the necessary protocols in the form of communication rules, such as the use of titles. By contrast, people in low power distance cultures as in Australia for example, do not feel so inferior to bosses or others in positions of power than say, people in Korea. People are treated as more or less equals regardless of their rank in society in Australian society (Hofstede, 1997; Kim et al., 1999). Consequently, there is more freedom to address one another as one would like, instead of obedience to a communication protocol such as the strict use of titles, and face-building language.

**Formality of writing**

According to nearly two thirds of the Australian participants, the best way to deal with status differences or uncertainties surrounding status was to present themselves formally rather than informally. This result was confirmed by the Leximancer analysis (Smith, 2002), which showed that the concept “formal” had a relative count of 100% in all the qualitative data on the section “social status” in the questionnaire (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, Table 4.9, p.117). According to these participants, formality of language shows respect for socially and culturally different others. The ways that the Australian participants said they conveyed formality of writing included addressing and signing off formally, avoiding colloquialisms and slang, using full titles, using a signature block and using a friendly tone. The last component, using a friendly tone, seems to be contradictory with characteristics pertaining to a formal style. However, many Australian participants claimed that using a friendly tone was an important characteristic of a polite email style. The use of formal language, which includes the use of titles, will often convey respect according to these participants. Displaying respect is one of the main principles of intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester, 1999, p. 331). Lustig and Koester (1999) explain the connection between formality and respect. “Language that can be interpreted as expressing concern, interest, and an understanding of others will often convey respect as will formality in language, including the use of titles, the absence of jargon, and an increased attention to politeness rituals” (p.329).
Formal language is characterised by special “attention to form” (Labov, 1972), where the formal writer tries to approximate as close as possible, the standard form and pronunciation of the language as it is defined in places of authority such as textbooks. A prototype of formal language could be, for example, the legal writing in a will, whereas a prototype of informal writing could be, for example, text messages on mobile phones.

The Australian participants’ preference for formal language seems at odds with the popular perception of an informal style of communication as the norm in Australia. As mentioned above, current cultural theory places Australia as a low power distance culture (Hofstede, 1997, 2002; Kim et al., 1999). In low power distance cultures people are not generally restrained by rules and protocol imposed from without, for example, rules for formal communication (Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1997; Kim et al., 1999; Mead, 1990). Within those cultures, people therefore have more freedom to communicate to one another, as they would like. This freedom however, may not be evident when communication transcends cultural boundaries. The results of this study show how expected communication protocols may change when people communicate to others outside their own culture.

However, the preference for formal language in their overseas email communication may highlight the Australian participants’ desire to avoid misunderstanding. In the questionnaire and interviews, many Australian participants said that the use of formal language to overseas email partners was necessary as they said it helped to avoid misunderstandings. They expressed their difficulty in trying to convey accurate, intended meanings, often in complex concepts, to an unseen and unknown email partner whose first language was not English. They indicated that the use of formal language and style was an important way to convey those intended meanings without creating ambiguities or non-intended sub-texts and nuances in the email message. They also said that if their email partners were from other cultures, it was unlikely that they both shared similar background frameworks of knowledge. It was therefore important, according to the participants, that the language was clearly expressed with no words or expressions that depended on the context or background knowledge for meaning.
Heylighen & Dewaele (1995) echo this belief when they say that formal language, either written or spoken, is used when there is a need for unequivocal understanding for the precise meaning of a message and when misunderstandings are to be avoided. Due to the absence of context, email communication should not contain any implicature (Grice, 1975) and deictic words (Baron, 1998, 2001). All language in email must be attached to a context (Baron, 1998; Crystal, 2001; Lan, 2000b). In other words, there must be a link between the words themselves and a concrete part of the place and time of the intended message or the spatio-temporal setting.

Deictic words or words that depend on the context for meaning should not be used in email communication (Crystal, 2001; Holmes, 1994). Examples of deictic words and phrases include, *his, them, here, over there, upstairs, now, tomorrow, did you get it to go over there?* and so on. These words and phrases depend on the context for meaning and, as such, have variable meanings. They are thus unsuitable for email messages as there is no shared context of communication. As well, expressions which pertain to a certain culture are context dependent and therefore depend on common knowledge. They are thus unsuitable for email communication. Examples include, *N.S.W., beat around the bush, John Howard, $100,* and so on. In the questionnaire and interview, the Australian participants said that they avoided such words and phrases in their email communication. To do so was considered polite according to many participants.

**Direct and Indirect Language**

Another dimension of email communication that was found important for politeness was the use of direct or indirect language. As mentioned previously, the use of indirect language is an important negative politeness strategy. Indirect language considers the face and the space of the other and attempts to minimise any imposition asked (Bond et al., 2000, p. 68). According to many researchers, indirect language is used to show greater politeness than direct language (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983; Watts, 2003). Some researchers place indirectness as a primary linguistic mechanism for politeness and face management (Fraser, 1990; Holtgraves, 1997; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1995; Wood & Kroger, 1991), and others place indirectness high on the politeness continuum (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
Indirect expression style refers to the use of messages to conceal or delay one’s true intentions (Bond et al., 2000; Hara & Kim, 2004; Ma 1996; Nelson et al., 2002). Indirect language usually adopts avoidance style in face negotiations and assumes a non-confrontational attitude. People who communicate indirectly tend not to say what is on their minds immediately and rely instead on suggestion and inference (Moran, 2001). Indirect language can include the use of negative politeness strategies such as hinting, being vague, overgeneralising, using metaphors and understating (Hara & Kim, 2004; Nelson et al., 2002). It can also include face-building language which may or may not have relevance to the aim of the email message but which serves the purpose of attending to the face of the receiver.

The Australian participants revealed their uncertainty in both data sources over the choice between directness and indirectness. They did not know whether to be direct in their intercultural email correspondence and thus have a clearer, more straightforward message or whether to make the language more indirect so as to appear more polite. The key, however, lay in striking a balance between the two, that is to create a clear and at the same time polite message. It was found that requests worded indirectly tended to be more polite. It was also found if the email language displayed too direct a style then some discomfort may be experienced by culturally different others.

Direct language, often cited as a characteristic of email discourse (Baron, 1998, 2001; Gains, 1999; Holmes, 1994; Lan, 2000a; Ma, 1996), had mixed appeal according to the Australian participants. Direct expression style refers to the use of language to show one’s true intentions (Ma, 1996). People who communicate directly say what is on their minds and mean what they say (Hara & Kim, 2004; Moran, 2001; Nelson et al., 2002). Directness tends to be more associated with establishing meaning whereas indirectness is more concerned with establishing relationships (Hara & Kim, 2004, p. 9). Direct expression style can include short sentences with little or minimal face-building language embedded, direct questions and imperative mood (Holtgraves, 1997). In the questionnaire, many participants cited direct language in email as being polite, as it was considered to portray clarity.

However, direct requests made via email were seen as impolite by most participants in this study. The speech act of “requesting” may be inherently face-threatening in English (Ma, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b; Suh, 1999; Yli-Jokipii, 1998), to both
requester and requestee, and as such requires more indirect language structures and 
politeness strategies, especially if the requestee (receiver) is unknown (Brown & 
Levinson, 1987, Suh, 1999). Requests worded directly are a threat to face and, 
according to Brown & Levinson (1987), those requests without any softening 
language included (“baldly on record”), rate the highest on the face threat continuum. 
An example of a “baldly on record” imperative was given by an Australian participant 
in the interview. When asked if he ever perceived a lack of politeness in the emails he 
received from overseas (Q2), he gave this answer:

*I don’t like pushy requests expressed by imperatives, an example (could be) 
‘Send me a copy of your available times and include your contact details’. 
(AInt7)*

This Australian participant disliked these two imperative requests (Send me a copy 
…, and include your details…), which he considered “pushy”. These types of request 
may be examples of the increasingly apparent direct, transactional nature of email 
communication. The sender has not added any softening language with the requests, 
which may save the face of the receiver. Politeness strategies can be added to this type 
of request so that face may be saved and even validated. Such language may include 
negative politeness strategies which respect the receiver’s own world, for example, ‘*If 
you have the time, could you send me a copy…. ’* The addition, ‘*if you have the time’, 
minimises the imposition and the illocutionary force of the request (Watts, 2003). It 
shows that the sender is aware and considerate of the receiver’s busy schedule. The 
other addition ‘*could you’, shows the sender is giving the receiver an option, as the 
modal verb ‘*could’ implies that the receiver may or may not be able to send a copy 
and as such, does not assume a willingness of the receiver to comply to the sender’s 
request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Giving options is an important politeness factor 
(Fraser, 1990; Lakoff, 1989), as it shows consideration for other and also gives the 

The use of direct or indirect language for preferred email communication style may be 
explained by certain cultural factors. According to some researchers (Gudykunst et 
.al., 2005; Hall, 1976a, 1976b, 1984; Moran, 2001), low context cultures exhibit direct 
communication styles where the use of language is used to show what is on the 
speaker’s mind. The style is usually brief, to the point and often includes direct
questions and the use of clarification devices when misunderstandings arise. Low context cultures, which include Australia (Hall, 1976a, 1976b, 1984), place high priority in the words themselves as the principal meaning source. In low context cultures, the mass of the information tends to be contained explicitly in the words (Gudykunst, 1997, Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hall, 1984; Hofstede, 1997; Ma, 1996; Moran, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005).

5.3 Politeness: The Korean Participants’ Views

A less detailed analysis of Korean results is given in this section because of the relative differences in sample sizes between the Australian and the Korean cohorts. Due to the small Korean sample size, all analyses and discussion arising from it are preliminary and are therefore, tentative.

Titles and Politeness

The most important outcome from the analysis of politeness from the Korean data was the participants’ emphasis on the use of correct titles to convey politeness. For the Koreans, the use of correct titles was a very important element in their concept of politeness, as they so strongly indicated in the questionnaire. In the interviews, the Korean participants also agreed that politeness in general was very important in email communication, not just in the use of titles. The Korean participants, as described by the Australian participants, also demonstrated the subjective nature of politeness. That is, most Korean participants had a different interpretation of the meaning and role of politeness. Many facets to politeness were given in their answers. Like the Australian cohort, the Korean participants described to the researcher their uncertainty about incorporating appropriate politeness in their email messages. They voiced their concern that it was hard to get the balance between clarity and politeness on email. The main ways they said they showed politeness was through the use of correct titles and formality of language. One participant summed up the general feeling:

*It is definitely important in addressing to use one’s title a lot in Korea and Japan – you can’t go wrong if you say ‘professor’ in every sentence even if you’re saying something almost insulting. (KInt5)*
There was a much stronger link between formality of language and politeness for the Korean participants than the Australian participants. Many participants indicated to the researcher that, for them, politeness equated with formality. This may reflect the general conceptualisation of politeness in Korea as one encompassing the use of honorifics. Honorifics is the use of certain elements of language such as titles, phrases, or grammatical forms, to convey respect. Politeness, in Korea, involves to a large extent, the use of honorifics, especially if the person being addressed is socially superior (Chen & Chung, 1994; Goody, 1978). Another possible explanation for equating politeness with formality by the Korean participants may be the fact that the Korean participants were writing in English, as non-native writers are more likely to stick to the rules of formal writing (Lan, 2000b, p. 4).

The fact that correct titles was a major politeness consideration for the Korean participants was confirmed by the use of Leximancer (Smith, 2002). This software package analysed all Korean qualitative questionnaire data on politeness, and revealed that the concept of “titles” was the highest scoring ranked concept in the graph by a factor of 100% (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2, Table 4.5, p 109 for a summary).

Correct titles or the lack thereof may account for the high percentage (43.8%) of Korean participants who considered their incoming emails to be impolite. Importantly this figure suggests room for improvement in email writing generally. It may also caution people from Australia who write emails to Korean academics to be particularly careful with politeness indicators and especially the use of titles in their language. The main reasons why the Korean participants considered their incoming emails to be impolite included lack of appropriate title, including using first name only on the initial email contact, lack of interest in communicating partner, no opening and closing of message and lack of face-saving language included.

In the interview however, there was an example of how variation of expected cultural norms can occur within a culture. One Korean participant listed this reason, which was at odds with all other data, when asked if he ever noticed a lack of politeness in the emails he received from non-Korean speaking people:

Yes, one of my English speaking acquaintances considers my email sexually harassing. I began my mail to her as ‘Dear Alexandra’. She wrote (to) me that I could not use ‘Dear’ or ‘Dear First Name’. I showed my email (the
Possibly trying to accommodate popular perceptions of English norms in the area of addressing, this Korean participant felt comfortable using a first name in his address to an English speaking female recipient. However, the use of a first name as a title by a Korean sender to an unknown overseas receiver is at odds with current cultural theory as well as results in this study. The use of first name was not acceptable to this particular receiver who was offended by such informality. Again, this seems to contradict the popular notion that many English-speaking cultures exhibit more informal communication styles. This example illustrates the type of offence that can easily occur when politeness indicators are not used appropriately or according to the personal preference of the receiver which may, at times, be at odds with certain cultural stereotypes.

Social Status

Results showing that the use of correct titles was a strong indicator of politeness for the Korean participants may be explained by the importance of social status in that culture. According to the results of this study, a high percentage (75%) of Korean participants said that they were aware of differences in social status in their emails to non-Korean speaking people. This represented a large increase on the Australian percentage (40.8%). From the data, it seems as if Koreans are much more aware of social status than Australians. According to the Koreans, formality of writing, use of correct titles and more complex sentence construction were ways to respect social status.

Correct use of titles and awareness of social status, can be a characteristic of the formality of social life in some Asian cultures, including Korea (Chen & Chung, 1994). The formality of social life involves smooth and predictable verbal interactions between people as they are considered a way to save face or avoid embarrassing situations in these cultures. The use of the correct titles forms part of predictable verbal interactions in social life in Korean culture and the absence of such protocol can mean loss of face (Chen & Chung, 1994; Wood & Kroger, 1991).
Hierarchies also form part of formal social life in Korean culture (Lee, 2004). Confucian philosophy, which has been and still remains an important ideological influence in many Asian cultures, promotes and respects relationship hierarchies (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Respecting hierarchies forms one of the four central tenets of Confucian teaching (the others are Jen (loosely translated means self discipline, benevolence, piety and trust), the family and education (Chen & Chung, 1994). The hierarchical nature of relationships requires formalised communication rules and patterns (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 1997). Included in the communication rules and patterns of these cultures, is the use of titles and honorifics, the use of which reinforces the Confucian cultural value of hierarchical relationships. Moreover, the use of titles and honorifics is especially important towards superiors, as it is seen as observing the natural order (Chen & Chung, 1994).

Korean culture is considered by some researchers to be one where there is a high level of uncertainty avoidance (Hoeklin, 1995; Hofstede, 1997; Straub, 1994). Uncertainty avoidance or the degree of tolerance in a culture for uncertainty and ambiguity differs within and across individuals and cultures. In cultures where it is said that the level of uncertainty avoidance is high, such as Korea (Hofstede, 1983, 1984b, 1997), various forms of procedures and practices are put in place in order to reduce the level of uncertainty for the members of that culture. Rules, conventions and even religions are thus formed in order to protect people from the unpredictability of future events and human behaviours. Such conventions could include the use of face-saving or face-building language in personal encounters. Communication patterns of high avoidance cultures often display such procedures and practices. To avoid uncertainty and ambiguity in social settings, some cultures put in place ritualistic, polite scripts as part of the communication rules, especially if the communication is to strangers (Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005; Wood & Kroger, 1991).

Politeness is considered more important when communicating to strangers in these cultures as it can temper the uncertainty associated with such risky interaction, especially in an email where the communicating partner is unseen and often unknown (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990). Adherence to these scripts and rules enables the members of that culture to predict interactions and to know their place in such interactions (Ting-Toomey, 1988, 1994, 2005). Non-adherence to these scripts, such as incorrect
use of, or omission of titles can be face-threatening to some people who are used to conventional practice. If established and expected communication rules are adhered to, for example correct use of title, face is not lost (Chen & Chung, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 1994, 2005).

Furthermore, some Korean participants said in the interview and questionnaire that they wanted more face-building language included in email texts. They indicated that they did not like email communication to have a direct transactional essence. The addition of face-building language supports and encourages polite email communication according to many Korean participants. An example of such face-building language is found in Email Thread 2 (see Chapter 7, Section 7.5.2, p. 268):

*We want to include distinguished guests like you for the conference. (Email 1)*

Such face-building and face-saving language, especially at the outset to the email, has an important function in rhetorical style as it attempts to create an abstract bridge connecting different cultures’ writing styles. Pathos, or the recognition of the reader (or receiver) by way of face-building language, is one of the three fundamental elements to written texts (Campbell, 1998). The other two are logos (the subject of the message) and ethos (the claim and justification of the author) (Campbell, 1998). Each culture interprets the priority of each element differently (Aristotle, 1984). Pathos is especially important in Asian cultures as it confirms an awareness of the reader’s (or receiver’s) emotions, conditions or needs by the writer (or sender) (Campbell, 1998). The use of such face-building language has another important function, that of creating a context for the imminent goal of the message. Context in communication has a much stronger importance in some cultures over others. High context cultures are ones where the context of communication assumes considerable importance in interpreting meaning (Chen, 1998; Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hall, 1976a, 1984). Context of communication can include many variables, verbal as well as non-verbal, such as the place of communication, the role of the communicators, their status differences, their relationship, their norms, habits and customs, their body language, their dress, posture and so on. In a high context culture, such as Korea (Clyne, 1994; Hall, 1976a, 1984), the context of communication is important in deriving the full meaning of the message. In high context cultures, variables such as those listed above add to or augment the meanings found in the words. In other words, several sources,
apart from the words themselves, convey just as much meaning. Examples of other sources include the nature of the communication, the participants and their relationship and status differences, background knowledge, body language, subtleties and so on. However, notions of high context communication appear at odds with data from the questionnaire in which 75% of Korean participants indicated that they liked direct communication in their email messages. This is discussed further on the next page.

In addition to the use of negative politeness (respect for other) such as the use of titles, many Korean participants wanted to receive positive politeness (relationship building) indicators in their incoming emails. One Korean participant was offended by an absence of such positive politeness strategies in his incoming intercultural email communication. He gave this answer when asked about a lack of politeness from non-Korean speaking people:

> Yes, just the way he talked (in the email). I was recruiting some English instructors and just one of them was not polite enough. He talked about what he wanted and never wanted to hear what our situation was like here. (KQ11)

According to this Korean participant, the sender did not include in the email any language of solidarity, interest or involvement and did not seek out the point of view of the receiver. Consequently, there was no sharing of knowledge (Scollon & Scollon 1995) and as a result, the receiver’s own face projection or self-image was not accepted (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ting Toomey, 2005). If, however, the sender had expressed interest in the receiver’s world, by way of warm comments showing concern for receiver, it would have engendered a commonly created viewpoint and thus feelings of solidarity. Such comments could include, Does this fit in with the way you would like?…. or Can you tell me more about your program… it sounds interesting? The use of the modal verbs would, can, the attitudinal epithet, interesting and second person pronominal use you would like, can you tell me more about your program, are examples of the language of solidarity. In using such language, the receiver’s face is accepted and even validated (Brown & Levinson 1987).
Direct and Indirect Language

Indirect language, especially for requests, was another example of negative politeness that the Korean participants considered important for politeness. Both the Australian and Korean participants emphasised that requests were impolite if they were not worded in indirect language. In the questionnaire, one Korean participant listed her preferred form for a “request” as *I was wondering if you could possibly do this for me*.... This linguistic structure illustrates several types of negative politeness strategies, which show non-imposition and respect for receiver’s own world. On the scale of politeness, this form rates very highly (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is an example of conventional indirectness which is common in “off record” requests as it is really the sender wondering to him/herself about the request rather than directly asking for something. Positive and negative politeness strategies (using modal verbs, for example, *could* and formulaic expressions, for example, *possibly*) have been added to soften this request. The negative politeness strategies show a desire on the part of the sender for non-imposition or not assuming that the request will be automatically carried out. Here the sender was almost giving the receiver the option to choose whether or not to carry out the request such was the concern for negative politeness towards the receiver. Giving receiver options in requests is a principle of politeness in English (Lakoff, 1989, 1990).

Asian cultures consider the use of indirectness in speech strategies as offering greater politeness (Fraser, 1990, p. 221; Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 29), where the values of preserving harmony and concern for saving face are primary (Clyne, 1994). According to the literature, high context cultures like Korea are said to exhibit indirect communication styles where language may be used to conceal or delay one’s true intentions in the communication process (Hara & Kim, 2004, p. 3). Communication styles in these cultures are often non-assertive, indirect and sometimes assume a non-confrontational style (McLaren, 1998).

5.4 Summary of the Participants’ Views of Politeness

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 above showed the results of politeness perceptions of Australian and Korean academics in their email communications from both data sources of questionnaire and interview. It was found that considerations of politeness were very
important in email negotiations, especially if other cultures are involved. Uncertainty about how to include appropriate politeness indicators was also revealed in the two data sources from both Australia and Korea. The use of politeness strategies was found to be an important way to consider face aspects both for sender and receiver (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967; Ting-Toomey, 2005), although the two cultures indicated different preferences. The Australian participants placed more emphasis on positive politeness while the Korean participants indicated a preference for negative politeness in their email communication. Politeness indicators include linguistic expressions that promote solidarity between sender and receiver and also that show a consideration and interest for the other. As seen from the results of this research, consideration of culturally different others in email communication may include such factors as giving a full title for address and using formality in language. The results also showed that certain cultural backgrounds do not easily allow a freedom of address for members of that culture. It was found that some people may feel uncomfortable when their familiar and established address procedures are contravened.

A level of discomfort may also be experienced by culturally different others when email language displays too direct a style. Some cultures prefer indirect communication styles from unknown receivers, especially for the speech act of requests, which may be inherently face-threatening (Ma, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b) and sensitive to cultural, contextual and linguistic variation (Yli-Jokipii, 1998, p. 123). These results caution that the contemporary bias towards informality, directness and brevity, popular in current email communication, needs therefore to be kept in perspective (Baron, 2001; Crystal, 2001; Gains, 1999; Lan, 2000a; Ma, 1996).

5.5 Relationships (and Choice of Words): The Australian and Korean Participants’ Views

A briefer analysis of the concepts of Relationships and Choice of Words is given in order to address the first of the two secondary research questions: Does email allow for social presence to develop between users? If so, how does language change as a result?
After conceptual analysis, Australia and Korean data were grouped together into the following interconnecting themes which are discussed below under the headings:

**Relationship-Building;**
- Social Presence;
- Raising Levels of Social Presence;
- Adaptation to Different Cultural Email Styles;
- Successful Negotiations.

**and Choice of Words;**
- Desirable Word Choice;
- Words to Avoid in Polite Email Communication;
- Appropriate Lengths for Polite Email Messages;
- Language Degeneration.

Conceptual themes which form part of the main heading of Relationship-Building are discussed next, followed by a discussion of those themes for the heading, Choice of Words.

### 5.5.1 Relationship-Building

**Social Presence**

Social presence is the ability of one person in any communication act to feel the intelligence, intentions and sensory impressions of the other (Tu, 2001), or the ability to feel that others are jointly involved in communicative interaction (Walther, 1992, p. 54). Factors that contribute to enhanced social presence in face-to-face communication are facial expression, direction of gaze, posture, dress, non-verbal and vocal cues and so on (Tu, 2001). All communication media differ in the amount of social presence that they convey. Current communication research cites email to be low in social presence (Dandi, 2003; Holmes, 1994; Sherblom, 1988; Walther, 1992). In other words, email, as a communication channel, has limited capacity to convey contextual information, non-verbal elements or backchanneling devices. Consequently, email users may not feel the intelligence, intentions and sensory
impressions of the other, (Tu, 2001) or even an awareness of the communicating partner (Fang, 1998). Due to these limitations, email is said to be effective only for conveying simple and less personal messages (Daft & Lengel, 1986, p. 560, cited in Lee, 1994, p. 144; Sherblom, 1988; Ulijn & Campbell, 1999).

However, the amount of social presence in email can be increased through the use of certain strategies (Lee, 1994; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). It is possible to create situational co-presence in email communication to make up for the absence of physical presence (Bays, 1998; Garton & Wellman, 1994). Strategies which could increase or enhance levels of social presence include comments showing concern for receiver, other warm comments, personal responses and anecdotes, especially at the outset of the email (Tu, 2001). Effort made to increase the amount of social presence within any communication medium is important as more complex messages can be conveyed and more successful communication may result when the social presence is raised (Dandi, 2003; Fang, 1998). As well, increased levels of social presence in email greatly enhance the ability to influence one’s communicating partner (Dandi, 2003). This also is an important consideration in decision-making for any academic or business negotiation. One Korean participant engaged the use of ancillary technology embedded within email to increase the level of social presence, as seen in this comment:

My email has a personal signature and a website attached where you can find my picture if you want – those kinds of things can contribute a little bit here and there (to developing an online relationship). (KInt7)

Ways of increasing the amount of social presence in intercultural email communication differed according to the two groups of participants in this study. Both groups gave many diverse themes that constituted relationship formation for them. In other words, there was a lack of consensus on the various ways relationships via email could be established, according to the participants. This closely parallels with the concept of politeness in this study where a similar lack of consensus showed that most participants had a different viewpoint on how politeness could be linguistically realised. However, both groups cited two main ways of forming successful online relationships: showing respect and showing consideration for the other. However, the ways of linguistically realising those ways differed according to culture. The Australian participants indicated that including personal anecdotes and
using helpful language made forming relationships online easier. Three Australian
participants summed up the general feeling:

(There was) a realisation that when both of us became more relaxed in our use
of language, it was much easier to understand each other. (AQ36)

It became warmer, more personal and personal anecdotes were added (and)
mutual encouragement (was) given. (AQ115)

Yes, the (French) gent became more humorous/gentle. I think he changed due
in part to my using culture specific humour during our email exchange. His
emails were longer, friendlier with the detail I needed. (AQ81)

By contrast, the Korean participants listed strategies such as finding commonalities
between sender and receiver, replying promptly, and using polite sentence
construction, rather than helpful language or personal anecdotes as the main ways to
increase feelings of social presence. Current research in the literature agrees that the
use of polite sentence construction can enrich email communication (Bunz &
Cambell, 2002; Lee, 2004; Ma, 1996; Simmons, 1994). Politeness, included in an
email message, can act as a social cue creating higher levels of social presence (Bunz
& Cambell, 2002).

Increasing levels of social presence and being aware of different ways to achieve it,
are important constructs in polite email communication. If an email message conveys
more interpersonal or social presence, the medium will be used more efficiently (Tu,
2001). On the other hand, if attention to social presence is ignored, there is a risk that
people will avoid using the medium (Sherblom, 1988; Tu, 2001), or simply that the
messages may become more and more impersonal and limited communication may
result (Walther, 1992). Having an awareness of different cultural ways of forming
professional relationships is an important factor in email communication. In this
study, the Korean participants’ preference for correct form and polite sentence
construction in establishing online relationships may be different to the Australian
participants’ preference for personalising their email messages, but the aim of forming
successful online professional relationships remains essentially the same.

Increasing levels of social presence may be easier for some cultures over others and as
well, some individuals over others. Some cultures or people may find it easier to
personalise email messages by embedding language which can increase levels of
social presence, than others. In cultures where the context of communication is high, as in Korea for example, attainment of social presence requires factors not compatible with email communication such as knowledge of the social context, background knowledge of the communicators, silence during the dialogue and so on. Moreover, people in high context cultures may feel uncomfortable disclosing information about themselves in such a low context online environment as email (Chen, 1998; St Amant, 2002). Thus, in these cultures, the low context nature of email may only allow feelings of social presence to develop to a certain extent, not enough to become fully sensitive to the personal attributes of the overseas email partners.

**Raising Levels of Social Presence**

Even though both groups had many opinions or strategies on how to improve levels of social presence or relationship-building in their email communication, there was evidence in both data sources of doubt and uncertainty as to how to go about it. Just over half of all participants (53.8% Australian and 56.3% Korean) said that they felt more at ease at the end of an intercultural thread than at the beginning. These figures, although representing a majority, indicate that there is a need for assistance to help the participants develop the necessary skills to improve their interactional language in email communication (Thorne, 2003). For the Korean participants, a high percentage of responses were “neutral” for questions on relationship-building which further pointed to possible uncertainty and doubt. As is predictable in a high context culture (Gudykunst et al., 2005; Hall, 1976a), the Korean participants did not indicate that they could overcome the low context nature of email to develop the social presence sufficiently so that the partners become sensitive to culturally different others.

**Adaptation to Different Cultural Email Styles**

In the questionnaire, there was limited evidence that the Australian and Korean participants adapted to different cultural email styles. 35.9% of Australian and 43.8% of Korean participants said that they adapted to the language style of their email partner (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6.1, Table 4.22, p.135). Even lower figures were recorded on perceptions of change in language style with only 33.1% of Australian and 25% of Korean participants believing that their overseas partner’s language style changed to accommodate cultural differences during an email negotiation thread.
These low figures indicate that email language styles remain fairly rigid which is perhaps due to general uncertainty and a lack of understanding of other cultural ways of writing. The high percentages for neutral or uncertain (27.1% Australian and 50% Korean) associated with these low figures underline this lack of understanding and uncertainty. From these figures, it would seem that there is a definite need for assistance to help the participants develop the necessary skills to adapt to different email language styles (Kim et al., 1999).

There was however, some indication of adaptation from the participants in the data from the interview. The main way that both the Australian and Korean participants said in the interviews that they adapted to their culturally different partner was in the use of the “echo approach”. This process, otherwise known as “convergence in speech accommodation” (Bunz & Cambell, 2002), involves mirroring the same level of politeness, friendliness, tone, use of title and word choice evident in the received email. This approach is supported in the literature where it states that often users accommodate towards politeness markers in their received email texts and structure their response accordingly (Bunz & Cambell, 2002). As well, people are more influenced in their email practice by the behaviour of their correspondents than by the recommendations of style guides (Crystal, 2001, p. 107; Lan, 2000a, 2000b). These comments summed up the process of the “echo approach”:

*My strategy is to follow whatever way they signed their name. (KInt8)*

*I try to get into the same ‘wavelength’ (pragmatically and politeness wise) as my communicating partners. (AQ55)*

**Successful negotiations**

Most of the participants from both groups had positive perceptions concerning the success of their email negotiations. 90% of Australian participants and 93.8% of Korean participants considered their email communications successful. Even though they expressed uncertainty as to how to go about suitable email communication, their perceptions of the outcomes were positive.

The following section includes a discussion of the conceptual themes under the main heading Choice of Words.
5.5.2 Choice of Words

*Once a word is uttered, a team of four horses cannot drag it back.*

(Chinese proverb) Anecdotes of Great Men

From the data, two sets of word choice for more polite email communication emerged. The first set incorporated words considered desirable and the second set listed words and expressions necessary to avoid, according to the participants.

Desirable Word Choice for Polite Email Communication

According to both groups of participants, language for polite email communication included formal, simple, direct words and expressions. Many Australian participants voiced their attention and concern to the researcher in carefully choosing words for the purpose of clarity of expression, especially if their overseas partners were not native English speakers. Over half of the Australian participants (52.5%) indicated that they *did* change their word choice in overseas email communication. Their main aims in choosing words were to ensure clarity and to avoid misunderstanding. This could be achieved by simplifying words and expressions, incorporating correct grammar, punctuation and spelling and maintaining formal language structures. Many participants communicated to the researcher their strong feelings on the importance of paying strict attention to word choice so that sub-textual meanings and misunderstandings would not arise and offences would not result. Strategies included carefully proof reading all emails before sending, asking others to check language and allowing emails to sit for a day for careful reviewing the next day and so on. One Australian participant confided to the researcher that, for the more important email negotiations, he “agonised over every word”. Some Australian participants gave these opinions on suitable word choice:

*I try to use wording which is simple, clear, unambiguous, especially to non-native English speakers. (AQ47)*

*S sometimes I use the simplest words and phrases to optimise the ease with which they can be read and understood. (AQ116)*

However, the choice of words could not be so simple as to appear patronising to the non-English speaking email partner. A potential underestimating of the English proficiency levels of overseas email partners by the use of oversimplified words and
phrases may result in unnecessary offence. Intercultural email communication, according to many participants, was a balancing act of choosing simple yet adequate words, clarity in expression without too much directness, sufficient and appropriate politeness indicators without verbosity or obsequiousness and pertinent and relevant cultural knowledge.

There were mixed results on the subject of direct communication between the Australian and Korean participants. In the questionnaire, a strong 75.0% of Korean participants indicated that they preferred direct communication and liked to “get straight to the point of the email”. By contrast, only 35.0% of Australian participants preferred direct communication style on email. In the interview, however, a majority of participants from both groups said that direct language was preferable as it was able to portray more clarity. Contradictory data from the two data sources appears to be evident here. Discrepancies exist between data from the interview in which the Australian participants cited a preference for direct language and data from in the questionnaire in which many said they preferred a more indirect style. Different sources offer contrasting data.

The Korean data also seems contradictory. Their preference for direct language appears contrary to popular perceptions of a high context culture where communication styles tend to be more indirect (Hara & Kim, 2004). For the Korean participants, the use of direct communication is evidently taking hold on their email language styles. Because email is so quick and convenient, some Korean participants are finding that they are dispensing with “small talk” and “face-building” language usually associated with Korean and other Asian cultures. These results are important as they show that the low context nature of email may be having an effect on the communication patterns of a high context culture like Korea which, in the past, have been marked by indirection and circular approaches (Hara & Kim, 2004; Kim et al., 1999; Ross, 2001; St Amant, 2002). Changes in communication patterns also appear to be evident due to the popularity of low context media such as email, SMS, mobile phones and chat rooms with young Asian students. These low context media seem to be the preferred choice of these students to develop and maintain relationships. Their popularity further points to contradictions in traditional perceptions of cultural communication patterns. These patterns appear to be changing as a result of repeated
use of low context media such as email. Email, therefore, seems to have modified or changed some previously identified characteristics of face-to-face intercultural communication (Kim et al., 1999; Ma, 1996).

On a continuum of clarity, directness and indirectness are located at opposite ends with indirectness signaling less clarity. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the more indirectness in the text, through the use of deference, hedging and softening, the more that clarity is lost in the process. Indirectness, however, remains a primary linguistic mechanism for politeness and face management (Bond et al., 2000; Brown & Levinson 1987; Hara & Kim, 2004: Holtgraves, 1997; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Sifianou, 1997). Many participants indicated that the medium of email is best suited to direct language, a fact supported by current email research (Fang, 1998; Ma, 1996). Indirect communication, by contrast, is not so suited to email as it relies heavily on context for creating meanings (Chen, 1998; Ma, 1996).

Both groups agreed however, that for the language function of “requests”, indirect language style is preferable. Orders and requests can easily threaten relationships because they can affect the receiver’s autonomy, freedom of choice, and freedom from imposition in English (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b). Requests are also sensitive to power distribution (Yli-Jokipii, 1998, p. 126). A request needs to be worded in English therefore, in such a way that the receiver feels that his/her rights to fair treatment have been adequately addressed. This can be achieved by wording the request indirectly with appropriate politeness indicators. If the request is worded too directly and abruptly, the receiver may feel his/her autonomy has been imposed upon and thus feel irritated or annoyed.

**Words to Avoid for Polite Email Communication**

Many participants in this study indicated that they avoided certain words and expressions. They wished to convey the intended meaning with limited or no contextual cues. Avoidance of certain linguistic elements, such as slang and colloquialisms, also conveyed respect to the receiver, according to the participants. The inclusion of such elements assumed prior knowledge which was often not the case. The Korean participants cited a preference for words which caused less confusion and an absence of contractions.
The fact that the participants indicated they avoided certain elements was supported in the Leximancer (Smith, 2002) analysis. In an analysis of all the qualitative data on word choice in the questionnaire and interview for the Australian participants, the software showed that ‘avoid’ was the most iterated concept (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5.2, Table 4.18, p.129). The Leximancer map, in Figure 5.2, shows clearly the importance of avoidance and its connection to certain linguistic elements, according to the Australian participants.

Figure 5.2: What the Australian participants avoided

Figure 5.2 shows the placement on the grid of the main concepts extracted from the questionnaire and interview qualitative data on the subject of word choice. The most commonly cited concepts are those in darker print, for example, avoid while those concepts less commonly cited are in lighter print, for example, write. The more frequently two concepts co-occur, the shorter the distance between them, for example, avoid and complex, and avoid and slang. The map shows that the concepts of complex and slang have often been used in the same context as avoid. Conversely, those concepts far apart on the map indicate use in separate contexts. That is, concepts formal, clear and simple, for example, have not been used in the same context and thus do not represent elements to avoid. This is a clear illustration of which linguistic
elements are to be avoided and which are to be included, according to the Australian participants.

**Appropriate Lengths for Polite Email Messages**

The results of this study uncovered apparent discrepancies over appropriate lengths for email messages. In the interview, some of the Korean participants said they did not like brief messages, while in the questionnaire some said that they preferred brevity. Brevity and clarity, two Gricean maxims (Grice, 1975), are common in email communication, especially when the context of negotiation has been set and the level of social distance has been reached (Crystal, 2001; Rice, 1997). However, some Australian participants felt that if a received email was too brief then that conveyed a certain lack of respect. The results from the questionnaire display such confusion. 62.8% of Australian and 50.0% of Korean participants were not sure how much information to give in any one email. Current research suggests that an email message is too long if it is over one screen in length (Crystal, 2001).

The use of attachments in email messages obviates the need for a longer text whereby further information can be obtained from the attachment if the need arises. A common pattern for message length in email threads is for the initial emails to be longer as the context for negotiation is set and then briefer ones as the thread progresses. It is important to try to accommodate different cultural and personal preferences in email lengths. Too short an email message and the receiver may feel dismissed, too long and the receiver may feel imposed upon.

**Language Degeneration**

It is interesting to note that the commonly held view of email contributing to language degeneration (Crystal, 2001; James, 2001, p.9; Lan, 2000a, 2000b) was not evident in this study. In fact, the opposite was true. Many participants took pains to ensure a high standard of prose containing standard spelling, punctuation and grammar in their email texts which they said resembled more a conventional letter format. This was perhaps due in part to their desire to avoid misunderstandings and offences and to convey politeness and respect to their email partners by taking the care to attain a high standard of literacy.
Furthermore, email communication may actually be improving language construction for non-native English speakers. The Korean participants said that the asynchronous nature of email gave them a chance to review their language before sending. They indicated in both the questionnaire and interviews that even though the medium was speeding up communication generally, the delay in response that email provided, enabled them to take care in their second language construction, free from anxiety. This is supported by current email research which states that the delayed nature of asynchronous communication can lead to the use of more syntactically complex language by second language users (Lan, 2000b; Sotillo, 2000)

The participants’ care and concern, even agony, in choosing suitable words further highlights the need for assistance to allay fears of possible miscommunications and offence. It was the researcher’s conclusion that the issues of politeness, relationship-building and appropriate word choice are uppermost in peoples’ minds when they go about their email communication, yet uncertainty and doubt still surround their application.

A brief analysis of the concept of Email Technology is now given in order to address the final secondary research question: What are the characteristics of email technology that may pose barriers to polite email communication?

5.6 Email Technology: The Australian and Korean Participants’ Views

A zone of uncertainty surrounded the answers from both the Australian and Korean participants in the section on email technology. There was a large percentage of “neutral” to many questions about potential problems or barriers in polite email communication (see Chapter 4, Section 4.7.1, Table 4.26, p. 144, for a summary). Importantly, this may indicate a lack of awareness by the participants that existing problems were already occurring. The study revealed that the zone of uncertainty comprised two major barriers to polite email communication. The first barrier concerned the lack of context in email communication and the second barrier concerned issues to do with time. Both barriers are now discussed.
Barrier 1

Lack of Context to Regulate Language and Politeness Indicators

According to many participants, email is suitable for messages not reliant on contextual factors, but it may not be suitable for sensitive or personal communication tasks. In this study, 79.3% of Australian and 100.0% of Korean participants agreed that they could express their ideas clearly on email while only 38.7% and 50.0% respectively said they could express personal feelings. As well, only 33.6% of Australian and 50.0% of Korean participants felt that email allowed them to resolve conflict or change misunderstandings. These figures may explain the zone of uncertainty, concerning the optimal way to communicate which was evident in all instruments in the study. Expression of personal feelings, emotion and resolution of conflict often require contextual factors such as nuance, mood, body language, touch, tone and inflection of voice and so on to adequately convey sensitive thoughts and feelings (Walther, 1992). The lack of context in email precludes the conveying of such information (Wallace, 2002). Current email research confirms these limitations by categorising email as a lean communication medium (Fang, 1998; Lee, 1994; Ngwenyama, & Lee 1997). A lean communication medium does not easily allow expression of nuance or implicature, while a rich communication medium affords an interactive nature of feedback and an ability to express subtle linguistic nuances (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Straub, 1994).

Because of the inability to express nuance and to convey contextual factors such as body language, tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues, email may not be a good medium for getting to know one’s communicating partner (Walther, 1997). This is echoed in the literature where current email research has offered little advice on how to use email effectively and best ways to manage the interpersonal dynamics of the medium (Walther, 1997, p. 345). Only 57.8% of all participants in the study said that email allowed them to get to know their overseas communicating partner, while 67% felt comfortable with their email partner. Many Australian participants indicated to the researcher in both data sources that email became a more suitable medium to accomplish such social communication tasks as conflict resolution, discussion of sensitive matters, coping with misunderstandings and so on, when it was
complemented with other media especially the telephone or face-to-face communication. These comments by Australian participants are illustrations:

A strong personal preference is to communicate face-to-face or by phone when possible, particularly when issues are sensitive by nature. (AQ79)

Sometimes it would be easier to use phone when you need continuous and immediate feedback. (AInt9)

No difference from domestic receivers – serious conflicts/misunderstandings are best cleared up through phone calls. (AQ71)

Barrier 2

Issues to do with Time and Interaction

A major issue of email communication lies in the area of suitable time frames for replies. As email communication is primarily a medium for information exchange, when an email is sent, there is an expectation of a reply (Crystal, 2001). Many participants in this study had different expectations of suitable time frames for reply ranging from 12 hours to 3 days. Some participants indicated that several of their email partners expected an answer within 5 minutes of receiving an email. Acknowledgement of receipt of an email seemed to reside in the zone of uncertainty. Some participants indicated to the researcher that they wanted their email partners to acknowledge that they had received an important email even if they did not have the time to fully answer at that point, while others were not aware that acknowledging receipt was a necessary or polite part of email communication. Other participants indicated that they were not sure when an email negotiation had ceased, to the satisfaction of both parties. Establishing an even exchange time rhythm for sending and receiving also resides in the zone of uncertainty. Unevenness or discontinuity of communication does not contribute to a smooth flow of information exchange. Issues such as the following examples from the participants need to be addressed if more successful email communication is the aim:

I get upset when I don’t get an immediate response particularly when I ask them to let me know as soon as possible. (KInt3)

So, it’s a real area of ambiguity here. You don’t know whether someone has got your email, whether they’re choosing not to answer inadvertently or whether they’re consciously choosing not to answer. (AInt12)
Whereas a couple of years ago, it would have been polite to answer all the emails that come in. Now we are so overwhelmed with emails that we’re highly selective of which ones we even answer. (AIInt12)

The two important other findings that surfaced during the course of the study and which were not part of the original focus concerned cultural perceptions and humour. They are discussed next.

5.7 Other Findings

Many participants volunteered freely to the researcher their impressions of cultural perceptions and humour in email communication. A summary of their impressions now follows.

Cultural Perceptions

The general consensus from the participants’ cultural perceptions was that Australian participants generally have a direct communication style and that other cultures, for example, Latin and Asian cultures, communicate more indirectly. This is not supported by the findings in this study, as seen in their responses previously discussed and in their actual usage in email texts (as seen in Chapter 7). However, research from the literature supports the participants’ cultural perceptions that people from Asian cultures are more likely to speak indirectly and to look for indirect meanings than are people from the West (Holtgraves 1997, p. 624; Kim et al., 1999; Meier, 1995). (Examples of comments on cultural perceptions volunteered by participants are given in Chapter 4, Table 4.34, p. 161).

There was some evidence from the Korean participants that they adopted a more relaxed style in their emails when they were communicating with people from non-Asian cultures. This included using first names instead of titles, dispensing with face-building language and writing brief texts. Current research supports this view that new communication media such as email is modifying some previously identified characteristics of face-to-face intercultural communication (Ma, 1996; Ulijn & Campbell, 1999, 2001).
Humour

Many Australian participants indicated that they wanted to include humour in their email communication as they saw it as relationship-building politeness (positive politeness), but were not sure how to go about it. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) and Ting-Toomey (1994) humour is an example of a positive politeness strategy (relationship-building) the aim of which is to protect the face of the hearer (receiver). Other face-protecting strategies include giving apologies and accounts, avoidance and aggression (Ting-Toomey, 1994). The inclusion of humour in any spoken or written text which contains a potentially face-threatening speech act such as a request, can serve the purpose of attenuating that threat and, as such, contributes to solidarity between the communicators (Holmes, 2000). Creating solidarity and protecting face are two functions of humour (others are sharing similarities and coping with weaknesses) (Ervin-Tripp and Lampert, 1992, cited in Holmes, 2000, p. 165). However, the use of humour can also have an impolite function. In an asymmetrical power situation, some superiors can, through humour, manipulate discourse to create repressive ends (Holmes, 2000). In these contexts, the communicative intention of humour can serve the purpose of reinforcing status differences and threaten collegial relations (Little, Ushioda, Appel, Moran, O'Rourke & Schwienhorst, 1999).

Some Australian participants, on the other hand, did not want to include humour as they saw it as creating potential misunderstandings and offences especially if the email partner was of a different cultural background. Some participants saw the use of humour as obstructing clarity and creating ambiguities. Some even saw the use of humour as disrespectful. The use of humour can assume common cultural knowledge which is often not the case, as this Australian participant asserts:

\[\text{Yes, either for clarity or simplicity I choose my words carefully and try to rein in my propensity for irony and humour with those I am not used to culturally. (AQ45)}\]

The use of humour was made easier when the social presence levels were high enough such that the sender and receiver were relaxed in their communication, as this Australian participant explained:
The Korean participants did not mention humour at all in either data source. This may be due to the difficulty of incorporating humour in a second language via a medium which conveys minimal contextual factors.

### 5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the salient aspects on the topic of politeness in intercultural email communication as a result of this research. These aspects were attained after a rigorous analysis of all data from the sources of the questionnaire and interview. It was highlighted that politeness is very important according to most participants. The importance of politeness in email was also confirmed with results of qualitative analysis by the software product *Leximancer*. But politeness is also a subjective phenomenon with many different interpretations. This is reflected in the literature when a lack of consensus among researchers on linguistic politeness is evident. Importantly, the study revealed widespread uncertainty as to the correct way to include appropriate politeness markers in emails. Many participants alluded to a zone of uncertainty in their email communication, especially their overseas communication, which infected not only the choice of politeness markers, word choice and language style but also non-linguistic aspects such as suitable time frames for reply and acceptable interaction rhythms and so on. The study also revealed differences in the way the Australian and Korean participants viewed politeness. Importantly, the study cautions that, in any email exchange, care should be taken to ensure adequate and appropriate politeness markers, as misunderstandings or offences may result in their absence.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, explains the practical approach this study has taken for assessing politeness in intercultural email communication. In the first part of chapter, it is shown how data outlined in this and previous chapters formed the conceptual framework of the thesis. The second part of the chapter discusses the practical instrument which arose from that framework. In the next chapter, it is demonstrated
how the practical instrument speaks to the main findings revealed in this chapter and how it also addresses the five gaps in the literature listed in the introductory chapter.
Chapter 6: From Conceptual Framework to Practical Tool

6.1 Introduction

The first part of this chapter, “The Conceptual Framework” summarises and reviews all the events which comprise the framework of this thesis. It presents to the reader a drawing together of the different strands and sources developed over the course of this research which have formed the framework. Data sources such as the gaps in the literature and the main findings are summarised and tabled. This chapter explains how sources such as these and others were used to further our understanding of politeness in email communication. A flowchart is given to illustrate each stage in the development of the framework. Description of each stage in the flowchart follows. The theoretical base of the conceptual framework is then discussed. Three concept maps are displayed to further enhance and clarify understanding of the framework.

The conceptual framework, although providing an approach for understanding politeness in email communication, does not help in an applied or practical way.

The second part of this chapter discusses the development of a practical instrument which is an outcome of the conceptual framework of this thesis. The need for something concrete and tangible led to an instrument which can assess politeness in email communication. It is explained why this instrument is more inclusive than the initial one for assessing politeness in email communication (EPA 1). The new instrument (EPA 2) is called The Tool-Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails. The Tool-Kit (abbreviated name) is best described as a metaphorical tool box containing certain linguistic implements for more polite email communication. This chapter explains how the new instrument made use of the views and opinions about politeness in intercultural email communication from the participants in Australia and Korea. These views were gathered and combined with certain theoretical elements from the literature, similar to the ones in EPA 1. Suggestions from academic colleagues about what they thought contributed to politeness in intercultural email communication were also potential data for the new
instrument. Reflections on its construction are then outlined. *The Tool-Kit* itself is then introduced with descriptions from the Glossary of Terms, an accompanying document explaining all items in *The Tool-Kit*. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the instrument. Lastly, further uses of *The Tool-Kit* are outlined. Importantly, it will be demonstrated in this chapter how the development of the conceptual framework of this thesis and its outcome, *The Tool-Kit*, speak to the main findings revealed in the previous chapter, and also how they addresses the five gaps in the literature outlined in the introductory chapter.

### 6.2 The Conceptual Framework

In this section, there is description of the events leading to the development of the conceptual framework, including the theoretical base and concept mapping. It begins with a revision of the major events in the story so far.

#### 6.2.1 The Story So Far

Politeness is important in intercultural email communication, yet there is little consensus on just what constitutes a polite email message, as discovered in Chapter 5. According to the participants, politeness is expected in email yet cultural differences signal different expectations. Many participants from both cultures included in this study were uncertain about how to include politeness in their email language and because of this offences were already occurring. This uncertainty may have far-reaching consequences for important and sometimes crucial email negotiations. The findings mirrored to some extent similar uncertainties surrounding politeness in the literature. Chapter 2 exposed many uncertainties and gaps in the literature which are summarised below in Table 6.1.
Table 6.1: The five gaps uncovered in this research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Gaps in the Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: There is little consensus on conceptualisation of politeness in the literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: There is increased divergence between ordinary speakers’ intuitive knowledge of politeness and the complex conceptualisations and technical language in the literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: There is minimal research on politeness in email communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: No instrument exists to locate and assess politeness in email texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: No instrument exists for teaching politeness in pedagogical settings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 reviews the main gaps which were exposed after an extensive reading of the literature. These gaps form part of the conceptual framework of this study. They ultimately led to the development of a practical instrument which attempted to close those gaps. Also included in the conceptual framework were the main empirical findings uncovered from the data analysis outlined in the previous chapter. It is helpful at this point to review these findings which are listed in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: The five findings uncovered in this research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Findings from this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Politeness is important in email communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: There is a lack of consensus on what is considered polite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: People are uncertain as to how to go about incorporating politeness in their email communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Offences are already occurring as a result of this uncertainty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: There are cultural differences in interpretations of politeness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 summarises in a global sense what was revealed through analysis of all data from the participants elicited from the three sources of questionnaire, interview and analysis of email texts. These five gaps and the five findings, outlined in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, are addressed in the course of this chapter as well as the remaining chapters in this thesis. These gaps and findings and other input for the conceptual framework
led to the creation of the email politeness assessment instrument discussed in the second part of this chapter. How and why the instrument came to be developed is explained firstly by a description of the conceptual framework of this thesis as a whole. This process provides an overview of all the stages in the study and how they interrelated over the four years’ duration.

### 6.2.2 Development of the Conceptual Framework

To facilitate further understanding of the story so far, there is now a summary of the different stages, both concurrent and sequential, in the development of the conceptual framework of this thesis. By providing such an overview, a clearer understanding can be gained of the lengthy, detailed and comprehensive process involved in creating such a framework derived from multiple data sources. Figure 6.1 illustrates the process. It represents a detailed follow-up version of the original and basic overview of the research process given in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.1, p. 6). In the form of a flowchart, Figure 6.1 clearly sets out the sequential and concurrent stages which were involved in creating the conceptual framework of this thesis. These stages are displayed on a timeline where the dotted line shows the current point in the story so far. This is followed by brief description of each stage in the process.
Figure 6.1: Flowchart of development of conceptual framework of thesis
In the following description of Figure 6.1 the reader is able to match the written
discussion of each stage with the corresponding section on the flowchart.

**Description of Figure 6.1**

Three sources of input formed the development of the conceptual framework of this
thesis. They were:

A: Theory and empirical results;
B: Results from tools developed to assess politeness levels; and
C: Peer validation from academic colleagues.

These three sources provided input concurrently and separately until a pivotal point in
the development of the thesis where all three converged. Each of the three sources is
briefly discussed below as well as discussion of the point of convergence.

**A: Theory and empirical results**

After a comprehensive reading of the relevant bodies of literature from 2002 onwards
(A1), the researcher formulated and crafted the research questions (A2). These
questions sought to gather information which could address the gaps evident in the
literature at the time of this study. In 2003, participants and sampling procedures were
then chosen for the purposes of addressing the aims of this study (A3). As this study
focused on politeness in email communication in an academic context, it was decided
to choose participants from a university setting. Choosing further participants outside
Australia was also necessary, due to the intercultural nature of this study. Next, the
data eliciting instruments of questionnaire and interview were then crafted in semester
2, 2003 (A4). These instruments were individually tailored such that the necessary
data for addressing the research questions could be attained. Questionnaires were then
distributed and interviews conducted with the sample of participants both inside and
outside Australia. Data from these two instruments were then collected and analysed
during 2004 (A5). This process involved reducing, collating, coding and thematising
data in an iterative way which would represent as closely as possible the participants’
own views and perceptions on the topic of this study. Reflection by the researcher on
all empirical results including the main findings took place between 2004 and 2005
(A6).
B: Results from tools developed to assess politeness levels

During 2003, the researcher was developing an initial instrument for assessing levels of politeness in email texts (B1). A third data source in this study, the email texts, was necessary as having multiple data sources to analyse similar data formed part of the rigorous research methodology of this study. At the time however, there were no existing politeness assessment instruments in the literature to guide this process. Consequently, the researcher borrowed certain elements of politeness theories from the literature to intuitively create the first email politeness assessment tool (abbreviated to EPA 1). EPA 1 was then used to analyse two authentic email threads during the second semester in 2003 (B2).

Reflection and evaluation on the use of EPA 1 for analysis took place during the first semester in 2004 (B3). The researcher was unhappy with its ability to efficiently analyse email texts for politeness, due to its subjective and cumbersome nature. Each email text analysis was very time consuming. As a result of this initial instrument’s inability to efficiently analyse email texts for politeness levels, the idea to create a more streamlined and objective instrument was born.

C: Peer validation from academic colleagues

From the beginning of this study (semester 1, 2002), suggestions were given at various stages to the researcher by academic colleagues on the topic of this study (C1). These suggestions were carefully and methodically recorded in the field notes book carried by researcher when in the field. For example, many academic colleagues indicated to the researcher that they liked the reply email to include the history of the negotiation, as it gave a context for subsequent interactions. These colleagues therefore, recommended their recipients use the “Reply with History” option for their email negotiations. Allowing the flow and exchange of ideas and suggestions as such contributed to peer validation, an important component of rigorous research practice (Merriam, 2002).

Point of Convergence: The Tool-Kit

The three sources of input converged in semester 2, 2004 (B4). This convergence led to the creation of the framework for email politeness assessment (The Tool-Kit or EPA 2, see Appendix 6). This new instrument was more inclusive in that it combined
data from the other data sources of the literature (A1), the empirical results and reflections on those results (A5 and A6), suggestions in the field notes book (C1), as well as reflections on the use of the initial instrument (B3). Compared to EPA 1, EPA 2 was a more streamlined, inclusive and systematic tool for assessing politeness in email communication (for a summary of the differences between EPA 1 and EPA 2 see Chapter 7, Section 7.3). A Glossary of Terms was also drawn up to explain items in this new instrument (see Appendix 6). The Tool-Kit and the Glossary of Terms are discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Stages in the research process after the dotted line form the content for the final two chapters (Chapters 7 and 8). In semester 1, 2005, the new instrument, called The Tool-Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails, (or EPA 2) was then piloted on the same email threads that were used for the initial analysis with more systematic and objective results (B5) (see Chapter 7). Further research projects for this instrument as well as for the research process as a whole were then outlined for 2006 and onwards (B7) (see Chapter 8).

6.2.3 Theoretical Base and Concept Mapping

Certain elements of politeness theories were included in the theoretical base of the framework, especially those of Brown and Levinson (1987) (see Chapter 2). Their politeness theory has, to date, not been tested in email communication. Application of this politeness theory to written email language provided an interesting opportunity for testing the model. As a caveat to their theory, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 23) caution that any quantitative data on politeness must be preceded and supplemented by qualitative data. This has been achieved in this study.

Some concepts outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987) have been used in the framework but it was felt that the language used to describe them was too complex. In keeping with the practical nature of this study, certain concepts have been renamed with more user-friendly language. For example, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) terms “Positive politeness” and “Negative politeness” have been changed to “Relationship-Building politeness” and “Respect for the Receiver’s Time and Space politeness” respectively, because these new terms represent more clearly the intended meanings and they avoid ambiguities with the word “negative”. Simplifying complex concepts
and the language behind them was a prime consideration in this study (thus addressing *Gap 2*, see Table 6.1).

Brown and Levinson (1987) posit that the degree of politeness is determined by three sociocultural factors – 1: the power difference between the communicators, 2: the social distance between them and 3: the weight of the request that is being asked. The degree of politeness in email communication therefore may be linked to information such as the status of the sender in relation to the receiver and the weight of the request or the aim of the email message. Consequently, the amount of politeness can be explained, in terms of Brown and Levinson’s theory, by referring to those variables of power and social differences as well as looking at the nature of the request. In this way, information across several social dimensions can be cross-checked and linked to give a more holistic portrait of politeness in email communication. This is illustrated and explained in the following concept maps.

**Concept Mapping**

As the topic of this study was complex and transdisciplinary, it was considered beneficial to show the reader in a simple, visual format all the interconnecting facets to polite email communication. The following three concept maps diagrammatically present a theoretical and conceptual overview of the framework for the purposes of clarity and ease of understanding (Novak & Gowin, 1999). Figure 6.2 (seen also in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, p. 66) shows an overview of the relevant research areas of this study and how they interconnect.
Figure 6.2: Intersection of fields of research in this study

Figure 6.2 illustrates the position of politeness within the parameters of this study, at the intersection of the three main bodies of literature. The black and white chequered intersection represents linguistic politeness within the context of intercultural email communication, the focus of this study. A fuller explanation of this intersection is given in Figure 6.3 where the individual elements contributing to politeness or impoliteness in email communication are illustrated in more detail.

Figure 6.3: Elements contributing to politeness in intercultural email communication
Figure 6.3 illustrates in a simple format the elements that contribute to politeness in intercultural email communication. It shows the variables within Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory and how they fit within the context of email communication. The variables are the power and social differences between the sender and receiver which are co-constructed through interaction and the weight of imposition of request in the email message. By using different politeness strategies in the email interaction, the sender or receiver is able to alter or at least influence the power and social differences between him/herself and the email partner. The variables illustrated in the boxes above, thus impact on the language in a cascading effect, as illustrated by the arrows. In other words, the power and social differences between the sender and receiver impact on the language used in the request, which in turn impacts on the amount and type of politeness indicators needed in the interaction.

The conceptual framework of this thesis evolved from the information illustrated in Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3. At the following important juncture, all the views and perceptions from the Australian and Korean participants, as well as suggestions from academic colleagues were mapped onto the framework. These views and perceptions have been thematised into five different strategy types listed below:

1: Email Characteristics Strategies;
2: Time Factor Strategies;
3: Language Style (including requests) Strategies;
4: Relationship-Building Strategies;
5: Respect for Time/Space Strategies.

The various strategies within each of those sections are shown in Figure 6.4, p. 220. This concept map diagrammatically lists those strategies, which, according to the participants, the literature and suggestions from academic colleagues, best convey politeness within the context of intercultural email communication. Figure 6.4 therefore, visually displays the breaking down of the invisible and unquantifiable elements of written linguistic email politeness into tangible and visible parts. Politeness may therefore, be identified and assessed (thus addressing Gaps 2 and 4). Figure 6.4 is now shown.
Figure 6.4: Politeness Strategies
The second part of this chapter explains how all the events discussed up to now, including the gaps in the literature, the main empirical findings, certain theory bases, the participants’ views, suggestions from colleagues, the concept maps, researcher intuition, reflections from the initial politeness assessment instrument (EPA 1) and other sources led to the creation of a practical instrument which could assess politeness in email communication. This instrument is now discussed.

6.3 The Tool Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails

This new instrument, named The Tool-Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails, may be described as a metaphorical tool box containing carefully honed words, phrases, lexical devices, syntactic structures and other linguistic “implements” which can be picked up for certain “jobs” or left in the box for later “jobs” in other contexts. In this section, initial description of The Tool-Kit (abbreviated name) is given firstly, including its purpose and potential audiences. Content for The Tool-Kit is then explained as well as how it was built on the theory base listed in the first part of this chapter. Reflections on the process of construction as well as a summary of the limitations of The Tool-Kit follow. Then the actual The Tool-Kit is displayed and explained via excerpts and descriptions from the Glossary of Terms.

Purpose of The Tool-Kit

All circumstances described in the first part of this chapter (especially the five gaps and five main findings, itemised in Tables 6.1 and 6.2), led to the creation of a practical instrument which could address the importance of politeness in intercultural email communication (it is thus speaking to Finding 1, see Table 6.2, p 211). The instrument places politeness in the context of email communication (it is thus addressing Gap 3, see Table 6.1, p. 211). This has not been considered before in the literature, as politeness research to date has mainly focussed on face-to-face communication. The new instrument has taken into consideration the views and perceptions of participants from Australia and Korea on the topic of politeness. In incorporating cultural differences from these two diverse cultures, the instrument
speaks to Finding 5 and Finding 2, (see Table 6.2) in its effort to combine all the participants’ perceptions to an overall consensus position. In taking certain elements from theoretical constructs, the instrument is also proposing a solution to the lack of consensus to politeness in the literature. Suggestions by academic colleagues over the four year duration of this study have also been incorporated into the design. The Tool-Kit then, is best described as a metaphorical bridge linking theory to practice and which has real world application. Based on systematic observations and taking into account current theories, this instrument is a well-grounded and systematic instrument for analysis as well as providing practical advice.

Importantly, The Tool-Kit also includes a measuring capacity. By adding up scores across a range of variables, it can provide a quick, practical estimate or indicator of the level of politeness in a single email or an email thread. Politeness levels across a number of dimensions can thus be scored and assigned a value.

In so doing, the instrument assists writers to reflect on their own use of email language and to raise awareness of the importance of politeness and how best to incorporate it. Consequently, The Tool-Kit also speaks to Finding 3 and addresses Gap 5 (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). As it gives people a way of mitigating offences by the use of the strategies offered, the instrument also speaks to Finding 4 (see Table 6.2) Importantly, the concepts in the instrument have been reduced in complexity and the language simplified so that people with no linguistic knowledge can understand and apply the strategies offered. The instrument thus attempts to stem the increasing divergence between everyday speakers’ intuitive knowledge of politeness and the complex conceptualisations in the literature (it is addressing Gap 2, see Table 6.1). The Tool-Kit assists and guides email writers to become better analysers of their own and others’ language. Taking the format of a set of protocols, it offers appropriate politeness language when and where uncertainty exists, as no such assistance existed at the time of this study (it is thus addressing Gap 4, see Table 6.1).

**Who is The Tool-Kit for?**

*The Tool-Kit* is designed for anyone who writes emails in English. Having an Australian English bias and limited intercultural elements, the instrument is nevertheless, a set of principles, ideas, set of phrases, lexical items and so on, that
people may refer to when guidance is needed regarding politeness in email. Importantly, it can also give a quick, practical estimate or indicator of the level of politeness in an already written email. The instrument however, is not an exhaustive taxonomy, as it is understood and accepted that in any email interaction, as in any face-to-face interaction, negotiation of more subtle politeness elements may be further required. The new practical instrument represents a starting point towards the intersection of politeness and email communication which, to date, has been ignored in the literature (thus addressing Gap 1 and 3, see Table 6.1) and was found from the data to be needed (thus speaking to Finding 3, see Table 6.2).

**Content of The Tool-Kit**

Knowledge acquired in three major areas was used to form the main content of The Tool-Kit. Firstly, relevant findings from the questionnaire and interview were instrumental for the content. Using mainly an inductive approach, this study considered the views and perceptions of both the Australian and Korean participants important to an overall understanding of politeness in email communication. (Chapter 4 displays full results). Secondly, a synthesis of certain elements of theoretical constructs was deductively derived and formed part of the content design. Similar theoretical constructs used for the initial instrument (EPA 1) were also used for the new instrument. Reflections by the researcher on the use of EPA 1 also contributed to its content design. Lastly, suggestions given by academic colleagues, recorded in a field notes book over the duration of this thesis, were combined with the previous knowledge bases to form the overall structure and content.

**Requests**

It was decided to focus on the speech act of requests as the results of this study indicated that this is a problematic area in email, especially when the communication occurs across cultures (Lee, 2004; Suh, 1999; Yli-Jokipii, 1998). Requests can threaten the face of the receiver and they can also lead to refusal, which has important negative implications for both sender and receiver (Lee, 2004; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b). In the questionnaire and interview, many participants alluded to the difficulty in phrasing requests such that they did not cause offence. It was also considered important to focus on requests as they are common in academic email communication.
The instrument however, can also be applied to emails which do not contain requests.

### 6.3.1 Construction of The Tool Kit

The construction of The Tool-Kit entailed many drafts. The lengthy editorial process was conducted in cooperation with my second supervisor whose first language was not English. The instrument, therefore, had input from a cultural viewpoint apart from that of the researcher. This extra linguistic and cultural input was important, as the goal was to fashion the instrument so as to be culturally relevant and of value in culturally diverse contexts.

The construction process was complex due to the nature of the topic and the difficulty in quantifying concepts with so many variables. There were also many subjective aspects to email politeness which differed, as expected, between Australia and Korea. For example, many Australian participants in the study indicated that politeness in email had more to do with being friendly and establishing relationships than using correct titles and formal language. By contrast, many of the Korean participants indicated that formality of language, in particular correct use of titles, rather than building relationships conveyed politeness. The instrument was thus an attempt to represent a global consensus of politeness for emails in English from all participants’ viewpoints (it is thus speaking to Findings 2 and 5, see Table 6.2).

Quantifying complex concepts was also difficult. For example, participants from both cultures indicated that very short emails as well as lengthy emails could be impolite depending on the circumstances. A short email, however, may include an attachment which politely requests further information. It is important therefore, to read The Tool-Kit in a holistic way and to link certain answers with others to get an overall portrait of politeness in email communication. In designing the instrument, the challenge was to combine data from all three knowledge bases into a succinct, culturally inclusive, user-friendly and objective tool, which could, hopefully, quantify the invisible and seemingly unquantifiable concept of politeness (addressing Gaps 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, see Table 6.1).
In the following section, *The Tool-Kit* itself is introduced. Excerpts and examples are given along with descriptions from the Glossary of Terms to illustrate how the instrument is used to assess politeness in intercultural email communication. The Glossary of Terms is a document explaining terms used in *The Tool-Kit* by way of definitions and examples. It accompanies and follows the same format as *The Tool-Kit* (a complete copy of *The Tool-Kit* and the Glossary of Terms is seen in Appendix 6).

### 6.3.2 Explanations of *The Tool Kit* using the Glossary of Terms

Discussion under each heading from *The Tool-Kit* is now given. These headings (except 10: Overall Performance) have been previously illustrated in Figure 6.3, p. 218 and Figure 6.4, p. 220. They are:

1. Email Classification;
2. Social Variables;
3. Request Weight;
4. Email Characteristics;
5. Time Factors and Requests;
6. Language Style;
7. Language Style of Polite Requests;
8. Relationship-Building;
9. Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space;
10. Overall Performance.

For the purposes of brevity, excerpts only from *The Tool-Kit* for each of the headings are discussed and explained below, together with some examples from the Glossary of Terms.

**1: Email Classification**

The first section in *The Tool-Kit* is entitled “Email Classification” which contains the following information.
Table 6.3: Email Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Email</th>
<th>E1</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
<th>E4</th>
<th>E5</th>
<th>E6</th>
<th>E7</th>
<th>E8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2.3.05</td>
<td>4.3.05</td>
<td>5.3.05</td>
<td>10.3.05</td>
<td>12.3.05</td>
<td>12.3.05</td>
<td>15.3.05</td>
<td>16.3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sender (Initials)</td>
<td>D.F.</td>
<td>J.P.</td>
<td>J.P.</td>
<td>D.F.</td>
<td>J.P.</td>
<td>D.F.</td>
<td>D.F.</td>
<td>J.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of written lines in email</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3 shows the first section which elicits information concerning physical aspects of the thread such as the time of the communication, the country of origin and text length. Columns E1, E2, E3 and so on represent each email in the thread, for example, E1 = Email one in the thread, E2 = Email two in the thread and so on. The Tool-Kit may accommodate email threads of less than 8 emails while those over 8 emails in length require an extended version. This can be achieved by using the landscape position in a word document in order to fit more columns for emails across the page. In this hypothetical example, 8 emails were exchanged between Australia (sender D.F.) and Korea (sender J.P.) during the period 2.3.05 to 16.3.05. The texts ranged in length between 5 and 20 lines. Information such as this is important for assessing background context which may affect levels of politeness.

The next section, “Social Variables”, assesses the status differences and the social distances between the sender and receiver of the email.

2: Social Variables

Information concerning social variables is important in explaining and assessing levels of politeness in email. As can be seen in Table 6.4 below, the social variables, monitored by the use of this instrument include the opening and closing titles used, whether the email is the first in the thread, whether there has been previous email contact and the status difference and the social distance between sender and receiver.
Table 6.4: Social Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: The opening title used</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>S.F</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: The closing title used</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>S.F</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>H.G</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: This is the first email in thread</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: S has had previous email contact with R</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Status Difference between S &amp; R (H/M/L)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Social Distance between S &amp; R (H/M/L)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 shows another hypothetical example where the opening and closing titles used in the thread ranged from Professor (Prof) to Doctor (Dr) to individual first and last names (H.G. and S.F). There was no previous email contact between sender and receiver and both the status and social differences between them were high. The variables of titles, status and social differences are defined and explained in the Glossary of Terms (see Appendix 6). In addition, *The Tool-Kit* monitors issues to do with requests which are explained next.

3: Request Weight

This section, “Request Weight”, assesses how much effort the request requires on the part of the receiver. A request may be defined as “an attempt by the speaker (sender) to get the hearer (receiver) to perform some action by virtue of the hearer (receiver) having recognised that such an attempt is being made” (Jacobs & Jackson, 1983, p. 287, cited in Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1996, p. 640). Requests can be for information, services, goods and clarification. Examples are given in the Glossary of Terms of requests that are considered to be high in weight as well as those considered low in weight. This information is also important as, according to Brown and Levinson, (1987), the weight of imposition of the request determines levels of politeness needed. An excerpt from the section “Request Weight” can be seen in Table 6.5.
Table 6.5: Request Weight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Lang Function is Request</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: No. of requests in email</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Type of request (eg., for services, goods)</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Weight of request (H/M/L)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5 shows a hypothetical email exchange of 8 emails where all, except emails 2 and 8, contained request(s). These request(s) were for services (Serv), information (Info) and time. The weight of these requests varied from high (emails 1, 3, 4, and 6) to low (emails 5 and 7).

The remaining sections in The Tool-Kit help to assess information related to: “Email Characteristics”; “Time Factors and Requests”; “Language Style”; “Language Style of Polite Requests”; and “Relationship-Building” and “Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space” (see Figure 6.4, p. 220). If answers given in the two previous sections, “Social Variables” and “Request Weight”, were considered high, then more politeness indicators in these sections would be needed in the email message (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to these authors, if the threat to the face of the communicators is high, that is, if the social and status differences are high and the request has a high weight, then more politeness indicators are used to lessen such a threat to face.

Before discussion of these remaining sections, there is firstly an explanation of the data column (Data). This column shows the sources of data for each item.

Sources of Data

As indicated previously, the content for The Tool-Kit comes mainly from a synthesis of 3 sources: data from the literature; the views of the participants in this study; and suggestions given to me by academic colleagues during the course of this study. That is:

1: Literature. (Lit=Literature)
2: Research participants. (PA=Australian participants and PK= Korean participants)
3: Suggestions of Academic Colleagues. (S=Suggestions)
Table 6.6 shows an excerpt which illustrates the relevant data source for each item in The Tool-Kit. This column would not appear in further developments of the instrument. It is only shown in this thesis to indicate the relevant sources.

Table 6.6: Sources of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email Characteristics</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Subject line is included</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Subject line is relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td>S, Lit, PA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reply function is used (if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.6 shows that for Item 1: *Subject line is included*; the source of data is S or suggestions by academic colleagues. In Item 2: *Subject line is relevant*; the source of data includes S (suggestions from colleagues) and Lit (the literature) and PA (the Australian participants). These three sources consider that it is polite to have a relevant subject line. The use of the reply function was considered polite by the Australian participants (PA) only in this study. In this hypothetical thread, emails 1, 2, 7 and 8 have not included subject lines and emails 3 and 8 have not used the reply function. The Glossary gives further information for this section (see Appendix 6).

The remaining sections in The Tool-Kit are now discussed.

4: Email Characteristics

This section, which is illustrated in Table 6.6 above, elicits information concerning elements pertaining to email. Such information includes whether the subject line of an email message is included and is relevant, whether the reply function is used, whether normal font is used, the length of the message and whether a signature block has been included. Such information is important for assessing politeness levels.
5: Time Factors and Requests

Issues to do with time were important factors for politeness in email negotiations according to the participants and academic colleagues, as indicated in an excerpt in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7: Time Factors and Requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Factors</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E7</th>
<th>E8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: If not the first in thread, the time delay in replying was under 3 days</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: All requests, if applicable, in previous email were acknowledged</td>
<td>PA, PK</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: All requests (in previous email) were answered</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: No time pressures given in this email</td>
<td>PA, PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7 shows the various aspects relating to time such as acknowledging and answering requests which occurred over the email thread. Item 1 shows that emails 2 and 5 have not responded to previous emails (1 and 4 respectively) in less than 3 days. In email 8, the request(s) in the previous email (email 7) were not answered. Email 1 (E1) is the first email in the thread, hence it is not applicable (N/A) to answer these items. Item 4 contains a statement expressed negatively *(No time pressures given in this email)*, so a tick (√) here indicates that there were no times pressures given in that email, whereas a cross (X) signifies that there were time pressures (as in emails 5 and 7). Other items in *The Tool-Kit* also stated negatively, follow this procedure as well. Further descriptions and explanations can be found in the Glossary (see Appendix 6).

The next section in *The Tool-Kit*, “Language Style”, concerns various aspects to written email style.
6: Language Style

This section elicits information concerning various aspects to written email styles which several data sources considered polite. Table 6.8 shows an excerpt from this section.

Table 6.8: Language Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Style</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: R’s full title is used in address</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: S’s full title is used in sign off</td>
<td>PA, PK S</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Greeting ‘Dear’ is used</td>
<td>PA, PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8 shows that, in this example, the receiver’s full title is used for address in all emails except 4, 5, and 8. The sender has used his/her full title in the sign-off in all emails except 2, 5 and 8. The greeting Dear, considered polite by both the Australian and Korean participants, as indicated in the data column, was used in all emails (see Glossary for further information).

The next section considers the language of polite requests in emails.

7: Language Style of Polite Requests

In this section, linguistic aspects for polite requests have been tabulated according to the relevant data sources as shown in an excerpt in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9: Language Style of Polite Requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Style of Polite Requests – (please go to next section if no requests)</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Modals used in request (eg. would, may)</td>
<td>PA, PK, Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Use of passive voice (eg. Is it possible for me to have ....?)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Longer sentences used for request (10 words or more)</td>
<td>Lit, S, PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.9 shows that modals have been used in the requests in emails 1, 2, 4, and 5 but not in emails 3, 6, 7 and 8 in this hypothetical example. Email 4 was the only email to use the passive voice for its request(s). Three of the emails in this thread used sentences of more than 10 words to make the request(s), considered polite by the literature (Lit), suggestions from colleagues (S) and the Korean participants (PK). More information on this section can be found the Glossary.

The next section, “Relationship-Building Strategies”, collates all the strategies for building relationships in email communication, according to the relevant data sources in this study.

8: Relationship-Building Strategies

Relationship-building language may be defined as language which tries to find common ground between the sender and receiver of an email (as distinct from face-building language which is used to validate the receiver and his work/world or culture). Relationship-building language corresponds closely to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) positive politeness. Table 6.10 shows an excerpt from The Tool-Kit.

Table 6.10 Relationship-building Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for indicating Politeness to Receiver</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship-building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Referring to previous email(s)</td>
<td>S, Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Thanking for previous email(s)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Responding to points made in previous email(s)</td>
<td>PA, Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.10 shows an example of a thread in which emails 2 and 4 did not refer to the previous email. This is considered impolite according to the literature and suggestions by academic colleagues as seen in the data column. Emails 7 and 8 were the only ones to thank the receiver for the previous email. All emails except email 4 responded to points made previously. The Glossary has further information on this section (see Appendix 6).
The final section on politeness in *The Tool-Kit*, “Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space”, collates items of polite language strategies which respect the time and space of the receiver.

9: Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space Strategies

“Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space” language may be defined as the many uses of language in a way that shows respect for the privacy, time and own world of the receiver. The aim of the use of this language is to allow the receiver as much freedom to be unimpeded as possible, while at the same time making a request. “Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space” language corresponds closely to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) negative politeness. Table 6.11 gives an excerpt to illustrate.

**Table 6.11: Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for indicating Politeness to Receiver</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect for Receiver’s Time &amp; Space – (omit if language function is not request)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Giving R time to respond</td>
<td>PA, S, PK</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Being indirect generally</td>
<td>PK, Lit PA</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Giving options to R</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Giving apologies to R (if necessary)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 6.11, none of the emails in the hypothetical thread gave the receiver (adequate) time to respond and were thus considered impolite. Emails 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 included indirect language generally and thus respected the receiver’s time and space in this aspect. Emails 3, 5, 6 and 8 did not give options to the receiver concerning the request(s) and email 8 gave the (necessary) apology to the receiver, while email 3 did not. In emails 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 an apology was not considered necessary. More information on this section can be seen in the Glossary (Appendix 6).

At the conclusion of *The Tool-Kit*, a place is provided to tally up results from all sections explained previously in order to gain an overall score of politeness for each email in the thread. This section, “Overall Performance”, the last one in *The Tool-Kit*, is discussed next.
The last section, “Overall Performance”, tabulates the individual scores for all key sections on politeness (Email Characteristics, Time Factors, Language Style, Language Style of Polite Requests, Relationship-Building Strategies and Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space Strategies). Politeness scores for each of these sections range from a minimum of zero (0) to a maximum of ten (10). The mean, or the average, for each of the politeness sections can also be calculated. Those sections in The Tool-Kit which record N/A (Not Applicable) are not included in the calculations. These individual scores can then be added up and converted to give the Total Politeness Percentage for each email in the thread. A space is also provided to record the mean, or the average, for each of the sections including the Total Politeness Percentage across the whole thread. In this way, politeness patterns both down the individual emails (vertical patterns) as well as politeness patterns across the entire thread (horizontal patterns) can be detected. Scores, including means, also provide an avenue for further analysis and discussion.

Scores for each of the six key sections are calculated out of 10 and therefore all have equal weight. Even though there are differences in the number of items for each of these key sections, for example, “Time Factors and Requests” has 4 items and “Email Characteristics” has 7 items, a uniform score (10) was calculated for each section. This was done for ease of understanding and also to avoid skewing measurements. This politeness instrument inevitably requires further work and research to determine a more rigorous method for assessing the weighting of each of the six key sections.

All scores can then be compared with estimates of the social variables such as the power and social distances and the weight of request(s) which are listed on the first page of The Tool-Kit. Scores can also be cross-checked and compared according to certain variables such as country of origin or type of request, for example. By looking at the extent to which the systematic observations of what people say about politeness in email and how those observations are borne out in the reality of email texts, The Tool-Kit thus attempts to refine, modify and extend elements of existing politeness theories in the literature. The Tool-Kit however, does not represent a new theory of politeness in and of itself, nor does it claim to give a completely objective measure of politeness. Rather, it is a means to facilitate the analysis and reflection on politeness.
in email communication. As mentioned previously, a further purpose of The Tool-Kit is to provide a quick, practical estimate or indicator of the level of politeness in an email text. It must be emphasised however, that politeness scores obtained by using The Tool-Kit are a rough guide rather than an absolute measure. The next chapter explains this process in more detail. Table 6.12 below, gives an example of how the Overall Performance works in an authentic email thread.

Table 6.12: Overall Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td>Kor</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Kor</td>
<td>Kor</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Kor</td>
<td>Kor</td>
<td>Aust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Status (Power) Difference</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Social Distance</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Request Weight</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Type of Request</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Email Characs Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Time Factors Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Language Style Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Language Style Polite Requests Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Relationship-Building Strategies Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Respect for R’s Time and Space Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Total % Politeness</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.12 illustrates the process of gaining overall politeness scores across an email thread between Australia (Aust) and Korea (Kor) (Row A). This authentic example is taken from Chapter 7, Section 7.5.3 (see Overall Performance), where further information on the assessment of politeness can be obtained. The power difference (Row B) and the social distance (Row C) between the two communicators is high (H), signifying perhaps that they are of a different professional rank and that this is the first time they have corresponded with one another. All emails in the thread contain a request(s), each of which has a differing weight, from low (L) to high (H) (Row D). These requests are for services (serv) (emails 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7), information (info) (emails 2 and 5) and time (time) (email 8) (Row E). The Total Politeness Percentage scores ranged from 79% to 45% (shown in Row L). Rows F to K contain scores relevant to each section in The Tool-Kit. In all sections, the maximum score is ten (10) and the minimum politeness score is zero (0). In Table 6.12, the scores for “Email Characteristics” (Row F) ranged from 10 (emails 3, 4 and 6) to 7 (emails 2 and 8). This may signify that the writers of emails 3, 4 and 6 used many politeness strategies for this section. In Row J (“Relationship-Building Strategies”), the scores ranged from 9 (email 1) to 4 (emails 4 and 8). This may signify that the writers of emails 4 and 8 did not include many of the relationship-building strategies included in The Tool-Kit, while the writer of email 1 did.

Mean scores are calculated to signal politeness patterns and give extra data for further discussion and analysis. For example, the mean for each section is calculated, ranging from a high of 9 (Row H: “Language Style”) to a low of 3.1 (Row I: “Language Style of Polite Requests”). The mean for the Total Politeness Percentage is 62% (Row L). Politeness recommendations based on these mean scores are then able to be made.

While the variables of power difference and social distance remain constant in this example, the total politeness scores can be matched against the weights of the requests which are not constant. In emails 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7, the weight of the requests is high and so, according to the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson, (1987), it is expected that the Total Politeness Percentage scores are also high. In this example, these scores are relatively high, (79%, 54%, 69%, 66% and 71% respectively), with the exception of email 3 (54%). Further explanations and information on this authentic example can be seen in Chapter 7, Section 7.5.
The next section discusses the limitations of *The Tool-Kit*.

### 6.3.3 Limitations of *The Tool Kit*

A major limitation of *The Tool-Kit* is its subjective nature. Even though the researcher attempted to bring objectivity into its construction by referring to the three knowledge bases listed for the content, subjectivity inevitably becomes a component when creating a tool to assess social and cultural factors.

A further limitation is the instrument’s potential cultural bias, in that it was created by the researcher of this study, an English-speaking, white Anglo-Western female. Moreover, the instrument is based on data drawn from a largely Australian audience. As such, it cannot be said to be truly intercultural. An offset to this limitation involved the double-checking of all content with my non-Anglo-Western supervisor in an effort to create a more culturally sensitive tool. As well, there was inclusion of data from the Korean participants and also certain intercultural theoretical viewpoints from the literature.

The difficulty of not being able to quantify certain important variables was also a limitation. It is not always accurate or even possible to count such complex and abstract notions as, for example, “showing a helpful attitude”. Other items were difficult to define and quantify, for example, “showing a willingness to accommodate the receiver”, and “choosing language which minimises the imposition of the request”. There remains uncertainty and doubt as to the reliability and validity of both defining and quantifying these abstract and subjective concepts.

The next section outlines further uses of *The Tool-Kit*. It explains how some of the limitations mentioned above may be minimised in future research projects. There is also discussion on the many ways this instrument can be of benefit in different contexts.
6.3.4 Further Uses of *The Tool-Kit*

Further uses of *The Tool-Kit* may provide a sharper focus of the possible patterns of politeness within each and across all its sections. This is important for future studies. Total politeness scores can be pitted against individual and multiple variables shown in the various rows in Table 6.12. For example, in future uses of *The Tool-Kit*, it may be found that higher scores are apparent in all politeness areas if requests were for information but not for services (Row E). Or lower scores in all areas may be linked to low power and social distances between the communicators and so on (Rows B and C). Intracultural comparisons of politeness may also be examined as well. For example, in the authentic email thread in Table 6.12, the Korean email writer has higher politeness scores for the section on “Email Characteristics” (Row F) but not for “Language Style of Polite Requests”, with the exception of email 4 (Row I). The Australian email writer has low scores for “Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space” (Row K) but has higher scores for “Language Style” (Row H). Politeness assistance can thus be targeted at areas in need, as shown by the results of *The Tool-Kit*.

Importantly, cross-cultural comparisons can also be made with the use of *The Tool-Kit*. In this example, comparisons between the Korean and Australian mean scores in each and across all sections *The Tool-Kit* can be analysed. Overall politeness scores may be compared and contrasted between cultures. Such information may be beneficial for developing and refining cultural competence, an important goal of international business communication instruction in the 21st century (Scott, 1999, p. 143).

A further important use of *The Tool-Kit* could also be to locate and assess language proficiency problems in a practical way, with non-native speakers of English (addressing *Gap 5*). For example, low scores by non-English speaking writers in the section “Language Style” (Row H), especially items on grammar, punctuation, and spelling may pinpoint target areas for future teaching. Native English speakers as well could benefit from assistance in these areas. Problems with pragmatic proficiency, common with second language learners, such as recorded in the section “Language Style for Polite Requests” (Row I) could also be detected. Thus, *The Tool-Kit* can not only be used as a guide displaying preferred protocols in the area of intercultural
email communication, but it can also detect aspects of language proficiency in need of future improvement. Importantly, non-native speakers’ views on the content of The Tool-Kit could also provide valuable alternative cultural perspectives for further reviews, thus minimising its limitation of potential cultural bias.

Over a larger corpus of other email threads, The Tool-Kit could also act as a scanner (or search engine) to assist the analysis of multiple email threads in order to detect possible patterns of politeness within and across all sections. The scanning function would enable many important analyses to take place across a range of variables, for example, cross-cultural, gender and generational comparisons of politeness. It would also enable a ranking of politeness strategies, useful for pedagogical as well as industrial settings. Certain strategies of politeness may be more important in different contexts than others. The use of this instrument may identify which strategies are more important for certain communicative contexts and so on. The Tool-Kit is thus a valuable tool for assessing, in a tangible way, individual and cross-cultural politeness elements across a range of variables. By breaking down politeness in intercultural email communication in such a visible way, The Tool-Kit can uncover important information and potential politeness patterns. It can also target areas in need of politeness proficiency assistance.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the salient aspects of politeness in email communication that arose as a result of this research. These aspects were attained after a rigorous analysis of all data from the questionnaire, interview, email texts, the literature and suggestions from academic colleagues. Arising out of the overall conceptual framework in this thesis, a new tangible and concrete instrument was created. The instrument, called The Tool-Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails (or EPA 2), was distinct from the original instrument (EPA 1) which was used to previously analyse email texts with limited results. Described as a metaphorical bridge linking theory to practice, the new instrument represents a starting point in trying to evaluate politeness levels in email communication. It is understood and accepted that further refinement of this instrument in future research projects would lead to overall improvement of its analytical power. Its development
came about as a way of dealing with the uncertainty and gaps in the literature and as a response to the widespread need from the participants. It was described how the content for the new instrument was derived mainly from a synthesis of three sources: views and perceptions from both the Korean and Australian participants; certain theoretical constructs from the literature; and as well, suggestions by academic colleagues over the four year duration of this study.

_The Tool-Kit_ was explained via excerpts of both hypothetical and authentic examples along with some explanations from the Glossary of Terms. It was shown how _The Tool-Kit_ could beneficially be applied in both industrial and pedagogical settings. In the future, it is envisaged that _The Tool-Kit_ may also be applied to many other computer mediated communication media such as web-sites, discussion groups and chat as well as non computer mediated media such as conventional letter format.

The next chapter, Chapter 7, tests the instrument with real world data. In the capacity of a pilot use, _The Tool-Kit_ will be applied to assess levels of politeness in the two authentic email threads previously mentioned in Chapter 3. These threads, spanning the cultures of Australia, Korea and Hong Kong, were used for authentic negotiations by academic staff at the Australian university in the recent past. Using _The Tool-Kit_ for systematic analysis, the next chapter will show the results of its initial pilot use.
Chapter 7: Application of *The Tool-Kit*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on a pilot testing of *The Tool-Kit*. Two email threads were used as a basis for the initial trial (the threads were also used for the initial analysis – see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.4, p. 87 and Chapter 4, Section 4.8, p. 155). Both threads are authentic negotiations undertaken by staff members at the Australian university with overseas academic contacts in the recent past. The first thread involves negotiation between Australia and Hong Kong, and the second between Australia and Korea. This chapter explains how *The Tool-Kit* was used for the purposes of identifying, assessing and detecting uncertainties in politeness indicators in the language across these two threads. It shows how *The Tool-Kit* was used to assess, in a tangible way, intercultural politeness elements in individual emails, as well as detecting patterns across both threads.

In this chapter, there is firstly a brief revision of the different roles of *The Tool-Kit* and identifying which roles in particular apply to this pilot use. It is then demonstrated how *The Tool-Kit* is more efficient and systemic than the initial email politeness assessment instrument used in Chapter 4 (EPA 1) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.4, p. 87 and Chapter 4, Section 4.8, p. 155 for discussion on the initial instrument). Next, the context of each email thread is discussed, followed by a copy of the thread itself. Results using *The Tool-Kit* are then given. This is followed by general discussion of the scores of each section of *The Tool-Kit*. Results from the pilot use are then linked to theory to strengthen the explanatory and analytical power of *The Tool-Kit*. High and low scores, as well as vertical and horizontal politeness patterns, detected by the use of this instrument, follow. This pilot application showed that, by breaking down politeness in email communication in a visible way, areas in need of politeness assistance are able to be targeted. Lastly, a summary synthesising all sections above completes this chapter.

Importantly, the process of peer review was conducted during both trial uses of *The Tool-Kit*. This process involved the double and cross-checking of the researcher’s
initial results with several academic colleagues, familiar with the field. Peer review was also conducted with others not trained in linguistics and not part of an academic environment for further input and consensus. All interpretations of politeness elements in the email threads were thus carefully reviewed and considered by multiple parties, combining experience and knowledge. The multiple peer review processes, then, were helpful in tempering possible researcher bias and subjectivity which can easily infect studies such as this and any instruments arising from it. Peer review was also helpful in bolstering the validity of results (Merriam, 2002; Sarantakos, 1998a).

7.2 Roles of The Tool-Kit

In this section, the different roles of The Tool-Kit are briefly reviewed. Firstly, The Tool-Kit is able to help in assessing levels of politeness in intercultural email communication across a corpus of email threads. Thus, the instrument has a research or analytical role. Secondly, The Tool-Kit can assist people to write more polite emails by providing a politeness protocol. People may consult or refer to The Tool-Kit for guidelines on polite email communication. From The Tool-Kit they can take out what they like or need as necessary. The Tool-Kit however, is not designed as a rule-based, lock-step set of procedures that must be strictly adhered to. Rather, it offers advice only. Thus, it has an advisory or teaching role as well. The contents of The Tool-Kit could well be used in any business, communication, culture, pragmatics or second language course of instruction.

A further role of The Tool-Kit is to provide a quick, practical estimate or indicator of the level of politeness in an email text already written. By using The Tool-Kit, writers could have an instant indication of the level of politeness in their email text before sending off. A politeness percentage would be assigned from the scores across a number of dimensions, as seen in The Tool-Kit. It must be emphasised however, that politeness scores obtained by using The Tool-Kit serve as a rough guide only, rather than an absolute measure.

In this chapter, two email threads are analysed using The Tool-Kit. It is shown how this instrument assumed the research or analytical role, in allowing the researcher a means to analyse and reflect on the language used in the threads. It is also shown how The Tool-Kit acted as a “ready reckoner”, in assigning a politeness value to each email
in the threads. Politeness scores, including means, were calculated within every section of The Tool-Kit, allowing tentative comparisons to be made and conclusions to be drawn.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.4, and Chapter 4, Section 4.8, the initial instrument to assess politeness in intercultural email communication (EPA 1), proved cumbersome and inefficient. It was felt its analytical power was limited. The development of the second instrument (The Tool-Kit or EPA 2) provided a more efficient, practical and inclusive way to assess politeness in email communication. The discussion below summarises the reasons why this is so.

7.3 Main differences between the initial instrument used for analysis (EPA 1) and The Tool-Kit (EPA 2)

Below are some of the reasons why the analytical power of The Tool-Kit (or EPA 2, see Appendix 6) was more efficient and effective than the initial instrument (EPA 1, see Appendix 4).

- The Tool-Kit was more user-friendly, in that it was easier to fill out sections with a tick (✓) or a cross (X). It, therefore, was quicker to analyse email threads.
- It was more inclusive, for example, information given by participants as well as academic colleagues about what they wanted to see for politeness in email was included in the content of The Tool-Kit.
- It included a Glossary of Terms, which included examples and allowed easy reference and further clarification of complex concepts. Thus, it was more systematic.
- It was also therefore, more easily peer reviewed, as multiple analysers can refer to the Glossary of Terms for easy reference and consensus.
- It included simpler language, for example, the term “negative politeness” (in EPA 1) was substituted with “respect for receiver’s time and space”.
- It allowed patterns to be detected more easily. Politeness patterns, both across a thread of many emails (horizontal patterns) and patterns within one email (vertical patterns) were able to be located.
• Politeness patterns were more accurate due to the scoring ability of The Tool-Kit. Politeness patterns evident from the use of the initial instrument were mainly impressions and therefore less well-grounded. Thus, The Tool-Kit was more able to locate and identify problem areas more quickly.

• It included information relevant to email communication, for example, email characteristics, time factors and requests. This information was not included in the original instrument.

• It included more social information about the sender and receiver, for example, the power and social distances between them. This was not included in the initial instrument. Therefore, tentative conclusions concerning the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson, (1987) could now be drawn.

• It included and recorded more information about the nature of the requests. This was not included in the initial instrument. This information was also important for assessing politeness in a holistic way.

Examples of the ability of The Tool-Kit to more systematically assess politeness will be discussed in Sections 7.4.5 and 7.5.5. The next section discusses the analysis of Email Thread 1. Firstly, there is a short description of the context, followed by a copy of the thread itself. Importantly, all names and identifying characteristics in both threads have been deleted and pseudonyms inserted to protect the anonymity of the email writers, thereby upholding the standards of ethical research (Merriam, 2002).

7.4 Email Thread 1

7.4.1 Context of Email Thread 1

Email Thread 1 (briefly described in Chapter 4, Section, 4.8.1, p. 156) contains six individual emails sent between two people: a native male English speaker (Peter, a pseudonym) who is an academic at the status of Professor at the Australian university and a female non-academic Chinese national (Sue, a pseudonym) whose second language was English. Sue is an educational administrator in Hong Kong. The email thread communication took place over a period of 2 weeks in June, 2004. The subject of the email thread involved two negotiations: firstly, to organise the establishment of a joint educational program in Hong Kong, and secondly, to organise accommodation for the Australian academic and his partner (T) for a forthcoming trip to Hong Kong.
7.4.2 Copy of Email Thread 1

Email 1: From Australia to Hong Kong

-----Original Message-----
From: Peter [mailto:j.@austuni.edu.au]
Sent: Friday, June 18, 2004 3:28 PM
To: s.@hk.org.hk
Cc: 
Subject: Start of Program

Dear Sue, (no title and no last name used in address)

Following your information of this week’s enrolments, the Dean and Head of School have decided that (Australian university) is prepared to proceed with offering the program starting on 19 July, providing there is an enrolment of at least 15 full students. We understand the problems that may be compounded by postponing the program yet again, and note your confidence that given a more appropriate lead-time, a full cohort can be achieved. We will go ahead on your proposal of offering a mid-year intake, who will be given the option of catching up with an overload in Semester 3.

Would you be kind enough to book us into a hotel for the period 17-23 July inclusive. We would prefer a hotel a bit better than the Wesley, please (at least one with a bistro and a bar). I have stayed comfortably but not too luxuriously at the City Garden Hotel in Northpoint, - that sort of level please, though I realise that this is a bit far to travel - there might be one a bit closer?

T. and I have booked our air travel, and we shall be arriving on QF97 on the evening of Saturday 17 July, and provisionally leaving on the evening of Saturday 24 July (though availability of seats might mean we have to leave on 23 July).

Good luck with your interviews tomorrow. I hope sincerely
a. that we manage to achieve at least 15 acceptable candidates, and
b. that the Board of the Arts Centre take the same optimistic view of the program’s future as (Australian university).

Keep in touch, early next week (I shall be working at home), but in touch with T., and leaving for America on Wednesday. Please make sure that you copy everything to T.

Best wishes and we’ll both see you in Canada!

Peter (no title and no last name used in closing)

Signature Block included here
Email 2: From Hong Kong to Australia

-----Original Message-----
From: Sue [mailto: s. @hk.org.hk]
Sent: Friday, June 18, 2004 9:53 PM
To: Peter.
Cc:
Subject: RE: Start of Program

Dear Peter,  (no title and no last name used in address)

Tks for the following email. The Mgt of HKAC has yet approved the start of the programme with 15 students. Pls therefore put on hold the hotel booking and airticket booking for the time being. I will talk to them again next Monday.

Regards,

S. (first name abbreviation used here)

No Signature Block included

Email 3: From Australia to Hong Kong

-----Original Message-----
From: Peter /Staff/Austuni
Sent: Monday, June 21, 2004 10:35 AM
To: s. @hk.org.hk
Cc:
Subject: RE: Start of Program

Dear Sue,  (no title and no last name used in address)

Thanks for this. What IS UP with the Non-Local Board? There might be another delay at our end, too. We'll keep in touch.

Peter  (no title and no last name used in closing)

No Signature Block included

Email 4: From Hong Kong to Australia

-----Original Message-----
From: Sue [mailto:s. @hk.org.hk]
Sent: Monday, June 21, 2004 01:51 PM
To: Peter
Cc:
Subject: RE: Start of Program
Importance: High

Dear Peter,  (no title and no last name used in address)
Good news. Approval has been given by HKAC Mgt for the launch of the programme subject to the following:

a. that the first cohort will have not fewer than 15 students
b. that written approval by Non-local Courses Registry is received before the start of the programme. We have yet received any written approval from NLR and therefore we cannot receive any tuition fee for the time being. In our offer letter, we will ask the candidates to write cheques to us, which will only be cashed on receipt of NLR’s formal approval. We will have to spell out clearly in the offer letter that the launch of the programme in July is subject to the written approval. If not, then the launch of the programme will be deferred to Jan / Feb 2005.

Peter, there will be a need for us to further work out detailed arrangements re. teaching and supervision for this cohort as discussed with you over the phone in order for this cohort to be possibly launched. K. and I will come back to you with our recommendation. We can talk about the arrangement for the Intake in Jan 05 when we are in Toronto. Pls go ahead to make your airticket booking etc.

Updates on recent applications:
We interviewed 6 more candidates last Sat. 5 were recommended to (Aust. Uni) to give direct offer. One was recommended to be modular student as he did not have academic qualifications at acceptable level for entry to the grad dip. So with the 11 candidates already recommended for offer (1 is conditional offer subject to documentary proof of his academic qualifications), we now have 16 offers in hand and one for modular studies.

We are going to interview one more candidate tonight.

Regards,

Sue.  (no title and no last name used in closing)

No Signature Block included

Email 5: From Hong Kong to Australia

-----Original Message-----
From: Sue. [mailto: s. @hk.org.hk]
Sent: Monday, June 21, 2004 02:37 PM
To: Peter
Cc: 
Subject: RE: Start of Program
Importance: High

Dear Peter, (no title and no last name used in address)

Another good news. Just received non-local written approval.

S. (first name abbreviation used here)

No Signature Block included
Email 6: From Australia to Hong Kong

-----Original Message-----
From: Peter [mailto:j. @Austuni.edu.au]
Sent: Monday, June 21, 2004 03:56 PM
To: s. @hk.org.hk
Cc:
Subject: RE: Start of Program

Dear Sue,  

(No title and no last name used in address)

Now that IS good news!

Peter.  (No title and no last name used in closing)

No Signature Block included

End of thread

The following section shows the results of the systematic analysis by The Tool-Kit. The use of The Tool-Kit reveals significant findings, not evident from the use of the initial instrument (EPA 1).

7.4.3 Results using The Tool-Kit
**THE TOOL-KIT: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails**

*Please see Glossary for explanations and definitions of terms.*

**Key:** √=yes, X = no, H=high, Med= medium, L=low. R=receiver, S=sender. N/A= Non-Applicable. E1=Email one in the thread, E2=Email two in the thread etc. Please see Glossary for key for sources of data in Data Column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Email</td>
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<td>18/6</td>
<td>21/6</td>
<td>21/6</td>
<td>21/6</td>
<td>21/6</td>
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<td>HK</td>
<td>HK</td>
<td>Aust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sender <em>(Initials)</em></td>
<td>P.</td>
<td>S.</td>
<td>P.</td>
<td>S.</td>
<td>S.</td>
<td>P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Variables - Power / Social Distances**

1: The opening title used | Lit  | Sue | Peter | Sue | Peter | Peter | Sue |
2: The closing title used | Lit  | Peter | S. | Peter | Sue | S. | Peter |
3: This is the first email in thread | Lit | √ | X | X | X | X |
4: S has had previous email contact with R | Lit | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
5: *Status Difference between S & R (H/M/L)* | Lit  | High | High | High | High | High | High |
6: *Social Distance between S & R (H/M/L)* | Lit  | Med | Med | Med | Med | Med | Med |

**Request Weight – (if email has no request please go to next section)**

1: Request is asked | Lit  | √ | √ | X | √ | X | X |
2: No. of requests | Lit | 1 | 1 | N/A | 2 | N/A | N/A |
3: Type of request *(eg for services, goods, information or clarification)* | Lit  | Serv | Serv | N/A | Info, Serv | N/A | N/A |
4: Weight of request *(H/M/L)* | Lit  | High | Low | N/A | Med | N/A | N/A |
<table>
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<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
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**POLITENESS**

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<tr>
<th>Email Characteristics</th>
<th>S</th>
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<th>√</th>
<th>√</th>
<th>√</th>
<th>√</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Subject line is included</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Subject line is relevant</td>
<td>S, Lit PA</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reply function is used (if applicable)</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Normal font is used</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Length is under 1 screen</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Length is over 3 lines. If not, is there an attachment?</td>
<td>Lit, PA</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Written or block signature is included</td>
<td>Lit, PA, PK</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total (out of 10)** | 10 | 8.5 | 7 | 8.5 | 7 | 7 |

**Time Factors and Requests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Factors and Requests</th>
<th>PA, PK, S</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>√</th>
<th>√</th>
<th>√</th>
<th>√</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: If not the first in thread, the time delay in replying was under 3 days</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: All requests, if applicable, in previous email were acknowledged</td>
<td>PA, PK</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: All requests (in previous email) were answered</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: No time pressures given in this email</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Total (out of 10)** | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
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<tr>
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<td>HK</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>HK</td>
<td>HK</td>
<td>Aust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Language Style**

1: R’s full title is used in address  
   PA, PK S | X | X | X | X | X | X |
2: S’s full title is used in sign off  
   PA, PK S | X | X | X | X | X | X |
3: Greeting ‘Dear’ is used  
   PA, PK | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
4: Appropriate leave-taking (eg. *best wishes*)  
   PA, PK | √ | √ | X | √ | X | X |
5: Grammatical accuracy  
   Lit S, PA | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
6: Punctuation accuracy  
   Lit S, PA | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
7: Standard spelling  
   Lit S, PA | √ | X | √ | √ | √ | √ |
8: Paragraph structure  
   Lit | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

**Total (out of 10)**  
7.5 | 6 | 6 | 7.5 | 6 | 6 |

**Language Style of Polite Requests – (please go to next section if no requests)**

1: Modals used in request (No.) (eg. *would*, *may*)  
   PA, PK, Lit | √ | X | N/A | X | N/A | N/A |
2: Use of passive voice (eg. *Is it possible for me to have*)  
   Lit | √ | X | N/A | X | N/A | N/A |
3: Longer sentences used for request (10 words or more)  
   Lit S, PK | √ | X | N/A | X | N/A | N/A |
4: Use of polite indirect question form for request (eg. *Would you be kind enough to send me a copy?*)  
   PK, PA, S, Lit | √ | X | N/A | X | N/A | N/A |

**Total (out of 10)**  
10 | 0 | N/A | 0 | N/A | N/A |
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</table>

**Strategies for indicating Politeness to Receiver**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship-building</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Referring to previous email(s)</td>
<td>S, Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Thanking for previous email(s)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Responding to points made in previous email(s)</td>
<td>PA, Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Attending to Receiver’s request</td>
<td>PA, PK</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Being optimistic (Using positive attitudinal words (eg. Good, OK)</td>
<td>PA, Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Using inclusive pronouns (eg. our, we)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Showing a helpful attitude</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Using face-bldg language (complimenting receiver)</td>
<td>PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Showing willingness to accommodate R</td>
<td>S, PA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Showing interest in R’s work or world or culture</td>
<td>PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: Avoiding jargon/colloqs/acronyms</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: Proposing future interaction</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total (out of 10)** | 10 | 2.5 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 5
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</table>

**Respect for Receiver’s Time & Space**

<table>
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<th>Section</th>
<th>Data</th>
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<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Giving R time to respond</td>
<td>PA, S,PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Being indirect generally</td>
<td>PK, Lit, PA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Giving options to R</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Giving apologies to R (if necessary)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Admitting error (if necessary)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Choosing language which minimises imposition of request</td>
<td>Lit, PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Avoiding demanding, abrupt language</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Avoiding more than 3 requests in email</td>
<td>S, Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total (out of 10)** 10 3 10 7 5 5

The Overall Performance for the thread is now given with scores for each section tabulated in order to calculate a final percentage of politeness for each email in the thread. The mean scores for each section are also given.
### Overall Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th><strong>Mean Score</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong> Country of Origin</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>HK</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>HK</td>
<td>HK</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong> Status (Power) Difference</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong> Social Distance</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong> Request Weight</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong> Type of Request</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Info, Serv</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong> Email Characters Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong> Time Factors Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H</strong> Language Style Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong> Language Style of Polite Request Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>J</strong> Relationship-Building Strategies Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K</strong> Respect for R’s Time and Space Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L</strong> Total % Politeness</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A brief discussion of each section of *The Tool-Kit* now takes place. Politeness scores, including the mean, are given for each section where scores were counted. Following this, there is explanation of a sample of scores, both low and high, from *The Tool-Kit* with links to the literature for strengthening purposes.
7.4.4 Brief Discussion of Sections in The Tool-Kit (Email Thread 1)

Some general points are discussed under the relevant headings from The Tool-Kit.

Email Classification

There were big discrepancies in email length. In the thread, the number of lines ranged from 24 to 1. As is sometimes typical in email negotiations, the initial emails are often longer in length as the context of the negotiation becomes established and the email length decreases thereafter. Emails of only one line in length were apparent (Emails 5 and 6).

Social Variables

In this thread, there was no use of titles at all. This may indicate that the two communicators knew each other before the thread started, as first names and even abbreviations of first names were used. There appears to be a difference in status between the sender and receiver, as the Australian sender was a Professor and the receiver from Hong Kong was a non-academic educational administrator. This difference in status, however, did not seem to be reflected in the language which may mean that the social distance between them was not great.

Request Weight

The requests in this thread were for services and information. The initial request (for services) in Email 1 had a high request weight (choosing and booking suitable hotel accommodation). Other requests had a medium weight (Email 4), and a low weight (Email 2).

Email Characteristics (Politeness Score Range = 7 – 10: Mean = 8)

A high mean score here indicates the use of politeness for the section on email characteristics is evident. For example, a relevant subject line was included in all emails in this thread. This is an important politeness consideration according to the data sources. As well, the reply function was also used, enabling the receiver to see the history of the negotiation for each email.
Time Factors and Requests (Politeness Score Range = 5 – 10: Mean = 5.8)

In this thread, a speedy rhythmic interaction of sending and replying was evident. A total of four emails were sent within a two-hour time span. As indicated in the score, some requests were not acknowledged or answered in this thread. Due to these discrepancies, this section will be taken up further in Section 7.4.5, Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory, p. 257.

Language Style (Politeness Score Range = 6 – 7.5: Mean = 6.5)

There were signs of linguistic variations and acronyms in the language especially in the emails from Hong Kong where an informal conversational genre was evident. Examples of culturally relative deictic words, acronyms, abbreviations, and capitalisations for emphasis, which may not have been understood in the receiving culture, were evident in the thread. There were also some examples of ellipsis, indications of informal language style, found in this thread.

Language Style of Polite Requests (Politeness Score Range = 0 – 10: Mean = 3.3)

The use of politeness indicators in requests was much higher from the Australian end. The first email in this thread contains many examples of indirect requests, which were often softened with both relationship-building strategies and respect for receiver politeness strategies. By contrast, the language of requests was more direct in the emails from Hong Kong. This is reflected in the low mean score for this section which will be taken up further in Section 7.4.5, Linking The Tool-Kit results to Theory, p. 257.

Relationship-building Strategies (Politeness Score Range = 2.5 – 10: Mean = 6)

The Australian academic included much more relationship-building language in his emails than the receiver in Hong Kong. This language served to raise the levels of social presence in the interaction. It also served to sustain an online interpersonal relationship in the thread and to develop collaboration between two culturally different parties. Due to some low scores obtained in this section, it will be taken up further in Section 7.4.5, Linking The Tool-Kit results to Theory p. 257.
Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space (Politeness Score Range = 3 – 10: Mean = 6.6)

Emails from Hong Kong were more direct in the language and offered fewer options. In this section, N/A (Not Applicable) applies to those sections where the item did not apply.

**Overall Performance**

The total percentage politeness scores ranged from 96% (Email 1) to 42% (Email 2). It is important to view these results in connection with other information elicited on page one of *The Tool-Kit*, especially the length of the message, the weight of request(s) and the social variables of both communicators. In this way, a more complete portrait of politeness can be gained. Further discussion on these results will be taken up in Section 7.4.8, Vertical Politeness Patterns evident in *Email Thread 1*, p. 266.

A small sample of both high and low scores obtained are now discussed and explained with relevant links to theory (discussed in Chapter 2).

**7.4.5 Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory (Email Thread 1)**

Vertical patterns for individual emails, that is, those patterns obtained by looking up and down within a single email are now discussed (horizontal patterns or those patterns obtained by looking across the entire thread are discussed in *Email Thread 2*). Confirmation of results by certain theoretical constructs from the literature serves to strengthen the explanatory power of *The Tool-Kit*. Its value as an instrument for systematic text analysis is thus further increased.

Two examples of high score vertical patterns are now discussed, followed by three examples of low score vertical patterns.

**7.4.6 High Score Patterns**

**Email 1 (from Australia)**

Score for Language Style of Polite Requests = 10

This is a perfect score for this section in *The Tool-Kit*. The vertical column of ticks
(√), evident in this section for Email 1, illustrates this high score. This email is now discussed with links to the literature to confirm and verify the high score obtained in this section.

This email contains two requests. The language in both of these requests contains a high level of politeness, according to the literature, which confirms this high score. The discussion below illustrates how politeness strategies are embedded in both the requests to achieve this high score.

The two requests in this email involve accommodation booking and the standard of hotel desired. To signal his intention to make the requests, Peter indirectly sets the linguistic scene by the use of projectional processes which serve the purpose of projecting his inner world (Halliday, 1994), for example, I prefer..., I realise.... The mood changes from declarative in the first paragraph to interrogative in the second as Peter requests assistance with accommodation, although this is done indirectly. As well, in the second paragraph, the modality changes with the addition of many modals for example, would you be kind enough..., we would prefer..., there might be one.... There is also the addition of many attitudinal epithets in the language for example, please, a bit better than the Wesley, not too luxuriously.

The first request and therefore the first potential threat to Sue’s face is:

*Would you be kind enough to book us into a hotel for the period 17-23 July inclusive.*

On the scale of politeness, this form of request rates very high (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is a common form of conventional indirectness with request value, as it is really asking about Sue’s level of kindness rather than directly asking her to do something. A less polite form of the same request, such as *Would you book us into a hotel?* would seem to be acceptable and even appropriate in the context of this negotiation so it is difficult to know why Peter has chosen such a high level of politeness for this particular speech act.

Positive and negative politeness strategies using modal verbs and formulaic expressions have been added to soften this request, for example, *would you be kind*
enough to book us into a hotel…. Positive politeness strategies, that is, strategies that show interest and sympathy toward Sue have been used, for example, kind, and please. Negative politeness strategies, that is, strategies of non-imposition or not assuming that the request will be automatically carried out and minimising the imposition with formulaic expressions of politeness, have also been used, for example, would you be kind enough…? Here Peter is almost giving the Sue the option to choose whether or not to carry out the request, such is his concern for her negative face.

The second request or potential threat to face, that of requesting a certain standard of accommodation, is also expressed indirectly:

*We would prefer a hotel a bit better than the Wesley, please (at least one with a bistro and a bar). I have stayed comfortably but not too luxuriously at the City Garden in Northpoint – that sort of level please, though, I realise that this is a bit far to travel – there might be one a bit closer?*

Here, Peter is using the negative politeness strategy of indirectness to request a certain standard of accommodation. *A bit better than the Wesley, please... that sort of level please,...* These utterances become requests as they both have request value even though the sender does not state directly what level of accommodation he would like. He may believe that asking for something in such an indirect way minimises the imposition to the receiver and is thus more polite. Peter is also complying with the “Modesty Maxim” (Leech, 1983) in his desire to appear modest and easy to please. He does not want to appear too demanding with the level of accommodation luxury, thereby perhaps playing down his own (real) wishes for accommodation standards. Peter’s language (*a bit better than the Wesley*) may be, however, an indirect criticism of Sue’s previous attempts at choosing accommodation for him. It is not apparent from the thread whether Sue, in fact, chose the Wesley for Peter in a previous visit to Hong Kong and he did not like it. If that is the case, this language may be interpreted by Sue as a criticism of her ability to choose accommodation for Peter and may therefore explain why she did not comply with his request of organising further accommodation for him. Examples such as this one where a politely written request may, in fact, be a camouflaged criticism, can not be picked up by *The Tool-Kit*. This
politeness instrument can not detect such potential sub-texts which can sometimes form part of linguistic politeness (Watts, 2003).

Peter is also following one of the principles in Lakoff’s politeness principle (Lakoff, 1989) in giving the receiver options to act. When requesting assistance for accommodation, the sender does not state emphatically what he wants. Rather, he gives his preferences by way of an example and gives the receiver an option of accommodation choice (…that sort of level please.). Peter is showing awareness of the politeness formula that states that as the hearer authority relative to the speaker increases and the social distance between them increases, the greater will be the need for providing the hearer with options and the greater the need for indirectness in the formulation of the expression conveying the message (Leech, 1983, cited in Fraser, 1990, p. 226).

Peter has used an indirect expression of request to ask for a hotel closer to the project centre, for example, though I realise that this is a bit far to travel – there might be one a bit closer? Again, positive and negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are evident here. The positive politeness strategies are the use of modal might and the addition of I realise that this is a bit far to travel. This is a solidarity strategy as it shows that the sender shares knowledge (distance to travel) with the receiver and agrees with her. It is also an “Agreement Maxim” (Leech, 1983), the purpose of which is to enhance the face of the receiver. The sender agrees with the receiver about the travel distances, indicating that he wants to acknowledge the receiver’s accurate assessments, thereby enhancing her face. The sender reduces the threat to the receiver’s face by requesting a hotel in a more convenient location indirectly, thereby reducing the imposition, for example, - there might be one a bit closer? The interrogative (question form) has been replaced by the declarative mood with the addition of a question mark at the end as a further attempt to show negative politeness towards the receiver.

In the same email, Peter also gives details of the arrival times and dates for himself and his academic partner (T), as well as the time and date of their departure:
There may be implicature (Grice, 1975) intended in this paragraph. By giving the times and dates directly in the declarative mood, the sender may be implying that he would like the receiver to meet them at the airport or consider some other welcoming arrangements, but has not asked for this directly. As such, it is an example of an “off-record” request (Brown & Levinson, 1987) using the “hint” strategy of negative politeness. This may be an example of Peter’s concerns about making potential impositions on Sue which would seem relevant for his cultural background. Sue, however, may have different interpretations about impositions on others and may not share Peter’s viewpoints on this matter.

As can be seen from the discussion above that the sender of this email (Peter) has included many politeness strategies in both requests. These strategies embed a high level of politeness, as confirmed by the literature. The high score obtained in the section of The Tool-Kit, reflects the use of such strategies. The initial analysis using EPA 1 did not elicit such information concerning polite requests. Hence it was not able to analyse the language embedded within polite requests as well as The Tool-Kit.

The next discussion, from the same email, explains the high score gained for another section in The Tool-Kit, Relationship-Building Strategies.

**Email 1 (from Australia)**

**Score for Relationship-Building Strategies = 10**

This is another perfect score. Again, the vertical column of ticks (√), evident in this section for Email 1, illustrates this high score. As indicated previously, Email 1 has many relationship-building strategies. The high score also confirms results obtained from the other data sources, the questionnaire and interview in which it was found that the Australian participants considered politeness on email involved building relationships. Some of the relationship-building strategies in Email 1 include:
These strategies serve to consolidate the professional collaboration between Peter and Sue and minimise further any existing social distance between them (Moran & Hawisher, 1998; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Tu, 2001; Walther, 1997). These linguistic expressions contain many positive politeness strategies which are designed to emphasise the solidarity already building between both parties and the forging of professional collaboration (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The politeness strategies have the overall effect of sustaining an online relationship. The leave-taking language before signing off: *Best wishes and we’ll both see you in Canada*, further emphasises Peter’s desire to maintain interpersonal relationships with Sue and to create feelings of solidarity and collaboration.

As can be seen from the discussion above, the sender of this email (Peter) has included many relationship-building strategies, in Email 1. The use of such strategies can serve to develop online relationships and trust between people (Barrett & Turtz, 1998; Herring, 1996; Walther, 1997). The high score obtained reflects the use of such strategies. *The Tool-Kit* was able to measure these strategies in a tangible way, instead of impressions and hunches only from the initial instrument for analysis (EPA 1). Next, there is discussion of a small sample of low scores obtained through the use of *The Tool-Kit*.

### 7.4.7 Low Score Patterns

**Email 2 (from Hong Kong)**  
**Score for Language Style of Polite Requests = 0**

This is the lowest possible score. It is explained with links to theory why such a low score was attained.
This email contains one request which is embedded in the third sentence. The language used to make this request is direct in nature and could therefore be considered impolite. It is a bald request to put on hold Peter’s travel bookings:

Pls therefore put on hold the hotel booking and airticket booking for the time being.

This directive may explain the sense of urgency in the speed of reply. A component of Lakoff’s (1989) politeness principle, to give the hearer options, is not given in this directive. The receiver must do as requested, as he has been given no other option for action. It is also interesting to note that Sue has requested Peter to put on hold the hotel booking but in the first email, Peter, at length, politely requested Sue to do the hotel choosing and booking for him. She has ignored his pleas for the booking of suitable hotel accommodation on his behalf. It is difficult to know why she has ignored this request and why Peter has not broached the subject further. It is also not known whether Sue expects that he will make his own accommodation arrangements.

The following example explains another low score, from the same email, for the section, “Relationship-Building”.

Email 2 (from Hong Kong)
Score for Relationship-Building Strategies = 2.5

From the same email, a low score for relationship-building is also evident. The following discussion, with references to the literature, explains this low score.

The body of the email message is extremely brief, consisting of three lines only. It is transactional in nature, giving the information that approval has been given for the project and also a directive to postpone airline and hotel bookings until a later date when more information about the project will be known.

Sue has used the lexical variation in the opening sentence (Tks for the following email, Tks for Thanks). This abbreviation may be used to save time in writing and to add to the conversational tone in the email. The use of lexical variations, not part of standard
English practice, may not be acceptable to some cultures which prefer a more formal email style (Baron, 2001; Crystal, 2001). The use of Tks (Thanks) and Pls (Please) in this thread may be interpreted as a positive politeness strategy, showing consideration and friendliness towards the receiver. It may, however, also demonstrate a certain flippant use of politeness markers and therefore may be offensive to others (Baron, 1998; Simmons, 1994).

The second sentence contains two abbreviations Mgt for Management and HKAC for Hong Kong Arts Centre. It is interesting to note that the key word in the brief email has been omitted (not): The Mgt of HKAC has (omission) yet approved the start of the programme. This omission may have caused a misunderstanding, as it is crucial to the locutionary meaning and the illocutionary force of the statement (Fasold, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Thomas, 1995). As well, the receiver may not understand these abbreviations and variations and may therefore take offence or misunderstand the message (Crystal, 2001).

In this email, there are no references to the receiver’s world or comments which could convey consideration for the receiver. Such absences can convey impoliteness in email communication (Pincas, 2001; Rice, 1997; Tu, 2001). If, in email, the communication centres on the wishes of the sender, without consideration to the dyadic nature of the online communication, a lack of politeness may result (Crystal, 2001; Rice, 1997; Wallace, 2002).

The discussion above illustrates a relative lack of strategies which show approval, consideration and appreciation of the receiver. The use of such strategies can validate the face of the receiver and are thus important for relationship-building (Fraser, 1990; Holmes, 2003; Meier, 1995; Watts, 2003). EPA 1, the initial instrument for analysis, showed indications only the use of relationship-building language was not echoed back from the receiver in Hong Kong. The use of The Tool-Kit was able to demonstrate this in a tangible way, by counting these strategies, instead of general indications only with the initial instrument.

The next example discusses another low score for the section, “Time Factors and Requests”.

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Email 4 (from Hong Kong)

Score for Time Factors and Requests = 5

The sender of this email (Sue) has not fully considered the other partner (Peter) in the email exchange in the section, “Time Factors and Requests”. The first paragraph of the email is transactional in nature as it gives the receiver information about the conditions of the approval. At the end of this paragraph, there is a change in field, tenor and mode of discourse (Halliday, 1994) as Sue makes her first request indirectly:

Peter, there will be a need for us to further work out detailed arrangements and supervision for this cohort as discussed with you over the phone........

Here, Sue is confirming or acknowledging that there is a need for her and Peter to work out further arrangements so she is not really making a request at this stage. The use of the vocative Peter at the beginning of this paragraph may be interpreted as assuming a face-to-face conversation mode. Thus, it may be a softening mechanism, the effect of which could show solidarity with the receiver. However, this vocative could also be interpreted as an imperative directive, having the value of an order (Fasold, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Thomas, 1995). In this case, the vocative Peter could denote a power difference between the two whereby Sue gives the order and Peter must respond. As such the use of a first name preceding a request would not be considered as a politeness marker. The use of third person inclusive pronoun us may show solidarity by reducing the social distance between Sue and Peter. There is no negative politeness as the sender does not give the receiver any option to decline forming the meeting. It is given as a direct order and as such, may cause offence. Only a direct imperative would be considered more face threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Sue, however, uses many interpersonal collaborative expressions in this paragraph and inclusive pronouns which can create feelings of solidarity, for example,

K. and I will come back to you with our recommendation.

We can talk about the arrangement... when we are in Toronto

Pls go ahead to make your airticket booking ...
It is interesting to note that Sue has still made no mention of accommodation booking in a suitable hotel for Peter and his academic partner. There is no reference so far to his requests. Sue seems to be intent on communicating her wishes and her news and is not receptive to attending to receiver’s wants. She signs off this email with the same formulaic expression as in her previous email Regards and signs off using her first name.

Importantly, information concerning “Time Factors and Requests” was not elicited from the initial instrument (EPA 1). It can be seen from the discussion above that The Tool-Kit was able to locate aspects to do with time, for both email exchanges and the answering of requests within the emails, thus enabling more analysis than EPA 1. Scores calculated by The Tool-Kit on items concerning time factors and requests have been linked to certain constructs from the literature for strengthening purposes. It must be emphasised however, that the politeness scores obtained in the discussion above, serve as a rough guide only, rather than an absolute measure. The use of The Tool-Kit and the resultant scores have allowed the researcher a means to analyse and reflect on the language used in the threads. A summary below highlights the main vertical patterns evident in Email Thread 1.

7.4.8 Vertical Politeness Patterns evident in Email Thread 1

Below is a summary of the vertical politeness patterns obtained by looking down the page of the thread.

- Total politeness percentages decreased as the email thread progressed (with the exception of Email 2).
- Total politeness percentages generally correlated to requests, for example, in emails where no requests were asked (Emails, 3, 5 and 6), politeness scores were low, with the exception of Email 3 (70%, 56% and 56% respectively).
- Total Politeness percentages corresponded to the weight of the request, for example, Email 2 whose request had low weight, also had the lowest politeness score (42%).
- Conversely, the email with the highest weight request (Email 1) also had the highest politeness score (96%).
Total politeness percentages were not affected by length of email for example, email 4 (23 lines) had a politeness percentage of 58%, while that of email 5 (1 line) was 56%.

7.5 Email Thread 2

A format, similar to Email Thread 1, follows for Email Thread 2. First, there is general description of the context of this thread. Next, there is a copy of the thread itself. Results using The Tool-Kit are then tabulated. Then, there is a brief discussion of all sections of The Tool-Kit giving the range of politeness scores, including the mean. Next, a small sample of low score results obtained is then discussed with relevant links to the literature. Horizontal politeness patterns, evident as a result of using The Tool-Kit, are then outlined. This is followed by a summary of both email thread analyses.

7.5.1 Context of Email Thread 2

Email Thread 2 (also briefly described in Chapter 4, Section, 4.8.2, p. 157) involves the exchange of eight emails between Australia and Korea which take place over a period of five weeks. It involves an exchange between two male academics. The Korean academic, a PhD, is organising, through the emails, an international conference and the Australian academic, a Professor, has been asked to give a keynote speech at the conference. The email exchange involves finalising the speaking arrangements at the conference, which is to be held in Korea. As in the previous thread, all names and identifying characteristics have been deleted and pseudonyms inserted to protect the anonymity of the email writers. In this thread, the pseudonym of the Korean academic is Dr Y.Z (Y denotes the first name and Z the family name) and that of the Australian academic is Prof V. X. (V denotes first name and X the family name). Letters denoting both first and family names are necessary as one or both names were used interchangeably in the address or closing in some emails in this thread.
7.5.2 Copy Email Thread 2

Note: There is a missing email between emails 1 and 2, whereby the reply to the initial Korean email by the Australian academic was not answered by the Korean organiser. As well, in email 7, the Korean organiser has addressed all Plenary speakers in an effort to clarify apparent confusion as indicated by the Australian academic.

Email 1: From Korea to Australia

-----Original Message-----
From: Y. Z [mailto: Y. Z.@..ac.kr]
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2003 09:53 PM
To: V.X @austuni.edu.au
Cc:
Subject: (no subject)

Dear Professor X.,  (Title of Professor and family name used in address)

I would like to ask you whether you can participate in our conference on November 7-9, 2003. At the moment, Professors K.J. (Lancaster University, UK), S.(Israel), and A. T. (Hong Kong University) are confirmed to join our convention. Another speaker excluding you has been contacted. We want to include distinguished guests like you on our poster and brochure for the conference.

If you decide to join us, we will provide you with detailed information. Please let me know as soon as possible.
Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Y. Z., Ph.D  (First and family name given with letters Ph.D)
Conference Chair, Asia ___

2003 Call for Presentations [attachment included]

Email 2: From Australia to Korea

-----Original Message-----
From: V.X [mailto: V.X@austuni.edu.au]
Sent: Tuesday, June, 18, 2003 09:28 AM
To: Y.Z.@....ac.kr
Cc:
Subject: Re: (no subject)
Dear Dr Y. Z,  *(Title of Dr. and first and family name used in address)*

Hello again from Brisbane. I hope you are well.

I haven't heard anything from your since my email some weeks ago. Could you please confirm that you still wish me to attend your conference as a keynote speaker.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

V. X.  *(First and family name given in closing with no title)*

*No Signature Block included*

---

**Email 3: From Korea to Australia**

-----Original Message-----

*From:* Y.Z. [mailto: Y.Z @.. ac.kr]

*Sent:* Tuesday, June, 18, 2003 15:28 PM

*To:* V.X. @austuni.edu.au

*Cc:*

*Subject:* Re: Asia ___ Conference

Dear Professor X,

I am sorry not to respond to your message. I thought I did, and I thought you and I agreed that you will make a presentation at the conference. In fact, your name is already on the brochure and the poster which will be printed in a week. We will send you and official invitational letter soon.

By the way, I was going to ask you a favor. I need your presentation titles for keynote speech (50min) and concurrent session (30min) as soon as possible. We have decided to apply for the Korea government fund for holding an international conference. I appreciate your cooperation in advance.

We may refer to the attached file for the detailed information on the conference. Thank you. Keep in touch.

Y. Z Ph.D.

Conference Chair, Asia ____
Email 4: From Korea to Australia

-----Original Message-----
From: Y.Z. [mailto: Y.Z. @..ac.kr]
Sent: Tuesday, June, 18, 2003 10:38 PM
To: V.X. @austuni.edu.au
Cc: 
Subject: Official Invitation Letter from Asia ___

Dear Dr. X.,  (Title of Dr. and family name used in address)

Please find enclosed our official invitational letter from the Asia ___ and other corresponding files. I would like to ask you to send me a short message indicating your willingness to accept our invitation.

In addition, I would like you to send me your tentative titles for the main presentation and for the concurrent session by June 22. Of course, you can change them later freely.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Y. Z., Ph.D.

Conference Chair, Asia ___

Invitation Letter.doc

Email 5: From Australia to Korea

-----Original Message-----
From: V.X  [mailto: V.X  @austuni.edu.au]
Sent: Monday, June, 23, 2003 08:41 AM
To: Y. Z, @..ac.kr
Cc: 
Subject: Re: Official Invitation Letter from Asia ___

Dear Y. Z.,  (First and family name with no title used in address)

I’m afraid you sent me the incorrect letter of invitation. Please send me the correct letter.

Also, can you briefly let me know what is expected in the “concurrent session”. I am unclear what you mean by this.

Thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

V. X.  (First and family name with no title used in closing)

No Signature Block included
Email 6: From Korea to Australia

Dear Professor X.,

I am really sorry to send you a wrong invitational letter. I am really ashamed of it. Now I am enclosing the right one for you.

Let me clarify what I meant by concurrent sessions. As a plenary speaker, you may talk about “Emerging issues in Asia _._.” Since we do not have much opportunity to listen to distinguished scholars like you, we also want you to give us a talk in one of the following areas. You may want to talk about your research findings or a specific topic for 30 minutes in the concurrent session.

1. Theory and Methodology
2. Proficiency Goals and Assessment
3. Education Policy
4. Curriculum/Materials Development
5. International/Intercultural Communication
6. Teacher Education
7. Teaching Young Learners
8. Multimedia-Assisted Language Teaching

I hope this helps you. At the moment, I want your (tentative) titles for both plenary and concurrent presentations as soon as possible. Obviously, you can change them later if you want to. We are going to apply for Korean funds for international conference. The deadline is July 1, and we do not have much time to prepare it. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Y. Z., Ph.D.

Conference Chair, Asia _._

Email 7: Korea to Australia

From: -----Original Message-----
From: Y. Z. [mailto: Y. Z.@..ac.kr]
Sent: Tuesday, June, 24, 2003 11:00 PM
To: V. X. @austuni.edu.au
Cc:
Subject: (no subject)
Dear Plenary Speakers,

Thank you for your acceptance of our invitation to the Asia ___ conference. If you do not send your official acceptance letter yet and you are going to participate, please let me have it soon.

There must be confusion regarding your presentations and travel funds since you are invited by several different officers of Asia ___. We are sorry for what happened and I am sure that won't happen again.

Besides, I would like to ask you for a big favor for us. The Asia directors at the meeting decided to ask all the plenary speakers to make two presentations: one for the keynote speech and the other for concurrent presentation. This is because we want to give audience more opportunity to expose to insightful and valuable speakers’ presentations.

At the plenary presentation, you may want to talk about the broad topic of emerging issues in Asia ___. At the concurrent presentation, however, you may talk about more specific topic in the following areas. Theory and methodology, Testing, Education Policy, Curriculum/Material development, Intercultural communication, Teacher education, Teaching young learners, and CALL. You can report your research findings and your own book.

I want you to give two titles to me as soon as possible if you are willing to make two presentations. If you cannot do, however, please let me know. We are in the process of applying for Korean government fund for holding an international conference, the deadline of which is July 1. As you may know, it takes a lot of fund to hold one. I hope you can help us. Thank you for your cooperation in advance. I look forward to seeing you in Busan in November. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Y. Z., Ph.D.
Conference Chair, Asia ___

---

Email 8: From Australia to Korea

-----Original Message-----
From: V. X. [mailto: V. X. @austuni.edu.au]
Sent: Wednesday, June, 25, 2003 08:41 AM
To: Y. Z. @..ac.kr
Cc: 
Subject: Re (no subject)

Dear Y. Z.,

(First and family name with no title used in address)

Thank you for your email. I am in the middle of marking examinations right now and the deadline for marks is 2 July.

I need time to think about my presentation titles. Therefore, I will contact you early next week.

Thank you.
Best regards,

V. X.  (First and family name with no title used in closing)

No Signature Block included

End of Thread

The following section shows the results of a systematic analysis by *The Tool-Kit*. The use of *The Tool-Kit* reveals significant findings, not evident from an initial first glance.

### 7.5.3 Results using *The Tool-Kit*
**THE TOOL-KIT: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails**

Please see Glossary for explanations and definitions of terms.

Key: √=yes, X = no, H=high, Med= medium, L=low, R=receiver, S=sender. N/A= Non-Applicable. E1=Email one in the thread, E2=Email two in the thread etc Please see end Glossary for key for sources of data in Data Column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email Classification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Email</td>
<td>20/5</td>
<td>18/6</td>
<td>18/6</td>
<td>18/6</td>
<td>23/6</td>
<td>24/6</td>
<td>24/6</td>
<td>25/6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sender (Initials)</td>
<td>Y.Z.</td>
<td>V.X.</td>
<td>Y.Z.</td>
<td>Y.Z.</td>
<td>V.X.</td>
<td>Y.Z.</td>
<td>Y.Z.</td>
<td>V.X.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. written lines in email</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Variables - Power / Social Distances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: The opening title used</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Y.Z.</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: The closing title used</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>V.X.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>V.X.</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>V.X.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: This is the first email in thread</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: S has had previous email contact with R</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Status Difference between S &amp; R (H/M/L)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Social Distance between S &amp; R (H/M/L)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Request Weight – (if email has no request please go to next section)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Request is asked</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: No. of requests</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Type of request (eg. for services, goods, information or clarification, time)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Weight of request (H/M/L)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
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<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
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**POLITENESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email Characteristics</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Subject line is included</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Subject line is relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reply function is used (if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Normal font is used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Length is under 1 screen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Length is over 3 lines. If not, is there an attachment?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Written or block signature is included</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Time Factors and Requests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Factors and Requests</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: If not the first in thread, the time delay in replying was under 3 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: All requests, if applicable, in previous email were acknowledged</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: All requests (in previous email) were answered</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4: No time pressures given in this email</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

**Total (out of 10)**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Aust</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Aust</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>E 1</td>
<td>E 2</td>
<td>E 3</td>
<td>E 4</td>
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<td>E 6</td>
<td>E 7</td>
<td>E 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Language Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: R’s full title is used in address</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: S’s full title is used in sign off</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Greeting ‘Dear’ is used</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Appropriate leave-taking (e.g., best wishes)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Grammatical accuracy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Punctuation accuracy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Standard spelling</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Paragraph structure</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total (out of 10) 10 9 10 9 7.5 10 9 7.5

### Language Style of Polite Requests – (please go to next section if no requests)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
<th>PA, PK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Modals used in request (No.) (e.g., would, may)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Use of passive voice (e.g., Is it possible for me to have)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Longer sentences used for request (10 words or more)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Use of polite indirect question form for request (e.g., Would you be kind enough to send me a copy?)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total (out of 10) 7.5 2.5 0 10 2.5 0 2.5 0
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
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<td>Aust</td>
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<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Aust</td>
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</tbody>
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**Strategies for indicating Politeness to Receiver**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship-building</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
<th>E 2</th>
<th>E 3</th>
<th>E 4</th>
<th>E 5</th>
<th>E 6</th>
<th>E 7</th>
<th>E 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Referring to previous email(s)</td>
<td>S, Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Thanking for previous email(s)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Responding to points made in previous email(s)</td>
<td>PA, Lit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Attending to Receiver’s request</td>
<td>PA, PK</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Being optimistic (Using positive attitudinal words (eg. Good, OK)</td>
<td>PA, Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Using inclusive pronouns (eg. our, we)</td>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Showing a helpful attitude</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Using face-bldg language (complimenting receiver)</td>
<td>PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Showing willingness to accommodate R</td>
<td>S, PA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Showing interest in R’s work or world or culture</td>
<td>PK</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: Avoiding jargon/ colloqs/ acronyms</td>
<td>PA, PK, S</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: Proposing future interaction</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>E 1</td>
<td>E 2</td>
<td>E 3</td>
<td>E 4</td>
<td>E 5</td>
<td>E 6</td>
<td>E 7</td>
<td>E 8</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Respect for Receiver’s Time & Space**

1: Giving R time to respond  
PA, S, PK | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

2: Being indirect generally  
PK, Lit, PA, | √ | √ | X | √ | X | X | √ | X |

3: Giving options to R  
Lit | X | X | X | √ | X | √ | √ | X |

4: Giving apologies to R  
(if necessary)  
Lit | X | X | √ | X | X | √ | √ | X |

5: Admitting error  
(if necessary)  
Lit | X | X | √ | X | X | √ | √ | X |

6: Choosing language which minimises imposition of request  
Lit, PK | √ | √ | X | √ | X | X | √ | X |

7: Avoiding demanding, abrupt language  
PA, PK, S | √ | X | X | √ | X | X | X | X |

8: Avoiding more than 3 requests in email  
S, Lit | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | X | √ | √ |

**Total (out of 10)**  
5 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 7.5 | 1 |

The Overall Performance for the thread is now given with scores for each section tabulated in order to calculate a final percentage of politeness for each email in the thread. The mean scores for each section are also given.
### Overall Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E1</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
<th>E4</th>
<th>E5</th>
<th>E6</th>
<th>E7</th>
<th>E8</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Aust</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Aust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
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<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
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<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Serv</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Email Characs Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Language Style Polite Request Total (out of 10)</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Relationship-Building Strategies Total (out of 10)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Respect for R’s Time and Space Total (out of 10)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Total % Politeness</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A brief discussion of each section of *The Tool-Kit* now takes place. Politeness scores, including the mean, are given for each section where scores were counted. Following this, there is explanation of a sample of scores from *The Tool-Kit*, with links to the literature for strengthening purposes. An initial analysis of these scores was done in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2, p. 236.
7.5.4 Brief Discussion of Sections in *The Tool-Kit (Email Thread 2)*

**Email Classification**

There were five emails from Korea and three emails from Australia. The lengths varied from 5 lines (Emails 2, 5 and 8) to 23 lines (Email 7).

**Social Variables**

The social distance between the two correspondents was marked as high as they had not met face-to-face before. Social and linguistic differences in the two cultures were also high. As well, there was a high difference in status between the two correspondents. The Korean organiser was not as high in status as the Professor from Australia. This difference may be reflected in the confusion surrounding the use of titles in this thread, which was not consistent or adequate.

**Request Weight**

Requests were of three types: service (Emails 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7), information (Emails 2, 5) and time (Email 8). Most requests in this thread were marked as high weight, except for requests in emails 2, 5, and 8.

**Email Characteristics Requests (Politeness Score Range = 7 – 10: Mean = 8.5)**

Unlike the previous thread, the systematic use of a suitable and relevant subject line was not evident for all emails in this thread. A letter of invitation was incorrectly attached causing misunderstanding, confusion and delay (Email 4).

**Time Factors and Requests (Politeness Score Range = 2.5 – 7.5: Mean = 6)**

Requests, sometimes written in direct language, were ignored in this thread, as evidenced by several low scores. A mutually convenient time rhythm for writing and responding was not established, as delays in responding from both ends were sometimes apparent. In this thread, time pressures or deadlines were given without consideration of receiver’s time. These points, reflecting low scores, will be taken up further in Section 7.5.5, Linking *The Tool-Kit* Results to Theory, p. 282.
Language Style (Politeness Score Range = 7.5 – 10: Mean = 9)

The scores for several items in this section were good as seen from the mean score. The use of suitable titles (Items 1 and 2), however, was inconsistent and inadequate, especially from the Australian respondent. Because of this inconsistency, the use of titles will be taken up further in Section 7.5.5, Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory, p. 282.

Language Style of Polite Requests (Politeness Score Range = 0 – 7.5: Mean = 3.1)

All of the items in this section need improvement, as seen by the low mean score. The use of polite indirect question form for making requests (Item 4) could be improved in both the Australian and Korean emails as many requests were direct in nature. Due to the low scores obtained in this section, it will be taken up further in Section 7.5.5, Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory, p. 282.

Relationship-building Strategies (Politeness Score Range = 4 – 9: Mean = 6.25)

The use of relationship-building language was lacking to some extent in this thread and consequently, it appeared that the levels of social presence could be improved. Due to the low scores obtained in this section, it will be taken up further in Section 7.5.5, Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory, p. 282.

Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space (Politeness Score Range = 1 – 7.5: Mean = 4)

In this thread, there were examples of demanding and abrupt language (Item 7), as well as examples of inadequate time for receiver to respond to requests (Item 1). Due to the low scores obtained in this section, it will be taken up further in Section 7.5.5, Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory, p. 282.

Overall Performance

Politeness scores ranged from 79% (Email 1) to 45% (Email 8). As evident in the previous thread, the emails in this thread in which the requests were of low weight (Emails 2, 5 and 8), showed low politeness scores (60%, 53% an 45% respectively). Conversely, those emails with high request weight (Emails 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7) had relatively higher politeness scores, with the exception of email 3 (79%, 54%, 69%,
66% and 71% respectively). As the other variables of power and social distance were constant in those emails, these results indicate cautious support for Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness model in relation to requests via email.

7.5.5 Linking The Tool-Kit Results to Theory (Email Thread 2)

Samples of the results of The Tool-Kit are now discussed and explained. Unlike the discussion of Email Thread 1, where politeness patterns down a single email (vertical patterns) were recorded and explained with references to the literature, the discussion for Email Thread 2 centres on patterns detected across the entire thread. A small sample of these patterns, where mainly low politeness scores were obtained, is now explained with relevant references to the literature (outlined in Chapter 2). Confirmation of results by certain theoretical constructs from the literature serves to strengthen the explanatory power of The Tool-Kit.

7.5.6 Low Score Patterns

The following items showed poor results as detected in the horizontal patterns across the entire thread. Each will be discussed in turn:

1: Time pressures and ignoring requests (Item 4 in Time Factors and Requests and Items 1 & 7 in Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space)
2: Uncertainty over title use (Items 1 & 2 in Language Style)
3: Direct language for requests (Language Style of Polite Requests)
4: Lack of relationship-building strategies (Strategies for Indicating Politeness to Receiver)

1: Time pressures and ignoring requests in emails (Item 4 in Time Factors and Requests and Items 1 & 7 in Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space)

There are several examples of time pressures and ignoring requests in this thread. The first involves the Korean academic ignoring the initial request of acknowledgement from the Australian academic to be a keynote speaker (Email 2). The second involves the attachment of an incorrect document which delays the communication process (Email 4). The third involves the Korean academic insisting on two titles being sent to him within a strict deadline of days only (Email 6). The fourth involves the Australian academic resisting the orders to send the two titles in that time frame without any
consideration for the convenience of such at the Australian end (Email 8). Efforts made to increase the pressure to act quickly and increase the speed of decision making in email communication, as seen in this thread, may increase a sense of alienation and decrease relationship-building skills (Sherblom, 1988, p. 40). Cultural differences in attitudes to time pressures may also be apparent in email communication (Ross, 2001; St Amant, 2002).

2: Uncertainty over title use (Items 1 & 2 in Language Style)

Uncertainty over title use is apparent in this thread. In Email 2, the Australian academic correctly addressed the Korean academic as Dr. and then his full name (including first and last names). The Australian academic was addressed as Professor M. As the negotiation progressed however, the titles changed. Midway through the exchange, the Australian academic dropped the title of Dr. and began using the Korean academic’s first name only, omitting his title. The Korean academic, in his emails, alternated between using Professor and Dr. as the forms of address. Dispensing with and changing formal titles in the address terms of an email thread, when there is no invitation to do so, may indicate that the sender is not confirming or validating the world of the receiver and may offend culturally different others (Bunz & Cambell, 2002; Crystal, 2001; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Sussman et al., 1991).

3: Direct language for requests (Language Style of Polite Requests)

In this thread, there were examples of directly worded requests. Such requests can be considered impolite and as such may cause offence (Culpeper, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 2000b) and threaten face (Lee, 2004). Examples of direct requests from the thread include:

- I need your presentation titles for the speech as soon as possible (Email 3);
- Please send me the correct letter (Email 5);
- We also want you to give us a talk in one of the following areas (Email 6);
- At the moment, I want your (tentative) titles (Email 6);
- I want you to give me two titles as soon as possible (Email 7);
- I need time to think about my presentation titles (Email 8).
Impoliteness in email communication can be conveyed, often inadvertently, through various language functions such as direct requests, criticisms, complaints, disagreements, non-compliances, threats, warnings, orders and so on (Bou-Franch & Garces-Conejos, 2003; Culpeper, 1996). The forms of language which convey these functions are often abrupt and assertive, sometimes with negative attitudinal predicates (Spencer-Oatey, 2000b, p. 25; Watts, 2003). Such impoliteness indicators do not build the face of either sender or receiver, rather they threaten face (Culpeper, 1996; Simmons, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1988). An example of a bald order (Brown & Levinson, 1987), without much softening by way of politeness indicators is also seen in the thread:

_We also want you to give us a talk. At the moment, I want your (tentative) titles for both presentations (Email 6)._ 

In this example, the sender is practically ordering the receiver to do as requested, that is, talk at the conference and give titles for both presentations. The sender has not even asked whether the receiver would like to give a talk or whether and when it is convenient to send the titles back. The effect of this bald order can result in damage to the face of the receiver. An example of non-compliance, another impoliteness indicator, can also be seen in the thread:

_I need time to think about my presentation titles (Email 8)._ 

Here, the sender is using the strategy of indirectness to avoid directly disagreeing with the receiver. The sender again puts the focus on himself needing time to think rather than directly disagreeing with the receiver to do as requested in his stated time frame.

Requests worded indirectly can convey more politeness (Sifianou, 1997; Holtgraves, 1997; Lakoff, 1990; Meier, 1995, 1997). Added forms of politeness, for example, simple formulaic expressions such as _please, thank you, could you_ , and so on, can also act as softening agents, the result of which is to lessen the threat to face, inherent in requests (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The evidence of requests worded directly in this discussion gives support to the horizontal politeness pattern showing a poor result.
4: Relationship-building (Strategies for Indicating Politeness to Receiver)

Positive attitudinal words were used in the language of this thread. Examples include, *hope, well, thank you, appreciate, keep in touch, assistance, agreed, please, would, freely, invitation, accept, can, like* and so on. These words or phrases show a positive light to the message and add an element of friendship-building (Dandi, 2003). The use of such language can create feelings of situational co-presence between sender and receiver (Bays, 1998; Tu, 2001) and raise levels of social presence in email communication (Garton & Wellman, 1994; Tu, 2001). They also help to develop collaboration between two culturally different communicators (St Amant, 2002; Tu, 2001). Further, such language can help to make up for the absence of physical co-presence (Bays, 1998; Pincas, 2001; Tu, 2001: Walther, 1992, 1997).

However, there were instances of negative attitudinal words in the thread, for example, *ashamed, afraid, incorrect, unclear, mean, not, sorry, confusion, haven’t, won’t, cannot, deadline, as soon as possible*. Too many negative attitudinal predicates may pose barriers to successful email communication, as well as inhibit cooperation (Bays, 1998).

Making references to the receiver’s world is an important relationship-building strategy which can also help to create feelings of social presence or situational co-presence (Dandi, 2003; Rice, 1997; Walther, 1992). Comments which confirm and validate the receiver’s world and also which show an interest in the way things are done in other worlds are important relationship-building strategies. In this thread, there were no examples of showing an interest in or validating the receiver’s world. However, there were instances of language which conveyed consideration for the receiver. Examples include:

- *I hope you are well. Hello from Brisbane (Email 2)*;
- *I am sorry not to respond to your message (Email 3)*;
- *Thank you for your assistance (Email 5)*;
- *You may want to talk about your research findings (Email 6)*;
- *I hope this helps you (Email 6)*.

These comments show that the sender is thinking about the position of the receiver and wants to attend to his face in some way.
Efforts made to re-establish good relationships after apparent misunderstandings were also evident in this thread. After receiving emails in which errors in communication were noted (Emails 2 and 5), the Korean academic responded with formal, apologetic and polite emails (Emails 3 and 6), as if trying to re-establish good relations with the Australian academic, with such phrases as *I’m sorry not to respond to your message* (Email 3) and *I’m really sorry to send you a wrong invitational letter. I am really ashamed of it* (Email 6). The use of politeness indicators, therefore, has an important role in initiating, maintaining and re-establishing relationships via email.

Below is a summary of the strong and weak horizontal politeness patterns which were evident across the thread after analysis using *The Tool-Kit.*

### 7.5.7 Horizontal Politeness Patterns evident in Email Thread 2

The following summary is divided into those patterns which show strong results and those showing weak results.

**Strong Horizontal Politeness Patterns**

- All emails displayed correct font, greeting *Dear,* leave-taking, grammatical and punctuation accuracy, spelling and paragraph accuracy.
- Jargon and colloquialisms were avoided in the emails.
- All emails proposed future interaction.

**Weak Horizontal Politeness Patterns**

- Title use was inconsistent and often lacking in the thread.
- The use of face-building language was only evident in the emails from Korea.
- The use of polite indirect sentence construction for requests was lacking.
- Modal verb use was minimal.
- Thanking for previous emails was lacking.
- Time pressures for requests were evident.

### 7.5.8 Summary of Analyses of both Email Threads

Results of both email thread analyses revealed areas where politeness was lacking. Assistance may be required in those areas showing low scores. Recommendations for
politeness assistance may be required, for example, in forms of address including title use, language style of polite requests, acknowledging and answering of requests, time and interaction issues and the use of strategies to raise levels of social presence in email communication.

In this pilot application, the use of The Tool-Kit allowed the researcher to see politeness patterns both within individual emails and across the entire thread. The allocation of politeness scores, including means, allowed further analysis and discussion. These scores, however, served as a rough guide only, rather than an absolute measure. Further research on The Tool-Kit after the completion of this thesis (outlined in the next chapter) could include such areas as refining and expanding its scoring ability, including visual graphic representation, within and across the many variables of this instrument.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown the results of a pilot testing of The Tool-Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails. Two email threads were analysed using The Tool-Kit. It was shown how the use of this instrument allowed the researcher a means to analyse and reflect on the language used in the threads. The threads were authentic email exchanges between academics and educational administrators in Australia, Hong Kong and Korea. Authentic email threads were chosen for this study as they have not traditionally been used in email research to date (Baron, 1998, 2001). Nor has the role of verbal politeness in written texts been given much scholarly attention in the literature (Maier, 1992; Pilegaard, 1997; Wilkie et al., 2005).

Results of the initial use of The Tool-Kit confirmed the five important main findings listed in the previous chapter, especially the uncertainty in incorporating politeness (Finding 3), the occurrence of offences (Finding 4) and evidence of cultural differences in the use of politeness (Finding 5). Importantly, The Tool-Kit revealed patterns in the use of politeness, not easily detected unaided. It located areas of strong politeness use as well as areas where assistance is needed for improved email negotiations, especially those across cultures.
The use of *The Tool-Kit* in this thesis has been as a pilot only. No generalisations can be drawn from such a small sample as in this chapter. However, it is envisaged that future uses of *The Tool-Kit* include a larger corpus of email texts for analysis. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, will conclude this thesis. It will outline ways in which further insight into politeness in intercultural email communication can be gained. It will also outline how *The Tool-Kit* can be expanded and developed in future research projects. Further refinements of the instrument, leading to more rigorous analysis and more reliable results, will also be discussed. In doing so, it will be demonstrated how this thesis has addressed the five gaps in the literature listed previously. Recommendations to email software manufacturers on the basis of the results of this study are outlined as well in the next chapter. Proposed workshop presentations disseminating the findings and outcomes of this research are also discussed.
Chapter 8: Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

8.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the main findings of this thesis. It highlights important aspects on the topic of this study and how it has addressed, in a practical way, the five gaps in the literature listed at the outset. The chapter also outlines how new knowledge and methods of analysis have been achieved. Future developments of the email politeness assessment instrument, The Tool-Kit, are then suggested as well as possible ways to incorporate it in further research. Discussion of ways in which The Tool-Kit could be applied in other contexts other than email, where politeness is a focus, takes place. Recommendations for email software developers are then outlined. This is followed by a brief discussion of the planned workshops for both industry and pedagogical settings to be given by the researcher at the conclusion of this study. Lastly, some final remarks conclude this chapter.

8.2 Main Findings of Thesis

Overwhelmingly, this study has revealed the significant finding that politeness is very important in email communication (Finding 1) (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2, p. 211 for a summary of the five findings from this study and five gaps in the literature). People expect polite emails. Practices of using email in transactional ways where information only is disseminated were not popular with both the Australian and Korean participants of this study who wanted and expected appropriate politeness indicators in their email messages. The study revealed also that people interpreted the concept of politeness in many different ways. Politeness is a subjective phenomenon as seen from the results of this study (Finding 2). The study also revealed that the correct use of appropriate politeness indicators is uppermost in the participants’ minds when they compose their email messages. In other words, the participants were aware of the need to include appropriate polite language, especially to unknown overseas receivers. However, the study also revealed that they were uncertain as to how to go about it
(Finding 3). A zone of uncertainty was crippling many participants as they attempted, unaided, to conduct their email negotiations. Polite title use, word choice, language style for requests, time frames for reply, appropriate interactive procedures, and so on were just some of the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects to email communication that were residing in the zone of uncertainty, at the time of this study.

Uncertainty about politeness can lead to unintentional offences. This study revealed that this was happening. According to many participants, offences were already occurring (Finding 4), especially in intercultural negotiations, where expectations of politeness and email discourse systems differed. This may have strong implications for important email negotiations in any academic or business venture. Over half of the Korean participants stated that the emails they received from overseas were impolite. This strongly suggests room for improvement in email writing in general, and the way Australian academics write their overseas emails, in particular.

Politeness can be conveyed in different ways in email. The study revealed that people from different cultures conveyed politeness differently (Finding 5). The Korean participants, in general, preferred the use of correct professional title and formality of language to convey politeness. By contrast, the Australian participants, in general, considered the use of more relationship-building language which helped and considered the receiver to convey politeness. However, they also indicated a preference for a formal language style which presented a different contemporary stereotype of Australian communication.

These cultural differences and individual variations highlight the subjective nature of politeness. In this study, it was revealed that a significant lack of consensus about the meaning of politeness was evident. Many people had different interpretations on just what constituted polite email communication. This subjectivity is mirrored in the literature where a lack of consensus on the definition, meaning and conceptual base of politeness by researchers is also evident. A recent movement in politeness research emphasising politeness as discursively negotiated between two communicators, also confirms this finding (Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2003).

Contrary to some empirical studies in the literature, the study revealed that social presence in email can be developed. Social presence or the ability of users to feel
jointly involved in communicative interaction was found to be apparent in this study. In particular, it was found that certain linguistic strategies raised levels of social presence in email and thus allowed relationships to develop between users. Such strategies included the use of warm and friendly comments, showing concern for the receiver and personal responses and anecdotes. It was also found that efforts made to raise the amount of social presence in email resulted in more successful communication.

Email however, contains certain characteristics which may pose barriers to relationship-building and polite communication. The low context nature of email may be one of those barriers. Deprived of the wealth of paralinguistic cues which are sometimes vital for politeness, email lacks avenues which could convey non-linguistic politeness. Certain cultures may be more able to adapt to this than others. People from high context cultures, used to tapping into other sources apart from the words for meaning, may find email too devoid of context to convey the intended politeness indicators and thus develop relationships. The low context nature of email may also mean a lack of avenues to clarify misunderstandings or rectify possible offences. Words are all important in email. They must carry all social, cultural and politeness information. Word choice, then is a crucial factor in email negotiation as was found in this study.

Time and interaction issues of email may pose another barrier. Many participants in the study voiced their concerns about issues of non-receipt or non-answering of email messages which remain areas of uncertainty. As well, factors such as email message overload, becoming increasingly apparent for many academics, may impact on the use of politeness indicators and the process of establishing a mutually convenient time rhythm for email reply and exchange.

8.3 A Practical Approach to the Assessment of Politeness in Email

Adopting principally an inductive methodological approach, this study sought the views and perceptions of participants from Australia and Korea about politeness in email communication. In essence, the epistemological and methodological approaches
to this research included a concern for capturing and understanding *ordinary email writers’ assessments of politeness* in their email interactions. What the participants said about politeness was pivotal to this study. To date, empirical politeness research including the opinions of email writers is almost non-existent in the literature (*Addressing Gap 3*).

The framework, and *The Tool-Kit* derived from it, developed in this study captured the complexity and the range of elements of politeness in email in a practical way. In so doing, it responded to the urgent need from the participants in this study and the lack of instruments available for assessing email politeness in the literature (*Addressing Gap 4*). *The Tool-Kit* has both the practical aim of assisting writers compose polite email communication as well as detecting areas in emails texts in need of assistance.

Content from the framework used for *The Tool-Kit* was derived mainly from a synthesis of three important sources: the Australian and Korean participants’ views and perceptions, theoretical constructs from the literature, and suggestions by academic colleagues. Viewing theoretical constructs from the literature formed the deductive component of this research. Focussing on the extent to which the systematic observations of the participants’ views on politeness overlapped and intersected with existing theory, a different lens through which to view theory was achieved. In this way, elements from certain theoretical constructs in the literature, especially those of Brown and Levinson (1987), were thus extended and refined. *The Tool-Kit* however, does not represent a new theory of politeness in and of itself, nor is it an absolute measure of politeness. Rather, it is a means to analyse and reflect on the level of politeness in email communication.

By deductively incorporating elements of theory, *The Tool-Kit* has thus achieved a practical reconciliation of the many differing concepts of politeness in the literature (*Addressing Gap 1*). As *The Tool-Kit* was primarily designed to assist all people, it was important that the concepts of politeness included were understandable and written in language common to everyday speakers. As a result, the study then, attempted to address the increasing divergence between ordinary speakers’ intuitive knowledge of politeness and the complex conceptualisations and technical language in the literature (*Addressing Gap 2*).
In sum, The Tool-Kit may be described as a well-grounded practical means of politeness assistance which bridges theory and practice. As such, it embodies a politeness protocol for the context of email communication. Its contents are based on systematic observations and take into account current relevant theories. Having real world application, The Tool-Kit could well have further practical use as an instrument for teaching politeness in pedagogical or industrial settings. To date, instruments for teaching linguistic politeness are scarce in the literature (Addressing Gap 5).

8.4 Future Developments of The Tool-Kit

In this study, The Tool-Kit was piloted. The pilot use embodied a starting point in trying to evaluate and assess email politeness. Its initial use on two email threads spanning the cultures of Australia, Hong Kong and Korea, revealed some interesting results. Importantly, linguistic and politeness patterns across both threads, not evident at first glance, were detected with the use of The Tool-Kit.

In this study, The Tool-Kit has focussed mainly on requests because this is a common function in email communication (Camino et al., 1998, p. 763) and a problematic area especially when the communication occurs across cultures (Lee, 2004; Suh, 1999). In the future however, it is envisaged that The Tool-Kit’s application be extended to other speech act contexts, for example, disagreements or complaints.

For the future, The Tool-Kit may undergo change for the purposes of refinement and improvement as our knowledge of the field grows. The approach used for its original construction was an authoring one in order to give it user flexibility and improved functionality. Now, input from others is welcome. Creating a more objective and culturally inclusive focus by including input from people from other cultures, is one important way to refine and improve The Tool-Kit.

In the context of this study, The Tool-Kit has been used to help analyse and assess levels of politeness in academic email threads. Upon further development, however, it is envisaged that this instrument may also be useful for the analysis of politeness in email interactions in other contexts for example, in industrial, political and even social worlds. Politeness in email has relevance in many spheres of social life.
8.5 Ways to Incorporate The Tool-Kit for Further Research

The Tool-Kit is just the beginning of a new way to approach and analyse linguistic politeness in the medium of email. Ideally, further research uses of the instrument would include having a larger corpus base of email texts for analysis. Novel and original ways in which the instrument could be included in further research include analysis of possible patterns of politeness within each and across all of the sections of The Tool-Kit. Cross-cultural, generational and gender based comparisons of politeness may also be examined. Determining and ranking cultural differences in the use of politeness strategies in email communication is another important area for future research. The ranking of certain politeness strategies within certain contexts holds enormous benefit for human communication research.

Importantly, further research projects using The Tool-Kit may also be conducted in contexts other than email where politeness is a focus. For example, it is envisaged that its content could have relevance for other computer mediated communication media such as web-sites, discussion groups and chat, for example. The concepts in The Tool-Kit could also have relevance to conventional letter format where writers are uncertain about polite language construction. With certain amendments, The Tool-Kit could also be helpful for politeness assistance in face-to-face communication. The practicality and usefulness of this instrument has the potential to span many spheres of social and cultural life in many different communication media.

8.6 Recommendations to Email Software Developers

The results of this study are of benefit to email software developers. They need to take heed of the opinions and perceptions of the participants encapsulated in the findings of this research. In particular, those barriers to successful email communication voiced by the participants should be very relevant to any future developments of software products. The “not-knowing” issues listed in Chapter 4, such as not knowing if an email has been received or not, or issues of redirection, need to be considered by software manufacturers. Adaptations which could increase levels of social presence in email such as photographic inclusions also need to be considered in the light of results of this study which illustrated the benefits of such additions to email communication.
Importantly, it is proposed that the contents of *The Tool-Kit* find a home as a component of email software itself. It is envisaged that all sections of *The Tool-Kit* be installed onto an email software or word processing program which could automatically be displayed on the computer screen upon request. Certain programming procedures would need to be undertaken so that key politeness indicators or absences of them are “picked up” by the software. Located on the tool bar of any computer, *The Tool-Kit* would thus enable an instant “politeness check” similar to the existing spell or grammar check. For any email text, politeness scores for individual sections, as well as a general overall politeness percentage, could also be given.

In this way, email negotiators or simply those writing in a word program would have, at their instant disposal, an electronic box containing carefully honed words, phrases, lexical devices, syntactic structures and other linguistic “implements” to assist when aiming for more polite email communication. At the convenient location of their own computer workstation, people may consult or refer to the electronic *Tool-Kit* for access to an email politeness protocol, as the need arises.

**8.7 Workshop Presentations**

It is envisaged that dissemination of the findings and outcomes of this study will be conducted by the researcher in the near future. Workshop presentations on politeness in intercultural email communication will take place with the participants at the Australian university as well as to the Korean participants in Korea. The purpose of the planned workshops is to raise awareness of the importance of politeness indicators in intercultural email communication. It will be shown how different cultural groups display preferences for various politeness indicators. During these workshops, audiovisual displays will focus on differences in results between the two cultural groups of Australia and Korea. *The Tool-Kit* will then provide the format of the workshops. Each section will be explained using the Glossary of Terms. The three concept maps will also be shown for enhanced conceptual understanding. Examples of intercultural emails containing different types of politeness indicators will be illustrated as well as those displaying a lack thereof.
A similar format of workshop presentation could also be conducted in many pedagogical settings and in different countries, English speaking as well as non-English speaking. As such, presentation of The Tool-Kit addresses Gap 5, which states that there exists no practical instrument which has real world application for teaching politeness. Presentations also address Gap 2, whereby everyday language is used to convey politeness concepts to students in a way that connects to real world applications. English language classes of foreign students as well as any student of business communication or studies of culture could benefit from workshop presentations. The Tool-Kit could be integrated into the students’ understanding of politeness and how it applies to the medium of email as well as any other computer mediated medium. Each section of The Tool-Kit could be linked to the relevant theory from the literature. The students’ views on the content of The Tool-Kit could also provide valuable alternative cultural perspectives for further reviews.

The planned workshops for both academic and pedagogical settings will be conducted in the spirit of Labov’s (1972) ‘Principle of Debt Incurred’ which states that researchers who use speech communities for the purposes of obtaining data for linguistic analysis, must bring back to those same speech communities the benefits of such linguistic analysis when the need arises.

8.8 Final Remarks

The study of politeness is a complex phenomenon. Making visible the invisible and abstract elements of politeness, quantifying and unifying these elements was indeed a complex task. In doing so, this thesis offers a coherent conceptual framework deriving from rigorous research and drawing upon many sources, such as the literature, our intuitions about email and authentic data in work-based settings. This conceptual framework may be used to think about how politeness is realised in email communication. In addition to the conceptual framework, this thesis also presents a practical tool in the form of The Tool-Kit for actually assessing politeness in email communication. In the form of a politeness protocol, this practical instrument makes tangible the more abstract qualities of politeness in email and provides a crucial point of departure for developing further our understanding of email communication.
In this way, this research has attempted to bring practical benefit to the problem of politeness in email communication by providing both the conceptual framework and specific strategies, procedures and tools to improve our practice. It has achieved this goal in a way that is understandable and accessible for those not specifically trained in linguistics. It is hoped that the primary goal of raising awareness of the importance of politeness, especially in email communication, has been achieved in this study and that the outcomes have assisted people to become better analysers of language. Greater knowledge and awareness of politeness in language, especially within an intercultural framework, can only lead to improved and more successful email communication.
References


Ziegahn, L. (2001). Talk about culture online: The potential for transformation. *Distance Education, 22*(1), 144-150.
Dear Colleague,

This questionnaire is for staff who use email to communicate with people in other countries as part of their work at _____ University (e.g., those who email fellow academics overseas to attend or present at conferences, international students and so on). It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Aim of the questionnaire
The primary aim is to gather information about the cultural and/or social factors within the language of intercultural email texts and to see whether these factors are causing any problems for communication. Results gained from this study will be used to assist staff at _____ University when communicating interculturally. Findings of the study along with strategies for improved future practice will be disseminated in workshops conducted by the researcher to all interested parties after the study has been completed.

What does the questionnaire involve?
The Intercultural Email Communication questionnaire is being distributed to academic staff at _____ University across all three groups: Arts/Education, Business/Law and Health/Science, as well as to staff at the International Centres. While it is to be completed anonymously, staff wishing to be involved in interviews in the next stage of the research process are invited either to identify themselves on the questionnaire form or to contact the researcher, Margaret Murphy. The contact details are given below.

How is confidentiality protected?
No individuals are identified in the questionnaire, except for those wishing to identify themselves for the next stage of the research process which endeavours to consider the issues in more detail. Participation is voluntary and no identifying characteristics will be used in any reporting of the research.

Feedback to participants
Those participants who would like feedback on the results of this questionnaire (in the form of tabulated results) can so indicate in the space provided on the last page.

Concerns or further information
Should you have any concerns, or require further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher directly.

Ms Margaret Murphy
m.murphy@XX.edu.au      Ph: 3875-5654 (W)
## Intercultural Email Communication Questionnaire

As you complete the questionnaire, please keep in mind the way you go about writing your emails for work purposes when the overseas receiver is unknown to you. The unknown receiver may come from another English speaking or a non-English speaking culture.

There are seven (7) sections in the questionnaire:

- **A: Background Information**
- **B: Politeness**
- **C: Social Status**
- **D: Choice of Words**
- **E: Relationships**
- **F: Email Technology**
- **G: Email Service**

### Section A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Gender:</strong></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Age:</strong></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>under 25</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>26 – 35</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>My employment at _____University is in:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>An academic capacity</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>A general staff capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Place of employment:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>Faculty________________</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>School________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Language background:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>Native English speaking</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>English is my second/or other language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>If English is not your native language, which language is?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>In which country(s) did you receive your education?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>How long have you lived in Australia?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>How long have you worked at _____University?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>How long has writing emails to people from overseas been part of your work?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Do you ever write emails for work purposes in languages other than English?</strong></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in which language(s) do you write them?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Have you negotiated by email, overseas conference participation or activities in the last twelve (12) months?</strong></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section B: POLITENESS

**Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In general, do you think you express politeness <strong>differently</strong> in your email communications with unknown receivers overseas compared to your email communications with people you know in Australia? If YES, how do you express politeness differently?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In your opinion, do you ever perceive a <strong>lack</strong> of politeness in the emails you receive from overseas? If YES, in what way?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In general, how do you <strong>show</strong> politeness in your overseas email communications?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section C: SOCIAL STATUS

**Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In general, are you aware of <strong>differences in social status</strong> between you and your overseas receiver in your email communications? If YES, how does it influence what and how you write?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In general, do you like to present yourself <strong>formally</strong> in your overseas email communications?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How do you show your preference for formality or informality?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In your email communications with people from overseas, do you find that the way they <strong>present themselves</strong> to be surprising /confusing /annoying?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section D: CHOICE OF WORDS

*Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you find that you use <strong>different wording</strong> in your overseas email communications?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you find that you use different wording in your overseas email communications to <strong>native</strong> speakers of English than to <strong>non-native</strong> speakers of English?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you find that you write things in a more <strong>direct</strong> way in your overseas email communications?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you change your wording to make sure it is <strong>clear</strong> to overseas receivers?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Are you ever <strong>surprised /confused /annoyed</strong> at the way overseas receivers write emails back to you?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section E: RELATIONSHIPS

Please recall *one example* of a series of emails sent back and forth to someone from overseas in a developing dialogue over time. During the course of this email dialogue:

*Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My language style changed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I adapted to the style of my email partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I felt more at ease in the communication process at the end than at the beginning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My email partner’s language style changed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I thought my email partner felt more at ease in the communication process at the end than at the beginning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The communication was successful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Were there any other <strong>changes</strong> in the extended email communication dialogue which you would consider unusual/unexpected?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Section F: EMAIL TECHNOLOGY

When communicating to someone overseas as part of my work, I find that email *allows* me to:

*Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Express ideas clearly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Express personal feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Resolve delicate issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Resolve conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Get to know the person I am writing to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feel comfortable with the person I am writing to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Edit my work before sending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When communicating by email to someone overseas as part of my work, I find these questions/issues arise:

8 Which form of address to use (e.g., correct title, correct name order)  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

9 How much information to give  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

10 Whether to answer all questions asked of me or just the important ones  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

11 How to reply to a difficult request  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

12 What to do when there is no reply to my email request  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

13 How to resolve a possible breakdown in communication  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

14 How to know if an accidental offence has occurred  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

15 How to resolve an accidental offence  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

16 In your experience, have you found any other concerns/limitations of using email to communicate to overseas receivers?  
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

Section G: EMAIL SERVICE

When conducting my email negotiations at _______ University with clients from overseas, I:

Please tick the correct box √ and complete the required sections:

1 Use standardised replies  
   never sometimes often always  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

2 Reply personally  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

3 Reply to a request within 24 hours  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

4 Reply to a request within 48 hours  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

5 Answer individual questions  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

6 Use a spell-checker  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

7 Check through my completed text for suitability  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ 

8 Achieve a successful outcome  
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Are there any **other issues** which arise during your email negotiations with overseas clients not mentioned here? If so, what are they?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

If you would like to be **involved in the next phase of the study** by participating in two follow-up interviews to discuss your responses in more detail, please complete:

NAME:________________________________________________

CONTACT:_____________________________________________

If you would like **feedback on this questionnaire** in the form of tabulated results, please complete:

NAME:________________________________________________

CONTACT:_____________________________________________

If you know of another staff member, or colleague at ______University who you believe is in regular email contact with colleagues overseas, perhaps someone who attends or presents at overseas conferences, then please write their name(s) in the space provided so that a questionnaire may be forwarded to them. Thank you.

NAME:________________________________________________

CONTACT:_____________________________________________

The completed questionnaire can be returned in the attached envelope via **internal mail**. Please send the completed questionnaire by **14th December, 2003**, to:

Ms Margaret Murphy

______University,

Australia

**Thank you for your valuable time. Your assistance is very much appreciated.**
Email Questionnaire

Introduction

My name is Margaret Murphy, from _____ University, Australia. My research involves finding out how people write emails in English to people in other countries (for example, you send English emails to people outside Korea). The questionnaire takes about 10-15 minutes to complete. Thank you for your assistance. It is much appreciated.

Who will complete the questionnaire?

- Academic and general staff at _____ University, Australia, as well as academic and general staff in Korea. The academic and general staff in Korea must be already using email to write in English to non-Korean speaking people at universities in other countries.
- The questionnaire is anonymous. You do not need to write your name.
- If you would like to have an interview with me, (the researcher) by email about the questionnaire, you can write your email address on the last page.

What is the aim?

The aim is to collect information about the cultural and/or social factors in the email language to see if there are any problems.

Is the questionnaire private?

Yes. There are no names written in this research. You do not have to complete the questionnaire if you do not want to.

Results of questionnaire

If you would like me to send you the results of this questionnaire, you can write your email address on the last page.

Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact me by email at this address:

m.murphy@XX.edu.au

Ms Margaret Murphy
Email Questionnaire

As you complete the questionnaire, please remember the way you write your emails to non-Korean speaking people living outside Korea.

There are seven (7) sections in the questionnaire:

A: Background Information  E: Relationships via Email
B: Politeness  F: Email Technology
C: Social Status  G: Email Service
D: Choice of Words

Section A:  BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Please tick the correct box √ and complete:

1 Gender:  □ Male  □ Female

2 Age:   □  under 25  □  26 – 35  □  36 – 45  □  46 – 55  □  55+ years

3 My employment in Korea is in:
   □  An academic area  □  A general (non-academic) area

4 I work at (affiliation):
   □  _______________________________________________________

5 Language background:
   □  Korean speaking □  English is my second language □  English is my third language

6 If Korean is not your native language, which language is?

7 Where did you receive your education?

8 How long have you lived in Korea?

9 How long have you worked at …………… University?

10 How long have you been writing emails, in English, to non-Korean speaking people?

11 Have you used email to help organise an international conference or activity in the last twelve (12) months?  YES □  NO □

12 Your most frequent email correspondents are from which ethnic group?__________________
### Section B: POLITENESS

*Please tick the correct box ✓ and complete:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think you express <strong>politeness</strong> differently in your emails to non-Korean speaking people than to your emails to Korean people you know? If YES, how do you express politeness differently? (for example, do you address people differently?, do you use special words and sentence structures?, do you open and close the messages differently? etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In your opinion, do you ever notice a <strong>lack of politeness</strong> in the emails you receive from non-Korean speaking people? If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In general, how do you <strong>show politeness</strong> in your emails to non-Korean speaking people?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Section C: SOCIAL STATUS

*Please tick the correct box ✓ and complete:*

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Are you aware of <strong>differences in social status</strong> in your emails to non-Korean speaking people? If YES, how does it change what you write?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you like to present yourself <strong>formally</strong> in your emails to non-Korean speaking people?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How do you show your preference for <strong>formality</strong> or <strong>informality</strong>?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What is your preferred form of address?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you find that the way non-Korean speaking people <strong>present themselves</strong> on email to be surprising?</td>
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<td>:-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section D:  CHOICE OF WORDS**

*Please tick the correct box √ and complete:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Do you find that you use <strong>different words</strong> in your emails to non-Korean speaking people compared to your emails to Korean speaking people?</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In general, do you usually write emails in a <strong>direct</strong> way?</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way? (for example, do you get straight to the point of the message in the first few sentences? do you make the messages brief?, do you use short, simple sentences? etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Do you change your words to make sure they are <strong>clear</strong> to non-Korean speaking people?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way? (for example, do you use simple words?, do you use words that have only one meaning? etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Are you ever <strong>surprised</strong> at the way non-Korean speaking people write emails back to you?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If YES, in what way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Section E: RELATIONSHIPS via EMAIL

In your email exchanges over time with non-Korean speaking people:

*Please tick the correct box √ and complete:*

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My language style changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I change to the language style of the non-Korean speaking people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I feel more at ease writing the emails at the end than at the beginning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The non-Korean speaking people’s language style changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I think the non-Korean speaking people feel more at ease writing the emails at the end than at the beginning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The email exchanges are successful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Are there any other changes in the email exchanges with non-Korean speaking people?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Section F: EMAIL TECHNOLOGY

When writing emails to non-Korean speaking people, I find that email *allows* me to:

*Please tick the correct box √ and complete:*

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Express ideas clearly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Express personal feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Change misunderstandings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Get to know the person I am writing to</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Feel comfortable with the person I am writing to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Edit my work before sending</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These problems occur when I write emails to non-Korean speaking people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Which form of address to use (e.g., correct title, correct name order)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How much information to give</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Whether to answer all questions or just the important ones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>How to reply to a difficult request</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>What to do when there is no reply to my email request</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>How to improve misunderstandings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>How to know if an unexpected offence has occurred</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>How to improve an unexpected offence</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Do you know of other disadvantages of using email to write to non-Korean speaking people?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Section G: EMAIL SERVICE

When using email to write to non-Korean speaking people, I:

Please tick the correct box √ and complete:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>never</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Use standardised replies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reply personally</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reply to a request within 24 hours</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Reply to a request within 48 hours</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Answer individual questions</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Use a spell-checker</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Check through my completed text for suitability</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Achieve a successful outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Are there any <strong>other problems</strong> when you use email to write to non-Korean speaking people?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you would like to participate in an **interview by email** with the researcher in Australia to talk about the questionnaire, please write your name and email address:

NAME: ____________________________________________
EMAIL ADDRESS: __________________________________

If you would like the **results of this questionnaire**, please complete:

NAME: ____________________________________________
EMAIL ADDRESS: __________________________________

If you know of someone else in Korea who uses email to write to non-Korean speaking people at universities outside Korea, please write their name(s) so that I can send them a questionnaire. Thank you.

NAME: ____________________________________________
EMAIL ADDRESS: __________________________________

The completed questionnaire **can be returned**:

1: By **email**: m.murphy@XX.edu.au
2: By **post to**: Ms Margaret Murphy
   ______University, Australia

**Thank you for your valuable time. Your assistance is very much appreciated.**

**END**
Interview Questions

Intercultural Email Negotiation

**Context:** Work related email negotiations with unknown receivers overseas. The unknown receivers could be from an English speaking or a non-English speaking culture but the emails are written in English. The receivers may be for example fellow academics, potential students or educational institutions. The purpose of the negotiations could be for example to organise international conferences, co-write academic papers, enlist student intake and/or forge professional links.

**Ice-breaker**
Q1: Do you **like** using email for intercultural email negotiation?

**Concept: Politeness**
Q2: How important do you think politeness is in overseas email writing generally? How do you incorporate politeness in your intercultural email negotiation?

**Concept: Formality**
Q3: How important do you think ‘formality’ (or ‘informality’) is in overseas email writing generally? How do you incorporate formality (or informality) in your emails?

**Concept: Titles**
Q4: How important do you think using ‘correct titles’ is in overseas email negotiation generally? What procedure do you use for addressing your (unknown) recipient?

**Concept: Directness or Indirectness**
Q5: In your opinion, how important is directness or indirectness in intercultural email negotiations generally? How do you incorporate directness/indirectness in your emails?

**Concept: Time Issues**
Q6: What are the main problems concerning ‘time’ that you have experienced within your email negotiation? How do you deal with them?

**Concept: ‘Not Knowing’ Issues**
Q7: In your opinion, what is it about email communication that causes uncertainties and/or problems?
Concept: Relationship building role within email
Q8: What are the best strategies you’ve found to improve relations with an unknown receiver overseas via email?

End of Interview

Thank you so much for answering these questions. It is much appreciated

As well……..

Is it possible for me to have a copy of an email thread in English (a series of sent and received emails to the same overseas receiver) that you have used for any intercultural negotiation in the recent past? A minimum number of four (two sent and two received) is preferred up to a maximum of ten (five sent and five received).

All names will be deleted and no reference will be made to any person or place written on the emails.

These emails will be used for the purpose of a linguistic analysis only. All information recorded in the email text will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be known only to the researcher.

Many thanks for your time. I will send the results of my analysis to you in the near future.
Initial Email Politeness Assessment Instrument (EPA 1)

Semester 1 and 2, 2003

Template for analysing each of the emails in a thread

Email Number in Thread_____  Total Number of Emails in Thread_______

From_____    To____

Date of Email_______    Time of Email_______

Addressed to –
Written by –
Cc’d –
Subject –
Attachment –
Language Function –
Length -

Key:

1: Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc
   • Request -
   • Request -
   • Admission -

Politeness

2: Positive politeness (attending to face) – solidarity and involvement
   • Examples

3: Negative politeness (attending to face) – non-imposition and respect
   • Examples

4: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)
   • Positive attitudinal words (including modals) –
   • Inclusive pronouns –
   • References to receiver’s world –
5: Formality
- Nouns (excluding pronouns)
- Adjectives
- Articles
- Prepositions
- Has full title eg Professor Brown
- Has full title in sign off
- Has paragraph structure
- Has signature block
- Has greeting ‘Dear’
- Has conventional closing eg yours faithfully
- Has grammatical accuracy
- Has punctuation accuracy

6: Informality
- Pronouns
- Verbs
- Adverbs
- Ellipsis
- Has first names/nicknames
- Has lexical variations (creative language)
- Has unplanned discourse
- Has greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other
- Has minimal closings
- Has grammatical inaccuracies
- Has non-standard spelling and punctuation

7: Directness
- Has questions in interrogative form
- Has brief sentences (10 words or less)
- Use of active voice predominately
- Use of imperative and declarative moods
- Clarification requests

8: Indirectness
- Has questions in non-interrogative form
- Has longer sentences (10 words or more)
- Use of passive voice
- Use of overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition
- Use of face-building language especially at the beginning of email

9: Impoliteness Indicators
- Complaints/Complaints
• Disagreements (or non-compliance)-
• Threats/ Warnings-
• Warnings-
• Bald orders (especially in imperative mood)-
• Negative attitudinal predicates-
• Assertive and abrupt language –
• Minimal or no reference to receiver’s world-
• Minimal or no consideration of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person. –

Summary of context of Email:
Email Politeness Assessment Instrument 1 (EPA 1)

Results of analysis of Email Thread 2 between Australia and Korea
(Email Negotiation Between 20/5/2003 and 25/6/2003)

Email 1

20/5/03 @ 9.53pm from Korea to Australia

Addressed to – Single Australian recipient (Dear Professor L.)
Written by – Conference Organiser from Korea
Cc’d – yes - 2 others in Korea
Subject – no subject
Attachment – yes ‘Call for presentations’
Language Function – Invitation to participate in conference
Length - 7 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc

- **Request** - *I would like to ask you whether you can participate in our conference*
- **Request** - *Please let me know as soon as possible*
- **Admission** – *I know you have read the message I sent you previously*

A: Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face) – solidarity and involvement

- *We want to include distinguished guests like you on our poster* - The sender is showing approval, appreciation and interest towards the receiver. The sender is complimenting the receiver and is thus validating his face

Negative politeness (attending to face) – non-imposition and respect

- *I would like to ask you whether you can participate in our conference* – The sender is being indirect and hedging in order to minimise the request. Thus the sender is trying to minimise the imposition (participating in the conference) and thus save the face of the receiver.
- *If you decide to join us, we will provide you with information* – The sender is not assuming willingness of participants of receiver to comply with request thus saving the face of the receiver
B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words (including modals) – would, like, can, want, include, distinguished, like, please, thank you, sincerely yours, will.
- Inclusive pronouns – our, our
- References to receiver’s world – we want to include distinguished guests like you on our poster
- Consideration for the receiver’s language, queries, request, offers, time, position, person

C: Formality

- Nouns (excluding pronouns) - 12
- Adjectives - 2
- Articles - 3
- Prepositions - 10
- Has full title eg Professor Brown - Yes, although it is incorrect – it should be Associate Professor
- Has full title in sign off - Yes
- Has paragraph structure - Yes
- Has signature block - Yes
- Has greeting ‘Dear’ yes
- Has conventional closing eg yours faithfully – yes (Sincerely Yours)
- Has grammatical accuracy - No
- Has punctuation accuracy - Yes

Informality

- Pronouns - 14
- Verbs - 15
- Adverbs - 1
- Ellipsis - none
- Has first names/nicknames - No
- Has lexical variations (creative language) - No
- Has unplanned discourse - No
- Has greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
- Has minimal closings - No
- Has grammatical inaccuracies – No
- Has non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

D: Directness

- Has questions in interrogative form - No
- Has brief sentences (10 words or less) - 2
- Use of active voice predominately - Yes
- Use of imperative and declarative moods – Please let me know as soon as possible
- Clarification requests - No
Indirectness

- Has questions in non-interrogative form – *I would like to ask you whether you can participate in our conference*
- Has longer sentences (10 words or more) - 4
- Use of passive voice –1
- Use of overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition - *we want to include distinguished guests like you on our poster. I would like to ask you whether you can participate in our conference*
- Use of face-building language especially at the beginning of email - *No*

E: Impoliteness Indicators

- Complaints/Complaints
- Disagreements (or non-compliance)
- Threats/ Warnings
- Warnings
- Bald orders (especially in imperative mood)
- Negative attitudinal predicates
- Assertive and abrupt language - *I know you have read the message I sent you previously*
- Minimal or no reference to receiver’s world
- Minimal or no consideration of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person. – *Another speaker excluding you has been contacted*

Summary of Email 1:

A one to one email letter of invitation from a Korean conference organiser to an Australian academic asking him if he can participate (speak) at an international conference. He has attached a document calling for presentations.
Email 2

18/6/03  @ 3.28pm from Australia to Korea – 4 weeks after first email

Addressed to – Single Korean recipient (Dear Dr J.)
Written by – Conference Speaker from Australia
Cced – no
Subject – no subject
Attachment – No
Language Function – Asking for clarification
Length - 3 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc

- Request - Could you please confirm that you still wish me to attend your conference as a keynote speaker?

A: Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face) – solidarity and involvement

- Hello again from Brisbane. – The sender is attending to receiver’s interests, including receiver’s world view into one’s own.
- I hope you are well – The sender is showing sympathy and consideration towards receiver

Negative politeness (attending to face) – non-imposition and respect

- Could you please confirm that you still wish me... -The sender is adopting an indirect style using the modal ‘could’ and qualifier ‘still’ and politeness indicator ‘please’. This is done to consider the imposition on the receiver and thus is considering his/her face.

B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words (including modals) – hello, hope, well, thank you, could.
- Second person pronouns (especially first person inclusive)– you, you, you, your
- References to receiver’s world – I hope you are well. Hello again from Brisbane
• Consideration for the receiver’s language, queries, request, offers, time, position, person - The Korean organiser has not confirmed with the Australian academic

C: Formality
• Nouns (excluding pronouns) - 5
• Adjectives - 2
• Articles - 1
• Prepositions - 2
• Has full title eg Professor Brown - yes
• Has paragraph structure - yes
• Has signature block - no
• Has greeting ‘Dear’ - yes
• Has conventional closing eg yours faithfully - yes
• Has grammatical accuracy - yes
• Has punctuation accuracy – No

Informality
• Pronouns - 7
• Verbs - 5
• Adverbs - 0
• Ellipsis - 0
• Has first names/nicknames - No
• Has lexical variations (creative language) - No
• Has unplanned discourse - No
• Has greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
• Has minimal closings - No
• Has grammatical inaccuracies - No
• Has non-standard spelling and punctuation Yes – omission of a question mark

D: Directness
• Has questions in interrogative form - No
• Has brief sentences (10 words or less) - 2
• Use of active voice predominately - yes
• Use of imperative and declarative moods - No
• Use of clarification – yes – could you please confirm that you still wish me to attend your conference as a keynote speaker

Indirectness
• Has questions in non-interrogative form –Could you please confirm that you still wish me to attend your conference as a keynote speaker
• Has longer sentences (10 words or more) - Yes
• Use of passive voice - No
• Use of over polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition –Could you please confirm that you still wish me to attend your conference as a keynote speaker
• Use of face-building language – Hello again from Brisbane. I hope you are well
E: Impoliteness Indicators

- Complaints/ Criticisms – Yes = *I haven’t heard anything from you since my last email some weeks ago.*
- Disagreements
- Threats/Warnings
- Bald orders
- Negative attitudinal predicates – *I haven’t heard anything from you since my email some weeks ago*
- Abrupt and assertive language
- Minimal or no references to receiver’s world.
- Minimal or no consideration of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person.

Summary of Email 2:

Approximately, four weeks’ later, the Australia academic replies. It seems as if the academic had sent another email, a few weeks’ prior, confirming his wish to attend the conference as a keynote speaker and asking in that email for acknowledgement of this. The Australian academic has not heard anything back from the conference organisers in Korea verifying this. This email written by the Australian academic is again asking for acknowledgement of attendance at the conference as a keynote. There has been no acknowledgment of email sent (non-interactive competence).
Email 3

18/6/03 @ 3.51pm from Korea to Australia – 30 minutes after previous email

Addressed to – Single Australian recipient (Dear Professor L.)
Written by – Conference Organiser from Korea (Dr J.)
Cc’d – yes 1 other in Korea
Subject – Asia TEFL Conference
Attachment – Yes
Language Function – Answering clarification and requesting
Length - 7 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc

- **Request** - By the way, I was going to ask you a favour. Indirect request
- **Request** - I need your presentation titles for the speech as soon as possible – baldly on record, minimal softening (as soon as possible)
- **Indirect request with implicature**- I appreciate your cooperation in advance– The sender is assuming the receiver has agreed in advance to the request

A: Politeness

Positive politeness – solidarity and involvement
- *We may refer to the attached file for the detailed information on the conference* – consideration for receiver’s world view

Negative politeness - non-imposition and respect
- *I am sorry not to respond to your message.* – The sender is offering an apology and is thus considering face of receiver
- *I thought I did, and I thought you and I agreed that you will make a presentation at the conference.* – The sender is admitting an impingement

B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words (including modals)– agreed, already, soon, appreciate, cooperation, thank you, keep in touch, will, will, will, will
- Inclusive pronouns (our, we, ours, us) - 0
- References to receiver’s world – *I am sorry not to respond to your message*
C: Formality
- Nouns (excluding pronouns) - 18
- Adjectives - 8
- Articles - 13
- Prepositions - 17
- Full title eg Professor Brown – incorrect title
- Paragraph structure - Yes
- Signature block - Yes
- Greeting ‘Dear’ - Yes
- Conventional closing eg yours faithfully – Yes (Keep in touch)
- Grammatical accuracy - Yes
- Punctuation accuracy - Yes

Informality
- Pronouns - 17
- Verbs - 18
- Adverbs - 4
- Ellipsis - None
- First names/nicknames - No
- Lexical variations (creative language) - No
- Unplanned discourse - No
- Greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
- Minimal closings - No
- Grammatical inaccuracies - No
- Non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

D: Directness
- Questions in interrogative form - No
- Brief sentences (10 words or less) - 5
- Active voice predominately - Yes
- Imperative and declarative moods – I need your presentation titles for (the) keynote speech as soon as possible
- Clarification requests - No

Indirectness
- Questions in non-interrogative form – By the way, I was going to ask you a favor
- Longer sentences (10 words or more) - 5
- Passive voice - 1
- Overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition - I appreciate you cooperation in advance
- Face-building language - No

E: Impoliteness Indicators
- Complaints/ Criticisms
- Disagreements (or non-compliance) – I thought you and I agreed that you will make a presentation at the conference
• Threats/Warnings
• Bald orders – *I need your presentation titles as soon as possible. I appreciate your cooperation in advance*
• Negative attitudinal predicates– *sorry, not, thought, thought, favour, need,*
• Assertive and abrupt language – *Your name is already on the brochure and the poster*
• Minimal or no **references** to receiver’s world
• Minimal or no **consideration** of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person.

**Summary of Email 3:**

About thirty minutes later, the Korean organiser replies to the Australian academic. He acknowledges that there has been a misunderstanding about the reply to the Australian receiver’s original request for acknowledgment of agreeing to speak at the conference. The Korean organiser thought that he had sent an email of acknowledgement but apparently he had not. The Korean organiser also requests the Australian receiver to send him the titles of both a keynote and a concurrent speech, without having first asked the Australian academic if he agrees to do both speeches. The Korean organiser said that he has attached a file with detailed information on the conference, but there is no such attached file.
Email 4

18/6/03 @ 10.38pm from Korea to Australia – 5 hours after previous email

Addressed to – Single Australian recipient (Dear Dr L.)
Written by – Conference Organiser from Korea (Dr J.)
Cc'd – No
Subject – Official Invitation Letter from Asia TEFL
Attachment – Yes – Letter of Invitation
Language Function – Requesting (Two Requests) and Giving Information
Length (excluding closings) - 5 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc

- I would like to ask you to send me a short message indicating your willingness to accept our invitation – indirect request with softening (would like, to ask you)
- I would like you to send me your tentative titles for the main presentation – indirect request with softening (would like)

A: Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face)– solidarity and involvement

- Please find enclosed our official invitational letter. – The sender is attending to receiver’s interests, wants and needs and is thus considering face of receiver.

Negative politeness (attending to face)- non-imposition and respect

- I would like to ask you to send me a short message indicating your willingness to accept our invitation – The sender is using an indirect request which has the effect of minimising the imposition (short message). The sender also uses the strategy of hedging (I would like to ask you) which has the same effect.
- Of course, you can change them later freely – The sender is giving the receiver options which means he is considering the receiver’s world and is lessening the imposition to some extent.

B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words (including modals) – would, would, can, please, would, like, short, willingness, invitation, accept, would, like, tentative, of course, can, freely, thank you.
- Inclusive pronouns (we, our, ours, us) - 0
- References to receiver’s world - Of course you can change them freely later
- Consideration for the receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person -
C: Formality

- Nouns (excluding pronouns) – 11
- Adjectives – 6
- Articles - 3
- Prepositions - 10
- Full title eg Professor Brown – No, incorrect title (Dr) and different from last email (Professor)
- Paragraph structure - Yes
- Signature block - Yes
- Greeting ‘Dear’ - Yes
- Conventional closing eg yours faithfully – Yes (Sincerely)
- Grammatical accuracy - Yes
- Punctuation accuracy - Yes

Informality

- Pronouns - 9
- Verbs - 8
- Adverbs – 1
- Ellipsis - None
- First names/nicknames - No
- Lexical variations (creative language) - No
- Unplanned discourse - No
- Greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
- Minimal closings - No
- Grammatical inaccuracies - No
- Non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

D: Directness

- Questions in interrogative form - No
- Brief sentences (10 words or less) - 1
- Active voice predominately - Yes
- Imperative and declarative moods – Please find enclosed our official invitational letter
- Clarification Requests - No

Indirectness

- Questions in non-interrogative form – I would like to ask you to send me a short message….. I would like you to send me your tentative titles
- Longer sentences (10 words or more) - 3
- Passive voice - 0
- Overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition - I would like to ask you to send me
- Face-building language - No

E: Impoliteness Indicators

- Complaints/Criticisms - No
• Disagreements - No
• Threats/Warnings - No
• Bald orders - No
• Negative attitudinal predicates - No
• Assertive and abrupt language - No
• Minimal or no references to receiver’s world
• Minimal or no consideration of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person.

Summary of Email 4:

Approximately six hours later, the Korean conference organiser sends another email to the Australian academic enclosing official invitation letter as an attachment. He also asks the Australian receiver to confirm his acceptance of the invitation and as well, to send him the tentative titles for both the concurrent and keynote presentations. The Korean sender has still not answered the Australian receiver’s request for acknowledgement of attendance as a keynote speaker at the conference. The Korean sender has still not asked the Australian receiver if he is willing to also present at the concurrent session. He also has not explained what the concurrent session entails.
Email 5

23/6/03 @ 8.41am from Australia to Korea – 5 days after previous email

Addressed to – Single Korean recipient – the Conference organiser (Dear J.)
Written by – Single Australian conference speaker
Cc/n – No
Subject – RE: Official Invitation Letter from Asia TEFL
Attachment – No
Language Function – Request and Asking for Clarification
Length (excluding closings) - 4 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc

- Request - Please send me the correct letter.
- Request - Also can you briefly let me know what is expected in the ‘concurrent session’.

A: Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face) – solidarity and involvement

- Please send me the correct letter – this potential face threatening act of a request in an imperative mood is softened slightly by the addition of politeness marker ‘please’

Negative politeness (attending to face) – non-imposition and respect

- I’m afraid you sent me the incorrect letter of invitation. – The sender is being indirect by using the opening formulaic expression ‘I’m afraid’.
- Also can you briefly let me know what is expected in the ‘concurrent session’. – The sender is requesting something by being indirect with the use of ‘can you let me know’

B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words (including modals) – please, correct, let, thank you, assistance, can
- Inclusive pronouns (we, our, ours, us) - 0
- References to receiver’s world - Thank you for your assistance
- Consideration for the receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person
- 
- First person pronouns – 4
- Exclusive pronouns (we, our, ours, us, mine) - 0
• Degree of reference to receiver’s world (good, satisfactory, minimal, none) – minimal

Formality
• Nouns (excluding pronouns) – 4
• Adjectives – 3
• Articles - 3
• Prepositions - 3
• Full title eg Professor Brown – No, use of first and last name only with no title - different from last email to the same person where the title (Dr) was used
• Paragraph structure - Yes
• Signature block - No
• Greeting ‘Dear’ - Yes
• Conventional closing eg yours faithfully – Yes (Best regards)
• Grammatical accuracy - Yes
• Punctuation accuracy – Yes (omission of question mark in line2)

Informality
• Pronouns - 9
• Verbs – 6
• Adverbs – 1
• Ellipsis - None
• First names/nicknames - No
• Lexical variations (creative language) - No
• Unplanned discourse - No
• Greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
• Minimal closings - No
• Grammatical inaccuracies – Yes (omission of question mark in line2)
• Non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

Directness
• Questions in interrogative form - No
• Brief sentences (10 words or less) - 4
• Active voice predominately - Yes
• Imperative and declarative moods – Please send me the correct letter
• Clarification Requests – Yes Can you briefly let me know what is expected…

Indirectness
• Questions in non-interrogative form – Can you briefly let me know what is expected…
• Longer sentences (10 words or more) -1
• Passive voice - 0
• Overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition - Can you briefly let me know what is expected…
• Face- building language - No
Impoliteness Indicators

- Complaints/Criticisms – Yes -I’m afraid you sent me the incorrect letter of invitation
- Disagreements (or non-compliance) - No
- Threats/Warnings - No
- Bald orders - Yes- Please send me the correct letter
- Negative attitudinal predicates (including modals) – afraid, incorrect, briefly, expected, unclear, mean
- Assertive and abrupt language –
- Minimal or no references to receiver’s world
- Minimal or no consideration of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person.

Summary of Email 5:

Approximately five days later, the Australian academic sends an email back to the organiser in Korea stating that the attached letter of invitation was incorrect. He requests the correct one be sent to him. He also requests an explanation and some information about what the concurrent session entails as he is unclear about it.
Email 6

24/6/03 @ 9.10am from Korea to Australia – 1 day after previous email

Cced – No
Subject – RE: Official Invitation Letter from Asia TEFL
Attachment – Yes
Language Function – Apology, Giving Clarification and Requesting
Length (excluding closings) - 10 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc
- **Request** - At the moment, I want your (tentative) titles for both plenary and concurrent presentations as soon as possible.
- **Request** - We also want you to give us a talk in one of the following areas – **Indirect request** - The deadline is July 1, and we do not have much time to prepare it
- **Admission** - I am really ashamed of it
- **Thanking** - Thank you in advance for your cooperation

Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face) – solidarity and involvement
- Since we do not have much opportunity to listen to distinguished scholars like you...Showing approval by way of a compliment (distinguished scholar). This strategy is used to soften the face-threatening act (request) following – we want you to give us a talk in one of the following areas.

Negative politeness (attending to face)- non-imposition and respect
- I am really sorry to send you a wrong invitational letter. – Expression of apology showing regret, using intensifier ‘really’ to add illocutionary force.
- I am really ashamed of it. – Admission of impingement and, by implicature, asking or begging for forgiveness. Attempt to save face of sender
- Obviously you can change them later if you want to. – Giving receiver options

Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words – really, sorry, right, clarify, may, distinguished, may, hope, helps, can, thank you, advance, cooperation, sincerely yours
- Modals – may, may, can, may,
- Second person pronouns – 10
- Inclusive pronouns (we, our, ours, us) - 0
- References to receiver’s world - I hope this helps you. Obviously you can change them later if you want to. I am really sorry to send you a wrong invitational letter. You may want to talk about your research findings.
Formality

- Nouns (excluding pronouns) – 15
- Adjectives – 12
- Articles - 5
- Prepositions - 12
- Full title eg Professor Brown – Yes, although incorrect (Professor – correct title is Associate Professor)
- Paragraph structure - yes
- Signature block - yes
- Greeting ‘Dear’ - Yes
- Conventional closing eg yours faithfully –Yes – Sincerely Yours
- Grammatical accuracy - Yes
- Punctuation accuracy – Yes

Informality

- Pronouns - 20
- Verbs – 20
- Adverbs – 1
- Ellipsis – 0
- First names/nicknames - No
- Lexical variations (creative language) - No
- Unplanned discourse - No
- Greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
- Minimal closings - No
- Grammatical inaccuracies – No
- Non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

Directness

- Questions in interrogative form - No
- Brief sentences (10 words or less) - 3
- Active voice predominately - Yes
- Imperative and declarative moods – No
- Clarification Requests – No

Indirectness

- Questions in non-interrogative form – We also want you to give us a talk. At the moment, I want your (tentative) titles for both presentations
- Longer sentences (10 words or more) - 5
- Passive voice - No
- Overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition – Since we do not have much opportunity to listen to distinguished scholars like you, we also want you to give us a talk in one of the following areas.
- Face-building language - distinguished scholars like you

Impoliteness Indicators

- Complaints/Criticisms – No
• Disagreements - No
• Threats/Warnings – Yes - *The deadline is July 1, and we do not have much time to prepare it.* Indirect request by implicature – warning to the receiver to send the titles within 6 days.
• Bald orders - *We also want you to give us a talk. At the moment, I want your (tentative) titles for both presentations*
• Negative attitudinal predicates (including modals) – ashamed
• Assertive and abrupt language
• Minimal or no **references** to receiver’s world
• Minimal or no **consideration** of receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person.

**Summary of Email 6:**

Approximately one day later, the Korean organiser sends the correct invitation letter and clarifies the procedure of the conference including the concurrent session. He also requests the Australian academic to send him two titles for both the keynote and concurrent sessions within a certain deadline (less than one week). The Korean sender has still not confirmed the Australian receiver’s willingness to participate in the concurrent session.
Email 7

24/6/03 @ 11.00pm from Korea to Australia – 14 hours after previous email

Addressed to – Group recipients (Dear Plenary Speakers)
Written by – Conference Organiser (Dr J.)
Cc: – Yes – to 2 others in Korea
Subject – No subject
Attachment – No

Language Function – Apology, Giving Clarification and Requesting

Length (excluding closings) - 17 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc

- **Request** – If you do not send your official acceptance letter yet and you are going to participate, please let me have it soon.
- **Request** – Besides, I would like to ask you a big favour for us.
- **Request** – I want you to give two titles to me as soon as possible
- **Indirect request** – I hope you can help us.
- **Indirect request** – Thank you for your cooperation in advance
- **Apology** – We are sorry for what happened and I am sure that won’t happen again.
- **Admission** – There must be confusion regarding your presentations since you are invited by several different officers of the AT conference

A: Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face)– solidarity and involvement

- *We want to give (the) audience more opportunity to be exposed to insightful and valuable speakers’ presentations* – The sender is giving a positive politeness strategy in showing approval and even complimenting the receiver indirectly, as the receiver is one of the speakers.
- *As you may know, it takes a lot of fund(s) to hold a conference* – The sender is using an in-group identity marker – as you may know. – showing solidarity that they both know how much funding is required to hold a conference.

Negative politeness (attending to face)- non-imposition and respect

- *There must be confusion regarding your presentations… We are sorry for what happened and I am sure it won’t happen again.* – The sender is admitting an impingement, gives an account of why the confusion is there and apologies. In doing so, the sender is considering the face of the receiver.
B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words (including modals) – thank you, acceptance, please, invited, would, like, may, may, can, willing, may, thank you, cooperation, look forward, thank you, sincerely.
- Inclusive pronouns (we, our, ours, us) - none
- References to receiver’s world - Thank you for your acceptance of our invitation to the AT conference. As you may know..., I look forward to seeing you...

C: Formality

- Nouns (excluding pronouns) – 40
- Adjectives – 13
- Articles - 10
- Prepositions - 11
- Full title eg Professor Brown – Dear Plenary Speakers
- Paragraph structure - yes
- Signature block - yes
- Greeting ‘Dear’ - Yes
- Conventional closing eg yours faithfully –Yes – Sincerely
- Grammatical accuracy - Some mistakes
- Punctuation accuracy – Yes

Informality

- Pronouns -34
- Verbs – 34
- Adverbs – 4
- Ellipsis – 0
- First names/nicknames - No
- Lexical variations (creative language) - No
- Unplanned discourse - No
- Greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
- Minimal closings - No
- Grammatical inaccuracies – Some
- Non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

D: Directness

- Questions in interrogative form - No
- Brief sentences (10 words or less) - 3
- Active voice predominately - Yes
- Imperative and declarative moods – Yes = I want you to give me two titles to me as soon as possible
- Clarification Requests – No
Indirectness

- Questions in non-interrogative form – Yes = 1: If you do not send your official acceptance letter yet and you are going to participate, please let me have it soon (Can you send me an acceptance letter if you are participating?). 2: I want you to give two titles to me as soon as possible (Can you give me your two titles soon?). 3: I hope you can help us (Can you help us?). 4: Besides, I would like to ask you a big favour for us (Can you...?).
- Longer sentences (10 words or more) - 11
- Passive voice - 0
- Overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition – The Asia directors at the meeting decided to ask all the plenary speakers to make 2 presentations: one for the keynote speech and the other for the concurrent presentation.
- Face-building language – This is because we want to give audience more opportunity to expose to insightful and valuable speakers’ presentations.

E: Impoliteness Indicators

- Complaints/Criticisms. No
- Disagreements (or non-compliance). No
- Threats/Warnings. No
- Bald orders. I want you to give me two titles as soon as possible.
- Negative attitudinal predicates (including modals). not, soon, confusion, sorry, won’t, favour, as soon as possible, cannot, deadline.
- Assertive and abrupt language. I want you to give two titles to me as soon as possible.
- An invasion of receiver’s space. You can report your research findings and your own book. I want you to give two titles to me as soon as possible. As you may know, it takes a lot of fund(s) to hold a conference. I hope you can help.
- Minimal or no reference to receiver’s world. Minimal reference.
- Minimal or no degree of consideration for receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person. Minimal consideration.

Summary of Email 7:

Approximately fourteen hours later, another email from the Korean organiser sent to all plenary speakers (including the Australia receiver). This email is one to many and it is carbon-copied to other Korean organisers of the same conference.

The email is explaining the confusion that has come about among the plenary speakers, due to the fact that the email invitations were sent out by several conference organisers.

The Korean sender explains finally that the conference organisers would like the plenary speakers to do two presentations – keynote and concurrent. He explains what is meant by both. The Korean sender also wants the email recipients to send him the two titles as soon as possible (with the deadline of now, 4 or 5 days).
Email 8

25/6/03 @ 9.22am from Australia to Korea – 10 hours after previous email

Addressed to – Conference Organiser (Dear J.)
Written by – Australian conference participant
Cced – No
Subject – RE: No subject
Attachment – No
Language Function – Indirect non-compliance to request with explanations
Length (excluding closings) – 4 lines

Key:

Face Threatening Speech Acts – Requests, Admissions, Apologies, Offers, Complaints etc
- Disagreement – I need time to think about my presentation titles.
- Explanation – I am in the middle of marking examinations right now and the deadline for the marks is 2 July. Therefore I will contact you next week.
- Non-Compliance to request- I need time to think about my presentation titles,

A: Politeness

Positive politeness (attending to face) – solidarity and involvement

- Thank you for your email – The sender is including receiver’s world into his/her own

Negative politeness (attending to face)- non-imposition and respect

B: Friendship Building (Relationships via Email)

- Positive attitudinal words – thank you, thank you
- Modals – will
- Second person pronouns – 2
- Inclusive pronouns (we, our, ours, us) - 0
- References to receiver’s world - Thank you for your email.

- Degree of reference to receiver’s world (good, satisfactory, minimal, none) – minimal

C: Formality

- Nouns (excluding pronouns) – 7
- Adjectives – 1
• Articles - 2
• Prepositions - 12
• Full title eg Professor Brown – No (just the first and last name without title)
• Paragraph structure - yes
• Signature block - No
• Greeting ‘Dear’ - Yes
• Conventional closing eg yours faithfully – Yes – Best regards
• Grammatical accuracy - Yes
• Punctuation accuracy – Yes

Informality
• Pronouns - 6
• Verbs – 4
• Adverbs – 1
• Ellipsis – 0
• First names/nicknames - No
• Lexical variations (creative language) - No
• Unplanned discourse - No
• Greeting ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’ or other - No
• Minimal closings - No
• Grammatical inaccuracies – No
• Non-standard spelling and punctuation - No

D: Directness
• Questions in interrogative form - No
• Brief sentences (10 words or less) - 3
• Active voice predominately - Yes
• Imperative and declarative moods – No
• Clarification Requests – No

Indirectness
• Questions in non-interrogative form – No
• Longer sentences (10 words or more) - 1
• Passive voice - No
• Overly polite hedging (including modals) to minimise imposition – No
• Face-building language – Thank you for your email

E: Impoliteness Indicators
• Complaints/Criticisms – No
• Disagreements (or non-compliance) – - I need time to think about my presentation titles,
• Threats/Warnings –
• Bald orders -
• Confrontational style - Slightly
• Degree of consideration for receiver’s language, queries, requests, offers, time, position, person, culture (good, satisfactory, minimal, none) - minimal

Summary of Email 8:

Approximately 10 hours later, the Australian academic sends an email to the conference organiser in Korea advising him that he has not given him enough time to think of the titles for both the keynote and concurrent sessions. He advises that he will contact the Korean organiser the following week after he has finished marking exam papers.
THE TOOL-KIT: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Emails

Please see Glossary for explanations and definitions of terms.

Key: √=yes, X = no, H=high, M=medium, L=low. R=receiver, S=sender. N/A= Non-Applicable. E1=Email one in the thread, E2=Email two in the thread etc Please see Glossary for key for sources of data in Data Column.

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<td>1: Modals used in request (No.) (eg. <em>would, may</em>)</td>
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<td>2: Use of passive voice (eg. <em>Is it possible for me to have</em>)</td>
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<td>5: Being optimistic (Using positive attitudinal words (eg. Good, OK))</td>
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<td>6: Using inclusive pronouns (eg. our, we)</td>
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<td>7: Showing a helpful attitude</td>
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**Respect for Receiver’s Time & Space**

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## Overall Performance

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End of *The Tool-Kit*
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

What is the Glossary of Terms?

The Glossary of Terms is a document explaining terms used in The Tool-Kit by way of definitions and examples. It accompanies and follows the same format as The Tool-Kit: An Instrument for Assessing Politeness in Intercultural Email Communication.

Who is the Glossary of Terms intended for?

The Glossary of Terms is intended for an academic context. However, future versions of the Glossary could be adapted for a more generic audience.

Where did data for The Tool-Kit and the Glossary of Terms come from?

All items in The Tool-Kit and the Glossary of Terms are derived mainly from a synthesis of three knowledge bases as indicated in the Data column. They are:

1: Literature. Current research from the relevant literature bodies was a source of data for The Tool-Kit and the Glossary of Terms.
   Lit= Literature

2: Research participants. Opinions from the Australian and the Korean participants during the research project were also sources of data.
   PA= Australian Participants, PK= Korean Participants

3: Suggestions from Academic Colleagues. Information given by academic colleagues during the course of the research project was also a source of data.
   S= Suggestions from academic colleagues

For example,

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<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>E 1</th>
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<th>E 3</th>
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The first item in the section Language Style in The Tool-Kit has PA, PK and S next to it in the Data column. This indicates that most Australian and Korean participants, as well as suggestions by academic colleagues considered that if the receiver’s (R’s) full title is used in the address of the email politeness is conveyed. Please note that the Data column would not appear in further uses of the instrument. It is initially provided to indicate the relevant sources.

The Tool-Kit is used for assessment of an email thread of up to eight emails in length (E1 to E8). Threads containing over eight emails require an extended version. Ticks (✓) and crosses (X) are written, as appropriate, in the columns so that politeness patterns may be detected over entire threads. For example, in the excerpt above, emails 4, 7 and 8 in the thread do not have the full title for the receiver used in the address while emails 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 do.
Email Classification

This section shows relevant information concerning the date of the email, the country of origin, the sender (initials) and the length of the text.

Social Variables

This section assesses the status (power) differences and the social distances between the sender and receiver of the email. There are 6 items in this section.

They are:

1: The opening title used

Title is defined as a ‘formal appellation attached to the name of a person by virtue of office or rank or attainment and used as a mark of respect’ (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2005). The opening title is the one used to address the receiver. Examples include:

- Prof = Professor,
- Assoc. Prof = Associate Professor,
- Dr= Doctor,
- F=First name only,
- FL=First and Last name,
- A= Abbreviation of name used
- C=Common group name, for example, Guys, Everybody, All

2: The closing title used

The closing title is the title used by the sender in signing off the email. Examples can be seen above.

3: This is the first email in the thread.

The first email in the thread may contain information not found in subsequent emails such as information concerning the origin, context and nature of the request and so on.

4: The Sender (S) has had previous contact with Receiver (R)

This information is important for assessing such factors as title use, level of formality of language, language tone and so on.

5: Status or Power Difference between Sender and Receiver

Status is defined as the ‘position relative to that of others’ and Power is defined as ‘the degree that a person is able to control the behaviour of another’ (Brown & Gilman, 2003), or ‘freedom of action to achieve one's goals, regardless of whether or not this involves the potential to impose one's will on others to carry out actions that are in one's interests’ Watts (2003, p. 276) or ‘the degree to which the hearer can
improve his own face and plans at the expense of the speaker's face and plans’ (Weber, 1947, cited in Holmes, 2000, p.164). Examples of status (power) differences in an academic context include:

- If a Professor is emailing a Doctor, then the status difference is high.
- If a Doctor is emailing a general staff member, the status difference is high.
- If a Professor is emailing a Professor, then the status difference is low.
- If a Professor is emailing an Associate Professor, the status difference is medium.
- If a general staff member is emailing an academic, the status difference is high.
- If a student is emailing an academic or a general staff member, the status difference is high.

6: Social Distance between Sender and Receiver

Social Distance is defined as the sense of ‘like-mindedness with one another’ (Brown & Gilman, 2003). Like-mindedness can include components such as social similarity, frequency of contact, length of acquaintance, familiarity and positive or negative affect. Low social distance denotes a high sense of like-mindedness and high social distance denotes a low sense of like-mindedness. Examples include:

- If the sender/receiver have met face-to-face before and have done previous negotiations by email, the social difference is low.
- If the sender/receiver have not met face-to-face before and have not done previous email negotiations, the social difference is high.
- If the sender/receiver have not met face-to-face before but have done previous email negotiations, the social difference is medium.

Request Weight

This section assesses how much effort the request requires on the part of the receiver. Examples are given of requests that are considered to be high in weight as well as those considered low in weight.

There are 4 items in this section. They are:

1: Request is asked

A tick is required here if the email contains a request. This section can be omitted if the email does not contain a request.

2: No of requests

The number of requests within each email is noted.
3: Type of request

Requests can be for:
1. Information, for example, asking for definitions of terms used in a conference paper,
2. Services, for example, asking the receiver to give a keynote address at the conference,
3. Goods, for example, asking for payment to be made to attend a conference,
4. Clarification, for example, asking for an explanation of topic covered in keynote address.

4: Weight of request

If the request requires a lot of engagement from the receiver in terms of physical, mental or emotional action or services, it has high weight. If the request exposes the face of the receiver or is highly confidential, then the request is said to have a high weight as well.

Examples of high weight requests:

- Asking for a collection of opinions from all members of a school at University and to report back with those findings in written form. (This request has high weight because it requires much work on the part of the receiver).
- A student asking a Professor to reassess his (the student’s) marks from a ‘Pass’ to a ‘Credit’. (This request has high weight because it requires extra consideration, judgement and mental work in terms of remarking on the part of the receiver).
- Asking for a submission of a research proposal within a strict time schedule. (This request has high weight because it requires complex mental work under time pressure on the part of the receiver).
- Asking for personal information about another academic staff member. (This request has high weight because it requires the receiver to provide private and potentially sensitive information to the sender).

Low weight requests do not require much effort on the part of the receiver to answer. Some examples are:

- Asking for initial expressions of interest to attend a conference.
- Asking for clarification on the date the joint article needs to be submitted to a journal.
- Asking for standard information on a course outline.
Politeness

The final section Politeness evaluates the use of polite language in an email, by way of explanations and examples, in the following areas: Email Characteristics; Time Factors and Requests; Language Style; Language Style of Polite Requests; and Strategies for both Relationship-Building and Respect for Receiver’s Time and Space. If answers given in the two previous sections Social Variables and Request Weight were high, then more of the following politeness indicators would be needed in the email message (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In all the following sections in the Glossary of Terms, please see the Data column for the sources for each item.

Email Characteristics

There are 7 items in this section. They are:

1: **Subject Line is included.** It is polite to include a subject line (if it is not there, the email may be deleted due to fear of viruses or ‘spam’).

2: **Subject Line is relevant.** If the subject line captures the essence of the email message, that is polite as it facilitates processing of the email.

3: **Reply function is used (if applicable).** If, in a thread, the reply is used then that is polite as it shows the receiver the history of the negotiation for easy referral.

4: **Normal font is used.** If a bold colour is used for example, red, that is impolite in certain cultures as it can indicate censure or embarrassment and thus loss of face.

5: **Length of the text is under 1 screen.** The receiver does not have to scroll down thus facilitating reading the message.

6: **Length of the text is over 3 lines.** This is polite because if the text is under 3 lines, the receiver may feel as if the communication is too brief. Alternatively, more information may be included in an attachment.

7: **A written or block signature is included.** This is polite as it shows the sender’s professional position and indicates to the receiver the professional position of the sender.

Time Factors and Requests

There are 4 items in this section. They are:

1: **If not the first in thread, the time delay in replying was under 3 days.** If an email is responded to within 3 days, that is polite. Over 3 days for replying is considered impolite.

2: **All requests, if applicable, in previous email were acknowledged.** It is polite to acknowledge all requests in an email, the difficult ones as well as the easier ones.
Examples of **acknowledgement of request** include:

- Thank you for your enquiry about possible courses at our university
- I received your request for further information and I will attend to it shortly.
- Your request for a copy of the conference proceedings is noted.

3: All requests (in previous email) were **answered**. If all requests in the previous email were answered, that is polite according to the participants and suggestions from academic colleagues.

4: **No time pressures given in this email**. It is polite not to force receiver to act under a time deadline according to the same sources as in the previous item.

Examples of **time pressures** include:

- Send me the two titles before the 22nd of this month.
- Can you tell me whether you want to be included in the list of speakers as soon as possible?
- To avoid unpleasant delays, please submit your order by the end of this week.
- I look forward to your answer very soon.
- Can I now have your confirmation to attend?

**Language Style**

There are 8 items in this section. They are:

1: **R’s (receiver’s) full title is used in address**. This is polite as it validates the receiver and his position according to the participants and academic colleagues.

2: **S’s (sender’s) full title is used in sign off**. This is polite as it validates the sender and his position and it also conveys full information to the receiver according to the same sources as the previous item.

3: **Greeting ‘Dear’ is used**. This greeting to considered polite, according to the participants in this research.

4: **Appropriate leave-taking used**. For example, *Best Wishes*. This is polite. Other polite leave-taking structures include, *Thank you for your assistance, Cheers*.

5: **Grammatical accuracy**. It is polite to use grammatical accuracy such as verb/subject agreement, as it conveys high literary standards to the receiver.
6: Punctuation accuracy. It is polite to use punctuation accuracy such as ‘capitals at the beginning of sentences’, as it conveys high literary standards to the receiver.

7: Standard spelling. It is polite to use standard spelling such as *tonight* (instead of *tonite*), as it conveys high literary standards to the receiver.

8: Paragraph structure. It is polite to use paragraph structure such as having one point per paragraph in a logical progressive chain, as it conveys high literary standards to the receiver according to the literature.

**Language Style of Polite Requests**

There are 4 items in this section. They are:

1: **Modals used in request (Number used).** It is polite to include modals in the request, for example, *would, can, may, might* and so on.

2: **Use of passive voice.** It is polite to use the passive voice occasionally according to the literature, for example, *Is it possible for me to have your answer?*

3: **Longer sentences used for request.** Short sentences (under 10 words) are considered abrupt, for example, *Send me a copy of the report.* An example of a longer more polite sentence for a request includes, *Would it be possible for me to have a copy of the report sent to my office at your earliest convenience?* See Data column for sources.

4: **Use of polite indirect question form for request.** This is considered polite. See Data column for sources.

Examples of **polite indirect question form for request** include:

- I wonder if you could tell me when you would like to start.
- Would you be kind enough to book us into a hotel for the period?
- I wonder if I could possibly ask you to consider.
- I would like to ask you whether you can participate in our conference.

**Strategies for Politeness - Relationship-Building**

Relationship-building language is defined as language which tries to find common ground between the sender and receiver of an email (as distinct from face-building language which is used to compliment the receiver). Below are examples of 14 relationship-building language strategies which have collaboration between sender and receiver as their aim:
There are 12 items in this section. They are:

1: Referring to previous email(s). For example, I received your email on Tuesday. Such language indicates that the sender is connecting this email to the previous one in a logical progression. See Data column for sources.

2: Thanking for previous email(s). For example, Thank you for your email which I received last Tuesday. Such language validates previous communication. See Data column for sources.

3: Responding to points made in previous email(s). For example, I have marked the date on the calendar of the joint meeting that you advised about in your last email. Such language acknowledges and validates the wishes of the receiver. See Data column for sources.

4: Attending to Receiver’s request. For example, I’d like to include in the paper your comments in the conclusion. Such language acknowledges and validates the wishes of the receiver. See Data column for sources.

5: Being optimistic (Using positive attitudinal words). For example, fortunately, best, may, wonderful, nice, would, hope, look forward, well, appreciate, luck, good. Such language creates important positive sentiments.

6: Using first person inclusive pronouns. For example, As we’re all trying to further the aims of our organisation, I think we should…. Such language creates solidarity between sender and receiver.

7: Showing a helpful attitude towards Receiver. This is defined as showing a willingness to cooperate with receiver, for example, Let me know how I can assist this project. Such language creates solidarity between sender and receiver.

8: Using face-building language. This is polite. Face-building language is defined as language, which validates or confirms the identity of the other person and his/her work/world or culture by way of compliments. See Data column for sources.

Examples of face-building language include:

- I would like to thank you for your recent attendance.
- We want to include distinguished guests like you on our poster.
- Your reputation as an esteemed academic has spread to our country.
- Your book has been well received at our University.

9: Showing willingness to accommodate Receiver. This is defined as showing thoughtful concern or empathy for the receiver, for example, There will be someone there to meet you at the airport, and You can send me the report when you have the time. Such language indicates an understanding of the position of the receiver and as such the sender is attempting to accommodate him/her.
10: *Showing interest in Receiver’s work or world or culture.* This is defined as *showing curiosity about attributes of the receiver,* for example, *Your city is very beautiful. I visited it last year.* Such language creates solidarity between sender and receiver.

11: *Avoiding jargon/colloquialisms and acronyms.* Avoid such language as *Mgt* (Management) and *HKAC* (Hong Kong Arts Centre) and *ASAP* (as soon as possible), as it is likely that the receiver may not share this cultural knowledge.

12: *Proposing future discussion/interaction.* For example, *Please let me know as soon as possible. I will contact you early next week. Keep in touch.* Such language indicates that the sender wants to keep dialogue open. *See Data column for sources.*

**Strategies for Politeness - Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space**

*Respecting Receiver’s Time and Space* language is defined as the many uses of language in a way that shows respect for the privacy, time and own world of the receiver. The aim of the use of this language is to allow the receiver as much freedom to be unimpeded as possible, while at the same time making a request. Below are some examples of strategies which use such language to minimise the imposition of a request in some way.

There are 8 items in this section. They are:

1: *Giving Receiver time to respond.* For example, *You can send me your details at your convenience.* Such language considers the busy world of the receiver.

2: *Being indirect generally.* Greater indirectness can indicate higher levels of politeness. *See Data column for sources.*

3: *Giving options to Receiver.* For example, *Obviously you can change the titles later if you want to.* Giving choices considers the autonomy of the receiver.

4: *Giving apologies, (if necessary).* For example, *I am sorry for not responding earlier.* Such language respects the face of the receiver.

5: *Admitting error (if necessary).* Admitting error respects the face of the receiver as it indicates and acknowledges that some damage has been incurred on the face of receiver and that the sender wishes to redress that damage in some way.

6: *Choosing language which minimises the imposition of the request.* The use of language for the purpose of understating a potentially burdensome demand considers the autonomy of the receiver. For example, *It won’t take a minute.*

7: *Avoiding demanding and abrupt language.* Avoid abrupt language such as, *I want you to give me two titles as soon as possible.*

8: *Avoiding more than 3 requests in one email.* A good rule of thumb is one request per email message. *See Data column for sources.*
Overall Performance

At the conclusion of The Tool-Kit, a place is provided to tally up results from all sections. The Overall Performance shows the individual scores which can then be added up to give the Total Percentage of Politeness for each email within the thread. Mean scores can also be calculated. All scores can be compared with estimates of the social variables listed on the first page, to give a holistic portrait of politeness. As such, a sharper focus of the possible patterns of politeness within each and across all the emails in the thread may be noted. It is through this process that recommendations can subsequently be made on the level and type of appropriate politeness needed for more successful email communication.

End of Glossary

References


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November, 05