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Cross Cultural Politeness Strategies in Asynchronous Academic Discussion Boards for International Graduate Students

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Abstract: In the changing environment of the online learning spaces and increasingly multicultural classrooms, academic communication has been transformed, in particular, with asynchronous discussion boards. Various polite strategies may be used in such situations by students of various cultural backgrounds, therefore influencing the level of clarity of the exchanged information, tone, and effectiveness. The problem to be addressed in this paper is that of cross-cultural difference in politeness strategy of asynchronous scholarly conversations. The aim is to explore how politeness plays out in international graduate students' bargaining for interpersonal relationships and establishing meaning in online academic discourse. The study has a qualitative discourse analysis approach that deals with corpus-based elements and examines approximately 150 discussion board postings of international graduate students. The results indicate that there are unique differences in the application of politeness strategies, such as differences in directness and indirectness and the common application of hedging, mitigation, and face-saving strategies. The students of the diverse cultures will express their agreement, disagreement, and even their position in different ways. The findings in the research are that politeness strategies play an important role in making sure that effective intercultural communication is achieved in the asynchronous context. The implications of the results include the academic writing pedagogy and the development of intercultural communicative competence when learning online.

Key Words: cross-cultural communication, politeness strategies, asynchronous learning, academic discourse, international students

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Introduction

The fast growth of online education has revolutionized the higher learning environment, especially with the popular use of learning management systems (LMS) like Moodle and Canvas. These sites have enabled asynchronous discussion boards to assume a vital role in the academic interaction process where students can now interact in an academic way beyond the limits of time and space. The forums play a significant role in the international graduate programs because crucial knowledge-sharing platforms for peer interaction and cooperative learning. However, the absence of real-time communication in an asynchronous environment renders the players in asynchronous environments to be highly reliant on linguistic means to render the meaning, tone, and interpersonal location.

In such cases, politeness could be regarded as one of the most significant factors that impact communication. Academic politeness is not only a matter of etiquette but also a good tool that would assist to regulate interpersonal relationships, avoid quarrels, and maintain respect. Studies have shown that politeness strategies define the meaning of messages, particularly in the online communication aspect, where there is no non-verbal communication (Jeong & Chiu, 2025). Such strategies are even more

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complicated in intercultural situations, when students introduce a variety of linguistic standards and cultural anticipations in the common digital context.

The issue of cultural diversity is paramount in influencing the ways of communication between international graduate students. The backgrounds of different cultures can be different, and this might lead to a difference in directness, hedging, and conflict resolution. An example is in comparing Chinese and American graduate students, where, in terms of dissenting, Chinese students take various pragmatic strategies that reflect more of their cultural values on authority and face-saving (Cai et al., 2024). Similarly, virtual collaboration across cultures revisits the challenges that students face in the process of adapting their communication patterns in new cultures both in real-time and over the internet (Van Rompay-Bartels et al., 2025). These differences can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations unless dealt with accordingly.

In addition, the increasing globalization of higher education has brought about the intercultural competence interest in digital communication. Studies have shown that cultural diversity plays a crucial role in influencing the dynamics of communication in virtual teamwork and academic interactions, affecting the participation and collaboration results (Yousef, 2024)

. Moreover, the use of politeness by students can vary with time as interact with other cultures, and the influence of pragmatic competence in the digital world is dynamic (Shakeeva et al., 2025).

Although increasing literature is available on politeness and intercultural communication, a significant gap in the literature relating specifically to asynchronous academic discussion boards still exists. Though previous literature has been biased towards politeness compared to face-to-face and email and virtual discussion, some slight attention has been put on how international graduate students form and perceive politeness during the postponed, text-based academic communication (Abaya et al., 2023). This is a critical gap, particularly with the increasing trend in application in asynchronous education in education systems around the world.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by taking into account cross-cultural politeness strategies in asynchronous academic discussion boards by international graduate students. There are three objectives of this research:

(1) To determine the kind of politeness strategies that students use,

(2) To make cross-cultural comparisons between these strategies, and

(3) To analyze the impact of these strategies on the interactions and academic discourse patterns.

This study contributes towards the general understanding of intercultural pragmatics and, in some way, provide some observations that will help to improve the communication in the digitally mediated academic environment.

This paper has six main sections. Section 1 presents the research context, problem and objectives. Part 2 is on the theoretical background, which covers politeness theory, cross-cultural communication and computer-mediated discourse. The research design, data collection and the analytical framework of the research are explained in Section 3. In section 4, the results are provided in tables and figures, pointing out the trends in politeness strategies and cultural differences. Section 5 discusses implications, interprets the results in terms of theory and past research. Lastly, Section 6 summarizes some of the important findings, contributions, limitation and future research directions.

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Literature Review

The theory of politeness, especially the paradigm of Brown and Levinson (1987), is still fundamental in comprehending how people handle the interpersonal relationship through language. According to the theory, the boundary between positive politeness, which is founded on solidarity and approval, and negative politeness, which is founded on respect for personal autonomy and mitigation of imposition, is provided. The predominant concept of this framework is the concept of face-threatening acts (FTAs), which are communicative acts and are capable of endangering the self-image or social status of an individual. Academic politeness, especially in circumstances where a hierarchical relationship exists, such as in the case of a student-lecturer interaction, is required for the reduction of a potential conflict and still having a respectful discourse.

This theoretical framework has been recent empirical research put in the current academic context. To indicate this, an analysis of lecturer-student interaction in Indonesian universities reveals that the students exploit politeness in a manipulative way to balance the power in their relationships with lecturers in order to establish harmonious relations in their academics (Anugrawati & Syam, 2024). Similarly, studies on online discussions also indicate that politeness is also a major determinant of the quality and persuasiveness of online discussion, which dictates the extent to which people participate and engage in the discussion (Jeong & Chiu, 2025). These findings show that politeness is not just a theoretical phenomenon but also a practical process that directly impacts the outcomes of communication in the educational context.

The application of cultural norms in the use of language, particularly in the academic context, is highlighted in the cross-cultural communication research. One can identify high-context and low-context cultures, and that difference can be applied to comprehend the differences between the two cultures. Compared to high-context cultures, which want to utilize the indirect mode of communication and implicit meaning, low-context cultures utilize a more direct and explicit mode of communication and meaning. These features of these cultures trickle into how the students go about forming answers, expressing their differences, and participating in academic arguments.

Empirical research has shown that culturally there are great differences in politeness strategies. To illustrate, Chinese graduate students resort to indirect and diminishing strategies in situations when do not agree with professors as compared to American students who resort to direct strategies (Cai et al., 2024). Likewise, the studies of telecollaborative interactions among culturally diverse students reveal that the participants should be in a state of negotiation and limitation of their communication styles to meet halfway (Alghasab & Alvarez-Ayure, 2023). Such findings underscore the importance of cultural awareness to comprehend and produce polite conversation.

There exist more complexities in intercultural communication via the Internet. Studies in the field of worldwide online cooperation indicate such challenges as miscommunication, lack of expectations, and the need to adopt flexible communication techniques (Van Rompay-Bartels et al., 2025). Studies also show that cultural diversity has the ability to both enhance and complicate communication, necessitating people to have increased intercultural competence (Yousef, 2024). The asynchronous discussion boards are particularly appropriate to apply such dynamics, as the latent replies can contribute to the probability of the misunderstanding.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) offers the technological context through which asynchronous discussion boards work. CMC lacks instantaneous feedback, non-verbal communication, and live clarification as in face-to-face communication, so it relies more on textual expression. Such an

alteration necessitates the use of overt linguistic tools in order to convey tone, will, and attitude among individuals.

Studies on politeness in CMC indicate that in the majority of situations, the participants are more likely to adopt such strategies as hedging, softening, and explicit evidence of respect to offset the deficits of non-verbal communications (AlAfnan & dela Cruz-Rudio, 2023). Even the studies in virtual communication between students of universities demonstrate the impact of virtual spaces on the languages used, as a consequence of which new context-specific norms of politeness were established (Sahib et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies of virtual language learning environments reveal that even simple communication such as greetings are influenced by the limitations and the opportunities of digital communication (Alonso-Marks & Bayonas, 2023).

The nature of the communications in the forum boards is asynchronous, and this presents special interactional dynamics. People will have extra time to develop solutions, and it can lead to more rational and creative displays of courtesy. However, the lack of immediacy can also cause the reduction of the level of spontaneity and even misinterpretation. All these make asynchronous CMC a distinctive and remarkable area of study in intercultural pragmatics.

The characteristics of academic discourse are defined by certain pragmatic characteristics that contain the norms and anticipations of academic discourse. These are hedging, mitigation, and stance-taking, which enable writers to present arguments in a careful manner, acknowledging other points of view and being respectful. These features are especially important in intercultural situations when students have to cope with the conflicting expectations in terms of academic communication.

Studies in the area of student communication practices indicate that politeness plays a significant part in determining academic communication. To give one such example, studies of email requests have revealed that students of their respective cultures employ varying levels of directness and mitigation in their approach to address their instructors (AlAfnan & dela Cruz-Rudio, 2023). Similarly, even research on intercultural academic scenarios also emphasizes the importance of politeness in maintaining interpersonal relationships and effective communication (Ezzaouya & Ohashi, 2023).

In addition, the study of the virtual communication among college students indicates that the politeness strategies are closely related to the interpersonal processes and competence perceptions (Sahib et al., 2023). These results indicate that the skill of applying the correct politeness strategies is one of the major elements of academic achievement, especially in the international and digitally mediated setting.

Research Gap

The valuable information available in the literature on politeness, cross-cultural communication, and CMC, there is still a big gap in the research about asynchronous academic discussion boards among international graduate students. There is a lot of research performed in face-to-face interaction, email, or synchronous online interaction, but little has been done as far as the construction and decoding of politeness strategies in delayed and text-based academic discussions.

The current research on intercultural communication in the online world demonstrates that the area of research needs to be developed further to describe how individuals modify their communication patterns in the dynamic online world. On the same note, the virtual collaboration research highlights the need to comprehend the dynamics of interactional processes in various modalities. Still, the peculiarities of

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handling asynchronous discussion boards, such as delayed feedback, longer reflection periods, and having written records, imply that should be analyzed more closely.

Thus, this paper fills this gap by discussing ways in which international graduate students use the strategies of politeness on asynchronous academic discussion boards, paying special attention to cross-cultural differences and their effect on interaction.

Methodology

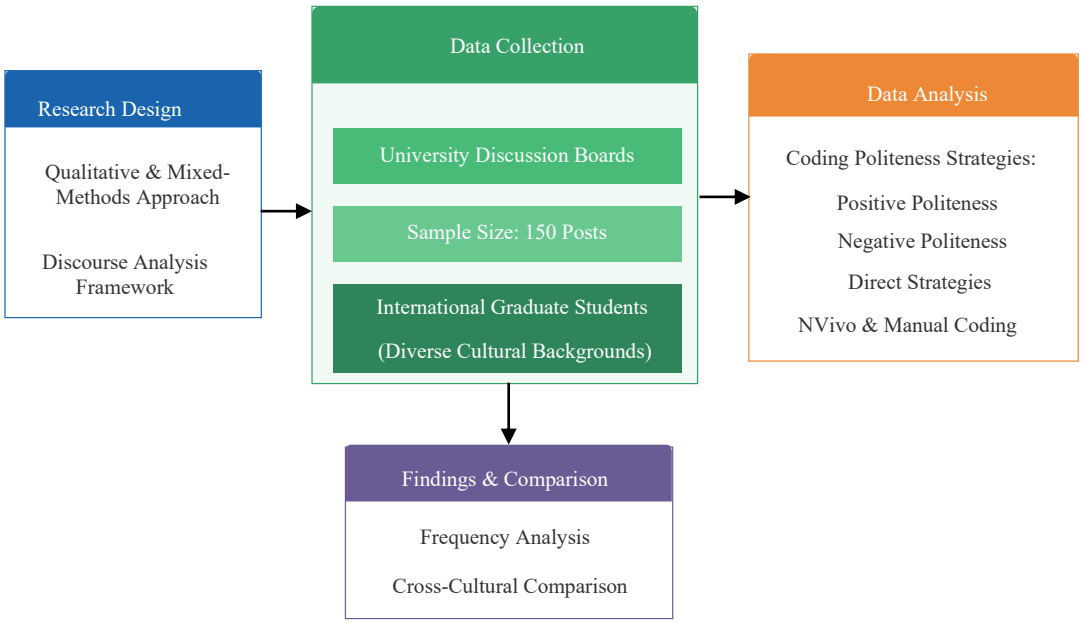

Figure 1: Methodological Framework for Analyzing Cross-Cultural Politeness Strategies in Asynchronous Academic Discussion Boards

The systematic approach of the methodology employed to study cross-cultural politeness strategies of international graduate students has been presented in figure 1. It begins with the research design, which involves a qualitative and mixed approach, which is based on a discourse analysis framework. It continues to data collection, which involved the collection of the discussion posts using university-based asynchronous platforms of culturally diverse participants. The second step is data analysis, which will be focused on coding linguistic features into certain categories, i.e., positive politeness, negative politeness, and direct strategies, with the assistance of both the manual data analysis and NVivo software. Lastly, the framework ends with findings and comparisons wherein the frequency analysis and variations across cultures are studied to comprehend patterns of interaction. This figure provides a good visual illustration of the step-by-step research process and how each of the steps will contribute towards achieving the objectives of the study.

Research Design

The research design that has been adopted in this paper is qualitative in nature and backs the quantitative aspects in investigating cross-cultural politeness in asynchronous academic discussion boards. The qualitative method particularly suits well as the research is expected to deal with the elucidation of the linguistic behavior, pragmatic meaning, and interactional peculiarities of the academic discourse that takes place in a natural setting. At the same time, it does not contain much quantitative analysis such as the frequency counts of politeness strategies in order to provide a systematic image of the emerging patterns.

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The research is based on a discourse analysis framework that is informed by the principles of intercultural pragmatics and computer-mediated communication (CMC). The discourse analysis can be applied to analyze in depth the use of language to create meaning, negotiate relationships, and face issues in the online academic environment. Specifically, the framework is attentive to the contextual, participant, and communicative intent-based politeness strategies. The primary tool of analysis is the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson since it allows categorizing the strategies into positive politeness, negative politeness, and direct (bald-on-record) politeness. Such an approach will enable us to grasp how culturally different students negotiate their path through politeness in asynchronous communication in a nuanced way.

Data Collection

Information that will be utilized in this study will be collected by use of asynchronous discussion boards that are available in learning management systems (LMS) of universities, e.g., Moodle and Canvas. These tools provide real samples of academic communication involving students talking, responding, and communicating with the teacher in a well-structured yet flexible environment.

The sampling technique is purposive in order to pick appropriate data that depict intercultural interaction. The dataset is made up of about 150 discussion posts, which are based on graduate-level courses that have a diverse group of international students. The first answers to the discussion prompts and answers to the peers, both monologic and interactive discourse, are also present in these posts.

The participants of this study will be international graduate students taking a course in English-medium courses. A diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and Western (among others). Such diversity makes it possible to fully compare cross-cultural patterns of communication. To promote ethical standards, all data are anonymized, and any identifying information, such as names, institutions, and courses, is removed. There are institutional research rules pertaining to research involving human subjects.

Data Analysis

The analysis will consist of a systematic coding procedure to determine and classify politeness strategies in the discussion posts. The coding scheme is developed based on the predetermined schemes in the politeness theory and cross-cultural pragmatics. The data are coded in three main categories:

- ***Positive Politeness Strategies:*** This is a show of solidarity, assent, encouragement, and appreciation. These may be either by praising the concept of peers, by using an inclusive vocabulary (e.g., "we" or "our"), or by expressing approval or agreement and then giving a divergent opinion.

- ***Negative Politeness Strategies:*** These are the strategies that presuppose the attempts to underline imposition and respect the independence of the interlocutor. Hedging (e.g., "I think" or "perhaps"), indirect requests, modal verbs, apologies (e.g., "could" or "might"), and weakening statements are typical features.

- ***Direct Strategies (Bald-on-Record):*** are uncompromising, unambiguous statements that are typical in situations where clarity is more significant than courtesy. Though this is not prevalent in the academic environment, such strategies can be traced in the brief answer or task-solution communication.

It is coded with the use of a combination of a manual analysis and qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo. A sample of the data is coded manually first to optimize the coding scheme and give clarity

in defining the categories. The whole dataset is analyzed, after which the trends are established between the cultural groups. Cross-checking and repeated coding are employed in order to reach reliability.

In addition to qualitative interpretation, the frequency counts are as well established with the aim of determining the frequency of different politeness strategies. The strategies are then compared against each other to find the difference between them when it comes to the cultural backgrounds and nature of interactions (e.g., first posts and responses). This type of mixed methodology of analysis allows depth and generalizability of the research process into the process of politeness in asynchronous academic communication.

Overall, the methodology provides a systematic but flexible framework for researching the contact point of language, culture, and digital communication with certain useful information on the pragmatic practices of international graduate students.

Results

The section gives the results of the research in terms of the analysis of the 150 asynchronous postings on discussion boards created by international graduate students. The results are concerned with the distribution of politeness strategies, cross-cultural differences, linguistic aspects, and patterns of interaction as observed in the data.

Frequency of Politeness Strategies

The analysis showed that a variety of politeness strategies were used by the students, with significant frequency differences. Positive politeness strategies were the most frequent, followed by negative politeness, and finally, direct strategies were quite low.

Table 1: Frequency of Politeness Strategies

Strategy Type	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Politeness	68	45%
Negative Politeness	57	38%
Direct Strategies	25	17%
Total	**150**	**100%**

The highest percentage (45) was positive politeness strategies, as seen in Table 1. These were words of approval, thanks, and support, and there were plenty of such words, which were used to maintain the tone of a supporting and cooperative argument in academics. There were also negative politeness strategies (38), especially in instances when students had a different opinion or displayed alternative points of view. The least frequent were direct strategies (17%), because the academic speech in an asynchronous environment is quite careful and deferential.

Cultural Variations

The results show that there are definite cross-cultural differences in using politeness strategies. The Asian cultural students had a preference for the indirect communication that is highly hedged, softened, and deferential. Such students tended to put into context their answers in a manner that downplayed possible face-threatening behaviors, especially in situations where disagreed with others or when critiquing ideas.

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Western cultural in nature students, in their turn, had more direct engagement tendencies. More open and even more direct in their answers and tended to have arguments and counterarguments that are less mitigated by the use of less strong words. These students were more likely to be less polite but, on the other hand, emphasized clarity and assertiveness in making contributions, although were not as rude as previously.

The politeness strategies in relation to the cultural groups are provided below as an example of the differences.

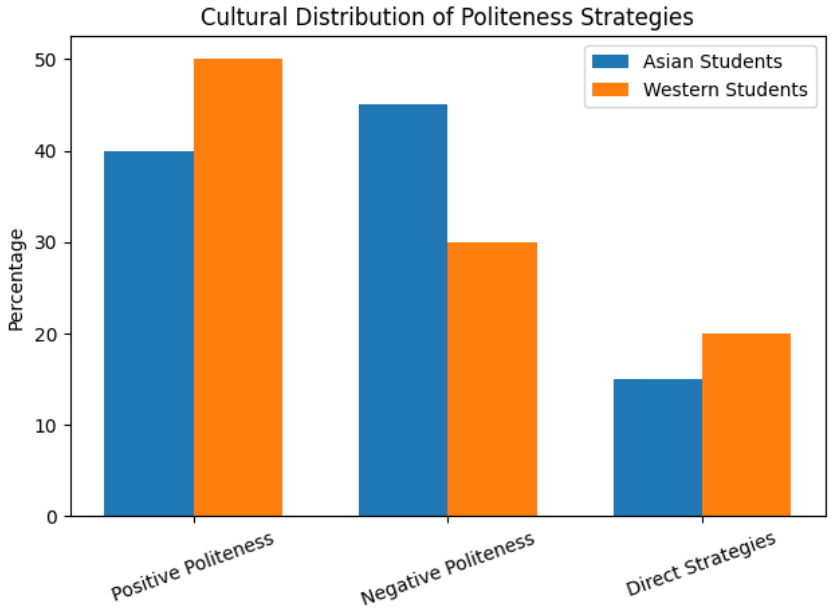

Figure 2: Cultural Distribution of Strategies

Figure 2 highlights that the percentage of negative politeness strategies by the Asian students was higher, and the percentage of the direct strategies by the Western students was relatively high. The only similarity between the two groups concerned the application of positive politeness strategies, indicating a shared concern with maintaining collegiality in academic interactions despite cultural differences.

Linguistic Features

Analysis of the data reveals several recurring linguistic features associated with politeness techniques. One of the most significant properties is the use of modal verbs such as "could," "might," and "would," which are used as hedging devices to undermine statements and dilute their force. As an example, students tended to use phrases such as "I believe that this could be viewed as." Or you may want to consider the other side of the problem, which suggests you prefer to be indirect and cautious.

There was also extensive use of softeners and apologies, mostly in situations of disagreement. It was important to avoid the conflict and use the right tone, which was achieved with phrases such as "I am sorry, however, I see it differently" or "with due respect." The latter were prevalent among students in cultures where deference and harmony in conversation are appreciated.

Responses were, to a great extent, structured using markers of agreement. The students also preferred to begin their posts with admissions or accepting the previous postings and, after that, provide their own views. Such remarks as "I agree with your point" and "That's an interesting point of view" were strategies

of positive politeness that fostered a sense of solidarity and cooperation. All cultural groups were identified as having this tendency, indicating that it is a major trend in academic discourse.

Interaction Patterns

It was also found that there were different interaction patterns in asynchronous discussion boards. Some of the remarkable trends include the large proportion of elaborated response styles; in this case, students were expected to elaborate their answers in detail and support their points with examples or references. This is indicative of the scholarly character of the dialogues and of the demand for criticality.

Taking turns between communication in asynchronous communication was quite different from how the face-to-face communication took place. This was because there would not have been instantaneous reactions, so the students had time to construct their messages and, as such, contributed better, carefully thought-out messages. This often led to longer posts that used several politeness strategies in a single response.

The other significant trend is that students are sequentially interactive. In this instance, students make it clear that referring to previous posts sequentially helps make sense of the discussion. Indicatively, students would call one another by name or refer to items mentioned at the start of the discussion, indicating that were listening and interested. It was also one of the practices that led to the use of positive politeness strategies, as interpersonal relations were enhanced.

There was also apparently a deficit in nonverbal communication, and the absence of nonverbal cues in asynchronous communication appeared to support the use of explicit linguistic signs of politeness. Those students who made up this restriction by using more open displays of assent, gratitude, and mitigation. This discovery underscores the importance of language as the primary means of managing interpersonal relationships in online schools.

Discussion

This research can be effectively analyzed within the politeness theory, especially using Brown and Levinson's framework of positive and negative politeness. The inclination towards positive politeness strategies in the data indicates that the students are eager to build rapport, demonstrate solidarity, and create a supportive academic environment. This is evident in the frequent use of agreement signs, appreciation, and inclusive language. Simultaneously, the high rate of negative politeness strategies indicates students' awareness of potential face-threatening acts (FTAs), particularly when must present an opposing opinion. Mitigating devices such as hedging, indirectness, and modal verbs also allow the student to agree or disagree without necessarily confronting the interlocutor. The relatively lower direct strategies also support the idea that meaning and respect should be negotiated with caution in academic discussion boards. In this way, the results show that politeness strategies do not merely represent linguistic options but are important resources to regulate social relationships in academic communication.

The use of these politeness strategies can be greatly influenced by cultural background. The tendency of Asian students to lean towards indirectness and hedging also aligns with the communication rules traditionally associated with high-context cultures, where preserving harmony and avoiding conflict are among the top priorities. On the other hand, the styles of low-context communication, in which clarity and explicitness are highly valued, may be observed in Western students' preferences for closer interaction. It should be noted, though, that these differences do not imply that either group is less polite than the other; only indicate that culturally conditioned differences in the expression of politeness are possible. The fact

that all of the groups employ positive politeness strategies indicates that share a common idea of what is expected of them in academics. However, can modify their language behavior to align with their intercultural expectations. This dynamic adjustment highlights the nature of pragmatic competence, in which students negotiate between their own cultures and the norms of international academic language.

Digital media are also asynchronous, and this factor strongly influences the use of politeness strategies. Asynchronous discussion boards also allow individuals to take more time to plan, edit, and organize their responses, unlike face-to-face communication. It is this long process time that contributes to the use of elaborated and highly mitigated expressions, since students can make selective decisions about the language use to minimize ambiguity and potential conflict. At the same time, the absence of nonverbal cues such as tone, facial expressions, and gestures makes explicit linguistic cues more important as a means of politeness. This is why the dataset shows high rates of hedging, apologies, and indications of agreement. In addition, written posts to the discussion boards can foster students' greater consciousness and respect for them, since not deleted and will therefore still be seen by their groupmates and educators. Therefore, the digital medium is not merely amoral; in actuality, it establishes politeness and redefines it in academic interactions.

The results of this research, when compared with past studies, display strong congruence and expand the knowledge base. Just as previous studies on intercultural communication have shown, this study establishes that cultural background has a major impact on pragmatic strategies, especially in disagreeing with others and in handling interpersonal relationships. It also aligns with research on computer-based communication, which has emphasized the need for explicit markers of politeness in textual communication. Nevertheless, the present study can also offer new insights, as it focuses on asynchronous academic discussion boards, which have been rather understudied. These results demonstrate that, despite the general tendency towards politeness being similar across situations, asynchronous forms lead to specific interactional dynamics that shape linguistic behavior. These results have significant implications for practice. In online teaching, instructors will provide guidelines on effective communication strategies and facilitate the expression of cultural differences to foster inclusive discussions. On the academic training side of writing, there is a need to focus on pragmatic competence and grammatical accuracy, in which students learn to hedge, take a stance, and associate disagreement with respect. Finally, the paper highlights the necessity of developing intercultural competence, as it is essential to be able to address the various communication patterns to successfully interact in a foreign academic environment.

Conclusion

The paper has addressed the concept of cross-cultural politeness in asynchronous academic discussion boards among international graduate students, as well as the significance of language in managing relationships in the online learning environment. The results show that positive politeness strategies, such as agreement and appreciation, are most commonly used to enhance collaboration. In contrast, negative politeness strategies, such as hedging and indirectness, are most commonly used to alleviate face-threatening actions. The less common strategy was direct, necessitated by the need to be clear in certain interactions. The work makes a contribution to sociolinguistics by showing the impact of the cultural backgrounds on pragmatic decision-making in academic communication. It also adds to the study of digital discourse by illustrating how online platforms, with their asynchronous nature, can help make communication more thoughtful and rigorously constructed. These teachings underline the importance of politeness as a crucial component of effective intercultural communication. In practice, the results indicate that teachers should consider intercultural communication training in online learning and focus on practical skills in teaching academic writing. The study, however, is limited by its relatively small, context-specific

dataset. Future studies should extend this by using larger samples and by relating various forms of communication to gain deeper insight into politeness strategies across academic contexts.

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