Intercultural Pragmatics and Politeness in Language Education: A Case Study of Student Communication in a Multilingual Higher Education Context

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Theoretical Framework

- Politeness manages face-threatening acts (FTAs).

- Brown & Levinson (1987): Positive vs. Negative politeness.

- Critiques: Ethnocentrism, intercultural variability.

- Other perspectives: Lakoff (1973), Scollon & Scollon (2001), Spencer-Oatey (2008).

Sociological Perspective

- Politeness reduces aggression, regulates interaction (Goffman, 1971).

- Functions as semiotic system, enabling conflict-free communication.

- Shift from sentence-level to discourse-level analysis (Mills, 2003).

Research Problem

- North Macedonia: Multilingual/multiethnic context.

- Languages: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, English, German.

- Gap: Limited research on ethnicity and politeness in academic communication in the Balkans.

Objectives & Research Questions

- Objectives:
- - Identify politeness strategies.
- - Analyze impact of ethnicity.
- - Assess pragmatic competence.

- RQs:
- a) What strategies are used?
- b) How is directness perceived?
- c) How does ethnicity influence choices?

Methodology

- Qualitative research.

- 60 students (30 Macedonian, 30 Albanian).

- Universities: UGD Štip & SEEU Tetovo.

- Methods: Written scenarios, interviews, reflective logs.

- Analysis: Content analysis (Brown & Levinson framework).

Participants

- Age: 19–28.
- Languages: Macedonian, Albanian (mother tongues), German & English (foreign).
- All at least B2 German.
- Students in German language departments.

Scenario 1: Deadline Extension

▶ Macedonians: 65% direct request.

▶ Albanians: 70% indirect/polite request.

▶ Interpretation: Albanians prefer indirect politeness, Macedonians clarity/pragmatism.

Table 1. Preferences for politeness strategies in academic requests among Macedonian and Albanian students

Politeness strategy	Macedonian students (n = 30)	Albanian students (n = 30)
Direct request with brief explanation	65% (19 students)	20% (6 students)
Indirect/polite request with explanation	25% (7 students)	70% (21 students)
Indirect hints (no explicit request)	10% (4 students)	10% (3 students)

Scenario 2: Peer Correction

- Macedonians: 40% direct correction.

- Albanians: 80% indirect suggestion/silence.

- Interpretation: Albanians emphasize group harmony, Macedonians tolerate open disagreement.

Table 2: Students' strategies for peer correction in academic contexts

Strategy	Macedonian students (n = 30)	Albanian students (n = 30)
Direct correction	40% (12 students)	20% (6 students)
Indirect suggestion	35% (11 students)	40% (12 students)
Silence/avoidance	25% (7 students)	40% (12 students)

Scenario 3: Borrowing Notes

- Macedonians: 45% direct, 35% polite apology.

- Albanians: 25% direct, 45% polite apology.

- Interpretation: Albanians more cautious, Macedonians slightly more direct.

Table 3: Preferred communication strategies when asking a classmate to borrow notes among Macedonian and Albanian students

Strategy	Macedonian students (n = 30)	Albanian students (n = 30)
Direct request	45% (14 students)	25% (8 students)
Indirect comment or excuse	20% (6 students)	30% (9 students)
Polite request with apology	35% (10 students)	45% (13 students)

Conclusion

▶ Albanians: Indirect, polite, face-saving.

▶ Macedonians: Direct, pragmatic, flexible.

▶ Implications: Intercultural pragmatic competence is vital.

▶ Need for educational practices supporting linguistic & cultural sensitivity.