

When East Meets West: A Comparative Analysis of Credibility and Persuasive Appeals in Cross-Cultural Email Negotiations between Genders

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Abstract

The bulk of studies focusing on cross-cultural variations in persuasive appeals examines letters or newspaper articles (Al-Ali 2006; Alhudhaif , 2005; Bhatia , 2014; Connor et al ., 1995; Ismail , 2010). It is rare for a study to examine persuasive appeals within intercultural settings via email communication for academic proposal purposes. To this end, this study investigates the use of credibility appeals in emails sent by Saudi and Australian PhD applicants to potential Australian supervisors. The study employs a genre-based approach, utilizing Swales' (1990) framework for genre analysis to identify the communicative purposes of each move in academic email negotiations. The results suggest cultural differences in self-presentation strategies. Despite quantitative similarities in credibility appeals usage, qualitative differences suggest cultural influences on communication styles. The study highlights the need for a culture-bridging approach to academic writing, promoting intercultural communication and contributing to a more comprehensive comprehension of academic email negotiations.

Keywords: Credibility Appeals, Self-Appraisal, Self-Glorification, Cultural and Gender Differences, Academic Emails, Intercultural Communication, Genre Analysis, Politeness, and Persuasion.

1. Background of Similar Studies

The literature review highlights the importance of analysing genre, politeness, and persuasion in intercultural communication. Several studies suggest that written discourse structures in different languages exhibit unique cultural characteristics (Kubota, 1997). Identifying specific genre and moves is a crucial aspect of exploring these discourse structures. Genre studies have focused on various types of professional writing, such as legal discourse, business settings, and most relevantly, academic research writing. Bhatia (2014) highlights the significance of considering the communicative purpose of a genre to identify its characteristics. For instance, Bhatia (2014) compares sales promotional letters and job applications, which share similar persuasive objectives of selling services or skills to potential employers. Consequently, these genres employ similar moves, such as establishing qualifications, incentivizing, including relevant documents, exerting pressure, and maintaining a polite tone (Bhatia, 2014). Credible appeals can be said to be the most dominant moves of this genre.

In the analysis of 200 job and scholarship applications from various South Asian countries, Bhatia aimed to showcase the uniqueness of the South Asian model. A comparison to the Western model revealed that although both included similar moves, South Asian applicants utilized alternative strategies such as self-glorification, self-degradation, target-glorification, and adversary-glorification, in contrast to the Western approach of emphasizing relevant qualifications and experience or self-appraisal. While Bhatia did not explicitly employ the persuasion framework, these strategies can be categorized as credibility appeals. Bhatia also labeled this type of letter as a "negotiation" or job negotiation, which is relevant to the initial negotiation emails sent to prospective PhD supervisors in the current study. Despite potential variations in move structures across different contexts and cultures,

incorporating a credible appeal through strategic moves are crucial for effective persuasion.

Research supports the notion that genre analysis is subject to cultural specificities. An examination of genre analysis studies that applied Bhatia's (2014) proposed moves revealed different tendencies for particular moves, with some creating new moves that were not present in the original framework. Therefore, a close analysis of student emails in the present study may reveal the underlying cultural values and practices embedded within them. For instance, while Bhatia (2014) emphasized the importance of self-appraisal over self-glorification, a Hungarian study found that self-appraisal was considered self-glorification in Hungarian culture (Furka, 2008). Conversely, a Pakistani study identified that establishing credentials was a crucial factor for the success of an application. Failing to present oneself as a unique candidate with significant achievements and abilities was deemed unsuccessful (Khan & Tin, 2012). Similarly, a Malaysian study found that applicants preferred to end politely and avoided using pressuring tactics, which reflected Malaysian cultural norms (Maasum, Darus, Stapa, & Mustaffa, 2007). However, these findings also indicated that Malaysian graduates' communicative norms need to align with the communicative purpose of promotional genres as proposed by Bhatia (2014). Nonetheless, one Philippine study found new moves, including how applicants expressed sentiments for the position or dealt with potential rejection (Miciano, 2014). Lastly, an Arabic study using Bhatia's model on job application letters concluded that institution-glorification was the most prevalent move, and promoting candidature was the most dominant move in the sample (Al-Ali, 2006). In exploring cross-cultural differences and similarities between Flemish and US job application letters, Connor et al. (1995) asserted that US applicants had more "enriched content," defined as exhibiting greater information and functional transparency.

Despite ongoing research on persuasive appeals, there remains a gap in knowledge regarding the persuasive appeals used in postgraduate emails seeking a PhD opportunity. Thus, a combined online and offline study was necessary, as different persuasive appeals are utilized depending on culture and situation. An offline cross-cultural study compared the persuasion tactics used by both a Jordanian and US organization when attempting to form a service partnership (Suchan, 2014). The author found that Arabic persuasion strategies differed fundamentally from those employed by Americans. Arabic persuasion was characterized by emotional norms and metaphoric language use in both Arabic and English, reflecting social and political hierarchies that shape Arabic interaction (Suchan, 2014). Similarly, Al-Momani (2014) examined letters of complaint written by Jordanian university students and noted that pathos was more prevalent in these letters than other modes of persuasion. Studies comparing cross-cultural persuasive texts or advertisements among native and non-native English speakers generally conclude that non-native English speakers utilize more emotional or affective appeals, while native English speakers focus more on rational appeals (Ismail, 2010; Zhu, 2017; Zhu, 2013). However, methodological concerns have emerged from the results of these studies, as they often compare different cultures within their respective comfort zones and among texts that serve slightly different purposes. A more accurate methodology would be to compare the persuasive appeals of two cultures or genders by employing similar tasks, context, and language, as is done in this paper. The use of such a methodology would lend greater credibility to the persuasive appeals used in postgraduate emails seeking a PhD opportunity.

Several studies have combined genre analysis and politeness to better understand the persuasive appeals utilized in various communication contexts (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002; Wang, 2005). Of note, several of these studies have incorporated a credible appeal in their methodology. For example, James, Scholfield,

and Ypsiladis (1992) investigated role-play scholarship applications written in English by eight native Greek-speaking students, all of whom had an advanced level of English proficiency. These letters were evaluated by native English-speaking students studying at the same university in the UK, incorporating Gricean maxims of politeness while examining how students used language within the politeness maxims. The study found that direct strategies were linked to credible appeals and were deemed rational, while indirect strategies were linked to emotional appeals. Complimentary behaviors, such as thanking, were characterized as affective appeals. The language used by the applicants was found to be egocentric, emotionally charged, and informal in places, which violated the Gricean maxims and reduced their credibility. Similarly, Farnia et al. (2019) collected 96 role-play scholarship letters written by Iranian participants, half in Persian and half in English. Both groups utilized rational and affective appeals but differed significantly in how they utilized moves such as openings, greetings, closings, and self-presentations. Direct strategies were mainly used in English, while impersonalised indirect strategies were utilized in Persian. One key finding was that the English language necessitates more direct strategies, such as personal pronouns in self-introductions (e.g. "My name is X"), while Persian relies mostly on impersonal pronouns (e.g. "This is X"). The authors suggested that participants possessed language knowledge but not necessarily cultural awareness. Overall, these studies showcase the significance of incorporating a credible appeal in persuasive communication and highlight the importance of analyzing the moves and politeness dimensions of the text to better understand the persuasive appeals utilized.

The study conducted by Al Abbad et al. (2019), which followed the design of James et al. (1992), explored the persuasive strategies used by 76 first-year Saudi female students in an academic environment. The students engaged in role-play letter writing for a fictitious scholarship application directed to Saudi Arabian providers of

scholarships, intentionally using English strategically to meet Saudi expectations. The authors analyzed the letters using a mixed-method approach within the persuasive appeals framework and found that the applicants employed various persuasive strategies grouped according to the Aristotelian Logos, Ethos, and Pathos framework. While religious references were extensively used, logical arguments were mostly employed by focusing on personal achievements and performance scores, and personal achievements are considered part of norms for formal and informal occasions in Saudi culture. However, it is challenging to conclude exactly how Saudi students appeared rational as the lines between appeals were blurred. Personal achievements are categorized primarily as credibility appeals, but they are included in the core criteria for acceptance, meaning that they can also be viewed as rational appeals. Nonetheless, while the study postulated that their findings were in partial contrast to earlier studies exploring Arabic persuasion, their conclusion is potentially biased by the study design, treating credible appeals as core rational appeals, and the entirely female-based data, which may not be representative of the entire country. Thus, including a credible appeal remains essential in persuasive communication, and studies should be designed with more generalized criteria and both male and female participants.

Although studies in genre analysis, politeness, and persuasion have provided great insights, the literature combining all three dimensions remains limited. Two major areas to consider are the relationship between modern (im)politeness and persuasive tactics and the distribution of moves under each persuasive appeal used by specific cultural groups in an intercultural setting. When students seek academic approval from potential supervisors, persuasive appeals filter the moves used in a way that clarifies their function and reveals the relationship between certain moves and the overall persuasive unit. This helps to provide bottom-up and top-down investigation and explore meaningful patterns across gender and culture, increasing our

understanding of how politeness and impoliteness impact the creation of identity and the management of rapport within certain cultures (Graham, 2007). Additionally, impoliteness and face do not solely refer to polite discursive behaviour but also refers to the process of defining relationships in interaction (Locher, 2008), revealing how each gender adjusts their language to different speech act events to meet their prospective supervisor's expectations. This process can provide insight into underlying dimensions about historical traditions that have contributed to certain linguistic behaviour. Thus, investigating how impoliteness and face are negotiated in online interaction remains an under-researched area (Locher, 2010a). Overall, further studies are necessary to better understand the complex interplay between genre, politeness, and persuasion in diverse cultural contexts.

This paper focuses on the measure of persuasive appeals known as credibility appeal, as proposed by Connor and Lauer (1988). Credibility appeal, or ethos, pertains to the personal appeal established by the writer or speaker's expertise or reputation. It is a vital aspect of persuasive communication, wherein the speaker's credibility is often central to their success in convincing their target audience to accept their position. A persuader's credibility can be enhanced by highlighting their expertise, experience, or knowledge on the topic at hand. Consequently, a perceived lack of credibility can often be a persuasive disadvantage. In conclusion, understanding how to establish and enhance credibility can greatly enhance the effectiveness of persuasive communication.

2. Methodology

2.1 Theoretical Framework:

The aim of this study is to examine the linguistic concepts of genre analysis, politeness, and persuasion in the context of academic email negotiations between students seeking PhD opportunities and their potential supervisors. Through a genre-

based approach, the study suggests that a more detailed understanding of the communicative functions of email negotiations can be achieved. Specifically, the study utilizes Swales' (1990) genre analysis framework and applies it to academic email communication by identifying the communicative purposes of each move in the email. By investigating each move in detail, the study can better comprehend the overall persuasive strategy employed by students in their email negotiations.

According to Swales (1990), genres consist of communicative events with shared communicative purposes, exhibiting similarities in structure, content, style, and intended audience. In this study, the major rhetorical moves of the negotiation genre were identified using a move strategy understanding of the genre. Bhatia (2014) argues that the coding system used should identify major rhetorical moves, as these vary in size and may occur multiple times within a single text. Thus, to articulate new rhetorical functions specific to email negotiation messages, additional communicative moves were added to the coding system. While it is acknowledged that move structure identification may be somewhat subjective, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted in this study to validate the analysis of strategic moves. Some moves were identified and classified separately due to their frequency in most students' emails or their importance, as outlined in guidelines from universities or research articles. Moreover, the study explores the presence of affective appeals within the persuasion framework and reveals that certain moves in academic emails convey higher levels of affective appeals. Ultimately, this study seeks to shed light on the persuasive techniques employed by students in academic email negotiations, providing a deeper understanding of this specific genre of communication and contributing to its overall comprehension.

2.2 Recruitment:

100 emails were collected from 100 Saudi participants (50 males and 50 females). In order to examine cultural differences 20 emails were collected from 20 Anglo-Australian students (five males and 15 females). It appeared that most Anglo-Australian students did not rely on emails to find prospective supervisors, instead using other direct communication means such as face-to-face or telephone communication. Since participation in the background information questionnaire was voluntary, the 40% of the Saudi students and the 85% of the Australian students participated in the questionnaire aged between 33 to 42 years old. All of the Australian students self-identified as Anglo-Saxon Australians from Australian or New Zealand backgrounds.

2.3 Email Analysis:

The negotiation moves involving credibility appeals (see Table.1) of each cultural group were identified and analysed. Some dominant linguistic features are discussed below. The moves in this study were informed by genre analysis literature and the guidelines of some universities, as previously stated. Twenty-seven moves were identified in total, but not necessarily all were used in every email. The dominant moves include opening, self-introduction, research interest, proposal, research justification, CV information, change/choose topic, request for acceptance, promote further contact and closing. The frequency of each move in both groups was calculated and analysed quantitatively. For the qualitative analysis, politeness strategies were examined under each of these moves, adopting Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model and the new wave of discursive politeness. The moves were, in most cases, independent clauses—clauses that stand by themselves as simple sentences—in line with Swales' (1990) description of moves. Below is an example of how emails were classified under specific moves with independent clauses:

My name is First and I'm an international student <Self-introduction] sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia <Fund]. I just finished my Master's degree in Information Systems at the University of XXXX <Major]. I am planning to start my PhD Program in the fall of 2016 <Timeframe]

However, there were several instances where students collapsed two or three moves into one clause. Below is an example of how some students naturally collapse more than one move into one clause:

I am writing in relation to potential supervision of my PhD project <Proposal], to commence in 2012 <Timeframe], in the Faculty of Education <Major].

Therefore, a workable definition is required to justify these instances of combined moves. A move in this study is defined as a discursal text performing a certain communicative function within a complete phrase or as part of the phrase in the email message. The data analysis was limited to the 27 moves each were defined accurately according to the topics the participants discussed in their emails. These are; opening, self-introduction, research interest, Phd topic, major, greetings, proposal, GPA, Timeframe, CV info, attachments, Research plan, Research experience, Change/choose topic, context, Self-promotion, Research justification, Program/Uni interest, Fund, Focus-on-supervisor, Request for acceptance, Gratitude, Options, Promoting further contact, Closing, Sign-off, Business-card signature.

2.4 Identification of credibility appeals

Table (1): Workable definition of credibility appeals

| Category | Definition | Example |
|--|--|--|
| <u>Credibility appeal</u> Generic moves of this appeal: Obligatory CV info/GPA/fund/self- promotion/attachment Optional Self-introduction | Presenting character and/or qualifications, scholarship awards in a manner that positively impacts on the prospective supervisor to facilitate persuasion. It generally has a competitive nature in this thesis. | Fortunately, I have been granted a scholarship from the Saudi Ministry ... to cover all of my tuition. I am a Saudi national lecturer at the University of X. |

The literature dealing with persuasive appeals was discussed in the previous section, along with definitions. However, for the purpose of this study, some workable definitions had to be developed to help classify each email in terms of its persuasive appeals. All email data was coded according to the body of the email without including opening moves such as ‘Dear Dr. First name’ or closing moves, which include *Best wishes*.

There was a sharp focus on how the body of emails, being the main discussion body, were evaluated in terms of persuasion; this revealed the kind of generic options or moves appearing under each persuasive appeal. These were then compared between Saudi gender groups and, to a limited extent, cultural groups (Saudis and Australians). Table (2) elaborates how the current researcher identified each persuasive appeal along with the moves which have been classified as belonging to it. This was also supported by an example from the data.

Table (2): Definitions of **credibility** appeals and their moves

| Credibility appeals' moves | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Obligatory moves | → | <p>CV info Emphasising qualifications: career, awards, courses, job experiences.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">↙</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GPA Mentioning their Masters scores, stressing their advanced level.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">↘</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fund Mentioning scholarships as part of their awards to continue their higher education.</p> | → | <p>Attachment Referring to attachments (CV, other credits, etc.)</p> |
| Optional moves | → | <p>Self-promotion Regarding the self as high-achieving and talking about future improvements, either in relation to abilities or how the career promotion will benefit them.</p> | ↘ | <p>Self-introduction Saudi students introduce themselves using their job title (e.g. I am a lecturer).</p> | | |

Table (2) presents the primary moves used by Saudi students in their personal statements. Obligatory moves such as CV information, emphasizing qualifications like career, awards, courses, and job experiences are often highlighted. Participants also stress their advanced levels by mentioning their GPA and Masters scores. They frequently mention scholarships as part of their awards to fund their higher education. Referring to attachments, including CVs and other credits, is also a common move. In addition to the obligatory moves, optional moves are also employed. Self-promotion is one of them, where students regard themselves as high-achieving and talk about future improvements in terms of abilities or how career

promotion will benefit them. Saudi students often introduce themselves using their job titles, such as “I am a lecturer”.

2.4 Reliability checks:

Although coding the current emails for their genre moves and persuasive appeals was at an adequate reliability level (since the researcher recoded them three times during the period of data collection), some communication scholars argue that a representative sample of 10% from the full data should be re-analyzed independently to further assess the reliability (Allen, 2017). Hence, 10% of the email data was coded by two independent raters. Both received training in data coding in both micro-level moves and macro-level persuasive appeals. The agreement percentage was 95% for the moves and 91% for the persuasive appeals. Both raters worked in individual settings and were not with each other on the day. When the researcher discussed the disagreement afterwards, there were prompt agreements that the researcher's coding was at times more accurate than the initial judgement of each coder.

3. Results

3.1 The three persuasive appeals:

Table (3): Saudi gender and credible appeals

| Saudi Gender | Credibility |
|--------------|-------------|
| Saudi Male | 129 |
| Saudi Female | 166 |
| Total | 295 |

There is no specific percentage recommended for each appeal in an academic email proposal. As shown in Table (3) there are two main differences between Saudi males and females concerning the use of credible and affective appeals. In total, women made slightly more appeals. The central difference is in the affective appeal; while women used 88 affective moves, men used 131. Quantitative analysis cannot tell the

full story without the help of qualitative analysis, which will be detailed further in each section devoted to these appeals.

3.2 Credibility Appeals:

Credibility appeals are rhetorically manifested in written texts via the writer's experiences, abilities, and knowledge, presenting their personality in a manner that positively impacts their audience. Credibility appeals should be based on the unexaggerated representation of the writer's qualifications of self-presentation and judgment (Connor & Lauer, 1985).

Table 4: Total number of persuasive appeals by culture

| | Credibility | Av. |
|-----------------|-------------|------|
| Saudi data | 295 | 2.95 |
| Australian data | 48 | 2.4 |
| Total | 343 | - |

In the current data, Australian students strategically utilised their CV information to show their research experience and how their current jobs have contributed to addressing the research problem or inspired them to take on the project. This is seen in Table 4, with only an average of 2.4 Australian moves constituting credibility appeals. As the qualifications are tailored to match the job description (Bhatia, 2014) — or, in this case, the PhD project — this strategy was labelled as self-appraisal. When used simply to impress the other party without linking to subject matter, this move was labelled as self-glorification: “an unsupported claim of the writer's own superiority based simply on feeling or desire rather than on rational judgment” (Bhatia, 2014, p. 70). What Bhatia (2014) suggested about the distinction of self-glorification and self-appraisal can be seen in the following example.

Saudi male data

1. I am a lecturer in the university and recently won a golden key prize. = self-glorification

3.3 Australian male data:

Bhatia's (2014) classification helps to distinguish the type of credibility appeal each cultural group is drawn towards using. When making credibility appeals, the Saudi students appeared competitive by showing willingness to amend or change their topics to gain the supervisor's approval; it is not clear whether this particular email purpose necessitates such strategy. However, there were instances where the Saudi students, as non-native English speakers, did not comprehend the pragmatic weight their statements could carry in their supervisors' mind; they tended to rely mostly on their credits such as CV, scholarships/funds or attachments. The main difference between the Saudi and Australian students is that the former listed qualifications without linking them to their PhD topic. Making direct and extensive reference to one's qualifications for self-presentation is also witnessed in another study on Saudi academic application letters (Abbad et al., 2019). Mainly, males stressed their competence, focusing on their qualifications, whereas female participants showed more self-confidence in their approach. (see self-promotion in Table 5).

Table (5): Chi2 results of credibility appeals in Saudi data

| No | Moves | Saudi Male (50) | Saudi Female (50) | Sig Chi2 | Interpretation |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Attach | 30 | 44 | 0.00 | Sig difference |
| 2 | CV | 29 | 41 | 0.28 | No sig difference |
| 3 | Fund | 30 | 38 | 0.08 | No sig difference |
| 4 | GPA | 17 | 18 | 0.83 | No sig difference |
| 5 | Self-promotion | 7 | 14 | 0.08 | No sig difference |
| 26 | Change topic | 7 | 5 | 0.53 | No sig difference |
| 7 | Justification | 5 | 1 | 0.09 | No sig difference |
| 8 | Self-introduction | 4 | 3 | 0.69 | No sig difference |
| 9 | Experience | 0 | 2 | 0.15 | No sig difference |
| Total | | 129 | 166 | - | - |

Although there were no statistical differences in self-promotion moves, this appeal was embedded in other moves in female data, such as the requestive move in the following example:

Saudi female data (Self-promotion embedded in request)

1. I believe that I am able to produce good research material under your supervision.

On average, women tended to use more moves under credibility appeals than men. Although the only statistical difference in this category was related to the number of attachments each gender referred to in their emails, the qualitative description will highlight discursive features that differentiate the way each gender group marketed their abilities. The next section discusses the change-topic move and how it has been employed in credibility appeal.

3.4 Change topic:

For this move to be classified as a credibility appeal, participants must attempt to appear competitive by convincing their supervisor that they were willing to change their topic to match the supervisor's interests. PhD supervisors expect students to be passionate about their topics to keep them motivated until the end of their research journey; therefore, showing a willingness to alter the topic might not be a good start. Below are some examples found in both gender groups' data:

Saudi male data (Change topic)

1. Be aware that the research proposal topic is flexible and can be changed or manipulated.

2. I'm sure we will work together in an interesting subject for both of us either as I proposed or as you might see by improving the idea proposed based on your experience.

Saudi female data (Change topic)

1. If I do have the chance to Find a supervisor, I will happily change my topic upon his/her recommendation, to start my proposal

2. *if you are willing to accept me.. I am also flexible to discuss different topic you think it is more appealing.*

Seven Saudi males and five Saudi females (see change-topic in Table 3) showed responsibility by having a PhD project in mind, but still offered to amend or change their topics. With the first example in the male data, the applicant was drawing the supervisor's attention by saying 'be aware' and then stressed that his topic can be 'manipulated', which may indicate a degree of under-the-table agreement. This reflects another facet of competitiveness in male data. The second example highlights a high imposition tactic by saying 'I'm sure we will work together', throwing the ball into the supervisor's court by asking them to improve the participant's proposal as 'you might see', reflecting the hearer-oriented Kalafah language that stresses the power of the supervisor. The female data, on the other hand, pinpoints a degree of bartering behaviour conditioned by 'if' ('if I do have the chance to find a supervisor, I will happily change my topic'). In the second example, the female participant started by using hearer-oriented language ('if you are willing to accept me') and then took responsibility 'to discuss different topic you think it is more appealing'. The change topic move can be used in a rational manner where participants strike a fine balance by mediating their interests with the supervisors', such as in this Australian female example: 'I have written a brief proposal and while I am not wedded to this topic, it may give you an idea of the general area of research I am interested in'. Thus, she indicated that she was not committed to that topic while highlighting her interest in that area.

3.5 CV information:

Providing CV information is one of the main moves under credibility appeals as it emphasises the participants' qualifications. This can include a number of strategies, such as mentioning the exact period of their experiences, recommendations, publications, and conferences. Twelve moves (out of 41) used by the Saudi women

and four moves (out of 29) used by the Saudi males fit into this range. However, the CV move in the Saudi data typically focused on just the job title: a trend across all the participants' data regardless of gender.

Saudi male data (CV info)

- 1. Currently, I am holding the position as a vice-dean for eLearning and Distance Education deanship*
- 2. I am a lecturer in the laboratory department in **** college at X university.*
- 3. After graduation, I got a job as a lecturer at the"... " University. Also I got award from one of te largest X companies in the middle east for best iPhone app and the prize was \$50000 for more details visit" ". And Founder my university iPhone App. [link to app included]. And I'm: 1- Sun Certified Programmer for the Java Platform, SE 6. 2- Oracle Forms Developer Certified Professional.*

The last example above was one of four rare cases that talked about the job experience relevant to the research topic, listing the participant's experience in the email and making it appear highly competitive in a way that correlates with a job applicant.

Saudi female data (CV info)

- 1. I have a wide range of experience in the financial industry as described in detail in my attached CV.*
- 2. I have a financial warranty and many recommendations from my teachers and Profs, in addition to an experience certificate for 5 years in the marketing sector*
- 3. The attached CV shows my work experience in academic research groups and conferences.*

While four Saudi women referred to recommendation letters and conferences to support their position (see examples Two and Three above), only one Saudi male mentioned this. Three Saudi women also mentioned that they published papers, compared to two Saudi men who mentioned research papers as part of their CV info.

It can be argued that most Saudi applicants in this study over-emphasised their CV moves, mentioning every possible experience they could as proof of competence (Bhatia, 2014). Arab candidates often stress their qualifications to reflect their potential value and usefulness to the prospective institution — or, in this case, to the potential supervisor (Al-Ali, 2004).

3.6 Justification:

Few Saudi men used their research justification as part of their credibility appeal. While more Saudi women used research justification as part of their rational appeal (see Tables 5), explaining why their research was worthwhile in terms of addressing a literature gap or real-life problem, three Saudi men provided rationales in terms of personal career promotion.

Saudi male data (Justification)

- 1. therefore, I need to improve myself by pursuing a PhD degree in Business and Marketing to enhance both my students' knowledge and the bank's performance.*
- 2. [I was] in charge of training employees from my university or other jobs. As a result, I am interested in some topics.*

These moves have been called research justification as they tend to provide reasons why participants chose to do a PhD or research in certain areas. Instead of providing rational reasons related to filling certain research gaps, they talked about how such a degree could add to their CV in terms of enhancing future gains.

Saudi female data (Justification)

- 1. Given these academic interests, I am interested in pursuing a doctoral degree at the University of XXXX to further my research agenda and interest in teaching at the university level.*

The previous example stressed doing a PhD to ‘further [their] research agenda to teach at the university level’. All justifications were dedicated to CV information,

rather than contributing to knowledge. Overall, this move was rarely used by Saudi participants (see Table 5).

3.7 Experience:

Rather than showing their research experience in terms of publications and other relevant matters, a few students thought that having a good academic position was a sign of research competence. This can be true in other contexts, but most of these students were young academics with few previous research publications or little experience, as evidenced by their emails. Those who have written one or two papers were sure to include this in their emails as part of their accomplishments. Bhatia (2014) argues that, in such instances, the applicant hopes such information will be well-received by the reader as relevant. It is indeed nothing but an account of one's fictional self, made relevant to the position's purposes (Bhatia, 2014). This aspect has been pointed out by Grice's maxim of relevance, where a person skilfully disguises the irrelevant self and makes it look legitimately relevant.

Saudi female data (Experience)

*1. I have also good knowledge and experience about ***[The topic] *** in regard to religious, language and cultural diversity*

However, in the previous example, the female participant did not provide evidence that she had 'good knowledge and experience' about the topic that she intended to explore. This contrasts with Grice's maxim of quality: "do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (Grice, 1975, p. 46). Although the amount of credibility appeals seems statistically similar between cultures, they are qualitatively different. In the Australian data, these experiences were more relevant and justified with more details. In general, the Saudi data was characterised by more ambiguity and a lack of supportive details.

3.8 Self-introduction:

Only a few Saudi participants introduced themselves in terms of their qualifications or job titles. Tannen (2009) believes that conventions for self-expression can be understood as socially agreed upon rituals. While it might not be relevant in an Australian context for someone to provide their job title as the sole self-introduction, it is a socially agreed upon ritual in Saudi Arabia to introduce oneself by a job title, rather than a name.

Saudi male data (Self-introduction)

1. *I am an MA holder in Applied Linguistics.*
2. *I am a lecturer at X university.*

Saudi female data (Self-introduction)

1. *I am an education and training officer in X.*
2. *I am a Saudi woman from Saudi Arabia, a researcher in the field of psychology and a master's degree from a prestigious university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia X University.*

That being said, there were only a few instances (see above) where Saudi students used their job title as the sole self-introduction strategy. For self-representation to be persuasive, it must arouse an appropriate response in the reader; it is a situation in which pathos, logos, and ethos in the true Aristotelian framework may not guarantee potential pragmatic success (Bhatia, 2014). With the examples above, it is difficult to determine how these statements would be interpreted by Anglo- Australian supervisors; it could slip past unnoticed or it might arouse negative reaction. This again raises the argument of (im) politeness. Although these statements sound rational on a surface level, they could be misinterpreted as having some implied arrogance by people from other cultural backgrounds.

3.9 Self-promotion:

Instead of using self-appraisal as a main strategy, which is all about tailoring self-achievements to meet the specific needs of the communicative event, 21 Saudi prospective students used a self-glorification strategy as part of the self-promotion move. Al-Ali (2004) believes that to “most people from an Arabic culture, self-appraisal may seem like bragging and is likely to be viewed as a kind of boasting which lacks credibility” (p.16-17). In this move, the applicants highlighted personal abilities and characteristics not necessarily relevant to the research topic. They showed how the PhD qualification will position them in the future, how their personal characteristics/value may be appealing to the prospective supervisor or useful to the prospective university, or how they will obtain personal gains from the overall PhD experience in a way that promotes the self.

Saudi female data (Self-promotion)

1. *I am very confident that I would succeed, and I would contribute significantly...*
2. *I will be working hard to attain this goal of completing a higher degree --.*
3. *This will help in my goal to prove that women in Middle Eastern countries as Saudi Arabia can create a mark in this particular field.*
4. *I am willing to show all the efforts that are needed to demonstrate how suitable I am...*

Saudi male data (Self-promotion)

1. *I would feel extremely privileged if given a chance to prove my worth and contribute to the file at the university.*
2. *and also I am open mind and friendly person.*
3. *Yet, I am looking for a new level of achievement and future research.*
4. *taking up challenges has always served as a source of excitement for me.*

These were classified as credibility appeals because the students believed that these characteristics added to their own credits and portrayed them as ambitious or competent. Women used a stronger tone in emphasising their confidence and uniqueness, evidenced by the way they expressed this move (see examples One and Four in the Saudi female data). The Saudi women wanted to not only

pinpoint their unique abilities but to also correct a misconception about Middle Eastern women, as seen in example Three. This may be due to the fact that women “in the masculine countries [...] are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12). Although Hofstede (2011) argues that women would be less competitive than men in their attempts, this is not always the case; women used this particular move two times more than men (seven men and 14 women). Not only that, but they rarely showed aspects of weakness — what Bhatia (2014) called self-degradation — in this move, seen in the first and second examples of male data: ‘if given a chance to prove my worth’, or ‘I am open mind and friendly person’. While women were self-centred in this move, some men showed how the PhD program would further their future achievements and enable them to overcome future challenges. This is seen in the third and fourth examples above. The above self-promotion statements do not address any general criteria for accepting a PhD student.

Australian female data (Self-promotion)

- 1. am keen to pursue study at a higher level. So, I have a strong background in research here in X.*
- 2. this is highly relevant to my long-term aspirations ..., as well as my determination to expand upon my data analytics and visualization skills.*

The self-promotion move was also found in the Australian female data. This move is more so about communicating personal desires and future goals, which has little to do with what a prospective supervisor wishes to know to make their decision. It

may show competence in terms of personal ambition and can, to some degree, build rapport between prospective students and supervisors.

3.10 Fund:

In this move, the students emphasised the fact that they had received a scholarship to influence the potential supervisor's decision. In some majors, such as medical sciences, some projects need funds; without a scholarship package, the supervisor will not be able to accept students. Saudi students in general preferred to use the term 'full scholarship' or 'fully sponsored'. Sixteen out of 38 women used the term 'full/fully' when describing their scholarship, while eight out of 30 Saudi men used this term. The function of adjectives, such as the word full, is very important; adjective choices can convey persuasion or "subtle shades of affect" (Hyland, 1998, p. 441).

Saudi female data (Fund)

1. *I have been granted a fully funded scholarship from my government to do my PhD in Australia.*
2. *I will be fully funded by my sponsor.*
3. *I have been granted with a full scholarship from my university experiences including study fees and living allowance. from X University to cover and living expenses of my study.*
4. *Finally, I would like to highlight that I have secured funding.*

Besides using the adjective 'full' to describe their scholarship, six Saudi men and three Saudi women went into further detail, mentioning that the scholarship would cover their living allowances, travel tickets, health insurance, or family expenses:

Saudi male data (Fund)

1. *This scholarship includes a monthly salary and health insurance other than guaranteed payment for the university courses.*

2. *I would like also to indicate that my study in university of XXX towards PhD degree will fully sponsored (e.g. tuition fees, living allowances, travel tickets) by XX.*
3. *I have[sic] granted scholarship covers my PhD studies and living expenses for me and my family.*
4. *I have a full scholarship that covers university tuition fees, study related expenses and Health Insurance.*

Elaborating on how the funds would cover the above-mentioned aspects is irrelevant in this email context. It also goes against Grice's maxim of manner to be concise, providing unnecessary details to the prospective supervisor whose only interest is in study-related expenses for the time being. In the last example of the female data, the participant described her scholarship as 'secured funding', which may reflect how students feel about such funding rather than communicating this aspect rationally.

3.11 GPA and attachment:

Mentioning a student's GPA score was one of the competitive credibility appeals in the Saudi data. However, in the male data, there is a slight degree of ambiguity relating to the exact GPA score; for example, one male participant claimed that he graduated with a very good grade, without mentioning the exact score. This could, however, be attributed to the Saudi educational system, where the term very good means B+ and excellent means A. Although the female data had instances of ambiguity in terms of grades, they gave more information on their GPA with both the exact grade and its label according to the institution. This can be seen in the examples below.

Saudi female data (GPA)

1. *as I landed several internships and graduated with a first-class GPA of 3.86 out of 4.*
2. *I have completed a Bachelor of Marketing with a (4.5 / 5) GPA.*
3. *I graduated with 4.32 GAP (pass with distinction) in 2012.*
4. *I graduated in March 2014 with (A) grade in all my subjects (except one subject B+).*

In respect of the attachment move, attachments have been referred to 74 times in Saudi data (see Table 5). In general, Saudi women used 44 attachment moves in comparison to the 30 moves made by men. The attachment move has been classified as a credibility appeal because it involves documents substantiating the students' claims. In their attachments, the Saudis usually included their CV, recommendations and research proposals, as indicated in the examples below.

Saudi male data (Attachment)

1. *However, I have attached to you my proposal and curriculum vitae.*
2. *Also, I have attached for you my PhD proposal and my CV.*
3. *Please find my resume, cover letter and a research proposal attached.*
4. *Kindly, find attached herewith a copy of my initial proposal and CV*

Saudi female data (Attachment)

1. *My CV and certificates for my previous degrees are attached.*
2. *I have enclosed my personal statement which includes a background about my study, relevant work experience and intended research topics.*
3. *Enclosed is my research proposal and academic CV.*
4. *Kindly find the attached PDF files of my research proposal, personal statement, and resume.*

The reason why there were many references to attachments in the Saudi data could be attributed to a reliance on attachments to tell the story, especially with respect to the students' proposed topic. In the Australian data, participants dedicated more time to talking about their proposed topic in the body of their emails. Al-Ali (2004) argues that the lack of details in Arabic applicants' letters is due to a belief that attachments speak for themselves. By relying on attachments, Al-Ali (2004) believes that students lose a potential opportunity to elaborate on their core abilities to convince the prospective reader. This is also consistent with earlier discussion on rational appeals,

where the Saudi students relied on the attached PhD proposal rather than discussing it in detail within their emails.

4. Study Conclusion

The study on credibility appeals in PhD applicants' emails provides insights into how prospective students present their qualifications, knowledge, and abilities to persuade potential supervisors. The study investigated the use of credibility appeals in emails sent by Saudi and Australian PhD applicants to explore the similarities and differences in the way each group of students approached the task of convincing potential supervisors to accept their applications. The study shows that credibility appeals play a crucial role in shaping the self-presentation strategies of PhD applicants. Credibility appeals are rhetorically manifest in written texts through the writer's experiences, abilities, and knowledge, presenting their personality in a manner that positively impacts their audience. However, credibility appeals should be based on the unexaggerated representation of the writer's qualifications of self-presentation and judgment.

The research finds that Australian students strategically used their CV information in their emails to demonstrate their research experience, and how their current jobs contributed to addressing the research problem or inspired them to take on the project. Australian students tailored their qualifications to match the job description, making this strategy referred to as self-appraisal. In contrast, Saudi students listed their qualifications without linking them to their PhD topic, making direct and extensive reference to their qualifications for self-presentation. This strategy was labeled as self-glorification, an unsupported claim of the writer's superiority based solely on feeling or desire rather than on rational judgment.

The study also reveals that both cultural groups used credibility appeals at a similar range, but the qualitative features of their discourses differed significantly. Although the amount of credibility appeal used seems statistically similar between cultures, they are qualitatively different. Saudi students tended to be more ambiguous and less supportive in their emails, relying on their attachments to make their case. Australian students, on the other hand, dedicated more time to talking about their proposed topics in the body of their emails, convincing the readers by elaborating on their abilities.

The study suggests that cultural differences play a role in how credibility appeals are used and interpreted, highlighting how Saudi and Australian students use different approaches to present their qualifications and how they communicate their ambitions and self-perceived worth. It also provides insights into how a more culture-bridging approach to writing academic emails can be developed. By analyzing the similarities and differences in the way Saudi and Australian PhD applicants use credibility appeals, the study shows how cultural diversity can enrich academic writing and help bridge the gap between different cultural approaches to writing academic emails. Therefore, the findings of this study can inform policymakers, educators, and researchers in their efforts to promote intercultural communication and bridge the gap between different cultural backgrounds.

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