Power and politeness in email communication in the workplace

A case study of a multinational company

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"Communication works for those who work at it."

-- John Powell --

<u>Abstract</u>

This thesis sets out to explore workplace communication of a multinational organization, through electronically transmitted messages (emails) involving employees in three power distance relationships, namely superiors to subordinates, subordinates to superiors and equals to equals. To carry out this study a corpus of 107 primary, work-related internal emails, written in English as a lingua franca by twelve participants, was gathered. Importantly, the participants belong to different nations, thus they have different linguistic backgrounds.

This study aimed to examine the language use in the informants' email and to shed more light on how people of various levels within a company, communicate in different ways. Therefore, intercultural communication is used as the principal analytical framework, so as to describe the communication between different employees, from various ethnicities and with various cultural backgrounds while performing a discursive and socio-pragmatic study using speech act and politeness theories. In this study, speech act theory, in an adapted version, is used for allocating the email messages gathered based on their communicative functions. Further, in order to investigate important pragmatic aspects of language use the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) concerning universal politeness strategies is employed.

The study further considered significant factors, which may influence the linguistic choices people make when communicating through email in the workplace, namely ethnicity, social distance and gender.

The findings revealed that hierarchy played the most significant role in the composition of email messages, amongst the three power distance relationships. Likewise, social distance and cultural background were influential factors, however, the study found that gender differences did not play a crucial role in the politeness level displayed in workplace email communication. Interestingly, the study provided evidence that workplace culture plays a critical role and can affect the language use in email communication amongst employees at all hierarchical levels.

Keywords: workplace email communication, politeness, power relations, cultural background, social distance, gender.

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List of abbreviations

CEO: Chief Operating Officer

CC: Close Colleague

CMC: Computer-mediated communication

DC: Distance Colleague

FTA: Face-threatening act

FW: Forwarded message

H: Hear

HR: Human Resources

RE: Reply message

S: Sender

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Communication is a simple although powerful word. Language is a means of communication and a medium to convey different meanings. A key characteristic of communication is that it always happens between two people, a speaker and a receiver. Communication guarantees an understanding between human beings as a means to achieving goals (Ünsar, 2014). It plays a decisive role in the interaction and harmony of individuals both in societal and working life (Ünsar, 2014). Likewise, communication has a fundamental role in collaboration between groups of people and in corporations (Ünsar, 2014). There are various types of communication, such as verbal (face-to-face, phone calls, video chat) non-verbal (body gestures/posture, eye contact, facial expressions, movement) and written communication (letter, email, leaflets, reports, memo).

Computer-mediated communication is a type of text-based communication that has gained remarkable momentum throughout the last decades, and has become an integral part of the development and continuation of interpersonal relationships among many groups of people, including employees. The way, in which we communicate in recent decades, has had an effect on all aspects of everyday life, including our working life. New communication technologies have been established in the workplace over the past few years such as instant messaging, electronic messages, videoconferencing, management information system, voice mail facsimile (fax), the Internet, as well as the World Wide Web, and have influenced communication in organizations (Miller, 2009). Via all these technological advances people from all around the world can now communicate effectively and exchange ideas within a split second. This type of communication is termed computer-mediated communication (and henceforth abbreviated to CMC).

CMC has emerged as a critical mode of communication and has modified the importance of time, space and face-to-face contact (Herring, 1996).

CMC "is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers" and it can be either synchronous CMC, which means that the transferred message can be read immediately (in real time) or a while later (delayed time) and this is what we call asynchronous CMC (Herring, 1996, p. 1).

Synchronous communication, as that among two individuals in a face-to-face conversation or a conversation on the phone has its equivalent with the CMC, in instant messaging or in chat rooms and similar platforms. This type of communication can be found in educational settings, at home and in the workplace. However, asynchronous CMC altogether, seems to hold the most important position, where there is, an adequate time-delay between the dispatch of a message and the time of it being read. The last form is manifested via online communication, in emails and in most types of bulletin boards and computer conferencing (Romiszowski and Mason, 2004). Email has been established as one of the most common form of CMC that takes place between people in various settings including home, education and organizations.

In recent times, technological advancements along with the Internet have promptly boosted the use of email as a regular social communication tool and have introduced it in many workplaces. All employees generally have access to this medium, but not without consequences, as it has greatly affected the social affairs among those involved (Markus, 1994). In the new modern era we live in, CMC comprises a basic underpinning (or software) that each and every corporation must be equipped with (Ean, 2010). Strictly speaking, it has totally transformed workplace communication and has altered the manner and style of human interaction at work.

Email is the form of CMC that this thesis aspires to explore. Communication stands for the exchange and sharing of information and email development provides the ground for a smooth and agile communication, aside convenience. Email transfers written messages at the touch of a button in a less intrusive way. The email medium has been extensively used both for governmental and personal communication within the academic and business world (Crystal, 2001). By the year of 1996, email has become the prevalent communication instrument in the professional world, and thus it is considered a milestone (Kinsley, 1996). Kinsley (1996) points out, that email is a wondrous combination of direct talk with the thoughtfulness of the written word.

It is said that Microsoft, is one overt illustration of a multi-national corporation, where in all probability, all of its communication falls out via the agency of email; hence the telephone never rings (Kinsley, 1996).

The majority of the world's email emanates from the business world. In particular, in 2012 the bulk of the sent and received emails for each day amounts to 89 billion and it is expected to increase dramatically and reach approximately over 143 billion by the end of 2016 (Radicati 2012).

A great number of studies (Herring 2000; Crystal 2001; Holmes and Stubbs 2003, Mills, 2003; Abdullah, 2003; Waldvogel, 1999; 2005; 2007; Kankaanranta, 2005; Bou-France 2006; 2011; 2013; Alafnan, 2014; Yeoh, 2014) has focused their attention on this nearly new medium of communication and has fostered the conclusion that various factors can affect differently workplace email communication.

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (2006) highlights the fact that language "as predominately social action and to its view its interactive enactment as the primary analytical focus" is of paramount importance for research concerned with politeness in the workplace (p. 20).

This thesis sets out to examine and appraise workplace email communication in a multinational company where the employees occupy different positions within the corporation and belong to different ethnic backgrounds. The research is concerned with looking at the specific functions of power relations alongside other factors such as social distance, cultural background and gender that can have an effect on language use at work. The present study initiates an analysis of workplace electronic conversations and espouses a discursive and socio-pragmatic framework in reviewing social and interactional factors, thus attempting to make a further contribution in the field.

The following central research question is addressed:

How does the relationship between different categories of people in a workplace affect the language use in email communication?

To answer this question, first and foremost, I look at the relative power difference among employees, so as to detect how power relations affect the language use in electronic communication. Email users may strive to construct a proper email in order to meet the receivers' standard.

The appropriateness in language use within a conversation is assumed to be possessed, chiefly by those people who occupy higher positions in an organization, therefore, may vary from individual to individual who have greater power. Fairclough (1996) indicates that appropriateness is ideologically lying in various sociocultural settings and the less powerful people need to abide by the standards of the supreme sociocultural class. Fetzer (2007) states that, "appropriateness is a relational concept anchored to co-participants, communicative contribution, gender and context" and it constitutes "the pillar of the social world" (p. 130).

Then, I inspect how the other factors such as the cultural background, social distance, and gender can affect the language use in email communication. As it is well-known, people cross-culturally employ different politeness strategies within a culture that are reflected in workplace communication. It is just to speculate that all cultures have some kind of norms that define what is considered more or less polite behavior (Meier, 1995). Importantly, both societies and individuals put different values on particular needs and they interpret differently what is polite or impolite. However, it is worth investigating whether human's communication patterns are affected by company's culture. Besides, the sociolinguistic variables of social distance and gender are also linked to the linguistic characteristics of the emails.

The research introduced here is spurred by a personal interest to explore and study the principles governing politeness in workplace email communication in an intercultural context.

The study is concerned with electronic emails from a particular multinational company which uses international English as a language of communication. Employees of different levels and ethnicities provided a corpus of all their work-related emails gathered in one-month. Then, the corpus of the emails possessed, was analysed on the basis of speech acts, politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson (1987) and the openings and closings in the workplace emails.

These features, quite naturally, are affected accordingly by aspects such as power relations, social distance, ethnic background and gender. To this end, specific functions of the email such as what is negotiated or requested are also put under the microscope.

1.2 Research variables

This study explores power relations among people communicating via the instrumentality of email in a multinational workplace. Power relations affect the expression of linguistic politeness of people involved in conjunction with other variables like culture, distance and gender.

1.2.1 Power

Power is the independent variable in this study. For this dimension, the most well-known term is power, although "social power and status" are also widely used (Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 7). Power relations take place between people who work at different hierarchical positions within a corporation (Vine, 2004). Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996) distinguish two types of status, viz. 'inherent status' and 'relative status'. The first type is associated with the power that derives from the position an individual occupies within a company that the entire corporate world acknowledges. The second feature of status results from the power that a person can put into use in interpersonal relations (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1996). As stated by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996) "relative status affords the individual, or group, less power and clout than inherent status, since it usually does not operate beyond corporate boundaries" (p. 637). Both these two kinds of status can exist side by side and can be "activated simultaneously, or be mutually exclusive, depending on contextual factors" (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1996, p. 637).

As stated in the Spencer-Oatey article, (1996) different authors give different interpretations of power. For instance, both Brown and Gilman (1972 [1960]) and Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) stress "control of another person's behaviour", while Cansler and Stiles (1981) concentrate on social class (as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 9). Leichty and Applegate (1991) put forward another perception of power, "the legitimate right to exert influence" (as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 9). Legitimate power "can itself have several bases or sources, and one of these can be social status or rank.

Thus social status or rank can endow a person with power of control, but need not necessarily do so, as it might not be acknowledged as relevant or applicable" (as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 12).

To sum up, considering the various terms used to describe 'power', a good many author have underscored some of the following components (as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 11):

1) Power of control (e.g. Brown and Gilman, 1972 [1960], Brown and Levinson, 1987 [1978])

2) Social status or rank (e.g. Cansler and Stiles, 1981)

3) Authority or the legitimate right to exert influence (e.g. Leichty and Applegate, 1991)

4) A general notion of equality-inequality (e.g. Holtgraves, 1986)

To conclude, the definition of legitimate power will be used invariably for the purpose of this study as the principal definition of power in the workplace. Additionally, the three power distance relationships that separate the sender and the receiver in the workplace communication come as follows in this study:

- o from an equal to an equal
- o from a subordinate to a superior
- o from superior to a subordinate

1.2.2 Politeness

Politeness is the dependent variable in the relationship in this study. Lakoff (1975) claimed that "politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction" (p. 64). Leech (2007) likewise, specifies politeness as "a constraint observed in human communicative behavior" that influence people to abstain from engaging in "communicative discord or offence" and retain "communicative concord" (p. 173). Leech (2007) distinguishes two types of politeness scale: the "semantic (or absolute) politeness scale" and the "pragmatic (or relative) politeness scale" (p. 174). The first kind of politeness postulates, according to Leech (2007) that "we can order utterances on a scale of politeness out of context" (p. 174).

Thereby implied that the more a request provides options to the hearers, the more polite it is considered. By the same token, *I am very sorry* is more polite than *Sorry*, owing to the fact that it emphasizes an expression of apology in a maximum way. This system is characterized "unidirectional" as it indicates levels of politeness by taking into account, the lexicogrammatical system as well as the semantic meaning of an utterance (Leech, 2007, p. 174). Pragmatic politeness scale on the other hand "is politeness relative to norms in a given society, group, or situation" (Leech, 2007, p. 174). This scale is context-sensitive, which means that it is based on the context in which it appears and is a two-way scale. As a result, a form regarded more courteous on the semantic politeness scale is considered less courteous with respect to the norms for the condition. For instance, the utterance *Could I possibly have the car?* if uttered by a daughter to her father, could be assumed as 'too polite' and would most likely be taken as ironical (Lecch, 2007, p. 174).

Watts (2003) insists on one thing that is unquestionable with reference to politeness behavior "it has to be acquired" (p. 9). He claims that no one was born with this asset or "with etiquettes and correct behavior" instead people need to acquire this virtue and be socialized into (Watts, 2003, p. 9). Politeness, in line with Watts (2003) occupies a dominant position in the study of language and it has been the subject of much controversy in linguistic pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and social theory.

What is more, Watts (2003) distinguishes among "polite" and "politic" behavior. The former is a behavior "beyond what is perceived to be appropriate to the ongoing social interaction, which says nothing about how members evaluate it" (p. 21). The latter is "that behavior, linguistic and nonlinguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction" (p. 21). It follows from the above that, the socially appropriate behavior is unmarked and in most cases passes unnoticed while the polite behavior is noticeable. Although Watts (2003) suggests that no linguistic structures can be intrinsically polite or impolite.

Holmes and Stubbs (2003) view *power* (institutional relationship) and *politeness* (concern for relational goals) as key elements that have an impact on the strategies people employ in interactions in the workplaces.

1.2.3 Culture

In consonance with Hofstede (1991), every individual bears inside themselves patterns of reasoning, contemplating, feeling and capability of functioning that were infused all through their life span. In most Western languages, 'culture' typically means 'civilization' or 'refinement of mind', as reported by Hofstede (1991, p. 5). Culture is a "collective phenomenon" since it is shared to a certain extent and it is not passed down but is learned (Hofstede, 1991, p. 5).

Spencer-Oatey (2000), explains culture as "a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior" (p. 4). This interpretation encloses four specific characteristics concerning cultures. In the first place, culture is fostered via a variety of norms and regulations that are either explicit or implicit. In the second place, culture is affiliated with groups in society; however two people within a social group do not share precisely the same cultural values. By the same token, culture has an influence on human's behavior as well as on the understandings of behavior. Ultimately, culture can be learned and is created via interplay and reciprocal relationship with other people (Spencer-Oatey, 2000).

1.2.4 Distance

Distance or social distance is a social variable that is extensively used in linguistics that has an impact on the production and understanding of language (Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 1). Apart from the terms 'distance or social distance' there are some additional terms that are used equally such as "solidarity, closeness, familiarity, relational intimacy" (Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 2). In accordance with Brown and Levinson (1987), social distance is a symmetric dimension that measures agreements and difference among people, a sender and an addressee in our case, which is basically, hinges on stable social characteristics. In general, social distance is related to the social connections between participants and it is a reflection of social intimacy (Borwn and Levinson, 1987). Distance or closeness and familiarity could be interpreted as the "frequency of contact, length of acquaintance, amount of self-disclosure (how much people reveal to another person about themselves), and amount and type of affect (Spencer-Oatey, 1996, p. 5).

Several authors, according to Spencer-Oatey (1996, p. 7) have diversely explained distance as encompassing some of the subsequent aspects:

1) Social similarity or difference (e.g. Brown and Gilman, 1972 [1960])

2) Frequency of contact (e.g. Slugoski and Tumbull, 1988)

3) Length of acquaintance (e.g. Slugoski and Turnbull, 1988)

4) Familiarity/closeness or how well people know each other (e.g. Holmes, 1990)

5) Sense of like-mindedness (e.g. Brown and Gilman, 1972 [1960])

6) Positive or negative affect (e.g. Baxter, 1984)

In conclusion, for the present study the aspects that will be considered as having an effect on employee's interaction with other people at work and thus will be investigated are frequency of communication and the degree of closeness or familiarity.

1.2.5 Gender

Gender is the last social factor which I will take into account. It has been proved to be a crucial factor, responsible for the variation in communication (Holmes, 1995). Gender identity is established within a society and it is ever changing. Everybody can use a number of speech acts, which can be generally tabulated as "female" or "male" (Holmes, 1995).

1.3 Organization of the thesis

This study is organized in five chapters and takes the following order. The first chapter **(1)** of the study introduces the topic, indicates the research variables and the way they have been made part of the study and provides a framework of the research being conducted. The second chapter **(2)** presents a review of related literature and deals with topics such as the computer-mediated communication, politeness theory, speech act theory, and intercultural communication. Then, the research aims, the research questions and operationalization and the hypotheses are presented and described. In chapter three **(3)**, the methodology section, the venue, the participants, the materials, the data collection and the analysis of the study are outlined in detail. In chapter four **(4)**, the results and findings of the study are presented via tables and graphs. In chapter five **(5)**, I summarize the most salient findings and discuss them in respect to the original research defined in chapter 2. In addition, I provide answers to the research questions and look at the outcomes of the hypotheses, to see whether they were confirmed or not. Ultimately, chapter five presents the conclusions along with some limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE

2.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that is of great importance for this research study. This chapter introduces relevant previous research studies and presents the theoretical frameworks that are used to fathom the subsequent examination. Finally, the research aims, the research questions, and the hypotheses are outlined.

2.2 Literature review

2.2.1 Previous Research

Communication researchers, social phycologists, people working in the business and organizational areas, were the first to embark on research on various forms of CMC and on email. In recent times, there is an interest from the side of linguists to explore this new means which might be the principal social communications channel "approaching if not overshadowing voice" (Negroponte, 1995, p. 191).

Latest research (Gimenez, 2000; Abdullah, 2003; Waldvogel, 2005; 2007; Kankaanranta, 2005; Kong 2006; Jensen, 2009; Alafnan, 2014; Yeoh, 2014) has shown that email has developed as one of the chief communication mediums and has an effect on workplace email communication.

The language of emails has been examined by many researchers over the past two decades (Sherblom, 1988; Rice 1997; Gains 1999; Gimenez 2000; Waldvogel 1999; 2005; 2007; Kankaanranta 2005; Yeoh, 2014). Rice (1997) analysed 200 emails of four people who occupied midlevel positions in four American companies and found a mixture of formal and informal discourse characteristics. He stated that the communication was compact and short, which suggests an orientation towards the conventionalized forms of rigid business emails. Along the same lines, Gains (1999) and Gimenez (2000) identified in their analysis of business emails many formal and informal features and syntactic forms.

With regards to the communicative functions, Sherblom's (1988) study of 157 electronic mails received from a middle level manager in a computer services department for several months revealed that the most popular function of communication was that of providing information. In terms of signature, the existence or not in the email showed the direction email was transmitted through the organizational chart, in other words, it varied remarkably with the direction of the communication. Lastly, it was found that signatures were not widely used by superiors, in comparison with the subordinates and others.

In the same vein, Waldvogel's (1999) study of 50 emails found a blend of formal and informal writing patterns and stylistic features. She reported that based on the awareness of the relationship among the sender and the receiver, emails provide opportunities for many speech genre to be used (Waldvogel, 1999). Later on, in 2005 Waldvogel investigated 515 emails from two different New Zealand workplaces, an educational organization, and a manufacturing plant. The study discovered that there was minor variation amongst the two organizations in the communicative actions for which email is used. Providing and seeking of information were the two main communicative functions in both workplaces, followed by making of requests. By the same token, it was found that the kind of organization had an influence on the manner in which emails were written. The messages from the manufacturing plant exhibited more aspects of solidarity, in comparison with those from the educational organization. Those email messages were found lengthy, contained more greetings and direct language structure. Moreover, a discrepancy between the two genders was identified between the two workplaces in terms of style. In the educational organization, women, in general, wrote longer emails and used affective aspects more than males. However, in the manufactory plant the reverse was applied (Waldvogel, 2005).

Waldvogel (2007) further analysed the 515 emails messages between the two New Zealand workplaces, in terms of greetings and closings. She reported that in the educational organization, reorganization in the company brought about low confidence to the workers and uncertainties within management that resulted in an indirect distant communication between staff. In light of this, the greetings and closings were not used much.

On the contrary, in the manufacturing plant the abundant use of greetings and closings mirrored the open and close relations between the employees and management and a direct, warm, genial workplace environment. The findings put forward that workplace culture was the principal feature accounted for the density of greetings and closings. Ultimately, the study suggested that a very important factor that needs to be taken into account is the cultural background when exploring linguistic patterns that people make, except for the sociolinguistic variables, a factor that the present study takes under consideration (Waldvogel, 2007).

Kankaanranta's (2005) study concentrated on internal email communication in English lingua franca, in a multinational corporation. Following the analysis of 282 messages composed by the Finnish and Swedish staff at all hierarchical levels, it was found that emails can be classified in three genres based on the distinct conditions appearing in a business context. The "Dialogue" genre, which is the task of exchanging information, shows more informal characteristics than "Postman", which is the genre for transmitting information and comments that shows more "outdate written phraseology" of business messages (Kankaanranta, 2005, pp. 6-7). In terms of identification of communicative moves, Kankaanranta (2005) indicated that two out of the nine moves that were identified in her corpus, were found in all three genres of the email messages and these were providing information and requesting for action, verbal response and conditional. With respect to salutations, she found that the frequent use accounted for the close relationships and the friendly ambiance in the workplace. Besides, she noted that a high rate of the emails (80% of the messages) initiated with a greeting and first name, underlying that the use of greetings was more frequent among non-native speakers. In all three genres, signatures and closing remarks were prevalent despite the diversity in textualisation moves.

Abdullah's (2003) research has shown that workplace emails encompass loads of emotion and negotiable work. Conducting a case study about the Malaysian relational communication in organizational email, she found that workplace status accounted for the prevalence of the communicative functions of the email messages. In line with her study, superiors inclined in writing emails requesting for action compared to subordinates who tended to write messages in order to provide information. Requests for actions were the largest in number in her dataset.

Further, she claimed that it was more likely for subordinates to write an email for requesting information compared with superordinates. By the same token, she indicated that approximately all females (97%) and the majority of males (87%) who dispatched email messages upwards in the hierarchical pyramid used signatures or leave-takings. Interestingly, nearly all who sent messages downwards the hierarchy also used some kind of sign-offs (Abdullah, 2003). These findings suggest either a cooperative atmosphere, which dominates in that workplace or the more democratic attitude of New Zealand to social relations in the workplace (Abdullah, 2003). Waldvogel (2007) highlighted Abdullah's research that we should consider carefully in that case, the impact of status and social distance on the use of signals of politeness, like in greetings and closings in emails, because the usage differs amongst cultures and organizations as well.

The works of Bou-Franch (2006, 2011, and 2013) were considered very important within the study of CMC. Initially, Bou-Franch (2006), examined a collection of 30 emails sent by Spanish university students to her email, as a university lecturer. She investigated the relational types of deference and solidarity in the opening and closing of emails and in requests. Bou-Franch (2006) eventually found that the social and interpersonal levels of communication were high despite the fact that much has been mentioned about the deficiency of politeness in electronic messages. Later on, motivated by her previous research, conducted a larger study in order to investigate the case in which the institutional power of individuals involved in the research and email position throughout interplay, have an effect on the openings and closings discourse practices (Bou-Franch, 2011). She examined short email conversation in Peninsular Spanish by focusing on the openings and closings of emails. The results indicated that discursive functions apart from technological restrictions were based also on social and interactional ones, calling attention to "contextual variability" (Bou-Franch, 2011, p. 1772). Ultimately, Bou-Franch (2013) examined the stylistic movement towards informality and the politeness orientations of speakers of various cultures. By analyzing a corpus of 140 emails in Spanish, sent by undergraduate students to their university lecturers, the results uncovered the intricate way in which formality and informality, directness or indirectness blend to meet pragmatic needs.

Further, it brought to the fore, that sender's emails were qualified by high rates of formality and a conventional indirectness as well (Bou-Franch 2013).

Last but not least, one of the most recent studies of workplace email communication is Yeoh's (2014) research in three companies and two different countries, Malaysia, and New Zealand. She analysed a corpus comprised of 1745 internal emails and found that organizational culture affects individual's linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. With reference to the communicative functions, the research showed that all three workplaces used the email more or less for the same function but with different proportions. In the two New Zealand companies, providing information was the most common function followed by request for action. On the contrary, in the Malaysian workplace request for action was the most frequent use when participants were communicating. Over and above, the study demonstrates how superiors and subordinates use power over the use of different linguistic strategies and concludes that operating the work is just more significant than maintaining good relationships. Besides, it was found that in New Zealand workplaces equality among employees is valued more in comparison with Malaysian workplace, where inequality is perceived as usual. In light of greetings and closings, analysis revealed that the extensive usage of informal salutations and sign-offs in the New Zealand organizations demonstrated that informants were willing to establish rapport and build up strong relationships. All the same, the Malaysian company used largely formal greetings and closings in their communication, which suggested that typical relationships govern the business email correspondence and the most important thing was to get the job done.

2.2.2 Power imbalance and Politeness in Email Communication Research

Earliest studies (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986) on email characteristics summarize that email messages sent from subordinates have no significant difference from those of superordinates. This information bolsters the opinion of power neutralization in email use in corporations. As a result of the absence of social context cues in email interaction, email "is seen to erode the influence of authority in communication processes" (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986, as cited in Panteli, 2002, p. 77). Over and above, there are studies (Dubrovsky et.al., 1991; Taha and Caldwell, 1993; Davidson, 1995; Pliskin and Romm, 1997 as cited in Panteli, 2002) which report that ranking disparities are markedly diminished during using email messages.

It was found that email can generate illusions of both physical and emotional proximity and ipso facto to free employees of lower levels from restriction parallel to status (Pliskin and Romm, 1997). Hence, the employees belonging to lower layers will have probably equal opportunities to directors, to offer their ideas in the process of decision making via electronic mail (Pliskin and Romm, 1997).

Politeness in email communication has been researched to a certain extent when it comes to the business context. The research of Rogers and Lee-Wong (2003) investigated politeness in email communication between subordinates communicating with superiors in the workplace. Two samples were taken into consideration and the results indicated "that conventional politeness dimensions are challenged when situated in subordinate reporting". Moreover, analysis concluded that "subordinates are still expected to demonstrate politeness and cooperation" to their superiors (Rogers and Lee-Wong, 2003, p. 406). Overall, subordinates negotiate in interactions with the dynamic members and show an acceptable level of understanding and adherence to their superordinates (Rogers and Lee-Wong, 2003).

Kong (2006) showed an interest in the use of politeness in email messages between superiors and members. Virtually, he examined the "frequency, semantic type and sequencing" of indoor messages of a company with "directive elements" (p. 77). It was found that subordinates used more politeness tactics in emailing superiors and the other way around, compared to peer-to-peer communication.

Studies examined politeness in email workplace messages (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996, Chang and Hsu 1998; Gains, 1999; Nickerson, 1999; Kankaanranta, 2001; Alatalo 2002, Alafnan, 2014) indicate that the making of requests is the core communicative function of email altogether.

Nickerson (1999) carried out a survey-based investigation and examined 200 messages written by employees in a Dutch-English company. She found that the greater proportion of messages copied to department and senior managers contained the exchange of information communicative function and were written in English irrespective of whether the receivers were native English speakers or not (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken, 2013). Kankaanranta (2001) and Alatalo (2002) focused on their studies, in research in requesting in internal business emails (as cited in Kankaanranta, 2005).

The former study indicated that requests occurred mainly in imperative and interrogative speech acts, whereas the latter study revealed that were predominately indirect in nature (Alafnan, 2014).

Further, Vinagre (2008) concentrated his research on linguistic politeness. In particular, she examined linguistic features of politeness strategies used by students in email exchanges between a small in number group of students and their partners. Vinagre's (2008) findings shown that the partners in these email exchanges didn't use negative politeness as it might have been expected, bearing in mind that the social distance among the participants, in that case, was high. By contrast, the emails contained more positive politeness strategies. Vingare (2008) highlighted that positive strategies were used to specify "solidarity, cohesion and are fostering closeness" whereas negative strategies used to indicate "high social distance, formality and impersonality" (p. 1022).

Alafnan (2014) studied politeness in business email communication in a Malaysian educational organization. More precisely he focused on the usage of politeness strategies in respect to ethnicity, power relations, and social distance. The analysis disclosed that Malaysian staff chiefly employed indirect negative and positive politeness strategies when communicating, which results in rapport, creation of close ties with the receiver of the message and mutual cooperation. What is more, the study divulged that social distance had a greater effect in comparison with power disparity, drawing from the fact that Malaysians were more courteous with distant workmates than were to close workmates. In terms of ethnicity, the study revealed that nationally diverse participants employed different politeness strategies. Eventually, in relation to the communicative functions it was found that imperative moves (171 occurrences) were preferred by the employees, and that interrogative politeness strategy was especially conventional in the emails of subordinates reporting to superiors.

Investigators underscored that politeness strategies are perceived differently by the various cultures (Sifianou, 1999; Yin, 2009; Ogiermann, 2009; Sukamto, 2012; Alafnan, 2012). The majority of linguistic norms varies from culture to culture and utilized differently from society to society (Sifianou, 1999).

For instance, cultures like Chinese value peace and harmony in interpersonal relationships thus, operate indirectly using negative politeness. French follow the same patterns, to wit they use predominantly negative politeness strategies in discourse organization. In a similar vein, English speakers prefer elaborated conventionalized constructions and value formality and indirectness, main characteristics of negative politeness. By contrast, Greeks identified with familiarity, friendliness and directness in their speech and are more inclined towards positive strategies (Sifianou, 1999). Ogiermann (2009) conducted a study on polite requests and indirectness in four languages: English, German, Russian and Polish and found that politeness is indeed culture-specific. The study revealed that Polish and Russian used more imperative structures than English and German. Polish may use fewer polite markers, nevertheless, exhibit a preference in formulaic expressions (Ogiermann, 2009). Another research which confirms the same finding is Wierzbicka's (2003). She argued that Polish speakers use bare imperative on a much greater scale than English, who prefer interrogative speech acts besides questions, and imperatives only for commands, fact that reflects their cultural attitude (Wierzbicka, 2003). In Indonesia, people value kinship terms of address rather than honorific epithets and prefer indirect request forms and not at all direct, which is a characteristic of negative politeness (Sukamto, 2012). Van Mulken (1996) who examined requests in the Dutch and French speech concluded that both cultures use predominately conventional indirect requests. Besides, she revealed that French people apologize more than Dutch and prefer conditional mode while Dutch use more polite markers, like *'please'* at the end of their utterance and downtoners such as diminutives (Van Mulken, 1996).

2.2.3 Gender and Politeness Research

In the literature, a controversy exists as to whether there are real differences between the conversational styles of men and women and if the variation in communication is sufficiently large to attach importance to the issue. In addition, the academic literature on gender stereotypes discloses, that people view men "to be more agentic than women and women to be more communal than men". In other words, women have a feeling of group solidarity, are more organized and less direct while men have more agency and self-confidence in communication (Carli, as cited in Barrett and Davidson, 2006, p. 69).

In accordance with relevant research, men more than women exhibit high figures of superiority, this is tied up with power or status (Barrett and Davidson, 2006). Consistent with Lakoff (1990), females have an inclination towards using more passionate and dramatic forms than their counterparts, more precisely they use more adjectives, are more indirect and polite and, in general, make fewer grammatical errors than male's, whose language is more direct, concise and powerful. Graddy (2004) cites sundry differences in the language of female and male. Interestingly, Graddy (2004) indicates that differences between the two genders might probably impact or modify the social dynamics in a group. Besides, Herring (1993; 2000) reports that, men incline to be "more adversarial, self-promoting, contentious, and assertive" in their conversations, while females in computer-mediated conversations have a tendency to be qualifying, apologetic, supportive, and polite" (as cited in Graddy, 2004, p. 4).

Herring (2003) goes on to suggest that "women are more likely to thank, appreciate and apologize, and to be upset by violations of politeness; predominantly female groups may have more, and more strictly enforced, posting rules designed to ensure the maintenance of a civil environment" (Herring, 2003, p. 207). On the other hand, regarding males she holds the opinion that men appear to be not so much concerned with politeness. Males can infringe on "online rules of conduct, or even enjoy flaming" (Herring, 2003, pp. 207-208).

Waldvogel (2007) in her study of the two New Zealand workplaces revealed in relation to the gender that differences in openings and closings were conspicuous. However, the patterns identified between the two organizations (manufacturing plant an educational organization) were extremely divergent. At the educational organization where females were the dominant gender the use of greeting was higher in proportion. By contrast, in the plant, which was male-dominated the reverse was true. It was suggested by the author that variation in the patterns of openings and sign-offs has to do with organizational culture.

Alafnan (2014) stressed in his study that future research is of paramount importance in relation to the gender. He highlighted that gender differences should be viewed more seriously and examined in terms of politeness in workplace emails. This thesis takes into account the gender factor as well.

2.3 Theoretical framework

2.3.1 Computer-mediated communication

Electronic messaging has come into view as a mode of communicating either individually with a specific person or else with a number of people concurrently, as stated previously. This incredibly vast area of information exchange "takes place among human beings via the instrumentality of computers" or even phones (i.e. smart phones) with the advent of mobile technology, and it is well-known as computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Herring, 1996, p. 1). The messages can be read immediately and then we are talking about synchronous CMC or at a later point in time, and this type is what we call asynchronous CMC (Herring, 1996). Both types carry their own special features and benefits as well. This thesis centers on email, which belongs to the asynchronous online type and provides users enough time when writing messages, thus they may feel less constrained. Likewise, writers can dispatch their message to many recipients at the same time which saves time (Skogs, 2015).

Previous research into CMC noticed isolation in the text electronic interplay, including absence of intonation cues, identity or attitude of interlocutors and ultimately culminated in that, this kind of communication was profoundly improper for development and maintenance of personal relationships (Herring, 1996). Nevertheless, it remained appropriate for channeling information. Although, according to Bou-Franch (2006) the condition changed by the late 90s as much of the theorizing, regarding the nature of the CMC was just speculations that seemed to be unfounded.

On the other hand, other studies (Sproull & Kiesler, 1992; Citera, 1998; Bishop & Levine 1999) have put forward the profits of CMC. Citera (1998) found that people who had a doubt or hesitation to express their opinion vis-à-vis can be more inclined and eager now with this medium. She also stressed that electronic members have greater and more novel ideas than face-to-face groups (Citera, 1998).

Bishop and Levine (1999) who focused on the workplace environment concluded that colleagues from various positions, but with the same enthusiasm and passion can now communicate via email more easily.

In particular, they reported that "(e)mployees as well as managers benefited from these new technologies" overall (Bishop and Levine, 1999, p. 230). As a result, this may reinforce their commitment to the organization and thus be of benefit.

2.3.2 CMC: from a social and physiological point of view

As early as 1980s the research (Kiesler et al., 1987) around the social and physiological characteristics of CMC was ongoing. CMC differs from other technologies both culturally and technically (Kiesler et al., 1984). Culturally, it was regarded as immature. Although two decades ago, professionals had used email communication and established some culture norms, which in turn affected the users of electronic email, no tendencies for etiquettes observed of how it must be used (Kiesler et al., 1984). Technically, on the other hand, Kiesler et al., (1984) remarked that it has the rapidity and simultaneity needed as well as the efficiency but lacked "the aural or visual feedback of telephoning and face-to-face communication" (p. 1125). Besides, it had "the adaptability of the written text" (Kiesler et al., 1984, p. 1125). The messages could be sent effortlessly to a group of people of any size and had the potential to be programmed for automatic copying (Kiesler et al., 1984).

The cultural conventions that accounted for direct social interaction are oftentimes not present and this has as a ramification serious repercussion on human's behavior. Hints regarding the social status of interlocutors are frequently absent, thus changing traditional patterns of dominance. This fact can have advantageous results, and for that reason it can be viewed as a positive effect of that medium (Kiesler et al., 1987).

Later on the researcher, Sproull, and Kiesler (1992) proposed a two-level framework concerning technology changes in corporations. Particularly, they said that communication technology has an effect in two levels; the first is "the anticipated technical effects" that email provides, for instance, the likelihood for upgraded modes of communication, benefits of efficiency or productivity profits that give ground for an investment in technology (p. 99). The 'second-level effects' allow people to get involved with new things that previously were impossible as the technology was obsolete. The new technology initiates people to switch to different things to come into contact with various people. Sproull and Kiesler (1992) remarked that "because

of task changes using the technology, people depend on one another differently; social roles, which codify patterns of attention and social interaction, can change" (p. 99).

A computer communication can increased participation and enhance new connections among workers in a networked organization. It is highly likely for "peripheral employees - people working on shift, in branch offices, and at the bottom of the hierarchy" to take advantage and set up connections and join groups (Sproull and Kiesler 1992, p. 116). In addition, Sproull and Kiesler (1992) pinpoint that "because of reduced social context cues, peripheral people should feel somewhat uninhibited about "meeting" new people electronically" (p. 116). In other words, by developing organizational cooperation computer communication can curtail the seclusion of socially peripheral employees (Sproull and Kiesler, 1992).

2.3.4 Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) Politeness Theory is the most eminent theory on linguistic politeness. According to Leech (2007), "has remained the most seminal and influential starting point for studying cross-cultural and interlinguistic politeness" (p. 1). The theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) builds on three notions: face, face threatening acts (henceforth FTAs) and politeness strategies. To begin with, everyone has a 'face', "the public self-image" that want to preserve (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 61). The concept of 'face' wants can be either 'positive' or 'negative'. The positive face is reflected in a need to be liked and appreciated by others or to quote them is "the positive consistent self-image or "personality" (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 61). In general, positive politeness moves are delineated as expressions of informality and familiarity (Meier, 1995). On the other hand, the negative face is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 61), in essence, the desire not to be obscured and to preserve one's own freedom.

In keeping with their theory, speakers (in CMC, 'senders') desire to preserve their social face in communication as well as basic wants. They view politeness actually as a perplexing system for alleviating FTAs. Occasionally, participants are forced to use FTAs, so as to get what they need. Any utterance can be understood as

potential face threat, be it suggestions, requests or advice considering that possibly inhibit the recipient's freedom of response (Holmes, 1995).

Brown and Levinson's model further explains five possibilities to express a FTA as shown in the Figure 1 below. The "estimation of risk of face loss" signifies the risk that the speaker or sender in our case will undertake, while making a request and the strategy is increasing in size as we move in a lower position in the figure.

Circumstances determining
choice of strategy:

Lesser

Estimation of risk of face loss

1. without redressive action, baldly

on record

Do the FTA

with redressive action

2. positive politeness

3. negative politeness

4. off record

5. Don't do the FTA

Greater
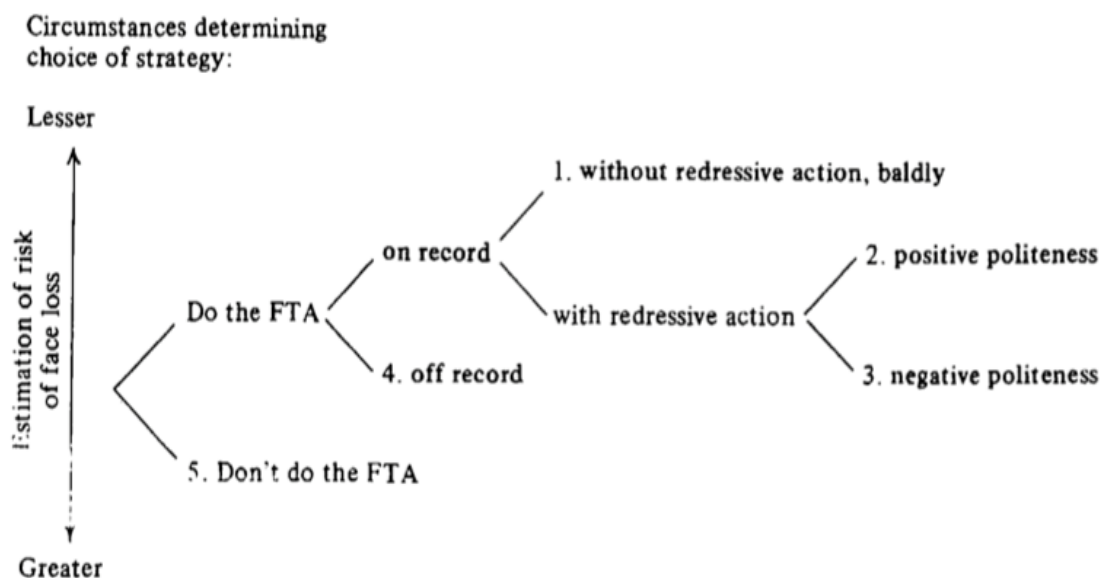
Figure 1 Flowchart of politeness strategies for doing FTAs (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p. 74)

In the first place, the speakers or in our case the senders have to make the decision if they are going to do the FTA. Subsequently, they select to do the FTA then, they might choose to do it 'on record', which means to carry out the act baldly, and without any redressive action (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 69). This speech act is done in the most definite way, without attention to the social aspect and realized oftentimes by imperatives. Brown and Levinson (1987) postulate that, that sort of strategy is typically employed in cases of emergency or propositions that need trivial sacrifices for the sake of the receiver. Furthermore, someone may also decide to perform the act employing positive redressive action, in other words 'give face' to the hearer by exhibiting solidarity with them. The individual seeks to lessen the treat to the receiver's face, thus desires not to threaten the receiver's face. Thirdly, the sender can employ negative redressive action. This strategy takes under consideration the hearer's or in our case receiver's desire not to be imposed upon. It is the most elaborated and conventionalized form of strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Indirectness is mainly associated with negative politeness strategies and indirect requests. Lastly, we have the 'off-record' FTAs, it is used when the speaker/sender acknowledges the risk of FTA to be too serious and chooses to say or do nothing, in order to prevent face loss.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that there are three social determinants the people evaluate when choosing the politeness strategies so as to hinder the threat to face. The three parameters are Power (P), Distance (D) and Rating of imposition (R). The former two are examined in this study. The combination of these three values will indicate the importance of the FTAs, which in succession have an impact on the strategy which is employed by the speaker/sender (cf. Figure 2). In light of a FTA request, in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, the speaker/sender has as previously mentioned four odds. We can glean from these that the more commanding the requests are, the more tactics the speaker/sender will employ, with the purpose of mitigating the face threat.
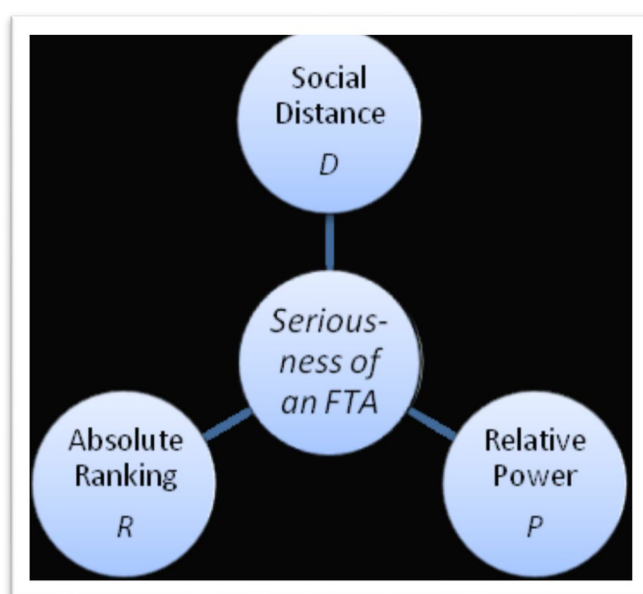
Figure 2 Factors in estimated risk of face loss (Brown and Levinson, 1987)

Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness is the only that attempts to explain how people generate politeness. Thus, in my study, I will consider seriously their model and the various manifestations they offer from a pragmatic point of view,

in terms of categorizing the various moves found within the emails into the two sets of politeness strategies (positives and negatives).

2.3.4 Criticisms of Brown and Levinson's model

The model of politeness of Brown and Levinson (1987) has been a valuable work; although, it has been criticized a lot in many studies, because of inconsistencies in its usage (Wierzbisca, 1985; Blum-Kukla and House, 1989; Sifianou, 1992, Meyer, 2001; Eelen (2001); Watts, 2003; Bargiela-Chiappini (2003); Leech, 2007; Terkourafi, 2008; 2011). Watts (2003) insists that Brown and Levinson's model "has dominated all other attempts to theorize about linguistic politeness" (p. 10). He holds the opinion that the strategies Brown and Levinson have set up are rather a facework and not politeness strategies. Furthermore, he claims that these strategies are not invariably consistent with politeness (Watts, 2003). Besides, Watts (2003) states that Brown and Levinson's model do not show consideration of what is considered to be polite behavior, as people in a particular conversation "are polite (or not, as the case may be), that they assess their own behavior and the behavior of others as (im) polite, and that (im) politeness does not reside in a language or in the individual structures of a language" (p. 98). Further to this, he claims that the notions of politeness and face need further investigation, something that Eelen (2001) underlines as well.

Leech (2007) proposed that Brown and Levinson's model (1987) has been criticized tremendously, due to its attempt to provide a definite and comprehensive model of linguistic politeness. He argues that their model has a Western prejudice, and consequently cannot assert to represent universality cross-culturally.

Other research (Blum-Kulka 1989; Blum-Kukla & House, 1989) has reveal that the relative importance of (P) power, (D) social distance and (R) rating of imposition can vary cross-culturally and so the variation in the options of the requests, either direct or indirect, are culture-specific. Cultures can differ in their linguistic choices and in preferences for positive or negative politeness strategies (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989).

In the same vein, studies have shown (Meyer, 2001; Watts, 2003) that negative politeness is closely intertwined with conventionalization for performing FTAs in most Western countries. Thus, the strategies to be employed rely heavily on

what it is perceived suitable and right for the speaker in any case, and it is culturally-determined.

2.3.5 Speech Act Theory and Politeness

The speech act theory has also referred to the issue of politeness and is considered the most crucial in the area of pragmatics, proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979). Linguistic communication for them was not merely a way of transmitting information, but a tool for achieving goals (Sifianou, 1999). Speech acts, at its simplest definition, is acts that speakers realized by speaking, so to say with words. The five categories of speech acts that Searle (1979) suggested after reorganizing Austin's list are the following as cited in Sifianou (1999, p. 95):

- 'Assertives': whose function is to describe states or events in the world (asserting, boasting and claiming)
- 'Directives': whose function is to direct the addressee to perform or not an act (ordering or requesting)
- 'Commisives': whose function is to commit the speaker to a future course of action (promising and threatening)
- 'Expressives': whose function is to express the speaker's attitudes and feelings about something (thanking, pardoning, congratulating)
- 'Declarations': whose function is to change the status of the person or object referred to by performing the act successfully (christening and sentencing).

Leech (1983) notes that "as far as Searle's categories go, negative politeness belongs pre-eminently to the *directive* class, while positive politeness is found pre-eminently in the *commissive* and *expressive* classes" including that assertives, with reference to politeness, are mainly "neutral" and declarations "being institutional rather than personal action", cannot entail politeness at all (as cited in Sifianou, 1999, p. 95).

Nevertheless, the particular circumstances and the people involved in these speech acts regulate the type and degree of politeness that is touching on social and cultural principles. Several social factors, age, gender, social status, intimacy, the spatiotemporal setting to mention but a few, decide on the kind of politeness tactics that will be used in order to perform the speech acts (Sifianou, 1999, p. 96). The

significance of every of the aforementioned factors rely upon all the others, and collectively they represent any social awareness every member of a culture has (Sifianou, 1999). Sifianou (1999) highlighted that the fact that cultures differ in relation to the significance they accredit clarifies thoroughly why people employ different politeness strategies cross-culturally. Along the same line, Wierzbicka (1994) argued that speech acts can vary markedly across cultures and languages, in view of the diverse cultural values.

The investigations of speech acts guide the analysis to a pragmatic discussion. Email messages are a communicative medium, which people make use of and, therefore they can exhibit speech acts. In the present study, the various emails are coded in terms of the speech act functions made by Waldvogel (2005) adopted from Searle's taxonomy of speech acts (1979) with some adjustment.

2.3.6 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication is associated with communication among people from different countries and cultural background. As reported by Spencer-Oatey (2006) intercultural communication "focuses on the role played by cultural–level factors and explores their influence on the communication process" (p. 2537). The study of intercultural communication aims, to improve the communication by examining and contrasting the speech acts and interactions of various people across cultures (Spencer-Oatey 2006).

Scollon and Scollon (1995) underscored that intercultural communication takes place among people and not between cultures, therefore, "all communication is interpersonal communication" (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 125).

Basically, cross-cultural communication studies provide us with awareness and understanding for the purpose of communication, from multicultural angles and simultaneously, guide us to greatly expand our intelligence and perception, bearing on the reason and the way people communicate in various ways.

In this study, intercultural communication is the principal analytical framework to outline the communication amongst various people, with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

2.4 Research aim

The aim of this study is to research email workplace communication that takes place within a multinational company, which uses English as a lingua franca, among different categories of people. This study concentrates on real internal email messages with the purpose of examining the language use in the informant's emails using speech act and the politeness theory. The study further considers significant factors, which may influence the linguistic choices people make when communicating via email in the workplace, namely social distance, gender, and ethnicity. The present study initiates an analysis of workplace electronic conversations and espouses a discursive and socio-pragmatic framework, thus attempting to make a further contribution in the field. This research is stimulated by a personal inducement to examine and appraise the principles presiding over power and politeness in workplace email communication in intercultural settings.

2.5 Research questions and operationalization

In consideration of the research aims, this study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

Central research question:

1. How does the relationship between different categories of people in a workplace affect the language use in email communication?

Sub-questions:

2. What are the main communicative goals that emails serve?
3. What kinds of politeness strategies do culturally diverse employees employ?
4. What is the effect of gender on the usage of politeness strategies in the workplace email communication?

To answer these questions, I will focus on a corpus of electronic emails from a multinational company which uses international English as a language of communication.

2.6 Hypotheses

On the basis of the favorable findings in the field of workplace email communication, this study examines the validity of the following six hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 puts forward that messages written by subordinates to superordinates will be more polite than the other way around, based on the principles of social hierarchy. Therefore, I expect that communication among peer will be neutral.

Hypothesis 2 postulates that the prevalent communicative function for subordinates will be 'seeking information', for superior 'directives' and for equals 'providing information'.

Hypothesis 3 posits that the degree of intimacy and reciprocity between the workers will play a significant role in the kind and amount of politeness used.

Hypothesis 4 speculates that as politeness strategies are culture-specific, thus every participant, who represents a particular culture, will employ either negative or positive strategies in their email communication based on what is dictated by their culture.

Hypothesis 5 assumes that females driven by their very nature as more sensitive and delicate will have an inclination towards using more positive politeness strategies in their emails than their male counterparts.

Hypothesis 6 speculates that subordinates will use more formal greetings and closings in emails addressed to superiors, than the other way around. Accordingly, I suppose that salutations and leave-takings among equals will be informal.

2.7 Statement of value

This study will contribute to the discussion on the research in workplace email communication in intercultural settings and will attempt to take a step further in this area.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Venue

The venue where this study took place was a multinational company in Amsterdam which produces a wide range of everyday products. From now onwards, this company will be labeled 'company A' for privacy reasons. Company A provides employment for about 1000 employees. Overall the number of people directly employed by this company has grown nearly twofold over the past ten years. The reason for approaching this workplace was fourfold as it was expected that all these employees are highly qualified and well trained in their workplace. Secondly, it was envisaged that the staff is technically proficient in the English language, which is the language of daily communication and maintain a sense of professionalism and integrity in their email exchanges. Thirdly, it was assumed that they have a rich cultural and linguistic background, as it is a multinational firm, and the workers come from various national backgrounds. Fourthly, the company culture which postulates openness and information exchange on a regular basis facilitates the data gathering procedure and enables me to get access to all those emails.

The corporation persistently seeks to retain an open and effective work culture. It spurs on pliability and innovation versus stable hierarchies and processes. Moreover, it looks for openness in personal communication, whenever possible. The company's utmost goal is to authorize individuals, groups and enterprises to make decisions on their own and drive their own success. Company A owns a leadership model which reflects the company's mindset. Employees should be committed to producing breakthrough results, based on autonomy and authorization, moreover, they should listen with understanding and appreciate diverse opinions. They should be accountable and act rapidly with versatility and purposefulness. Eventually, they should cooperate and unite with teams, and give valuable and constructive feedback. This description of the company's culture is based on the information found on the website of that organization.

3.1.2 Participants

Twelve employees (aged 26-44) from different national backgrounds, various positions and hierarchy levels within the company participated in the study. The participants' levels are classified into five categories. Figure 1 shows a hierarchical representation.
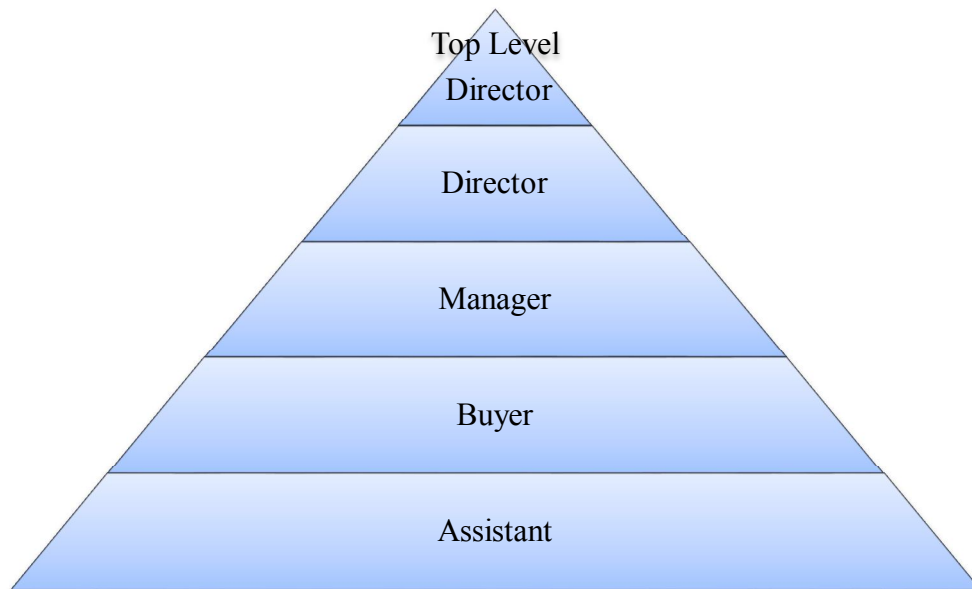
Figure 3 Hierarchical representation of participants' levels

The organization chart of the department in which I carried out my research designates that the ranking of the subjects had five levels. For the present study, I cooperated with only one department, that of Finance, thus the description of the company's chart is restricted merely to this department. The top level director is accountable for the whole department, thus it is found at the highest place in the pyramid. The director oversees several managers, strengthens productivity and operational efficiency, and hierarchically is located one step further down from the top level director. Third in the hierarchical classification are the managers of the company. They are in charge of their immediate subordinates the buyers as well as of the assistants; additionally they keep an eye on employees' productivity and manage the objectives that the directors have set down. Next comes the buyers in the hierarchical classification, who are negotiating with the suppliers and take into consideration the promotions and offers.

The assistants can either be assistant buyers who are liable in describing a product, provide additional information about a particular product, or a secretary who is responsible for clerical work, has to assist his/her supervisor, to schedule activities and meetings and to track orders.

As a matter of fact, there are additional layers in the company, such as senior managers and higher levels in the hierarchy, such as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the president and the vice president. However, for the present study the consolidated electronic exchanges are between people found in the aforementioned five levels and the organization chart is restricted to these five levels.

A key participant of that company approached the Human Resources (HR) manager who gave permission to conduct the research and approach other employees to volunteer and participate. In fact, it is not considered an easy task for a researcher to gain access to real and authentic workplace email exchanges. Accordingly, I compiled electronic messages from all twelve participants. All of them are from different levels of hierarchy which made the study more interesting and variable.

The background inventory carried out before the beginning of the study acquired demographic information about the participants involved in the study. The data gathered from the inventory comprise pseudonyms, names, nationality, position within the company, gender and the total number of emails contributed. The number of participants is illustrated in table 1. According to that table, the total number of participants is twelve. There are eight male employees and four female employees. The participants' language of communication for the internal and external exchanges is the English language, even if it is not their mother tongue. Interestingly enough, there is only one native speaker involved in the present study, the rest are non-native English speakers.

Pseudonyms	Nationality	Position	Gender	Total emails
Brice	French	Top Level Director	Male	5
Cheng	Chinese	Assistant	Female	16
Diana	Indonesian	Assistant	Female	22
George	Greek	Buyer	Male	23
Greg	Dutch	Manager	Male	11
Lionel	Dutch	Buyer	Male	15
Maria	Polish	Buyer	Female	13
Mel	French	Manager	Female	21
Mike	Greek	Buyer	Male	27
Nick	British	Manager	Male	20
Paul	Dutch	Director	Male	8
Philippe	French	Director	Male	13
Total: 12				194

Figure 4 reveals the visual representation of the gender distribution of the participants involved. The percentage of males who participated in the study was 67% while the percentage of the female employees who participated was 33%. These percentages refer to the participants of both groups and are portrayed graphically in figure 4.
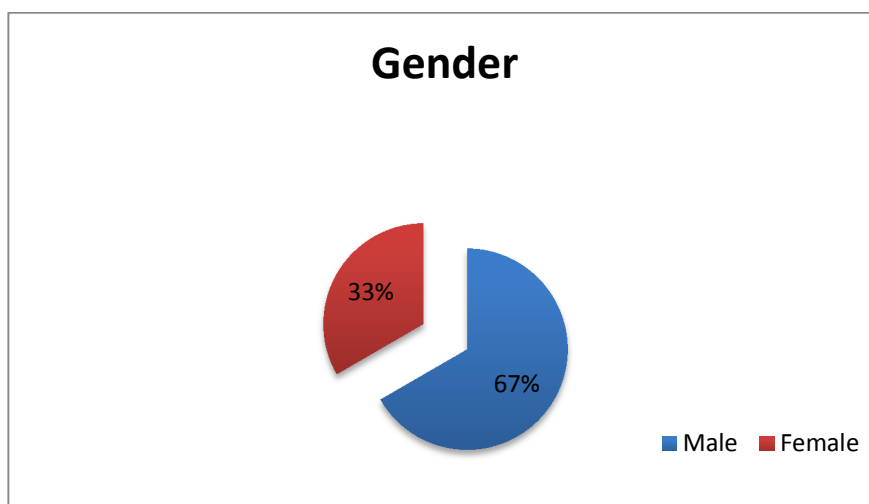
Figure 4 The percentages of male and female participants in the study

Figure 5 shows the participants' hierarchical level in percentages in the form of a pie chart.

What is observed is the low participation of top level directors, mainly due to the fact that they do not directly communicate with operational level employees on a regular basis.

Level Distrubition

■ Top Level Director **■** Director **■** Manager **■** Buyer **■** Assistant

8%
17%
25%
33%
17%
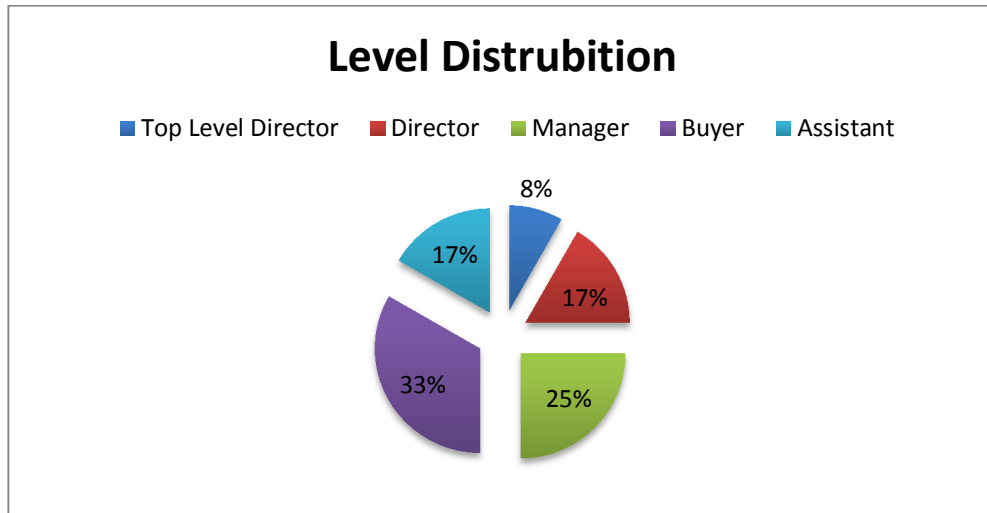
Figure 5 The percentages of distribution of the levels of participants in the study

Below follows a visual representation of the participants' ethnic background. Interestingly, there is no dominant nation observed, instead nationalities are randomly assigned among the participants. There is a great cultural diversity in the company, due to the fact that it is a multinational corporation.

Ethnic Diversity

■ Chinese **■** Indonesian **■** Greek **■** French **■** Polish **■** British **■** Dutch

9%
8%
17%
25%
8%
8%
25%
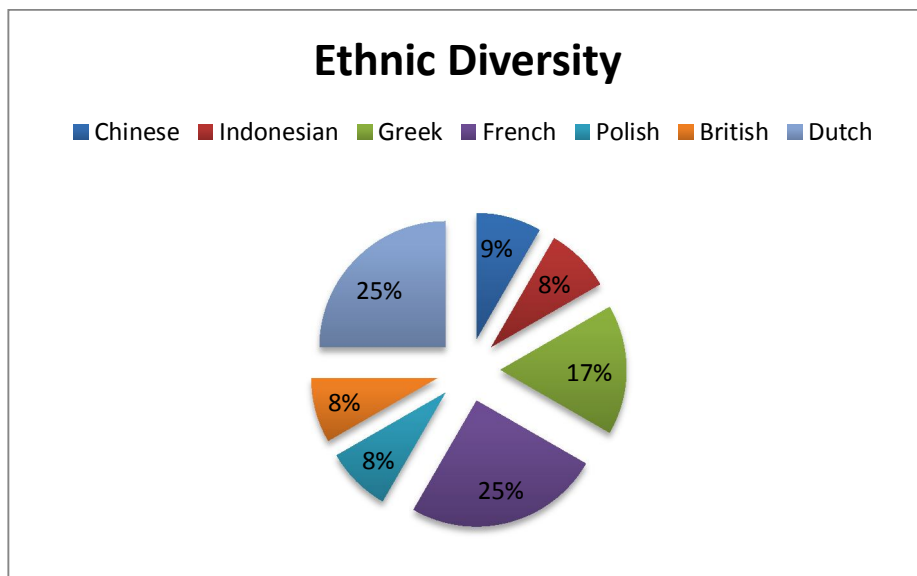
Figure 6 The percentages of ethnic background of participants in the study

What follows is a graphical representation of participants' composition in terms of gender, ethnicity and hierarchical level.
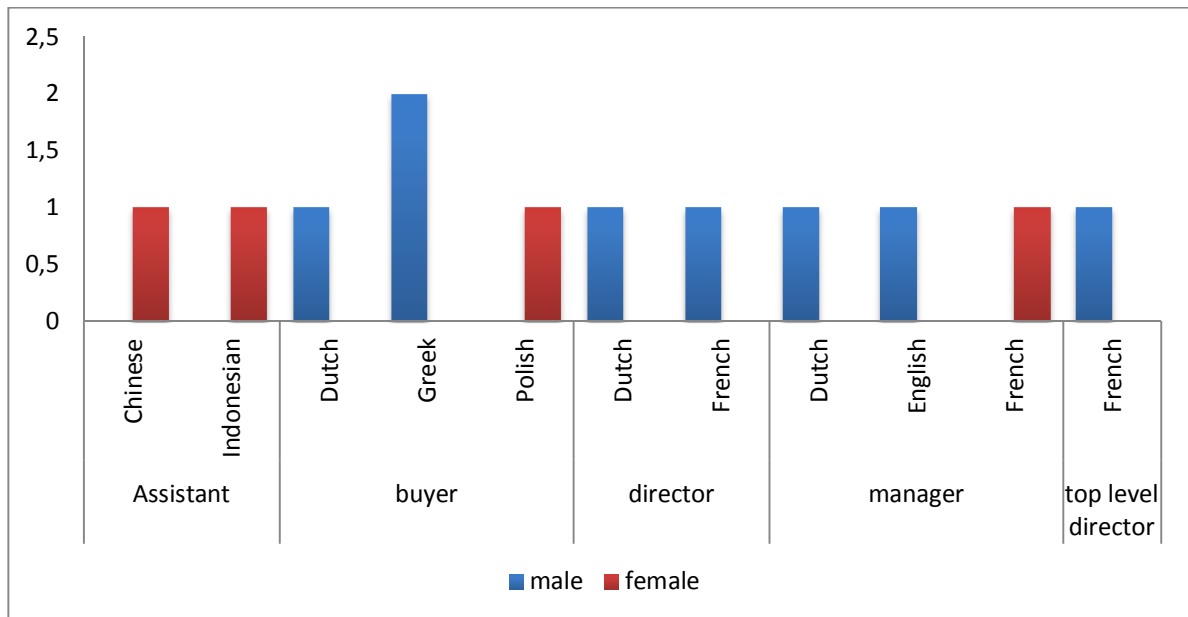
Figure 7 General overview of distribution of gender, level and ethnicity of all participants in the study

What we can glean from the figures above is that there is diversity within the organization concerning the ethnicity. It is the policy of the corporation not to discriminate against different people seeking employment. Regarding gender diversity, the fact that mostly men occupy higher level positions is random in this sample, as based on the information provided by the company's website, women occupy director level positions at 37% rate and managerial at 48%.

3.1.3 Material

The written corpus to be analysed includes internal email exchanges (n = 194) gathered from the twelve participants, employees or workers in a multinational organization.

3.1.4 Data collection

The goal of this study was to collect data related to workplace issues. A total number of 194 emails was gathered. A wide range of emails delivered to me consisted of primary emails, replies to emails, chain emails, invitations of appointments and meetings. With the exception of a couple of deleted email messages which were private and confidential in nature as they enclosed private information from independent customers and companies, all the other work-related messages were taken into consideration.

However, the corpus of the emails delivered to me contained a selection from the emails that were exchanged during the period that the emails covered.

The compilation of the emails provided by the company covered one-month. That period spans from the 6th of March until the 6th of April approximately. This period was selected in order to obtain emails from the participants that were not biased. I asked for permission to research email communication a month prior to the date the key participant contacted the HR manager so as not to prejudge the participants' writing style. The emails analysed were produced in the normal course of communication in the company. They were produced before contact was made for the emails to be made available for the study.

The key participant passed on to me the corpus of emails that the key people offered and he provided me with some basic background information of workplace matters. Drawing upon the emails, the majority were accompanied by direct interchange as there was no response message to the subject. Many of the messages comprise chain messages, that is to say, emails which are follow-up or consist of return messages, which are forwarded with the subject of "RE", which stands for 'reply' or "FW" which stands for the 'forwarded" messages, to one or more receivers. The table below is a review of the emails that are new emails or chain messages.

Table 2 Total email composition in numbers and in percentages

E-mails	Number	Percentage %
New messages	107	55,1
Chain e-mails	87	44,9
Total	194	100

Table 2 reveals the composition of emails obtained from the company A in total number and percentages respectively. As can be observed, the new or primary emails stand for 107 in total amount, which constitutes a 55,1%, while the respective figures for chain e-mails are 87 or 44,9%. In this study, only the primary messages (n=107) on a topic will be taken into account for the analysis of the emails.

In order to gain more knowledge about the social distance between the sender and receiver of the messages, I created a questionnaire (see Appendix I) that was sent to the main participants via the key person.

Specifically, the participants were asked to assess the social relationship with their rest colleagues involved in the research and to state their social distance, next to their name on a scale of 1 to 5, from very good friends (1) to just colleagues (5). An overall grade less than 3 renders the given relationship as "close colleagues" (CC), whereas a grade higher than 3 as "distant colleagues" (DC).

3.1.5 Frameworks

It has been argued that the study of politeness in the workplaces inevitably demands "both multidisciplinarity research and multimethod approaches" (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 2006, p. 25). Coleman (1989) in his volume emphasizes the necessity for multidisciplinarity and the usage of various analytical frameworks, so that it is possible to gain a proper understanding of workplace communication (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 2006).

Just as "workplace" is not easily defined, so it is also no longer possible to identify work based studies with one or two obvious disciplines […] such is the nature of discipline boundary-making that "communication" in the workplace is claimed by different discipline groups as their terrain. Even what counts as a "workplace" is an inter-disciplinary dispute (Sarangi and Roberts 1999, p. 5, as cited in Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 2006, p. 25-26).

Following the data gathering, intercultural communication is used as the general analytical framework so as to describe the communication between different people, from various ethnicities and with various cultural backgrounds while performing a discursive and socio-pragmatic study using speech act and politeness theories. In this study, speech act theory (Searle 1979) is used for allocating the email messages gathered, based on their communicative functions. Language is a means to accomplish miscellaneous functions, such as providing information, giving instructions, thanking, apologizing and suggesting in a single communicative event (Searle, 1979). Further, in order to investigate important pragmatic aspects of language use the research of Brown and Levinson concerning universal politeness strategies (1987) is employed. It has remained the most important and influential starting point for studying cross-cultural and inter-linguistic politeness (Leech, 2007). People cross-culturally, in order to communicate, adopt various strategies within a culture.

Importantly, both cultures and individuals have an inclination to put different values on particular needs and they convey differently these values. Despite the fact that people communicate cross-culturally in divergent ways, after all, they have something in common. People around the world have two basic needs. In line with Brown and Levinson (1987), they aspire to be accepted and simultaneously struggle to maintain the control over their actions coupled with freedom so as not to be infringed on by others (Sifianou, 1999).

3.1.6 Analysis of emails

The analysis of the primary emails (n=107) was realized in two stages. As an introductory step, I read the email messages to get a first look of the way and the context in which they were written. After that, I read them a second time and meticulously, using qualitative analysis and excel, I coded the emails based on their communicative and speech act functions, the use of imperative (direct imperative, imperative with please, with please kindly, with let and please let and imperative) the use of universal politeness strategies, which they were categorized in terms of positives and negatives politeness strategies, according to the perceived threat to the recipient's positive or negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and the type of requests (interrogatives with modals, negatives, Wh-questions, any news, declaratives) depending on the mood choices of the informants. Finally, I coded the emails, according to the types of greetings and leave-takings expressions. By adopting this analysis, I was able to provide discourse and pragmatic data so as to illustrate how language is used between different categories of people in a workplace.

Table 3 below shows the amount of the emails per each participant in numbers and percentages, which were used for the analysis.

Table 3 Primary emails of the participants in numbers and in percentages

Pseudonyms	Number of emails	Percentage %
Brice	2	2%
Cheng	11	10%
Diana	15	14%
George	18	17%
Greg	6	6%
Lionel	4	4%
Maria	7	7%
Mel	9	8%
Mike	20	19%
Nick	8	7%
Paul	2	2%
Philippe	5	5%
(Total)	(107)	

In general, I observed the emails sent by these categories of people:

o equal to equal

o subordinate to superordinate

o superordinate to subordinate

I coded the email messages using the following speech act functions, a classification made by Waldvogel (2005) adopted from Searle's taxonomy of speech acts (1969) with some adjustment. In what follows, examples of emails representing the message types are listed to show how the email messages are classified:

Providing information: where someone is giving information

e.g. "From [name of company] to [location] the existing contract only valid up to 31. 5.2015. Please find the description below".

Seeking information: this includes **request information** such as contract or contact numbers, prices, status of reports, location, and **request help** that covers questions seeking help.

e.g. "Could you please let me know what is your current position/location today in order to give you access on the SSD contract database?"

e.g. "Could you please help and contact [name] to get the signature and post the   hardcopy to [name] please see below?"

Directives: their role is to direct the addressee to carry out an act. The category includes:

request action: where someone is requested to carry out a task

e.g. "Can you please perform necessary corrections for below 2 contracts after liaising with [name]? Please also ask him or [name] to correct prices in the SSD portal".

suggestion, opinion, and **advice**: where someone has the option to do something if it is useful for him/her.

e.g. "I suggest you contact both when you get the pricelist".

e.g. "Please, can you have a look and advise".

Commisives: their role is to commit the speaker to a future action, for instance, promises.

e.g. "These are the prices I promised to send you".

Expressives: their role is to express the speaker's attitudes and feelings concerning something, such as thanks and apologies.

e.g. "Thank you for your feedback".

e.g. "Apologies for the short notice".

Invitations: are requests for meeting.

e.g. "Do you have time to meet and discuss after lunch?"

It should be highlighted that emails may perform more than one communicative function, thus I considered carefully all the actions, therefore many emails ended up being multi-functional. In most cases, the communicative function was unequivocal and could be detected more easily.

3.1.7 Ethical considerations

Matters of ethics were discussed with a key participant prior to the collection of any data. It was agreed upon the manager of Human Resources and myself, that there will be strict confidentiality regarding the participants identity. Notably, the identity of those engaged in the research will be protected by pseudonyms during the whole process and their privacy respected. In addition, pseudonyms were given to people involved into the emails, and places, dates, names of projects and further information perceived as identifiable, were not presented as in the original emails produced by the participants, with a view to provide confidentiality. Johnson (2004) claims that "in an 'information society' privacy is a major concern in that much of the information gathered and processed is information about individuals" (p. 70). This view emphasizes the anonymity of the subjects and the integrity of the source of the data. Thus, the goal was to ensure that the participants' actual identities will be kept away from publicity. Additionally, the agreement covered the fact that the name of the company will be safeguarded, as well as the storage of the data until the end of the study. Moreover, it was also secured that all the information included in the emails will be kept secret. The key people were fully informed about the research and I had their consent to proceed with their emails

3.1.8 Additional data sources

The company's website page supplied me with useful information with reference to the arrangement of the organization, the management style, the hierarchical structure of the labor force and the organizational culture.

It is noteworthy to state that all the management, including the background inventory and contact with the HR manager in order- for me to collect the data, was carried out by a key participant so that the procedure would go on quite easily and smoothly without any interruption or postponement.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The results of this study are presented in this chapter in terms of descriptive statistics. Data, as collected through the emails, is displayed via tables and graphs. For the purpose of the research, it was decided that the findings to be presented thematically, according to the order the research questions have been posed.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Communicative functions of workplace emails

Table 4 lists the types of the communicative functions identified in the corpus of the emails. To begin with, the information given, which accounts for 55% and the directives which accounts for 45% respectively, are amongst the most prevalent and common discursive functions that were used by all employees in workplace emails, followed by seeking of information (30%). As a rule, staff members used emails for other functions intermittently.

Table 4 Communicative function of primary emails

Type	Form	(N)	Percentage (%)
Providing information		59	55%
Seeking information		32	30%
request information	Question (e.g. Can you tell me..)	25	
request help	Question (involving the word help)	7	
Directives		48	45%
request action	Polite imperatives	31	
suggestion	Declaratives	10	
advice	Imperatives (involving 'advice')	7	
Commissives		7	7%
promises		7	
Expressives		15	14%
apology		5	
thanks		10	
Invitations	For meetings and discussions (framed as questions)	5	5%

The crucial role that email plays in the communication of information, which accounts for more than half of the emails is demonstrated very explicitly by these findings.

Table 5 below summarizes the amount of speech acts that were performed by the three power distance relationships, namely equals to equals, subordinates to superordinates and superordinates to subordinates when communicating via messages. Therefore, a comparison between different pairs can be observed.

Table 5 Main communicative function of workplace emails pairwise

Speech acts	eq_eq (N)	eq_eq (%)	sub_sup (N)	sub_sup (%)	sup_sub (N)	sup_sub (%)
Providing information	27	47%	17	32%	15	30%
Seeking information	8	14%	18	34%	6	12%
Directives	12	21%	11	21%	19	38%
Commisives	7	12%	0	0%	0	0%
Expressives	1	2%	6	11%	8	16%
Invitations	2	4%	1	2%	2	4%
Total	57		53		50	

For the communicative action of providing information, it can be seen that predominately equals to equals with a percentage of 47%, produced more emails of that kind (27 occurrences). The amount of emails produced by subordinates to superordinates and superordinates to subordinates ranges between 32% and 30% respectively (17 and 15 occurrences), thus there is no significant difference in terms of information giving between these two pairs.

Although, a closer look at the data reveals that superiors produce more directive emails, with a percentage of 38% (19 occurrences), in comparison with equal encounters (21% or 12 occurrences) or the communication between subordinate to superordinate (21% or 11 occurrences). This preference for directives by institutionally dominant employees emphasizes the fact that, they hold legitimate power and have authority over the rest workers, thus can order that some things must be done. Another striking result based on the findings, turns out to be the act of expressives that made up of thanks and apologies. Superiors found to have the highest percentage (16%) in comparison with the other two power distance relationships. In other words, it is detected that in 8 emails employees of higher positions apologized and expressed gratitude to lower status people more often than the other categories did. This finding suggests that institutionally dominant employees are open to express their feelings to their inferiors or equals either by thanking or apologizing. Besides, this highlights that in terms of expressives, there is an imperceptible (faint) hierarchy observed. For the seeking information function, workplace emails flowing from subordinates towards their superiors on a 34% rate consists another noteworthy finding. This occurs due to the fact that employees on operational level need information in order to proceed with the execution of their tasks while the role of managerial level employees is to coordinate and organize them.

4.2.2 The Imperative Strategy

The imperative strategy happened overall 126 times in the compilation of the emails. The imperative form occurred in five different forms, that is to say, the direct imperative, such as for example: *'check the codes'*, or using *'please'* (e.g. please find attached), *'please kindly'* (e.g. please, kindly advise me), *'let'* (e.g. let me know) and *'please let'* (e.g. please let me know). Below follows a visual representation of the distribution of the usage of imperative sentences. It illustrates the number of the sentences occurred in the corpus of the workplace emails and the respective percentage.

Table 6 Distribution of the use of the Imperative strategy in the emails

	(N)	(%)
Imperative	29	23%
Please + Imperative	71	56%
Please kindly+ Imperative	3	2%
Let + Imperative	13	10%
Please Let + Imperative	10	8%
(Total)	(126)	

The results demonstrate that there is a tendency from employees at all hierarchical levels, towards using *'please plus imperative'*. It happens 71 times overall in a total of 107 emails. Noticeably, the participants use that form of imperative, in general, very frequently in order to mitigate the illocutionary force and show deference. Besides, this finding stresses, that, it has become part of their workplace culture to construct requests in this way. As regards more polite strategies, such as *'please kindly + imperative'*, it appears that it is the rarest strategy used within the corpus. With reference to imperative (29 occurrences), the most unambiguous and explicit form of directives, it follows that, its use is not so often when compared to *'please + imperative'*, however, in comparison with the rest forms is the second most frequent strategy that occurs within the set of emails. Overall, it seems that the preferred form of imperatives by all participants, is that accompanied by the marker *'please'*, and its first and foremost usage is to lessen the directive force and thus, sound more polite.

The table below allows us to gain a more insightful view on the imperative politeness strategy, taking into consideration two factors: the influence of ethnical background and power relations.

Table 7 The effect of power distance relations and nationality on the use of Imperative politeness strategy

Nationality	Imperative	Please + Imperative	Please Kindly + Imperative	Let+ Imperative	Please Let +Imperative
Chinese	2	6		1	1
eq_eq	1	1		1	
sub_sup	1	5			1
sup_sub					
Dutch	1	9		2	
eq_eq	1	5			
sub_sup		1			
sup_sub		3		2	
English	2	4		1	2
eq_eq		1		1	
sub_sup					
sup_sub	2	3			2
French	8	15			
eq_eq		2			
sub_sup					
sup_sub	8	13			
Greek	15	26	3	7	5
eq_eq	13	12	1	3	2
sub_sup	2	9	2		1
sup_sub		5		4	2
Indonesian	1	8			2
eq_eq					
sub_sup	1	8			2
sup_sub					
Polish		3		2	
eq_eq		1		2	
sub_sup		1			
sup_sub		1			

In the first place, investigating the effect of power relations on the usage of imperative politeness strategies reveals that 47 moves were made by equals, 34 moves were made by subordinates to superordinates, and 45 moves were made by superiors to subordinates in total. French superordinates used this strategy more times than others of the same level. Strictly speaking, they used 13 times *'please+imperative'*, 8 times direct *'imperative'*, followed by Greeks with 11 times in total (5 times *'please+imperative'*, 4 times 'let+*imperative'* and 2 times *'please let+imerative'*).

Obviously, the strategy with *'please+imperative'* is overwhelmingly the most common used technique by the superiors. This suggests that the institutionally power participants sought to diminish the imposition and to seem polite. Strikingly, the practice of *'please kindly'* or even *'kindly'*, which are regarded ordinary or proper in organizational communication and found more often in written discourse are negligible. Invariably, only Greeks use this kind of imperative politeness strategy and it was performed mainly by subordinates to superordinates (two times) and one time by peers. Indonesian and Chinese subordinate shows an inclination towards using the technique of *'please+imperative'* to almost all their email messages sent up the hierarchy. The fact that both these participants occupy lower positions, hierarchically speaking, uncovers that they are deference-oriented and probably want to maintain their face. Dutch employees in communication with equals used *'please plus imperative'* as well, (5 instances) while for Dutch subordinates and superodinates the moves are insignificant. On the whole, the analysis revealed that, all these lingua culture groups preferred the polite way of expressing their requests, to wit *'please plus imperative'*. It follows that, this phrase is about to be made automatic or routine in email workplace communication among colleagues.

4.2.3 The Interrogative Strategy

The usage of interrogative politeness strategy is the most common type of request in the corpus of the emails. Holmes (1983) divides the interrogatives into two main categories: modals with 'can' and 'non modals' realized with 'could', 'may' 'would' (p. 103). Nevertheless, in my study I did not adopt that classification and categorize my data into the following two categories: interrogatives with modals (can, could) and non-modalised interrogatives. In the set of emails, the usage of interrogative occurred 54 times with modals and more precisely: 'can' 32 instances, 'could' 21 instances and one occurrence with 'may'. The usage of 'could' we can say that has a more softening action within the emails. In what follows, two examples of requests are given with 'can' and 'could' retrieved from the corpus to illustrate how these requests are realized:

Example 1

From: superordinate to subordinate

Could you please coordinate with the Team by [name of team] Friday 20th March a list of suppliers and mailing address we would like to use after [name of project] implementation?

In this email communication, the superordinate, namely the manager asks from the subordinate, to wit the buyer to liaise with a team in order to provide a list of suppliers and addresses. It is a request for action and can involve a potential threat to the receiver's face. The use of interrogative with *could* seem to soften the imposition in tandem with the marker *'please'*.

Example 2

From: subordinate to superordinate

It seems that we have a delivery within [type] 2015 in [place] again for [name of product and number]. *Can* you please place a request with all the necessary details through [name of portal] portal?

In this example, the subordinate asks for action, after giving the information about the delivery of a product in the same place again. One more time, the request realized with interrogative with modals. Requests of that type have been conventionalized as polite requests in English.

Apart from using interrogatives with modals, the use of Wh-Questions and Yes/No Questions that are classified as non-modalised interrogative in the present study, are occurred 23 and 39 times respectively, this is another type of interrogative form that is detected in the corpus. In general, they are considered moderately direct as requests and by large are found in the request for information. The following are two illustrations of these forms:

Example 3

From: equal to equal

For me, there are two key questions:

I.   *Why* we were still able to create contract in [name], before the rate was set up in the system?

II. Moving forward, *when* will those rates be set up? Obviously, we don't want to wait every end of the year for this. ;-)

In this example, the request for information is fairly direct and informal, but this is justified by the fact that it is communication between equals. The use of Wh-questions indicates that a more elaborated reply is expected by the recipient of the message. The ubiquity of the emotion at the end of the sentence is taken to mean that, familiarity is important after performing such request so as to lighten the workplace mood. In addition, it implies close constant contact between these two colleagues.

Example 4

From: subordinate to superordinate

Attached are the new [name of code] from [name] to [place] and [place]. Incoterm [name], payment term 60 days. Budget price=contact name. Validation till 28th Feb 2016. Now, *are you* okay with that information? *Do you* need me to contact with Kelly too?

In this example, the form of yes/no questions is occurred between an unequal communication. The anticipated answer is merely looking for one-word reply, namely a yes or no, which suggests that the sender wants to exempt the recipient from a lengthy or elaborated email answer. For the two questions cited here, a mere yes or no possibly suffices.

Interrogatives composed the second form of requests after imperatives within the corpus (116 instances). Informants used modalised and non-modalised forms chiefly to perform the function of requesting information and action.

4.2.4 The Declarative Strategy

      Declaratives is another formal type, which can operate as a request. It occurs 61 times within the collection of emails. Declaratives can be expressed in "hints" and "need statements" and are regarded polite therein, "they can leave options open to the addresses to interpret them in the way they wish", thus are less face-threatening requests as Sifianou (1999) states (p. 149). Declarative requests can be found in the workplace environment too. Usually they are produced by superordinates to subordinates, as in a professional setting duty and obligation are clear-cut between colleagues (Ervin-Tripp 1976, as cited in Sifianou, 1999, p. 151). Although in the set of emails, I found that are used as well between emails sent downwards and between peers communication. The succeeding are two instances of declarative forms found in the dataset.

Example 5

From: superior to subordinate

> *I will need to* have an answer soon!

Example 6

From: subordinate to superior

> *I will need* a table that includes all cost centers per supplier please.

      Overall, the declaratives was the least common form of politeness strategy requests that used within the corpus of emails. A reason for this is that declarative mood suggests agreement or consent and understood most of the times as commanding and powerful by colleagues in an office setting. Therefore, they might want to mitigate the immediate character of the request, by selecting to shy away from this kind of requesting.

4.2.5 Summary of forms of requests used in workplace email communication

Requests can be realized in a variety of constructions. As we have already observed in the present study, different types of syntactic forms performed by the informants in order to communicate their message.

Table 8 Synopsis of the distribution of requests performed based on power distance relationships in numbers and percentages

Forms	eq_eq	%	sub_sup	%	sup_sub	%	Total
Imperative	41	52%	36	45%	49	62%	41%
Interrogative	36	42%	50	58%	30	35%	38%
Declarative	21	13%	11	7%	29	18%	20%
Other forms	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%	1%
Total (305)	(99)		(98)		(108)		

It is found that the imperative form is the preferred formula of directives by the majority of institutionally dominant informants -at least to a certain extent- in comparison to subordinates or in equal encounters. This finding supports that superiors make their request in such an explicit and straightforward manner, in order to clear up misunderstandings. The rate stands at 62% (n=49), followed by a rate of 52% (n=41) in equal communication, which leaves behind subordinates with a percentage of 45% (n=36). Interrogatives were preferred more when making a request by subordinates. Its rate corresponds with 58% (n=50), substantially greater than that of superiors (35%, n=30). This finding puts forward that institutionally inferior participants try to maintain their face by being conventional and elaborated in their requests when sending to institutionally power employees. A lower percentage of declaratives was used in total, with superiors (18%, n=29) to have used it more often than others. Overall, the differences may not be marked in rates but, it is noticeable that there is an inclination towards the selection of a certain type of request, at least for superiors (towards imperative forms) and subordinates (towards interrogative forms).

4.3 Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies

In line with Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two sets of positive and negative politeness manifestations used by people when communicating with each other. Analysing the corpus of emails, I probed that the communicators used 8 instances of positive politeness and 8 instances of negative politeness strategies within their email communication (see Appendix II). As table 9 demonstrates, two males and two females participants of divergent levels taken into consideration, namely for males: a buyer (subordinate), and a director (superior), and for the females: an assistant (subordinate) and a manager (superior) respectively.

Table 9 Positive politeness strategies used in the emails based on gender and hierarchy

	Males	George (buyer)	Philippe (director)	Females	Diane (assistant)	Mel (manager)
Notice, attend to addressee (H)	1	1	0	2	1	1
Presuppose, raise, assert common ground	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intensify interest to the addressee	0	0	0	1	1	0
Offer, promise	2	2	0	3	2	1
Give or ask for reasons	0	0	0	1	0	1
Be optimistic	2	1	1	3	1	2
Include both S and H in the activity	5	5	0	3	1	2
Give gifts to H, show understanding, sympathy, cooperation	0	0	0	1	1	0
(N) emails	23	18	5	24	15	9
(%) p.p.	43%	50%	20%	58%	47%	78%

Table 9 illustrates that the majority of the positive politeness strategies were used by females who used in a total of 24 emails approximately 58%. The positive strategies used by females include mainly: *offer and promise, be optimistic* and *include both sender and writer*, which were used predominately to maintain a friendly and warm workplace atmosphere. The principal function of *'offer and promise'* is when you guarantee that you will do or give something to someone. The prime function of *'be optimistic'* politeness strategy is when the sender is assuming that the writer will help him/her to get what he wants. The *'include both sender and writer in the activity'* strategy is when both sender and recipient are included in the email. In what follows, examples of these strategies from the corpus of emails are cited:

Example 7

From: subordinate to superior

I will try to get it for you by the end of the week.

Example 8

From: superior to subordinate

Hope you have seen that and act so.

Example 9

From: equal to equal

Let's discuss it after lunch.

Males by contrast, used slightly less positive strategies in their exchanges at a rate of 43% in a total of 23 emails. The positive strategies they used are the same that females used with the most frequent to be the *'include both sender and writer in the activity'* (5 occurrences).

Focusing on the effect of hierarchy, we can observe that the director used only 20% positive politeness which is considered lower than the index average.

Table 10 below shows the usage of negative politeness strategies by the same employees -two females and males- as previously. What we can glean in general is the fact that, the negative politeness was preferred to a considerable extent compared to positive strategies (see Table 9).

Table 10 Negative politeness strategies used in the emails based on gender and hierarchy

	Males	**George (buyer)**	**Philippe (director)**	**Females**	**Diane (assistant)**	**Mel (manager)**
Go on the record as incurring a debt	0	1	0	0	0	0
Be conventionally indirect	16	11	5	18	12	6
Question, hedge	0	3	0	5	3	2
Be pessimistic	1	0	1	0	0	0
Minimize the imposition	1	1	0	1	1	0
Give deference	0	0	0	3	3	0
Apologize	2	0	2	1	1	0
Impersonalize S and H	1	1	0	3	3	0
(N) emails	23	18	5	24	15	9
(%) negative	91%	94%	160%	129%	153%	89%

Overall both females and males used predominately the *'be conventionally indirect'* strategy with a total amount of 18 occurrences for females and 16 for males respectively. The main function of this strategy is its conventionalized form and the elaborated style. The following are examples of this conventionalized form retrieved form the corpus:

Example 10

From: equal to equal

> Could you please let me know your current position in order to give you access to [name of a system] contract database?

Example 11

From: subordinate to superordinate

> Can you please provide the valid prices for below materials sourced form [name of company]?

Example 12

From: superior to subordinate

> Could you please grand access to [name] and confirm she works for [name]?

Moreover, it is found that female participants used negative politeness much more than their male counterparts at an additional rate of 38%. Another remarkable finding is the extremely high percentage of negative politeness strategies observed in two diametrically opposed participants in terms of hierarchy, namely a director and an assistant above 150%. Strictly speaking, the director within a total of 5 emails used 8 instances of negative politeness strategies while the assistant used 23 instances of negative strategies out of 23 emails.

This finding implies that in emailing employees at different hierarchical layers, they shift their politeness attitude towards negative strategy. Finally, what it should be stressed, is the fact that figures exceeding 100% are due to the fact that one unique email might contain more than one type of politeness strategies.

Further on, exploring the outcome of social distance, the table below is a representation of the amount of positive and negative politeness strategies used by four participants who occupy various positions within the company. The results are based on the four informants' statements with regard to the social distance and their categorization as "close colleagues" (CC, where CC <3) and "distant colleagues" (DC, where DC>3) (see Appendix III). Participants were asked to assess on a scale of 1 to 5 their social relationship with their colleagues from the company they work for. In particular, grade 1 corresponds to "very good friend" relationship whereas grade 5 corresponds to just "colleague", which is taken to mean that no relationship exists on top of the professional one. As an example, Diana graded with 5 her relationship with Brice while Brice graded with 4 his relationship with Diana which gives an average grade of 4,5 (4,5>3 thus relationship is characterised as DC).

Table 11 The effect of social distance in conjunction with hierarchy in the usage of politeness strategies

	Positive	Negative
Assistant (Diana)		
CC (N=6)	7	7
DC (N=6)	1	11
Buyer (George)		
CC (N=6)	6	4
DC (N=5)	4	6
Manager (Mel)		
CC (N=6)	5	4
DC (N=3)	2	5
Director (Philippe)		
CC (N=0)	0	0
DC (N=5)	1	8

As table 11 shows, close colleagues (CC) used overall 18 times positive politeness strategies with their intimate colleagues while with distant colleagues (DC) only 8 instances of positive politeness strategies were detected in their email communication. Interestingly, the assistant used 11 times negative politeness within a number of six emails while she equally used positive and negative politeness (7 occurrences for each strategy) with her close workmates. Similar figures are observed for the director, who used 8 negative politeness strategies with distant colleagues and only one positive politeness strategy with the same workmates. These findings suggest that they are cautious in emailing to their colleagues in order not to provoke exaggerated intimacy. The manager is found to use more positive strategies with close colleagues, specifically, 5 instances out of the six emails, which suggests that she cooperate with them more frequently compared with other colleagues while only 2 instances of positives were detected in her communication with distant colleagues, which implies that she shows deference towards them, but actually she values familiarity and directness. In general, she used 5 times indirect politeness with the distant colleagues within a number of three emails. Intrinsically, it is quite clear that the usage of negative politeness strategies was particularly typical in the emails sent to distant colleagues and a tendency towards positive politeness strategies observed in the emails sent to close workmates. These findings suggest that social distance affected the level of politeness in the email communication amongst colleagues.

Furthermore, examining the effect of nationality on the usage of positive and negative politeness strategies came up with these results. Figure 1 illustrates the sum of emails sent per ethnicity and the proportion of negative and positive politeness strategies in percentages.
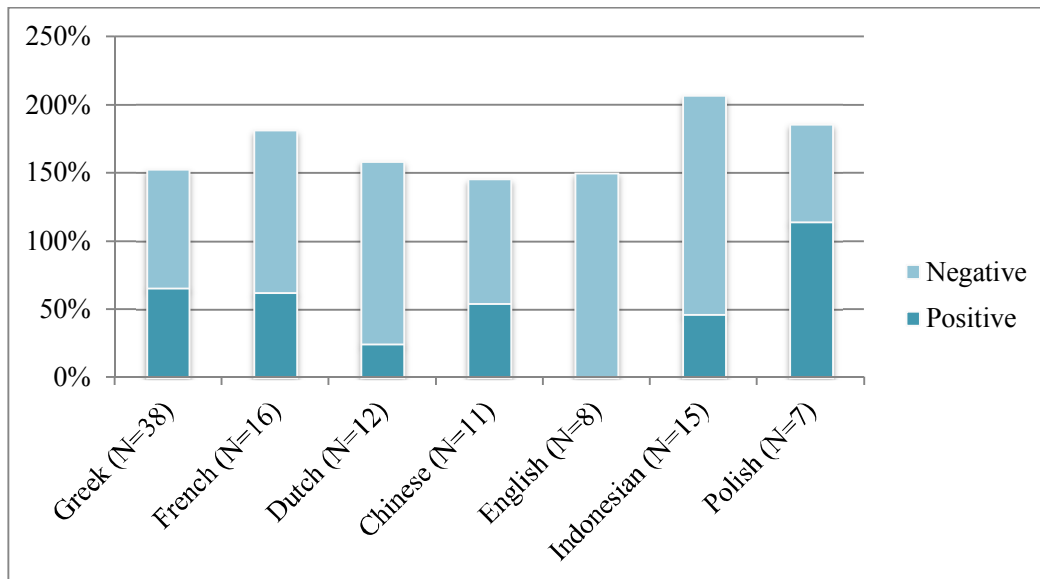
Figure 8 Politeness strategies used per ethnicity

It is found that the English participant used solely negative politeness strategies in his email communication which is aligned with the related theory as presented in Sifianou (1999). Indonesian and Dutch participants dominantly used negative politeness strategy without though, completely disregarding the positive one. Importantly, the Polish participant stood out among the others, as she was the only one who mainly adopted positive strategies in all of her emails. In this point we should underline the fact that, employees of specific national identities do not follow positive politeness strategies as expected (e.g. Greeks), though a stream towards negative politeness is observed regardless of their ethnical background. These findings indicate that all lingua culture groups wanted to show deference and not to impinge upon the recipient of the email.

Investigating the effect of hierarchy on the usage of positive and negative politeness strategies we earn the following results in percentages.
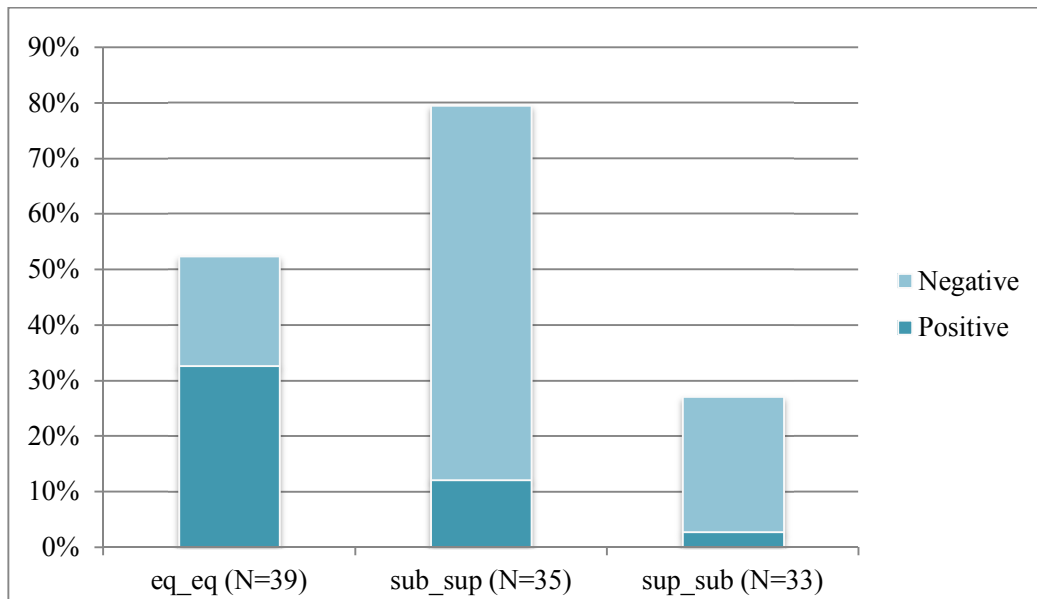
Figure 8 Politeness strategies adopted per hierarchical level

A closer look at the findings reveals that institutionally power participants use principally negative strategies when addressing to institutionally non dominant informants and vice versa. These findings recommend that negative politeness strategies are mostly preferred when the receiver has a great distance in terms of hierarchy over the sender. Besides, taking on negative strategy, they chiefly separate the sender and the addressee from the violation, keeping a low profile. On the contrary, in email exchanges between peers, communicators employed largely positive strategies. This finding implies a degree of familiarity and closeness between employees of the same level, and a freedom to send messages in a direct way, avoiding formalities emanating from institutionally power inequalities.

Figure 10 below is a graphic representation of politeness strategies as adopted by participants of different genders
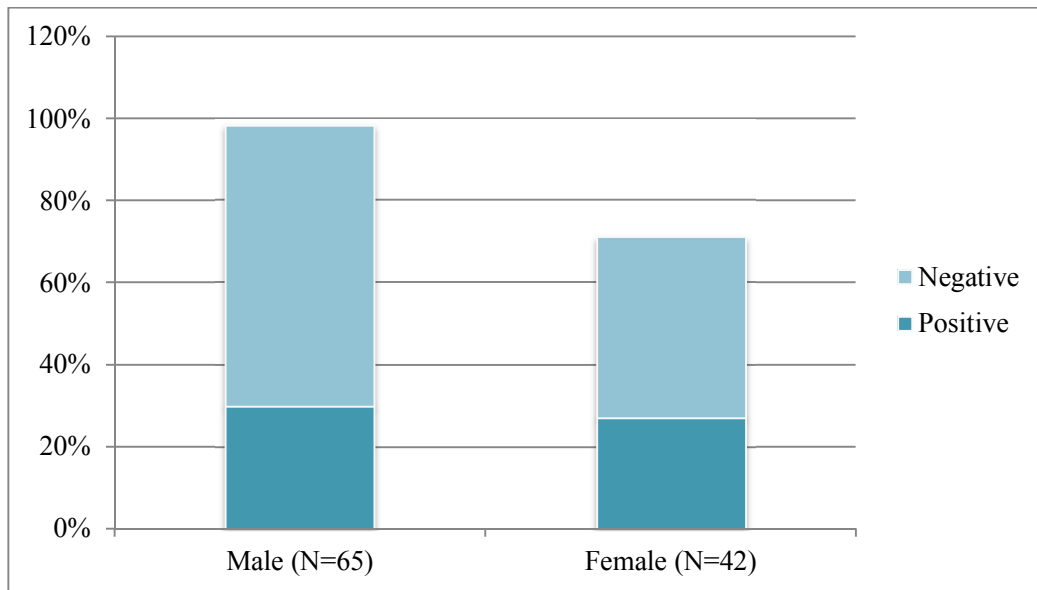
Figure 9 Politeness strategies adopted per (sender's) gender

It is found that the usage of negative politeness strategy by male participants is more than two times higher than the figure of positive strategy. In other words, the positive figure for males, accounts for 30% while the negative figure accounts for 68%. Similarly, female participants mostly took on negative politeness strategies in their email communication though only 1,5 times as much as they did positive ones. Overall, they primarily used the negative strategy to disconnect the composer and receiver of the email from the imposition and violation towards the addressee.

4.4 The use of Greetings and Closings

Greetings and closings are regarded as the most prominent structural element of emails (Pérez Sabater et al., 2008). Both instill a personal touch into the email communication and can benefit a worker to establish working relations in a corporation (Waldvogel, 2005). Thus, the extensive research for the presence or absence in the use of salutations and sign-offs, can foster one's awareness into individual's interpersonal relationships (Waldvogel, 2005).

4.4.1 Greetings

Overall, greetings used in the emails were predominately informal with the most frequent being *'Hi plus first name* or *Team'*. Broadly speaking, informal moves from the addressee to the recipient may involve a degree of familiarity while more formal moves oriented towards deference (Scollon and Scollon, 1995, Waldvogel, 2007).

As table 12 represents, the preferred form of openings within the corpus of emails is the usage of a greeting word and first name of the addressee or generally the greeting word and Team. The most popular greeting word within this category was *'Hi'* (68 instances), followed by *'Good morning'* (8 instances) and *'Good afternoon'* (7 instances). The same trend was observed in all three kinds of participants' level.

Table 12 The use of greetings based on different hierarchy levels

Greetings	Greeting word only	Greeting+ First name/Team	Dear+ First name	First name
eq_eq	1	30	4	3
sub_sup	1	30	4	0
sup_sub	0	23	10	1
Total	**2**	**83**	**18**	**4**

Strikingly, it is observed that in the case of superior to subordinate communication, 10 out of 34 emails began with a more formal greeting that of *'Dear'* plus the *'First name'* of the recipient. In 3 messages equal communication started baldly with the person's name in their emails. The above findings postulate that there is a specific trend followed by participants of all levels. Therefore, the organizational culture appears to have a greater impact on the use of greetings, as it was permitted to begin their messages, taking on a more familiar and informal salutation. Thus, institutional power has no impact on the commencement of the emails.

4.4.2 Closings

Table 13 below illustrates the preferred form of leave-takings within the compilation of emails alongside institutional power.

Table 13 The use of closings based on different hierarchical levels

Leave-takings	Formal closing+First name	Informal closing+First name	Thank+ First name	No closing
eq_eq	22	3	9	1
sub_sup	26	0	9	0
sup_sub	24	2	7	0
Total	**72**	**5**	**25**	**1**

As can be seen from Table 12, the type of closings preferred by the participants was the *'Formal closing'* plus their *'First name'* (72 instances). In that category fall into closings expressions like *'Best regards',* which was the most common one, *'Kind regards'* is another type of farewell that used*,* and finally, little less signed off their messages using *'Regards'*. In a smaller number -less than half of the former- of emails the closing expression was *'Thanks'* plus *'First name'* (25 instances). *'Thanks'* was used apart from expressing thanks to someone for an action, as a ritual leave-taking formula. The informal closing was the least used in that corpus, in 5 messages 3 equals and 2 superiors ended their emails using the expression *'Cheers',* which is considered more informal and friendly than *'Kind regards', 'Regards'*, which are used invariably by the participants in my study. Similarly with opening expressions, the pattern here is more company rather than level specific. The closings employed an air of obedience and deference, as the participants kept a comfortable distance, which suggests that they possibly comply with their rules and regulations of the company A.

Ultimately, all the emails, with no exceptions, bear the company's logo after their sign-offs. This included their full name, their organisational position, the department to which they belong, telephone contact numbers and fax, the name of the company and postal address. The fact that all participants used, as a rule, this tactic unfolds that they followed company's line and abided by the company's organisational culture.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study has investigated workplace communication of a multinational organization in Amsterdam (company A), through electronically transmitted messages (emails) involving employees in three power distance relationships, namely superiors to subordinates, subordinates to superiors and equals to equals. Nowadays, the communication amongst colleagues has become an easy task, integrated into the everyday affairs of every company, due to breakthrough in technological innovations over the past few decades that have changed tremendously the workplace life.

This study has examined internal work-related email messages, written in English as a lingua franca by twelve participants, who belong to different nations and with various linguistic backgrounds. The importance of internal communication in lingua franca English, according to Kankaanranta (2005), has gained power and impetus on the account of "the surge in cross-border mergers and acquisitions since the early 1990s" (p. 400). In addition, the study has been concerned with the analysis of a corpus of 107 primary emails, with the purpose of examining the language use in the informants' emails using two basic frameworks: speech acts and politeness theories. Speech act theory has been used in this study, so as to examine the communicative functions of workplace emails, while the politeness theory was a useful framework that was used to explore the pragmatic functions of the communicative types. By exploring the communicative functions and the various politeness strategies in workplace emails, the present research attempted to show how communication is achieved via emails. Over and above, this study aimed to facilitate intercultural communication, to help us expand our understanding and also to shed more light on how people of various levels within accompany communicate in different ways.

The study further considered significant factors, which may influence the linguistic choices people make when communicating through email in the workplace, namely ethnicity, social distance and gender.

5.2 Main findings

The study led to some interesting findings of the workplace email communication and the interpersonal relationships among different employees.

To begin with, the main communicative function identified in the corpus of 107 internal messages written by the twelve participants was *providing information*, which accounted for 55% (59 occurrences) in the study or in other words, accounted for over half of the speech act functions (Table 4). The *directives* stood at 45% (48 occurrences) and were the second most popular function used by workers in their email communication (Table 4). These two types of communicative functions represent the two prevailing moves that emerged from the corpora analysis. What is more, it was necessary to make a distinction, in terms of hierarchy, of the communicative events. Interestingly, it was found that the predominant communicative function, to wit *providing information* was used mostly between equals sent to equals with a percentage of 47% (27 occurrences) (Table 5). Another noteworthy finding turns out to be the *seeking of information* function used predominantly from subordinates flowing to superiors. These normal or regular requests of the workplace, with a rate of 34%, was the major communicative function made by subordinates (Table 5). Superiors used more directives than other employees, 38% of the acts (Table 5). A last unexpected result as dictated by the findings for the speech act functions is the act of expressives, where superiors hold the highest percentage that of 16% (Table 5).

Furthermore, the findings indicated that employees at all hierarchical levels used mostly *please plus imperative* (71 occurrences in a total of 107 emails, Table 6). French and Greek used invariably bare imperative in half of their emails in comparison with the rest of the ethnicities. Moreover, they used please and imperative in the majority of their emails (Table 7). In general, superiors used mostly imperatives in their email communication, specifically 49 instances of imperative were observed (Table 8). A good 58% of interrogative requests were identified within the email correspondence of subordinates when sent to superiors.

Looking at the positive politeness strategies used in the emails, in terms of gender (2 males and 2 females) and hierarchy (subordinate and superordinate), findings revealed that the two women used more positive politeness strategies compared with the pair of males. They used strictly 58% of the occurrences versus 43% used by their male counterparts (Table 9). Negative politeness strategies, generally, were used essentially more in comparison with positives (Table 10).

A surprising finding is the extremely high percentage of negative politeness strategies, observed in two diametrically opposed participants (director and assistant) in respect of hierarchy. In other words, the director within a total of 5 emails used 8 instances of negative politeness while the assistant used 23 instances of negative strategies out of 23 emails (Table 10).

Considering the effect of social distance, striking findings uncovered that it plays a fairly important role in conjunction with hierarchy. Principally, it was found that employees used commonly indirect (negative) politeness strategies when addressing to distant colleagues, and considerably more positive (direct) politeness strategies with their close workmates (Table 11).

On the basis of nationality and politeness strategies, the results indicated that the English participant used solely negative politeness strategy in all of his emails while the Polish informant was the only one who used predominantly positive strategy at such a high rate, in comparison with the rest participants (Figure 1). Hierarchically speaking, superiors used chiefly negative politeness strategies in all of their emails, but to a lesser extent than subordinates did. However, this proportion weakened when they sent to equals who primarily used positive strategies (Figure 2). Investigating the effect of gender, both sexes used, for the most part, negative strategies, although the percentage of men is greater than of women (Figure 3).

Lastly, examining the greetings and closings amongst the different categories of people, interestingly, findings disclosed that a *greeting plus first name or team* (hi, hello, good morning/afternoon) was the main trend in all emails by almost all the three power distance relationships (83 instances in total by all) (Table12). As far as the closings of the emails are concerned, it was found again that, approximately for all the three pairs the *formal closing plus first name* (best regards, kind regards, regards) was the mainstream sign-off (Table 13).

5.3 Answers to research questions

This study intended to find answers to the following research questions:

The central research question was: *How does the relationship between different categories of people in a workplace affect the language use in email communication?*

First and foremost, this central research question -based on hierarchical level of participants- focused on three power distance relationships, namely equal to equal, subordinate to superordinate and superordinate to subordinate and intended to investigate how hierarchy affects the linguistic choices people make in email communication in a workplace. Drawing on the findings, the research showed that the way employees compose their emails depends on whom the email is addressed to, in other words, if they sent it up, down the hierarchy, or horizontal. The effect of hierarchy was observed initially in the main communicative functions. Superiors, as being the ones who hold the institutional and legitimate power within the workplace, used in their emails mainly directives when writing to their subordinates; hence they were more direct in their email communication. To put it differently, superiors put in their requests specific orders, so as there is no room for misinterpretations. On the other hand, subordinates tended to use considerably more the interrogative form rather than the imperative in their emails forwarded to superiors. Intrinsically, subordinates made greater use of modalised interrogative forms like "could you please tell me..?"- or "can you send me..?" so as to seem polite and provide evidence of consideration, as seen in Table 8 (Section 4.2.5). Besides, in terms of politeness strategies, I found, that both superiors and subordinates used more negative politeness strategies overall, although unsurprisingly, subordinates to a much greater extent, almost more than double figure opposed to superiors, so that to show signs of deference and obedience to the higher-ranking people in their email correspondence as seen in Figure 2 (Section 4.3). Importantly, examining the outcome of social distance between four participants of various ranks within the company, the study found it plays a crucial role in email workplace communication among employees. As such, workers appeared more polite to distant colleagues, as they used more negative or indirect politeness strategies while to close ones, employed more direct or positive strategies as seen in Table 11 (Section 4.3). Hence, it is clear that the relationships among different levels of employees are affected by the degree of familiarity or intimacy they establish.

Ultimately, in light of openings and closings, one key pattern was observed concerning the language use amongst the various hierarchical positions, the informal greeting (*hi, hello,*) plus first name and the formal closings (*kind regards, best regards*) plus their first name. These two types dominated within the emails. Thus, more than half of the participants sent emails upwards and downwards the hierarchy along these lines. This finding hints at the fact that, workplace culture appears to have a profound impact on greetings and closings in the emails communication than power imbalance.

The second question was: What are the main communicative goals that emails serve?

In order to answer this question, I had to analyse the corpus of emails, which are considered as communicative events, using speech act theory. The findings indicated that there was a high number of emails that served the function of *providing information* within the corpora of primary emails. This function accounted for more than half of the speech acts followed by *directives* and next by *seeking information* as seen in Table 4, presented in section 4.2.1.

According to the results, from a hierarchical point of view, in the email communication between a superior to a subordinate the act of *providing information* occurred to a lesser extent in comparison to equals as seen in Table 5, presented in section 4.2.1. However, regarding the speech act of *directives*, superiors used them to a considerable degree as opposed to subordinates or equals as observed in Table 5. The higher proportion of directives expressed by superiors reveals a need on their side to protect and save their status within the company. Yet, on the other hand, it should be stressed that the amount of directives given by superiors make up a third of the total speech acts, fact which suggests that in the workplace an egalitarian and warm atmosphere exists.

The third question was: What kinds of politeness strategies do culturally diverse employees employ?

In terms of politeness, I analysed the emails based on the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). As I already have reported in the literature section, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) has remained the most eminent in the study of cross-cultural pragmatics.

In line with them, there are two sets of politeness manifestations, the positives, which are considered more direct and involve familiarity and solidarity and the negative ones, which are indirect and conventionalized forms and thus are perceived as more formal and polite (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In accordance with the results, overall, surprisingly a tendency was found towards negative politeness strategies from the various participants representing different cultures. A closer inspection of the data disclosed that, the English participant employed exclusively negative strategies, both in upward and downward interaction as shown in Figure 1, section 4.3. What is more, the Polish informant stood out amongst the others, as the only one who employed more positives than negative strategies. Dutch participants used the least amount of positive strategies compared to the rest of the ethnicities and employed mainly negative tactics. Furthermore, Greeks used mainly negatives as well, and not positives as expected based on relevant literature. French, Chinese and Indonesian followed the same pattern and chose negative or indirect politeness strategies, although among the three, the Indonesian participant used the largest amount of politeness strategies compared to the rest as seen in Figure 1, section 4.3. The aforementioned findings are more or less consistent with the literature about these lingua culture groups, although they are outlined in more detail in the discussion section.

The fourth question was: What is the effect of gender on the usage of politeness strategies in the workplace email communication?

It was found in this study regarding the gender factor, that there is a considerable difference between males and females in terms of politeness and that women, at odds with what is stated in the literature, did not use more politeness in comparison with men. More precisely, men and women used the same amount of positive politeness strategies as seen in Figure 3. Overall, both used mainly negative strategies, as the rates are higher for both sexes in comparison with positives. Yet, men's percentage of negative politeness strategies is noticeably greater than that of women, approximately 1,5 times as much as females did positive ones, which constitutes the fundamental difference in the adoption of politeness strategies genderwise, as illustrated in Figure 3 introduced in section 4.3.

5.4 Original hypotheses

This study examined the validity of the following six hypotheses. In general, I hypothesize well and achieved similar results to what I was expecting.

Hypothesis 1 puts forward that messages written by subordinates to superordinates will be more polite than the other way around, based on the principles of social hierarchy. Therefore, I expect that communication among peer will be neutral.

In that case, my hypothesis is confirmed on the basis of the results I obtained. Subordinates, overall, used more politeness in their email communication with their superiors and not the other way around, as observed in Table 8 presented in section 4.2.5. This underlines that non dominant participants were rather cautious and discreet in emailing, so as not to show an immoderate intimacy or an unacceptable behavior, which is not appropriate within the organization. Superiors on the other hand, as expected, used politeness to a lesser extent while in the communication between peers more positives strategies were adopted. The latter emphasizes the importance of close contact, familiarity and intimacy among equal email communication, as seen in Figure 2 presented in section 4.3.

Hypothesis 2 postulates that the prevalent communicative function for subordinates will be 'seeking information', for superior 'directives' and for equals 'providing information'.

The second hypothesis is simply confirmed by the findings as presented in Table 5 section 4.2.1. Indeed, directives were realized mostly by institutionally power participants, whereas seeking information has consistently been used by an overwhelming majority of subordinates. Among equals, the major communicative function was in fact providing information.

Hypothesis 3 posits that the degree of intimacy and reciprocity between the workers will play a significant role in the kind and amount of politeness used.

In my study, I found that indeed is the case and those colleagues who stated that had a close relationship with their co-workers used more positive or, in other words, direct politeness, which instills into workers friendliness and closeness in their email communication and a sense of community.

However, those who reported that they had a distant relationship and they posit their co-workers on a scale of 1 to 5, into the last categories, namely 4 or 5, indeed with them the email communication was simply formal as they used more negative politeness tactics or, to put it differently, more indirect and conventionalized forms. This is seen in Table 11, section 4.3.

Hypothesis 4 speculates that as politeness strategies are culture-specific, thus every participant, who represents a particular culture, will employ either negative or positive strategies in their email communication based on what is dictated by their culture.

The fourth hypothesis is partly confirmed in light of the results I obtained. I had foreseen correctly that every culture expresses differently politeness and thus most likely, employs different strategies. Based on the relevant literature, every country shows a clear pattern towards either positive or negative strategies, but each on a specific direction. Nevertheless, in my study, some findings are not in alignment with previous studies, as seen in Figure 1 section 4.3.

Hypothesis 5 assumes that females driven by their very nature as more sensitive and delicate will have an inclination towards using more positive politeness strategies in their emails than their male counterparts.

The fifth hypothesis is not confirmed by the results which indicated that both genders used the same amount of positive politeness strategies as seen in Figure 3 section 4.3.

Hypothesis 6 speculates that subordinates will use more formal greetings and closings in emails addressed to superiors, than the other way around. Accordingly, I suppose that salutations and leave-takings among equals will be informal.

The last hypothesis is partially supported by the results I gained. As a matter of fact, the study yielded almost identical results for subordinates and superiors when it comes to greetings. Both used the informal greeting (hi, hello) and the first name and did not adopt more formal salutations as seen in Table 12, section 4.4.1. Regarding equal email communication, the hypothesis was confirmed since they used informal greetings.

With regard to leave-takings, both superiors and subordinates preferred formal sign-offs in email communication with each other and with their equals too as seen in Table 13, section 4.4.2. Therefore, considering the above results we can reach the conclusion that the company's culture makes all the difference to greetings and closings.

5.5 Discussion and comparison with other research

Previous research on the communicative functions of emails (Sherblom 1988; Abdullah 2003; Kankaanranta 2005; Waldvogel 2005; Yeoh 2014) showed in general, that providing information and requesting action were the two main actions performed through email, a fact which turns out to be consistent with this investigation. Specifically, Sherblom (1988) found in his study that providing information was the most popular function performed basically by managers. The same applies to Abdullah (2003), where she indicated that the function of providing information was the main communicative function in her analysis of emails. However, in opposition to Sherblom (1988) she revealed that providing information was originally realized by subordinates while the request for action was mainly performed by superiors. Besides, she argued that the request for information is more likely to be written by subordinates rather than superordinates (Abdullah, 2003). According to Kankaanranta (2005), the two key moves are providing information (comments and information) and request for action (looking for a verbal or non-verbal action) which is in line with my results.

Waldvogel (2005) in her study found that providing and seeking information were the prevalent communicative functions in the two workplaces she investigated, namely, a manufacturing plant and an educational organization, which is partially compatible with this study. Yeoh (2014) found in her examination of three workplaces that all used the email roughly for the same function, but with different distribution. For the two New Zealand companies she studied, providing information was the prevailing function, followed by the request for action. By contrast, in the Malaysian workplace request for action dominated the email corpus. Moreover, she found that there was no substantial difference in preference for requests for action between superiors and subordinates in the two New Zealand companies. However, for the Malaysian workplace she found that superiors inclined towards request action in their emails while subordinates primarily provided information (Yeoh, 2014).

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Overall, these results are more or less in accordance with what this study has found which means that providing information was the core communicative function (45% or 48 occurrences) and subsequently directives (45%) where requests for action occurred 31 times within the corpora, followed by seeking information (30%). Nevertheless, my study revealed that providing information was a function chiefly performed by equals in email communication with each other, and this is at odds with what Yeoh's (2014) and Abdullah's (2003) found. Although, in terms of requests for action, it was found in my study that superiors performed predominantly this function, thus the findings are in agreement with Abdullah's (2003) and Sherblom's (1988) results, who also argued that for a superordinate it is reasonable to produce more requests for action in communication downwards the hierarchy.

Further on, research on politeness in email communication in the workplace, found that politeness in a work environment is of the essence (Abdullah, 2003). Earlier research (Dubrovsky et al., 1991; Taha and Caldwell, 1993; Davidson, 1995; Pliskin and Romm, 1997 as cited in Panteli, 2002) has shown that ranking disparities are lessened throughout email communication. Research of Rogers and Lee-Wong (2003) on communication between superior and subordinate showed that the latter should have humble polite behavior towards superiors and to be willing to assist anytime.

Kong (2006) found in his study that subordinates used more politeness strategies in emails sent up the hierarchy and the other way around, compared with equal to equal communication. Partly the same applies to my study, where it was found that subordinates used a larger amount of politeness strategies when flowing upwards than the other way around. By contrast, communication among peers included considerably more politeness compared to superiors sent to subordinates.

Alafnan (2014) who studied the use of politeness tactics in workplace email communication found that in general, the indirect politeness strategies were preferred mostly by his participants on an 88% rate (44% negative and 40% positive politeness strategies). A finding that conforms to the results I obtained. Likewise, he found in terms of ethnicity, that the participants used indirect positive and negative strategies in various frequencies, which is more or less in agreement with the present results.

In this study, respondents of various ethnic backgrounds used either negative or positive strategies but with an overt tendency towards negative indirect strategies. Lastly, concerning the social distance, Alafnan's investigation concluded that it constitutes more influential factor than power. He found that more direct politeness strategies were used by close workmates, in spite of hierarchical position, while negatives politeness strategies were employed more by the distant ones. This study revealed the same, but it took into account the hierarchy level of participants, and it was found that higher level employees used to a much smaller percentage the positive strategies both to close and distant colleagues compared with their subordinates.

Kankaanranta (2001, as cited in Alafnan, 2014) and Alafnan (2014) found that requests are basically performed using imperatives and interrogatives, which is also - in accordance with the results -of the -present study. As found in Ho's (2009) study, the imperative was preferred for requests sent up the hierarchy in Hong Kong investigation. Along the same lines, the present study deduced that imperatives made up the largest percentage (41%), with 126 instances in the compilation of emails and employed substantially by superiors when sending downwards, while the interrogative occurred 16 times (38%) within the corpus and used dominantly by subordinates when making requests to superiors. As stated by Holmes and Stubbs (2003, p. 34) a superordinate uses more the imperative form when dispatching directives for normal duties to lower level colleagues and when there is an overt power distance and the imposition is low. Moreover, in accordance with Waldvogel (2005) the use of imperative "can also help reinforce one's identity as a manager" (p. 224). As Brown and Levinson (1987) indicated interrogatives are polite conventionally indirect requests. Within this research, interrogative forms were used predominantly by subordinates reporting to superiors, because, as Blum-Kulka (1987) argued requests starting with "can you" and "could you" hold the greatest amount of politeness. Hence, subordinates who used this type of request, for the most part, wanted to express sympathy to their higher status colleagues and show deference. Besides, Yeoh (2014) found that from the three companies she investigated, the Malaysian company had the largest percentage of requests occurred in imperative (68%) while for the other two New Zealand companies, interrogatives made up the highest percentage, which is also in line with Waldvogel's (2005) finding.

Yeoh (2014) also revealed that 'please plus imperative' form was favored more by all participants from the three companies. This finding is in line with the present study, where I found that employees at all hierarchical levels used, as a rule, 'please plus imperative' (71 occurrences in a total of 107 emails). Blum-Kulka et al., (1989b) reported that the marker "please" has the potential to lower the force of a request, and make it sound more polite.

Studies about cross-cultural communication (Hofstede, 1991; Van Mulken, 1996; Sifianou, 1999; Wierzbicka, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009; Sukamto, 2012) indicated that different cultures utilized differently the linguistic norms, thus they employ either negative or positive politeness strategies depending on what it is dictated by their culture. The majority of the findings are consistent with the previous research, with the only exception of the finding regarding Greeks. It was found in my study that Greek participants used negative strategies heavily, while Sifianou (1999) argued that Greek culture values familiarity and directness in their communication, therefore they have an inclination towards using more positive politeness strategies. Nevertheless, as the participants' language of communication is the English language, it is likely to be affected by the English norms, and as a consequence changed their strategy from positive to negative, in an attempt to comply with their norms. Politeness theory proposes that the reason why many people stray from the polite or direct strategies lies in the need to maintain their face by considering their recipient (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This is the logic behind why all these people faithfully employed the negative indirect politeness strategies in their upwards, downwards and lateral communication with their colleagues.

Investigating the effect of gender in the use of politeness strategies in workplace emails this study found that the levels of positive politeness strategies are almost equal amongst females and males in general. Furthermore, both genders used basically the negative strategy overall. However, males used considerably more negative strategies than their counterparts, a finding which is at odds with previous research. According to Holmes (1995) women have a propensity to be more polite than men and "women are much more likely than men to express positive politeness or friendliness in the way they use language" (p. 6). This statement is opposed to what my research has found. A possible explanation about this may be that the sample includes random level employees and thus, there is no control over the effect of level.

Consequently, the higher level of politeness observed on males might be driven by the power rather than gender effect itself. As previously stated, in peer-to-peer communication a higher amount of positive politeness was detected, whereas, in unequal communication, the negative politeness strategy was dominantly used.

Although, in keeping with Herring's (2003) theory, she suggested that "women are more likely to thank, appreciate and apologize" and indeed in terms of expressives, which include apology and thanks within the dataset, it was found that 3 out of 5 apologies were made by women and 7 out of 10 thanks were realized by women too. However, it was not found in my research that men were not concerned with politeness as Herring (2003) asserted about men.

In terms of greetings and closings, it was found in my research that a main trend was observed in the emails, including an informal greeting in the beginning and formal closings and a first name for sign-offs. The fact that mostly all participants, regardless of their hierarchical level, used widely this type of greetings and closings, indicate that this behavior appeared to be the norm in company A, thus it is allowed in communicative openings in emails and reflect that people enjoy a close working relationship amongst them and there is a special workplace culture within the institution. The closings on the other hand, espoused an air of politeness and distance which is regarded perfectly suitable after requesting action, help or giving directives. Moreover, it seems that it is more a matter of daily routine to greet one another using an informal style and sign-off their emails using *kind regards* or *best regards* and their first name. Bou-Franch (2011) showed in her research about the openings and closings in Spanish conversations, that there was a high amount of "sociability" detected in the emails messages and she briefly summarized her results in one sentence "people first, business second" (p. 1772). The study of Waldvogel (2005) between the two workplaces that of manufacturing plant and the educational organization has shown that, the much frequent use of greetings and closings and the informal terms of address within the plant, reflects that it has a culture that values harmony and friendliness and there is cooperation between the staff and managerial level employees in opposition with the educational organization, where the greetings and closings were not used broadly (only about 20%).

Waldvogel (2007) further suggested that, even though greetings and closings are politeness signals, the existence or not of these in emails does not indicate politeness is lacking from those who leave them out.

5.6 Limitations and future research

This study had its deficiencies as well, and future studies could shed more light on the investigation of intercultural workplace email communication.

First of all, it was not possible to gather sufficient amount of email messages for all participants, mainly from top level employees due to the fact that, they do not have regular communication with managerial and operational level employees. Furthermore, in terms of ethnicity, my research included participants from different ethnic backgrounds, but in some cases (e.g. Indonesian, Polish, Chinese, and English) there was only one representative. Another limitation of this study is the fact that it is a case study, addressing only one company, thus the results could not be generalized before conducting further research. Essentially the results are not typical for every organization, as the scope of this study is restricted to the data and findings of this company only. The research constitutes a qualitative analysis and it does not include quantitative analysis, as no statistical test has been conducted, thus the findings are suggestive.

Further studies should be conducted in various workplaces and contexts that use English as a lingua franca, in order to explore if these findings and suggestions do hold water using quantitative analysis. Besides, future research should take into consideration the working years of each employee, so as to see if the language use in email communication is affected by that factor. As newcomers in every job are expected, regardless of their level to be more polite and formal compared with someone who works at the same workplace for some time.

Over and above, interviews with the participants would also be of benefit for a more detailed investigation.

The field of CMC has just started to expand, therefore more research is needed about workplace communication and the factors that affect the language use. Hence, further empirical investigation is vitally important. Only by the constant empirical

investigation can we hope to gain more clarity on which factors influences email communication in the workplace.

5.7 Conclusion

On the whole, this study attempted to shed more light on various aspects that affect language use in workplace email communication in a multinational organization that uses English lingua franca as the language of communication.

This study has revealed that the effect of hierarchy played the most significant role in the composition of email messages, amongst the three power distance relationships, namely superiors to subordinates, subordinates to superiors and peers to peers. Subordinates were found to use a great deal of indirect negative politeness and interrogative requests in their communication with higher status colleagues than the other way around, while the communication among peers was basically more direct (positive strategies) and informal. Broadly speaking, a marked tendency towards negatives strategies at the three levels of interaction was noticed.

Likewise, the effect of social distance was also an influential and decisive factor in conjunction with hierarchy, as it was found that "close colleagues" used more positive or direct strategies, whereas "distant colleagues" used considerably more negative or indirect strategies in their email communication. Yet, it is essential to highlight that superiors used the smaller amount of positives strategies overall.

With regard to cultural background, the study has revealed that in itself it contributed to the selection of the speech act and the politeness strategies, as according to relevant literature, strategies are culture-specific, thus participants were definitely influenced by their culture for the construction of emails.

Interestingly, the study provided evidence that workplace culture plays a very crucial role and can affect the language use in email communication amongst employees at all hierarchical levels. In terms of greetings and closings, the findings supported the claim that the company's culture was the most seminal factor that accounted for the dominant trend, viz. to use the informal greetings and formal closings, in upwards, downwards and lateral email interactions, in circa three-fifths of emails in the corpus.

Ultimately, this study revealed that the gender differences, as opposed the claims in some of the previous literature, do not play a significant role in the politeness level displayed in workplace email communication. However, it remains interesting for future work to examine the effect of gender in conjunction with the power and social distance, taking into consideration a larger sample.

In conclusion, I am convinced that this study has provided some deep insights into workplace email communication of employees of various cultures and levels and will serve as an agent to this end.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire

Name:

Position in the company:

> How do you assess your social relationship with the below colleagues from the company you work for? Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, considering the following.

1. **Very good friend** (I do lots of social activities with this person outside work)
2. **A friend** (someone I like and I do things with outside work)
3. **An acquaintance** (some I know but less frequently doing things outside work with)
4. **Very good Colleague** (someone who I just work with and occasionally have contact with outside work)
5. **Colleague** (someone I just work with and do not have contact with outside work)

Brice	1	2	3	4	5
Cheng	1	2	3	4	5
Diana	1	2	3	4	5
George	1	2	3	4	5
Greg	1	2	3	4	5
Lionel	1	2	3	4	5
Maria	1	2	3	4	5
Mel	1	2	3	4	5
Mike	1	2	3	4	5
Nick	1	2	3	4	5
Paul	1	2	3	4	5
Philippe	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your time!

Appendix II

A list of the politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987, pp. 101-102) is presented below with examples from the corpus of emails.

Positive Strategies	Examples
1. **Notice, attend to addressee (H)**	Hope you had nice holidays!
2. **Presuppose, raise, assert common ground**	Apparently, there is a contact that, both me and you, overlooked to check.
3. **Intensify interest to the addressee**	[...] what I found to be of great interest in the contract you sent me […] you know what I mean?
4. **Offer, promise**	I will try to get it for you by the end of the week
5. **Give or ask for reasons**	I think we already agreed to extend contract […] Why don't you ask [name] about this?
6. **Be optimistic**	Hope you have seen that and act so.
7. **Include both S and H in the activity**	Let's discuss it after lunch.
8. **Give gifts to H, show understanding, sympathy, cooperation**	Please, have a look the table below, it will help you with the prices. For any further please feel free to contact me.

Negative Strategies	Examples
1. **Go on the record as incurring a debt**	I could easily do this for you no problem.
2. **Be conventionally indirect**	Could you please check the [name] code for the two companies in [location and location]?
3. **Question, Hedge**	I was kind of wondering whether you could see this issue before this afternoon meeting.
4. **Be pessimistic**	I don't think the invoice will be paid in time.
5. **Minimize the imposition**	I just wanted to ask you some contract details, in particular period/qty, validity, incoterm.
6. **Give deference**	Looking forward to your response.
7. **Apologize**	Apologies for the short notice
8. **Impersonalize S and H**	At this moment, we are still waiting for [name] approval.

Appendix III

Below are the results of the questionnaire regarding social relationships of each of the twelve participants with the rest of the colleagues.

	Brice	Cheng	Diana	George	Greg	Lionel	Maria	Mel	Mike	Nick	Paul	Philippe
Brice	-	4	4	3	5	3	5	3	3	4	3	2
Cheng	5	-	2	4	5	3	5	4	3	5	5	4
Diana	5	2	-	4	5	4	2	2	2	4	5	4
George	4	5	2	-	4	4	3	2	2	4	5	4
Greg	4	5	5	4	-	4	3	5	5	5	4	4
Lionel	4	3	4	4	4	-	5	3	3	5	5	2
Maria	5	3	2	4	3	5	-	3	4	4	4	5
Mel	3	4	1	2	4	4	2	-	2	4	5	5
Mike	4	4	3	2	5	2	3	3	-	4	5	4
Nick	5	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	3	-	5	5
Paul	3	5	5	4	3	4	5	4	4	5	-	4
Philippe	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	5	4	-