Negotiation and Impoliteness Strategies in Saudi and Australian Postgraduate Students' Emails

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Abstract
Although negotiation via email takes place every day between students and their supervisors/lecturers, the processes underlying these negotiations have been largely neglected in research to date. Further, there is a need to investigate the linguistic email communication problems that Saudis encounter when they study abroad. This study aims to identify the dominant features of email communication of twenty Saudi and Australian post-graduate students with their lecturers. The research sought to understand the following: to what extent negotiation moves differ from one group to another; if there is a significant difference between the two raters when rating native speakers (NS) versus non-native speakers (NNS); whether there is a significant relationship between students' scores and total number of words used in negotiation moves; the most important moves that might have affected the raters' decisions when giving the highest scores versus the lowest scores; and whether there is difference between total scores of NS and NNS. Whereas the qualitative analysis employed (im)politeness as the theoretical framework, the quantitative analysis focused on the moves used by students in terms of context, proposal, justification, options, and requests. It was found that NS and NNS had similar likelihoods of gaining higher grades when using more details. When both NS and NNS failed to employ a focus-on-context move, they were likely to fail in their negotiations. International students need to be encouraged to give more detailed explanations to improve their negotiation techniques. Pedagogical implications include greater insights into the appropriate use of email negotiation strategies between students and their lecturers.

Keywords: academic negotiation, gender differences, (im)politeness in email communication, (im)politeness strategies, negotiation moves

1. Introduction

It is increasingly being realized that academic background knowledge is reflected through the various social practices in academic communities (Hyland, 2008). When post-graduate students communicate with their lecturers, they not only exchange information, but also project an image of themselves (Sproull, Kiesler, & Kiesler, 1992). With the explosive growth of the Saudi King Abdullah Scholarship program which each year sends thousands of Saudi students overseas, there is a need to investigate the linguistic email communication problems that Saudis encounter when they study abroad. The ultimate goal of the scholarship is not limited to broadening students' horizons but also to prepare them for a globalized and multicultural world.

According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia, there are about 12,000 Saudi students studying in Australia. This study aims to investigate how Saudi and Australian students use appropriate language of negotiation by identifying their negotiation moves and (im)politeness strategies. It offers a new insight in terms of examining how these students with their different Saudi and Australian perspectives negotiate academic requests via email at a multicultural Australian university. Any miscommunication caused in their interactions may have negative consequences for one or both parties. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) argues that communication failure in emails between students and their lecturers could have a negative impact on students' academic progress. Furthermore, in some extreme cases students could be led to either change universities or withdraw from their studies. Deviation from the norms of email communication in academia can also lead to the dismissal of an academic, as happened recently at The University of Auckland (Haugh, 2010): an academic, whose email interactions with a student were made public was dismissed due to an impolite email sent while a student was negotiating an extension for submitting an assignment. This incident has evoked an online debate and raised awareness of appropriateness regarding emails in academia (Haugh, 2010). Turban, King, Lee, and Viehland (2006) also argue that the question of how to conduct negotiation via email is of great theoretical and practical importance. It is important to note that email interactions have rarely been investigated from a negotiation or persuasion perspective especially in academia where language use and e-communication strategies play a major role in educational settings (Waldvogel, 2007).

This paper identifies the dominant features of twenty Australian native speakers' (NS) and Saudi Arabian non-native speakers' (NNS) negotiation strategic moves in email correspondence with their tutor over the topic of a mark-improvement-request, a stimulus situation. As in the existing literature, all of the correspondents are postgraduates who are expected to have mastered academic negotiations. The major strategic moves investigated were 1) Proposal, 2) Focus on Context (developed by the researchers of the present study), 3) Justification, and 4) Options and Requests (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002). The study reported here provides insight into the appropriate use of negotiation strategies between students and their lecturers, whether NS or NNS students, when they are negotiating academic issues of concern to them.

2. Literature review

Negotiation, regardless of its focus, is an essential part of everyday life. The exchanges in negotiation typically include action exchanges and knowledge exchanges. Whereas the speakers in action exchanges request the provision of goods or services, in knowledge exchanges they request some information, such as approval of an academic request (González & DeJarnette,

2015). It is acknowledged, however, that cross-cultural negotiation is confusing and hard to achieve, as it implies a full understanding of how other cultures function differently from our own (Cohen, 2001; Zheng, 2015). Since negotiation by itself is a stressful task, the pressure of the task increases when one has to negotiate in a different language (Trosborg, 1989). This is especially true of international NNS studying in an English-speaking country. Learning the strategies adopted successfully by NS might compensate for NNS' lack of communicative competence in their use of English. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) point out that NNS are more likely to become successful negotiators when they adopt NS' norms in negotiation strategies and are likely to have fewer rejections.

Since negotiation can only be successful if it entails the use of persuasion to influence the beliefs or the actions of others (Boden, 1995; Young, 1991), NNS are obliged to learn persuasive writing. Hinds (1987) observes that there are cross-cultural differences in the rhetorical structure in the use of persuasive texts. Among the reasons why NNS often lack competitive ability in persuasive writing might be a lack of exposure to the culture of the target language or the absence of instruction in strategic persuasive writing (White, 1989). Moreover Biesenbach-Lucas (2000) states that some international students are unfamiliar with sociolinguistic conventions of e-mail use in an academic setting. Crowhurst's (1991) study reports empirical research showing that students who receive instruction through a contrastive model of persuasive writing show improvement in their performance. Hence, there is not only a need to investigate students' writing focusing on persuasion (Ferris, 1994), but also a need to teach them how to master it in times of negotiation.

When analyzing NS and NNS' persuasive strategies in writing, researchers have found that there is a significant relationship between persuasion and the number of words used in a message. To have persuasive negotiation strategies in an email, a student needs to address all anticipated counterarguments through collapsing all the negotiation moves into one initial message, which might cause the email to be protracted. NNS tend to produce shorter emails (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002). A similar finding was reported by Sims and Guice (1992), who examined NS and NNS' business letters and found that the latter group deviated significantly from the NS group in writing shorter letters. It is not surprising that NNS write subparts of a message; this can be attributed to their own linguistic deficiencies, the different rhetorical structure of their first language (Ostler, 1987), or perhaps time constraints when writing (Ferris, 1994). In addition, Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002) argue that although NNSs differ from NSs in several ways in their use of negotiation strategies, they are similar in some negotiation moves, such as "context", but differ significantly in their use of "options." These investigators concluded that "options" are one of the most efficient moves in online negotiation. Korobkin (2002) believes the differences in findings across many studies could be explained by the fact that negotiation dynamics varied considerably across "contexts"; therefore it is hard to provide a single "script" to instruct negotiators on how to navigate through negotiation. Bloch (2002) investigated international students' e-mail interactions with faculty, and identified four types: asking for help, making excuses, making requests, and phatic communication. The latter type aims to maintain relationships, rather than to carry real information. A similar category, relationship, is distinguished by Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999), but is not identified in any of the other studies.

2.1 Email (im)politeness and negotiation discourse

Although email writing is a common practice among academic staff at different levels, surprisingly few research papers addressed the issue of persuasive writing negotiations between academics. However, the use of (im)politeness strategies via email is increasingly receiving scholarly attention. Brown and Levinson (1978) model of politeness has frequently been described as one of the most influential politeness frameworks to emerge from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics and sociolinguistics (Eelen, 2014). Their model is derived from Goffman's (1955) notion of "face" and 'conversational logic' proposed by Grice (as cited in Brown & Levinson, 1978).Since the term politeness by itself might suggest a positive side of the interaction, impoliteness in this project is adopted to reflect the complexity of the interplay between what is deemed polite or impolite, specifically between people from different cultural backgrounds.

While the concept of persuasion/negotiation need be investigated in addition to politeness, other scholars seem to focus merely on politeness. It seems that for linguists, the notion of politeness is the core theoretical framework that is capable of interpreting communicative behavior in computer-mediated communication. Most studies focus in particular on some of the terms and expressions used by international students in their emails, compare them to those used by English speakers, and examine how they pragmatically fail to convey their messages (e.g. Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). These studies do not focus on the deeper meaning of emails in their holistic and synthetic form. Investigating emails from both linguistic and structural (micro and macro) levels can reveal some essential strategies that international students may lack in sounding convincing. Focusing on both levels results in more profound research outcomes that are useful for international students.

It has been pointed out that any norms for interaction merge with the norms of politeness (Danielewicz-Betz, 2013), which may give scholars enough justification for relying heavily on politeness in investigating different linguistic behavior in students' emails. There is a possibility that even the most polite email can receive a simple 'no' reply if it does not use persuasion. Hence, it is important to focus more on strategic rhetorical behaviour rather than to limit the focus to linguistic choices (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002; Bloch, 2002). Studies that analyzed students' emails from different dimensions, such as focusing on the relationship between their linguistic features and the identity or the cultural determinants of the students have shown interesting results. For example, Luke and Gordon (2012) examined professional identity development via email between supervisors and supervisees in academia and found that the use of certain discourse markers such as "that being said" created solidarity and displayed supervisee competence. They also suggest that inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our" create a shared alignment of professional needs. When examining student-faculty communication by email, Danielewicz-Betz (2013) took into account various pragmatic markers and cultural determinants of the students' email communication styles. Among the findings relevant to the present study is that Saudi students use different persuasive tactics to achieve what they want, even if they involve imposition or face-threatening acts, especially when it comes to negotiating grades.

When analyzing electronic discourse communication, a number of scholars have found several significant differences between electronic and face-to-face negotiation (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999; Ocker & Yaverbaum, 1999). Kettinger and Grover (1997) state that face-to-face

communication is preferable in times of negotiation, while electronic media is better for resolving disagreements. Nonetheless, these studies focus more on non-linguistic aspects of the communication such as the use of power or authority in certain body language behaviour. Generally, there are some suggestions in the existing literature that face-to-face linguistic strategies differ from those that are used online. Language has been ignored in the bulk of current research; in some cases, it "has been relegated to the status of a manipulable independent variable" (Firth, 1995, p. 8). Therefore, the interactional nature of the linguistic aspects of negotiation strategies needs to be addressed in its own right, specifically in relation to NSs and NNSs' online negotiations.

The main purpose of this paper is to fill the gap in the literature with more insights about the appropriate use of negotiation as well as politeness strategies between students and their tutors, whether NS or NNS, in times of using email correspondence to negotiate academic issues of concern to the students. The findings of the literature review will be compared with those in the present study to confirm similarities or detect inconsistencies. This involves "an analysis of computer-mediated negotiation from a linguistic perspective" following Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2000, p. 2) category with the minor addition of a focus-on-context move. The backgrounds of the participants in the present study, namely postgraduate students from Saudi Arabia and Australian NS of English, differ from those of the participants in the previously mentioned studies.

3. Methodology
This section presents the methodology of the research study, which includes participants, materials, research questions, and analysis tools.

3.1 Participants
Twenty participants took part in this study: ten native Saudi Arabian postgraduate students and ten Australian postgraduate students. In order to avoid a gender effect, in each group, half of the study participants were males and the other half were females. In order to judge the effectiveness of each group's negotiation strategies, two English-speaking teachers (one male and the other female), both of whom have at least 8-10 years of experience, participated in this study to evaluate the students' emails in terms of the persuasiveness of their emails in the negotiations that were raised in them. The rating was from zero to 10/10.

3.2 Materials
Both groups were provided with a stimulus situation, where they were asked to imagine they had received a low grade on an important assignment on which they had worked very hard to gain the best grade possible. The students then wrote an imaginary email to their tutors, trying to persuade them to do something about their grade. A brief description of the purpose of this pilot study was sent to the targeted students' email accounts with a request for their participation. Those who were interested in participating wrote an imaginary email to their tutors and sent it to the researcher via her email account in which she collected the data for this study. A total of 20 emails were examined. Demographic information was obtained for both the students and the raters.

A sheet was designed on which raters had to score each student's email on a scale from 0 to 10. In the rating sheet, NS and NNS are not distinguished, as the emails were mixed together; therefore, the raters' main focus was to look at the content of the emails without recognizing the identity or the background of the writers from either group. However, for purposes of clarifying the findings for readers of the present study, demographic information about each student's background was collected.

3.3 Research questions

This paper provides answers to the following five research questions:
1) To what extent do negotiation moves differ from one group to another?

2) Is there a significant difference between the two raters (male, female) when rating NS versus NNS?

3) Is there a significant relationship between students' scores and the total number of words used in negotiation moves?

4) Which are the most important moves that might have affected the raters' decisions when giving the highest scores versus the lowest scores?

5) Is there any difference in total scores of NS and NNS?

3.4 Analysis tools

The students' email messages were analyzed according to the presence or absence of the following seven categories of email negotiation moves (S Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002), in an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of their techniques. The motivation for the selection of the framework of this research was the lack of linguistic research that categorizes negotiation moves especially where academic email writing is concerned. The categories are defined below:

1) Context: this move gives more details about a specific proposal, which is generally used to reduce uncertainty in negotiation (Lebow, 1996). It was, however, decided to call it *focus on context*, where students try to focus on a topic by giving their lecturers legitimate reasons for their belief that they deserved a higher grade on an assignment, such as having worked hard to meet the assignment's requirements;
2) Proposal: in this move, students explicitly state the purpose of their email, such as having received a low grade;
3) Justification: in this move, students justify their general need for high grades, such as their hopes of being accepted into an honors program;
4) Options: this move gives alternative solutions, such as providing more options for solving the current situation;
5) Request for appointment: in this move, students request to a face-to-face meeting with the tutor;
6) Request for improvement: asking for a higher grade; and
7) Request for feedback: asking for feedback to help students understand the reason for a low grade they have received.

In order to take into account the different lengths of the sentences students used in each strategy, it was useful to count the number of words used by both parties in each negotiation move. All the negotiation move choices used in this study were included to investigate which of them had a significant impact on the negotiation; however, the main moves that will be analyzed in detail are Context ("focus on context") and Options.

3.4.1. Quantitative analysis

Following Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002), each message in the students' emails was assigned to one of the negotiation moves mentioned above (context, proposal, justification, options, request for information, request for response, and other requests). Finally, the sentences constituting each move were divided into clauses in order to arrive at an objective means for measuring the degree to which each move was developed. This quantitative part also included two raters to score each email on a scale from 0 to 10 according to the quality of persuasion that it carried.

3.4.2. Quantitative analysis

Some interesting linguistic phenomena from the emails of the two cultural groups will be examined in order to explore cross-cultural differences between Saudi and Australian students. A proportion of the qualitative analysis will be focusing on proposals and requests for a reply in line with Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2002) analysis who adopted Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford's (1993) theoretical framework. Further, this paper will also focus on proposals and requests because they are considered to be the most essential moves in email negotiation. Without proposals "the messages under investigation would constitute merely inquiry rather than negotiation" (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002, p. 158). It is argued that an explicit request for a reply necessarily includes negotiation, particularly, as Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth believe, with the asynchronous email media.

4. Results
4.1 Quantitative findings
The findings revealed no significant differences between the two raters when rating NS versus NNS, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Raters' total scores*

	Raters' Gender	NS		NNS	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
Scores	**M**	10	6.3	10	5
	F	10	6.3	10	2.5

Table 1 shows that when rating NS, there was no difference between the two raters (M= 6.3, F=6.3). However, when rating NNS, it can be seen that the female rater gave the students a much lower score. This may represent a gender effect in rating.

The findings showed a great difference between NS and NNS with regard to negotiation moves and total number of words. While most of the NS' messages negotiated Justification and Option with the tutor, the NNS negotiated Proposal and Justification, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Differences between negotiation moves and total word count among NS and NNS*

Negotiation Move	NS		NNS	
	Words	%	Words	%
Focus on context	122	12.42	84	13.98
Proposal	149	15.17	135	22.46
Justification	281	28.62	176	29.28
Option	203	20.68	115	19.13
Request for feedback	69	7.02	0	0.00
Request for higher grade	66	6.72	81	13.48
Request for appointment	92	9.37	10	1.67
Total	982	100	601	100

Focusing on the major moves adopted by the students, it is clear from the table that the two groups differed significantly in some of the major moves, namely Justification, Options, Request for Feedback, and Request for Appointment. Overall, NS managed to use a higher number of words on each move, except for requests for feedback and higher grades. NNS used a higher number of words on each move, except for requests for feedback and appointment. Interestingly, none of the NNSs requested feedback, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**.
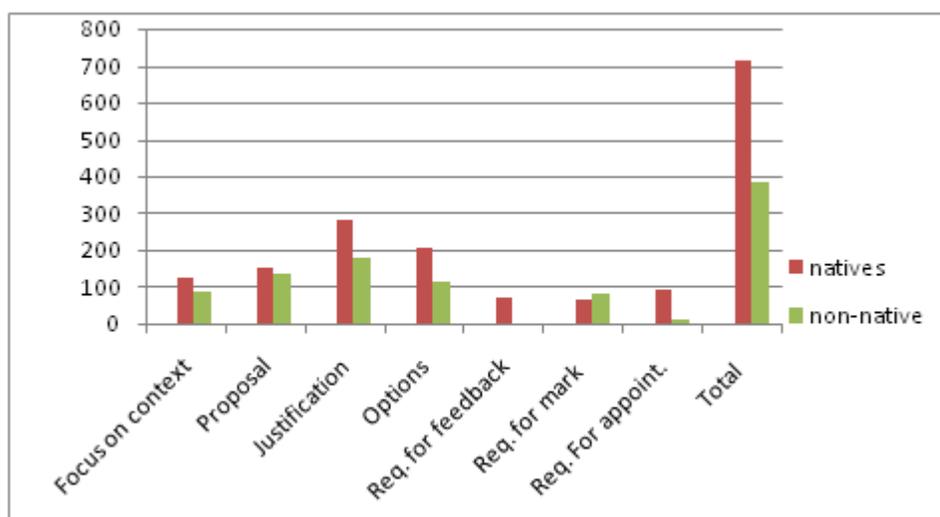

Figure 1. Differences in negotiation moves and total word counts among NS and NNS

Table 3 and Table 4 reveal the moves that might have had the greatest effect on the raters' decisions when they gave the lowest scores, versus when they gave the highest scores.

Table 3. *Lowest scores for NS and NNS*

Negotiation Move	NS		NNS	
	Words	%	Words	%
Focus on Context	0	0.00	0	0.00
Proposal	10	14.28	14	25.45
Justification	23	32.85	17	30.91
Option	11	15.72	17	30.91
Request for feedback	0	0.00	0	0.00
Request for higher grade	12	17.15	7	12.73
Request for appointment	14	20	0	0.00
Total	70	100	55	100

Comparing the lowest-scored student negotiation strategies in Table 3 with the highest-scored student negotiation strategies in Table 4 for both groups, it is clear that the students who received the lowest scores did not focus on the context at all (NS= 0, NNS=0), whereas the students who received higher scores were those who did focus on context, using a relatively large word count under that strategy (NS= 33, NNS= 25).

Table 4. *Highest scores for NS and NNS*

| Negotiation Move	NS		NNS	
	Words	%	Words	%
Focus on context	33	20.50	25	35.21
Proposal	28	17.39	9	12.68
Justification	46	28.57	22	30.98
Option	0	0.00	15	21.13
Request for feedback	20	12.42	0	0.00
Request for higher grade	34	21.12	0	0.00
Request for appointment	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	161	100	71	100

Regardless of which students received the highest or lowest scores out of all the participants, the overall difference between NS and NNS is noticeable in relation to the total word counts used in their correspondence. Whereas both native and non-native highest-scored students concentrated on justification and focus on context, the highest-scored NNS did not explicitly request a higher grade. They also did not directly request feedback or an appointment.

4.2 Qualitative findings

   Some general but interesting phenomena will be introduced first in this section. For example, even though the role-play email did not require students to write a title for their email, of the 20 participants, one Saudi student wrote the title: *Urgent matter regards to XXX assignment*. In Saudi culture, it is often recommended that people should sometimes exaggerate the importance of their matters to promote actions, lest they not be taken seriously. However, expressing urgency for topics of this kind in an Australian context may not be perceived positively. Levy and Murphy (2006) believe that some words can be added to minimize an imposition and the accompanying illocutionary force, such as "If you have the time, could you send me a copy?" Regarding terms of

address, Rau and Rau (2016) believe that these are considered a move of politeness. The findings showed that students of both cultural backgrounds used the addressing term "Dear" in their emails, which is consistent with students' general practice when they need to discuss such sensitive issues as a higher grade. Rau and Rau (2016) argue that the use of a particular term of address depends on different factors or modes of communication.

According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993, students need to strike a balance between compliance and initiation in their negotiations to reserve their own status and, in certain situations, determine speech acts that are congruent with that status (as illustrated in Figure 2). Some general observations are presented before focusing on the two moves discussed earlier; Proposal and Request for a Reply. This illustration is relevant in understanding how such balance should be maintained in some of the examples provided in this section.
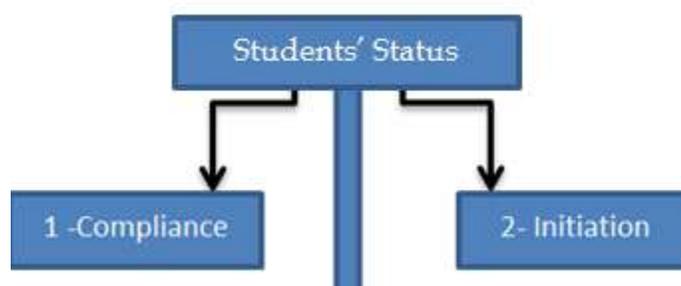
Figure 2. Status balance for students' successful academic negotiations

Since two independent academics were recruited to rate the emails of both cultural groups, from the least convincing rated as 1/10 to the most convincing rated as 10/10, the least convincing and the most convincing emails were further investigated by the present researchers. Some persuasive strategies might have influenced the raters' decisions. The following are the least convincing examples (one from a NS and one from a NNS):

Lowest scored students, NS and NNS:

Example NS: My mark for the last assignment was under my expectations ([mark]) and I think you would agree that it could improve.

The native speaker in this instance argued that the lecturer would agree that this grade could improve because it was under her expectations. Despite the fact that the native speaker used politeness strategies through hedging (could/would) and through the inclusive *expression I think you would agree that*, which mitigates the illocutionary force (Brown & Levinson, 1978), some important negotiation moves were missing. No reasons were given why the lecturer should improve the grade (mark), such as the student having met the general criteria for the assignment, nor was any proposed course of action (option move) proposed for the lecturer to consider. These might be possible reasons why both raters thought this email was the least convincing. The next example is written by a Saudi student:

> I had 3 exams in 1 day, which results in lack of time to prepare all subjects.
> Please help me to improve my mark.

Although the emails in this study were based on a role-playing technique, it is interesting that a couple of Saudi emails focused on excuses rather than *focusing on the context*, such as evidence of hard work or meeting the assignment criteria. The excuses included being sick, not having enough resources, or, as above, *having three exams in one day*. This email received the lowest score because it did not provide enough information about why the student wanted a higher grade; neither did it make use of suggestions for some course of action. It was a short appeal that pleaded for the professor's help rather than initiating options. There were very few politeness strategies to mitigate the interactions. Even the word *please* in this example has not functioned as a politeness marker, as it was followed by the imperative *help me*. Some of the UK lecturers commented that "the use of imperative always sounds harsh even when a 'please' is added" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, p. 14). Another example of a non-native speaker's email is shown below.

> Hi Professor,
> I hope you are well, my name is xxx student at your class (Sociolinguistics) and my Id student is 12345. However, I didn't ask for extension, I kept working on it even I went to ESL for amendment and giving some feedback. I heard about your fairness in grading the essays and about your humanity especially for international students, that's why I am writing with hope to respond to my appeal.
> I anticipate hearing from you regarding the above matter.
> Regards,
> XXXX

Both successful emails were written by female students. This email written by a NNS has got the highest score for being convincing, 8/10, by the male rater, but only 3/10 by the female rater, although, overall in the highest scoring category for a non-native speaker. Although it contained some effective arguments such as having the assignment checked academically by the ESL center (focus on context), the emotional part of it was striking. The female student indicated that she had heard about her lecturer's "fairness" and "humanity" with international students, which would typically portray her as "appealing for the professor's charitable assistance" (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002, p. 160). She then explicitly requested a reply to her email, which is an important move in email genre. Overall, the student used the core negotiation moves with good "initiation." However, she failed in terms of the language she used to articulate her demands and overused "compliance," which may have shaken the status of the student's balance as an independent post-graduate researcher. It seems from this example that the use of the core negotiation moves might encourage some academics to disregard the linguistic features and focus on the content of the effective argument of the student. An example of a native speaker's email is shown below.

> Dear Dr Jones,
> I am xxxxx , student number xxxxxx, and I am writing this letter as a query regarding my first Quan. Methods essay. I am happy to accept your mark, there is no problem about that. However, to obtain a high overall mark in this

subject is important for me in being able to go on to do a minor thesis- as you know, a "B" average s necessary for me to do that , so a "C" is below the mark.

I did read the assignment criteria carefully; I searched the topic widely, and as far as I could see, met the criteria in an appropriate way-but obviously not according to your marking.

Could you please tell me where I went wrong, and what could I have done to improve my submitted essay? Have I misunderstood your meaning in some areas? It's really important for me to be clear about this, as I must improve what I do for the second and final assignment submission.

I will be grateful for any guidance you can provide in this.
Thanking you in advance,
Yours sincerely,
Xxxxxx

This email had a perfect balance of compliance and initiation as suggested by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993). It did not contain any direct confrontation; rather the writer suggested that she was *happy* with the grade given. Like the email of the previous NNS, this student employed all the negotiation moves necessary for this particular genre. She provided reasons why she needed a high grade without actually requesting it, which is under the "justification move." She then "focused on the context" by providing good justifications such as researching the topic widely and reading the criteria carefully. Further, she used some compliance strategies in the form of questions such as … *what could I have done to improve my submitted essay? Have I misunderstood your meaning in some areas?* Her message was transmitted delicately, indirectly, and in a very polite manner. Before ending her email, she indicated that she would be grateful for *any guidance* instead of saying "any feedback on the essay," which she was hoping to have, what may be called a polite ambiguity. She ended by "Thanking you in advance," which emphases the expectation of a reply. This email received the highest score by both raters and by an individual academic who refused to rate all the emails because he believed that no student could negotiate a higher grade with him, but he agreed that this was the only email he could accept*.*

The following are examples from NSs that focus on two moves, proposal and request for response.

No	Native Speakers' Examples
1	Would you consider a redraft of the assignment?
2	I would like to request more information regarding the grading of the paper as well as more feedback as to why the grade given was deemed suitable
3	If you could spare the time to meet with me [Request for Appointment] to discuss this issue, it would be greatly appreciated. If not, if you might refer me to any course of action I might be able to undertake

4   I will be grateful for any guidance you can provide in this.
5   I was therefore wondering if there is something I can do, such as extra work and submissions, [Options] to further my competency in this subject
6   Am wondering whether I could come and speak to you [Request for Appointment] about this with a view to either having it remarked [Options] or resubmitting a new draft

The above examples show how native speakers began negotiation by requesting a higher grade. NS used more tentative language than NNS, which not only serves to observe the status difference between students and their lecturers but also helps in generating a course of action. In example 5 above, a native speaker used hedges such as *I am wondering* and subsequently used *whether* and *either*. It seems that a person who uses tentative language is likely to produce one of two different suggestions. In the examples above, most native speakers used hedges such as *wondering, would,* and *if you could*, which motivate the speaker to put forward suggestions to open more doors for negotiation. By providing more suggestions (options) to the lecturer, post-graduate students preserve their status as independent scholars in the eyes of their lecturers. In contrast, lacking such initiative and requesting a lecturer to find a solution result in a negative evaluation by the lecturer, and they run the risk of appearing incompetent and failing to carry out the negotiation process further (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990).

No	Non-Native Speakers' Examples
1	Please consider this request?
2	I need a higher mark on my essay.
3	I am sure I deserve better than D mark.
4	Please help me to pass this subject.
5	I am seeking your kind help to repeat the exam.
6	Please reconsider my request and retest me in this subject?

When attempting to request a higher grade, Saudi students used more assertive expressions that lack appropriate status-preserving strategies, such as *I need a higher mark* or *I am sure I deserve better than D mark*. These expressions have a high degree of imposition and therefore threaten the recipient's face (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Most interestingly, the tone of these messages ranges between commanding ("I need a higher mark") and pleading ("[p]lease help me to pass"). Assertiveness and overuse of compliance are unfavorable qualities coming from post-graduate students, who should demonstrate a scholarly position. Therefore, as Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) argue, students should strive for a balance between compliance and initiative. In a subsequent study, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) suggest that, in order to be good negotiators, NNS should employ more suggestions and fewer rejections. In example 3 above, the student showed a rejection of the grade by asserting that he deserved a better grade. From a negotiation perspective, this can also put Saudi students at a disadvantage, because they neither used options to open up the door for negotiations, nor used successful pragmatic requests. Therefore, "I need a higher mark "or "[a]m seeking your kind help to repeat the exam" are not considered polite, as they present potential threats to the recipient through a negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978). If the students failed to negotiate successfully, this may have resulted in the

withdrawal of their right to have their opinion considered (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). Two out of 10 Saudis managed to explicitly request a reply to their emails. However, most of the other emails focused on asking for a meeting time and then completed their emails by thanking the lecturers, expecting that their request for a meeting time is enough for a reply. The explicit expectation of a reply is an important cue in this medium for the negotiated topic to continue. The following examples show how NS employ hedging in their messages.

No   Native Speakers' Examples

1   If you could spare the time to meet with me [Request for Appointment] to discuss this issue, it would be greatly appreciated.

2   I will be grateful for any guidance you can provide in this.

3   I would like the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you and am available for a meeting at your earliest convenience.

4   I am wondering whether I could come and speak to you.

5   I would much appreciate any advice/efforts to look into this matter.

6   I was hoping you would consider my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

7   It would be great to discuss this.

8   I nervously await your response.

9   I am aware that you have many commitments but would appreciate a face-to-face meeting.

Hedging is often noted in NS' messages (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993) and was also evident in later research by Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002). Unlike NNS, Native English speakers have a clear range of proposals that are expected initiatives from post-graduate students. Their expressions in wondering about a solution to a low grade typically include a variety of hedges that are not present in NNS' messages, such as *If you could – I would like the opportunity – I would much appreciate – I was hoping you would consider*, etc.

In general, NS' requests for responses are tentative and appropriate to both the situation and the medium, except for one instance where the student said she would *nervously await* the lecturer's response. Overuse of emotional expressions over a higher grade topic may be perceived as infelicitous because it exceeds the congruence maxim and therefore lacks a status-preserving strategy.

5. Discussion

This section includes discussion of the findings and offers some possible explanations, summarized in terms of the five research questions presented in Section 3.3. The discussion is structured both by findings that are consistent with previous studies (Section 5.1) and by those that add new insights in this field (Section 5.2).

5.1 Findings consistent with previous research results
Q.1 To what extent do negotiation moves differ from one group to another?

Observing both groups in terms of their use of different negotiation moves revealed that NS deviated significantly in their employment of "options" from NNS, using 50% more in this move. As Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasonforth (2002) point out, options are the most important move, providing more alternatives and not limiting the tutor's response to a single point. Other moves showed differences as well. NS outperformed NNS in only one move, the "request for feedback," which indicates the NNS' reluctance to make such explicit requests. This finding is in line with those of a number of studies (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002) where NNS used email mainly to submit the final draft, but not to solicit their instructors' input. Overall, NS used more extensive negotiation strategies than did NNS.

Q.3 Is there a significant relationship between the students' scores and the total number of words they used in negotiation moves?

A significant relationship existed between the scores and the number of words in negotiation moves. There is strong evidence that adding more details and information most likely improves the quality of persuasion, as indicated by the fact that the teachers who participated in this study unintentionally gave higher scores to those emails with a higher number of words. What is striking, however, is that this is applicable to NS as well as NNS. Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002) suggest that NNS always tend to provide brief messages in their emails, which rarely include strong negotiation strategies. Therefore, to appear convincing in their negotiations, it is highly recommend that NNS employ strategies with larger numbers of words.

5.2 Findings that provide newer insights in this field
Q.2 Is there a significant difference between the two raters (male, female) when rating NS versus NNS?

The only significant difference found between raters was in their evaluation of NNS' emails. The two managed to give NSs fairly similar results. The reason the female teacher gave NNS almost half the score that the male teacher gave (respectively 3 vs. 8 marks out of 10) might be attributed to a gender effect or to the different personalities of the teachers. Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002) indicated that different tutors often have different reactions to students' emails. Holmes (1995) suggests that women are more sensitive to the language and the feelings rather than the content, whereas men focus on the information. Therefore, the low-scoring NNS used good negotiation moves but failed to pragmatically fulfill the linguistic expectations.

Q.4 What are the most important moves that might have affected the raters' decisions when giving the highest scores versus the lowest scores?

Despite the fact that *"options"* was found to be the most significant strategy that gave NS an advantage over NNS in Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2002) study, the "focus-on-

context" strategy was the most important move affecting the raters' decisions in the present study. After examining the lowest-scored students and the highest-scored students in both groups, it was found that is obvious that students who managed to "focus-on-context" and provide more evidence in relation to the issue gained higher scores. It is unlikely that other possible negotiation strategies could have affected the raters' decisions, since the two parties varied distinctively in their use of the other moves. Looking at their "focus-on-context" words, the two students with the highest scores were the only students who used the word "criteria" in their emails, in order to provide evidence that they had applied the criteria for the assignment, this being one of the key issues; the rest of the students did not include this word in their emails. The lowest-scoring students did not mention anything about the past or reasons why they believed they did not deserve a low grade; instead they merely focused on what to do next, using the fewest number of words in their emails. In his book, Korobokin (2002) stressed that negotiators should not simply critically assess what they want to achieve from the negotiation but should also emphasize the relative importance of their various desires. As they were more interested in achieving their future desires, the lowest-scoring students missed the fact that they should draw on "history" and "take into consideration the research [they] have done" (Lewicki, Hiam, & Olander, 1996, p. 18) and offer more reasons for why they think they deserve higher grades.

Q.5 Is there any difference in total scores of NS and NNS?

Both groups differed significantly in the mean average of their scores which proves that NSs employed more negotiation strategies than NNS (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002). Furthermore, there is new evidence in this study that the reason that NSs gained higher scores might be attributed to the fact that they used a larger number of words, an old assumption that has long thought to be applied only to NNS, which can also be one of the possible reasons explaining why NSs attained higher grades.

6. Conclusion

It has been found that NS and NNS have similar likelihoods of gaining higher grades when using more details (words). Focus-on-context was found to be the most important negotiation move to explain the reason raters gave students who used this strategy the highest grades of all, which places importance on the fact that different negotiation topics require emphasis on some strategies more than others. Overall, NS wrote longer emails, one of the possible reasons why they gained higher scores. NNS need to be encouraged to give more detailed explanations to improve their negotiation techniques, rather than explicitly ask their tutors to "help" them find solutions.

The pedagogical implication of this study is that some orientation in effective email negotiation moves should be provided that focuses on a number of common academic negotiation tasks. Linguistic scholars should balance their focus between rhetorical negotiation moves and the language students' use in each move. Some empirical evidence in this study shows that students who use the essential negotiation moves have some chance to communicate successfully despite their pragmatic failure. Finally, given the lack of studies on negotiation discourse, more studies are needed in this field, which may include other cultures and the online media.

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