Unveiling Pragmatic Misconceptions about Saudi Gender Differences in Requestive Behaviour: An Analysis of E-mails Sent to Australian PhD Supervisors

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the ways that Saudi male and female PhD students write their requests to potential PhD supervisors in Australia. While other studies of request analysis are generally more categorical, the current project is more concerned with the way requests by Saudi men and women are made. The authors, using DCTs, have come up with results that do not reflect the real gender differences in requesting behavior. In contrast, this research is an extension of contextualism, or rather, an emphasis on contextual aspects of speech acts, which corresponds to the idea that they have a major degree of dependence from context on interaction (House & Kádár, 2023). A total of 120 authentic emails, 120 from 120 participants equally divided into five male Saudis and five female Saudis, along with five male Anglo-Saxon representatives from the Anglo-Saxon sample, formed the database for gender research in Saudi Arabia. Methodologically, it merges selective pragmatic frameworks, from first-order politeness analyses, second-order analyses, to third-order analyses of politeness (House & Kádár, 2023). The findings provide a counterpoint to the stereotype of expecting the gender- and cultural difference in requesting behavior. This also offers an important case for future research on how to observe these distinctions. In this study, cultural and situational considerations play

a pivotal role in the research on speech acts. Finally, it would have implications for scholars and practitioners working in the field of pragmatics.

Keywords: E-Mail Communications, Gender Differences, Methodological Implications, Im/Politeness, Cultural Differences.

1. Introduction

Requestive behaviour holds a high stake in the decision-making process; those who write polite requests are perceived as more competent, prompting cooperation on the part of the email recipient (Jessmer & Anderson , 2001). It is widely acknowledged in politeness literature that requests are intrinsically face-threatening acts since they are intended to threaten the receiver's negative face , meaning their freedom from imposition (Brown & Levinson , 1987). This research explores the requestive behaviour of Saudi students when writing to prospective PhD supervisors as "authority figures" (Chen , 2006, p. 35). The research aims to answer the question, "What requestive behavior do students (from both cultures) employ to gain approval from the prospective supervisor?" with two sub-queries:

a) How do Saudi males and females differ in terms of their requestive patterns?

b) What is the impact of power distance on each gender's requestive language?

While mainstream speech act analysis has primarily categorized linguistic expressions as either direct or indirect (Taguchi, 2006), this paper offers a more extensive investigation into the various linguistic (lexico-syntactic) forms used to make requests, reflecting the participants' entitlement to make the request (Curl & Drew, 2008). The primary aim of such an analysis is to "investigate what can be learned from the writer's choice of linguistic form - why in that form? Why in that position? - especially when that form in that position is a recurrent systematic feature" (Curl & Drew, 2008, pp. 10-11). Some request strategies provide justifications and explanations to appeal to the hearer "as a rational agent in need of persuasion" (Blum-Kulka, 2005, p. 267). Therefore, this study employs a blended

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top-down approach to examine the cultural and gender influences on requestive behavior. It is also used to evaluate the perception of power among gender groups, highlighting both their request sequential position and the discursive features of their request forms.

Curl and Drew's (2008) analysis revealed that in ordinary interactions wherein a request is made, individuals often use the words 'could/would' and start with 'I wonder if.' This approach is commonly used in institutional interactions. Consequently, the design of a request is affected by the writer's understanding of contingencies surrounding its granting and their entitlement to make a particular request to a particular hearer. Based on the discursive approach to politeness, contextual factors should also come into play when evaluating requestive behavior; otherwise, the investigation of discursive features would lack the judgment of politeness and impoliteness (Mills, 2011). Furthermore, this study will consider the dimension of culture and gender to determine the pattern of requests, reflecting an individual's entitlement to make such requests.

2. Background and Previous Research on Requestive Behaviour in Saudi Discourse

To justify the way the current requests are analysed, it is theoretically significant to refer to what other researchers have done and discovered while analysing the Saudi students' requests. Due to the lack of studies of Saudi-English requestive behaviour, existing research on both spoken and written requests will be included to further understanding about English requestive features. Al- Ammar (2000) investigated the linguistic strategies and realisation of requestive behaviour among 45 Saudi females majoring in the English language at a Saudi college using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The focus of her study was on spoken English and Arabic, with the findings suggesting that female students tend to use indirect strategies when the hearer is higher in status. Again employing DCT, Umar (2004) examined request

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strategies produced by Saudi and other Arabic students in comparison to those of British students. He found that Arabic students with advanced levels of English were heavily influenced by their cultural background when formulating requests; they seemed unaware that the appropriate Arabic request scheme in a given situation might not be appropriate in English. Focusing on Saudi female spoken and written requests, Al-Ageel (2016) found that power status, social distance, and the degree of imposition influenced the requestive strategies in a given context, which is consistent with politeness theory. However, she also found that there were culturally specific features related to the communicative and requestive patterns in Saudi culture; females prefer the opting-out strategy and conventional strategies that appear like hedged direct requests, similar to that in the Arabic language. Further, she proposed that there was a link between the Saudi notions of *Kalafah*/*Mayanah* and social distance or power. Saudi females used more *Kalafah* strategies (formality) when interacting with people of higher social distance/power and *Mayanah* (informality) when interacting with their friends. Al-Ageel (2016) called for additional research focusing on the role of gender in Saudi communities, as her data was completely female-oriented.

Some comparative studies examined request strategies used by Saudi English learners and found that they tended to implement more direct strategies in their requests than their counterparts of other cultural backgrounds (Aba-alalaa , 2015; Al-Hamzi , 1999; Umar , 2004). Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) discovered that Saudis used more direct strategies than Americans; however, while Americans used conventionally indirect strategies among family and friends, Saudis seemed to use them as their super-strategies when speaking with people of higher power. Yet, there has not been any kind of measurement where female and male data are compared against a similar situation that entails the use of power. Using the Brown and Levinson (1978) framework, Al- Gahtani and Alkahtani (2012) investigated requests produced by Saudi males with both high and low-level English proficiency through

audio-taped role-plays, comparing these to the requests from a group of Australian native English speakers. Social power (+/-P) was an important factor that affected the level of directness in the request strategies chosen by the Saudi groups. For example, a mild hint strategy (off-record) increased in use in proportion to the hearer's power (+P),and the 'title' strategy was also overused exclusively when the hearer was the speaker's professor. This, however, was not the case with the Australian participants in their study.

A substantial body of pragmatics research employs Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) classifications as the main methodological approach to analysing requestive behaviour, either through DCTs or naturalistic email data (Al-Marrani , 2018; Krish & Salman, 2018; Najeeb, Maros, & Nor, 2012). However, after testing these classifications, many of the requests in the current data fell under the category of non-conventional indirect; therefore, little is known about the assessment of requests in regard to the degree of power perception for both genders. While approaches like Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) are useful in providing a potential account of patterns of request,they are inapt as a criterion for judging how each gender responds to power-imbalance situations. This is evident from a PhD thesis that attempted to apply request classifications in Australian naturalistic data; the study found that politeness is not simply a matter of incorporating syntactic and lexical attenuation devices within variants, nor is it inevitably a matter of increasing indirectness of the form (Le Couteur, 1996). Studies analysing Saudi students' requests not only employed DCTs, but also included groups comprised of a single gender (Al-Ageel , 2016; Al- Gahtani & Alkahtani, 2012). It seems that any corpus investigating requestive behaviour for pragmalinguistic purposes triggers ambiguous classifications, and the results of these remain questionable (Van Mulken, 1996). The taxonomy criteria should then stem from the corpus as distinctive features that the researcher could observe and identify, until a well-developed taxonomy "free from normative judgement" exists (Van Mulken 1996, p. 692). Observing naturally-

occurring speech acts is strongly advocated by many linguists (Béal, 1994; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Wolfson, 1989), as it provides an internal validity of any linguistic phenomena under investigation (Qari, 2017). Besides, House and Kádár (2023) propose a more nuanced approach to studying politeness that considers context, power dynamics, and individual differences. The authors advocate for the inclusion of third -order and fourth-order politeness, which they argue more accurately reflect the complexities of polite communication. The authors draw on a range of cross-cultural examples to illustrate their point, showing how cultural and individual differences influence the way individuals communicate politely. They also emphasize the importance of taking into consideration the different forms of communication, such as verbal and nonverbal, and how these may be influenced by factors like gender, age, and culture.

There is a growing interest in Saudi email investigation, which has provided important results concerning the pragmatic features of email language. Bulut and Rababah (2007) investigated the pragmatics of email communication in English between Saudi female students and male professors. They found that the discursive features and politeness strategies of the females were similar to Biesenbach-Lucas (2005) native English American participants. They also found that students usually preferred positive politeness strategies in their requests to their professors, while they mostly had negative politeness-oriented address terms when starting their messages. Hariri (2017) investigated emails written in Arabic in Saudi Arabia within academic settings. She found that some patterns correlated to whether the writer/receiver of an email was a woman or man—and/or a lecturer or student—and that there is a relationship between the choice of politeness strategy and identity construction. For example, her findings showed that women were more likely to employ thanking or closing features at the end of their emails; men used more openings, requests and apologies. A more relevant discovery in relation to this thesis was that discursive choices made by the Saudi males in her study mostly represented expected

hierarchical standards, whereas Saudi females acted against expected hierarchical norms.

Linguistic research links language use in high power distance with the specific cultural backgrounds of the participants. Although challenged by new wave politeness theorists, it is generally assumed that social distance or power increases the use of politeness strategies as a universal phenomenon (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Hofstede (2001) argues that high power distance has been associated with compliant behaviour, as these cultures tend to be more authoritarian and stress conformity and submissiveness. Therefore, when people from high power distance contexts negotiate with others in power, they tend to engage in obedient communication strategies by using either compromise or collaborative styles (Galin & Avraham, 2009). Only a few studies have investigated gender variations in politeness in both hierarchical and one-sided communication in a high context institutional setting. Hobbs (2003) analysed voicemail messages in a legal setting, finding that positive politeness strategies such as joking, complimenting and claiming reciprocity were used almost exclusively by male speakers. This may be attributed to the one-sided nature of voicemail communications; callers may use politeness strategies to bridge communicative gaps created by the lack of interactive exchange. Lips (1991) points out that the way one can understand how men and women deal with power is largely dependent on the social context. In this thesis' social context, the data of both gender groups' approach to contacting a prospective PhD supervisor was examined, providing a clearer means of comparison, especially in terms of power-distance orientation. The first findings in this project, detailed in the next section, concern 11 requests that were identical in terms of the requestive behaviour used.

3. Methodology

3.1 Recruitment:

The email corpus consisted of authentic single email messages initiated by both Saudi and Australian postgraduate students when trying to find a prospective PhD supervisor in Australia. There are 120 authentic emails composed by 120 students (100 Saudis and 20 Australians). Both cultural groups identify as native-speakers of their language (Arabic for Saudis or English for Australians based on self-identification). However, all the emails were written in English regardless of the participant's background. The participants were given the freedom to delete any confidential or personal information included in their emails.

3.2 Identification of Requestive Moves:

Requestive moves are the generic moves that precede or follow requestive behaviour. The requestive behaviour is analysed with a data-driven approach, describing the distinctive features of the current data and matching these with Trosborg's (1995) categories. Her classifications assisted in quantifying the differences among gender and culture using the SPSS statistical package to calculate descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative aspect of the requestive behaviour relied mostly on the work of politeness theorists and data observations, as some emails were partially copied from an online source. The moves following or preceding the requestive behaviour were almost 17 moves.

The identification of the boundaries of the individual rhetorical moves was based on semantic orcontent criteria. It is difficult to base genre analysis on only three or four basic moves, as designedby Swales (1990), because this study aims to identify all possible moves that come before or after the requestive behaviour; these may vary in size and could be realised by one sentence or more, as they can be variable in length or occur multiple times in a single text (Biber, Connor, & Upton, 2007). Swales (1990) also provides a good definition of a move as a functional semantic

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unit, where length depends on the writer's purpose ـ … and the move performs a communicative function that can be realised through certain linguistic content. Therefore, a move strategy understanding of genre was used in this project, whereby the …coding system used identified the major rhetorical moves of the negotiation genre (Bhatia, 2014).

Each portion of a text has at least one function, in line with Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2002) and Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008). It was necessary "to add other communicative moves in order to articulate new rhetorical functions specific to the communicative needs" (Al-Ali & Sahawneh, 2008, p. 46) of these particular email negotiation messages. However, it is acknowledged that move structure identification involves "a degree of subjectivity that is perhaps unavoidable" (Holmes 1997, p. 325). To validate the current analysis of strategic moves adopted by senders to bolster their email messages, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted. The reason why some moves were identified and classified separately, even if several occurred within a single clause, stems from either their frequent existence in most students' emails or their importance. The importance was measured by finding some of these moves in the guidelines of some universities such as the University of Edinburgh and a research article by Jafree, Whitehurst, and Rajmohan (2016), who highlighted the most important points that one should mention when approaching a prospective PhD supervisor via email. These guidelines expect students to mention certain information, such as the 'timeframe' or the time when the students expect to start their PhD program. Hence, some

> I am a lecturer at X University **<CV info]** and I have a full scholarship from my University
>
> **<Fund]** and I am interested to pursue my doctorate degree **<Proposal]** in
>
> your reputed university **<Program/Uni interest]**

compound sentences could collapse more than two moves according to the content of the message, as the following example demonstrates.

When the students used the same move in different clauses — for example, when they requested an acceptance from their supervisors in different places in their emails —, they were coded according to the number of times they had used them. Under the requestive move (recorded in an Excel spreadsheet), there were three lines of three different requests. Therefore, the number of requests each student used contributed to an increased number of requests used by each gender or cultural group overall. This helped to see how much students focused on certain moves according to gender and culture. In particulary those moves surrounding the requestive behaviour. The definition of each move that comes before or after the research students' requests are provided in Table 1 as follows.

Table (1): the definition of the requestive moves (moves coming before and after requests)

Negotiation moves	Definition
1- **Fund**	When students either indicate that they are funded by the government or they are in the process of applying for a scholarship
2- **Research interest**	When students specify the area they are interested in researching in their thesi
3- **Proposal**	When the students first state the purpose of their email, such as 'I am writing to you as I have recently applied for a PhD program'
4- **Justification**	Providing reasons why they chose their research topic; these can be personal, institutional (needs), or a research gap. It sometimes conflicts with CV info, due to contextual reasons (e.g. 'I worked in XXXX University labs and I became interested to do my PhD in **** University'). The researcher made a decision whether some of the moves were best fitting under-research-justification or CV info according to the context.
5- **PFC (promoting further contact)**	Either explicitly indicating they look forward to hearing from the addressee soon or implicitly showing willingness to answer any questions, asking for a meeting/further documents, or asking for a fast reply to their request
6- **Focus on supervisor**	By mentioning anything relating to the supervisor's area of research, publication, knowledge, or by other complimenting reasons directed to the supervisor
7- **Focus + compliment**	When the students mention a compliment about the supervisor.
8- **Attach**	When referring to any attached document, often a CV or a research proposal.
9- **Change topic**	Any expression of willingness to change or choose a topic for a PhD project. Different terms have been used to express such willingness, such as 'Change/review

	the research proposal/consider any comments ...etc.'. Some Australian students ask their supervisor about available projects that they
10- Topic	Providing the title of their projects (either Masters or PhD).
11- Major	When students first mention their educational major/background,which may not necessarily reflect what they want to do in their thesis. This is often accompanied by the name of their former university.
12- Self- promotion	When praising a student's own abilities and achievements, indicating how their PhD will give them access to a better future,or even how the ranking of the university will influence their future career.
13- 13-Context	Providing personal background about either meeting the prospective supervisor in the past or hearing about them fromsome
14- Self- introduction	When students introduce themselves by their names. Alternatively, in a few examples, students did not mention theirname but instead said things like: 'I want to tell you just a bit about myself"
15- CV	Any statement about a student's work or educational background in a general sense, such as doing two Masters degrees in two different fields, or information on academic achievements.
16- Program interest	Expressing interest in the program itself, in the university rankingor complimenting the prospective university, which can be called *glorifying the institution* under adversary glorification (Bhatia,2014).
17- Gratitude	A statement of gratitude at the end of the email (e.g. 'Thank you for taking the time to read my email').

3.3 Data Analysis:

The analysis of the requestive behaviour is approached from varying angles—textually and linguistically—to provide an understanding of how requests were patterned in Saudi participants'data and what this reveals about gender differences in the context of academic negotiations. Therefore, the analysis was data-driven from the micro-level (in terms of the organisation of requestive positions and supported moves) and the macro-level (in terms of what it could reveal about cultural values and gender-specific tendencies).

4. Result

Most participants—regardless of their gender—positioned their request at the end of their emails (as Figure 1 indicates). Eight Saudi male applicants placed their request right at the beginning of their emails, compared to 10 Saudi women who made the

request in the middle. The number of requests Saudi males made outnumbered the females. When analysed in light of discourse sequences, requests include two elements: head acts, and supportive moves. As the term indicates, head acts are the core elements that refer to main requests, such as 'Could you supervise my research?' Supportive moves, meanwhile, are the adjuncts to the head act, such as providing reasons to modify the impact or force of the requests. They can be put either before (pre-supportive moves, such as 'If you accept me, I will acquire more knowledge..') or after the head act (post-supportive moves, such as 'You will help me approach my dreams if you accept my request'). Research focusing on discourse organisation or the supportive moves of requests has found that participants often use different combinations of supportive moves to increase the likelihood of the hearer's acceptance (Dombi , 2019; Trang , 2019). The current supportive moves in this thesis have different labels to identify their functions (negotiation moves).
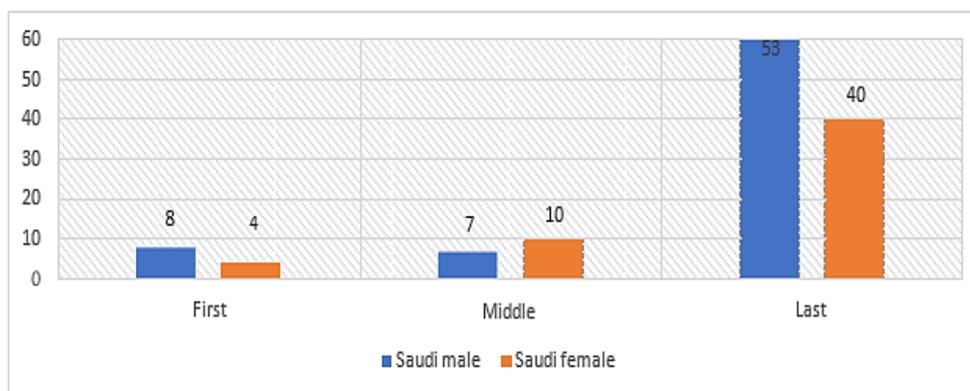

Figure (1): The position of requests in emails

The participants used many strategies to try and gain acceptance by a prospective supervisor. The most supportive moves found in Saudi male requestive data were found to be:

1. **Fund move,** which concerns having a full scholarship.

2. Complimenting the supervisor or commenting on their great work, which has beencalled the **focus on supervisor move.**

3. Showing willingness to **change** the PhD proposal or **topic** if outside the area of thesupervisor's interest.

Table 2 clarifies the most frequent supportive moves that both Saudi men and women employ

Before and *after*   placing their requests.

Table (2): Negotiations moves before and after requests in Saudi data

Negotiation moves	Moves before requests (F= 54 requests; M=68 requests)				Moves after requests (F= 54 requests; M=68 requests)			
	Saudi F	Saudi M	Chi2 Sig.	Results	Saudi F	Saudi M	Chi2 Sig.	Results
1-Fund	11	7	0.12	No sig.	1	5	0.16	No sig.
2-Research interest	8	6	0.3	No sig.	5	3	0.28	No sig.
3-Proposal	3	9	0.15	No sig.	0	1	0.37	No sig.
4-Justification	0	2	0.2	No sig.	1	0	0.25	No sig.
5-PFC	4	1	0.1	No sig.	22	9	0	Sig.
6-Focus on supervisor	10	2	0	Sig.	0	1	0.37	No sig.
7-Focus + compliment	2	6	0.25	No sig.	1	2	0.69	No sig.
8-Attach	4	1	0.1	No sig.	3	7	0.34	No sig.
9- Change topic	2	2	0.81	No sig.	0	7	0.01	Sig.
10-Topic	1	1	0.86	No sig.	2	2	0.8	No sig.
11-Major	1	3	0.43	No sig.	2	1	0.42	No sig.
12-Self- promotion	2	4	0.58	No sig.	2	2	0.81	No sig.
13-Context	1	1	0.86	No sig.	0	2	0.2	No sig.
14-Self-introduction	0	2	0.2	No sig.	1	0	0.25	No sig.
15-CV	2	1	0.42	No sig.	0	2	0.2	No sig.
16-Program interest	1	2	0.6	No sig.	1	2	0.69	No sig.
17-Gratitude	0	0		No sig.	2	2	0.81	No sig.
Total	52	50	-	-	43	48	-	-

It is to be noted that these are not the total number of moves because some of these moves might be repeated elsewhere in the students' emails. This table only captures the moves that came straight after or before the requests[1]. Notably, the move with the highest frequency that preceded a request for Saudi female students was the fund move. Saudi females also focused more on supervisors before requesting, with a significant difference ($p = 0 \leq 0.05$) in comparison to Saudi males (see Table 2). Six Saudi male students used focus + compliment before implementing a request by using an affective appeal. There are three moves that both genders have in common before the requests: fund, research interest and focus on supervisor. However, in terms of moves that come straight after the requests, one move in common is promoting further contact (PFC), with a Chi- square significant difference of $p = 0 \leq 0.05$ (Table 2). Females appeared to utilise this more than males. Saudi males instead tended to use their Change topic move straight after requesting at a significant difference ($p = 0.01 \leq 0.05$), as women did not use it after requests at all.

At a frequency level, 44% of Saudi women promoted further contact straight after the request. This may be due to a need to be reassured that their request is answered; the students therefore left the supervisors with this last impression that they should notify them of acceptance or rejection. Herring (1996) also notes that women encouraged further communication in emails. This move has been found to be one of the main negotiation moves in email media, as it carries on the negotiated topic at hand (Alsharif & Alyousef , 2017; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth , 2002). Similarly, Lesikar (1984, as cited in Bhatia, 2014) believed that an invitation for further correspondence opens the door for further negotiations. The Saudi women used PFC for two reasons: confirmation of approval ('I would be very grateful for your reply') or a meeting to discuss ('and wish to arrange a time to meet…'). Both cases indicate

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[1] If a participant made two requests in two different positions in their email, then these moves were counted separately. However, if a participant made two requests in a row, the moves before or after the requests were counted as though there were only one request.

a desire to know their supervisor's decision.

The Saudi female participants mostly requested immediately after indicating something related to the supervisor, either commenting on the supervisor's work or indicating shared research interests ('I found your research interesting and perfectly fits my PhD plan'). This then led to a more natural request: 'It would be very excited to me if you supervised my research since you are working on similar issues'. Additionally, the Saudi female participants used a Saudi cultural concept called *Mayanah*, where showing friendliness is essential to lessen the impact that a power imbalance may have on negotiation through a more informal approach. *Mayanah* in its strategic element is similar to 'claim[ing] common ground', found in Brown and Levinson's positive politeness schema. Brown and Levinson (1987) outline three main categories: 1) Convey 'X is admirable, interesting,' 2) 'Claim in-group membership with H, and S) 'Claim common ground [point of view/opinions/attitudes/knowledge/empathy]'. Each category has sub-strategies to carry out the act. In the first category, there is a sub-strategy called 'exaggerate interest with the hearer'. An example from the Saudi female data—which also reflects *Mayanah*—is the use of amiable terms such as 'excited to me if you supervised', where this participant conveyed an admirable stance and interest towards the hearer. Both the second and third positive politeness categories above constitute the key communicative purpose in *Mayanah*, where participants tried to avoid highlighting themselves as lower in status even within the complementing speech act ('I think you will be the right person to supervise me').

The Saudi male participants consistently initiated their emails with the reason why they were writing—the *proposal move*. This can have an implied request form, such as 'I am hoping to have the opportunity to become a PhD candidate at X University'. Immediately after, they would indicate their request ('so I am looking for a PhD offer from you') or introducing their fund status before placing their request ('I have been granted a fully funded scholarship… [which] will cover my tuition and practical

fees... In conclusion, it's my pleasure to do my PhD in your department').Typically, the Saudi male students ended their requests by an affective choose/change topic move, such as '... and would like you to recommend which one [topic] is most suitable in which area'. The Saudi male requests were characterised by language of giving deference (Brown & Levinson,1987) that, at times, necessitated the use of over-politeness to fill the gap of such power imbalance('If you take me as one of your PhD students, it would be an honour for me'). This relates to another Saudi cultural notion known as *Kalafah* that informs how people respond to power relationships; one emphasises "either the lowering of oneself or the raising of the other" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 178-179). Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that giving deference has twosides to the coin in the realisation of deference: the negative side is when the speaker humbles himself, while the positive is when the speaker raises the hearer in the way that satisfies their desireto be treated as superior. An additional dimension that the current data added to this politeness strategy is the use of hearer-oriented language in different moves and requests ('I believe that if **you** could give me some of **your** time and supervise me', or 'looking for a PhD offer from **you**'). The way Saudi male students responded to such *Kalafah* or formality between themselves and thesupervisor was partly emphasised by hearer-oriented language (Blum-Kulka et al ., 1989), which includes pronouns like 'you' or 'your'. A more thorough discussion about differences in requestivebehaviour between genders will be provided in the next section.

4.1 Language and Power:

This section focuses on the relationship between language use and gender in relation to power; specifically, how language is shaped in a way that reflects how each gender perceives power differences. Despite the fact that many pragmatic and sociolinguistic studies have attempted to explore the relationship between language use and gender, some issues remain unexplored (Al- Khawaldeh & Žegarac , 2013). One such nuance is whether women's and men's speech acts reflect power

differentials in certain situations (Mills, 2003; Tannen 1999). A number of influential studies have declared that differences in linguistic behaviour are rooted in differences in the social construction of gender; each gender is expected to meet certain rules in certain social or institutional settings (Crawford, 1995; Trudgill, 1999). Brown (1980) maintains that situations of social interaction are important for analysing language use because they provide evidence of the social motivations informing discursive choices. Power is traditionally thought of as the control powerful people have on powerless subordinates (Belkin et al., 2013). However, Mills (2003) upholds the notion that, in the study of power, we should step away from the binary of the powerless and powerful divide. The relationship between power and language is rather more complicated. If we move away from such binary thinking, we may be able to unveil contextual factors that play certain roles in the way each gender reacts to a power differential situation. Johnson & Roen (1992) have also highlighted the significant role contextual variables play in shaping gender language differences. Among those contextual variables in this study is the degree to which each gender perceives power in academic email interactions, and how this may be reflected in their use of supportive moves. The notion of supervisory power seems to be interpreted differently by each gender as manifested by their communicative style. To effectively analyse the results, it was necessary to consult the relevant literature to support the current findings of the Saudi male participants showing more politeness strategies when voicing a request.

There seems to be a lack of studies on how each gender perceives power in certain workplace or academic situations, especially when each gender applies for entry into tertiary study. In particular, observing the language and power variations between genders in naturalistic email data—specifically in Saudi discourse, where gender segregation dominates—has received scant scholarly attention. Over the past three decades, various scholars have argued that women express positive politeness and use mitigating strategies to avoid threatening their interlocutors' face (see Holmes

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(2013) for an overview). The results of some traditional studies, which found that female speakers use powerless speech, may be attributed to different social roles and status of men and women in traditional societies (Smith , 1992). Most of the current participants are men and women who already work as academics and are in good career positions. The analysis in this paper is intrinsically linked to problems central to research on gender-differentiated speech: in particular, the issue of how power and solidarity relations are encoded in language. Evidence pertaining to gender differences in the speech act of requesting is still lacking. As has been confirmed, requestive behaviour generally offers "fertile ground for the study of any potential connections between linguistic politeness and gender" (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003). Investigating requests offers the clearest examples of rapport-sensitive speech acts (Spencer-Oatey, 2000).

In total, men made more requests (68) than women (54) in this research. At a qualitative level, there were contextual features that determined how an affective request can be judged, which differed across genders more so than discursive features. The way requestive behaviour was judged required workable categories for analysis to differentiate between affective and rational requests. This formula was inspired by Bardovi-Harlig (1996), who suggested four main categories to differentiate native and non-native speakers in their use of speech acts: the form of the speech act, semantic formula, content/contextual factors, and different speech acts. These categories were based on what she had observed in her native and non-native data. This provided grounds for how researchers could build their own categories for specific speech acts and, in this instance, differentiate the requestive behaviour of male and female participants. As Saudi male participants made 68 requests, this means that about 38% made two or more requests in their emails. This is consistent with Hariri's (2017) thesis, which found that Saudi males made more requests in their emails than females.

Each request was coded in line with genre studies, classifying each move as a separate

textunit according to its particular communicative purpose (Bhatia, 2014; Swales, 1990). Hence, the repetition of requests was coded in accordance with how the moves were classified in this project. From a qualitative point of view, the repetition of requests added more force to the tone of the email, especially when two or more requests came sequentially. This may be perceived as a pleading for acceptance that may, in turn, make the imposition even higher on the supervisor. This can be seen in one example from a male who made four requests in a row:

Saudi Male Data (Request)

1   *I would like to know if you agree to have a new student in that period <request] (1). It gives me a great opportunity if I work under your supervision and learn from your experience in the filed <request] (2). I have many ideas for the PhD project and I am enthusiastic to work under your supervision < request] (3). In order to complete official requirements here in my university, I need an acceptance letter from University of X < request] (4).*

Having many requests in a row is one technique that evaluates requestive behaviour as demanding—and, therefore, affective/emotional. Recent research has highlighted the significance of minimizing any negative effects of requestive behavior on the relationship between the requester and the requestee, emphasizing the importance of new wave politeness. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding what exactly constitutes negative effects. To fully comprehend the illocutionary dynamics of email correspondences, it is essential to merge the first and second order politeness in line with House and Kádár's (2023) framework. This approach will facilitate a deeper understanding of the intricacies of polite communication. The evaluation of whether requests are emotional or affective also has a connection to supportive moves, which can immediately influence how a prospective supervisor receives requestive behaviour. For instance, five male students placed their requests straight after a direct compliment to the supervisor. (Focus + compliment in Table 2):

Saudi male data (Focus + compliment)

1 *this inspiration is laced with a passion to be trained **under the supervision of the scholar like you who has developed an international reputation** in the field. I would very much like to be supervised by you at your convenience*

Besides the compliment, the way the above request is worded is unusual in terms of asking to be supervised at the supervisor's 'convenience', as supervision is about dedicated time and effort. Again, this is a reflection of *Kalafah,* where the student showed that he would demand the least attention to encourage acceptance. Requiring the least 'demand' from a supervisor was only found once in the female data, though this participant indicated that her brother had assisted her with writing the email. Lastly, a request placed in a terse email without providing essential details makes the requestive behaviour seem dismissive and leaves a negative impact on the potential supervisor due to its potential lack of seriousness. This can be observed in the example below:

Saudi male data (Request)

1 *Hi D. X*
This is (name), I am from Saudi Arabia and I am looking for supervisor in my PhD study. I would love to be one of your student[sic], If you are interested in my research. Looking forward to your reply.
Regards
Name

This prospective student has not referred the supervisor to an attached PhD proposal. If the requestive behaviour was only stripped away from the above email ('I would love to be one of your students[s']') and compared to female requests, they may resemble one another linguistically; however, taking contextual factors into

account, they would differ qualitatively in some considerable ways. For this and similar reasons, the new wave of politeness theorists have prioritised contextual factors over discursive features (Haugh & Culpeper , 2018). Contextual elements are adopted to clarify the way certain utterances are carried, assisting with the judgement of politeness or impoliteness (Mills, 2011). The existing literature in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and pragmatic studies lacks sufficient elaboration on how a short email can potentially influence the evaluation of its content. However, previous research has indicated that incorporating reasons either before or after making a request can reduce the impact or forcefulness of the requests (Sifianou, 1999; Taguchi, 2006; Trosborg, 1995). In the context of using short emails as the primary means of communication with an overt request that is not explicitly directed to the supervisor as the main point of contact makes the request appear more like a taken-for-granted order. The following example further illustrates this concept:

Saudi male data (Request)

1 *Hi,*

This is (name) 28 year old and study at X university in X, Australia (Master of X, major:X, minor: X). The expected date of graduation is June 20**. I would like to continue for PhD in X specifically X.

I am fully sponsored by Saudi government.see ya

First Name

The previous case displayed an extreme informality in its opening and closing remarks, where the student did not address the supervisor by name after the casual greeting and concluded the email with a casual closing remark. The content of the email implied a high imposition question, as the student stated a desire to pursue a PhD while emphasizing being fully sponsored, suggesting it as a guarantee for admission. The prospective supervisor responded assertively, providing appropriate

steps to approach a supervisor and apologizing for rejecting the student. Despite the student's plea for acceptance and a change in approach, no further replies were received. While some studies suggest keeping emails concise, in this particular context, students should provide essential details about their research plans and applications while adopting an appropriate politeness tone for academia. Isolating the requestive behavior of this email (i.e., "I would like to continue for PhD in X") may not clearly reveal the level of imposition caused by the brevity of the email and could potentially be misinterpreted as rational rather than affective. Additionally, as proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), it could be classified as a non-conventionally indirect request, showcasing limited insights into how these requestive behaviors were shaped. Therefore, it is crucial to consider various contextual factors, as suggested by House and Kádár (2023), beyond just linguistic features when analyzing email requests or evaluating politeness in speech acts. This becomes particularly important when assessing factors such as content persuasion, politeness, and tone. This example lacked persuasive elements as it lacked crucial applicant details and ended carelessly, which negatively impacted the supervisor's perception.

Kecskes (2015) argues that if a researcher finds cues, such as explicit comments made by the receiver of a specific interaction, this would bring about sufficient evidence of the inappropriateness of that instance. However, he also asserts that when evaluating intercultural communication, the "researcher is expected to identify the norms of appropriateness for a given community of practice and then assess a given utterance as polite or impolite against those norms"(Kecskes, 2015, p. 44). In the case of this project, evaluating requestive behaviour demanded some contextual factors, whether it was the shortness of the emails, multiple requests in a row, or even requesting after a direct compliment to a supervisor. These contextually-linked factors, which weaken the position of the request in emails, have not been recognised in the majority of existing pragmatic studies as they tend to focus on the forms of

specific requests rather than global issues surrounding them. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) also pointed to the semantic formula that might differentiate groups. One formula found in this data was what may be called an exaggerated assertion specific to *Kalafah* language, such as 'I am confident that your acceptance will definitelychange my life'. Other semantic formulae include honorific language (e.g. 'I am honoured/grateful') and hearer-oriented language, which was particularly used to stress power differential language by Saudi male students. This will be examined in the next section.

4. 2 Hearer-and Speaker-Oriented Language:

Table (3): Total number of affective requests in Saudi data

	Affective requests	Total requests	Percentage
Saudi Male	45	68	66.18%
Saudi Female	10	54	18.51%
Total	**55**	**122**	**45.08%**

As shown in Table 3, the data reveals that 66.18% of Saudi males submitted affective requests, while only 18.51% of Saudi females did so. Zughaibi (2023) argues that Saudi females possess higher pragmatic awareness compared to Saudi males. Additionally, Curl and Drew (2008) suggest that the perceived entitlement of a request is inherent in its construction and is influenced by contingencies that may affect the recipient's willingness to grant the request. To further examine the different perceptions of power between genders, semantic formulas were employed to differentiate their strategies. One such formula was the use of hearer-oriented language, which was predominantly utilized by Saudi male applicants as part of a deferential strategy known as "giving deference" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) suggested different categories that aim to reflect the speaker's referential point of view rather than power differential language. Among the categories relevant to this discussion are hearer-oriented language and speaker-orientedlanguage. They provided some examples for each category:

1- ***Hearer-oriented***: *(Could **you** tidy up the kitchen?)*

2- ***Speaker-oriented***: *(Could **I** borrow your notes?)*

It is crucial to critically examine the notion of speaker-oriented language as the preferred approach for avoiding confrontation with the hearer. The binary distinction between hearer and speaker-oriented language lacks clarity and warrants a reevaluation, particularly in the context of power imbalances. By delving into the use of hearer- and speaker-oriented language within such power dynamics, we can uncover significant insights into how language responds to and reinforces varying levels of power. Empirical evidence challenges the prevailing view, suggesting that hearer-oriented language is actually perceived as more polite in situations of power distance, granting the hearer the agency to decide on compliance (Phillips, 1993; Van Mulken, 1996). For instance, compelling research highlights that children tend to employ more hearer-oriented requests when seeking favors from adults, a manifestation of their awareness of the power dynamics at play rather than a mere desire to be polite (Ervin-Tripp & Gordon, 1986, as cited in Kasper, 1990). This calls for a reconsideration of the assumption that speaker-oriented language is always the most effective approach to avoid confrontation, and opens the door for a more nuanced understanding of language dynamics in power-imbalanced contexts.

It is noteworthy that in the Saudi context, male participants demonstrated a tendency to employ hearer-oriented language, accentuating the power dynamics between themselves and their potential supervisors. This inclination could suggest the utilization of a *Kalafah* approach to negotiation. Conversely, Saudi women displayed a preference for speaker-oriented requests, focusing on their personal desire to modify the addressee's behavior for their own benefit (Trosborg, 1995), as exemplified by phrases like '***I*** would be very excited if you supervise **me**'.

Notably, the hearer-oriented requestive behavior of Saudi males exhibited a pleading tone, primarily due to the formulation of their requests. For instance, the observation was made that both genders utilized a similar number of hedges. Nonetheless, the inclusion of phrases such as '***If you*** could give me some of your time and supervise me' introduced a pleading tone mitigated by the presence of an if-clause. Such

expressions, situated between hedges and requests, cannot be effectively discerned through quantitative analysis alone.

This pleading tone places the prospective students at risk of compromising their academic and scholarly status by portraying themselves as demanding. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) argue that students must strike a delicate balance between compliance and initiative in their negotiations to safeguard their own status. In certain situations, they need to determine speech acts that align with and uphold their status. A key limitation of quantitative analysis is its inability to comprehensively capture discursive features within specific contextual factors, thereby hindering the summarized portrayal of gender differences.

A key limitation of quantitative analysis is its inability to comprehensively capture discursive features within specific contextual factors, thereby hindering the summarized portrayal of gender differences. It was too simplistic to count the pronouns 'I' or 'my' as signs of speaker-oriented language and 'you' or 'your' as signsof hearer-oriented language specific to a deferential tone. Another example to elucidate this difficulty is shown by the data of the Saudi women who employed hearer-oriented pronouns as referential rather than deferential. This can be seen in the statements below.

Saudi Female Data (Hearer-Oriented Language)
1 *I wonder if **you** take on a new PhD student*
2 *I am not sure if **you** are willing to supervise*
3 *I wonder if **you** are interested in such a topic*
4 *I hope **you** would be able to supervise me*

These examples reveal Saudi women adopting strategies that preserve their own status, distancing themselves from using explicit illocutionary force in their requests, except for ten instances categorized as affective requests (see Table 2). Many theorists, such as House and Kádár (2023), Culpeper and Haugh (2018),Kecskes (2015), Locher (2012), Mills (2011) and Haugh (2007), have addressed the

challenges posed by contextual factors to politeness theory and its analysis. The following section will explore the quantitative similarities in discursive features across both Saudi genders, where the influence of contextual factors cannot be determined.

4.3 Discursive Features of Requests:

Due to the sociolinguistic nature of politeness and its influence on requestive behavior (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987), it is important to consider the variations in requests based on the content being asked for and the recipient (Eskin, 2018, p. 49). While many studies focus on the application of requests and their categorization into head-act taxonomy and categories (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Trosborg, 1995), this study takes a comprehensive data-driven approach to understanding the role of negotiation and culture in requestive behavior. Specifically, the researcher deductively analyzed the emails to identify linguistic features related to requests. To classify the various forms of syntactic downgraders used in requestive behavior, the researcher adopted Trosborg's (2011) categories of internal and external mitigating devices. Internal mitigations encompassed interrogatives (question-like structures, such as 'Do you have the possibility'), declaratives (sentence-like structures, such as 'I hope you will be able to supervise my proposal'), and conditionals (which may include if-clauses or other conditional forms, such as 'Once you accept me as a PhD student, I can then submit an application'). These syntactic features served to reduce the directness or force of the request. On the other hand, external mitigations comprised polite markers like 'please' and hedges such as 'would' or 'could' (refer to Table 5). Both forms of mitigation are presented in Table 4 and will be further examined in subsequent sections.

Table 4 illustrates the mean, standard deviation, number of participants, and occurrences of syntactic downgraders and lexical devices used in the requestive

forms for the Saudi females and males[2]. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean use of syntactic downgraders and lexical devices differentiated between genders. However, no significant differences were found for either lexical linguistic devices (*t* (118) = .52, *p* = .928) or syntactic downgraders (*Levene's t* (95.85) = -1.14, *p* = 258). This made it difficult to detect discursive features between genders in Saudi discourse through quantitative analysis due to similarities in their use of English language at a macro-level. In terms of frequency, Saudi women were more inclined to use hedges than any other linguistic feature, followed by conditional statements.

For Saudi males, declarative syntactic downgraders were the most commonly used linguistic feature, with hedges a close second. The least used linguist feature was declarative syntactic downgraders for females, and interrogative syntactic downgraders for males.

Table (4): Use of syntactic downgraders and lexical devices in request forms

Linguistic features	50 Saudi females (= 54 requests)			50 Saudi males (= 68 requests)		
	M (sd)	Participants	Occurrence	*M (sd)*	Participants	Occurrence
Lexical devices	**1.32 (0.79)**	**43(86%)**	**66**	**1.32 (0.84)**	**41 (82%)**	**60**
Hedges	1.14 (0.64)	43(88.0%)	57	1.20 (0.89)	38 (82%)	54
Polite markers	0.18 (0.39)	9 (18.0%)	9	0.12 (0.33)	6 (12%)	6
Syntactic downgraders	**1.14 (0.53)**	**46 (92.0%)**	**57**	**1.24 (0.72)**	**43 (86%)**	**62**
Interrogative	0.22 (0.42)	11 (22.0%)	11	0.02 (0.14)	1 (2%)	1
Declarative	0.14 (0.35)	7 (14.0%)	7	0.86 (0.35)	1 (20%)	43
Conditional	0.78 (0.51)	37 (74.0%)	39	0.36 (0.48)	3 (60%)	18

[2] Note: participant refers to unique participant count (females made 54 requests and males made 68 requests), whilst occurrence refers to total number of occurrences (i.e. in their request, some participants may employ the above features more than once)

Table (5): Examples of Syntactic Downgraders in Saudi Data

	Declarative	**Interrogative**	**Conditional**
Males	*I look forward to have the honor to undertake my PhD under your supervision.*	*Would you willing to talk to me a bit more, by email or on the phone?*	*It would be such honourable if I have the chance to be a PhD candidate under your supervision.*
Females	*I would like to join the group and hope you can be my supervisor.*	*Could you please advise me about the PhD projects and supervision availability*	*I would like to know if you have the capacity to supervise me because I am planning to apply for a PhD degr*

Table 5 provides illustrative examples for each requestive category of syntactic downgraders, following Trosborg's (1995) framework. In terms of the declarative style, Saudi males tend to adopt honorific language and display respect in their requests, whereas Saudi women predominantly employ a neutral declarative style. This difference is evident in the examples provided in the table above. Regarding the interrogative style, only one Saudi male used a question mark after making a request, whereas this strategy was more commonly observed in the female data. This particular observation will be further discussed in subsequent sections. Moreover, the conditional requests made by Saudi males predominantly center around expressing their feelings, specifically emphasizing the sense of being 'honored' if granted the opportunity for acceptance. Conversely, the Saudi female examples reveal a different trend, as a desire for confirmation becomes apparent. This is evidenced by the following formula: ***'they want to know' + 'if' the supervisor is able/have the capacity/interested to supervise them***. In this context, the use of 'if' does not serve to emphasize any status difference as observed in the case of Saudi

> 1 *I wonder **if** you are interested in such a topic. If you do so, it would…*

males, but rather functions as an inquiry about the availability of the supervisor. Additional examples that support this finding are as follows:

Saudi female data (Use of 'if')

> **2** *I wonder **if** you take on a new PhD student in 2015 and if you are interested in my projectproposal!*

It seems that Saudi males focused more on *Kalafah* language in their conditional requests, which largely presumes a humble stance in this data. Alternatively, as Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 272) argue, the if clause in certain examples "functions pragmatically as a hedge on the force of speech act".

Saudi Male Data (Use of 'if')

> **1** ***if** you could give me some of your time and supervise me, I would be very happy...*
>
> **2** ***if** given a chance to prove my worth*
>
> **3** ***if** I have the chance to be a PhD candidate*

Interestingly, as there seems to be similarities in Saudi males' use of declarative and conditional requests, Saudi women's conditional requests at times overlap with their interrogative requests; both seem to revolve around their need for confirmation, closed with a question mark. This reflects doubt and a desire to be reassured and confirmed. Like tag questions, question marks—at least inthese particular requests—are utilised to invite verification, consent, confirmation (Waseleski, 2006)or simply as "a notion of possibility" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 153). This can be seen in the following examples.

> **1** *I am interested in your area ...., and **would like to know** your possibility for supervision atend of 2017**?***

Saudi Female Data (Use of Question Marks)

> **2** *I **would like to know** can you accept new students for Fall 2015**?***
>
> **3** *However, **I am not sure** if you are willing to supervise such this area**?***

The use of a question mark or an exclamation mark in some formal business letters can be interpreted as a sign of informality. Ball (2009) argues that question marks can be used as a stylistic, rather than traditional, rhetorical device. Since the question mark indicates that the person is asking a question, it can be argued that the use of the question mark in these academic emails embeds an illocutionary force for the receiver to answer it. This is in line with research on emoticons, which concluded that the use of certain emoticons online indicates the illocutionary force of the text and contributes to its pragmatic meaning (Dresner & Herring , 2014). The requestive data of the Saudi women in this study included more than 22% who used interrogative forms (11 participants out of 50), seven of which used question marks. The use of the questioning strategy could be seen as further evidence of the women pushing for a reply, as they wished to receive confirmation of whether or not their project would be approved by that supervisor.

Since the focus of this thesis is largely on the language of negotiation, requestive behavior is viewed from this particular angle, particularly from the point of view of how one could be more culturally competent when comparing Australian ways of negotiation to that of Saudis. There is one particular difference that generally distinguishes the Australian data: the sense of providing alternatives (optionality) to mitigate the negotiations. This was rarely found in the Saudi data, though it should be considered in any form of negotiation (Alsharif & Alyousef, 2017; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002). The example below illustrates this sort of optionality

> **1** *If I proceed with this study and therefore need a supervisor, I am wondering if this is something you may be able to consider? If you think this could be both possible and of interest to you, could I request a time to meet with you and discuss further? If it is not possible for you at this stage, then of course I understand* **completely**.

Australian Female Data (Use of 'if'):

There is a list of different scenarios in the above response expressed by the 'if' conditional, reflecting an indirect way of requesting through hedging. This was then concluded with the student expressing their understanding that their request may be met with a refusal. The following is another similar example that highlights an understanding of the fact that approval may not be granted:

> **1** *I understand PhD projects are often limited by funding and am wondering if you are taking on any students.*

Australian Male Data (Use of 'if'):

This minimises the imposition on the supervisor, provides optionality (Leech, 2016) and preserves the student's status (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990).. By demonstrating understanding in this context, the student may elicit empathy from the prospective supervisor, potentially leading to their acceptance. Furthermore, this portrays the student as an independent and empathetic individual - someone with whom the supervisor could envision collaborating throughout a PhD project. In negotiation literature, the effective utilisation of emotions, such as showing understanding, has been linked to higher satisfaction and increased likelihood of future agreements (Mueller & Curhan, 2006). Interestingly, while eight Australians (40%) used the phrase 'I understand', as shown in the previous example, only one Saudi male (1%) used it in the context of acknowledging that the supervisor was on leave ('I understand that I should not expect feedback from you soon').

The concept of anticipating rejection does not seem to exist in Saudi negotiations, at least not in this specific context. It is not customary for Arabic speakers to make requests of individuals with higher authority, but rather to indicate that rejection would be accepted gracefully. The value of empirical studies, such as this one, lies in their ability to highlight underlying cross-cultural differences between Arabs and

Anglophones. While there is a significant amount of literature suggesting general tendencies in Arabic persuasion, such as the use of repetition, metaphoric language, and strong emotions when presenting ideas (See Suchan, 2014 for an overview), very little is known about the intricacies of these persuasion strategies. Examining the presence and absence of certain linguistic choices adds further insight to the already established body of research. In the present Saudi data, the use of the conditional 'if' was not employed to anticipate possible rejection, but rather to express gratitude if accepted: '*If you could give me some of your time and supervise me, I would be very happy as I am sure I will learn a lot from you and provide a good thesis*'.

4.4 Hedging:

As depicted in Table 6 below, the Saudi participants in this study utilized a range of lexical hedges. While previous researchers, including Holmes (1990), Low (1996), and Hyland (1996), have identified numerous lexical hedges, this section focuses specifically on the eight hedges employed by the participants in their requestive moves. According to Holmes (1990), hedges serve to express uncertainty, tentativeness, and soften the speaker's utterances. It is worth noting that while the term 'believe' was categorized as a hedge in the case of one male participant, it was not classified as such in the female data, where it instead served as a strengthener ('I believe that I am able to produce good research material under your supervision'). This finding revealed gender differences in the implementation of hedges. Conversely, one male participant employed 'believe' to emphasize power distance ('If you believe that one of my topics needs changes to be acceptable, perhaps you could suggest changes'). As 'believe' was the only hedge used as a strengthener in the data of two female participants, they were excluded from the analysis. The remaining hedges are presented in the table below.

Table (6): Hedges used in requests in Saudi data

	Saudi Females (*n* = 50)			Saudi Males (*n* = 50)		
Hedge	*M (sd)*	**Participants**	**Occurrence**	*M (sd)*	**Participants**	**Occurrence**
Could	0.18 (0.39)	9 (18.0%)	9	0.18 (0.39)	9 (18.0%)	9
Would	0.68 (0.74)	26 (52.0%)	34	0.58 (0.76)	21 (42.0%)	29
Hope	0.12 (0.33)	6 (12.0%)	6	0.22 (0.46)	10 (20%)	11
Think	0.04 (0.20)	2 (4.0%)	2	0.02 (0.14)	1 (2.0%)	1
Believe	0	0	0	0.02 (0.14)	1 (0.2%)	1
Can	0.10 (0.30)	5 (10%)	5	0.16 (0.37)	8 (16%)	8
Wish	0.04 (0.20)	2 (4.0%)	2	0	0	0
May	1.00 (0.00)	2 (4.0%)	2	0.04 (0.20)	2 (4%)	2

Table 6 illustrates the usage of hedges by the Saudi participants. Among the hedges, 'would' was the most frequently used (52% of females, 42% of males), with eight females and eight males utilizing it twice. 'Could' was employed by 18% of both Saudi females and males. 'Hope' was utilized by 12% of Saudi females and 20% of males, with one male participant using it twice. 'Think' and 'believe' were each used by 4% of females and 2% of males. Interestingly, none of the Saudi males used 'wish,' while 4% of females did. 'Think' was only used by 4% of females and 2% of males. 'May' was employed by 4% of both males and females. 'Can' was used by 10% of females and 16% of males. To analyze whether there were any significant differences in the mean usage of hedges between Saudi Arabian males and females, an independent samples t-test was conducted, but no significant differences were found.

An independent sample t-test was also conducted to determine whether the mean use of hedges differentiated the Australians and Saudis. There was a significant difference in the mean use of 'would' (Levene's t (39.22) = -2.11, p = .041). Saudi participants (M = 0.63, M = 0.75) used 'would' more than Australians (M = 0.35, SD = 0.49). There was also a significant difference in the mean use of 'can' (Levene's t

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(99) = -3.846, p < .001).No Australian used 'can', whereas some Saudis used 'can' at a higher rate (M = 0.13, SD = 0.34). An independent sample t-test was then conducted to determine whether the mean use of syntactic downgraders and lexical devices differentiated between Saudi and Australian females and males. There was no statistically significant difference between the mean use of lexical devices for Australian and Saudi Arabian females (t (63) = 0.30, p = .767). However, there was a statistically significant difference in the mean use of syntactic downgraders for Australian (M = 0.93) and Saudi females (M = 1.14) (Levene's t (49.71) = -2.05, p = .046). These results suggest Saudi females had a greater mean usage of syntactic downgraders than Australian females.

Table (7): Hedges used in requests in Australian data

Hedges	Females (n = 15)			Males (n = 5)		
	M (sd)	Occurrence	Frequency	M (sd)	Occurrence	Frequency
Could	0.40 (0.63)	5 (33.3%)	6	0	0	0
Would	0.33 (0.49)	5 (33.3%)	5	0.40 (0.55)	2 (40%)	2
Hope	0.20 (0.41)	3 (20.0%)	3	0.20 (0.45)	1 (20%)	1
Think	0.13 (0.35)	2 (13.3%)	2	0	0	0
Believe	0	0	0	0	0	0
Can	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wish	0	0	0	0	0	0
May	1.33 (0.58)	3 (20%)	3	0	0	0

Given the noticeable frequency of the hedge 'would' among Saudi participants, a qualitative analysis was conducted to explore the distinct ways in which each gender employed it. In the Saudi male data, the use of the hedge 'would' was observed in requestive contexts, reflecting the use of *Kalafah* language.

> **1** *I **would** very much appreciate it **if you could help** me find a supervisor*

Saudi male data (Hedge)

2 *I **would** be very happy as **I am sure I will learn a lot from you** and provide a good thesis.*

While there were some similarities between the Saudi male and female data (e.g., 'It would be a great opportunity to work with you'), the female participants used Mayanah language, which was not observed in the male data (e.g., '[I] would be excited to enrol in one of the available projects in the X lab'). Generally, the linguistic patterns of Saudi males and females were comparable in terms of their use of the hedge 'would.' However, certain contextual factors revealed gender differences in their requestive behavior, indicating a tendency towards either *Kalafah* or *Mayanah* orientation. These contextual factors could include cultural norms, social expectations, and the power dynamics between the participants and the interlocutors. These findings suggest that the differences observed in the use of hedges reflect gender-specific communication styles influenced by cultural and social factors. The variations between traditional *Kalafah* and contemporary *Mayanah* orientations highlight the complexities in navigating politeness norms in different contexts. The results highlight the distinct gap between traditional and contemporary politeness approaches. The traditional approach tends to focus on evaluating statements in isolation, while the contemporary approach takes into consideration broader contextual factors.

5. Conclusion

The presented study offers a comprehensive exploration of different discursive behaviors surrounding requestive events, contributing new insights into the evaluation of requestive behavior through a data-driven approach. This research expands on existing categorical studies by delving deeper into the subject matter. By incorporating both traditional and contemporary politeness frameworks (House & Kádár, 2023), the study unveils distinct gender differences in request strategies, with Saudi men displaying language that emphasizes hierarchy more frequently than females, leading to a higher overall number of requests. These findings align with previous research by Hariri (2017), where men were found to use more requests and

apologies compared to their female counterparts. Therefore, this study sheds light on and corrects some existing misconceptions regarding generalised gender differences, urging the inclusion of comparable data for more accurate representation.

Kalafah and Mayanah, two negotiation orientations specific to Saudi culture, are discussed in this research, where hearer- and speaker-oriented language are implemented to examine the influence of power dynamics on language use. The study asserts that hearer-oriented language, as employed by Saudi males, places recipients in a weakened position. However, existing literature suggests that it may be confrontational for the recipients. Hence, it proposes the use of speaker-oriented language as a more polite alternative. Additionally, the study closely examines the differences between syntactic downgraders and lexical devices in the request forms used by both genders.

Further, this research considers Tannen's (1999) claim that men tend to prioritise hierarchical dynamics, thus explaining the emergence of Kalafah language among Saudi men when confronted with power imbalances. By challenging stereotypical studies that categorise women as inherently more polite, the study advocates for the creation of a more complex pragmatic model that encompasses the interplay of gender with other variables such as race, class, age, or culture in the production and interpretation of linguistic politeness during interactions.

In addition to shedding light on gender differences in polite negotiation within the Saudi Arabian context, this study further introduces a framework for categorizing these differences. The dual negotiation approaches of Mayanah and Kalafah explored in this research may have broader implications beyond the Saudi culture, warranting further investigation. Furthermore, the study's general findings reveal that Saudi women are more likely to imitate native speakers using online resources, while most participants position their requests at the end of their emails. Saudi female participants exhibit a higher inclination toward promoting further contact to ensure

the fulfillment of their requests. On the other hand, Saudi male participants display a more competitive approach in their requestive behavior, incorporating moves that emphasise funding arrangements and their openness to changing their PhD topics, with a greater utilisation of off-record requests. Lastly, a significant difference is observed between the two cultural groups regarding the use of 'can,' where Saudi students employ 'can' more frequently in their data, in contrast to Australian participants who never use the term in their emails. These findings highlight the importance of cultural nuances in linguistic expressions of politeness.

Overall, this study provides unique insights into gender differences in polite negotiation within Saudi Arabian culture, offering a framework for classification. The identified negotiation approaches extend beyond the Saudi context and warrant further investigation. The research not only contributes to the knowledge of requestive behavior but also paves the way for future studies that examine the interplay between gender, culture, and other socio-cultural factors in shaping linguistic politeness.

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