Linguistic Politeness: A Pragmatic Analysis of the Request Letters

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Abstract

The objectives of this study are: discover the linguistic features in the opening strategy, closing strategy, and directness of the head-acts in the request letters; identify and analyze positive and negative politeness strategies used in request letters sent by students, organizations, and companies to the office of the Dean of Student Affairs; investigate the use of politeness strategies that indicates about linguistic conventions. This study employed a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The primary data for this study consists of request letters from students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated and various organizations within and outside the academic institution. The researcher selected 15 request letters submitted to the Dean of Student Affairs Office during the 2021-2022 academic year. This study employed three tiers of corpus analysis. The research reveals that request letters sent to the Dean of Student Affairs Office at the institution employ a diverse range of politeness strategies. The "other complimentary close and other pre-closing" is another element of the closure strategy that the researcher discovered. The head-acts shown that request letters are often direct on a degree of directness. The utilization of politeness strategies within a broader socio-cultural context illuminates established linguistic norms. The diverse inclinations towards employing politeness strategies and their multifaceted applications in request letter communication do not necessarily indicate a transition from impoliteness to politeness or vice versa. It demonstrates that people's communication styles and methods of politeness are evolving.

1. INTRODUCTION

With traditional students, the usual required documents are the request letter for them to approve their activities or anything they want to seek permission from the school and this will be addressed to the specific office. These documents aim to create a favorable impression of the requester, encouraging the head of the office to approve their request. A request letter is crafted when someone needs information, permission, a favor, service, or anything requiring politeness and a humble request. Depending on its purpose, a request letter can be brief or detailed, but it always employs a specific and direct approach. One significant advantage of a request letter is that it alleviates pressure on the recipient and spares the sender from potential embarrassment. The recipient has ample time to respond, and the sender can handle a written refusal more easily than a verbal one. Essentially, students need to use linguistic or pragmatic strategies to persuade the office to approve their requests. Fraser (1983) describes pragmatics as "the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes the intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes." Without this understanding,

miscommunication can occur. Politeness is a crucial element of pragmatic competence. Politeness is "the expression of speakers' intention to mitigate the face threats that some face-threatening actions bring to others" (Mills, 2002). There are strategies by which interlocutors can soften the strings of face-threatening gestures called politeness strategies.

One of the pioneering studies looked into replacing supplementary psychology lectures with email communication (Smith, Whiteley & Smith, 1999). Bloch (2002) observed how her graduate ESL students employed rhetorical strategies in their interactions outside the classroom. Chjenova (2013) examined various aspects of email communication, such as greetings, levels of directness, and syntactic, lexical, and external modifications. She found that there were few guidelines for writing emails to teachers, resulting in students being unsure about appropriate politeness and language. Hallajian and David (2014) also noted ongoing violations of email netiquette in academic contexts, despite its common use. They highlighted that faculty members often find student emails to be impolite, reflecting a broader dissatisfaction. Many studies have focused on evaluating emails based on the politeness and appropriateness of the sender's language.

Eelen (2001) explained that within the Anglo-Saxon scientific tradition, politeness is studied through pragmatic and sociolinguistic lenses. Both linguistic subfields are engaged in politeness theories, as politeness is closely linked to language use in pragmatics and reflects the connection between language and society. Scovel (1998) stated that pragmatics focuses on what people mean during everyday interactions, while sociolinguistics examines the reasons behind what we say, to whom, when, and where. Eelen (2001) affirmed that despite their differences, the pragmatic and sociolinguistic views converge in politeness theory, emphasizing the interplay between language and social context. However, this consensus is limited, as each theory offers a distinct definition of politeness.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

Numerous researchers have examined politeness in different contexts, particularly focusing on variations in email usage within academic settings, such as request letters. The objectives of this study are:
1. Discover the linguistic features in the opening strategy, closing strategy, and head-act directness in the request letter.
2. Identify and analyze the positive and negative politeness strategies used in the request letter sent by students, organizations, and companies to the office of the Dean of Student Affairs.
3. Discover what the use of politeness strategies indicates about linguistic conventions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section covers the foundational theories underpinning the study, specifically Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness (1987) and principles of Pragmatics. In the Philippines, Correo (2014) examined the politeness strategies employed by Filipinos, particularly Bicolanos, in asynchronous computer-mediated communication. His research confirmed the relevance of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory in the local context. This aligns with Simmons' (1994) study, which supports the universality of politeness and highlights unique linguistic and cultural aspects of Filipino, especially Bikol, politeness. Suarez (2012) analyzed politeness strategies in workplace emails through a pragmatic approach based on Yule's (1996) concept of politeness. This study found that both positive and negative strategies, especially indirectness, were used in emails to enhance politeness by increasing optionality. However, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings and lacks a detailed socio-cultural analysis of Filipino communication.

Despite numerous studies on politeness and impoliteness in computer-mediated communication, such as emails (see Brown and Levinson, 1978; Culpeper, 1996), workplace emails from non-native speakers remain understudied (Alfanan, 2014). Noticing this gap and frequently receiving emails himself, the researcher saw an opportunity to explore not only the grammatical aspects but, more importantly, the pragmatic elements of workplace correspondence.

Soroko (2012) conducted a study in Poland analyzing job application letters, focusing on structural categories (moves) and strategies for self-presentation. Similarly, Henry and Roseberry (2001) examined job application letters from native English speakers, analyzing (1) moves, (2) strategies used within each move, and (3) the primary syntactic patterns and word combinations in each strategy. In the ASEAN context, Rahim and Arifin (2014) investigated trends in job application letters written by Malaysians. Using Bhatia's (1993) transition structure as a framework, both Rahim and Arifin (2014) and Henry and Roseberry (2001) found results that differed from Bhatia's original structure. Henry and Roseberry (2001) identified four additional moves, such as referring to a job advertisement, stating reasons for applying, naming referees, and setting terms and conditions. Conversely, Rahim and Arifin (2014) found that pressure tactics were uncommon in Malaysian letters, which emphasized politeness and respect, particularly towards individuals in positions of power.

2.1. Theoretic foundation

The most widely recognized theory of politeness is by Brown and Levinson. According to their 1987 theory, politeness needs can be addressed through various strategies, including bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and others. Positive politeness strategies aim to lessen the threat to the listener's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Fifteen strategies can be used to indicate positive politeness as expressed by the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). These strategies include the following (Brown & Levinson, 1987):

1. Noticing and attending to the hearer,
2. Exaggerating by giving different intonation, tone and other prosodic features or exaggerating by using intensifying modifiers,
3. Intensifying interest to hearer,
4. Using in-group identity markers,
5. Seeking agreement by the addressee's statements through using specific statements or repetition,
6. Avoiding disagreement by using false agreement, by expressing pseudo-agreement, by using hedge or by making white lies,
7. Showing common ground,
8. Joking,
9. Showing the speaker's concern for the hearer's wants,
10. Offering and promising,
11. Being optimistic,
12. Including both the speaker and the hearer in the activity,
13. Telling or asking the reason,
14. Assuming reciprocity,
15. Giving gift to the hearer in the form of sympathy, understanding and cooperation in the conversation.

Negative politeness strategies involve minimizing imposition on the listener and maintaining their independence. This can include using modal verbs or expressions of hesitation, apologizing for the imposition, and asking questions or seeking permission to ask questions. Koike (1992) defined negative politeness as "considering the listener's desire to be uninhibited

in acting and gaining attention." Based on the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987), ten strategies can be used to show negative politeness including the following (Brown and Levinson, 1987):

1. Being indirect,
2. Using questions and hedges,
3. Being pessimistic (i.e. being pessimistic whether the hearer wants to do what we ask or not),
4. Minimizing the imposition,
5. Giving deference and being deferent to the hearer,
6. Apologizing,
7. Impersonalizing speaker and hearer by making your addressee unmentioned,
8. Generalizing expression rather than mentioning addressee directly,
9. Nominalizing,
10. Going on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer

2.2. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of how natural language speakers communicate more than what is explicitly stated. In the philosophy of language, natural language, also known as ordinary language, is spoken, written, or signed by humans for general communication purposes. Glaser (2009) defines pragmatics as the study of contextual meaning, involving the interpretation of what people mean in specific contexts and how these contexts influence what is said. This study requires understanding how speakers adjust their speech and how listeners interpret it based on who is involved, where, when, and under what circumstances the communication occurs.

Similarly, Yule (1996) describes pragmatics as the study of speaker meaning, focusing on how context influences what is said. It involves considering how speakers tailor their messages according to their interlocutors and the situational context. Pragmatics encompasses the study of language, meaning, and context in communication. Learning a language through the lens of pragmatics offers significant benefits. It allows us to understand people's intended meanings, assumptions, goals, and the types of actions they perform (such as requests, refusals, agreements, disagreements, gratitude, and apologies) when they speak. Successful communication requires speakers to understand the meaning and impact of their utterances in relation to context and intent. Pragmatics covers various fields, one of which is politeness, which is the research interest and focus of this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Initially, each request letter was read to gain an overall understanding of the data. In the second reading, a quantitative analysis was conducted, focusing on the frequency and tabulation of linguistic features in three specific areas: (1) the order of opening addresses, (2) the directness level of the main request, and (3) the closing strategy. The third reading involved analyzing 15 positive politeness strategies and 10 negative politeness strategies as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987). For the qualitative aspect, the researcher aimed to deepen the analysis by explaining the reasons behind common patterns and linguistic conventions observed in the data. This involved considering both the immediate context of creating the request letters and the broader social conditions and structures influencing them. The analysis sought to describe the linguistic patterns in the request letters, consistent with pragmatic study methodologies.

3.1. Data Collection

The primary data for this study consists of request letters from students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated and various organizations within and outside the academic institution. The researcher selected 15 request letters submitted to the Dean of Student Affairs Office during

the 2021-2022 academic year. As the Dean of Student Affairs at St. Vincent's College Incorporated, the researcher had access to all relevant request letters while adhering to privacy regulations.

Request letters were chosen for this study for several reasons. First, requests as a speech act have been extensively studied in pragmatics and are well-defined in various contexts. Second, there is a specific interest in examining the use of pragmatic politeness in request letters from students, organizations, and companies to the Dean of Student Affairs. Third, unlike some studies that focus on emails, this research uses request letters within a higher education setting. Finally, drafting request letters is crucial in the Dean of Student Affairs office, not only for obtaining approvals but also for strengthening relationships between students and the office and demonstrating professionalism and effective communication skills.

3.2. Corpus Analysis

This study employed three tiers of corpus analysis. The initial tier concentrated on linguistic aspects, particularly the opening and closing sequences of the request letters. Given the pragmatic focus on linguistic politeness, the second tier delved into politeness strategies, drawing from Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework. Frequency counts and percentage distributions were utilized in both tiers to identify prevalent language features and politeness strategies within the request letters. The third and final tier involved a qualitative examination of linguistic conventions stemming from the application of politeness strategies.

4. RESULTS

This section explores linguistic elements present in request letters, such as opening sequences, greetings, the directness of requests, pre-closings, complimentary closings, and both negative and positive politeness strategies. Additionally, it aims to elucidate the linguistic conventions derived from the application of these politeness strategies.

Table 1. The distribution of opening moves used in request letters

Opening Strategy	For example	Number of request letter	Percentage
Greeting/term of deference + form of address	Greetings of Peace and Prosperity/Dear Sir	7	46.67%
Dear + (NP)	Dear Mr. X	7	46.67%
Form of address only (Form of address only)	Sir/Ma'am	1	6.66%
Greetings only	Good morning!	0	0
No address nor greetings Total		0	0
		15	100%

Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of opening actions observed in the request letters. Based on the data presented in Table 1, 46.67% of the participants used a greeting similar to the greetings of Peace and Prosperity or the type of term of deference dear + form of address sir. This high percentage suggests that students commonly use formal, respectful salutations, indicating a

high level of deference and respect towards the recipient. Another 46.67% also started their request letter with the linguistic features Dear + Noun Phrase (NP), the noun phrase is used after Dear with "Sir," "Sir/Madam/Ma'am," the title (for example, "Mr. X"). This format also reflects a formal and respectful tone, adhering to conventional letter-writing practices. Only 6.66% of the letters used form of address only, like "Sir/Ma'am," indicating that while less common, some students opted for a slightly less formal approach. However, this still maintains a level of respect. There were no instances of greetings only ("Good morning!") or no address nor greetings. This absence reinforces the preference for formal and respectful opening moves in the context of request letters within this institution.

The results suggest that students are well-aware of the formal requirements and cultural expectations of politeness in academic settings. The consistent use of formal greetings aligns with Filipino cultural norms where addressing authority figures with respect is highly emphasized. The preference for formal opening strategies also indicates an understanding of the pragmatic need to establish a respectful and positive tone at the outset of the communication, which is crucial in requests where approval or favorable consideration is sought.

The students demonstrate a high level of pragmatic competence by appropriately selecting opening strategies that align with cultural and institutional expectations. This competence is crucial for effective communication and can significantly impact the likelihood of a favorable response. The consistent use of formal openings reflects the students' awareness of the importance of politeness and deference in their requests. This awareness is indicative of their understanding of the power dynamics and the need to mitigate potential face-threatening acts.

Table 2. Shows the distribution of final moves used in request letters

Final Strategy	For example	Number of request letter	Percentage
Pre-closing	Thank you/Thank you so much	1	7%
*Other Pre-closing	May the Lord Grant your Heart Desires/Your confirmation will be truly appreciated/Your nimble response is appreciated in the record/We appreciate your consideration and we look forward for your support in this endeavor	4	27%
Total		5	34%
Complimentary close	Respectfully yours/Truly yours/Sincerely/Sincerely yours	10	67%
	In JPIAN Spirit/Ever praising your kindness/Yours in	5	33%

*Other complimentary close	Vincentian Spirit/With you in Vincentian Spirit		
Total		15	100%

* Two more strategies were incorporated at the conclusion of this request letter due to their frequent occurrence in the data.

In the final strategy, there are 27% of participants who use different and not common pre-closings, so it is called other pre-closing because the requester uses a different way of thanking, for example that can be seen in the request letter, May the Lord Grant your Heart Desires/Your confirmation will be truly appreciated/Your nimble response is appreciated in the record/We appreciate your consideration and we look forward for your support in this endeavour. Regarding the related linguistic features of related strategies, we can see in the use of *other pre-closings* that minor variations in this structure include the use of lexical items at the end, such as "appreciated" and "consideration." Based on expressions of gratitude, found that this strategy can be achieved through the following syntactic structure: May the + NP, Your confirmation + NP, We appreciate + NP. While 7% used the common pre-closing strategy of thanking the requester using Thank you/Thank you so much. And there were 66.67% who did not use any pre-closing moves.

Plus, there are 67% (10 out of 15 request letters) using a common complimentary close in their request letter. Therefore, the analysis revealed that the most commonly employed complimentary closing is Truly yours with 70% (7 out of 10), 10% (1 out of 10) used Respectfully yours, 10% (1 out of 10) used Sincerely, and 10% (1 out of 10) used Sincerely yours. While 33% use *other complimentary close*, such as In JPIAN Spirit/Ever praising your kindness/Yours in Vincentian Spirit/With you in Vincentian Spirit. Students use this other complimentary close strategy because mostly institutional organizations send the request letter.

In general, the results for the opening and closing moves are not surprising because the use of greetings and terms of respect in a letter as well as the closing are conventional forms, except for those other pre-closing findings of researcher in which the students used a different method of greeting that we can see in the table above and other complimentary close in which the name of the organization or institution is used. In these studies, the findings revealed a dominance and variations of forms of address, greeting, and closing in request letters of organizations, companies, and students inside and outside of St. Vincent's College Incorporated forwarded to the office of the Dean of Student Affairs, respectively

It should be noted that even more than linguistic convention, the use of the term of deference sir/ma'am as part of the opening gestures and the use of thank you/May the Lord Grant your Heart Desires as a preliminary closing, are strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (face-threatening acts) on the addressee's negative face even though this may mean damage to the requester's negative face.

On the other hand, using sir without a name as a form of respect as well as any form of greeting does not necessarily mean that it should not be interpreted as disrespectful or impressive. Rather, it can be viewed as a strategy to preserve the linguistic conventions associated with greeting use. In Filipino culture, students are always trained to address people in authority using sir or ma'am. It would be considered impolite for students, for example, to call their teachers by their first names. It would be even more impolite not to make a proper greeting. Hence, in this study, the participants' use of the form of respect can be seen not only as a form of

conformity to conventions but also as a display of politeness within a dynamic discursive practice society.

The students consistently adhere to formal closing conventions, which is crucial in maintaining the appropriate tone in academic and institutional communication. This adherence demonstrates their understanding of the importance of formality and respect in such contexts. The use of institution-specific closings highlights the students' awareness of and connection to the cultural and spiritual values of their institution. These closings not only show respect but also reinforce a sense of belonging and shared identity. The variety of closings used, ranging from the highly formal "Respectfully yours" to the institution-specific "Yours in Vincentian Spirit," indicates the students' pragmatic awareness. They tailor their closings to fit the context and the relationship with the recipient, which is a key aspect of effective communication.

The use of both conventional and institution-specific closings reflects the students' understanding of cultural and institutional norms, as well as their ability to navigate these norms effectively to achieve their communicative goals.

Table 3. Level of directness of the head-acts

Level of Directness	Request Strategy	*Frequency Count*	Percentage
	Performatives	8	53%
	Want Statements	1	7%
	Expectation Statements	0	0%
Most Direct	Hedged Performatives	0	0%
	Imperatives	0	0%
	Need Statements	0	0%
	Direct Quotations	0	0%
	Obligation Statement	0	0%
	Query Preparatory (permission)	0	0%
Conventionally Indirect	Query Preparatory (ability, willingness)	0	0%
	Query Preparatory (availability)	0	0%
	Suggestive Formulae	0	0%
	Hints + performatives	6	40%
Direct		9	60%
Indirect		6	40%
Total		15	100%

Another linguistic aspect examined in this study is the degree of directness in the main requests of the request letters. As depicted in Table 3, it indicates the degree of directness of the main requests across the 15 analyzed request letters. The results show that 53% (8 out of 15 request letters) employed the most direct approach by utilizing performatives as the primary request strategy, while 7% (1 out of 15 request letters) utilized want statements. The majority of instances fell under the most direct category. Conversely, 40% (6 out of 15 request letters)

employed indirect strategies, utilizing hints combined with performatives as the request strategy.

Below are examples of request letters. Certain sections have been redacted to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Request Letter 1. *Performative*

March 18, 2022

(Name of sender)
Dean – Student Affairs
St. Vincent's College Incorporated
Padre Ramon St. Stake, Dipolog City

Sir:

Being a distinguished academic institution, we recognize your contribution in molding students who will serve as agents of transformation and development in society. In line with this, the Human Resources Department of (name of company) would like to ask for the list of the (name of courses with the name of the students). Let this be our way of reaching your graduates and to strengthen our partnership in building our talent pool.

Should you have any clarification please do not hesitate to contact us at (telephone number).

We appreciate your consideration and we look forward to your support in this endeavour.

Sincerely,

(Name and signature of the sender and his position in the company)

Noteb by:

(Name and signature of their head in the company)

In request letter 1, it's apparent that the requester opts for directness by employing a performative strategy. Given the context provided in the preceding request letter, it's evident that immediate attention and action from the addressee are required. The requester seeks approval from the addressee to furnish them with a list of urgently needed student names from the mentioned courses. The direct approach adopted in the request letter isn't necessarily intended to be intentionally impolite or restrictive to the addressee's freedom. Rather, it can be inferred that the use of direct strategies aims to facilitate the addressee's comprehension of the request's urgency, thereby enabling prompt action. In this instance, requesters diverge from the conventional lengthy introductions to convey their message swiftly and efficiently.

Table 4. *Positive Politeness Strategies*

Request Strategy	Frequency Count	Percentage
Give (or ask) reason	12	80%
Be optimistic	5	33%
Include both S and H in the activity	3	20%
Notice, attend to hearer (H)	3	20%
Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	1	7%

Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	2	13%
Offer and promise	2	13%
Avoid disagreements	1	7%
Seek agreement	3	20%
Assume or assert reciprocity	0	0%
Exaggerate	0	0%
Intensify interest to H	0	0%
Use in-group identify makers	0	0%
Joke	0	0%
Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	0	0%
Total	32	

The third phase of the analysis involves examining the utilization of positive and negative politeness strategies, aiding in the identification of recurring patterns that constitute linguistic conventions.

Based on the data presented in Table 4, a total of 32 instances of positive politeness strategies are observed in the request letters. These strategies predominantly include providing or soliciting reasons (80%), maintaining optimism (33%), and both practices at 20% inclusively, along with acknowledging the recipient's perspective and seeking agreement, which emerge as the primary request strategies. Furthermore, strategies such as presupposing/common ground assertion and offering/promise each account for 13%, while asserting or presupposing and avoiding disagreement are each utilized in 7% of the request letters. It's noteworthy that the number of instances of positive politeness strategies (32) surpasses the total number of request letters (15), as certain strategies are employed multiple times within a single letter.

Request letter 3. *Positive Politeness Strategy*

November 11, 2021

(Name of sender)
Dean, Student Affairs Office
St. Vincent's College Incorporated

Dear Sir:

St. Vincent's College Incorporated is proud to celebrate its first-ever Virtual Intramurals 2021. Herewith, we the office of the (organization) is currently making preparatory efforts for the upcoming Virtual Intramurals this coming November 29-30, 2021.

In line with this, we would like to humbly ask the permission from your good office to officially approve the following flow of events. Attached to this letter are the list of events for the upcoming two-day event of the Intramurals.

We in this organization are hoping for your speedy and favorable action regarding this matter, especially for the fact that this preparation taken by the organization is in line with the school administration's concern over the satisfaction of the Vincentians during the celebration, especially in the midst of the pandemic.

We are looking forward for your positive response; your confirmation will be truly appreciated.

Ever praising your kindness,

(Name and signature of the sender and his position in the organization)

Request letter 3 employs various positive politeness strategies in its discourse. Firstly, the lexical choices "Dear sir," "humbly," and "good office" serve to acknowledge and enhance the positive face of the recipient. Secondly, the inclusion of detailed reasons for the request effectively justifies the requester's actions, establishing common ground and context between the parties involved, a prevalent pattern in request letters. Thirdly, the use of the pronoun "we" fosters inclusivity, enhancing the sense of belonging and indicating a collaborative connection aimed at strengthening the relationship between the requester and the recipient. Additionally, the expression "we are looking forward for your positive response; your confirmation will be truly appreciated" reflects optimism regarding the outcome of the request, thereby reducing the likelihood of disapproval, which could potentially threaten the positive face of the recipient.

In this formal academic context, other positive politeness strategies such as assuming or asserting reciprocity, exaggerating, intensifying interest in the recipient, joking, and giving gifts were not observed in the data. These strategies are typically more common in oral discourse and are seldom utilized in formal written communication.

Table 5. *Negative Politeness Strategies*

Request Strategy	Frequency Count	Percentage
Give deference	15	100%

Be conventionally indirect	4	27%
Minimize the imposition	7	47%
Hedge	0	0%
Impersonalize S and H	0	0%
Be pessimistic	0	0%
Apologize	0	0%
State the FTA as the general rule	0	0%
Normalize	0	0%
Go on record	0	0%
Total	26	

Table 5 displays the frequencies of negative politeness strategies observed in the analyzed request letters. While the variance was not significant, it can be inferred that fewer negative politeness strategies were employed compared to positive politeness strategies. The data indicates 26 instances of negative politeness and 32 instances of positive politeness.

According to Table 5, the primary three negative politeness strategies utilized are: giving deference (100%), minimizing the imposition (47%), and employing conventional indirectness (27%). Conversely, strategies such as hedging, impersonalizing, adopting a pessimistic tone, apologizing, stating the face-threatening act (FTA) as a general rule, normalizing, and making a direct statement were not utilized, possibly because they were deemed inappropriate for the context of a request speech act and unsuitable for written discourse directed towards an individual of higher status.

The data demonstrates that 100% of the request letters (15 out of 15) employed deference as a negative politeness strategy. Therefore, in formal written communication such as a request letter, it is customary to commence with a deferential mode of address to mitigate the perceived imposition. Request letter 4 below illustrates the application of negative politeness strategies.

Request letter 4. *Negative Politeness Strategy*

March 07, 2022

__(Name of sender)__
Dean of Student Affairs
Saint Vincent's College Incorporated
Padre Ramon St. Estaka, Dipolog City 7100
Zamboanga del Norte

Dear Mr X:

Good morning!

We are third year (course) students of the (name of the school) who are currently taking up a course on Training and Development. As a partial requirement for this subject, we are expected to look for an organization that we can assist by providing a free training program. We have identified (course) of Saint Vincent's College Incorporated as the organization that we would like to provide training assistance. We have considered something that would help the members' well-being to keep them motivated academically especially amidst this pandemic, so as a group, we have decided to provide a training that would relate to their resiliency which would help boost the members' motivation and self-esteem moving forward throughout the semester. But before we could elaborate on the final flow and schedule, we must follow our training processes model called, ADDIE, which stands for, needs Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. So with that, we would like to inform you of the following:

● The administration of an online questionnaire to the key officers of the (course) as well as an online or phone interview to determine the actual training needs of the organization
● Designing and developing an appropriate training program based on the results of the training needs analysis
● Virtual or online conduct of the training program
● A documented evaluation of the effectiveness of the program

This partnership will not entail any cost from your end. We will take care of the training materials and aids, training handouts, as well as the training certificates. All we will need is your approval and the commitment of your organization to participate in this project. This project will run from February to early May 2022. As part of professional ethics, we ensure that whatever data that will be collected while we go through the program will be kept with utmost confidentiality.

__We hope that this request will merit your approval__. Should you have questions, please feel free to contact (name of the person to be contacted) through her email at (email) or through her mobile phone at (mobile number).

__Respectfully yours,__

Noted by:

__Approved by:__

__(Name of person who will approve the letter)__
Dean of Student Affairs
Saint Vincent's College Incorporated

This request letter employs various negative politeness strategies. The sender initiates with an appropriate opening, "Dear Sir X," to show respect to the recipient and reduce the sense of imposition. Although the letter is not conventionally indirect, as it contains a clear imperative regarding the recipient's expected action upon receiving it, the first paragraph thoroughly outlines the purpose of the letter. Towards the end, the phrase "approved by" is used, suggesting an immediate approval request from the recipient. However, this could potentially impose pressure, mitigated by the inclusion of phrases like "we hope that this request will merit your approval" and the use of "please," maintaining the positive face of the recipient. It appears the sender is mindful of not threatening the positive face of the recipient. Crystal (1995) suggests that politeness in sociolinguistics and pragmatics refers to linguistic elements associated with social behavior norms, encompassing courtesy, rapport, deference, and distance. These

elements include specific discourse markers (such as "please"), an appropriate tone of voice, and suitable forms of address (like the choice between intimate and distant pronouns or first and last names).

Moreover, the utilization of negative politeness strategies in the letter indicates an effort to alleviate the perceived constraints and imposition on the recipient's potential response upon receiving it. The incorporation of negative politeness strategies in the letter implies that language choices are not merely dictated by adherence to conventional forms but are also influenced by the nature of the relationship between the sender and the recipient. Furthermore, the linguistic conventions observed here are shaped by the linguistic resources available to the senders.

5. CONCLUSION

The frequent utilization of politeness strategies and the various ways in which they are deployed in request letter communication do not necessarily signify a shift from impoliteness to politeness or vice versa. Rather, this underscores the evolving nature of interpersonal communication and the diverse choices individuals make regarding politeness strategies.

The request letters analyzed in the study employed a variety of politeness strategies. Both positive and negative politeness strategies were evident, reflecting the students' efforts to maintain respect and deference while making their requests. The use of conventional forms of address and closing strategies, such as "Dear Sir/Madam" and "Respectfully yours," was prevalent. Additionally, unique pre-closing phrases and complimentary closes specific to the institution's culture, like "In JPIAN Spirit" or "Yours in Vincentian Spirit," were also common. These findings highlight the interplay between conventional linguistic practices and cultural specificity in the context of request letters at St. Vincent's College Incorporated.

The analysis of the head-acts in the request letters revealed a tendency towards directness in making requests. This directness, however, was often softened by the use of politeness strategies to mitigate the potential face-threatening nature of the requests. This balance between directness and politeness indicates a pragmatic approach by the students to achieve their communicative goals while maintaining a respectful tone.

The study found that the use of politeness strategies and linguistic conventions in the request letters not only adhered to established norms but also evolved to reflect broader socio-cultural contexts. The adherence to formal address and respectful closings, for instance, aligns with Filipino cultural norms of respect and deference towards authority figures. The findings underscore the importance of pragmatic competence in written communication, particularly in academic and institutional settings. The ability to effectively employ politeness strategies reflects a high level of linguistic and pragmatic awareness among the students, which is essential for successful communication and relationship building within the institution. The research illustrates that the request letters sent to the Dean of Student Affairs at St. Vincent's College Incorporated are characterized by a sophisticated use of both positive and negative politeness strategies. These strategies are deeply rooted in cultural norms and conventions, demonstrating the students' pragmatic competence and their ability to navigate formal institutional communication effectively.

Moreover, the usage of politeness strategies unveils linguistic conventions within a broader socio-cultural framework wherein language is viewed as a system of practice. Poststructuralists argue that language extends beyond mere grammar and patterns; it encompasses a range of practices that are constantly challenged to accommodate the symbolic power inherent in

particular modes of communication, interactions with interlocutors, and societal constructs like race, gender, ethnicity, and organizational hierarchy.

To some degree, the employment of politeness strategies in request letters addressed to an academic institution transcends linguistic functions and serves as a social act that delineates the relationships between communicators. Thus, participants engaging in discursive social practices, such as composing request letters, not only exchange information but also convey communicative intentions along a continuum that emphasizes harmony and preference on one end and alleviates constraints and impositions on actions on the other.

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