

Intercultural Pragmatics: Integrating Diverse Pragmatic Styles in Multicultural Academic Discourse

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Abstract

Globalization, migration and the mingling of cultures in one community has made this world highly multicultural. This interconnectedness brings the need to interact and have different relationships with people from various cultures which poses challenges for people who would cross the borders of the countries altogether with their cultural boundaries. While diversity brings rich academic environment it also includes contemporary challenges, particularly in terms of pragmatic competence. This paper's aim is to examine how language is used in academic contexts preserving divergent pragmatic styles for politeness, directness, argumentation and critical engagement in academic communication. A qualitative analysis of students' e-mails and their communication with professors is used to identify key points of intercultural pragmatic friction because different cultures have different norms which are essential to be taught in terms of concrete strategies for pragmatic norms and intercultural communication. Finally, the study concludes that teaching pragmatic norms explicitly can help students navigate academic discourse more effectively by fostering mutual respect for diverse communicative styles without demanding cultural assimilation.

Keywords: *Intercultural communication, Pragmatics, Pragmatic Styles, Culture*

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Introduction

Individual interactions create various cultures (countries, regions, or groups). To achieve intercultural communication that is transparent and productive, participants need to be conscious of their personal and cultural boundaries to grasp the boundaries and opportunities for mutual understanding. In other words, you have to understand yourself in order to comprehend another person and their culture. The process is continual, with the goal of continuous communication and an profound comprehension of both the Other and the self rather than a definitive transparent understanding of either (Sarris,1993).

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Along with having a firm command of grammar and vocabulary, one of the most crucial aspects of being skilled in a language is being able to use it effectively in social contexts. Recognizing cultural standards means deciphering inferred meanings, and utilizing appropriate speech acts such as requests, apologies and refusals. Pragmatic competence is sometimes disregarded in favor of linguistic competence in language training, despite being essential for the English Language Learners' (ELLs') effective communication. Inadequate pragmatic competence may make it difficult for students to express themselves directly, which could result in misunderstandings or poor communication. Pragmatic competence is the capacity to use the language in a way that is acceptable and effective in a range of different communication circumstances (Thomas, 1983). This capacity is essential to the processing of human language. People are able to express themselves and understand concepts that go beyond basic definitions of words and. When they become proficient in this area, consider nuances of context, societal norms, and purpose it suggests that they have good communication skills. Understanding how people acquire and apply pragmatic competence has theoretical and practical implications for the domains of advanced technology, education, and communication.

Today's globalization in higher education has resulted in increasingly diverse classrooms, bringing together students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Because culture is who we are and how we live and this process is changeable (Jankova Alagjozovska, 2018), those changes bring new challenges in the society. Globalization, migration and the mingling of cultures in one community has made this world highly multicultural. This interconnectedness brings the need to interact and have different relationships with people from various cultures which poses challenges for people who would cross the borders of the countries altogether with their cultural boundaries. While diversity brings rich academic environment it also includes contemporary challenges, particularly in terms of pragmatic competence.

Literature Review

As a fundamental idea in pragmatics, politeness is essentially the strategic use of language to govern interpersonal relationships rather than just being about manners. Being courteous becomes an essential linguistic tool for handling activities that are inherently face-threatening in academic settings since language is deliberately developed and disseminated in these settings. The most significant model in the field of pragmatics is Brown and Levinson's (1987) paradigm. This paradigm states that every capable member of the society has both positive and negative aspects, such as the need for freedom and autonomy as well as the need to be respected, liked, and accepted. A complementary strategy of tact, kindness, approval, and modesty was put out by Leech (1983). The most pertinent maxims in academia, according to this method, are generosity, tact, approval, modesty, sympathy, and agreement. To obtain larger coverage, four additional maxims are added: obligation by the speaker and hearer, opinion, and feeling reluctance. Language proficiency is one of the essential components of Bachman's (1990) Communicative Language Ability (CLA) Model. The model defines pragmatic competence as the knowledge of language that allows language users to accomplish communicative objectives in the context of functional and sociolinguistic features, such as understanding registers, genres, dialects, and imaginative and ideational functions. Spancer-Oater (2000, 2008) described the Rapport Management paradigm, which encompasses social rights, obligations, and interactions in addition to face and identity. In academia, where maintaining academic



relationships is crucial, this is extremely applicable. This, "rapport" refers to people's subjective impressions of (dis)harmony, warmth vs antagonism, and smoothness versus turbulence in interpersonal relationships. Compared to other politeness theory models, the RMM offers a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach since it begins with the study of interpersonal relations rather than the research of linguistic tactics. Among all these concepts, Locher and Watts (2005) state that Brown and Levinson's work is not a theory of politeness but a theory of facework, dealing with face-threatening acts and not with situations in which face-threat mitigation is not a priority i.e. aggressive abusive or rude behavior. In this sense, Locher and Watts (2005,2008) propose the notion of relational work as a process of defining relationships in interaction. Their model suggests delineation between first-order politeness and second-order politeness to account for the concepts of polite, impolite, polite and appropriate behavior. This model is described as "the various ways in which polite behavior is perceived and talked about by member of socio-cultural groups" and focuses on how some groups use language in interaction to index good manners.

Materials and Methods

A qualitative analysis of students' e-mails and their communication with professors was conducted to identify key points of intercultural pragmatic friction. Since the prime aim of this study is to examine how language is used in academic contexts preserving the pragmatic styles of politeness, directedness, argumentation and critical engagement, the following research questions are to be answered:

- How do students from different ethnic backgrounds exhibit divergent pragmatic styles in e-mail communication with their professor in a multicultural academic setting?
- Which specific points of intercultural pragmatic friction arise in student-professor e-mail exchanges?
- How can explicit teaching of pragmatic norms help students navigate the academic discourse and what types of strategies are most effective in reducing misunderstanding without requiring cultural assimilation?

Students from first and second year at the Department of English language and literature within Goce Delcev university Stip were selected as random participants. This study investigated intercultural pragmatic friction in academic communication using a qualitative methodology backed by descriptive statistics. More precisely, twenty spontaneously occurring email exchanges make up the research corpus of this study. Based on the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the students, the data was split into two separate groups: group L1 domestic (n = 13) i.e. e-mails sent by students from North Macedonia working in their home academic setting. Group L2 International (n = 7), Turkish international students' emails about adjusting to a foreign academic environment.

A thematic discourse analysis methodology based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory was used to examine the gathered corpus. Every e-mail was coded for particular communication activities (such as requests for clarifications, grade appeals, and extensions as shown in table 1 below) that naturally endanger the "face" of the recipient. Three main topics are the focus of the language analysis, i.e. 20 faculty emails were analyzed in terms of:



1. Salutations and honorifics (such as title appropriateness)
2. Internal Mitigation (such as modal verbs and syntactic hedging)
3. Structural Directness (e.g., circuitous preambles versus unmitigated imperatives)

Results

The participants in this study are students from the Department of English language and literature whereas 20 random e-mails were analysed in terms of pragmatic norms. As stated in Table 1, the distribution of pragmatic markers among the 20 studied e-mails reveals important friction areas, particularly with academic hierarchy and request techniques.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Mitigation Strategies

Linguistic Feature	L1 Domestic Students (n = 13)	L2 International Students (n = 7)	Total Corpus (N = 20)
Unmitigated Imperatives	5 (38%)	2 (28,6%)	7 (35)%
Appropriate Hedging	7 (53,8%)	1 (14,3%)	8 (40)%
Inappropriate Title Usage	2 (15,4%)	6 (87,5%)	8 (40)%
Indirect/Ambiguous Requests	3 (23,1%)	5 (71,4%)	8 (40)%

Referring to the *Title Usage Discrepancies* it can be stated that salutations and titles exhibit the largest statistically significant difference between the participants. Only 15.4% (n = 2) of L1 domestic students used improper titles or honorifics, compared to a startling 85.7% (n = 6) of L2 international students. This demonstrates that a major challenge for international students is negotiating the hierarchical limitations of the target academic community.

The way requests are organized further demonstrates this boundary confusion. Only 14.3% (n = 1) of international students successfully used proper hedging to soften their requests, compared to 53.8% (n = 7) of domestic students. Rather, 71.4% (n = 5) of overseas students used unclear or indirect vocabulary. This ambiguity frequently creates procedural friction in an academic setting by forcing professors to speculate about the students' main goal of their e-mails. A very interesting result that can be noted is that the data shows an unexpected trend in terms of directness. In fact, L1 domestic students used unmitigated imperatives more frequently (38.5%, n = 5) compared to their overseas colleagues (28.6%, n = 2). Unmitigated imperatives were found in 35.0% (n = 7) of all correspondence in the entire corpus. This suggests that domestic students may occasionally resort to over-familiarity or bluntness due to perceived connection to the local academic culture, while international students struggle with appropriate softening mechanisms.

All things considered, these results provide credence to the theory that intercultural pragmatic friction is not consistent. While local students run the risk of friction through informal, unchecked requests, international students encounter friction because of over-formalization and uncertainty.



Discussion

The study's findings demonstrate that intercultural pragmatic ability is not a direct consequence of structural language proficiency. The L1 North Macedonian and L2 Turkish students both showed sophisticated English grammar and vocabulary, but their email exchanges revealed important areas of cultural conflict. Their divergent native sociocultural norms, which specify how hierarchy, respect, and directness are conveyed, are the fundamental cause of these disparities.

Finally, the paper concludes that teaching pragmatic norms explicitly can help students navigate academic discourse more effectively by fostering mutual respect for diverse communicative styles without demanding cultural assimilation (fig.1).

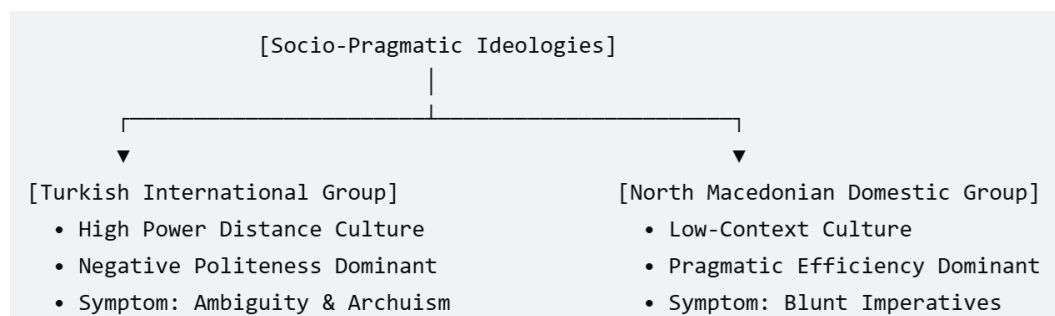


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Socio-Pragmatic Ideologies and Communication Symptoms

The study demonstrates that academic competency is not ensured by advanced language skills. The corpus analysis shows that there is reciprocal intercultural conflict in emails between students and professors. According to Uyanık and Şyükyılmaz (2016), from one hand, Turkish international students function under high power-distance norms, which cause friction through overly ceremonial greetings and unclear, convoluted requests that mask their communicative meaning. On the other hand, domestic students from North Macedonia place a higher priority on low-context pragmatic efficiency, which causes conflict by defaulting to overly familiar, undiluted imperatives (Zylfiu, 2024). Explicit educational intervention is necessary since implicit contextual exposure is unable to close these clear cultural style gaps (Kasper, 1997). International orientations and course curricula must incorporate contrastive discourse workshops and explicit metapragmatic education.

Conclusion

To sum up, Turkish international students ($n = 7$) function under high power-distance standards, as summarized in Figure 1, creating friction with overly ceremonial greetings and structurally unclear, convoluted requests, while domestic pupils from North Macedonia ($n = 13$) favor low-context pragmatic efficiency and cause friction by defaulting to unrestrained imperatives that are too familiar.

The study exposes that pragmatic competence in multicultural settings is not a matter of universal connectedness but of culturally shaped expectations. The e-mail analysis revealed clear divergence between Macedonian and Turkish communicative styles reflecting broader cultural dimensions. Explicit pedagogical intervention is required since implicit exposure to the university setting is unable to close these clear socio-pragmatic style disparities. More precisely, if Macedonians are shown how to add



honorifics and soften when appropriate and Turks being shown that directedness can signal efficiency rather than rudeness can enable students to navigate academic discourse without abandoning their cultural identities. To reduce this institutional conflict and ensure the success of cross-cultural students, universities must incorporate targeted metapragmatic education, contrastive discourse workshops, and standardized syllabus guidelines into their frameworks. By fostering pragmatic awareness rather than demanding assimilation, educators can transform potential conflict into mutual respect, allowing low-context directness and high-power distance politeness to coexist as equally legitimate academic resources.

Conflict of interests

No conflict of interest.

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