

A Corpus-Assisted Investigation of (In) Directness in Pakistani Students' Email Requests

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Abstract

The power of language in human affairs cannot be overstated, which drives us to communicate strategically. For instance, research suggests that request strategies, such as indirectness, help build positive interpersonal relationships. This research examines (in)directness in computer-mediated communication (CMC) within the Pakistani academic setting. More precisely, the aim of this investigation is to recognize the request strategies in students' email requests. The present research utilizes a sequential mixed-methods investigation framework. A corpus of 32358 tokens was assembled from the emails received by four instructors of public-sector universities between 2021 and 2023. Specimens from the corpus were qualitatively scrutinized using the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The outcomes guided the formulation of the hypothesis, which was subsequently tested using corpus analysis software to triangulate findings. The integrated findings illuminate request strategies in student email requests to faculty. The discoveries fill a gap in the literature by investigating (in)directness in the Pakistani academic context, contribute to the expanding corpus-assisted research, and provide insights for educational policy formation in Pakistan.

Keywords: Politeness, Email, Request, Corpus-Based Analysis

Introduction

Words have power. Consequently, language plays a vital role in human affairs, including cultural expression, preservation of culture through historical records, identity formation (Nawaz et al., 2021, 2022), political and legal discourse, social relations (Ramzan & Alahmadi, 2024), and, most fundamentally, the building and nurturing of positive and fulfilling relationships (Abdelrady et al., 2025). In interpersonal communication, people do not always speak directly and explicitly for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons is politeness, which encourages the speaker to be indirect in their requests. The speech act of request has been of interest to researchers because of its inherent potential for imposition. Requesting is a directive speech act as it tries to convince the listener to perform an action in favor of the speaker. Students tend to make several different kinds of requests to their faculty over the course of their studies. These include requests for all degrees of imposition, from leaves of absence to the grant of recommendation letters to pleas for better grades, and so on. For qualitative discourse analysis, Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1984) cross-cultural speech act realization project (CCSARP) appears to be the most widely used analytical framework for a thorough examination of students' requests to faculty.

A number of studies on ESL/EFL students revealed a lack of pragmatic competence in the target language (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024) – the ability to use language in a way that is appropriate in a given context (Alemi & Maleknia, 2023; Burgucu-Tazegul et al., 2016; Dronia, 2023; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, 2015, 2016; Economidou-Kogetsidis et al., 2021; Hendriks, 2010; Najeeb et al., 2012; Pham & Yeh, 2020; Savić, 2018; Winans, 2020; Zhu, 2012). Since politeness itself belongs to the domain of pragmatics – the subdiscipline of linguistics that studies how context and language interact to form meaning – pragmatic failure tends to occur in non-native speakers’ attempts at linguistic politeness in English. This study aims to explore the same in the Pakistani context.

For triangulation of results, this study uses a qualitative discourse analysis joined with a corpus-based approach, in order to provide insights into a specialized corpus of students’ email requests to faculty, consisting of 32,164 tokens, with the help of AntConc.

Studies indicate that politeness shapes teachers’ judgments of students and their competencies and assists in fostering constructive relationships between teachers and learners (Akram & Li, 2024), resulting in enhanced academic outcomes (Buka, 2013; Chen & Ramzan, 2024). Interaction between students and teachers is no longer confined to classrooms. There has been a significant transition toward computer-mediated communication (CMC) in educational domains after the COVID-19 pandemic (Urbanek et al., 2023). Learners continue to rely on email to seek clarifications, turn in assignments, and place requests to faculty, all of which contribute to defining their individual association with the instructor. Nevertheless, there is scarce scholarship available on CMC in the Pakistani academic setting. The absence of adequate direction in practicing e-politeness leads students to face challenges in composing emails to their faculty effectively. This issue is further intensified by the fact that such digital correspondence generally takes place in English, which functions as a second language for students. This research intends to investigate and illustrate the phenomenon of (in)directness within Pakistan’s sociocultural setting and to offer insights into how learners, as second-language users of English, can be trained to develop their request strategies for effective interaction with teachers, thereby promoting stronger academic relations and improved educational achievement.

The objective of this study is to identify the linguistic markers in request strategies employed by Pakistani students in their email communication with faculty.

The research question that drives this research is: What are the request strategies used by Pakistani undergraduates in their emails to faculty?

This research seeks to address the gap in the existing body of knowledge by exploring (in)directness in the Pakistani setting. More specifically, it offers insights into how Pakistani students can make requests to their faculty more politely via email, thereby enhancing interaction quality and boosting academic performance.

The limitations include scope, sample size, and generalizability. Specifically, the dataset is small, and a larger corpus may yield more nuanced results. In addition, the study’s generalizability is constrained by the geographical region, as the population under investigation is restricted to public-sector universities in Lahore, Pakistan, between 2021 and 2023 (prior to the widespread adoption of generative AI chatbots). Hence, the findings may not be replicable across other regions and/or professional domains.

Literature Review

During the literature review, certain themes and/or perspectives emerged in research on email requests in the academic context, as discussed in the following sections.

Politeness and Computer-Mediated Communication

The very first academic study that combined politeness theory and CMC was a Master's thesis (Beaman, 1992) from the University of Iowa, USA. It explored politeness in the context of a computer-networked classroom, describing CMC as a “new emergent register.” It was found that linguistic markers of politeness in everyday speech were employed in CMC to avoid face-threatening acts, suggesting that the research area shows promise for future studies.

A similar publication, *Politeness Theory in Computer-Mediated Communication: Face Threatening Acts in a 'Faceless' Medium* (Simmons, 1994), followed shortly from Aston University, Birmingham, England. The researcher performed a qualitative analysis of discussions over a 10-week period by anonymous (predominantly) native English-speaking members of a “bulletin board system” (BBS), an online forum created around a single topic. The BBS was chosen because it was about a controversial topic (namely, censorship) that invited different opinions and provided the ground for frequent FTAs and their mitigation. The findings showed that despite the anonymity and subsequent inconsequentiality on the virtual forum, FTAs were the exception rather than the norm. Members went the extra mile to convey politeness through linguistic choices “to compensate for the missing clues normally provided by prosody and kinesics” (p. 44). Moreover, the researcher reflects that the members, with time, became more accustomed and well-adjusted to polite communication within the “faceless medium” of CMC, given its novelty at the time of research.

This area received further attention from politeness researchers in the 2000s. For instance, Graham (2007) analyzed 387 messages in an email list discussion about the Anglican church through the framework of relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005) to focus on how (im)politeness and identity are negotiated within a community of practice. Findings suggest that each group tends to have its own norms of politeness, which intersect with CMC norms of politeness to create unique, context-dependent expectations of what it means to be polite.

It is important to mention that although some of the abovementioned politeness research contains emails, the analyses and interpretations have been carried out from the larger perspective of computer-mediated communication without delving into email as a separate genre within CMC.

Exploratory Research on Request Strategies in EFL Emails

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) remains the most frequently cited work relevant to this study and is recognized for advancing politeness research on SERF, particularly by expanding the categories of CCSARP (Blum-Kulka & Olshain, 1984). The results revealed that more direct strategies were utilized in requests involving lower levels of imposition. However, non-native learners demonstrated limited linguistic adaptability and insufficient use of lexical modifiers. It is recommended that pedagogical interventions be introduced to enhance NNSs' pragmatic awareness.

Politeness is a situated phenomenon (Haugh et al., 2011; Locher & Watts, 2005), so its norms and syntactic realizations vary between languages and cultures (Congman et al., 2019; Parveen & Akram, 2021). A comparative study (Yang, 2002) of speech acts in email requests of Korean non-native English speakers (NNES) and American native English speakers (NES) revealed that Koreans used more apologizing moves and fewer thanking moves than their American counterparts. The choice of the CCSARP framework and the subsequent findings of cultural differences informed the choice of an analytical framework for this current study.

Lee (2004) launched an enquiry into email request strategies written in English by Chinese EFL students in Hong Kong in order to compare it with previous research on requests in the Chinese language. Moreover, the recipients of emails included both Chinese and English

teachers. The results were consistent with the previous findings that directness in requests seems to be a distinctive feature of the Chinese in both intercultural and intracultural communication. However, some of the findings regarding syntactic modification were inconsistent with previous research (Wong, 2000) that used the DCT method. Lee's (2004) emphasis on the "naturalistic enquiry approach" and preference for "authentic written requests" over "experimental written data" have informed the data collection choices in the current study. A similar study by Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch (2013) focused on comparing (in)directness and (in)formality in email requests of students from England and Spain in their respective native languages. The findings show that Spanish students prefer more directness and formality than their English counterparts, who prefer conventional indirectness and "stylistic informality." Apart from the differences in well-defined categories, the researchers discovered a new category and termed it "unmarked directness," which seems to be the default choice in certain contexts for Spanish speakers. This current study seeks to identify instances of this new category (unmarked directness) in Pakistani students' emails to faculty.

A comparison between German, Japanese, and Saudi Arabian students' email requests in English (as a foreign language) was carried out to determine the appropriateness of interaction as well as to investigate the pragmatic markers used by students of different nationalities. The findings (Danielewicz-Betz, 2013) showed that the teacher's perceived personality and attitude seem to have an impact on students' choices of politeness strategies. A comparison of the current findings with previous research on native English speakers' email requests revealed that non-native speakers of English tend to be more direct in their requests, which seems especially true for Saudi Arabian students. The claim in previous research that non-natives relied on the word "please" was also corroborated in the study. Comparisons within the study showed cultural variation in students' treatment of faculty. For instance, Saudi students seem to view their faculty as "loco parentis" or friends, showing a high degree of closeness, while Germans see their teachers as the representatives of the institution for assistance in their studies. Japanese students seem to view their faculty as a source of authority and advice. All three sets of students were found to lack pragmatic competence, a finding which prompted the researcher of this current research to review more literature regarding the tendency of pragmatic failure in EFL learners.

SERF in two English-speaking countries, England and Australia, is compared in a study by (Merrison et al. (2012) to find the "cross-cultural nature of Englishes in these requesting events" (p. 2) The results indicated that while both data sets were consistent in indirectness, there were nuanced differences in the degree of indirectness, which was higher in the Australian emails. Major cultural differences appeared in the self-identities constructed by the students in their requests; while the British portrayed themselves as helpless and at the mercy of their instructors, the Australians projected themselves as confident in their roles as students and expected the faculty to fulfill theirs.

The lack of syntactic modification as a request strategy appears to have a negative impact on how the sender's personality is perceived. Hendriks (2010) conducted a study involving requests by Dutch EFL students. Four emails were selected, and two versions of each email were created: one was syntactically modified, while the other version lacked such modification. A perception questionnaire was designed where native speakers of English rated the randomly assigned emails for politeness on a Likert-type scale. Results of the perception questionnaire showed that the senders of emails without syntactic modification were perceived as less agreeable. Since the aforementioned modifications change the directness level of a request from direct to conventional indirectness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). This finding clarifies why non-native English speakers' preference for directness is judged as impolite/inappropriate in most perception studies.

EFL students seem to lack explicit knowledge about the etiquette of academic email. A recent study in Iran (Alemi & Maleknia, 2023) has explored the same phenomenon from the perspective of communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1973); in short, the theory states that individuals adjust their linguistic behavior to either match or mismatch with that of their interlocutors. The focus of the research was to see if EFL students could adjust their levels of politeness in response to emails or, more precisely, if verbal markers and structural elements are mirrored by Iranian students. Four separate versions of an email containing different combinations (or lack) of politeness markers were developed and sent randomly to the participants. A quantitative analysis of the responses showed no mirroring/accommodation, which is in line with the previous findings, confirming the lack of pragmatic competence in EFL students.

In summary, exploratory studies on (in)directness indicate EFL learners' tendency to favor positive politeness and directness in requests, with certain exceptions. Nevertheless, the body of research examining this phenomenon remains limited in the Pakistani context. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

Similar Research in the Pakistani Setting

As noted earlier, limited scholarship exists on politeness in student email requests to faculty within the Pakistani context. Haider and Zandi (2022) carried out a metapragmatic investigation of impoliteness in Pakistani SERFs. In their study, six emails were evaluated by 152 professors (both native and non-native English speakers) through a perception questionnaire. The findings indicated that non-native professors were more accommodating of the absence of acknowledgment of imposition in student requests. In addition, senior faculty were observed to be more accepting of the lack of face enhancement compared to their junior colleagues.

The research most closely aligned with the present study is a recent work by (Amina Shahzadi et al., 2021) which compared the politeness and request strategies of Pakistani and Chinese students in a Pakistani university. The results revealed that Chinese students employed more indirect strategies, while Pakistani students favored direct strategies, often using varied markers and terms of endearment to express positive politeness. However, the study relied on the DCT method and involved a relatively small sample ($n = 40$), which are the limitations that the current research seeks to address.

Methodology

The current investigation is rooted in an abductive research methodology, which incorporates aspects of both deduction and induction. A deductive methodology is theory-driven: it commences with a recognized theory and appraises it against information under specific circumstances. An inductive methodology, conversely, seeks to derive generalizations from the analysis of particular instances to formulate a new theory or add to a current one. As a result, the abductive methodology alternates between theory and information, with both having an equally significant impact on the investigator's methodological choices during the progression of the investigation.

Research Design

The present research employed a mixed-method investigation framework. The identical qualitative information was examined both qualitatively and quantitatively to reach findings and their explanation. The reasoning behind the selection of a mixed-method framework was the requirement of forming a comprehensive comprehension of politeness in Pakistani student-

teacher emails.

Linguistic investigation inevitably handles qualitative information on one level or another. Qualitative examination by itself, nevertheless, shows us merely one facet of the situation. For a thorough comprehension based not just in theory but also in information, the present study utilized a computer-assisted quantitative examination of the specialized email corpus under investigation. Merging the two distinct techniques enabled the investigator not solely to acquire more insights into the dataset but for triangulation of results (Figure 0.1).

Data Collection

An integration of convenience sampling and purposive sampling was utilized for the gathering of information, i.e., student emails to faculty. The initial recipients were six lecturers from two public-sector universities of Lahore, selected for the convenience of access. The lecturers, after anonymization, characterized their students as undergraduates between 18 and 22 years of age with varied cultural backgrounds. Lahore is the second biggest city in Pakistan and the provincial capital of the province of Punjab, the most populous of the country. It is the preferred city for students seeking higher education across the nation, particularly in public-sector universities. Therefore, their emails could be generalized to universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used in the creation of a specialized corpus, which (after simultaneous qualitative examination) achieved a saturation point of approximately 30,000 tokens, made up of 323 emails. The inclusion criteria for sampling were specified as follows:

- a) The chosen email included one speech act(s) of request.
- b) The emails were sent/received between June 2021 and June 2023.

The justification for the first criterion was that the request is not only the most frequently encountered speech act in student-faculty emails but also intrinsically face-threatening as it

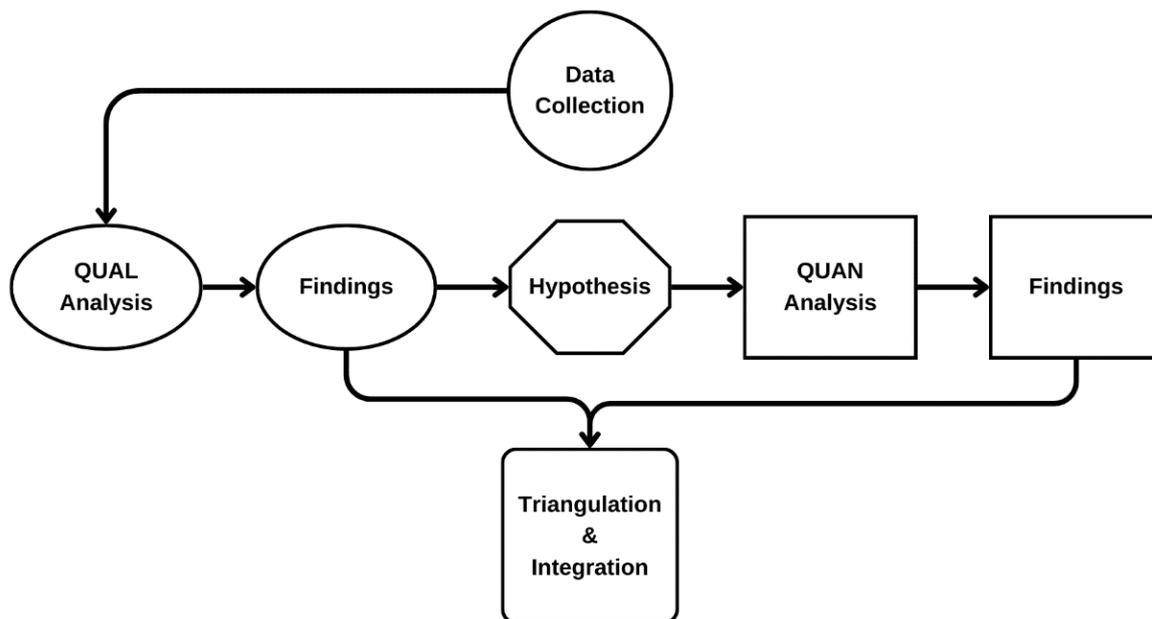


Figure 0.1 Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design

attempts to affect the autonomy of the requestee while the selection for the particular time frame indicated in the second criterion was the uniformity of the sample because the time preceding the starting period was characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown

and the ensuing online classes. However, a distinct investigation into the email communication during the COVID-19 lockdown could have potential for examination.

Preliminary sampling uncovered some frequent keywords in the target emails, for instance, “help,” “issue,” “problem,” and, naturally, “request,” which enabled additional data gathering by using the search feature within the faculty’s inboxes. The emails were anonymized by deleting any and all identifying information, such as names, registration numbers, batch numbers, etc., while labeling each email at the conclusion with (M) or (F) to denote the students’ genders.

Corpus Cleaning and Standardization

Following data acquisition, a text document was generated to contain the entirety of the corpus. Moreover, a revised edition of the target corpus (i.e., customized corpus) was produced by rectifying the spelling errors identified during qualitative examination. The reasoning behind generating the corrected version was the necessity for precision, uniformity, and interference reduction throughout the software-assisted quantitative analysis.

Corpus modification involved:

- a) Rectification of spelling errors (for instance, "attendence" was changed to "attendance," "alot" was changed to "a lot," etc.)
- b) Normalization of spelling in accordance with American English (for example, "favour" was changed to "favor," "organise" was changed to "organize," etc.)
- c) Standardization of variants of the same term (for instance, different iterations of the Muslim greeting were standardized as "assalamualaikum," and different spellings of the address form "madam")

Table 0.1 shows a streamlined inventory of the iterations of the target corpus:

Table 0.1

Details of Corpus and its Versions

Name	No. of tokens	Description	Purpose
Raw Corpus	32,358	The raw, unaltered sample	Qualitative Analysis
Tailored corpus	32,164	The original corpus after correction of spelling	Quantitative Analysis

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

Addressing the research question required the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project

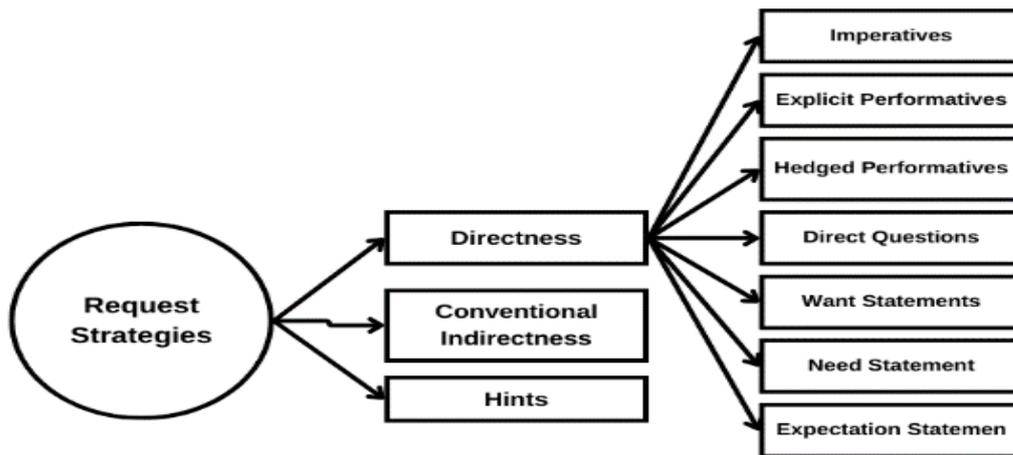


Figure 0.2 Request Strategies in Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP)

(CCSARP) framework (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) for an in-depth inquiry into the request strategies and lexico-syntactic modification in the email corpus, as shown in Figure 0.2.

Computer-Assisted Corpus Analysis

After rectifying spelling errors and standardizing spellings in the unprocessed corpus, the customized corpus was imported into AntConc (a freely available corpus linguistics application created by Laurence Anthony) to investigate the corpus quantitatively in line with the investigation objectives. Frequency tallies of content words were utilized as a beginning stage. Grammatical words were mostly disregarded, apart from modal verbs, as they were noted to be an integral component of indirect requests employing negative politeness. The leading 30 most frequently appearing words were subsequently examined in context via a concordance investigation using the keyword-in-context (KWIC) utility of AntConc to sift out unrelated words and shortlist terms that contributed to politeness. The procedure was reiterated to additionally classify the words into types of politeness to reach findings (Figure 0.3).

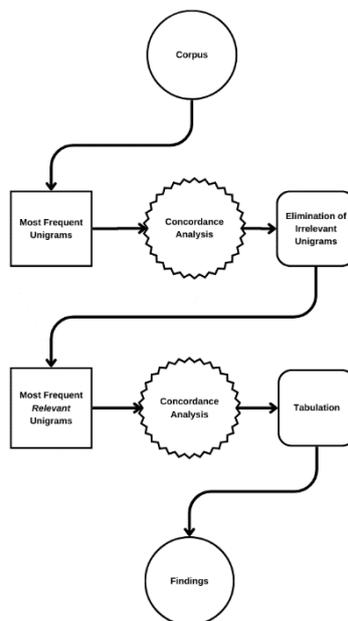


Figure 0.3 Concordance Analysis

Data Analyses & Results

This chapter is separated into two parts, given the research design. Section I characterizes qualitative data examination with illustrations from information, followed by the outcomes in tabular and graphic format. A hypothesis founded on the qualitative outcomes is formulated to be evaluated by a subsequent corpus-based examination. Section II recounts the step-by-step testing of hypothesis through the corpus-based analysis in detail. Instances from the corpus are displayed, alongside a number of KWIC/concordance screenshots.

Qualitative Data Analysis

A total of 200 emails were analyzed through CCSARP to reveal a total of 233 speech acts of request (see Table 0.1), comprising 137 direct request strategies, 78 conventionally indirect request strategies, and 6 non-conventionally indirect strategies (i.e., hints). A new category (code-switching) with 12 instances was also discovered during the analysis.

Table 0.1 Request Strategies (number of occurrences)

	Direct	Indirect	Hints	Code-Switching	Total
Male	70	33	4	10	117
Female	67	45	2	2	116
Total	137	78	6	12	233

In order to get a clearer understanding, the number of occurrences in each request strategy was divided by the total number of speech acts of request and multiplied by 100 to obtain percentages (see Table 0.2)

Table 0.2 Request Strategies (%age)

	Direct	Indirect	Hints	Code-Switching
Male	59.8	28.2	3.4	8.5
Female	57.8	38.9	1.7	1.7
Total	58.9	33.5	2.6	5.2

Findings show that Pakistani students tend to prefer direct request strategies over other request strategies (see **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.**)

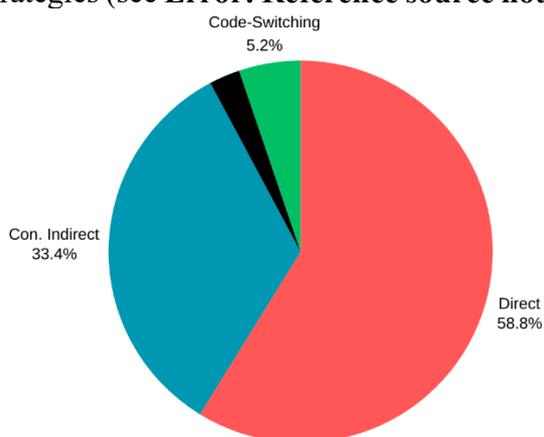


Figure 0.1 Request Strategies

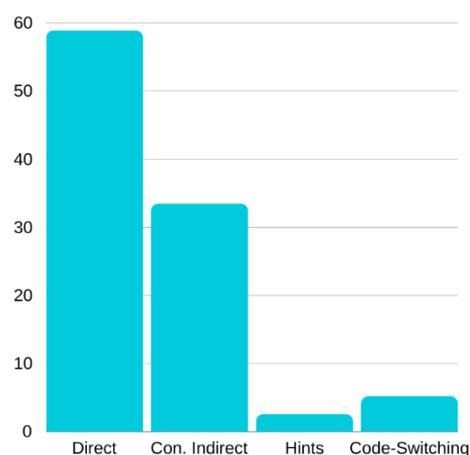


Figure 0.2 Request Strategies

Direct requests were chiefly realized through the use of politeness and/or mitigation markers, such as *please* and *kindly*. For instance,

- (1) *Assalamualaikum! I hope you are enjoying good of your health. Madam, I just received your message via CR. Madam, you said earlier that assessment 7 will replace your low assessment marks. That's why the whole class agreed to give that assessment. Madam kindly do that compassion. It's a kind request we did a lot of effort in this course.*

Since the objective of this study was to request head acts (underlined), the reliance on politeness markers kindly followed by an imperative (do that compassion) seems to be the default choice for the majority of Pakistani students, especially male students. There are numerous examples, such as:

- (2) *Assalamualaikum Madam, I hope you will be in the best of your health. My MIS final term marks are not appearing on CMS. Kindly help me out with that. Waiting for your reply.
Thanks and Regards,*

Conventional indirect in CCSARP is realized in two ways: through suggestory formula or through query preparator. The former sub-strategy is irrelevant to emails. Hence, only the latter was adapted by Biesencach Lucas (2007) and, subsequently, this current study. Query preparatory statements are defined as language-specific formulaic syntactic structures that prepare the listener for an upcoming request. In the given data, various examples were found, such as:

- (3) *Assalamualaikum Madam,
Hope you are doing well. Madam, I'm writing you to inform you that there is some construction work going on at my house, and because of that I'm unable to attend today's lecture as no one was at home. Can you please mark my attendance for today's lecture I'll be very thankful to you for this act of kindness.*

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely,

- (4) *I enrolled in DLD in your recent course, but I couldn't attend lectures properly due to the clash of my OOP subject timing. Consequently, I couldn't get passing marks in did after the final result. It is requested to please give me passing marks because i already had a probation in last semester. This is my last chance. if i failed there is a high chance that i will be dropped by the university.*

- (5) *I am ----- from ___ afternoon and I added COAL with F20 cs morning. I am writing this email to request you to please give me some sessional marks so I can clear this course. Otherwise my degree will get late by another year and I will lose my job. I know i did really bad mistake and I'm really sorry for that.*

I will be forever grateful to you if you could do this one favor as my entire future depends on it.

Regards,

- (6) *ASSALAMUALAIKUM madam!
Madam I wanna request you something. In lecture you said that you will increase one mark if the grade is changing from one number. Madam my grade is changing from one number. I will be very thankful to you if you increase my one number. Thank you very much.*

Respectfully,

In the abovementioned examples, several different query preparatory formulas used by Pakistani students can be observed. (4) shows an expression common to native English speakers for exercising indirectness. (5) and (6) use embedding the request head act, resulting in indirectness. Similarly, (7) also uses a query preparatory formula that seems literally translatable from the Urdu language, yet works perfectly well in English.

Code-switching was added as a separate category of request strategies, since it was observed as an unclassified request strategy with respect to CCSARP. Students used Urdu – more specifically, Roman Urdu, which uses English alphabets to spell out Urdu words – for high imposition requests. For instance,

(7) *Assalamualaikum madam*

Hope u will be fine.

My name is ____

Madam mere economics mein total 68 marks hain. Madam mere midterms or final mein 50 marks hain. Apsy request hy please sessional mein 20 marks dy dein .70 marks py mera grade change ho jayega. (Madam, I have a total of 68 marks in economics. Madam, I have 50 marks in midterms and finals. It is requested, please give me 20 marks in sessionals. My grade will change on 70 marks)

Please madam just 2 marks70 py grade change hojayega. (The grade will change on 70 marks)

Apka shukr guzar rahun ga. (I will stay thankful to you)

May you live long!!!!!!

(Mostly word-to-word) English translation in parenthesis has been added by the researcher to demonstrate the high imposition of the request, as well as to show that the matter isn't so complex as to not be put into words in a second language. More examples:

(8) *Assalamualaikum madam Apse request kii thi Kal ke thode extra marks de detii. Mera wo semester probation ka issue ban Jana warna kindly AP thode extra marks de den.apse office mai kaha tha Apne kaha tha mail kr dena.Please.* (It was a request to you to grant some extra marks for yesterday. Otherwise it will become an issue of semester probation for me. Kindly give me some extra marks. I said it to you in the office and you asked to send you a mail. Please.)

(9) *madam Allah ka wasta hai mere dost nai mujhe bola hai k apko mail karay k quiz agay kar dain, MADAM elections agay ho saktay hain ye tou phir quiz hai,* (Madam, for Allah's sake, my friend asked me to mail this to you to postpone the quiz. Madam, elections can be postponed; this is just a quiz)
Madam please it's a request

Direct strategies were further distributed into sub-strategies (see Table 0.3 and Table 0.4). Imperatives were revealed to be the most common sub-strategy of direct requests, followed by explicit performative, among others.

Table 0.3: Distribution within Direct Strategy (number of occurrences)

Sub-strategies	Male	Female	Total
Imperative	41	27	68
Explicit Performative	14	24	38
Hedged Performative	3	3	6
Direct Question	2	0	2
Want Statement	2	1	3
Need Statement	2	9	11
Expectation Statement	6	3	9
Total	70	67	137

Table 0.4: Distribution within Direct Strategy (percentage)

Sub-strategies	Male	Female	Total
Imperative	58.6	40.3	49.6
Explicit Performative	20.0	35.8	27.7
Hedged Performative	4.3	4.5	4.4
Direct Question	2.9	0.0	1.5
Want Statement	2.9	1.5	2.2
Need Statement	2.9	13.4	8
Expectation Statement	8.6	4.5	6.6

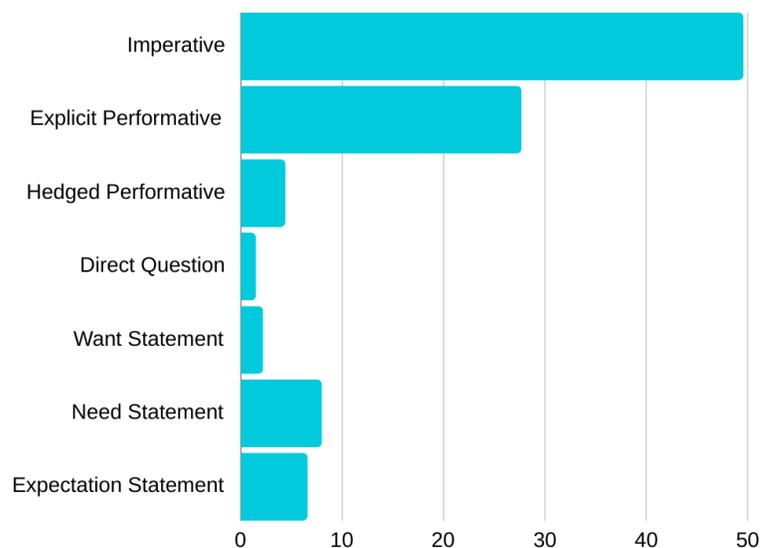


Figure 0.3 Sub-Strategies of Direct Requests

Hypotheses Formulation

Based on the outcomes of the qualitative examination, the following hypothesis was formulated (to be evaluated through a corpus-based analysis):

H1: Pakistani students favor direct request strategy over conventionally indirect strategy and hints.

Corpus-Based Analysis

After customization of the corpus (as elaborated in the Methodology chapter), AntConc was utilized to identify the leading 30 most common words in the corpus (Table 4.3). The selection of the number 30 was arbitrary yet it appeared to be an appropriate choice considering the corpus was comprised of approximately 30,000 tokens in total.

Table 0.5

Most Frequent Unigrams

Rank	Word	Freq.
1	madam	407
2	request	242
3	will	222
4	assalamualaikum	214
5	marks	197
6	hope	186
7	please	172
8	kindly	158
9	well	144
10	would	128
11	can	126
12	regards	123
13	time	118
14	semester	111

15	course	102
16	thank	101
17	sir	100
18	email	96
19	class	88
20	exam	80
21	grade	80
22	student	76
23	help	71
24	quiz	71
25	finds	64
26	writing	63
27	doing	62
28	could	61
29	do	57
30	health	56

After running concordance for all words individually using the KWIC (keyword-in-context) feature of AntConc (Figure 0.4, Figure 0.5, Figure 0.6, Figure 0.7, and Figure 0.8), the tokens which did not contribute to request strategies were deleted from the list of thirty most frequent words in the corpus, and the rest were shortlisted and tabularized (**Table 0.6**). Honorifics, greetings, and closing formula were eliminated from the list, since (in)directness (as studied by CCSARP) is limited to the request head act. Concordance analysis was utilized to filter out irrelevant words and tabulate shortlisted words into their corresponding categories.

end the deadline for the Lab task. Thank you for your understanding. (M) Sir,	can	you please replace my F grade with an I . It's a kind request i
(F) Madam what are your free hours for today. If you are not available today	can	you please share you availability for tomorrow? I have to get my general form
be held tomorrow(Friday),because i had not attempted the online exam. So,	can	you please share me the online exam, that was held on SEB.This will help
you. Regards (F) Assalamualaikum madam I hope this email finds you well.	Can	you please share dummy data file of hostelite students so that we can start rr
ove 30 or so because my paper was went so well but on CMS I am seeing 23.	Can	you please again check my marks from the paper? I will be really obliged if
ssday). That is not available. I have confirmed form one other student as well.	Can	you please check? Also, my humble apologies for the inconvenience being ca
emester and ask for compensation assignments from teachers. Dear Madam,	can	you please give me some time to complete any of the assignments and not fi
3 references for it. An email will be sent to you titled 'reference for Fulbright'.	Can	you please have a look into it? Thank you, madam. Regards (F) Assalamualail
MCO's. Thanks in advance. (X) Respected Madam, I hope you are doing well.	Can	you please increase the time of submission of the Case Study? We were havin
of that I'm unable to attend today's lecture as no one was at home.	Can	you please mark my attendance for today's lecture I'll be very thankful to
'(batch 2008-2012). . i want to apply for PhD. and i need a reference letter .	Can	you please provide me a reference letter so that I may apply for admission? I
ave applied in University of Alberta for Masters and I need 3 references for it.	Can	you please refer me, If I send you my transcript ? I will be very grateful
secondly due to the time shortage I had to finish my exam in a hurry. So	can	you please show some leniency in checking the exam. Moreover, there is anc
SUPARCO). I need a little career counseling regarding job and further studies.	Can	you please spare 15 minutes to guide me about it. Looking forward to your re
Assalamualaikum Madam, Madam other teachers have finalized my results.	Can	you please tell me my marks in economics after the sessional marks? Kindly I
lable. The last lecture (05-Apr-21, Monday) is also not uploaded yet. Madam,	can	you please upload both? Some teachers provide us with the link to the Googl
I want to do specialization in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence mainly.	Can	you please write a recommendation letter for me as some unis require this let

Figure 0.4 Concordances of "can"

u. Please consider my request. Regards: (M) added Assalamualaikum Madam,
 ily appreciated. Thanks and regards, Yours sincerely, (M) Assalamualaikum,
 tter, it'd be great favor to me! Regards (M) Assalamualaikum respect Madam,
 oe you will put some considerations on my request. (M) Assalamualaikum Sir,
 y me in this mail so reset my password thanku (X) Assalamualaikum Madam!
 t and I hope you will pass me in the course JazakAllah (X) Assalamualaikum! I
 tion to my request. Yours sincerely, (F) Assalamualaikum! Respected Madam,
 ll be satisfied with the reasons. Thank you! -- Regards, (M) Assalamualaikum!
 ly thankful to you. (Allah Hafiz Fi Aman Allah) (M) AssalamuAlaikum Madam,
 bmission date for me. I'll be highly thankful to you. (F) Assalamualaikum Sir! I
 ill be highly obliged. Thanking in anticipation! (F) Assalamualaikum Madam! I
 appreciate your time and consideration of my situation. Sincerely, (M) A.o.A! I
 Your participation will be highly appreciated. Regards (F) Assalamualaikum! I
 earing about your kind response. -- Regards (M) Assalamualaikum. Madam! I
 SS of my attendance with this email. (M) Assalamualaikum Madam! I
 ay Allah bless you Ameen. Thanks in advance. (M) Assalamualaikum Madam,

Hope you are doing well. Madam I'm writing you to inform that there is some
 Hope you are doing well. Respectfully, Madam my grade is changing with two numl
 Hope you are doing well. This email is to request you for a favor. I lost
 Hope you are doing well. I have just received my result of EAD midterm and was
 Hope you are doing well. Madam we want to request to you regarding midterm exam
 hope you are fine and enjoying good health. Basically, I am absent that day i did
 Hope you are fine and doing well. Madam, I have a request for you regarding my
 Hope you are fine and working well. Madam as I discussed with you in the class
 Hope you are fine and doing well. Madam Alhamdulillah our semester went really w
 hope you are well. I am your former student -----, BSEF15M. Sir! Actually i need 2-3
 hope you are well. I am your former student __. Madam! Actually, i need 2-3 Referer
 hope you are well. Sir i study Digital Logic and Designing (DLD) from you in this
 hope you are enjoying good of your health. Madam just received your message via
 hope you are enjoying Ramazan. Madam i need your help. I want to know our exam
 hope you are fine. As there will be the quiz of CS afternoon and i become
 Hope you are fine. Madam, I'm Muhammad Anas, a student of BS-IT fall 2016-2020 :

Figure 0.5 Concordances of "hope"

ial approval for my leave from the administrative office. Thank you for your
 ial approval for my leave from the administrative office. Thank you for your
 reflect my overall comprehension of the course content. Thank you for your
 request you to consider it before that issue is solved, please. I appreciate your
 request you to consider it before that issue is solved, please. I appreciate your
 your willingness to assist me in this process. Thank you very much for your
 ur attention to this matter. I eagerly await your response. Thank you for your
 iligently and made sincere efforts to excel in my studies. Thank you for your
 iligently and made sincere efforts to excel in my studies. Thank you for your
 uld provide on this matter would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your
 ur consideration and assistance would mean a lot to me. Thank you for your
 pter 10 slides total cost is not given instead ATC is given" Thank you for your
 : that may arise due to the discrepancy. I understand the importance of your
 ave the lectures. So could my attendance be a problem? Thank you for your
 al information please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Thank you for your
 rade and better reflect my understanding of the subject. Thank you for your
 completing survey, please contact: Thank you in advance for your precious

time and consideration. I look forward to a positive resolution. (M) Sir it is humbly
 time and consideration. I look forward to a positive resolution. (M) Sir it is humbly
 time and consideration of my request. I appreciate your guidance and am open to
 time and consideration of my situation. Sincerely, (M) A.o.A! I hope you are well.
 time and consideration of my situation. Sincerely, (M) A.o.A! I hope you are well.
 time and consideration. Best regards, (F) Dear Ms. Khan, I hope this email finds yo
 time and consideration. Sincerely, (M) Assalamualaikum Hope you are doing wel
 time and understanding. Sincerely, (F) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you in
 time and understanding. Sincerely, (F) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you in
 time and assistance. I look forward to your response. Best regards, (F) ASSALAMU,
 time and attention to this request. ----- Warm regards, (M) Assalamualaikum! I
 time and attention. I look forward to hearing back from you soon. Sincerely, (F) Re
 time and commitment to your students, and I genuinely appreciate your assistanc
 time and consideration. BSEF21M544 (M) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds yo
 time and consideration. Warm regards, (X) Madam we cannot come to university
 time and consideration. Sincerely, (M) I hope this email finds you in good health
 time and cooperation. Your participation will be highly appreciated. Regards (F) A

Figure 0.6 Concordances of "time"

dness. Yours obediently, (M) Dear PROF. DR. __, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to respectfully request a review appeal regarding a recent decisi
natter. Sincerely, (M) Dear Madam Sadeeqa, I hope this message finds you	well.	I am writing to express my concern regarding the recent notification about t
ve long!!!!!! (M) added Assalamualaikum Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to kindly request a scaling of 1 mark in my economics paper. I
ranks in anticipation (M) Dear Professor Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to kindly remind you of our recent meeting regarding my final r
semester. (M) Dear madam, Assallam o allaikum I hope this letter finds you	well.	I am writing to sincerely apologize for my performance in the recent econo
ciated. Regards, (M) Assalamualaikum Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to inform you of a recent diagnosis I have received. Unfortunate
you for taking the time to read my message. (M) I hope this letter finds you	well.	I am writing as the class representative for FA23-BCS-A regarding a concern :
allow us . Thank you. (X) ASSALAMUALAIKUM , I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to inform you of an unforeseen circumstance that has affected i
norrow at your office? (X) Dear Madam Sadeeqa, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to request your assistance in providing me with a letter of recon
ttached document. Thank you! (F) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am reaching out to request your assistance in providing a letter of recomm
ou for your time. Best regards, (F) Respected Madam, I hope you are doing	well.	I am reaching out to request your permission to use you as a reference for
ny POM project. Thank You (M) Dear Madam, I hope this message finds you	well.	I am reaching out to request a small adjustment regarding the upcoming M
or me. I'll be highly thankful to you. (F) Assalamualaikum Sir! I hope you are	well.	I am your former student -----, BSEF15M. Sir! Actually i need 2-3 Reference L
igned. Thanking in anticipation! (F) Assalamualaikum Madam! I hope you are	well.	I am your former student __. Madam! Actually, i need 2-3 Reference Letters f
a positive outcome. Regards (M) Assalamualaikum Madam I hope you feel	well.	I am Afghan student Shershah From department of SE. Since we are facing S
is not available for Students. (X) Dear Madam, I hope this message finds you	well.	I am Hamad Munir, Roll No. BITF17M512. Unfortunately, I missed the comm
jay. Regards, (F) Respected Madam, Assalamualaikum! I hope you are doing	well.	I am Khadija Parvaiz from mcsf19 morning. I final year student and I along w

Figure 0.7 Concordances of "Well"

. Regards (F) Assalamualaikum Madam. Hope you are doing well. I'm	writing	to you regarding the panel discussion. We are a team of 5 members. One of
cript? I will be very grateful to you. Thank you. Regards (F) Dear Sir, I am __	writing	to you regarding my admission in pucit in evening program . I have comple
writing to you multiple times on the same issue. I assure you I won't be	writing	to you regarding attendance in the future. (Allah Hafiz Fi Aman Allah) (M) A
I that day. Today, nobody in the class could remind you about this and I am	writing	to you as a reminder to get my attendance marked. I'll be highly obliged
I'll provide him with my medical reports tomorrow. Madam, The reason I'm	writing	to you is I was marked absent 4 times during this period and I humbly reque
to mark my attendance today. I am sorry for making you feel disturbed by	writing	to you multiple times on the same issue. I assure you I won't be
aikum Madam, Hope you are doing well. I'm Ammara from the group no. 7	writing	to you on the behalf of my group members Zoha (47) and Bakhtwar (31). Wi
ar Madam , I hope this email finds you in good health and high spirits. I am	writing	to you with utmost respect and a sincere request for your guidance and sup
ation. Best regards, (F) Dear Ms. Khan, I hope this email finds you well. I am	writing	to bring to your attention a conflict that has arisen regarding tomorrow's ec
ear Madam, I hope this email finds you in good health and high spirits. I am	writing	to bring to your attention a situation that has affected my academic perform
ear Madam, I hope this email finds you in good health and high spirits. I am	writing	to bring to your attention a situation that has affected my academic perform
ualaikum Sadeeqa Madam! I hope this email finds you in good health. I am	writing	to bring to your attention some concerns regarding my recent assessments.
ualaikum Sadeeqa Madam! I hope this email finds you in good health. I am	writing	to bring to your attention some concerns regarding my recent assessments.
Yours Sincerely, (F) Respected Madam! Hope this mail finds you well. I am	writing	to bring it to your notice that my Arabic Final Resit Marks haven't been
hope you'll make a way out. (F) hope this email finds you well. I am	writing	to request your kind consideration to scale up add/drop students' marks for
nshallah. Thanking you in advance. (F) I hope this email finds you well. I am	writing	to request your kind consideration to scale up add/drop students' marks for
s I need Transcript .. Thank you ! (F) I hope this message finds you well. I am	writing	to request your understanding regarding the delay in submitting my assignr

Figure 0.8 Concordances of "writing"

Table 0.6 : Shortlisted Unigrams Relevant to Request Strategies

Direct			Conventionally Indirect		
Rank	Word	Freq.	Rank	Word	Freq.
2	request	242			
7	please	172			
8	kindly	158			
			10	would	128
			11	can	126
23	help	71			
			26	writing	63
			28	could	61
Total		643			378

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed by the prevalence of more frequent words that corresponded with direct request strategies.

Discussion

The current investigation concentrated on examining the request strategies of Pakistani students in their emails to faculty. The principal discovery of this study can be summarized as follows: Pakistani students prefer a direct request strategy over a conventional indirect strategy and hints.

This finding is in line with the previous research from various countries, such as Cyprus (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018), the Philippines (Briones & Liwanag, 2023), Malaysia (Alafnan & Rudio, 2023), Turkey (Burgucu-Tazegul et al., 2016), Japan and Germany (Danielewicz-Betz, 2013), among others, which similarly found the non-native English speakers' preference for directness. Students seem familiar with the basic conventions of email writing, which is evident by the use of formulaic utterances along with opening and closing formulas specific to emails. The tendency to use direct strategies may be explained by the lack of language proficiency and pragmatic competence. However, some elements of application writing – which is a mandatory part of English syllabi in Pakistani schools and colleges – may also be responsible for the explicit performative sub-strategy of directness (i.e., “I request you...”).

Implications of the Study

The present research focused on investigating the request strategies employed by Pakistani students in their emails within an academic context. The principal finding of this investigation can be summarized as follows: Pakistani students exhibit a preference for direct request strategies over conventionally indirect approaches and hints.

Email requests from Pakistani students to faculty appear to lack the pragmatic competence necessary for employing negative politeness and indirectness, which are considered appropriate in the given context but may lead to pragmatic breakdowns when communicating with native English speakers. As global interconnectedness increases daily, driven by the continuous expansion of digital technology (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025)—particularly over the last two decades—pragmatic competence in English seems to grow increasingly vital for successful international and intercultural communication.

Pakistan (alongside other nations where English is routinely taught as a second language) must address the pragmatic dimension of English through informed policy adjustments in school and college curricula (Akram et al., 2020), which play a foundational role in shaping most students' second language habits (Ramzan et al., 2020, 2023, 2025).

Furthermore, the concerning frequency of spelling and grammatical errors in the emails, coupled with

students' strong dependence on fixed request formulas, highlights the need for a policy reorientation toward teaching English as a language rather than a subject. This shift should be supported by a Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)-based assessment framework that encourages creative language use, replacing the current system that prioritizes and rewards memorization.

Limitations

The constraints of this investigation incorporate its scope, sample magnitude, and generalizability, primarily due to time and financial limitations. Aside from gender, this research does not account for the sociolinguistic facets (social class, ethnicity) which might also influence politeness. Furthermore, the study possesses a restricted sample size, and a bigger corpus could uncover more nuanced results. Additionally, this investigation has confined generalizability because the population was limited to universities of Lahore, Pakistan, between 2021 and 2023, and a comparable study in other geographic regions and industries might not yield the same outcomes. It would be relevant to note that the present research has employed only one out of numerous models of politeness, and utilizing a different framework could disclose an alternate viewpoint on the topic of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on these findings, subsequent investigations should contemplate experimental studies to establish the effectiveness of pragmatics-centered instructional interventions on the pragmatic capability of ESL students. Additionally, quantitative metapragmatic studies of native English speakers' interpretation of politeness in Pakistani emails would constitute an outstanding joint research endeavor, particularly when combined with qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, comparative analysis on Pakistani monolingual and/or bilingual speakers' expressions of politeness in Urdu (or other local languages, such as Sindhi, Pashto, Punjabi, etc.) and English in intracultural communication would yield important discoveries regarding the function of language in politeness.

Conclusion

The investigation sought to examine request strategies within the context of Pakistani students' emails to faculty by employing the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) coding framework combined with a corpus-assisted examination in a mixed-method sequential research design for the purpose of triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the dataset. The examinations indicated Pakistani students' inclination for direct request strategies rather than conventional indirect requests and hints.

The present study connects the void in literature by exploring (in)directness in the Pakistani setting and adds to the expanding body of linguistic research in Pakistan and corpus-assisted investigation in general. The outcomes offer an understanding of the pragmatic capability of Pakistani students and possess practical consequences for educational policy formation in Pakistan.

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