# Impoliteness and Emotional Appeals in Academic Email Negotiations of Saudis and Australians

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**Abstract**

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on cross-cultural variations in persuasive appeals by examining email communication for academic proposal purposes. In contrast to previous studies that focused on letters or newspaper articles, this study offers a more nuanced analysis by exploring the use of impoliteness frameworks and persuasive appeals within a genre analysis. Specifically, the study compares email data written by twenty Australians and a hundred Saudis, analysing gender and cultural differences in the use of emotional/affective appeals and (im)polite moves. The findings reveal that Saudis, particularly males, use more pressuring tactics, such as imposition tactics, under the affective appeal, while Australians employ fewer emotional/affective appeals in comparison to Saudis. Moreover, the study challenges traditional gender differences in linguistic research, with Saudi males using more affective language (than females) in communication with power imbalances due to the appreciation of a hierarchical system in high context cultures. These findings have implications for intercultural communication and the crafting of persuasive messages in various contexts, including academic proposal writing.

**Keywords**: impoliteness, persuasive appeals, academic negotiations, intercultural and cross-cultural communication, gender differences, genre analysis

## 1. Background of Similar Studies

Some studies support the notion that the written discourse structures of each language exhibit a certain cultural uniqueness (Kubota , 1997). Perhaps one of the best ways to look into these structures is by identifying their genre and specific moves. Some genre studies have focused on identifying professional writing in various settings such as legal discourse, business settings and — most relevantly — academic research writing. Bhatia (2014) emphasised that the communicative purpose of a genre has an important impact on genre identification. For example, Bhatia (2014) compared sales promotional letters and job applications; although different, they are closely related in the sense that their purpose is to sell services or skills to a potential employer. They tend to have a similar persuasive function and therefore employ similar moves: establishing credentials, offering incentives, enclosing documents, using 'pressure tactics', and ending politely (Bhatia, 2014).

Pressure tactics constituted an appropriate area for investigation in the current study. Bhatia collected 200 applications for both jobs and scholarships from different South Asian countries, including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. To demonstrate how the South Asian model was unique, Bhatia compared them to the Western model; although both letters included the same general moves, the way these moves were connected to the specifications of the job was different. Generally, the Western application letter highlighted qualifications and experiences relevant to the job: a strategy known as self-appraisal. Many applicants from South Asia used the cover letter to enclose their CV, without offering self-appraisal to increase their chances of acceptance. They offered other strategies: self-glorification, or even self-degradation, target-glorification and adversary-glorification. Although Bhatia (2014) did not use the persuasion framework, he made reference to it and deemed the latter strategies as emotional in the eyes of Western employers, who expect self-appraisal in a logical manner. To be persuasive and achieve credibility, individuals need to add tactical emotions to their writing that arouses an appropriate emotional response (Bhatia, 2014). Bhatia (2014) refers to this sort of letter as 'negotiation' or job negotiation, which is relevant to the initial negotiation emails sent to prospective PhD supervisors in the current paper. He also acknowledges that there may be different move structures in different contexts and cultures. Hence, the next section will be dedicated to relevant studies; although none employed all the dimensions described in this research — genre, persuasion, and politeness — some did merge one or two aspects into a single framework.

There is research evidence that genre analysis is subject to cultural specificities. For example, many of the genre

analysis studies described below that applied Bhatia's (2014) proposed moves found different tendencies for specific moves, even creating new moves that did not exist in his original work. As such, the close analysis of student emails in the current study may reveal the underlying cultural values and practices that are embedded within them. While Bhatia (2014) encouraged the notion of self-appraisal over self-glorification, one Hungarian study found that self-appraisal was not valued in Hungarian culture; it was instead deemed self-glorification (Furka, 2008). A Malaysian study suggested that applicants avoided soliciting a response from their prospective employer because they preferred to end politely; their letters also lacked pressuring tactics, reflecting Malaysian cultural norms (Maasum, Darus, Stapa, & Mustaffa, 2007). Despite this, Maasum et al. (2007) concluded that Malaysian graduates' communicative norms need to meet the communicative purpose of the promotional genre as proposed by Bhatia (2014). This not only assumes that Bhatia's (2014) model is perfect, but also dismisses the possibility of the applicants' moves being well situated within Malaysian cultural expectations. Another variation found in a Filipino study revealed new moves, including how applicants showed feelings for the position or dealt with possible rejection (Miciano, 2014). An Arabic study using Bhatia's model was conducted on job application letters written by 90 Arabic applicants, discovering the prevalence of the institution-glorification move (Al-Ali 2006); which is considered part of showing some affective/emotional tendecy to be part of that 'great' instution. In other words, any language of compliments either towards people or institutions qualify the statement to be part of affective appeal.

Previous research on internet discourse has identified a number of persuasive strategies used for specific purposes. Ho (2014) examined email discourse, focusing on the justification for the request, and found that evaluative language could appeal to recipients' emotions (pathos); its inclusion would enhance rapport and increase the persuasiveness of the message. Affective appeal was found to be the most important appeal in YouTube health-ad video clips (English, Sweetser, & Ancu, 2011). Other studies compared persuasive appeals in TV advertisements in English and Arabic and found that pathos was mainly used, albeit in an implied fashion (Rabab'ah & Khawaldeh, 2016).

There remains a wide gap in knowledge regarding the affective appeals used in postgraduate emails seeking a PhD opportunity. Hence, there was a need to combine both online and offline studies, which draw on different persuasive appeals depending on culture and situation. An offline cross-cultural study compared the persuasion used by both a Jordanian and US organisation when attempting to form a service partnership (Suchan, 2014). The author found that Arabic persuasion strategies differed in fundamental ways to those used by Americans. Arabic persuasion was characterised by metaphoric and emotional norms when using both Arabic and English language, attributed to social and political hierarchies that shape Arabic interaction (Suchan, 2014). Al-Momani (2014) examined letters of complaint written by Jordanian university students, noting that pathos (emotional appeal) was more prevalent in these letters than the other two persuasion types. Studies that compare cross-cultural persuasive texts or advertisements among native and non-native English speakers generally conclude that non-native English speakers use more emotional or affective appeals, whereas native English speakers focus more on rational appeals (Ismail, 2010; Zhu, 2017; Zhu, 2013). However, methodological concerns emerge from the results of these studies, as they compare each culture within its comfort zone and among texts that have slightly different purposes. It would be more accurate methodologically to compare the persuasive appeals of two cultures or genders by using similar tasks, context and language, such as in this research.

Although these studies provided great insights into both genre politeness and persuasion, the literature that combines the three dimensions of genre, politeness, and persuasion is still limited. There are two major areas to consider: 1) the relationship between modern (im)politeness and persuasive tactics and 2) the distribution of moves under each affective appeal that participants from specific cultural groups utilise to meet expectations in an intercultural setting.

## 2. Methodology

### *2.1 Theoretical Framework*

This study explores the intersection of three key linguistic concepts - genre analysis, politeness, and persuasion - in the context of academic email negotiations between prospective PhD students and their potential supervisors. It argues that a genre-based approach to politeness and persuasion can provide a more nuanced understanding of the communicative functions of email negotiations. The current study employs Swales' (1990) genre analysis framework, expanded upon by other studies to better fit the context of academic email moves. This approach helps to identify the communicative purposes of each move in the email and its contribution to the overall persuasive strategy employed by the students. By adapting the genre analysis framework for academic email communication, the study is better equipped to reveal the unique characteristics of this genre and contribute to a deeper understanding of how students negotiate requests in this context.

A genre is a class of communicative events that share sets of communicative purposes, exhibiting similarities in structure, content, style, and intended audience (Swales, 1990). These events are comprised of a sequence of moves

conveying a rhetorical function, combined to achieve an overall communicative purpose. The identification of the boundaries of the individual rhetorical moves was based on semantic or content criteria. It is difficult to base genre analysis on only three or four basic moves, as designed by Swales (1990), because this study aims to identify all possible moves; these may vary in size and could be realised by one sentence or more, as they can be variable in length or occur multiple times in a single text. Swales (1990) also provides a good definition of a move as a functional semantic unit, where length depends on the writer's purpose and the move performs a communicative function that can be realised through certain linguistic content. Therefore, a move strategy understanding of genre was used in the current paper, whereby the coding system used identified the major rhetorical moves of the negotiation genre (Bhatia, 2014).

In this research, each portion of a text has at least one function, in line with Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002) and Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008). It was necessary "to add other communicative moves in order to articulate new rhetorical functions specific to the communicative needs" (Al-Ali & Sahawneh, 2008, p. 46) of these particular email negotiation messages. However, it is acknowledged that move structure identification involves "a degree of subjectivity that is perhaps unavoidable" (Holmes 1997, p. 325). To validate the current analysis of strategic moves adopted by senders to bolster their email messages, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted. The reason why some moves were identified and classified separately, even if several occurred within a single clause, stems from either their frequent existence in most students' emails or their importance. The importance was measured by finding some of these moves in the guidelines of some universities such as the University of Edinburgh and a research article by Jafree, Whitehurst, and Rajmohan (2016), who highlighted the most important points that one should mention when approaching a prospective PhD supervisor via email. These guidelines expect students to mention certain information, such as the 'timeframe' or the time when the students expect to start their PhD program. Hence, some compound sentences could collapse more than two moves according to the content of the message, as the following example demonstrates. Furthermore, the study also explores the presence of affective appeals within the persuasion framework. The analysis reveals that certain moves in the academic email genre shape and convey higher levels of affective appeals as will be explored in section 2.4. The study delves deeper into the underlying affective strategies and how they contribute to the overall effectiveness of the students' persuasive emails. By identifying and analyzing these appeal strategies, the study can shed further light on the persuasive techniques employed in this specific genre of communication.

*2.2 Recruitment*

A total of 100 Saudi participants - 50 males and 50 females - were enlisted to provide their emails in an effort to explore cultural differences. Additionally, 20 emails were gathered from 20 Anglo-Australian students - five males and 15 females - to serve as a point of comparison. Interestingly, it was noted that a majority of Anglo-Australian students did not utilize emails as a means of identifying potential supervisors, opting instead for direct communication methods such as face-to-face or telephone conversations. It is worth mentioning that participation in the background information questionnaire was voluntary, with 40% of Saudi students and 85% of Australian students between the ages of 33 to 42 choosing to participate. As for the Australian students, all self-identified as Anglo-Saxon Australians hailing from either Australian or New Zealand backgrounds.

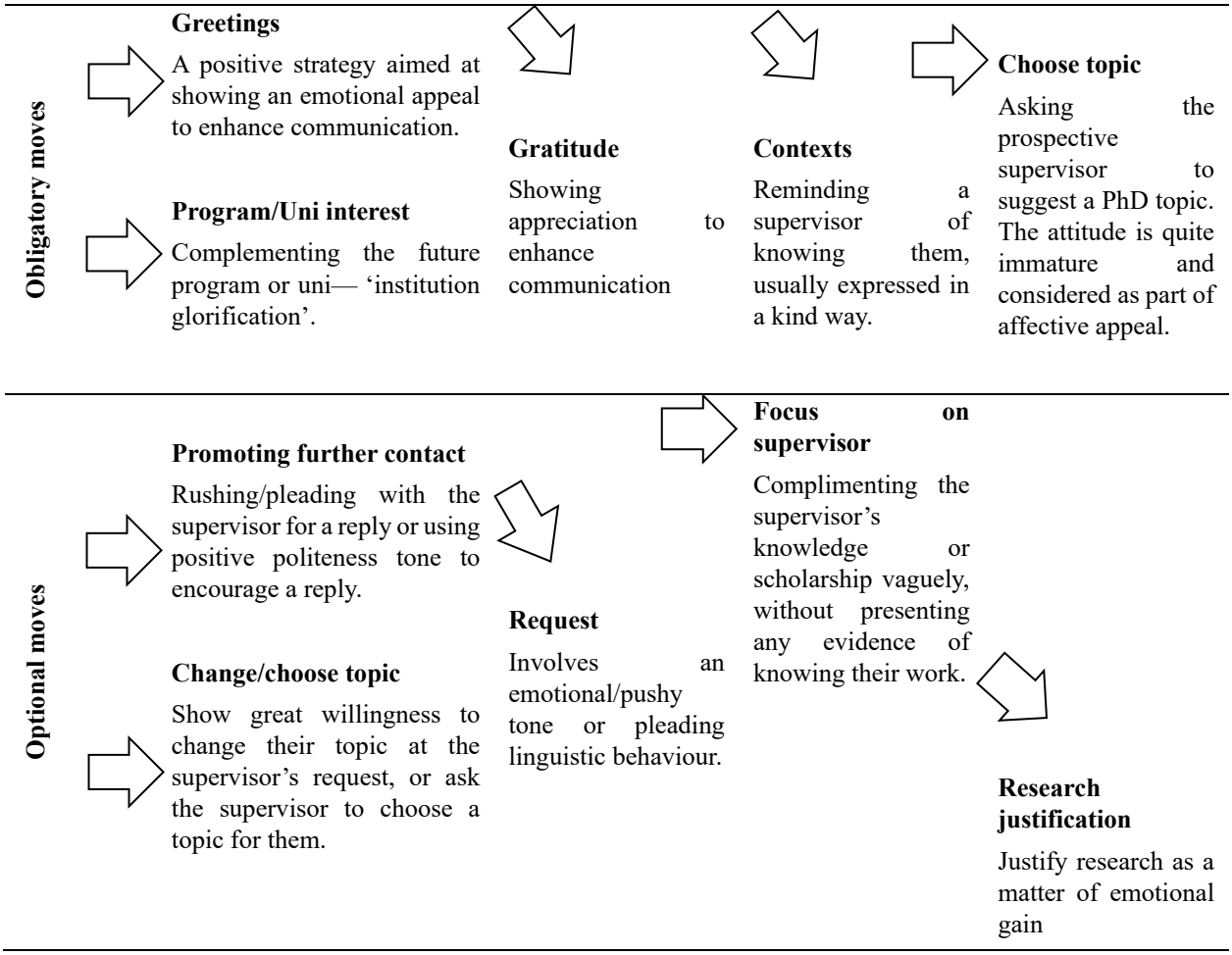
*2.3 Email analysis*

The negotiation moves (see Table 1) and politeness strategies of each cultural group were identified and analysed. Some dominant linguistic features are discussed below. The moves in this study were informed by genre analysis literature and the guidelines of some universities. Twenty-seven moves were identified in total, but not necessarily all were used in every email. The dominant moves under affective appeals include greetings, gratitude, context, choose topic, program interest; which were called obligatory. However some moves (sub-topics discussed in the emails) at times tend to have some emotional language such as promoting further contact (PFC) , request for acceptance, or focusing on supervisor.

*2.4 Identification of Affective Appeals*

The frequency of each move in both groups was calculated and analysed quantitatively. For the qualitative analysis, impoliteness strategies were examined under each of these moves, adopting Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model and the new wave of discursive im/politeness framework. The moves identified under affective appeals in their obligatory and optional tendencies are defined and demonstrated in the table below.

Table 1. Definitions of affective appeals and their moves Affective appeals' moves




Affective appeals are defined here as engaging the prospective supervisor's feelings by complimenting work or mentioning personal matters (family, financial issues, etc.); Expressing gratitude, greetings, or positive feeling statements such as 'I would love, great pleasure', using informal expressions or showing a weaker position by asking the supervisor to find them a topic for their PhD. Such as this example which was extracted from the current students' data "It is with great pleasure that I submit my request for PhD supervision in mathematics to you."

I understand that you are incredibly busy, but I would so enjoy discussing this with you **< promoting further contact]**… I hope you have a wonderful evening **<greetings].**

*2.5 Reliability Checks*

Although coding the current emails for their genre moves and persuasive appeals was at an adequate reliability level (since the researcher recoded them three times during the period of data collection), some communication scholars argue that a representative sample of 10% from the full data should be re-analysed independently to further assess reliability (Allen, 2017). Hence, 10% of the email data was coded by two independent raters. Both received training in data coding in both micro-level moves and macro-level persuasive appeals. The agreement percentage was 95% for the moves and 91% for the persuastive appeals. Both raters worked in individual settings and were not with each other on the day. When the researcher discussed the disagreement afterwards, there were prompt agreements that the researcher coding was at times more accurate than the initial judgement of each coder.

## 3. Results

### *3.1 General Comparisons*

Table 2. Differences between both genders in the use of Affective appeals

| Saudi Gender | Affective Appeals |
|---|---|
| **Saudi Male** | 131 |
| **Saudi Female** | 88 |
| **Total** | 219 |

There is no specific percentage recommended for affective appeals in an academic email proposal. As shown in Table 2, there are two main differences between Saudi males and females concerning the use of affective appeals. While women used 88 affective moves, men used 131 (Table 2). Quantitative analysis cannot tell the full story without the help of qualitative analysis, which will be detailed further next.

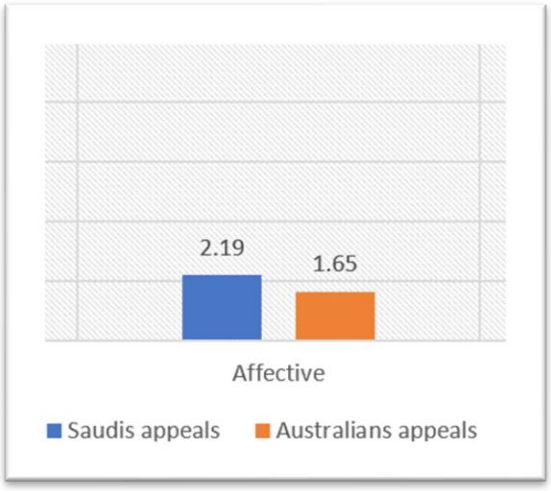



Figure 1. The average number of affective appeals by culture

The way moves are made under affective appeals has not been researched to date; as such, this was a focus for this thesis. Figure 1 presents a comprehensive account of the total moves employed by each cultural cohort in response to this particular appeal, with 219 moves employed by the Saudi students and 165 by the Australian students. Each group seemed to know the affective appeals needed to persuade; however, the way this was implemented differed. The strategic moves used under affective/emotional persuasive appeal were also different either by culture or by gender. This will be further explained next.

### *3.2 Affective Appeals*

Affective appeals or emotions can serve as an impulse to take a certain action; however, the audience's state of mind will influence the way they look at the presented case (see Section 3.5). In short, affective appeals include any argument that targets the reader's emotions (Goering, Connor, Nagelhout, & Steinberg, 2011). The following discussion presents the affective appeals used in the current academic email proposals to target the emotional dimension of prospective supervisors' minds. Pathos in the Aristotelian view is an affective characteristic aiming to place the audience into a certain frame of mind (see Section 3.5). Al Abbad et al. (2019) posit that affective appeals are not only related to feelings, but also to all qualitative changes that include the notion of learning. In this research, affective appeals are judged both by certain politeness formula in terms of discursive features and the message content in terms of showing humbleness, pleading for help, or complimenting the addressee. The source of these could be arguably emerging from the emphasis on hierarchy in Arabic culture (Suchan, 2014).

Affective appeals mostly rely on positive politeness, with varying degrees of imposition. Bhatia (2014) called these sorts of impositions pressuring tactics, without referring to politeness theory. These strategies will be discussed in detail over the course of this section. It was generally found that some moves did not exist in the native-speaking data: glorifying the program, institution or studying in Australia, complimenting the supervisor without presenting evidence of familiarity with their work, and requesting in an emotional and pleading manner. The existence of these emotional appeals would contribute significantly to persuasion if used with certain cultural audiences (Psaltou-Joycey &

Ypsilandis, 2001); in this case, a Saudi audience. According to Nydell (2018, p. 89) Arabs "place a high value on the display of emotion, sometimes to the embarrassment or discomfort of foreigners. It is not uncommon to hear westerners label this behaviour as immature, imposing their own values on what they have observed" (p. 89). Culpeper and Haugh (2020) define impoliteness as a language or behaviour that is negatively evaluated by the recipient in a particular context. When linking impoliteness with an ineffective use of affective appeal or pressuring tactic, it could be argued that both may cause a specific emotional reaction that may make the reader resistant to persuasion.

Table 3. Chi2 results of affective appeals between Saudis and Australians

| No | Moves | Saudi (100) | Australian (20) | Chi2 | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Request | 55 | 4 | 0.004 | Sig difference |
| **2** | Gratitude | 35 | 7 | 1 | No sig difference |
| **3** | PFC | 33 | 3 | 0.1 | No sig difference |
| **4** | Focus | 33 | 3 | 0.1 | No sig difference |
| **5** | Greetings | 26 | 4 | 0.57 | No sig difference |
| **6** | Program | 11 | 0 | 0.11 | No sig difference |
| **7** | Change | 17 | 3 | 0.82 | No sig difference |
| **8** | Context | 4 | 7 | 0.00 | Sig difference |
| **9** | Self-intro | 3 | 0 | 0.43 | No sig difference |
| **10** | Justify | 2 | 2 | 0.06 | No sig difference |
| **Total** | | **219** | **33** | - | - |

As shown in Table 3, there are two major differences (Moves One and Eight) between Saudi and Australian data in the way they used the request (with a Chi-square significant difference of $p = 0.004 \leq 0.05$) and context moves ($p = 0.00 \leq 0.05$). Generally, it was the use of positive politeness strategies in the Saudi data that caused these differences, apart from the instances of informality found in the Australian data. Australian students used more context moves in which they mentioned personal knowledge of the supervisor. This draws us back to Locher's (2010b) definition of relational work — the process of negotiating relationships in interaction. Utilising the context move resulted in Australians using more informal and perhaps affective language when providing context in relation to knowing the potential supervisor:

| **Australian male data (Context)** | |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I met you ever so briefly at last night's presentation and I would like to meet with you for a more serious discussion than appropriate over wine and pies.* |

Hence, besides using politeness strategies, the Australian affective appeal also implemented informality in their approach. This comes in sharp contrast with James et al.'s (1992) study, which suggested that affective appeals are linked to indirect politeness strategies. This study made the case that affective appeals can also be linked to positive politeness strategies that are not necessarily indirect or hinted at by the applicants.

Table 4. Chi-Square results of affective appeals in Saudi data

| No | Moves | Saudi Male (50) | Saudi Female (50) | Sig Chi2 | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Request | 45 | 10 | 0.00 | Sig difference |
| **2** | Gratitude | 15 | 20 | 0.29 | No sig difference |
| **3** | Promoting further contact | 10 | 23 | 0.00 | Sig difference |
| **4** | Focus | 22 | 11 | 0.01 | Sig difference |
| **5** | Greetings | 15 | 11 | 0.36 | No sig difference |
| **6** | Program | 7 | 4 | 0.33 | No sig difference |
| **7** | Change | 12 | 5 | 0.06 | No sig difference |
| **8** | Context | 3 | 1 | 0.3 | No sig difference |
| **9** | Self-intro | 2 | 1 | 0.55 | No sig difference |
| **10** | Justify | 0 | 2 | 0.15 | No sig difference |
| **Total** | | **131** | **88** | **-** | **-** |

In terms of Saudi gender differences, a Chi-squared test revealed a significant association between Saudi gender and affective appeals, meaning there are significant differences between the Saudi males and females in terms of moves like the request, promoting further contact, and focus on supervisor (as shaded in Table 4). The data reveal that Saudi males used more affective language under the requestive move (1) and the focus on supervisor (4) move; Saudi females tended to use more affective language and politeness strategies when promoting further contact (3) (see Appendix D for the definitions of each of the affective appeal moves mentioned above).

### *3.3 Impoliteness and Persuasion*

Impoliteness is directly linked to face-threatening acts (FTA) (Schnurr, Marra, & Holmes, 2008). There is a lack of research that links the new wave of discursive impoliteness and persuasion literature. For the most part, new wave theorists believe that participants are innocent of the linguistic implications of impoliteness in written communication (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 2011b). Such impolite instances can come into existence during high-stakes instances of negotiating a PhD acceptance by prospective supervisors. The pressuring tactics put forth by Bhatia (2014) resemble politeness strategies with high imposition, or what can be deemed as impoliteness. Although Bhatia did not conduct his study using a politeness framework, the pressuring tactics he analysed could be understood as instances of impoliteness as defined by key scholars (see Section 3.2.2). For Saudi students, the risk of being misinterpreted or construed as being impolite has, in many cases, profound implications for acceptance into a PhD program. For this reason, this section aims to investigate the research gap of this specific genre and endeavours to dig deep into the persuasive rituals embedded in impoliteness strategies. The statistical results highlighted three differences between the Saudi gender groups in their use of affective appeals (see Table 4), though there were some other qualitative differences in the way they employed emotions. Both tended to use positive politeness strategies in gender-specific ways, which could trigger what Jenkins and Dragojevic (2013) have termed 'psychological reactance' by the prospective supervisor.

According to Jenkins and Dragojevic (2013), the theory of psychological reactance shares the core concept of politeness theory: the need for autonomy and independence. Like politeness theory, imposition/impoliteness or perceived threat to psychological freedom results in reactance arousal or resistance to a persuasive message. Since persuasion indicates an effort to influence action, it has an inherent face-threatening/illocutionary-force nature, according to both politeness and speech act theories. Unlike traditional politeness theory, modern impoliteness theorists suggest that the key for the judgement of impoliteness is dependent on the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's intentions (Bousfield, 2010; Culpeper, 2011b). This makes it particularly challenging for second-language speakers, who rely on their cultural background in their persuasive attempts. Thus, their pleading tone or pushy requests — expected within their cultural norms — might be misinterpreted by prospective Australian supervisors.

### *3.4 Imposition Tactics*

There were three high imposition (or pressuring) tactics used by Saudi prospective PhD students under the affective appeal. These tactics, as defined by Bhatia (2014) in a job application context, aim to promote a response from prospective employers by impelling them to make a decision. While Bhatia (2014) listed pressuring tactics as a separate move, in this study these pressuring/imposition tactics were found to exist within several moves under affective appeals. However, what is labelled here as imposition tactics aim to not only elicit a positive response but to also place some imposition on the supervisor to promote cooperation. One example of this is the Saudi students asking their potential supervisors to choose a topic for their PhD, promoting what they see as collective decision-making. From an Australian viewpoint, however, this can be interpreted as lack of scholarly independence and initiation, which can cause negative reactions from the potential supervisors and possibly lead to rejection (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990).

Predominantly, students negotiate from a position of weakness; nevertheless, Bhatia (2014) claims that it is not impossible to find some applicants negotiating from a position of strength. This is in stark contrast to Brown and Levinson's model, which shows that power distance is not a reliable predictor of how interactants will respond to power imbalance. Contemporary impoliteness theorists have challenged the notion that power is a predictive factor in how interactants negotiate face, as this involves a degree of complexity (Culpeper, 2008; Locher, 2008). In fact, people with lower status can decide to exercise power with others of higher status (Locher, 2010b). This is relevant in this particular context, where some Saudi students thought that having a fully-funded scholarship could make them a desirable target for supervisors who needed research budgets or simply needed new PhD students. There were other cases in which the language of impoliteness was used to exercise power, simply because these students were writing in a second language and were unaware of how to be pragmatically competent.

*3.5 Request as an Affective Appeal*

It was striking that Saudi men used 45 affective requests, compared to the 10 affective requests in the female data. Each gender group showed different linguistic behaviour. These requests imply varying degrees of imposition that impact negatively on the recipient and do not leave the appropriate space for the supervisor to make an independent decision. Due to their force, they can be considered impolite; this is part of the pressuring tactics under the affective appeal. Unlike first-wave theorists' evaluations of politeness, Spencer-Oatey (2005) argues that (im)politeness is an evaluative label that people attach to certain behaviour, as a result of their subjective judgments about social appropriateness. In this particular context, it was noticed that some requests were poorly formed and incongruent with students' status (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). For example, need statements are used more frequently by high-status speakers (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015); however, a male student in this study used a need statement after requesting acceptance and decided to place this comment beneath his signature with seven exclamation marks:

| **Saudi male data (Need statement)** | |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I need feedback!!!!!!!* |

This example illustrates the arguments in the previous section about power and impoliteness, and how some supposedly lower-status students break the boundaries of power, either by flagging their despair or using their assertive tone inappropriately. This example blends affective appeals with impoliteness, but also proposes that affective appeals can come in direct strategies, rather than indirect ways of communication, as claimed by James et al. (1992).

In his study, Al-Ali (2006, p. 128) found that some Arabic participants were invoking compassion in a way that was not found in the English-speaking data; they described this move as when "[t]he writer appeals or asks the prospective employer earnestly for help and support. (e.g. 'I would be grateful if you take my letter seriously because I am in need for this job' (p. 128). In the current data, most of the affective appeals used by male students invoked compassion to various degrees. This highlights the power-differential language that the Saudi males used in several other moves, such as requesting and promoting further contact. Some instances in the women's data also reflect the complicated relationship between power and status, as it seems that some requests come with an ordering tone. The first example below seems bluntly on record with explicit illocutionary force (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It includes an imperative form, regarded by native English speakers as a "pushy reques[t]" (Murphy, 2006, p. 183). The other examples are highly demanding of supervisory acceptance — particularly the second, which uses the forceful language 'willing to do everything' to push for approval.

| **Saudi female data (Requests)** |
|---|
| ***1*** *I therefore request you to accept me as a PhD candidate.* |
| ***2*** *I am able and willing to do everything to meet your expectations and PhD requirement.* |
| ***3*** *I would be very happy if my interests would inspire you to become an administrator.* |

In the last example, the expression 'would inspire you' was inappropriately employed; it would be better to say 'would be of interest to you'. Claiming that the student's topic would inspire the supervisor to accept supervision indicates arrogance, meaning that the student is not maintaining her lower status or showing native-like competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). The male students, at times, invoked more compassion and pleaded more for help; this was another form of pressuring/high imposition tactic, which was rarely found in the ten affective requests made by the Saudi females.

| **Saudi male data (Affective requests)** | |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I hope you can **help** me, if you like, to be one of your students in the near future* |
| **2** | *a) I would be delighted if you could **help** me with this issue*<br>*b) At the moment, I am searching for a potential supervisor for the PhD study and I would appreciate it if you could possibly **help** with this.* |
| **3** | *I would very much like to be supervised by you **at your convenience*** |
| **4** | *I'm hoping you would be **kind enough** to accept me* |

In the first two examples above, the male students used a similar linguistic formula that included the word 'help', portraying themselves as helpless students in contrast to the expectation supervisors may have for postgraduate students (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2002). The third example showed a student's willingness to wait for supervision at the supervisor's 'convenience'; the fourth seemingly put the supervisor's kindness to the test. While all the Saudi male affective requests (45) were more pressuring in demanding acceptance, one Australian participant's request was mitigated to give the supervisor the option of whether he would be 'open' to being their supervisor.

3.5.1 Choose Topic

The move of choosing a topic has been classified as one of the most pressuring/imposing tactics. It portrays the student as pleading for guidance and places pressure on the supervisor to help the student choose their PhD topic. These students could risk appearing incompetent and unable to make a decision for themselves (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). This move is known as change/choose topic, as occasionally students refer to their willingness to change topics; at other times, they ask the supervisor to choose a topic for them. It is the most ineffective move employed, as PhD students should write to their potential supervisors with a topic in mind. Instead of saying that they are still researching to find a topic themselves, some students asked supervisors to make this decision.

| | **Saudi male data (Choose topic)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I will be grateful if you would clear me more on my PhD plans--* |
| **2** | *if you are available, please share any topic you may be interested in---* |
| **3** | *I am expecting to do the best in my PhD in a field that would be interesting for both of us* |
| **4** | *finally, I am happy to get your idea and feedback about my email and I am free to send you any docs if you would like to make sure that you are working with the right person* ***:)*** |
| **5** | *I am happy to do any topic of research that would help us to work together* |

The first example has a politeness formula at the surface; however, looking at the context, this implied request may be deemed impolite considering its imposition on the potential supervisor to assign the student a topic, as the student did not suggest any particular PhD plan in his email. The fourth example was the only instance where an emoticon was used in Saudi male data; the only other occurrence was in the Australian female data, where one participant included an emoticon in the P.S section under her signature.

| | **Saudi female data (Choose topic)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I have not decided the topic yet as there are many ideas I am thinking about….* |
| **2** | *I do need your guidance if you can to decide the topic of my proposal* |
| **3** | *so if you have a hot topic related to these, I will accept.* |
| **4** | *However, before I start writing the proposal, I'd like to meet a supervisor to discuss it first.* |
| **5** | *I don't have a ready proposal yet but I need to ask if you have a project for me.* |

Similarly, the Saudi women's data shows hesitation and indecision in terms of specifying a PhD topic. The first, second and fifth examples ask the supervisor to directly decide a topic, while the rest suggest that the students have some areas of interest but they need a supervisor to confirm their options. The Saudi inclination to ask a supervisor to choose a topic can be attributed to different academic cultures, where students are expected to rely on their supervisor's expertise as a manifestation of politeness. In Australian universities, however, students are supposed to be self-directed. In high power distance cultures, Hofstede et al. (2010) believe that students regard their teachers or supervisors as knowledgeable leaders; hence, they accept the knowledge offered to them without question. The trend of asking for help in choosing a research topic was also found in the Australian data, but it was expressed with slightly different language. The Australians' motivations to employ this move could be attributed to two different kinds of pressures: gaining a scholarship under the desired/offered topic or increasing the chances of approval. In either case, PhD candidates are expected to show readiness by specifying areas of interests instead of indirectly or directly asking a supervisor to suggest a topic.

| | **Australian female data (Choose/change topic)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *Obviously I'm not in the X realm but if you think we may be compatible.* |
| **2** | *I'm a friend of X. X[he] mentioned you are looking for a PhD candidate to write about X and activism. I was wondering if you had a little more info on this….I am interested.* |

| | **Australian male data (Choose/change topic)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *so given your expertise I thought I would first ask you if you hand any topics which came to mind that would like to research next……If nothing comes to mind I am happy to suggest some topics of my own to gauge your interest* |

In all the Australian female examples above, there was a tendency of prioritising the supervisor's topic suggestions. However, only one Australian male asked the potential supervisor to choose a topic for him; meanwhile, he was still taking some initiative to do the work himself if the topic was not provided. Making suggestions and generating options is essential in negotiation so as to not leave the addressee with a single choice they may be opposed to and reject outright (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). This tendency of making suggestions was present in different moves in the Australian data but not in the Saudi data.

3.4.2 Promoting Further Contact (PFC)

This tactic was used by both genders, though more commonly by female participants. As Table 4 shows, 23 females and 10 males employed this move. Although Saudi females used more affective appeals to solicit a response, most Saudi males used high pressuring tactics such as those in the following examples.

| | **Saudi male data (PFC)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I look forward to a positive response from you.* |
| **2** | *I would be very grateful for your response.* |
| **3** | *I know you're very busy so I appreciate any time you can give me. Thank you very much,* |
| **4** | *Also, if you want to discuss this please feel free to contact me on (tel. no.).* |

There was a range of pushy ways to promote further contact, including what Bhatia (2014) called self-degradation, where the sender clearly portrays his status as lower. In the first of the previous examples, the male participant strategically used 'positive response', which is about imposing one's will on others. It is more strategic to use status-preserving strategies, as suggested by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990). Expecting a positive response when the supervisor is not available for supervision might come across as highly pressuring because it assumes the supervisor's acceptance is guaranteed. In the third example, the participant acknowledged the supervisor's busy schedule but still pushed for 'any time he can give him', which conveyed a pleading tone. In the last example, the participant directly asked the supervisor to contact him on his phone number if interested, shifting the role of power between the applicant and the prospective supervisor. The statement should ask the supervisor if he is available for a meeting or a phone call; it is then the student's duty to chase up and call the supervisor, not vice versa. Even though Saudi female applicants employed more PFC moves, their data did not contain the pressuring tactics that highlight the language of deference used by Saudi men. Their moves were higher in affective appeal to convey positive feelings as a gesture of friendliness and readiness. Though their data are presented here to reflect their affective PFC moves, it is not considered part of the pressuring tactics.

| | **Saudi female data (PFC)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *please feel free to ask. And I will be **happy** to answer.* |
| **2** | ***Happy** to catch up anytime that suits you* |
| **3** | ***happy** to answer any questions about my research goals and qualifications.* |
| **4** | *I will be more than **happy** to discuss that further* |

Fifteen women encouraged the potential supervisor to ask any questions about the topic to solicit a response; only seven Saudi men did this. One interesting aspect is that the women expressed being 'happy' to receive questions or to be invited for a future meeting, while the men expressed this same feeling when they asked the potential supervisor to suggest different topics, being 'more than happy to discuss other ideas'. This may reflect each gender's priorities; while women are happy to meet and discuss, Saudi men are happy to listen to the supervisor's suggestion and change their PhD topic.

*3.6 Other Moves under the Affective Appeal*

3.6.1 Greetings

Greetings can be used as a positive strategy aimed at showing an emotional appeal to the potential supervisor. It not only portrays the sender as a kind person but contributes to a sense of obligation for the supervisor to accept the student. Positive politeness strategies have been discussed by Brown and Levinson (1987) as something to be avoided, as it deprives the other person of the freedom to decide with so many implied impositions. New wave politeness theorists, on the other hand, suggest that statement is bounded and further elaborated by context. As a result, the greetings made by the Saudi male participants did not simply reflect positive politeness that included 'implied imposition' but highlighted an undesired self-degradation tactic in terms of blending greetings with their implied 'glorification' to the prospective supervisor. This can be debatable, as some statements seemed a bit more acceptable than others. For example, the first statement below ('It is my pleasure to be one of your students') came as the first line of the student's email, which could reflect a rather pleading tone as these prospective students may already know that some supervisors are unavailable. As shown in Table 6.7, Saudi men made slightly more greetings (15) than women (11). While the majority of male and female examples focused on the usual way of email greetings ('I hope you are well'), a few students were creative in their greetings:

| | **Saudi male data (Greetings)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *It is my **pleasure** to be one of your students.* |
| **2** | *I have had the **pleasure** to browse your web page…* |
| **3** | *It is my **pleasur**e to send you this email ...* |

While only 11 women started their emails using greetings, a few more males implemented other politeness greetings, seen in the examples above. They expressed their pleasure to be either future students, to be browsing the supervisor's work or simply to 'send you this email'.

| | **Saudi female data (Greetings)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *Hoping you are well and gaining more success in your works.* |
| **2** | *It is my pleasure to write to you.* |
| **3** | *Hello **dear** First name, I hope you are well.* |

Instances of informality and creative use of language existed more in the women's data. The first example focused on good wishes of 'gaining more success in your work'. However, instances of direct affection also existed in the female data, as seen in the third example above. This is considered a violation of the social norm in an academic setting (Hallajian & David, 2014).

3.6.2 Gratitude

In terms of gratitude, traditional politeness scholars Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that expressing thanks is intrinsic to all face-threatening acts because it can threaten the addressee's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In fact, thanking can be face-threatening for both speaker and hearer in some cultures like Tzeltal (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Appropriate use of gratitude has crucial academic value in email communication; however, failure to express it can lead to negative consequences (Ren, 2017). However, in light of a modern politeness perspective, such gratitude can not only threaten the negative-face of the addressee, freedom of action and freedom of imposition, but also have a dual function of affecting how the addressee values the positive face of the student. In their affective appeals, students

used some moves such as gratitude with high imposition—or, as Bhatia (2014) called it, pressuring tactics. The example below reflects this notion:

| | **Saudi male data (Pressuring tactic in gratitude)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I'd like to thank you so much for accepting me. [before acceptance]* |

In negotiation literature, emails have to be wrapped up with the best possible impression for further collaboration (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002). Ebner (2011) argues that for some email recipients (especially for prospective PhD supervisors), a greater level of formality will increase rapport and trust. Due to the high negotiation stakes in these emails, prospective Saudi students should use their best strategies to mitigate the imposition of their request by using the gratitude move. However, most male participants used this move with a pleading or pushy tone.

| | **Saudi male data (pressuring tactics in gratitude)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *Thank you in advance for any help you can provide* |
| **2** | *I appreciate your kindness cooperation* |
| **3** | *Thank you for considering my request.* |
| **4** | *Thank you, Susan and I'm looking forward to hearing from you.* |
| **5** | *I really appreciate the opportunity of mailing you and looking forward to hearing from you.* |

While Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that the language each person uses reflects their power-status, academics may expect to sense individuality and independency in their students' language (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). The male examples above have employed the speech act of gratitude, expecting acceptance in advance. In other words, the gratitude acts here were used to indicate acts not yet performed (Aijmer, 2014). While most were thanking the supervisor in advance for an assumed acceptance, the second example was the first line of the student's email after introducing his name, which comes across as a pressuring tactic. The first example stressed an advance gratitude for 'any help' the prospective supervisor might be able to provide. In the fourth example, the use of the first name was an attempt to establish rapport and, at the same time, an implied imposition. In the last example, the male student expressed gratitude for being able to send an email to that potential supervisor, which was an affective instance that was hard to interpret. The first part of this statement was deemed affective gratitude (under affective appeal), while the rest was considered a rational appeal for promoting further contact. Using the email medium, one should expect that their email might never be read by the recipient, especially when sending emails to unfamiliar supervisors. This example elaborates a violation of two Gricean maxims of politeness: the maxims of quantity ('do not say more than required') and maxims of quality, where one avoids obscurity and ambiguity.

**Saudi female data (Gratitude)**

**1** ***Thanks very much.***
***Regards,***
***First Last***

Even though the Saudi female students used gratitude more often than the males (20 vs 15), they did not employ it as a pressuring tactic, except for one who said, 'Many thanks in advance'. The gratitude move is often used as a closing signal (Ren, 2017) and this is particularly true for the female data. The above example shows how the gratitude move is used as a closing signal in the females' emails.

3.6.3 Program Interest

The prospective Saudi students indicated their appreciation of the target program or university. Only the Arabic native-speakers employed this strategy, while no Australian participants did this. It is quite interesting to realise that the Saudi students employed some communicative components not found in the English data; "motivated by cultural values of

the society, Arab writers tend to make use of certain eulogies and formulaic expressions during their social interactions so as to meet particular communicative functions specific to their culture" (Al-Ali 2006, p. 133). Institution glorification, as Bhatia (2014) labelled it, was a move that nine Saudi women used. Interestingly, almost half chose to praise aspects of themselves or of how the program would boost their skills/future career paths straight after praising the program.

| | **Saudi female data (Program interest)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I know that by studying at your **fine institution**, I will acquire more knowledge…* |
| **2** | *I believe that your **program will offer an excellent** next step forward to my academic and professional training* |
| **3** | *The School of Health Sciences **PhD program offers exactly** what I am looking for in the continuance of my higher education and research* |
| **4** | *I have particularly chosen to apply to your university **because of the strong feedback** I gathered about the program from previous alumni* |
| **5** | *I would like to apply for admission to your **prestigious university** for a PhD degree that will serve my family, my community and my country.* |

Al Abbad et al. (2019) assert that praising the government, the country and institutions were among the norms in Saudi female letters in their data, which was echoed in the current data. When commenting on the program, the Saudi female participants focused largely on the feedback they were hearing from others (see the second and third examples). They also used adjectives to praise the prospective institution such as 'fine and prestigious'. One Saudi female praised Australia: 'I found that Australia is the best choice to do PhD'. This was also found in one study as part of Saudi participants' negotiations while appealing their academic grades (Alsharif & Alyousef, 2017), and in the examples from this study included below. Interestingly, one Australian male participant did mention a preference to study at Melbourne for family reasons: 'I am looking to Melbourne as my partner has just started her PhD at X University in Melbourne, so we are planning on living there for the next three years at least'. The difference is that the former stresses a compliment—'Australia is the best choice'—while the latter is giving a reason as to why he has chosen Melbourne. However, both are unnecessary details not within the prospective supervisor's interest, though it could have been an attempt to build rapport.

| | **Saudi male data (Program/university interest)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *These aspects of your program not only stand out, but are **ideal** to me* |
| **2** | *I have read the school of computing website in detail. I love it because the variety of research area..* |
| **3** | *I would like to pursue or start my PHD program in you **respected** university* |
| **4** | *The components of your program that I find most **appealing** consist of…..* |
| **5** | *I Have visited Queensland 3 times and I found the life style very comfortable there* |

The Saudi male participants used different adjectives to express their admiration towards the program: 'ideal, excellent, respected, appealing, reputable, high-ranking'. They also mentioned some aspects of the PhD program they were particularly interested in (see the second and fourth examples above). In the second example, the participant said 'I love it' in reference to the program, which can be considered as charged and informal language. It could be that Saudi men are using such expressions to be more relational in their approach.

3.6.4 Focus-on-supervisor

The Saudi students rarely indicated familiarity with an exact piece of their supervisor's work; most (33 out of 49 students) claimed an admiration for the supervisors' work and expressed their trust that they would help them achieve their dreams. It has been argued that "people resist persuasive messages that make unjustified meta-communicative claims" (Jenkins & Dragojevic, 2013, p. 561). Only one male student, using an affective appeal, brought some evidence that he actually had 'a quick look' at the supervisor's profile and found it interesting that 'the most interesting thing, is your supervision of one student searching in *** which is my area of interest'. Four Saudi male students claimed to

have read the supervisor's publications but had no evidence. The rest focused on complimenting the supervisor without claiming knowledge of their work, such as 'how great the staff is, including yourself'.

| | **Saudi men examples (Focus on supervisor)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *your interests in research are a source of inspiration for me* |
| **2** | *these astonishing publications have given me a promising topic for my future studies* |
| **3** | *I went through your profound profile and found that if you take me as one of your PhD students it would be an honour for me.* |
| **4** | *this aspiration is laced with a passion to be trained under the supervision of the scholar like you who has developed an international reputation in the field.* |

The previous examples are a mix of direct compliments such as 'a source of inspiration for me', 'your profound profile' and 'international reputation'. The Saudi men were found to glorify their prospective supervisors more than the females.

| | **Saudi women examples (Focus on supervisor)** |
|---|---|
| **1** | *I had the chance to read your publications in incontinence and women's health and I really enjoyed it.* |
| **2** | *I look at your profile and I'm interested to be one of your students.* |
| **3** | *and I was very glad to find that you are interested in this field and published studies in it.* |
| **4** | *After reading your website, I found it is more interested and suitable for my research area* |

This general focus on supervisors without referring to specific work was classified as an affective appeal (see Appendix D), as it involved vagueness coated with compliments.

## 4. Conclusion

This research has explored the affective appeals and their relationships with impoliteness. Although statistical comparisons show similarities and differences in the patterns between both gender and cultural groups, the qualitative analysis revealed subtle nuances that are more specific to each. It can be hard to compare two cultures based on the percentage of how much each affective appeal was used, as the way they are employed differs strategically and linguistically. Although most of what has been mentioned in this paper was data-driven, providing new insights into Saudi gender differences and partially cultural differences.

The current results challenge traditional gender differences in linguistic research in that the Saudi men made more compliments, greetings and used more affective language in communication where there was a power imbalance. This may be due to the hierarchical system existing in high context cultures, which possibly influenced the men's language. At both theoretical and methodological levels, this paper provided details regarding issues with designing the study and critiques of the old and new waves of politeness. In particular, it identified two major areas to consider: 1) the relationship between modern (im)politeness and persuasive tactics; and 2) the distribution of moves under each persuasive appeal that participants from specific cultural groups utilise to meet expectations in an intercultural setting. This helps to both provide bottom-up and top-down investigation and explore meaningful patterns across gender and culture. Further, it addressed gaps existing in both old and new waves of politeness. That is, while first-wave theorists believed power-distance was a predictable factor for certain linguistic production, new wave theorists challenge the notion that power is a predictive factor in how interactants negotiate face, as this involves a degree of complexity. While addressing affective appeals, which are traditionally seen as impolite, modern impoliteness theorists suggest that the judgement of impoliteness is instead dependent on the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's intentions.

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