EXPLORING THE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF EFL LEARNERS IN THE PRODUCTION AND JUDGEMENT OF FORMAL WRITTEN REQUESTS

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BY

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STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any degree to any other university or institution. The sources of information used and the extent to which the work of others has been utilized have been indicated in this thesis in the manner conventionally approved in the research field in which the thesis fits. The approval from Ethics Committee has been obtained (Protocal number HE25NOV2005-D04426).

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to examine the pragmatic competence of Cantonese adult learners of English possessing different levels of proficiency when performing the speech act of requesting for a formal purpose in writing. Pragmatic judgment – one of the two aspects of pragmatic competence – was examined by studying the most proficient group (i.e., native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers at university), whereas pragmatic performance – the other aspect of pragmatic competence – was examined by studying the two weaker groups (i.e., university students at two language proficient levels). Both pragmatic judgment and pragmatic performance were examined by investigating the same four dependent variables (i.e., *politeness*, *directness*, *formality* and *amount of information*). Teacher data, collected through a Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire completed and returned by sixteen EFL teachers (eight native Cantonese speakers and eight native English speakers) and by means of individual interviews, were analyzed quantitatively for responses to twelve questions and qualitatively for responses to an additional two questions. Student data, consisting of both experimental and authentic letters and e-mails, were analyzed quantitatively.

Main research findings suggest:

- It is possible for very proficient NNSs of English, (i.e., the EFL teachers in this study), to achieve native-like pragmatic judgments in most aspects, except for their views on several pragmatic considerations (i.e., “unnaturally polite” expressions, usefulness of “negative” words, supportive moves not to be used and writing plans preferred).

- As the English proficiency of L2 learners improves from Grade E to Grade A/B (as determined by the Hong Kong A-level Examinations in the subject “Use of English”), their pragmatic performance shows improvement.

For pedagogical reasons, a qualitative analysis was conducted for Questions 1 and 2 in order to generate examples of "unnaturally polite"/ "polite" / "impolite" expressions and to provide examples of inappropriate supportive moves in relation to three writing topics.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes three sections. The first section outlines the purposes and scope of this study, the second section explains the rationale and significance of this study, and the last section provides explanations of terms used in this study.

The pragmatic competence of L2 learners in making requests has been the subject of many research studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Caryn, 1997; de Kadt, 1992; Ellis, 1992; Eslamirasekh, 1993; Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, & Bell, 1987; Kasper & Schmidt (1996); Kim, 1995; Kubota, 1996; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Suh, 1999a, 1999b). The speech act of requesting, according to Brown and Levinson (1978), is a face-threatening act (p.71). According to Brown and Levinson (1978), in communication and interaction face involves two aspects of people's feelings. One is the desire of the individual not to be imposed on ("negative face"), and the other is the desire to be approved of or to be liked ("positive face"). The notion of face has also been the focus of research among other linguists and sociologists. For example, Goffman (1967) defines "face" as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p.5). To some extent, Brown and Levinson's (1978) view of face is similar to Goffman's (1967) view that "maintenance of face" is "a condition of interaction" (p.12). Goffman (1967) believes that in

attempting to save the face of others, a person “must choose a tack that will not lead to loss of his own; in trying to save his own face, he must consider the loss of face that this action may entail for others” (p.14). What appears to be common between Brown and Levinson’s (1978) notion of face and Goffman’s (1967), is that, when face has been threatened, face-work must be undertaken (where “face-work” is defined as “the actions undertaken by a person to make whatever he or she is doing consistent with face” [Goffman, 1967, p.12]). However, Goffman’s (1967) approach to the notion of face differs from Brown and Levinson’s (1978) in that the former examines issues related to face from a sociological point of view, whereas the latter focuses on the use of linguistic options to realize direct and indirect politeness strategies. This study aims to examine the speech act of request from a linguistic point of view rather than from a sociological point of view (i.e., what linguistic options will L2 learners of English choose in terms directness and indirectness when making the speech act of requesting). As such, Goffman’s (1967) sociological approach of examining face-work is only discussed briefly here with the intent of presenting an alternative approach to the study of “face”. Other linguists have also challenged Brown and Levinson’s (1978) conceptualization of face. For example, Matsumoto (1988) argues that Brown and Levinson have ignored the interpersonal or social perspective of face and that they have overemphasized the notion of individual freedom and autonomy. Gu (1990) points out that concerns such as autonomy and imposition are not regarded as face concerns in Eastern cultures. Spencer-Oatey (2000) maintains that “Brown and Levinson’s (1978) conceptualization of positive face has been

underspecified, and that the concerns they identify as negative face issues are not necessarily face concerns at all" (p.13). She proposes a modified framework incorporating face management and rapport management (i.e., "the management of harmony – disharmony among people" (p.13) for conceptualizing face and rapport. Spencer-Oatey (2000) considers Brown and Levinson's model to constitute primarily a personal or individual conceptualization of face, whereas her model incorporates a social or interdependent perspective to the management of relations. She attempts to distinguish between "face needs" (i.e., "where our sense of personal/social *value* is at stake" (p.15) and "sociality needs" (i.e., "where our sense of personal/social *entitlements* is at stake" (p.15). Spencer-Oatey's (2000) model treats Brown and Levinson' (1978) "negative face" not as a face need but rather as a "sociality right" (p.15). In her attempt to examine "face" from a broader perspective, Spencer-Oatey (2000) holds that there is a need to develop sub-categories within the category of "face"; however, such sub-categories are not the focus of this study. Eelen (2001) suggests that it is important to see the dynamic nature of the judgment of appropriateness in relation to linguistic acts. He believes that there should be a firmer embedding of politeness within the dynamics of social reality (p.257). Mills (2003) also argues that this issue is important. Mills (2003) maintains that speakers and their utterances should not be analyzed in isolation but in relation to a wider group or society (p.26) and that the norms of a particular community of practice be analyzed at a higher level than simply the utterance, in terms of "what forms of politeness/impoliteness are considered to be permitted to whom; what

strategies may be adopted by participants and how they are judged by others" (p. 10). Politeness, as referred to in this thesis, is embedded with the specific social reality of students and the Department Head of the English Language Centre at City University of Hong Kong. Mills' (2003) argument that analysis is necessary above the level of the utterance is explicitly dealt with in this thesis by way of the focus on letters/e-mails of request, treating those texts as belonging to a genre. Watts (2003) argues that Brown and Levinson's (1978) model does not take account the discursive struggle over the social values of politeness among interactants. Watts argues that it is necessary to study politeness within a theory of social practice (p.259) and to establish a theory of politeness "which concerns itself with the discursive struggle over politeness$_1$ (i.e., over the ways in which (im)polite behavior is evaluated and commented on by lay members and not with ways in which social scientists lift the term *(im)politeness* out of the realm of everyday discourse and elevate it to the status of a theoretical concept in what is frequently called Politeness Theory" (p.9). Watts takes an explicit Foucaultian approach to the analysis of discursivity and politeness, which is inherent, though not explicitly drawn upon, in the argument of this thesis, dealing (as it does) with contrast between native and nonnative speakers of English.

To sum up, this study concentrates on Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory – believed to be the prototype generating various largely compatible views and frameworks for analysis of the notion of "face"; this tangential discussion of various approaches to the study of politeness is

therefore merely intended to provide a useful social and sociological counterpoint to Brown and Levinson's conception.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), the speech act of requesting places both the speaker's and the hearer's face at risk, imposing on the addressee's negative face or freedom to act without impediment. As such, certain linguistic strategies to preserve the addressee's face have to be employed. Strategies for achieving this outcome include hedging or questioning, showing deference, apologizing and impersonalizing. Such strategies can often be realized via conventional indirectness or by idiomatic, culture-specific utterances that convey the speaker's intent while minimizing the imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p.75). Scollon and Scollon (1983) encompass the politeness strategies mentioned in Brown and Levinson's (1978) model with respect to the basic distinction between deference and solidarity. Scollon and Scollon (1983) characterize overall systems of interaction as either solidarity or deference politeness systems (p.175). Whereas a solidarity system would emphasize group membership and favor low-numbered strategies mentioned in Brown and Levinson's (1978) model (i.e. "bald on record" and "positive politeness", p.65), a deference politeness system would emphasize deference, indirectness and thus would favor the high-numbered strategies (i.e., "negative politeness", "off record", or "don't do the FTA" (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.65).

Further, the degree of indirectness was linked to the degree of politeness as a proposed linguistic universal for the European languages examined in

Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) study in their "Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project" (CCSARP). However, speaking (or writing) in a way that can be considered polite (e.g., by using conventional indirect means) by NSs of English presents a major challenge to L2 learners, and even advanced NNS English users sometimes fail in politeness realization (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). In relation to L2 learners' difficulty in using the target language politeness expressions, Spencer-Oatey and Jiang (2003) suggest that politeness maxims in crosscultural pragmatics be replaced with a new notion – "sociopragmatic interactional principles" (SIPs). SIPs are socioculturally-based principles that guide people in producing and interpreting use of language. These principles are value-linked, so – in a given culture and/or situational context – people are guided by norms or preferences regarding the implementation of the principles (p.1635). Goffman (1967) also believes "each person, subculture, and society seems to have its own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices" (p.13). To sum up, the cultural differences in using face-saving strategies and perceiving the use of indirect strategies might contribute to the difficulty L2 learners experience in using politeness expressions in the target language.

Politeness, however, constitutes only one of the components of pragmatic competence. For example, in addition to the variable "degree of politeness", Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) develop five additional pragmatic variables (i.e., "ability to use the correct speech act", "formulaic expressions", "amount of speech used and information given", "degree of

formality" and "degree of directness"). Possibly as a result of the need to handle various aspects of pragmatic competence, L2 learners have found it difficult to acquire pragmatic competence in the target language, as has been reported by many researchers (e.g., Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1991; Wolfson, 1989).

Canale (1988) defines *pragmatic competence* in this way:

> Pragmatic competence is… concerned with the relationships between utterances and the acts of functions that the speakers intend to perform through these utterances…and the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the appropriateness of utterances. The notion of pragmatic competence …thus includes illocutionary competence, or the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions of performing acceptable language functions, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context. (p. 90)

The development of pragmatic competence is a complex process. To illustrate, Thomas (1983) mentions that it is naïve to attribute an error in pragmatics simply to a single cause. Factors at work might involve the language proficiency of L2 learners, the perception of a certain social context (e.g., the size of imposition of a request) from the cultural perspective of the speaker/writer, the transfer of L1 pragmatics to L2 pragmatic contexts. When one lacks either illocutionary competence or sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983) is said to occur. Thomas maintains that, for an utterance to be pragmatically successful, two types of judgment needed to be involved: pragmalinguistic

judgment and sociopragmatic judgment. The former refers to the "basically grammatical… assessment of the pragmatic force of a linguistic token", and the latter implicates the "judgment concerning the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, and relative rights and obligations" (p.103). An example of the first type of judgment involves a judgment of the intent such as that in the indirect request; i.e., "Can you pass the salt?" (Wolfson, 1989, p.16). For a NS of English, it is proposed that this question is heard in the context as asking for action, not information. The failure to understand the illocutionary force of the indirect request is termed, by Thomas (1983), *pragmalinguistic failure*. An example illustrating this second type of judgment involves a judgment of the appropriateness of a phrase such as "come if you want to", which is added to information about when and where a social gathering will take place. A NS of English would interpret this phrase in context as a polite remark for giving the addressee an option not to accept the invitation, whereas it is argued that a Japanese would interpret this phrase as an impolite remark urging the addressee not to come (Wolfson, 1989, p.17). The lack of knowledge about the size of the imposition, the relative power or the social distance between the addressee and the requester may result in sociopragmatic failure, in Thomas' (1983) terms. To avoid sociopragmatic failure, which Thomas (1983) regards as more serious for the possibility of stereotyping a person speaking a certain first language, she emphasizes the importance of raising learners' metapragmatic awareness (p.91) of why a speaker chooses a certain linguistic form to fulfill a certain function with reference to the proper usage of language in relation to the specific culture of the language.

Metapragmatics involves the study of "culture-specific values and weights of contextual factors, as well as the sociopragmatic values ascribed to alternative realization procedure" (Kasper, 1989, p.50).

A. Purpose and scope of this study

The purpose of the present study is to examine whether the pragmatic competence of adult learners of English improves when their language proficiency level improves. The two aspects of pragmatic competence – pragmatic judgment and pragmatic performance – were examined using groups at different language proficiency levels (refer to Section C, Part 3 in this chapter for the definitions of "pragmatic judgment" and "pragmatic performance", and Section C, Part 8 for the definition of the term "English proficiency level"). Pragmatic judgment was examined using the very proficient group – the native Cantonese-speaking ESL teachers at university -- whereas pragmatic performance was examined using the two comparatively weaker groups – university students at two language proficient levels.

There are three research foci in this study:

- Examining the pragmatic judgment of two groups of EFL teachers teaching in the English Language Centre at the City University of Hong Kong, namely, the native Cantonese-speaking teachers (CSTs) and their colleagues the native English-speaking teachers (ESTs)
- Examining the pragmatic performance of two groups of university

students who were learning English as a L2 (namely, students who scored Grade A/B and those who scored Grade E in the Hong Kong A-level Examinations in the subject "Use of English") using experimental data consisting of 120 letters of request written by these two groups of students on three topics related to their academic life

- Examining features of formality (refer to Section 3, Part 2d in this chapter for the definition of "formality") in the authentic letter discourse and e-mail discourse written by E-grade students and addressed to their department head making formal requests

The three research foci are linked in the following way:

All the participants in the study can be regarded as L2 learners at three stages of language proficiency: the very proficient ones (i.e., the Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers in the ELC), the better L2 students (A/B-grade students), and the weaker L2 students (E-grade students). The Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers in the ELC may also be considered to be continuing learners of English despite their current status as English teachers in the ELC, and despite the fact that some of them have lived out of Hong Kong in foreign countries for a number of years. They had declared in the Personal Background Questionnaire that they spoke only one first language -- Cantonese -- so it could be inferred that English had been a language they had had to learn. Further support to the assertion that the Cantonese teachers were L2 learners of English was obtained from the personal information they supplied in a follow-up questionnaire asking them

whether they had learnt English as a second/foreign language in their primary and secondary education. All eight Cantonese teachers indicated that they had learned English as a foreign/second language in their primary and secondary education (for an average of six years in each stage).

As a matter of fact, this group of Cantonese teachers constituted not only a group of l2 learners of English but also the most proficient group of L2 learners in this study. Attempts were made to ascertain the proficiency level of this group of Cantonese teachers, but this was done in a general way rather than by placing them into a comprehensive scale because they would have perceived such an act as extremely intimidating. A follow-up questionnaire was sent to the eight Cantonese teachers asking for information about their education qualification including their second degrees and/or third degrees. Two of them had obtained their first degrees in Hong Kong, and six of them in countries where English is spoken as a first language (i.e., three from Canada, two from the U.K. and one from the U.S.A.). Seven of them received second degrees in a field related to English (i.e., TESOL, English Language Education, Comparative Literature, English); six Master's Degrees and one Bachelor's Degree; of these, three degrees were obtained in the U.K. and four in Hong Kong); two teachers had a third degree in the field of English (i.e., Comparative Literature, English; both degrees were Master's Degrees; one degree was obtained in Hong Kong and one in Japan).

Further, these teachers were selected out of a large pool of English-speaking Cantonese individuals living and working in Hong Kong. The hiring institution assumed that they are proficient. The criteria that were required of job applicants for a teaching post in the English language centre at the City University of Hong Kong in 1998, the approximate time when these eight Cantonese teachers were recruited, were: "A first degree and a professional qualification in TEFL/TESL with at least one year's post qualification relevant teaching experience. Experience in teaching English for Academic Purposes is desirable"[1]. The fact that the eight Cantonese teachers have successfully taught the English language at tertiary institutions for an average of ten years also lent support to the belief that their English proficiency was better than that of the student group, which comprised A/B-grade students and the E-grade students.

Assuming that the CSTs are very proficient L2 learners, the three foci can be linked by regarding the levels of pragmatic competence of three proficiency groups as occurring at different points on a continuum from the weakest to the strongest:

First, the pragmatic judgment of the very proficient group of L2 learners was compared with that of native English-speaking teachers to see whether there would be significant differences in the pragmatic judgments between these two groups of raters. Then the pragmatic performance of A/B-grade students was compared with that of the E-grade students to see whether the

former would perform differently from the latter. Finally, the weakest group's authentic e-mails and letters written to the department of the ELC making formal requests were examined to test the null hypothesis that there would be no significant differences in formality across the two modes of discourse.

The linkage between the second and the third research foci was that, formality, which is one of the measures of pragmatic performance, would be examined using experimental data in the second research focus, and in third research focus, this pragmatic aspect was further examined using authentic data. As can be recalled from the previous discussion, the design of this study aimed at revealing a progressive picture of the pragmatic competence of L2 learners of different language proficiency levels.

The following research questions and sub-hypotheses were formulated:

Research question 1

Quantitatively, will native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers, who can also be viewed as very proficient learners of English, differ significantly from native English-speaking EFL teachers in their pragmatic judgment of university students' request letters?

Research question 2

Quantitatively**,** will male EFL teachers differ significantly from female EFL teachers in their pragmatic judgment of university students' written requests?

Research question 3

Qualitatively, what characteristics of a written request do EFL teachers consider appropriate?

Research question 4

Quantitatively, will A/B-grade students differ significantly from E-grade students in pragmatic performance?

Research question 5

Quantitatively, will there be any significant differences in formality between the letter discourse and the e-mail discourse written by E-grade students for their authentic requests made to the department head?

Hypothesis 1

Quantitatively, there are no significant differences between the native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers and the native English-speaking EFL teachers in terms of pragmatic judgment.

Hypothesis 2

Quantitatively, there are no significant differences between male EFL teachers and female EFL teachers in their pragmatic judgment.

Hypothesis 3

Quantitatively, there are no significant differences between A/B-grade students and E-grade students in terms of pragmatic performance.

Hypothesis 4

Quantitatively, there is no significant difference in formality between the letter discourse and the e-mail discourse written by E-grade students for their authentic requests made to the department head.

B. Rationale and significance of this study

1. Politeness expressions used in a request message

It is not unusual to find in the request letters written by weak L2 learners of English in the department where I am teaching (the English Language Centre at the City University of Hong Kong [hereafter ELC]) the presence of language expressions that the addressees may regard as impolite, such as the use of "want" in "I want you to mark this essay for me". Further, formal modal verbs used to soften the assertive force of a request do not seem to be among the grammatical structures that students with poor English proficiency regularly use. Actually, directness such as that in the inappropriate use of "want", and under-use of politeness markers such as "would" and "could" are not found just among the weak language group in

Hong Kong. Karkkainen (1992) finds that when making complaints and suggestions, Finnish students of English use fewer modal verbs (0.28% of all epistemic devices) than NSs of English (0.45% of all epistemic devices) (p.202). Eslamirasekh (1993) finds that Persian speakers are considerably more direct in making requests when compared to American speakers. In his study, significantly more Persian speakers used expressions like “Close the window”; “Menu, please”; “Were you in class yesterday?” “Give me your notes to write”; “Excuse me”. Takahashi and DeFon (cited in LoCastro, 1994, p.3) find that Japanese EFL learners tend to style shift from less direct to more direct requesting behavior. Kasper (cited in Kasper & Rose, 2001) also finds that L2 learners often under-use politeness markers even though they make regular politeness utterances in L1. Suh (1999b) finds that the Korean students differ significantly from the English native speaker group in the use of downgraders (e.g., past tense softeners, modal verbs “could” and “would”) in all six situations in his study. Kim (1995) finds that while 47% of nonnative speakers of English in her study use “preparatory conditions” (i.e., asking for the willingness or ability of the addressee), they limit the usage to “Can I” rather than a more polite modal verb such as “could” in a situation where the requesters ask their employer to “let them out of work” early.

2. Supportive moves used in a request message

My colleagues and I often receive students’ written requests that lack appropriate supportive moves (e.g., “preparatory”, “precommitment”) that can contribute to indirect request strategies, which have been found to be the

dominant pattern preferred by the subjects in the study conducted by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). That the supportive moves used by L2 learners are often different from those preferred by NSs of English has been documented in previous research studies. For example, Suh (1999b) finds that Korean learners differ from English native speakers in the use of some supportive moves by relying on L1 pragmatic norms. In the situation where the subjects were instructed to ask their classmates to borrow their notes, the Korean students used the supportive move "precommitment" (e.g., "Do you do me a favor?") inappropriately by putting them after the head act, while NSs of English usually put that supportive move before announcing the head act; in addition, Korean learners employed the supportive move "appreciation" less frequently in comparison with English native speakers. Kim (1995) finds that the Korean speakers in her study differ from NSs of English in that the L2 learners do not use any "preparatory" statement (e.g., "I have a request to make.") at all, but at the same time they overuse the supportive move "apology". Apart from the differences in types of supportive moves used, the number of supportive moves used was also found to be different. In both Suh's (1999b) and Eslamirasekh's (1993) studies, the nonnative speakers of English were found to use significantly more supportive moves than did native speakers. As Suh (1999b) explains, the "talk-too-much" behavior may result in pragmatic failure because of the irrelevance of the information and the weakening of the illocutionary force owing to the distraction caused by the verbosity (p.32).

3. The pragmatic preferences of addressees who speak different first languages

Since English constitutes one of the two major languages in use (Chinese and English) in Hong Kong, it is not unusual for L2 learners of English to encounter the need to use the English language to make formal written requests in their academic life and during their future working life. Despite request messages being written in the English language, the addressees of those requests may be native speakers of English or native speakers of Cantonese in the Hong Kong setting, where the working population consists of both local Chinese and expatriates from overseas. As has been shown in previous studies (e.g., Eslamirasekh, 1993; Kim, 1995; Suh, 1999b), politeness expressions and supportive moves produced by NNSs of English were found to be different from those produced by NSs of English; given this, it would be reasonable to speculate that the perceptions of the addressees who speak various first languages concerning what constitutes a politeness message and/or other aspects of pragmatic competence would also be different. For example, Harada (1996) finds that advanced learners of English in her study differ from American speakers of English in their judgment of the effect of age and familiarity between interlocutors on the use of politeness expressions. Japanese learners of English indicated that they would speak more politely to someone who was older than they were; however, American speakers valued the factor of familiarity more. They indicated that they would speak more politely to an addressee whom they did not know personally (p.44). Harada (1996, p. 45) provides nine examples of the degrees of politeness:

(i.e., “Could you get me the salt?” “Would you get me the salt?” “Will you get me the salt?” “Would you mind getting me the salt?” “I need the salt.” “Can you get me the salt?” “I’d appreciate it if you would get me the salt.” “Get me the salt.” “Can’t you get me the salt?”). He observes that Japanese L2 learners differ from speakers of North American English in that more l2 learners chose the expression “I’d appreciate it if you would get me the salt.” as a politeness expression they would use while speakers of North American English considered the expression too polite for merely requesting salt, thus sounding sarcastic.

The differences in pragmatic judgments between people who speak different first languages may originate from ethnolinguistic differences of two communities of language speakers, which in turn might result in the transfer of L1 pragmatics to L2 pragmatic situations. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) and Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Welz (1990) maintain that NNSs of English tend to transfer their native pragmatics into English pragmatic situations and that pragmatic transfer is pervasive and not limited to any specific foreign/second language-learning environment. Many studies of the pragmatic competence of L2 learners have produced findings in support of pragmatic transfer possibly being due to ethnolinguistic differences. For example, when justifying the findings of her study, Harada (1996) explains that “Japanese seems to require its speaker to be especially polite in speaking to an acquaintance who is much older than him/her, and the ESL learners carried on the LI rule to their L2” (p.44). de Kadt (1992) maintains that direct requests in Zulu receive high politeness rating in Zulu

culture and concludes that speakers of Zulu English transfer the Zulu pragmatics to L2 pragmatic situations in the use of directness and in the use of reasons to justify their requests (p.123). Clankie (1993) holds the view that it is in the culture of Japanese to use expressions of regret to show their gratitude, and so they might the expression "I am sorry" to show their gratitude if they were to use the English language in thanking a NS of English (p.16).

As a result of negative pragmatic transfer or the result of some other problems in the process of the development of pragmatic competence, the pragmatic preferences of addressees speaking different first languages are likely to be different. It follows that qualitative information revealing the preferences of addressees speaking different languages would be useful to L2 learners. Related findings can provide L2 learners with information about what politeness expressions, supportive moves and other pragmatic considerations are preferred by addressees who speak different first languages. That information could in turn be used to increase L2 learners' "intercultural communication awareness" (Dirven & Putz, 1993, p.152). The possible differences in the pragmatic judgments of addressees speaking different first languages lead to a pedagogical question: should L2 learners be taught the English pragmatics considered appropriate by NSs of English or the English pragmatics considered appropriate by NNSs of English who co-exist in the same community with NSs of English? Despite the uncertainty of "whose pragmatic system is to be taught" (Rose, 1994, p.52) and the uncertainty of whether the writers would benefit from writing in

accordance with the pragmatic preference of the addressee (i.e., having a greater chance of getting the request approved), L2 learners could at least be made aware that differences in the pragmatic preferences between NSs of English and NNSs of English exist and the possibility that L2 learners might need to use different request strategies to suit the pragmatic preference of the addressee if s/he wants the request to be successful. Recognizing the difference in pragmatic opinions across different language groups is especially important considering that, in the Hong Kong setting, many people who hold senior positions in organizations and who are responsible for responding to the requests made by their students or by their subordinates do not speak English as their first language. It follows that it would not be sufficient for L2 learners of English to know the English pragmatics acceptable only to NSs of English. They also need to know the pragmatic preference of addressees who are NNSs of English, particularly those with whom they are likely to be interacting in English. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any research investigating the differences in the pragmatic judgments made by native speakers of Cantonese who hold senior positions (e.g., having the power to approve or reject a request) and by their counterparts who are NSs of English. This study attempts to fill this gap and aims at providing both quantitative and qualitative information about the pragmatic judgments made by native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers and native English-speaking EFL teachers regarding what constitutes an effective formal request written in English[2].

4. The pragmatic preferences of the addressees of different genders

Gender differences in language use have been a focus of attention since 1970s (e.g., Brown, 1980; Cameron, 1990 & 2007; Cao, 2007; Holmes, 1995; Goodwin, 1998; Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Hong, 1997; Lakoff, 1975; Mills, 2003; Tannen, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Zimin, 1981). The research interest in the language used specially by women might be due to the general expectation that the language used by women is different from that used by men, possibly as the result of the general perception that women on the whole have less social power, hold inferior social status and are still placed in the position of subordination when compared with men (e.g., Cao, 2007; Clankie, 1993; Hong, 1997; Lakoff, 1975).

In terms of general communication style, some researchers expect women's communicative style to be different from that of men, while some hold a different view. For example, Lakoff (1975) characterizes women's language as being non-assertive and polite; Zimin (1981) maintains "the sexes have different speech styles or perhaps different ways of dealing with the world" (p.38). Brown (1980) states that "it seems reasonable to predict that women in general will speak more formally and more politely, since women are culturally relegated to a secondary status relative to men and since a higher level of politeness is expected from inferiors to superiors" (p.112). Kemper (1984) also holds the view that women are expected to speak more politely than men. Clankie (1993) maintains that Japan women are expected to act more politely than men in many aspects of life including language (p.48). Hong (1997) maintains that both ancient and

contemporary Chinese society expects women to be polite, elegant and affectionate. Holmes (1995) asserts that women are more positively polite than men in that "women's utterances show evidence of concern for the feelings of the people they are talking to more often and more explicitly than men's do" (p.6). However, Mills (2003) contests Holmes' (1995) notion that women are globally more polite than men, arguing that this is based on a stereotypical view of women's language. Although Mills (2003) admits that gender is not an unimportant factor, she asserts that "gender ought not to be seen as a factor which determines the production or interpretation of speech in any simple way" (p.235). She argues "gender cannot be simply correlated with the use of particular linguistic forms or strategies" (p.239), and "the association of women with the use of question tags or with minimal responses, for example, is one which operates only at the level of stereotype, but this stereotype may have effects on the way interactants see themselves and their role with the community of practice" (p.239). Cameron (2007) also questions the notion that men and women speak different languages and argues that people's faith in this notion is misplaced (p.3). One example of such common beliefs is that men tend to interpret minimal responses (i.e., brief acknowledgments of others' speech like "yeah", "uh huh", and "mm") as "I agree", whereas women tend to interpret such minimal responses as " I'm listening". Cameron (2007) points out that there is simply no evidence to show that minimal responses mean different things to men and women. She based her claim on the study conducted by Reid-Thomas (1993, as cited in Cameron, 2007), who finds that both male and female judges took some minimal responses to indicate

“listening to others” and others to indicate “agreement”; the two groups also concurred in their judgments of which were which. Reid-Thomas concludes that gender of the interpreter is irrelevant and that the context is the factor contributing to how people interpret minimal responses. In view of the different opinions held by previous researchers regarding gender differences between men and women, this study aims to contribute to that body of research in this regard by examining the effect of gender on the pragmatic judgment made by addressees. To be specific, will there be significant differences in the pragmatic judgments made by male and female EFL teachers on letters of requests written by native Cantonese-speaking students?

The findings of empirical studies investigating gender differences in pragmatic preferences in various aspects of pragmatic competence are inconclusive.

On the one hand, some findings have confirmed the gender differences in language use. For example, Swacker (1975) finds that men are more likely to describe something using exact quantities while women are more likely to estimate quantities. Of the two styles, the objective or empirical style requires more words than does the interpretive style (Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Henley, 1977). Schaef (1985) maintains that women tend to emphasize verbal intimacy in their social interaction while men pay attention to their own status. Newcombe and Arnkoff (1979) find that tag questions, qualifiers and compound requests, three politeness techniques Lakoff (1975)

claims to be used by women, are rated less assertive than male language forms. Siegler and Siegler (1976) and Bradley (1981) also provide evidence that tag questions – more frequent in women's speech – are associated with less assertiveness. Tannen (1990) finds that women's communication tends to be more supportive and rapport-building, while men's communication tends to be report-giving and informative. Argamon et al. (2003) find that females favor personal pronouns, while males favor noun determiners. Cao (2007) finds that females tend to use intimacy-oriented address forms, while males tend to use status-oriented address forms. Ide (1992) finds that the tendency of Japanese women to use more polite linguistic forms is greater -- for example, the use of higher linguistic forms owing to higher assessment of the politeness level toward the addressee, the more formal use of second person pronouns, the absence of deprecatory level of first and second person pronouns, avoidance of vulgar expressions and beautification of honorifics. McMillan, Clifton, McGrath and Gale (1977) report sex differences between the speech of male and female college students, with women using more tags, more intensifiers such as "so" and "such" and modals such as "might". Similarly, in a study that coded use of empty adjectives, tag questions, qualifiers and the intensifier "so", Crosby and Nyquist (1977, Study 1) finds that there are gender differences in speech style. Crosby and Nyquist (1977, Study 3) finds that female clients requesting aid or information in a police station use more tag questions, qualifiers and politeness expressions than do male clients, and that female police personnel also use this style more often than do male police personnel.

However, some research studies have shown insignificant gender differences in language use or findings opposite to those reported previously. Newcombe and Arnkoff (1978, cited in Newcombe and Arnkoff, 1979) videotaped pairs of unacquainted undergraduates talking about three topics of general interest and analyzed the tapes for instances of tag questions, qualifiers (e.g., “I guess”, “maybe”) and other language differences discussed by Lakoff (1975) (e.g., the use of rising intonation on declarative sentences and euphemisms). Newcombe and Arnkoff (1978, cited in Newcombe and Arnkoff, 1979) find no differences in speech style due to the gender of speakers either for frequencies or frequencies divided by time speaking. Smeltzer and Werbal (1986) investigate whether or not males and females would differ in their managerial written communication style. They review and evaluate two communication samples written by second-year Master of Business Administration students. Their findings show no significant differences in the sixteen dimensions of language use (p.46), i.e., active voice/passive voice, “you”/”me” orientation, positive/negative tone, direct/indirect approach, easily understood/ambiguous, persuasive/not persuasive, high-quality memo/low-quality memo, personal/impersonal tone, requesting tone/demanding tone, Gunning-Fog Index, number of words, number of excessively difficult words, number of sentences, number of clichés, number of paragraphs and number of negative words (pp.44-45). Sterkel (1988) seeks to confirm the findings of the Smeltzer and Werbal’s (1986) study and investigates the differences in writing style in a persuasive letter, a sales

letter and a collection letter between males and females in an undergraduate business communicative class by extending the sixteen dimensions to twenty. The findings of Sterkel (1988) show that there are no significant differences across all twenty dimensions of style, i.e., number of words, number of sentences, number of passive verbs, use of the direct/indirect plan, number of abbreviations, number of contractions, number of specific references, number of courtesy words, action demanded/requested, number of jargon and slang words, number of intensifiers, number of negative words, number of superlatives, number of extravagant adjectives, number of sports and military-related words, number of hostile verbs, question tags, average sentence length, percent of passive verbs, number of qualifiers (e.g. “I think”, p.21) and disclaimers (e.g., “I know this sound silly, but…”, p.21). Clankie (1993) finds that there are no significant differences between American male and American female students in the length and formality of gratitude expressions used. Similarly, there are no significant differences between Japanese male and Japanese female students in the length and formality of gratitude expressions used. Gleser, Gottschalk and Watkins (1959) find that there are no differences between men and women in the use of adjectives, adverbs or interjections. Hirschman (1975) finds that men use “I think” (one of the politeness techniques Lakoff [1975] considered to be used by women) more often than do women. Dubois and Crouch (1975) find 33 tag questions from males, but none from females, on tapes of question periods following formal presentations at an authentic professional meeting. They conclude that, in at least one genuine social context, men use both formal and informal tag questions but women do not, although the

sample size in their study is too small to be generalized to make definitive statements about women in every social context.

Since findings concerning gender differences in the use of language are inconclusive, this study intends to contribute to the research findings concerning gender differences. Specifically, this study intends to investigate whether female and male addressees would differ significantly in their pragmatic judgments of what constitutes a polite formal written request in a professional setting. To the best of my knowledge, there is no research investigating the pragmatic preferences of female and male EFL teachers in the area of formal written request letters. The findings from such a study would be useful in providing L2 learners of English with information about the differences between female and male addressees in the use of preferred politeness expressions, supportive moves, use of negative words, writing plans and other pragmatic aspects.

5. Relationship between linguistic and pragmatic competence

The relationship between linguistic competence and pragmatic competence has been studied by some researchers. Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) point out the difficulty of L2 learners who show strong proficiency levels in attaining pragmatic competence. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) observe that, paradoxically in their view, pragmatic failure is more likely to occur among advanced foreign language learners possibly because they are better able to express their ideas in words than learners showing a poor proficiency level. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) show that, even at the advanced level

(i.e., graduate students enrolled at a North American university), linguistic competence is not a sufficient criterion to guarantee pragmatic competence. Hoffman-Hicks (1992) examines the pragmatic competence of intermediate-level learners in the foreign language setting and concludes similarly that linguistic competence is a pre-requisite to pragmatic competence but that such linguistic competence does not guarantee pragmatic competence. Harada (1996) finds that the advanced learners of English in her study are not always closer in their judgment to native speakers of English than are intermediate learners, suggesting that there may not be much difference between advanced and intermediate learners of English in levels of pragmatic competence. However, some researchers find that exposure to the culture of the target language (e.g., through living or working in an environment where English is spoken as a first language) would help to bridge the gap between L2 learners and NSs of English in terms of the development of pragmatic competence. For example, Tanaka (1988) finds that her Japanese students in the United States have perceptions of politeness more similar to those of American students than do those in Japan. Clankie (1993) finds that 53% of the responses to fifteen situations made by ten Japanese male students in his study are of native speaker quality (p. 54) and that the ten female Japanese students have a higher percentage of “Native-Like/Perfect” responses than do male students (p.61). Clankie (1993) attributes the native-like performance of the male students to their exposure to American speech norms and to their education (they having met the minimum English standard [450 points on TOEFL] set by the university to be qualified to be exempted from taking English courses)

(p.52). For the higher percentage of female native-like responses, Clankie (1993) speculates that the female students might be stronger in their skills in English than were male students (p.61). Nakajima (1997) finds that, in business settings, male speakers of American English and of Japanese perceive politeness strategies in a similar way. In her study, she asked the seventeen native speakers of Japanese and the five native speakers of American English, both working for large companies, to rank some English expressions involving refusing, giving embarrassing information and disagreeing. All native speakers of Japanese had experience living in the target culture, ranging from four months to four years (p.56). Nakajima concludes that living experience in the target culture helps learners to acquire target-like pragmatics.

These previous studies seem to suggest that linguistic competence does not guarantee pragmatic competence; however, it is possible for working adults who show a very advanced proficiency level of the target language and those who have exposure in the target culture to achieve native-like pragmatic competence as far as their judgments on the appropriateness of some pragmatic expressions are concerned. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any research examining the relationship between the linguistic and pragmatic competence of native Cantonese-speaking learners of English at the tertiary level in making a formal written request. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining the pragmatic competence of L2 learners of English who are tertiary students and who are working adults.

6. Computer-mediated communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC), conducted in an ever-growing and ever-changing medium, refers to a large variety of communication systems, including e-mail, e-chat, discussion boards, weblogs, e-journals, conferencing and other electronic discourses. The emergence of various CMC sub-varieties has been the study area of many researchers (e.g., Amiran & Unsworth, 1991; Collot & Belmore, 1996; Foertsch, 1995; Gains, 1999; Georgakopoulou, 1997; Gold, 1991; Harrison, Stephen, & Winter, 1991; Herring, 1996; Herring, 2004; Liddicoat, 1994; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Ma, 1996; Mulholland, 1999; Nickerson, 1999, 2000; Spears & Lea, 1992; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Van Mulken & van der Meer, 2005; Yates, 1996; Zuboff, 1988). The main issue investigated in the field of computer-mediated discourse concerns the linguistic description of different CMC sub-types, focusing on the written and spoken language features of CMC discourse. Yates (1996) regards CMC discourses as both “written like” and “spoken like”, and CMC discourses are said to be forged out of different, spoken and written existing genres. Georgakopoulou (1997) recognizes electronic discourse as combining qualities of both face-to-face interactions (e.g., immediacy and informality of style, transience of message, rapid feedback or immediate feedback) and written language (e.g., lack of visual and paralinguistic cues, physical absence of the addressee). Crystal (2001) defines *netspeak* as a type of language displaying features unique to the Internet. Crystal’s work has been considered typical of much scholarly work on language use in CMC in the 1990s in English and other languages. Studies at this early

stage attempted to provide linguistic description for both synchronous (e-chat, instant messaging) and asynchronous (mailing lists, newsgroups, discussion boards) modes of digital communication (Androutsopoulos 2006). Studies like Crystal's (2001) work focus on the effect which technology has had on the language use of CMC and pay less attention to the socially situated discourse in which these features are embedded; as a result, language use in CMC has been regarded as being homogenized and simplified (Herring, 1996, 2004). For example, Crystal (2001) concludes that the language of "chatgroups" constitutes a mixture of informal letters and essays and highly colloquial constructions and non-standard usage (p.165). Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004) maintain that language use on the Internet is "distinct, homogeneous, and indecipherable to 'outsiders'".

However, some researchers (e.g., Herring 1996, 2004) have advocated the need to shift from medium-related to user-related patterns of language use in CMC discourse and to consider the interplay of technological, social and contextual factors in the shaping of computer-mediated language practices rather than treating the language use in CMC as homogenized and simplified. Georgakopoulou (1997) stresses the need to examine the language use of e-mail discourse by considering contextual parameters rather than the medium alone; examples of contextual parameters include the participants' intimacy roles and relationships, linguistic and sociocultural features of a specific discourse community, the communicative

context features of e-mail (e.g., the addressee's physical absence) and the conventionalized discourse style of e-mail (e.g., language play, intertextual references) (pp.157-158).

7. Language features of E-mail as a CMC sub-variety

Different researchers have examined e-mail as one of the sub-varieties of CMC. Maude et al. (1985) and Shackel (1985) find that the body of an e-mail message is found to be normally organized in the form of thematic units which either lack or present loose connections. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) find that young people are more likely to use speech patterns that capitalize on non-standard varieties. In Georgakopoulou's (1997) study of interactional and transactional e-mails sent between people who are well-acquainted, e-mail was found to serve different purposes:

- Some of the e-mails functioned as quick, local phone calls involving rapid exchange of news and social arrangements;
- Some of the e-mails functioned as cards encoding various speech acts such as thanks, congratulations, apologies;
- Some of the e-mails closer to the transactional end of the continuum involved some form of academic co-operation, i.e., requests for papers, invitations to lectures and seminars, co-participation in projects.

Georgakopoulou (1997) concludes that the discourse style of e-mail messages is an amalgam of different existing genres, spoken and written:

letters, notes, telephones, telegraphs, post-cards, conversations, etc. In the e-mails in her study, the opening and closing sections (e.g., greeting) were found to be normally absent or followed a routine pattern ("hello" to be followed by the writer's first name). Georgakopoulou (1997) reports the use of "quotation" or text-copied excerpts from the previous message and playful language; she observes that these imported portions of others' messages fulfill the function of turn-taking in conversation. Crystal (2001) regards the language of e-mail to comprise "functionally distinct elements" (such as headers, signatures, greetings and responsive quotations) that can help identify e-mails as a linguistic variety (p.94). However, Androutsopoulos (2006) maintains that it is "empirically questionable whether in fact anything like a 'language of e-mails' exists because the vast diversity of settings and purposes of e-mail use outweigh any common linguistic features" (p.420). Further, new social uses of chat technology for tutorials, political talk or praying sessions result in discourse patterns that are not similar to "e-chat" style; for example, "non-standard usage" is sparse in chat sessions with politicians (Androutsopoulos, 2006, p.421).

Following the line of thinking of Androutsopoulos (2006) and Georgakopoulou (1997), I hold the view that there is not any fixed form of language use and/or rhetorical structure in e-mail per se; rather, the linguistic and rhetorical structures of e-mail would depend on the setting and purpose of any given particular e-mail and the status and relationship of the participants in the interaction. Based on this view, in this study general e-mail messages are not regarded as constituting a genre because the

purposes (the main parameter distinguishing genres according to Swales'[1990] definition of genre) of e-mail messages can be different. The messages conveyed through the communication system of e-mail are referred to as "the e-mail discourse" in this study, and the messages conveyed through the medium of letters are referred to as "the letter discourse". The discussion about genre classification follows in the next section.

8. The classification of genre

The term *genre* has been defined in many different ways over the past twenty years. For example, Martin (1985) states that "genres are how things get done" (p.50), listing poems, narratives, expositions, lectures, recipes, manuals, appointment making and news broadcasts as examples of genres. Couture (1986) characterizes genre as "conventional instances of organized texts" (p.80). Genres include both literary and non-literary text varieties; for example, short stories, novels, sonnets, informational reports, proposals and technical manuals. Biber (1988) defines genre loosely as "text categorization made by the basis of external criteria relating to the author/speaker purpose" (p.68). Examples provided are novels, newspaper articles, editorials, academic articles, public speeches, radio broadcasts and everyday conversation. Swales (1990) defines genres of communication in terms of shared purpose and common conventions of content and style within a discourse community. A genre is defined as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert

members of the parent discourse community and therefore constitute the rationale for the genre" (p.58). Bauman (2001) regards genre as orienting frameworks of conventionalized expectations and routine ways of speaking and (inter)acting in specific sites and for specific purposes. Among these various definitions of genre, the definition provided by Swales (1990) has been quoted widely in the recent literature on genre studies.

In this study, I draw on the concept of genre developed by Swales (1990), Virtanen and Maricic (2000) and Bhatia (1993, 2004). Their concepts of genre are similar because Virtanen and Maricic (2000) and Bhatia (1993) developed the notion of genre based on Swales (1990)'s definition. Virtanen and Maricic (2000) view the notion of genre as "closely tied to its context and culture and therefore see the relationship between genres and their situational and cultural contexts as bi-directional and dynamic" (p. 123). Genre is defined by a set of communicative goals shared by a discourse community (p.127). Their study, conducted in 2000, was concerned with a particular speech act (i.e., Request for Information) which was manifested in messages posted on *Linguist List* (hereafter LL) in the section labeled "Queries". In applying their notion of genre, they regarded the queries posted on LL (an edited person-to-group international academic mailing list) as constituting a genre. In their argument that the LL queries should be regarded as constituting a genre, they explained that LL queries shared a set of communicative goals. The queries were essentially messages requesting help or information and therefore requiring a response. To convey this objective to the intended audience was the primary goal of

the queries posted on LL, which could be regarded as forming a discourse community. The queries posted on LL constitute a class of communicative events, the notion of which allows for the dynamism necessary for analysis in relation to context and culture. Bhatia (1993) takes over Swale's concept of genre and focuses on the communicative purpose as the central parameter distinguishing among genres. For example, Bhatia (1993) classifies abstracts and introductions derived from research articles as two different genres on the grounds that the two text-varieties serve different communicative purposes despite their similarities in term of their contextual configuration (e.g., the same research setting, the same mode of communication, similar participants relationships and the same level of formality). The purpose of research article abstracts is to present "a faithful and accurate summary, which is representative of the whole article", whereas "research article introductions, on the other hand, only introduce the article without giving out everything reported in the article" (p.82).

Following the examples provided by Virtanen and Maricic (2000) and Bhatia (1993), I regard the messages that are the manifestations of the speech act investigated in this study -- request for permission (henceforth RFP) -- as constituting a genre for three reasons. First, each of the RFP messages shares the same communicative goal of obtaining the permission of the department head for their request in relation to their study, as required in the writing tasks for the student participants. Second, the English language centre (ELC) at the City University of Hong Kong constitutes a speech community consisting of students and staff; the communication

between students and the department head, as reflected in the authentic requests made to the latter by the former, constitutes an example of language events in this speech community. Third, the RFPs written by the L2 learners in this study are likely to be similar in terms of schematic structure (i.e., selection of content, ordering of content and the form which texts realizing genre take) because the nature of the requests has been prescribed in the writing task and the writers possess the same proficiency level of English (i.e., E-grade holders in the Hong Kong A-level examination in the subject of English). According to Swales (1990), the rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their schematic (or generic structure). While further confirmation of the RFPs as a genre needs to be fully documented in a subsequent research study like the one conducted by Virtanen and Maricic (2000), classifying them preliminarily as a genre in this study using Swales (1990)'s definition will permit me to interpret the findings about the pragmatic performance of L2 learners from another perspective – the dynamics of genre in response to two channels of communication (i.e., CMC and non-CMC). Virtanen and Maricic (2000) view genre as being "created, maintained, altered, done away with and replaced with others by a discourse community for particular communicative needs which arise in the given culture and in given situational contexts" (p.128). It seems reasonable to assume that this view is shared by Yates and Orlikowski (1992), who suggest that genres are produced, reproduced and altered by individuals through a process of structuring. That is to say, community members can challenge and eventually modify these genres through their actions. In view of these

dynamic views of genre, it would be interesting to examine the possible modifications made to the RFP genre when it is composed through a CMC sub-variety (e-mails) and when it is composed through a traditional medium (letters) by L2 learners of English.

9. Analysis in studies of CMC

In the studies of CMC, a common practice has been to compare a CMC sub-variety with a previously established text variety in terms of language use and social interaction. For example, Androutsopoulos and Ziegler (2004) examine code-switching in their data in the context of previous studies of the phenomenon in conversational data. Herring and Paolillo (2006) use a written corpus as their point of departure and yardstick when they examine genre and gender differences in weblogs.

Following that approach, this study uses the RFP genre conveyed through a non-CMC sub-variety (letters) as a yardstick for the examination of one aspect of language use (i.e., formality) in the RFP genre conveyed through a CMC sub-variety (e-mail). Formality has been chosen to be one of the study foci in this study among the various researchable aspects of genre analysis (e.g., lexico-grammatical features, text patterning, structural interpretation of the text-genre, Bhatia, 1993) as a further step to explore the notion of formality (which has been examined in an earlier part of this study about the pragmatic performance of L2 learners) in relation to CMC studies. Since RFPs manifested in letters constitute a conventional non-CMC genre, examining the formality in the RFP manifested in e-mails would provide

some clues about L2 learners' performance in CMC, which has at present become a popular communication means used between students and teachers and/or between students and department administrators. A comparison of formality between the letter discourse and the e-mail discourse is not intended to explore the unique distinction between formality and informality across the two modes of discourse; rather, a consistent finding in this line of inquiry is that language choices on CMC when compared with a previously established text variety "are not about either-or, same-different, old-new but about (at times) creative, agentive and strategic re-appropriations, recastings and conglomerations of resources that suit, and are shaped by, the environment at hand" (Georgakopoulou, 2006). The comparison to be made in this study is presented quantitatively with the view of examining the effect of a CMC sub-variety on the formality of language use in request messages written by L2 learners of English and whether those learners are aware of the necessity to use language of relative formality that is compatible with the nature of the request. Although some linguists (e.g., Halliday, et al. 1964; Givon, 1979) maintain that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times, whether L2 learners of English are capable of adjusting the level of formality as the demands of the situation require remains unanswered. This study intends to investigate this issue in the context of a formal written request conveyed through a CMC sub-variety and through a non-CMC sub-variety in a professional setting. Considering interactional e-mails (i.e., those sent between well-acquainted people for socializing) are characterized by speech-like features (as discussed in the section concerning the language

features of e-mail), it would be interesting to examine the formality of language used in transactional e-mails (i.e., those sent for professional purposes) communicated through two channels, bearing in mind that genres are dynamic rhetorical forms which change over time in response to the needs of the participants (Virtanen & Maricic, 2000, p.129) and that genre mixing is an essential characteristic of genre dynamics (Bhatia, 1997).

10. Formality of language

Formality is a parameter of variation to which register[3] analysts have given considerable attention (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1972; Fischer, 1958; Hudson, 1994; Joos, 1961). However, there is substantial disagreement over the definition of variation. Furthermore, researchers have used different labels to classify language varieties occurring in the various social contexts in which communication events take place.

Voegelin (1960), using the labels “casual utterances” and “non-casual utterances”, concludes that no universal grammatical features could be systematically identified to distinguish the former from the latter. He maintains that such a distinction has to be drawn in general cultural terms rather than in linguistic terms. Three cultural criteria have been proposed to distinguish casual and non-casual utterances:

1) The range of social contexts where non-casual and casual utterances occur;

2) The general agreement among the people in the culture in evaluating the appropriateness of utterances with reference to participants, occasions, locales, and choice of language variety; and

3) The need to undergo formal training involved to produce non-casual utterances (p.60-64).

In an early but influential paper, Joos (1961) describes five styles in spoken English: *frozen* (containing printed unchanging language such as biblical quotations and archaisms); *formal* (containing technical vocabulary; exact definitions being important; involving one-way participation, no interruption); *consultative* **(**involving two-way participation; background information provided — prior knowledge not assumed; common occurrence of "backchannel behavior" such as "uh huh", "I see", etc.; interruptions allowed); *casual* **(**in-group friends and acquaintances; no background information provided; ellipsis and slang common; interruptions common); *intimate* **(**non-public; intonation more important than wording or grammar; private vocabulary). Labov (1972), in his study of spoken discourse, employs a scale of formality, characterized by the speaker's attention paid to speech. On this scale, there are five styles of speech ranging from informal to highly informal: *causal, interview, reading passage, word list and minimal-pair list*. Irvine (1984) maintains that linguistically there is a greater need for consistency in the choices of successive phonological, syntactic, lexical or prosodic variants in a formal context than in an informal one (p.214). Givon (1979) proposes "every language has a wide range of discourse registers, from the loose-informal-pragmatic to the

tight-formal-syntactic" (p.84). The typical example provided of the loose-informal-pragmatic register is early childhood discourse, and the extreme example of the tight-formal-syntactic register is adult, formal, educated, written language (pp.102-107). However, there is very little agreement as to how the spectrum of formality should be divided. Quirk et al. (1985) place formality on a scale showing five levels of formality: *very formal, frozen, rigid*; *formal*; *neutral*; *informal* and *very informal, casual, familiar*.

As can be seen from the previous discussion, different researchers have devised different ways to divide the spectrum of formality depending on the research purpose and the research context. This study does not intend to develop yet another scale of formality; rather, it aims at investigating whether there are significant differences in formality between the letter discourse and the e-mail discourse in relation to the speech act of Request for Permission by developing measures for formality to suit the purpose and context of this study. The development of such measures was based on opinions held by the sixteen teacher participants in this study with reference to the measures used by previous research studies comparing spoken and written registers (e.g., Blankenship, 1962; Blass & Siegman, 1975; Cayer & Sacks, 1979; De Vito, 1966; Gibson et al., 1966; Golub, 1969; Harris, 1977; O'Donnell, 1974; Price & Graves, 1980). In general, such studies focus on lexical features such as type/token ratio, word length, the frequency of co-occurring words, grammatical features such as frequencies of adjectives, prepositional phrases and nominalizations; and clause-level syntactic

features such as the frequencies of various clause types, T-unit length, and subordination indices; sentence length and passive construction. The measures used in this study to investigate formality will be explained later in the following section entitled "terms used in this study".

C. Terms used in this study

The terms explained include *head acts*, *supportive moves*, *politeness*, *directness*, *formality*, a*mount of information*, *pragmatic competence*, *pragmatic performance*, *pragmatic judgment*, *mean T-unit length*, *the first language of a rater, modes of discourse, genre, and the English proficiency levels of students.*

1. Head acts and supportive moves

A request, according to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), is composed of two parts: the head act and the supportive moves. See the example below provided by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989):

Johnny, could you fetch me a cup of water? I'm too tired to get one myself.

In this example, "Could you fetch me a cup of water" is the head act, which tells the listener that what you are saying is a request. "I'm too tired to get one myself" is the supportive move, which justifies your request, and provides the felicity condition for it to be heard as a request (Searle, 1969).

2. The four pragmatic variables

The four pragmatic variables examined in this study were adapted from the analysis frameworks of the following research studies: a) Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995), b) Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) Project, c) Suh (1999b) and d) Chen (1996).

The four pragmatic variables are:

1) *politeness*,

2) *directness*,

3) *amount of information,*

4) *formality.*

- *Politeness* includes two dimensions: a) politeness expressions used to introduce head acts, and b) supportive moves used.
- *Directness* includes a) the position of the head act of the exact request designated by the writing topic, and b) the use of negative words.
- *Amount of information* refers to the quantity of information contained in a r*equest message.*
- *Formality* includes the language features that are compatible with the formal nature of the request.

The measures of the four pragmatic variables were also modified from the analysis frameworks used by a) Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995), b)

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) Project, c) Suh (1999b) and d) Chen (1996) based on the actual expressions used by the student writers in this study and based on comments made by the teacher participants. The measures of these four pragmatic variables are shown in Appendix A and Appendix B. Explanations of these four pragmatic variables are set out in what follows:

a. Politeness

As can be seen in Template 1 (Appendix A), *politeness* subsumes two categories: "mitigating politeness expressions introducing head acts" and "supportive moves". Detailed explanations of the sub-categories within *politeness* are:

Mitigating politeness expressions introducing head acts

- Modals for polite request – "would", "could" and "may";
- Past tense tone softeners;
- Politeness marker "please" occurring in question form, e.g., "Would you please proofread the job application form?";
- The use of "a bit", "a little", "somehow" to mitigate the size of the request;
- Involving the addressee directly, bidding for cooperation; e.g., "Do you think you could";
- The use of words such as "possible", "possibly" to modulate the impact of the request on the addressee;
- The use of the word "mind" as in "would you mind";

- The use of the word “appreciate” or other word forms of the same word as in “I would appreciate”;
- The use of the word “grateful”, “gratitude” as in “I would be grateful if you could”;
- The use of the word “honored”, “honor” as in “I would be honored”;
- The use of the word “pleasure” as in “It is my pleasure to invite you”;
- The use of the word “glad” as in “I am glad to invite you to be my interviewee”;
- The use of the word “nice” as in “It would be nice if you could be my interviewee”;
- The use of the word “helpful” as in “It would be helpful if you could proofread the letter”;
- The use of the word “thankful” or “thank you” as in “I would be thankful if you could proofread the letter”; and
- The use of the word “kindly” and “kind” as in “Please kindly reply to me whether you would be my interviewee” and as in “It would be most kind of you if you could be my interviewee”.

Supportive moves

As can be seen from Template 1, supportive moves examined in this study subsume the following:

- Preparing the addressee for the coming request,
- Minimizing the force of imposition of the request,

- Acknowledging the imposition of the request,
- Showing the effort made,
- Complimenting the addressee,
- Showing gratitude,
- Pointing out the importance of the request,
- Apologizing,
- Offering compensation,
- Pointing out the negative consequences of refusal to the author,
- Pointing out the benefits the author would gain if the request were approved,
- Asking for forgiveness,
- Providing the addressee with options,
- Showing sincerity,
- Showing appreciation,
- Showing regret,
- Recognizing and responding to the greater authority of the addressee,
- Making a promise,
- Making a personal appeal.

Table 1 explains these supportive moves and provides examples. The explanations and examples were modified from the analysis frameworks used by a) Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995), b) Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns

(CCSARP) Project, c) Suh (1999b) and d) Chen (1996) based on the actual expressions used by the student writers in this study.

Table 1 Explanations and examples of various types of supportive moves

Types of Moves	Definition	Example
Preparing the addressee for the coming request	The requester prepares the addressee for the ensuing request by announcing that he or she will make a request, by asking about the potential availability of the addressee for carrying out the request or by asking for the addressee's permission to make the request without actually announcing the nature of the request.	I have a favor to ask.
Minimizing the force of imposition of the request	The requester tries to reduce the force of imposition created by the request.	It will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter.
Acknowledging the imposition of the request	The requester refers to the inconvenience caused to the addressee and acknowledges the imposition created by the requested action.	I understand this is an imposition.

Showing the effort made	The requester points out the effort s/he has made in relation to the request in order to convince the addressee that the request is justified.	I have worked very hard in the course and passed all the assessments.
Complimenting the addressee	The requester compliments the addressee.	My classmates said that you were very helpful.
Showing gratitude	The requester thanks the addressee for his/her help.	Thank you for your help.
Pointing out the importance of the request	The requester emphasizes the importance of making the request.	I would like to seek your assistance in a matter that is of utmost importance to me.
Apologizing	The requester apologizes for an inappropriate act or for the inconvenience caused to the addressee.	I am terribly sorry that I have been absent for 10 hours
Offering compensation	The requester offers compensation or mentions his/her intention to offer compensation.	I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation.
Pointing out the negative consequences of refusal to the author	The requester points out the negative consequences for him/her if the request is rejected.	I may lose the good job

Pointing out the benefits the author would gain if the request were approved	The requester points out the benefits for him/her if the request were approved.	Your help will surely increase my chance of getting the job.
Asking for forgiveness	The requester asks for the addressee's forgiveness for what s/he has done.	Please forgive me.
Giving options to the addressee	The requester provides options to the addressee as far as the details of carrying out the request and the possible rejection of the request are concerned.	You could choose the place and the time for the interview.
Showing sincerity	The requester emphasizes his/her desire to receive a positive reply.	I sincerely hope that you can help me.
Showing appreciation	The requester shows his/her appreciation for the assistance requested.	I would appreciate your kind assistance.
Showing regret	The requester shows his/her regret about an inappropriate act.	I am sorry to inform you that I have been absent for 10 hours.
Recognizing and responding to the greater authority of the addressee	The requester shows his/her respect for the addressee by referring to the addressee's authority	You have the authority to excuse me. I would be grateful if you could grant me your permission.
Making a promise	The requester promises to do or not to do a certain act again.	I promise that I will not be absent from class in future.

Making a personal appeal	The requester shows his/her desperation to be helped by the addressee by emphasizing the lack of other possible avenues.	You are the only person that I can go to.

b. Directness

As can be seen from Template 1, *directness* is examined using the following two measures:

a) The position of the head act of the designated request, and

b) The number of negative words used.

The position of the head act of the request

The position of the head act of the request designated in the writing topic was identified by using one of the following plans:

Plan 1: “Preparing” + “Background” + “Request”

Plan 2: “Preparing” + “Request” + “Background”

Plan 3: “Background” + “Request”

Plan 4: “Request” + “Background”

The explanation of the elements of the four plans follows:

“Preparing”

The requester prepares his/her addressee for the ensuing request by announcing that he or she will make a request, by asking about the potential

availability of the addressee for carrying out the request or by asking for the addressee's permission to make the request – without however giving away the nature or the content of the request.

E.g., *May I ask you to do me a favor?*

"**Background information"**

The writer provides background information about the nature of the request. Examples follow in Table 2:

Table 2 Examples of background information

Topic	**Examples of "background information" (taken from students' scripts)**
1. Requesting the department head to give special consideration for the unsatisfactory attendance rate.	Information about the course taken and the situation about the attendance, for example, "I am taking the Spoken Language course. However, due to some personal reasons, I could not attend the lessons punctually and I was failed in the attendance requirement of the Spoken Language Course."
2. Requesting a teacher to proofread a job application letter	Information about the need to ask someone to proofread the job application letter, for example, "I am now applying for my favorite job. As a decent and precise job application letter is very important to decide the success or not in this application."
3. Requesting a teacher to be the interviewee	Information about the need to conduct such an interview, example, "As one of my English course required, I have to invite a native speaker of English to do an interview with me for a project."

"Request"

The term *request* here means that request designated in the writing topic. The letter writers in this study might make several minor requests related to the request designated in the writing topic. Some of these minor requests

were general, such as “Could you do me a favor?”, when they prepared the addressee for the coming request; some were specific, such as “Would you call me back?”, when they wanted to ask the addressee to call them for a reply. For the analysis of the position of the head act of a request letter, only the expression that indicated the specific request required in the writing topic would be included. For example, “I would like to invite you to attend an interview” would be included in the analysis, whereas the expression “Would you please call me at xxxx xxxx?” would not. The purpose of writing that request letter was to ask for an interview, so asking the addressee to return the phone call was just a small step related to the purpose of the letter.

The number of “negative” words used

A requester may present some negative messages directly by using words with negative connotations, such as “If I cannot drop the course, I will end up having a fail in the assessment, which will pull down my GPA [Grade Point Average]”. Alternatively, the requester may modify his or her wording in the hope of creating a positive tone in the letter, which in turn might help him or her to obtain a favorable response because of the overall pleasant effect of the letter. For example, he or she can rewrite the earlier sentence using such positive words as “If I can study another course I am more interested in, my GPA can remain high.”

In identifying negative words in a letter, not all negative words were included in the corpus for analysis. Only the expressions that showed

opinions were included, whereas the reasons for the request were not. For example, in the sentence “Unfortunately, I do not know any native speakers of English”, “unfortunately” was included in the corpus of negative words, but the fact that “I do not know any native speakers of English” was not. One more example is that in the sentence “If you are unable to do this, however, I completely understand”, “unable” was included in the corpus of negative words, whereas “ill” and “hospitalized” in the sentence “My mother has been ill and hospitalized for one month.” were not.

c. Amount of information

Amount of information was indicated by the overall length in number of words of a letter or an e-mail. Researchers find that L2 learners of English talk too much by adding a variety of supportive moves to requestive utterances (e.g., Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; House & Kasper, 1987; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989). Edmondson and House (1991) call the tendency of L2 learners to be more verbose than target language speakers as the “waffle phenomenon”. To study the phenomenon of waffling, this study compares the amount of information provided by L2 learners at two language proficiency levels. The variable “amount of information” was adapted from one of the six variables (i.e., “ability to use the correct speech act”, “formulaic expressions”, “amount of speech and information given”, “degree of formality”, “degree of directness” and “degree of politeness”) used by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995, pp.163-166). Further discussion of the measurement of “amount of information” will be provided in chapter 3.

d. Formality

As can be seen from Template 2a (Appendix B) and Template 2b (Appendix C), *formality* (refer to earlier discussion above [Section B, Part 10] on this term) subsumes two categories:

1) Violations of formality,
2) Features of formality.

The further sub-categories of these two groups were based on the comments provided by the sixteen raters in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaires they completed and the oral comments they provided in the interviews following the completion of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire (refer to Chapter 3 for an explanation of the way the methodology was set up). The items below were mentioned by at least one of the raters in either their written or oral comments

Violations of formality

- The use of "I" as the subject of a main clause or/and a subordinate clause;
- The use of lower case "i" for "I";
- The use of lower case "u" for "you";
- All contracted forms – "can't", "don't", etc.;
- Abbreviated forms, e.g., "Yr" for "your";
- Informal words and phrases, especially words from slang or other informal registers;

- The use of the imperative structure: all commands addressed to the reader requiring actions (e.g., “Do not fail me”);
- Omission of sentence subject “I” in expressions like “I look forward to seeing you”;
- Problems with the opening salutation, such as use of first name only with or without the prefix “dear” or the title (e.g., “Dear Mary”, “Mary”), the use of the full name with or without the prefix “dear” or the title (e.g., “Dear Mary Brown”, “Mary Brown”), the use of the prefab “Dear Sir/Madam”;
- Problems the closing salutation including inappropriate choice of the closing salutation, inappropriate spelling and upper/lower case of “Yours sincerely”, and the use of one’s first name.

Features of formality

- Use of modal verbs “would”, “could” and “may” to introduce a head act;
- Complexity of sentence structure, using Mean T-unit length (MTL) as a measure to determine length.

3. Pragmatic competence, pragmatic judgment and pragmatic performance

The term *pragmatic competence* subsumes both *pragmatic judgment* and *pragmatic performance*.

Pragmatic judgment refers to the opinions of the sixteen raters about the quality of the twelve request letters in terms of the four pragmatic variables previously defined: 1) *politeness*, 2) *directness*, 3) *amount of information*, and 4) *formality.* The raters followed the fourteen questions in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire (Appendix D) either to give ratings showing their pragmatic judgments of the letter using the five-point Likert scale or to indicate their preferred strategies if they were to write the letter for that topic.

Pragmatic performance refers to the performance of the student participants in terms of the same four pragmatic variables when they write formal request letters under experimental conditions. The categories comprising the four pragmatic variables were counted, and then comparisons of instances of categories were made between A/B-grade and E-grade students to examine whether there were significant differences between the two groups.

4. Mean T-unit Length

Complexity of sentence structures, one of the measures used in this study to examine formality, is examined by using the mean T-unit length (Hunt, 1965). The mean T-unit length is obtained by dividing the number of words in a script by the number of T-units. An explanation of what constitutes a T-unit is provided in the next paragraph. The rationale for using the mean T-unit length as a measure of the complexity of sentence

structures and the drawbacks of the T-unit will be provided in Chapter 2 (Literature Review).

Hunt (1965) defines the T-unit as "one main clause expanded at any of many different points by structures that are modifiers or complements or substitutes for words in the main clause. Short main clauses can be expanded by incorporation into them of either subordinate clauses or non-clauses (p.41)". That is to say, a T-unit contains only a single clause with or without other clausal or non-clausal structures that are embedded in or attached to it. In fact, "T-units are the shortest grammatical allowable sentences into which a paragraph can be segmented (Hunt, 1965, p. 35).

To illustrate Hunt's concept of T-units, a 67-word long sentence written by a fourth grader in his 1965 study is repeated below and segmented into T-units:

I like the movie we saw about Moby Dick the white whale the captain said if you kill the white whale Moby Dick I will give this gold to the one that can do it and it is worth sixteen dollars they tried and tried but while they were trying they killed a whale and used the oil for the lamps they almost caught the white whale (Hunt, 1965, p.11).

First T-unit: I like the movie we saw about Moby Dick, the white whale.

Second T-unit: The captain said if you can kill the white whale, Moby Dick, I will give this gold to the one that can do it.

Third T-unit: And it's worth sixteen dollars.

Fourth T-unit: They tried and tried.

Fifth T-unit: But while they were trying they killed a whale and used the oil for the lamps.

Sixth T-unit: They almost caught the white whale.

As can be seen in this example, the T-unit preserves the subordination achieved by the writer but not the coordination between main clauses (or T-units). Hunt excludes "between T-unit" coordination from his maturity index because of the young writer's tendency to string T-units together constantly with "and" after "and", forgetting to put in a period. In fact, "coordination between T-units is an index of immaturity" (Hunt, 1965, p.37).

5. The first language of a rater

The first language of a rater was defined as the language s/he claims to speak when s/he is required to indicate his/her first language in the Personal Background Questionnaire. The two languages used as independent variables in this study are Cantonese and British English. The Cantonese language were selected because it was the first language of the L2 learners of English in this study, and because native Cantonese-speaking teachers in this study were regarded as the most advanced L2 learners of English among three groups of L2 learners in this study. British English was selected because teachers speaking this variety of English as their first language constituted the largest group in the ELC; consequently, enlisting a

group of teachers who spoke the same variety of English would be possible only if British-English speaking teachers constituting the pool were included. The total size of each of the populations of teachers who spoke other varieties of English (e.g., Australian English, American English, New Zealand English, etc.) was less than eight persons (the number of expected teacher participants), so including teachers who spoke other varieties of English in the study would introduce the additional intervening variable of "variety of English". Since one of the research purposes of this study was to determine whether the pragmatic judgments made by native Cantonese-speaking teachers would be significantly different from those made by native English-speaking teachers, it was considered important to maintain the linguistic homogeneity of each of the groups in terms of the variety of their first language. The variety of English a teacher speaks might have an effect on his/her pragmatic judgment, which in turn might skew the findings reflecting the overall patterns of that particular group. In order to control this additional intervening variable, only teachers speaking British English were included in the group constituting native speakers of English.

The following measures were adopted to ensure British-English speaking raters were included in the study:

First, the information providing clues to the variety of English a teacher speaks was obtained from the General Office of the ELC. The information that offered the greatest hint was the nationality recorded in a teacher's

resume. Teachers who claimed their nationality to be British were invited to participate in this study. After the completion of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire, each participant was required to declare in the Personal Background Questionnaire the first language s/he speaks. If "English" was indicated as a rater's first language, the teacher was further required to indicate which variety of English s/he speaks. All eight teachers selected declared that they spoke British English as their first language.

After the completion of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire, native Cantonese-speaking teachers were also required to indicate in the Personal Background Questionnaire their first language. All eight local teachers declared that they spoke Cantonese as their first language.

6. Modes of discourse

The two modes of discourse[4] examined in this study comprise the e-mail mode and the letter mode. *The e-mail mode* refers to the request messages sent to the addressees through the electronic communication system of e-mail, and *the letter mode* refers to the request messages sent to the addressees through the conventional communication tool of letters.

E-mails collected are the authentic electronic messages sent to the department head of the ELC. There are two sources of the letters used in the present study: one source of the letters consists of authentic letters submitted to the department head of the ELC by postal mail or by hand

(hand-written or typed), while the other source of the letters is the letters written by students in class under experimental conditions (all hand-written).

7. Genre

The genre that constitutes one of the control variables in this study is the requests addressed to the department head to obtain her approval for special consideration for the writer's unsatisfactory attendance rate and for rescheduling an examination. For the discussion of the classification of genres, please refer to Section B, Part 8, earlier in this chapter

8. The English proficiency level of students

The determination of the English proficiency level of students is based on the student participants' examination results in the subject Use of English in the Hong Kong A-level Examinations. Grade A is the highest grade along the scale A, B, C, D, E and U, where "U" stands for "unclassified", and the worst grade is E.

A-grade students were chosen as participants because they represented students having the highest English proficiency level under the Hong Kong examination system; B-grade students were also chosen since there were not enough A-grade students in the class of the teacher who agreed to help with the data collection for this study; E-grade students were chosen because they represented the weakest group. In order to examine the effects of language

proficiency on students' pragmatic performance more effectively, the two groups most widely separated by the greatest differences were selected.

Notes

1. The information was printed in the Classified Advertisement Section of the South China Morning Post (9 May 1988).

2. The requests designated in the writing task of this study are regarded as being formal in nature. Students addressed these requests related to academic matters to a teacher and to the department head with whom they have not had any previous contact. The recognition of the requests specified in the writing task of this study as formal draws support from Gumperz' (1964) and Irvine's (1984) notion of formality of social occasions. Gumperz (1964) distinguishes between transactional and personal interaction. Transactional interaction "centers about limited socially defined goals," as in the case of religions services or job interviews, where participants "in a sense suspend their individuality in order to act out the rights and obligations of relevant statuses". On the other hand, personal interactions are typified by casual conversation between friends and peers, and participants "act as individuals, rather than for the sake of specific social tasks" (p.149). According to Irvine (1984), positional identities, whose existence, attributes, and incumbents are widely recognized throughout the community, are more frequently appealed to in formal than in informal situations (p.216), and "the wider, or more public, the scope of the social identities invoked on a particular occasion, the more formal the occasion is" (p.217). Formal occasions are characterized by the

emergence of a central situational focus, “a dominant mutual engagement that encompasses all persons present” and that distinguishes the main focus of attention from various peripheral interactions (p.217). The requests in the writing task of this study constitute a transactional interaction, the positional identities of the addressees are “teachers” and “the department head”, and the “central situational focus” is the request in focus of each of the writing topics (i.e., attendance requirement, proofreading a job application letter and attending an interview about a research project).

3. The term *register* has been used in many different ways. Halliday et al. (1964) identify three variables that determine register: field (the subject matter of the discourse), tenor (the participants and their relationships) and mode (the channel of communication, e.g., spoken or written). Other researchers restrict *register* to occupational varieties (Trudgill, 1974; Wardaugh, 1992), such as computer-programmer talk and auto-mechanic talk. On the other hand, some researchers, such as Atkinson and Biber (1994) and Ferguson (1983), use the term *register* as an umbrella term to include any language variety associated with particular situational or use characteristics” (Atkinson & Biber, 1994, p.351). Some researchers, such as Crystal and Davy (1969), discard the term *register* completely, considering that the term is inadequate for the existence of numerous varieties. They use the term *style* to cover everything from conversation to legal documents to press advertising.

In this study, the term *register* is not used because there is a considerable ambiguity in the meaning and use of the term. The term *register* was avoided when findings about the formality in the scripts written by A/B-grade and E-grade students were reported because the scripts from a given language group were described as showing more/fewer features of formality than the scripts written by the other group. Similarly, when findings concerning the formality in the e-mail discourse and the letter discourse were reported, the scripts were described as showing significant or insignificant difference in formality between the two modes of discourse. In both cases, the terms *formal register* and *informal register* were not used.

4. Traditional modes of discourse include narration, description, exposition and argumentation (Biber, 1994, p.51). In this study, *modes of discourse* refer to the messages sent via two different communication channels (i.e., via e-mail and by letter).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the written pragmatic competence of adult L2 learners of English at university level in the realization of the speech act of requesting in formal settings. The discussion in this chapter covers three main areas. The first area involves pragmatic theories and pragmatic issues related to this study. The second area discusses the major methods of data collection used in pragmatics research. The third area concerns the modifications made to my study based on four major studies that have shaped the analytical framework of this study. The last area deals with the use of T units as a syntactic measure in my study. The ways in which the reviewed literature has led me to design the study I have undertaken will be indicated at relevant junctures.

The first area includes the following sections:

- The inadequacies of Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory;
- The issue of directness/indirectness in relation to language strategies;
- The level of indirectness and the Bulge Theory;
- Pragmatic judgment;
- Rhetorical plans, content and form;
- The disinclination of L2 learners to follow the norms of the target language.

As mentioned in chapter 1, Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory instructed me to investigate the degree of directness of language use in written realization of the speech act of requesting. Brown and Levinson's (1978) speech theory is briefly summarized below.

Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory states that requests place both speaker's and hearer's face at risk and that indirectness is generally preferred when the speaker estimates that the weightiness of a face-threatening act (hereafter FTA) is great. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), the weightiness of an FTA is the sum of the values assigned to three sociological variables, that is – the power (P) that the hearer (hereafter H) has over the speaker (hereafter S), the social distance (D) between S and H and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition in a particular culture (p.81). Other things being equal, the seriousness of an FTA determines the level of politeness with which an FTA will be communicated. As such, requests that involve a high probability of imposing on the hearer's negative face or freedom to act without impediment require certain adjustments or politeness moves which preserve the addressee's face. These adjustments will relate to the consideration of the three sociological variables (i.e., P, D and R).

However, the ability of L2 learners to make these adjustments is questionable, based on my observation that directness seems to be the dominant pattern in the requests made by my students in class. Examples illustrating directness in language use by native Cantonese-speaking

students include the frequent use of “want” to indicate their wish for making a request (as in the expression “I want to ask a question”) and the under-use of politeness markers, such as the modal verbs “would” and “could”. My observation prompted me to investigate the language strategies used by L2 learners in terms of the degree of directness in contexts involving the three sociological variables mentioned in Brown and Levinson’s (1978) politeness theory. To be specific, would “conventionalized indirectness” (Brown & Levinson 1978, p.75) or the use of low-numbered strategies (i.e., perform the FTA without “redressive action”) (p.65) be the main pattern used by the subjects in this study?

A discussion of the inadequacies of the politeness model, as I see it in relation to my research, will be presented below, followed by a discussion of how these inadequacies were addressed when I planned the research design of this study.

A. Inadequacies of Brown and Levinson’s (1978) model

1. Power, distance and imposition as defining constructs

Brown and Levinson (1978) have not rigorously defined the three sociological variables mentioned in their politeness theory (i.e., P, D and R). Because of the vagueness of the definitions of these three sociological variables, the incorporation of the three variables in empirical studies is likely to produce findings that are not entirely valid and reliable. For example, because of the vague definition of *power*, some subjects in an empirical study might equate power with status, while some subjects, in a

specific cultural context, might equate power with advanced age. It follows that, given the same situation, the source(s) of power of the addressee in a given situation may be perceived differently by different speakers. Differences in this regard might lead a researcher to draw invalid conclusions about the effects which an addressee's power exerts. To address this problem, there seems to be a need to single out each factor that might be the source of power in a given cultural context (e.g., age, gender); individual factors could then be used as either independent variables or controlled variables in empirical studies.

The lack of rigorous definition of these three variables is evidenced in the quotations from Brown & Levinson (1978):

> P (H, S) is a measure of the power that H has over S…. For example, P(H, S) may be assessed as being great because H is eloquent and influential, or is a prince, a witch, a thug, or a priest…. P is the degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own evaluation (face) at the expense of S's plans and self-evaluation…. In general, there are two sources of P, either of which may be authorized or unauthorized – material control and metaphysical…. The reflex of a great P differential is perhaps archetypally "deference". (pp.81-82)

> D is a symmetric social dimension of similarities/differences within which S and H stand for the purposes of this act. In many cases (but not all), it is based on an assessment of the frequency of interaction and the kinds of material or non-material goods (including face) exchanged between S and H…. An important part of the assessment of D will usually be measures of social distance based on stable social attributes. The reflex of social closeness is, generally, the reciprocal giving and receiving of positive face. (pp. 81-82)

> R is a value that measures the degree to which the FTA is rated an imposition in that culture…. R is a culturally and situationally defined ranking of impositions by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent's wants of self-determination or of approval (his negative- and positive-face wants). In general there are probably two such scales or ranks that are emically identifiable for negative-face FTAs: a ranking of imposition in proportion to the expenditure (a) of services (including the provision of time) and (b) goods (including non-material goods like information, as well as the expression of regard and other face payments). (pp.81-82)

In my view, the definitions of "power" and "social distance" are vague, though the definition of "imposition" is less problematic. For example, Brown and Levinson (1978) assert that "P(H, S) may be assessed as being great because H is eloquent and influential, or is a prince, a witch, a thug, or a priest" (p.81). Nonetheless, Brown and Levinson (1978) have not elaborated on the sources of power for the examples illustrating kinds of addressees, such as thugs. The lack of explicit specifications about the sources of power might lead to different interpretations regarding what makes a great value of P. Concerning social distance, Brown and Levinson (1978) have not provided examples to illustrate what constitutes "stable social attributes" (p.82).

Further, Brown and Levinson (1978) merely state that these three variables subsume all other factors (e.g., status, authority, occupation, ethnic identity, friendship and situation factors) that have major effects on the assessment of the weightiness of a speech act (p.85). Stating that these three variables subsume all other factors does not seem to increase the applicability of Brown and Levinson's model in empirical studies; on the other hand,

subsuming all other factors (such as status and friendship) under these three variables might produce findings that may actually be the result of other independent variables rather than results of the three designated sociological parameters. Exactly what is subsumed under these three variables is not precisely stated in Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory; as a result, the interpretation of P, D and R in any given situation is open to a speaker, depending on the factors that come into play when the speaker perceives the power and social distance of the addressee. Examples of possible additional factors are: age, the goal of the request, the rights and obligations of the parties involved (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989, p.137); race, class, and gender (Mills, 2003). Bell (1988) also finds that age (as a component of status) is an important factor influencing the choices of politeness strategies made by Korean subjects. Sohn (1986) and Miller (1994) find that native speakers of English alter their speech according to their perception of social status and social distance.

Candlin (2005) is concerned that, while the triple perspectives (power, distance and imposition) proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) sound attractive in theory, they have in practice raised a number of issues concerned with the operationalisability as defining constructs. According to Candlin (2005), *power* is a highly complex construct. A person's social role may, in particular circumstances, be sanctioned as being more "powerful" in relation to another in that context, but it cannot be equated with the subtle variations and power shifts in an exchange, and, indeed, power does not simply derive from status or role. Mills (2003) also argues

that the assessment of one's power in any situation is something which is dependent on a range of factors; for example, someone may have a "powerful" position in the company, but s/he may not have real power in the company (p.100). Further, Mills (2003) points out that in China, Japan and many Arab countries, the status of an individual is obtained only through one's interactions with the larger group; that is – one's sense of self and value is drawn from one's position in relation to others and from one's role within the group and wider society as a whole (p.27). In ignoring this variability, the original progenitors of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) project movement might have taken a very simplistic line.

The same holds true for other key constructs such as *distance/solidarity* and *imposition*, though *distance* is probably less of a problem than *imposition,* which is intensely culturally and contextually bound – a view that draws support from Mills (2003) and Watts (2003). Mills argues that social distance, like power, is a variable about which interactants might have different perceptions, and is negotiated in each interaction (p.101). She also maintains that the rank of imposition is again a matter of negotiation, because "it is not clear that interactants always agree on their perceptions of how much of an imposition a particular request is" (p.101). Watts (2003) maintains that the social distance parameter is not a reliable way of characterizing the relationship between S and H (p.96).

In response to these reservations concerning the use of the three sociological constructs in empirical studies (e.g., the difficulty of defining the three constructs rigorously and the various sources of power), the variables "power", "social distance" and "imposition" were not used as independent variables in this study; rather, they were used only as control variables. In other words, since the problem of internal validity might arise if they were used as independent variables in empirical studies, this study does not aim at studying the possible effects these three sociological variables would have on the politeness strategies by L2 learners. Further, other sociological variables, such as age, the goal of the request, the rights and obligations of the parties involved (as mentioned by Bell, 1988; Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Sohn, 1986) were taken into account when three writing topics were set for this study; for example, the age of the addressee in each topic was specified; the obligation of the addressee to comply with the request was indicated in the writing instructions.

Using the three social parameters in empirical studies, however, might not have been the intent of Brown and Levinson when they developed the model in 1987. Their intent might have been merely to explain and predict the politeness strategies an individual speaker might use. However, many researchers have incorporated these three variables in their studies using the Discourse Completion Task (hereafter DCT); for example, Bell (1988), Blum-Kulka (1982); Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989); Bulatetska (1996); Chen (1996); Frescura (1995); Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1992 &

1995); Nakajima (1997), among many others. In the DCT, different situations are provided, and the respondents are expected to write down what they will say to the addressees. For example, one of the situations listed in the questionnaire developed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) is:

> You are the member of the local chapter of a national ski club. Every month the club goes on a ski trip. You are in a meeting with the club president, helping plan this month's trip. You want to borrow some paper in order to take some notes (p.138).

As can be seen from the description, the values of power, social distance and imposition have not been explicitly specified; as a consequence, respondents, whether or not they speak the same or different first languages, may have different perceptions of the values of these variables. The problems of using the Discourse Completion Task as a tool to investigate the pragmatic competence of respondents in empirical studies will be discussed in detail in a later section of this chapter entitled "The inadequacies of Written Discourse Completion Tasks" (Section G, Part 1).

2. The universality of the politeness theory

Concerning cross-cultural variation, Brown and Levinson (1978) make the following claims when justifying the usefulness of their model:

1) Positive-politeness cultures (e.g., the Western U.S.A and some New Guinea cultures) and negative-politeness cultures (e.g., the British culture and the Japanese culture) are distinguished (p.250).

2) Different cultures attach varying degrees of importance to P, D and R (p.254).

3) Cultures may differ in the degree to which face want is treasured (p.254).

Despite the considerations given to cross-cultural variation, Brown and Levinson (1978) make a universal claim about the language strategies interlocutors would use in four kinds of dyads specified by two polar values (high and low) attributed to S and H on the two dimensions of P and D. Brown and Levinson claim "now our model predicts that in such dyads strategies of language use will not be randomly distributed; rather, within each of these dyad types only the particular corresponding distribution of strategies … will occur in any culture" (p.255). The strategies specified in the four dyads illustrated one central concept of Brown and Levinson's model – the more an act threatens the speaker's face or the hearer's face, the more the speaker will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy (i.e., an indirect strategy) (p. 65). However, Brown and Levinson (1978) seem to have overlooked the following issue:

In the four dyads, the social variable "imposition" was not incorporated. The omission of the variable "imposition" in the four dyads might be the result of Brown and Levinson's (1987) assumption that the size of imposition is constant as far as the perceptions of the speakers involved in the dyad are concerned. However, this assumption is likely to be problematic, especially for individuals speaking different first languages. Take Dyad 2 (low P, high D) as an example. One situation compatible with

the combination of a high D value and a low P value occurs when a frustrated traveler asks a stranger to borrow money to get a railway ticket because s/he has lost his/her purse (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.86). For this dyad, the language strategy "negative politeness/off record" was predicted in Brown and Levinson's (1978) model (p.255). However, requesters speaking different first languages may perceive the size of imposition in this situation differently as a result of cultural (and economic) differences; that is to say, a requester speaking a certain first language may view the act of borrowing money from a total stranger as a serious request, whereas a requester speaking another first language may regard the force of imposition in this situation as small. In the latter case, the requester might use a low-numbered strategy, as opposed to the "negative politeness/off record" language strategy predicted by Brown and Levinson (1978, p.255). This example shows that the difference in the perception of the R value would probably result in the occurrence of language strategies not predicted in Brown and Levinson's (1978) model. The speculation that interlocutors speaking different first languages might perceive the force of imposition differently draws support from Mills' (2003) argument and from the empirical findings obtained by Blum-Kulka and House (1989). In her critique of Brown and Levinson's politeness model, Mills (2003) argues that the act of passing the salt, which Brown and Levinson (1978) considers to be an FTA, constitutes what is regarded as a "free gift" (p.60) in most societies, and therefore does not threaten face. She supported the opinion held by Sifianou (1992) that regarding the act of passing the salt as an FTA seems to be a "particularly Anglocentric view of society and of what it is

permissible to ask strangers to do" (p.60). Blum-Kulka and House find that, in the request for a ride, the level of imposition (reflected by *estimates for degree of difficulty*) is rated highest by Argentinians among the three groups of participants, followed by Germans and Hebrews (p.143). Thus, neglecting the factor of imposition in the four dyads has inevitably weakened Brown and Levinson's (1978) claim that only particular language strategies will occur in any culture within each of these dyads (p.255).

To account for the possibility that the native Cantonese-speaking student writers and the native English-speaking teachers in this study might perceive the size of imposition involved with the same request quite differently, both the students and the teachers were told that it was not within the responsibilities of the addressee to comply with the request in each of the three situations. This explanation implies that the designated request in each of the three situations would involve great imposition. I believe that such instructions would minimize to some extent the difference in the perception of the force of imposition between the writers and the raters of the letters. Further to mitigate the possibility that individuals speaking different varieties of the same first language would perceive the size of imposition of the same request differently, the eight native English-speaking raters included in this study were selected based on the criterion that they all speak the same variety of English as their first language (i.e., British English). (Refer to Chapter 3 for the explanation why the variety of British English was chosen.) For the same reason, all eight native Chinese-speaking teachers and all native Chinese-speaking students

selected to be included in this study speak the same dialect of Chinese – Cantonese – as their first language.

Further, the possibility that individuals speaking different first languages would perceive the size of imposition of the same request differently was taken into account in this study in the following way. The force of imposition of the three requests in the writing task of this study was considered when I interpreted findings concerning the pragmatic judgments made by two groups of EFL teachers on the letters of request written by individuals of various language proficiency levels. For example, would it be possible to explain the differences in the ratings assigned by NSs of English and NSs of Cantonese to the appropriateness of request letters from the perspective of the effect that the first language of the addressee has on his/her perception of the weightiness of the request? That is, would it be possible that an English-speaking rater who regarded a request as being very imposing would expect the writer to be extremely polite, and therefore his/her rating assigned to the letter would be lower than that assigned to the same letter by a Cantonese-speaking rater who perceived the size of imposition of the request as smaller?

B. The issue of directness/indirectness in relation to language strategies

This study aims to examine whether directness would be the predominant pattern in the requests written by the participants in this study (i.e., native

Cantonese-speaking L2 learners of English) in connection with such social situations as those in which indirect language strategies would normally be predicted according to Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness model. this study aims to investigate whether politeness expressions used by native Cantonese-speaking L2 learners of English would tend towards the direct end in Brown and Levinson's (1978) model, as did some other speakers of "non-European" languages such as the Farsi speakers in Eslamirasekh's (1993) study. As mentioned earlier (Chapter 1, Section B, Part 1), it is not unusual to find, in the request letters written by lower level L2 learners of English in the department where I teach, the presence of language expressions (such as the use of "want" in "I want you to mark this essay for me") marking their usage as impolite. Further, formal modal verbs used to soften the assertive force of a request do not seem to be among the grammatical structures that these students with limited English proficiency regularly use. Would it be possible that such use of direct language is the result of students' preference for solidarity language (in Scollon and Scollon's [1983] terms)? Would it be too simplistic to label the use of the word "want" and the underuse of formal modal verbs in requests written by students to their class teachers as impolite?

At the theoretical level, the concept of indirectness has been the interest of many researchers. Austin (1962) emphasizes the performative nature of language; that is, speakers perform an act by means of what they say; however, he also points out that actions such as these, nevertheless, can be accomplished without these performatives. For example, by saying "I will

be there", the speaker can also make a promise. The implicit act performed by the utterance is an illocutionary act. Searle (1969) focuses on how people arrive at meaning instead of how language acts, and he focused on the gap created by two kinds of meanings: explicit and implicit meanings. The former refers to what is said and the latter refers to what is meant. A speaker may withhold information as a means of making the hearer look for an implied meaning, or a conversational implicature. Searle (1975) linked certain types of indirectness with certain forms of language through a claim for conventionality; that is, certain expressions are used conventionally for performing certain indirect speech acts. Thomas (1995) put forward a variety of reasons for the universal use of indirectness, one of which being politeness/regard for "face" (p.143). Brown and Levinson (1978) maintained that there exists a systematic way of making an indirect speech act for the maintenance of face – by questioning or stating a felicity condition. For a request to be successful or felicitous, "the addressee must be thought potentially able to comply with the request, and the requester must want the thing requested" (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.137). By questioning or stating the felicitous condition(s), "one can construct readily understandable indirect speech acts. In many contexts these are conventionalized to the extent that there can be no doubt about what is meant – that is, they are on-record expressions" (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.138). For example, the question "Can you shut the door?" constitutes a conventionalized indirect speech act that will be interpreted as a request rather than as asking about the hearer's ability to shut the door. Recent researchers, however, have begun to question the

research focus on the use of indirectness to show politeness. For example, Mills (2003) questions the concept of "indirectness" in relation to different cultures. She argues that research on politeness should not focus on the analysis of indirectness as an instance of polite behavior; rather, fundamental questions about whether all of the participants in the conversation consider particular utterances as indirect and whether or not they themselves consider indirectness to be indicative of politeness (p.14). In response to the issue in relation to whether interactants consider indirectness to be indicative of politeness, one of the research foci in this study examines the pragmatic judgments of two groups of EFL teachers (native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers and native British English-speaking EFL teachers) on the use of directness/indirectness, as shown in letters of requests written by native Cantonese-speaking students. How would British English-speaking EFL teachers and Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers respond to students' possible use of directness to show politeness? Would both groups of EFL teachers consider the possible use of directness to realize politeness to be inappropriate? Would there be any significant difference in the judgments made by two groups of EFL teachers with respect to their perception of directness? Watts (2003) even questions Brown and Levinson's (1978)'s fundamental claim that politeness is a universal feature of language use; that is – the claim that all the languages in the world possess the means to express politeness. Watts argues that Brown and Levinson' claim for universality is made in relation to their "conceptualization of an idealized concept of politeness" (p.12), not in relation to how groups of participants "struggle over politeness" (p.12).

Watts (2003) believes that linguistic means through which politeness is expressed “differ quite radically in terms of the structural types that realize politeness across a range of different languages” (p.12). This study has also addressed the need to examine how groups of participants interpret politeness strategies used in the process of communication by examining two groups of EFL teachers’ interpretation of the politeness strategies used in letters of request written by L2 learners of English. Specifically, this study intends to answer the following questions: Will the addressees who speak the same language as the students’ (i.e., the native Cantonese-speaking teachers) interpret students’ politeness strategies in the same way as the Cantonese students do? Will the addressees who speak the target language (i.e., the native British English-speaking teachers) interpret students’ politeness strategies differently from the student writers? The findings of this study should not be generalized beyond the two languages examined in this study and beyond the context of the writing tasks designated in this study. It is important, however, to recognize the limitations of the data elicited in a study investigating the use of language to realize politeness, because the use of politeness strategies is seen as intensely culturally and contextually specific. Some previous researchers (e.g., Watts, 2003) have pointed out that linguistic means used to realize politeness may differ across languages. The way Cantonese-speaking students in this study used politeness strategies to achieve the purpose of the writing task and the way the two groups of EFL teachers judged the politeness strategies used by the students are specific to the culture in which they live and are bounded by the assumptions peculiar to that culture.

Studies investigating the universality of politeness phenomena across languages and cultures have found that the use of directness/indirectness differs across languages. Examples of studies focusing on the level of directness/indirectness in speech act realization are: Barnlund and Araki (1985), Blum-Kulka (1987), Blum-Kulka and House (1989), Cenoz and Valencia (1996), Coulmas (1981), Daikuhara (1986), de Kadt (1992), Hill et al. (1986), House and Kasper (1981), Huang (cited in Bouton 1996), Kitagawa (1980) and Levenston (1968). Levenston (1968) finds that Hebrew speakers favor a higher level of directness compared with native speakers of English in showing agreement and disagreement. House and Kasper (1981) find that German speakers tend to be more direct when they make requests or complained than do English speakers. Blum-Kulka (1982, 1983) confirms this finding in a study related to the speech act of requesting. Blum-Kulka and House (1989) find that while the overall distribution along the scale of indirectness follows a similar pattern (i.e., conventional indirectness is clearly the preferred strategy type) in all five languages examined, the specific proportions in the choices between the more direct and less direct strategies are culturally specific. The results show Australian English speakers to be the least direct (about 10% of the expressions used fell into the type of directness) (p. 133) and Argentinian Spanish speakers to be the most direct (about 40% of the expressions used fell into the type of directness) (p.135); direct expressions accounted for 33% for Israelis, 22% for French Canadians and 20% for German speakers (p.135). Tannen (1981) finds that speakers of American English are more direct than speakers of Greek. Cenoz and Valencia (1996) find that

speakers of the North American variety of English use more direct and fewer conventionally indirect strategies than do European speakers of English. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005) find that the Finnish writers in their study tend to make direct requests (e.g., “Please comment on this”), whereas the Swedish writers prefer indirect requests (“Could you comment on this?”).

In some non-Western cultures, directness has been found to receive high politeness ratings. Eslamirasekh (1993) finds that Farsi speakers are considerably more direct in making requests as compared to North American-English speakers and that the general level of directness in Farsi-speaking society is relatively high. The Farsi data show that 70% of requests are phrased as impositives (most direct), more than 25% are phrased as conventionally indirect, and only about 4% as hints (p.91). Eslamirasekh (1993) concludes that politeness strategies used in the Iranian culture would consist of positive politeness rather than of negative politeness and maintains that the difference in directness level does not necessarily imply that the speakers of one language are more polite than the speakers of another language. Similarly, de Kadt (1992) finds that requests in Zulu are significantly more direct in formulation than requests in South African English and that directness receives high politeness ratings.

C. Level of indirectness and the Bulge Theory

Wolfson (1988) asserts that, at least for middle-class speakers of North American English, the pattern of words for the speech acts of invitation,

compliment, disapproving and thanking is similar among interlocutors in intimate relationships and among interlocutors in distant social relationship (pp.33-36). However, the pattern of words used in such speech acts as those cited previously is different among interlocutors who do not fall into these two extremes of the social distance scale (i.e., intimates and strangers). Wolfson (1988) calls this phenomenon the Bulge Theory because the increased different patterns center toward the middle of the social distance scale (p.32). Wolfson (1988) explains that the relationships in the middle of the scale are not clearly defined, making speakers pay greater attention to composing messages in order to maintain a positive relationship and to reduce risk, whereas at the two extremes of the scale, interlocutors can simply rely on formulaic expressions because they do not have to worry about the problem of face as much as when they are talking to strangers or acquaintances.

The concept underlying the Bulge Theory (Wolfson, 1988) – that is, increased different patterns in politeness expressions used center around the middle of the social distance scale – was incorporated in this study by not setting the addressees in the writing tasks at the two extremes of the social distance scale. The addressees in the writing tasks were prescribed as the department head and as teachers with whom the writers have not had previous contact. Both department head and the teachers represent addressees who are neither total strangers to the writers nor their intimates. By avoiding the two extremes along the scale of familiarity mentioned in the Bulge Theory, this study aims to develop such writing tasks as those that

would require writers to pay due attention to the use of language strategies in their attempt to maintain a positive relationship with the addressees and to achieve the purposes of the writing tasks.

D. Pragmatic judgment

Metapragmatics, defined by Mey (1993) as "reflection on the language users' use" (p. 182), reveals why a speaker chooses certain linguistic forms to fulfill the pragmatic function and what the culture-specific criteria seem to be for the proper use of the language (Kasper, 1989). Measuring the metapragmatic judgment of interlocutors constitutes one area of research in the field of pragmatics (e.g. Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1984; Chen, 1996; Harada, 1996; Olshtain & Huang [as cited in Bouton, 1996]). Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1984) consider metapragmatic judgment to have great value in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies because metapragmatic judgment discloses the sociocultural rules, beliefs and values underlying a speaker's utterance in a speech act. Chen (1996) states that the hearer at the other end of the interlocution is the one to judge whether a speech act is felicitously carried out, and therefore there is a need to include the addressee's reaction in the study of speech acts. In response to the concern of previous researchers (e.g., Chen, 1996; Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1984) that the metapragmatic judgment of the recipient of a request should be taken into consideration, this study aims to study the pragmatic judgment of two groups of EFL teachers on the appropriateness of the pragmatic performance in letters written for formal requests. In other words, examining the pragmatic performance of L2 learners is not the only research

focus in this study; another research focus involves the investigation of the pragmatic judgment of L2 learners. To be specific, would the pragmatic judgment of native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers on the appropriateness of request letters differ from that of native English-speaking teachers? Further, following Chen's (1996) advice that an open-ended section should be incorporated in a pragmatic questionnaire for a respondent to justify his/her answer, the pragmatic judgment task used in my study required raters to supply reasons for their ratings, and each rater was interviewed to enhance response validity and to collect qualitative feedback.

More details about the various forms of the Metapragmatic Judgment Questionnaire used by previous researchers are provided in a later section in this chapter (i.e., Section G, Part 1d).

E. Rhetorical plans, content and form

1. Rhetorical plans

The study of direct/indirect language strategies to show politeness in the realization of speech acts constitutes only one of the research dimensions in this study. This study also investigates the rhetorical plans used in letters of request written by participants displaying different levels of language proficiency. Would native Cantonese-speaking students prefer a rhetorical plan in which background information is provided before the head act of a request is announced, as predicted by Kong (1998) in his finding that that Eastern cultures such as the Chinese culture prefer the inductive approach (i.e., "justification" + "request")? In this study, four rhetorical plans

demonstrating four ordering patterns incorporating three moves – that is, "providing background information about the request", "stating the request" and "preparing the addressee for the request" – were investigated. The four rhetorical plans are:

- Rhetorical Plan 1– in this plan, the first move is "preparing the addressee for the request", the second move is "providing background information about the request" and the last move is "stating the request";

- Rhetorical Pattern 2 – in this plan, the first move is "preparing the addressee for the request", the second move is "stating the request" and the last move is "providing background information about the request";

- Rhetorical Plan 3 – in this plan, the first move is "providing background information about the request" and the second move is "stating the request";

- Rhetorical Plan 4 – in this plan, the first move is "stating the request" and the second move is "providing background information about the request".

While this study uses the term *rhetorical plans* to study semantic formulae[1] (the means by which a particular speech act is accomplished in terms of the

primary content of an utterance [Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Fraser, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983]), different researchers have used slightly different terms for such semantic formulae. Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) uses the term *strategies*; Kasper (1995) uses the term *convention of means*; Al-Ali (2004) and Virtanen and Maricic (2000) use the term *moves* in their study of the speech act of requesting.

Al-Ali (2004) analyzes the types and average length of strategic moves used by Arabic and English writers to request a job interview in their job application letters in response to either of two roughly identical job advertisements, one in English and one in Arabic. He finds that the Arabic and English writers used different move strategies to achieve the same purpose; for example, the English writers included explicit requests for a job interview, but none of the Arabic letters included such an explicit move.

In their study of the moves used in a particular speech act – "Request for Information", Virtanen and Maricic (2000) identify four core moves used in the forty request messages posted on the Linguist List (an edited person-to-person academic mailing list in the section labeled "Queries"). *Topic introduction* constituted Move 1; *Request* Move 2; *Gratitude* Move 3; *Signature* Move 4. In 30 out of 40 queries (75%), the opening move was *Topic and/or sender introduction*. The two closing moves, *Gratitude* and *Signature,* appeared after the *Request* move. Virtanen and Maricic (2000) find a systematic variation across the data when the move *Justification of the request* is regarded as another prototypical move. They believe the

variation reflects the cultural backgrounds of the participants (p.131). Of the forty queries, 14 (35%) contained the *Justification* move. Among these 14 justified queries, 8 made use of the deductive strategy of "request + justification"; 6 exhibited the strategy of "justification + request". Based on Kong's (1998) claim that Eastern culture, such as the Chinese culture, prefers the inductive approach (i.e., "justification" + "request") while the Anglo-American culture favors the deductive approach (i.e., "request" + "justification"), Virtanen and Maricic (2000) maintain that the differences in the numbers of request messages using the two patterns might be due to the large number of Anglo-American participants. However, they have reservation about this explanation owing to the lack of sufficient background information collected about the participants; the personal information Virtanen and Maricic gathered is merely participants' names, addresses and affiliation. In addition, Virtanen and Maricic (2000) maintain that the deductive type indicates a view of politeness in which the requester is very much aware of imposing on the addressee's time, a mentality typical of writers who follow Anglo-American rhetoric; Virtanen and Maricic (2000) further argue that opting for the move *Zero-justification* appears to be an even more conspicuous indication of a concern for the addressee's time.

Following Virtanen and Maricic's (2000) approach to studying the sequence of core moves in a request message, this study investigates the rhetorical plans used in letters of request written by participants showing different language proficiency levels. Findings about exactly where native

Cantonese-speaking students would announce the head act of a request in the letter and how addressees would respond to the rhetorical plans preferred by Cantonese-speaking students would disclose the preferences of speakers of Cantonese and speakers of English for semantic formulas, as far as the speech act of requesting is concerned.

2. Content

a. Amount of information

Content refers to the specific information given by a speaker. Researchers have found that L2 learners of English talk too much by adding a variety of supportive moves to requestive utterances (e.g., Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1986; House & Kasper, 1987; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989). As noted in Chapter 1, Edmondson and House (1991) refer to the tendency of L2 learners to be more verbose than target language speakers as the "waffle phenomenon". To study the phenomenon of waffling, this study compares the amount of information provided by L2 learners at two language proficiency levels. Would the L2 learners showing a lower level of language proficiency in this study be more verbose than those showing a higher level of proficiency? The variable "amount of information" in this study was adapted from one of the six variables (i.e., "amount of speech") used by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) in their study of the ratings assigned by NSs and NNSs of English to the appropriateness of NS and NNS responses to DCT items using six pragmatic aspects. Further explanation about the measure of "amount of information" will be provided in Chapter 3.

In addition, this study aims to discover whether the interpretation of "irrelevance" and "redundancy" is culture-specific as far as the content of a request message is concerned. When the "waffle phenomenon" occurs, the addressee may regard some of the information as irrelevant or redundant (Edmondson & House, 1991). Would an addressee who is a NS of English consider some of the information provided in letters of request written by native Cantonese-speaking students irrelevant or redundant? Would an addressee who is a NS of Cantonese hold the same opinion? What specific supportive moves would addressees speaking English or Cantonese as their first language consider irrelevant/redundant?

b. Pragmatic failure and supportive moves

In my view, both pragmalinguistic judgment and sociopragmatic judgment (Thomas, 1983) constitute a problem for NNS, and it may also be the case that NS would not be able to differentiate between the two. To explore the validity of either or both of these assertions, there is a need to investigate whether pragmatic failure would occur between requesters who are native Cantonese-speaking students and addressees who do not speak the same first language. I am interested in examining the effects of the supportive moves used by native Cantonese-speaking students, as perceived by native speakers of English. Would the use of some supportive moves by native Cantonese-speaking students, such as asking for forgiveness, be considered useful or counter-productive by native English speaking raters? As a result of different perceptions of what constitutes effective supportive moves,

would the addressee who is a NS of English consider the requests written by native Cantonese-speaking students impolite, although it might not be the intention of the L2 students to be impolite?

Previous research findings have shown that the strategies or supportive moves used to realize a request by speakers of different first languages might be different. For example, expressions of regret are used in Japanese culture[2] to show gratitude in contrast to British culture, in which apology is not used for showing gratitude (Al-Khatib, 2001; Clankie, 1993). Wolfson (1989, p.17) points out differences between Japanese and Americans in extending invitations: the students and immigrants living in the United States said they found it very offensive when their American friends ended their invitation by saying "Come if you want to", since in Japanese culture a polite request would require the speaker to urge the guest to accept the invitation; urging the guests to accept an invitation is not typical behavior in American culture. Al-Ali (2004) finds that the Arabic letters requesting a job interview in this study contain such moves as "glorifying the prospective employer" and "invoking compassion" while none of the English letters written for the same purpose do. He concludes that different rhetorical strategies are regarded as differentially effective by different cultures.

3. Form

a. Linguistic forms used by NNSs

This study aims to investigate the use of mitigating expressions by native Cantonese-speaking L2 learners of English. Would the L2 learners in this

study use downgraders to mitigate the assertive force of a request? What syntactic downgraders would they use? Would they use mainly the politeness marker “please” (as indicated in Suh’s [1999b] study)? Would they be competent in using other downgraders, such as a consultative device (e.g., “Would you mind…?”), an agent avoider (e.g., “Is it possible that…?”) and the combination of one downgrader with another? Researchers have found that NSs of English differ from NNSs in the use of typical expressions to realize a speech act. As far as linguistic devices to mitigate the assertive force of imposition is concerned, Takahashi (2001) finds that Japanese EFL learners do not possess the L2 pragmalinguistic knowledge to understand that “an English request can be mitigated to a greater extent by making it syntactically more complex by embedding it within another clause” (p. 173). They prefer the form “Would/Could you…?” instead of “Would it be possible for you…?”. Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) find that “NNSs realizations of strategy types included numerous linguistic moves that make them characteristically non-native” (p.48). For instance, the Japanese speakers of English in Hudson, Detmer and Brown’s (1995) study were found to be much less concerned with adding politeness strategies when they were in a position of power conversing with people they did not know, although it appeared that they were generally concerned with politeness (p. 39). Downgrader strategies, for instance, were used only sporadically (p.40). Likewise, Suh (1999b) finds that the downgraders used by the Korean students of English constitute only half the number used by the NSs of English in his study. In addition, the politeness marker used most frequently by the learner group was the word “please”,

whereas the English native speakers preferred to employ a consultative device (e.g., “Would you mind…?”) and an agent avoider (e.g., “Is it possible that…?”) to reduce imposition (p.27). The second difference between the learner group and the native speaker group is that many of the NSs of English tended to combine one downgrader with another. For example, the combinations they used included:

1) a consultative device and an understater (e.g. “a little bit”),
2) an agent avoider (e.g., “Is it possible that…?”) and an understater, or
3) a device intended to play-down (e.g., the use of the past tense with present time reference, as in I “wanted” to see…) and an agent-avoider.

The difficulty for L2 learners of English in using appropriate linguistic form in performing speech acts might be due to the lack of a L1 language learning environment, where learners can be exposed to the authentic use of linguistic expressions to fulfill different pragmatic functions in response to contextual cues. The sources of difficulty might be that “conventions are acquired through primary socialization in family or friendship circles or intensive communicative co-operation in a finite range of institutionalized environment” (Gumperz, 1996, p. 383).

The study, however, does not aim to report the distribution of the aforementioned syntactic downgraders used by the participants in this study; rather, the approach used in this study is to compare the downgraders used

between participants displaying two levels of language proficiency. As a L2 learner's language proficiency level improves, would his/her pragmatic competence also improve? A review of studies concerning the relationship between linguistic competence and pragmatic competence follows.

b. Linguistic competence and pragmatic competence

Is pragmatic competence acquired in parallel with linguistic competence? Given that findings concerning the relationship between linguistic and pragmatic competence are inconclusive, this study aims to reveal a picture showing the pragmatic competence of L2 learners of English at different language proficiency levels. Would the pragmatic performance in the letters of request written by the L2 learners who scored Grade A/B in the Hong Kong A-level Examination differ from that in the letters written by those who scored Grade E? Would the pragmatic judgment of the native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers differ from that of their counterparts who are NSs of English?

Some studies seem to indicate pragmatic competence is not necessarily acquired in parallel with linguistic competence. For example, Kasper and Schmidt (1996) find that proficiency might have little effect on the range of realization strategies used by learners. Similarly, Takahashi (1996) does not find any proficiency effects on L2 pragmatic competence either. Harada (1996) concludes that the effect of L2 proficiency is not always as expected. The results of her study, in which pictures of people representing different ages, social status and familiarity in terms of relation

to each other were used as cues to elicit data, indicate that advanced learners are not always closer to the native speakers than are the intermediate learners in the researcher's judgment, suggesting that there is not a great deal of difference between advanced and intermediate learners in terms of levels of pragmatic competence. Fouser (1997) finds that an advanced learner of Japanese, who is a Korean-speaking student, draws on his L1 heavily in completing the tasks, and his pragmatic areas of language deviate from the generally accepted Japanese linguistic norms. Fouser (1997) concludes that although language transfer would help learners attain a high level of global proficiency in a closely related target language, it might be less effective in helping them attain a similar level of pragmatic competence. In their study of the speech act of chastisement produced by native Turkish speakers learning English, Dogancay-Aktuna and Kamisli (1997) find that advanced ESL learners could diverge significantly from target language norms. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) concludes that the pragmatic knowledge of L2 learners with very good grammatical knowledge would also differ from target-language pragmatic norms. All these studies seem to suggest that linguistic competence does not guarantee pragmatic competence.

However, some studies from other researchers have reached different conclusions. In a study that includes low-level learners, Scarcella (1979) finds that higher-level learners differ from lower-level learners in the use of imperatives. When making requests, higher-level learners showed sensitivity to status, using imperatives only with equal familiars and subordinates, while the low-level students always used imperatives.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1986) study show that the use of external modifiers in L2 Hebrew increases with linguistic proficiency, as does the number of words used. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) find that low and high proficiency learners differ in the order and frequency of semantic formulae they use. The lower proficiency group is also more direct in their refusals than are higher proficiency ESF learners. Advanced learners were found to be better than intermediate learners at identifying contexts in which L1 apology strategies could and could not be used (Maesiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Ross, 1996). The use of modality markers (downtoners, understaters, hedges, subjectivizers, intensifiers, comment upgraders and cajolers) by participants in her study also improved with proficiency (Trosborg, 1987). Koike (1996) also finds a proficiency effect in the recognition of the intent of speech acts. The third- and fourth-year English-speaking learners of Spanish were significantly better at identifying the intended force of the suggestions than were the first- and second-year students. Cenoz and Valencia (1996) find that the use of mitigating supportive moves is more common among advanced NNSs and that the use of mitigating supportive moves is closely related to linguistic competence. Caryn (1997) finds that the NNSs of English in her study always rely on direct request strategies until their proficiency and competence begin to improve gradually. The adults NNSs – university students coming from nine levels of language proficiency with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds – did not begin to use more complex request strategies until they had achieved higher language proficiency.

F. The disinclination of L2 learners to follow target language norms

Researchers have different opinions about the possible causes of pragmatic failure. Takahashi and Beebe (1987) believe pragmatic transfer to be one of the causes. Rubin (1983) suggests that L2 learners need to know the values that speakers in a speech community hold. However, some researchers hold the view that an unwillingness on the part of some L2 learners to follow the norms of the target language might be another factor that contributes to pragmatic performance that deviates from these norms (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Kubota, 1996; Siegal, 1996). Although exploring whether L2 learners in this study are willing to follow the norms of the target language is not the main focus of this study, this study raises some questions about the willingness/unwillingness of native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers to follow the pragmatics of the target language when the findings concerning the pragmatic judgments of two groups of EFL teachers are interpreted. The possible willingness/unwillingness of L2 learners to follow the pragmatics of the target language has given rise to other questions; for example, should L2 learners be taught to follow the pragmatics of the target language if they are to use English as the medium of communication to make a request of a Cantonese-speaking addressee in an environment where Cantonese is spoken as the first language? Would the Cantonese-speaking addressee use the Cantonese pragmatics or English pragmatics to judge the appropriateness of a request letter written in English? These issues are beyond the scope of this study, but they shed light on the possible ways to interpret the result of this study.

L2 learners have, in some cases, been found to be unwilling to follow the pragmatics of the target language. Siegal (1996) reports that some Anglo-European women learning Japanese in Japan in his study refused to follow the normative Japanese female speech styles. In another study, Kubota (1996) finds that the Americans learning Japanese did not necessarily try to follow the Japanese speech styles although they were aware of them; they preferred to use a non-offensive style with which they were comfortable. This study involved role-plays of a scenario including the face-threatening situation of making a request of a supervisor. The findings showed that all the English-speaking women learning Japanese (AJs) explained the situation before making the request while the four native Japanese speakers (JJs) made the request first; the former (AJs) made the request implicitly, whereas the latter (JJs) did that explicitly. The AJs learning Japanese disclosed in the follow-up interview that they were aware of the Japanese rules in making requests, but they did not want to follow that style. Cohen (1997) reports in his diary that, when he was learning Japanese, he himself did not like to follow the Japanese norms with respect to the use of honorifics in interactions where a high-status person speaks to an equal- or lower-status interlocutor (p.151). In her study examining politeness strategies by Japanese when performing the speech acts of refusals, of giving embarrassing information and of disagreement between lower- and higher-status colleagues, Nakajima (1997) finds that both the native speakers of Japanese and the native speakers of English value their L1 norms in speaking to a higher-status colleague.

Apart from these empirical findings about L2 learners' inclination not to follow the pragmatics of the target language, some researchers have made some explicit claims about the need to consider the wish of L2 learners to follow the norms of the their own language when using the target language as a means of communication. For example, Chen (1996) claims "the distinction between linguistic/cultural imperialism and awareness-raising can be a subtle one" (p. 6). She maintains that L2 learners should be taught to be aware of the difference between the metapragmatic criteria, patterns and beliefs of the target language and those of their first language. The aim of teaching is to add to the learners' pragmatics repertoire instead of replacing their own belief system (p.6). Norton (2000) and Cook (1999) point out the importance of knowing the inclination of L2 learners to follow the norms of the target language. Kirkpatrick and Xu (2002) hold the position that, since the number of non-native speakers of English in the world is much greater than that of NSs, the goal of learning English should not be just for communicating with native speakers of English.
Kirkpatrick and Xu (2002) argue that native speakers of English should accommodate to "nativised varieties of English" (p.278). They propose that "speaker of variety X must accommodate to speakers of variety Y when in the culture domains of variety Y speakers and vice versa. When in a neutral domain, speakers must accommodate to each other" (p.278).

G. Data collection methods

Traditionally, data collection methods can be classified into two types: observation and elicitation (Wolfson, 1986). The methods can also be

classified into production or comprehension depending on what data respondents are asked to produce (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). In pragmatic research, the three main methods of data collection are Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCTs), observation of authentic speech and role play.

This study used a combination of methods of data collection, that is – authentic data, experimental data and individual interviews. Although a review of related literature shows that WDCTs have been used widely in research into native and interlanguage speech act realization (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989a, 1989b; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Fouser, 1997), the Written Discourse Completion Task was not used as a research tool in this study because of some inherent problems with the methodology. Rather, authentic data used for written communication were used. To supplement the authentic data, written requests made in the form of letters were collected in a classroom setting. The participants were instructed to write three letters of request: one to a teacher, one to the department head and one to the language adviser in the Self-access Language Learning Center. Three topics related to the academic study conditions with which these participants were likely to be familiar were chosen so as to increase the internal validity of the data collected. In response to Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken's (2007) comment that findings based on a corpus of authentic data can provide valuable clues to the collection of simulated data (e.g., what students as opposed to business people with experience do) (p.12), the three writing topics used in the experimental writing tasks in this study were

generated based on the types of the authentic requests sent by students to their class teachers and to the department head in the English Language Centre.

1. The inadequacies of Written Discourse Completion Tasks

Most studies employing the WDCT as a tool to investigate the pragmatic competence of L2 learners do not seem to have taken into account the following inadequacies of the WDCT:

a. The internal validity of the data

The first problem is concerned with the internal validity of the data collected through the WDT. Candlin (2005) questions the validity of using the WDCT to measure L2 students' pragmatic performance. According to Candlin (2005), there is an inherent problem in the validity and authenticity of the discourse completion task, and consequently in any data it delivers. It is doubtful whether respondents can really imagine they are the characters in the situations and whether they have the real-life experience to supply valid answers to the situations specified in the WDCT. In other words, the setting of a number of scenarios representing different values of the variables "familiarity" and "social power" may yield data that do not have internal validity. The reason is that there is no guarantee that a respondent will be able to imagine the power relationship and the degree of familiarity designated in a situation and to use appropriate language accordingly. For example, in a situation about a staff member asking his/her department head to lend him/her a pen, the factors influencing what the staff member would

say in that situation may be beyond the imagination and life-experience of a university student. As a consequence, findings obtained from respondents who are undergraduates are likely to be invalid.

Another factor that might negatively influence respondents' ability truly to put themselves in the context specified in a WDCT might be the large amount of information contained in a WDCT. A typical WDCT contains at least ten situations, and it is questionable how much information specified in the various situations can be understood and given due consideration by subjects. This concern seems to have gained some support from the pilot study I conducted using the Discourse Completion Task designed in 2005. The Discourse Completion Task included twelve situations in which a systematic combination of the two values of "familiarity" ("+" meaning "very familiar", "-" meaning "not familiar") and three values of "power" ("+" meaning that the speaker has more power than the hearer", "-" meaning that the speaker has less power than the hearer", "=" means that there is no difference in power between the speaker and the hearer). The pilot test was administered to an Australian, who was a colleague of mine. The answers provided by her were similar across the twelve situations in terms of request strategies and linguistic expressions regardless of the different values of the independent variables designated in the questionnaire. It seems that the "plus", "minus" and/or "equal" signs attached to the two independent variables did not affect her choice of request strategies and linguistic forms. This may have been due to her personal style of making polite requests regardless of the roles she was invited to play in the twelve

situations, or perhaps due to the nature of spoken language, or perhaps due to the possibility that the values of the two independent variables stated explicitly in the Discourse Completion Task in the format of "+/- familiarity", "+/-/= power" had in fact failed to catch her attention (Appendix E).

b. The usage of spoken language by means of written language

The second problem is concerned with the study of the usage of spoken language by means of written language. Wolfson, Marmor and Jones (1989) maintain that written responses in the WDCT might not be able to represent the spoken utterances because "short, decontextualized written segments are not comparable to authentic, longer routines" (p.182). Beebe and Cummings (1985, as cited in Chen, 1996, pp.39-40) pointed out that the WDCT is inadequate in showing the following information:

- actual wordings used in real-life situation, the range of formulas and strategies used such as the strategy of avoidance,
- the length of response or the number of turns it takes to fulfill the function,
- the number of repetitions and elaborations that occur and
- whether or not someone would naturalistically choose to refuse in a given situation (p.14).

Candlin (2005) also points out that it would be problematic to study the usage of spoken language by means of written language. Although Suh

(1999b, p.6) argues that respondents' performance in DCTs should show their best ability because they do not have to produce responses under time pressure, it is questionable whether the responses written down on paper can reflect what they would say in a situation that requires spontaneous oral responses; there is no guarantee that the pragmatic features shown in the written responses constructed using longer time will be reflected in the supposedly oral responses. Further, the need of having to express responses in the written form might increase the formality and politeness levels of the responses, and the effects of the medium of communication on the pragmatic strategies to be used by participants may not be uniform across different groups of participants.

c. Different perceptions of the power, social distance and imposition of the addressee

The third problem with the WDCT is that a subject's perception of the power, social distance and imposition (the three sociological variables in Brown and Levinson's [1978] model) of the addressee in a situation described in a WDCT is likely to be different from that of the researcher and/or from that of another subject in the same study, thus obscuring research findings. For example, one of the situations (Situation 5) used in the WDCT developed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) was "You work in a small department of a large office. You are in a department meeting now. You need to borrow a pen in order to take some notes. The head of your department is sitting next to you and might have an extra pen" (p.88). From the information provided by Hudson, Detmer and Brown

(1995) about variable distribution, the addressee in Situation 5 (i.e., the department head) was meant to possess High P (power), High D (social distance) and low R (imposition) (p.6). However, the respondent who has had the real-life experience of being a close friend of his/her department head may interpret the value of D in Situation 5 as low based on the close relationship with his/her department head. In addition, although lending a pen to a subordinate is not likely to be seen as a big imposition by the department head, forgetting to bring a pen to a meeting may be regarded by an employee as indicating that s/he is careless and disorganized; thus, the act of borrowing a pen from his/her department head might be perceived as betraying his/her own weakness to the head. This kind of psychological make-up might make the request a difficult one for the respondent to make, which in turn might increase the R value of the request as perceived by the respondent, thus conflicting the small value of R assumed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995). Some other researchers have also voiced this concern. Blum-Kulka and House (1989) maintain that members in different cultures might differ in their perceptions of social situations as well as in the relative importance attached to any of the social parameters (p.137). Blum-Kulka and House (1989) admit that, in the situations they used for their study, they would have to assume that the "roommates were as close socially in Israel as in Germany, and the policeman was equally powerful in Argentina as in the States. The issue involved is that of the degree of cross-cultural variation in perceptions of social reality" (p.137). Spencer-Oatey also (1993) finds that groups of subjects from different cultural backgrounds perceive the context of the same speech act differently.

Despite the possible differences various social variables might have on the choice of language strategies, the WDCT has been widely used in pragmatic research. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1984) suggest that the WDCT meets the need of cross-linguistic research to control social variables for the purpose of comparison; in addition, the data elicited by this research tool tend to be consistent and reliable because the same scenarios are given to respondents. The majority of the studies reviewed in this chapter followed the format of the WDCT first developed by Blum-Kulka (1982) for comparing the speech act realization of native and nonnative Hebrew speakers without major modifications. Among the literature reviewed, only one or two studies attempted to make some modifications to determine whether groups of respondents would share common perceptions of the various social contexts and both respondents and the researcher would share common perceptions as well. For example, Huang (cited in Bouton, 1996) tried to insure that the American and Chinese respondents in her study would assign the same relative power and distance for the situations she developed. She asked the Americans and the Chinese respondents to rate some characters in terms of their perceptions of the power and social distance the persons in the situations would normally have in relation to the respondents (e.g., “a police officer in the street”); she also asked the subjects to indicate how much of an imposition they thought each of the requests would require if asked of someone who was merely an acquaintance (e.g., “ask someone to help wash the car”). Then she combined the characters, the requests and the imposition to generate different situations. The situations were rated again by another set of American and Chinese

respondents. The situations that showed similar ratings of by both groups of respondents were used in the final instrument. The procedure followed by Huang (as cited in Bouton, 1996) probably eliminated the problem(s) caused by the difference in perceptions between groups of respondents and between the investigator and the respondents; however, the problem of validity and authenticity still remains.

d. Focusing only on the speaker's point of view only

The fourth problem with the WDCT is that this tool focuses only on the speaker's point of view. There is no way of knowing the extent to which the utterances produced by a speaker would be accepted by a hearer (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1984, p. 241). The need to incorporate the hearer's point of view in studies of politeness strategies draws support from such researchers as Eelen (2001), Mills (2003), Watts (2003) and Chen (1996). In critiquing Brown and Levinson's (1978) model of politeness, Eelen (2001) asserts that in Brown and Levinson's (1978) study, "politeness is regarded as a unique and objective system that exists 'out there' in reality, that can be discovered, manipulated and examined just any physical object can" (p.179), and he argues that it is necessary to "examine the way that, throughout conversations, participants assess whether the utterances of the other interactants can be classified as polite or impolite, according to a range of hypothesized norms" (p.179). In a similar vein, Mills (2003) stresses the need to analyze the role of assessment or judgment by both speakers and hearers (p.245). She thinks that it is necessary for research in the area of politeness to switch from the analysis of the strategic behavior on the part of

individual speakers to an analysis which views politeness as a practice enacted within a community of practice (p.74). Watts (2003) also believes in the importance of examining individual evaluations of what constitutes polite and impolite behavior and the ways "in which instantiations of (im)politeness are assessed" (p.47). To examine the judgment of hearers, Chen (1996) suggests the use of a pragmatic judgment test, in which subjects would judge the appropriateness of the written responses provided by other subjects. A metapragmatic judgment test usually consists of responses to different situations, ranging from appropriate to inappropriate. Respondents are asked to rate the appropriateness of the answers on a scale of 1 to 3 or 1 to 5. The metapragmatic judgment test used in Olshtain and Blum-Kulka's (1984) study consisted of four request and four apology situations. Each item included a description of the situation, and the six phrases of the request or apology in question represented formal/polite variants, informal/intimate-language variants and direct/blunt variants. Respondents were asked to rate the answers on a scale of 1 to 3. A variant of the judgment task questionnaire incorporates an open-ended section for a respondent to justify his/her answer. The questionnaire developed by Chen (1996) serves as an example. In the questionnaire, there were four scenarios and six refusal statements randomly selected from the previous written discourse completion task. For each statement, in addition to the task of rating the appropriateness-level on a scale of 1 to 5, the subjects were asked to provide comments on their ratings. See Appendix F for the sample of the metapragmatic judgment task developed by Chen (1996). Further, Chen (1996) proposes the use of an interview to increase response

validity (p.64). Providing an opportunity for a rater to justify his/her ratings by incorporating an interview in the research design of a study might resolve the problem raised by Kasper and Dahl (1991) – i.e., that a metapragmatic test has its limitations – respondents' subjective understanding of the task, their interpretation of the situation and the context may be different from what is intended to be understood. In an interview, the possible discrepancies in the interpretation of the nature of the task, the situation and the context between the researcher and the raters may be detected when a rater is justifying the ratings that appear inconsistent to the researcher.

e. Relatively low ranking of WDCT compared with other forms of Discourse Completion Tasks

Brown (2001, pp.301-302) compares the following forms of the Discourse Completion Task:

- written discourse completion tasks (WDCT)
- multiple-choice discourse completion tasks (MDCT)
- oral discourse completion tasks (ODCT)
- discourse role-play tasks (DRPT)
- discourse self-assessment tasks (DAST)
- role-play self-assessments (RPSA)

Some of above-mentioned instruments are found to be less satisfactory as measurement tools. In his study examining each of the six types of instruments for measuring pragmatics, Brown (2001) compares the six types

of instruments in terms of task difficulties, score distributions, reliability, validity and such practical test characteristics as relative difficulty of administration and scoring of the tests. He compares the data produced in two studies, one investigating the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL), and one investigating the learning of Japanese as a second language (JSL). The data for the EFL setting and for the JSL setting were gathered by two of his doctoral students.

He concludes that, in the EFL study, the best to the worst measures overall would be: DAST, DRPT, RPSA, WDCT, ODCT and MDCT. In contrast, the overall rankings for the JSL study, the best to worst measures would be: ODCT, DRPT, DAST, RPSA, WDCT and MDCT. As can be seen from the above analysis, WDCT has some problems as a measure of pragmatic performance because of its low reliability and its low criterion-related validity.

2. Observation of authentic speech

Authentic speech collected through observation in a natural setting provides a great deal of contextual data, such as pitch, tone, pace, non-verbal reactions, relationship of the interlocutors and so on. The strength of authentic data is that it has high internal validity. The use of authentic speech also provides natural data for researchers to reconstruct the speech event in focus. Very few speech act studies have used this approach because it is highly unlikely that a given speech act can “reoccur with the same event, in the same context, and/or with interlocutors of the same

relationship" (Chen, 1996, p.36). Further, when one observes without intervening, it is very hard to control different variables (Wolfson, 1986).

3. Role-play and simulated data

Role-play also allows the research to collect naturalistic data. In a role-play, respondents are given some instructions about their roles, the situation and at least one participant's communicative goal, but the outcomes of the conversation are not prescribed. It can be said that role-play is "real" in the context of the play in that some outcomes need to be negotiated (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p.228). Role-play is better than the first method of observation of authentic speech in that it is replicable and allows for nonnative-native comparison in cross-cultural studies (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p.229). Suh (1999b) believes that there is a need for researchers to adopt various methods such as role-play so that subjects are provided with opportunities to interact in an open-ended context. Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken (2007) use the term "simulated data" to refer to data "collected on the basis of a set of instructions for the writers or speakers involved in which they are asked to play a particular role" (p.14). Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken believe that it might be necessary to work with simulated data rather than authentic data in the investigation of a particular aspect of business discourse. Planken (2002) maintains that simulation serves as the best alternative in situations where access to authentic data is difficult (p.51). Nevertheless, role-play has its limitations. For example, participants may think what they are going to say will not actually affect the face of the interlocutors, so they

may not use the indirect strategies that they would otherwise use in a real-life situation. On the other hand, participants tend to be obliged to produce the item the investigator is interested in studying (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p.27), thereby producing utterances that may obscure research results. For example, some participants in Chen's (1996) study admitted that they dramatized the interaction, resulting in utterances that they would not have used in real-life situations.

Based on the pros and cons of different data collection methods, this study used a combination of such methods (i.e., authentic data, experimental data and individual interviews). Further details concerning the data collection methods used in this study will be provided in Chapter 3.

H. Frameworks of analysis

1. Four related studies

The analytical framework of this study is based on the framework devised by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) in their Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) project together with that developed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995). The modifications made by Suh (1999b) to the coding scheme devised by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) were also incorporated in the analysis framework of this study. Although Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) study constituted one of the studies that shaped the research framework of this study, I did not use the research tool used by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), that is – the WDCT. Instead, I used authentic letters and e-mails and generated the

three writing topics used for collecting experimental data based on the types of requests appearing in the authentic data. For a detailed discussion of the inadequacies of the WDCT, please refer to Section G, Part 1 of this chapter. In addition, based on the recommendation made by Chen (1996) about the use of the Metapragmatic Judgment Task Questionnaire, I devised a Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire to examine the pragmatic judgments of two groups of teachers on the letters of request written by student participants. An outline of these four studies, which had shaped the research framework of my study, will be provided, followed by the description of the modifications I made to accommodate to my research purpose.

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989)

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) use discourse completion tasks to investigate pragmatic strategies across cultures and languages. They find that both cultural factors and situational factors play a role in influencing pragmatic performance. The two primary cross-cultural differences specific to requests identified in their analysis are: a) level of directness, and b) amount and type of request modifications (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989, p.24). They categorized nine strategies according to degree of directness: mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative, locution derivable, want statement, suggestory formula, preparatory, strong hint and mild hint (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989, pp.278-280). To be specific, the coding scheme used in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) study includes the following elements:

1) The head act of a request

2) Supportive moves

3) Request strategies

A request strategy is the "obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the Request is realized" (p.278). Directness means "the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from locution" (p.278). The Request strategies are ordered from directness to indirectness with Mood derivable (e.g., "Clean up the kitchen") being the most direct and mild hints (e.g., "You've been busy, haven't you?")

4) Internal modifiers

Syntactic downgraders are classified as internal modifiers because they modify the Head Act internally by mitigating the assertive force of the request. Syntactic upgraders are also classified as internal modifiers; they are used to increase the impact of a request.

5) Supportive moves/external modifiers

Supportive moves are considered as external modifiers because they are external to the Head Act, occurring either before it or after it. They are used to mitigate or aggravate a request.

Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995)

Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) include the following dimensions in their training manual for the raters, who are native speakers of English. The raters were required to rate the appropriateness of NS and NNS responses to WDCT items on six aspects:

1) Correct speech act

2) Formulaic expressions

This category includes the use of typical speech. The raters were instructed to judge the appropriateness of the wording/expressions (p.164).

3) Amount of speech

4) The degree of formality

5) Directness

6) Politeness

Suh (1999b)

Suh (1999b) adds some sub-categories to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) coding scheme in his study of the supportive moves and expressions of politeness in requests made by ESL Korean learners. The sub-categories are: acknowledgment of imposition, concern and appreciation, rhetorical questions, promise of non-recurrence, willingness and seriousness of urgency.

Chen (1996)

In the Metapragmatic Judgment Task Questionnaire used by Chen (1996), she required her participants to provide reasons for their ratings concerning the appropriateness of the pragmatic responses provided in the questionnaire. Chen also recommended the use of interviews to increase response validity (p.64).

2. Modifications made to suit the analytical framework used in this study

The modifications made in this research based on the four previous studies are highlighted in what follows:

The coding scheme used by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) was modified in the following ways. The categories of "internal modifiers" were incorporated in the category "mitigating politeness expressions used to reduce the assertive force of the head act of a request". The supportive moves selected for examining L2 learners' pragmatic performance in this study were based on the supportive moves proposed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989, pp.287-288). Two sub-categories developed by Suh (1999b) – "acknowledgment of imposition" and "appreciation" – were also included in this study to accommodate cases not included in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) coding scheme. The categories "mitigating politeness expressions used to reduce the assertive force of the head act of a request" and "supportive moves" constitute the measures of "politeness" in this study.

To obtain a more comprehensive picture of L2 learners' pragmatic competence, this study investigates three other pragmatic dimensions in addition to the dimension of politeness. Other pragmatic aspects examined in this study include "directness", "formality" and "amount of information" – three variables selected based on the analytical framework established by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995). Modifications made to

this study based on Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995)'s analytical framework follow.

The first two dimensions ("correct speech act" and "formulaic expressions") proposed by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) were not incorporated in my study. The speech act investigated in this study is the speech act of request, so there is no need to examine whether the subjects have used the correct speech act. "Formulaic expressions" are hard to define, so they were not included in the analysis.

The variables "politeness", "formality" and "directness" were re-defined in my study. Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) did not define these three terms rigorously; rather, they merely gave vague explanations about these terms. The explanations provided by Hudson, Detmer and Brown to the raters in their study were repeated as follows:

"Formality can be expressed through word choice, phrasing, use of titles, and choice of verb forms. Use of colloquial speech can be appropriate in American English when the situation is informal….You are the judge" (p.165).

"Pragmatically defined, most speech is indirect….Directness can be indicated by verb form or strategy choice" (p.165).

"This concept [politeness] has many dimensions and has been the topic of many discussions in speech act studies. Politeness includes the aspects of

formality and directness, among other things such as politeness markers…. Due to its many elements, it is impossible to prescribe a formula for politeness for a given situation" (p.167).

These three variables were re-defined in my study as follows:

1) Politeness (as measured by: i) the politeness expressions introducing the head act of request, and ii) the supportive moves used;
2) Directness (as measured by: i) the position of the head act in the letter, and ii) the number of negative words used; and
3) Formality (as measured by: i) violations of formality; ii) features of formality.

The category "the position of the head act in the letter" was established in this study based on: 1) one of the four dimensions (i.e., "semantic formula") suggested by Bardovi-Harlig (2001) for studying speech acts, and 2) one of the categories (i.e., "core moves") developed by Virtanen and Maricic (2000). For detailed definitions and explanations of these three variables and other dependent variables used in this study, refer to the section entitled "The four pragmatic variables" (Chapter 1, Section C, Part 2).

Similar to Chen's (1996) Metapragmatic Judgment Task Questionnaire, the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire used in this study required raters to provide reasons for their ratings; further, each respondent was interviewed so that s/he was provided with an opportunity to justify his/her ratings, a process which might increase response validity.

For more details concerning the analytical framework of this study, please refer to Chapter 3.

I. Mean T-unit length as a measure for "complexity of sentence structure"

Mean T-unit length (Hunt, 1965) is used in this study to measure the complexity of sentence structure (one of the sub-categories within "features of formality"). The definitions of *mean T-unit length* together with *mean clause length* and *clauses per T-unit* – three syntactic measures developed by Hunt (1965) – will be provided in the subsequent section, followed by a discussion of the limitations of T-units as a syntactic measure. I also provide reasons why I still used mean T-unit length to measure the complexity of sentence structure in this study.

1. The three syntactic measures developed by Hunt (1965)

Mean T-unit length

A T-unit contains only one single clause with or without other clausal or non-clausal structures that are embedded in it or attached to it. According to Hunt (1965), "T-units are the shortest grammatically allowable sentences into which a paragraph can be segmented" (p.35). The mean T-unit length is obtained by dividing the total number of words of a script by the number of T-units.

Mean clause length

Hunt (1965) defines mean clause length as follows:

> A clause is taken to be a structure with a subject and a finite verb (a verb with a tense-marker). If the subjects or any part of the verb phrase were coordinated they merely lengthened the clause. The whole structure was considered as one clause (p.28).

Clauses per T-unit

This is defined as the number of all clauses (both subordinate and main) divided by the number of T-units or, since the number of main clauses is identical with the number of T-units, the ratio is equal to the number of all clauses divided by the number of main clauses.

Hunt (1965) finds that even though mean sentence length, mean clause length and subordination ratio all increase with grade level, there is considerably more overlap among grades than with the mean T-unit length. Hunt also finds comparably revealing overlap with mean clause length and subordination ratio. Hunt concludes that T-unit length, which admits far less overlap among the three grades, is a more reliable indication of a student's grade level and increasing control over syntax.

O'Donnell et al. (1967, cited in Watson 1979) study how mean T-unit length would correlate with the number of sentence-combining transformation per T-unit. They find a notable relationship between these two measures.

O'Donnell et al (1967, cited in Watson 1979) maintain that "when fairly extensive samples of children's language are obtained, the mean length of T-units has special claim to consideration as a simple, objective, valid indicator of development in syntactic control" (p.41).

2. Limitations of T-units

Certain problems in T-unit analysis have been pointed out – in some cases definitional and in others procedural. Some are related to T-unit analysis in general, while others are related specifically to the application of T-unit analysis to second language data.

First, while mean T-unit length reflects excessive coordination between sentences, it fails to deal with excessive coordination within a sentence (Ney 1966, cited in Gaies 1980). Ney argues that it is essentially arbitrary to view coordination of sentences and coordination of noun phrases as being qualitatively different. The following pair of sentences illustrate Ney's argument (Ney 1966, cited in Gaies 1980, p.234).

- Then the rain falls and spring comes. (2 T-units)
- So he went through the woods and pulled the feather out of his hat from the partridges and put a flower in his hat and walked on through the woods. (1 T-unit)

This kind of arbitrariness is also found in Hunt's treatment of coordinate and subordinate conjunctions like "for", "so" and "because" in terms of their

degree of complexity. For example, Hunt treats a sentence containing two clauses joined by the subordinator “because” as one T-unit, but he treats the structure as two T-units if the clauses are joined by the coordinator “for”; however, the use of “for” or “because” does not really inform the reader about the learners’ relative syntactic complexity.

Second, T-units do not appear to be particularly appropriate for the analysis of data from subjects showing relatively low proficiency (Gaies, 1980). In the data drawn from such subjects, grammatical and lexical errors are so frequent and of such a nature that they tend to interfere not only with the reader’s or listener’s understanding, but also with the researcher’s ability to tabulate T-units. In other words, T-unit analysis seems to be useful only among writers whose English proficiency has reached a certain level of development.

3. Reasons for using mean T-unit length as a syntactic measure

Although there are limitations, I have used mean T-unit length as a measure for the complexity of sentence structure in this study for four reasons:

1) T-units are easy to use and can be identified fairly objectively.

2) The subjects in this study are university students who have scored at least Grade E in the Hong Kong A-level Examination in the subject of English, so there is reason to believe that their writing should not

contain too many serious errors as to cause difficulty in identifying T-units.

3) After consideration of T-units and various measures, O'Donnell (1976) claims that mean T-unit length is the most useful and usable syntactic measures over a wide age range.

4) Gaies (1980) concludes that T-units still have the value of reflecting the fact that, even in the second language environment, language development involves an increasing ability to incorporate and consolidate more information into a single grammatically interrelated unit – i.e., to put more chunks of information into a sentence.

Notes

1. Semantic formulae constitute one of the four dimensions to the investigation of speech acts – i.e., choice of speech acts, semantic formula, content and form (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p.14).

2. I recognize that cultures are not uniform, and it is only for purposes of illustration that I have generalized the term *culture*.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLODGY

The information regarding the methodology used for each of three research foci in this study will be organized by using four headings: 1) Participants, 2) Instrumentation, 3) Data collection, and 4) Data analysis. This chapter will end with the section addressing the nature of the pilot tests conducted.

A. Research focus 1: Measuring teachers' pragmatic judgments

1. Independent variables

- Gender of the rater
- First language of the rater

2. Dependent variables

Politeness – Using the five-point Likert scale, the raters' judgments of the politeness level of a letter in terms of the politeness expressions and the supportive moves used in each letter were scored.

- Formality/informality - Using the five-point Likert scale, the raters' judgments of the formality/informality level of each letter were scored.
- Directness/indirectness – Using the five-point Likert scale, the raters' judgments of the appropriateness of the position of the head act of the designated request and the use of negative words were scored.
- Amount of information - Using the five-point Likert scale, the raters' judgments of the appropriateness of the amount of information provided in each letter were scored.

3. Control variables

a. Sociopragmatic variables of "power", "social distance" and "degree of imposition"

"Power", "social distance" and "degree of imposition", the three sociopragmatic variables often examined by researchers in the field of pragmatics, were controlled in this study. To control the factor of "power" of the interlocutor, the student writers were instructed that they were to write to the department head and to a teacher. To control the factor of "social distance", the student writers were instructed that the writer making the request had not had any previous contact with the department head and the teacher. To control the factor of "degree of imposition", the force of imposition of the three requests in the writing task was set to be "strong" with the first topic requiring the department head to use her discretion to judge whether the requester might be exempted from the general attendance requirement, and the second and the third topics requiring the addressees to invest extra time and effort in assisting the requesters.

b. Age of the participant's interlocutor

The addressee was said to be forty years old. The age difference between the addressee and the requester was meant to create a barrier such that the requester would feel it inappropriate to write in an informal register.

c. The first language of the participant's interlocutor

The first language of the addressee was set to be English. Since the English pragmatic knowledge of the students in this study was to be

examined, the addressee was set to be a native speaker of the English language.

d. Gender of the participant' interlocutor

To the best of my knowledge, the effects that the gender of the addressee might have on a requester's pragmatic decision, such as word choice and request strategies, have not yet been fully determined, so there was a need to control the gender factor by identifying the addressees as females for all three writing topics in this study.

4. Teacher participants

This study involved **s**ixteen raters, consisting of eight native Cantonese-speaking ESL teachers and eight native English-speaking ESL teachers from the U.K. The division by gender was equal. All of the teachers taught in the English Language Centre (ELC) of the City University of Hong Kong (Table 3).

Table 3 The makeup of the sixteen raters

	Native Cantonese-speaking ESL teachers	**Native English-speaking ESL teachers from the U.K.**
Females	4 raters	4 raters
Males	4 raters	4 raters

According to the background information the raters provided in the Personal Background Questionnaires, the profiles of the sixteen raters are summarized below:

a. Four Cantonese female raters

Three raters out of these four had previously lived overseas; two had lived in Canada, and one in England. The duration of foreign experience ranged from five years to ten years. Three raters identified their ages as falling between 46 and 55, and one rater identified her age as falling between 36 and 45. Two of the teachers had taught English as full-time teachers at tertiary institutions in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for an average of fifteen years, and two of the teachers had taught English as part-time teachers at a tertiary institution in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for an average of seven years.

b. Four Cantonese male raters

Two raters out of these four had previously lived overseas. One had lived in the U.K. for eighteen years, and one had lived in the U.K and Canada for four years. Two raters identified their ages as falling between 36 and 45, and two raters identified their ages as falling between 46 and 55. Two raters had taught English as full-time teachers at tertiary institutions in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for an average of eleven years, and two raters had taught as part-time

teachers at tertiary institutions in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for an average of ten years.

c. Four British female raters

Two raters identified their ages as falling between 25 and 35, and two identified their ages as falling between 36 and 45. One rater had taught English as a full-time teacher at a tertiary institution in countries where English was spoken a foreign/second language (Japan, Hungary, Brazil, China, Hong Kong) for seven years; the other three raters had taught English as part-time teachers at tertiary institutions in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for an average of six years.

d. Four British male raters

Three raters identified their ages as falling between 36 and 45, and one rater identified his age as falling between 56 and 65. Two raters had taught English as full-time teachers at tertiary institutions in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for an average of four years; one rater had taught English as a full-time teacher at a tertiary institution in countries where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (UK, Poland, Japan, Hong Kong) for ten years; the remaining rater had taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English was spoken as a foreign/second language (Hong Kong) for fourteen years.

On the whole, the age range of the eight Cantonese teachers was between 36 and 55, and they had taught in the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong for an average of 13 years. Five of them had lived overseas for an average of nine years. The age range of the eight British teachers was between 25 and 65, and they had taught in tertiary institutions in countries where English was spoken as a second/foreign language (including Hong Kong) for an average of 9 years.

5. Instrumentation

a. The selection of three writing topics for the written formal requests

In order that the subject matter of the topics to be chosen for the writing task was closely related to the life experience of the student writers, a preliminary inspection of some thirty authentic e-mails/letters making formal requests sent to the department head of the English Language Centre in Semester A 2005 (from September to November) was conducted. It was found that the subject matter of the requests was repetitive in general and could be classified into three main categories: 1) a request for attending the end-of-course examination regardless of a student's unsatisfactory attendance rate, 2) a request for the examination date to be rescheduled, and 3) a request for "late drop" of a course.

Since the first topic accounted for the majority of the scripts collected, it was chosen as one of the writing topics for collecting experimental data.

In order to enrich the data to be collected, three different topics, which were all related to the life experience of the student writers, were used in the writing task. The remaining two writing topics were developed based on the previous request messages I had received from my students: 1) messages requesting their job application letters to be proofread, and 2) messages requesting an interview for their projects. The three writing topics are shown in Appendix G.

b. The makeup of the 12 letters used for eliciting the responses from the raters

A total of twelve letters was prepared to elicit the pragmatic responses from the sixteen raters. The twelve letters were written by participants of different language proficiency levels in order that the language and content of the twelve letters would be diverse enough to generate informative comments from the raters.

Three letters were written by an American ESL teacher who had taught ESL at the tertiary level for more than thirty-five years, and three were written by a Cantonese ESL teacher who had taught ESL at the tertiary level for about ten years. For the remaining six scripts, three were written by two Cantonese working adults who scored Grade B and Grade C in the Hong Kong A-level Examination in the subject “Use of English” in 2002. Each of these two working adults wrote three letters, but only three letters from this batch were selected based on the criterion that diversity in content and politeness expressions was preferred. The last three letters were written by

two E-grade students who took the English Enhancement Course "Language Skills for Research Projects" offered by the ELC in Semester B 2006. Each of these two E-grade students also wrote three letters, but again only three letters from this batch were chosen using the same criterion (Table 4).

Table 4 The makeup of the twelve letters used for the Pragmatic Judgment Task

Written by	**Letters**
An American ESL teacher	Letter 1 (Topic: Attendance)
	Letter 2 (Topic: Proofreading)
	Letter 3 (Topic: Interview)
A Cantonese ESL teacher	Letter 4(Topic: Attendance)
	Letter 5(Topic: Proofreading)
	Letter 6(Topic: Interview)
Two E-grade students taking English courses in the ELC	Letter 7 (Topic: Attendance)
	Letter 8 (Topic: Proofreading)
	Letter 9 (Topic: Interview)
Two B/C-grade working adults	Letter 10 (Topic: Attendance)
	Letter 11 (Topic: Proofreading)
	Letter 12 (Topic: Interview)

The letters from the two teachers and from the E-grade students were received in January 2006, and the letters from two working adults in April 2006.

The participants wrote the letters in their free time. The suggested time for completing three letters was one hour, but they were allowed to use more time if needed. The letters they wrote would be used primarily to elicit pragmatic responses from the Cantonese and the British raters. Therefore,

whether these six writers used the same amount of time to finish the three letters was not a significant matter. What mattered the most was the quality of the completed letters because generating informative comments was the sole purpose for preparing these twelve letters. In other words, since the research focus was to examine the pragmatic judgments made by two groups of teachers rather than the performance of these letter writers, it was not necessary that the six writers finish the three letters in exactly one hour.

The twelve letters (four letters for each of the three topics) were rated by each of the sixteen raters, who followed the fourteen questions in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire either to give ratings showing his/her pragmatic judgments of the letter using the five-point Likert scale or to indicate his/her preferred strategies if he/she were to write the letter for that topic. The twelve letters produced are shown in Appendix H.

To avoid ordering effects, the order of the twelve letters was randomized using a random numbers table, producing sixteen versions of the twelve letters (Table 5).

Table 5 The order of the twelve letters in the sixteen versions

	V1	**V 2**	**V3**	**V4**	**V5**	**V6**	**V7**	**V8**	**V9**	**V10**	**V11**	**V12**	**V13**	**V14**	**V15**	**V16**
1st letter	L5	L1	L4	L8	L7	L4	L9	L1	L4	L7	L5	L3	L7	L11	L11	L10
2nd letter	L4	L5	L9	L4	L9	L10	L1	L6	L1	L8	L8	L7	L4	L5	L2	L11
3rd letter	L1	L2	L2	L5	L11	L9	L11	L2	L3	L1	L11	L1	L5	L1	L9	L8
4th	L6	L9	L12	L11	L6	L8	L4	L8	L11	L4	L12	L11	L11	L7	L3	L4
5th letter	L9	L7	L11	L1	L5	L12	L5	L5	L12	L10	L3	L6	L6	L2	L5	L7
6th letter	L7	L4	L5	L10	L4	L3	L6	L7	L2	L12	L4	L10	L9	L4	L12	L6
7th letter	L10	L11	L6	L9	L10	L7	L2	L10	L8	L9	L1	L2	L3	L9	L6	L9
8th letter	L12	L3	L8	L6	L1	L5	L7	L9	L5	L11	L7	L8	L10	L10	L1	L2
9th letter	L11	L12	L3	L2	L12	L11	L8	L12	L7	L5	L6	L4	L8	L6	L10	L12
10th letter	L2	L6	L1	L3	L8	L1	L10	L11	L10	L3	L9	L12	L1	L8	L7	L1
11th letter	L3	L8	L7	L7	L2	L2	L3	L3	L9	L6	L10	L9	L12	L12	L8	L3
12th letter	L8	L10	L10	L12	L3	L6	L12	L4	L6	L2	L2	L5	L2	L3	L4	L5

(“V1” stands for “Version 1”; “L1”stands for “Letter 1”)

Table 6 shows that the first letter in Version 1 is Letter 5, the second letter is Letter 4, the third letter is Letter 1, and the last letter is Letter 8; the first letter in Version 2 is Letter 1, the second letter is Letter 5, the third letter is Letter 2, and the last letter is Letter 10.

Each rater was assigned a number, which matched the version number of the set of letters. The Cantonese female raters were labeled as Rater 1 to Rater 4, the Cantonese male raters were labeled as Rater 5 to Rater 8, the British female raters were labeled as Rater 9 to Rater 12, and the British male raters were labeled as Rater 13 to Rater 16 (Appendix I).

c. The pragmatic judgment questionnaire

The structure of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

The fourteen questions in the judgment pragmatic questionnaire were developed based on four pragmatic variables: politeness, formality/informality, directness/indirectness, and amount of information.

Question 1 to Question 6 were related to "politeness". "Politeness" subsumed two dimensions: expressions introducing head acts and supportive moves used. In Question 1, the teacher was asked to rate some expressions in terms of how polite s/he thought the expressions were. In Question 2, the rater was asked to underline all the supportive moves s/he regarded as being inappropriate. In Question 3, the teacher was asked to rate the quality of the supportive moves used in the letter. In Question 4, the teacher was asked to give an overall rating to the politeness of the letter by considering both the expressions introducing head acts and the supportive moves used. In Question 5 and Question 6, the rater was asked to indicate his/her preference for different supportive moves. Question 5 asked the rater to rank the six most important supportive moves from a given list of twelve supportive moves, and Question 6 asked the rater to

indicate the supportive move(s) he/she would definitely not use if he/she were to write such a letter.

In Question 7 and Question 8, the rater was asked to indicate his/her opinion about the level of formality of the letter. Question 7 asked the rater whether he/she thought the letter was formal, informal or hard to categorize as either formal or informal. Question 8 asked the teacher to rate the appropriateness of the register in the letter.

In Question 9 and Question 10, the rater was asked to indicate his/her opinion about the level of directness of the letter. The pragmatic aspect "Directness/indirectness" was measured by examining the negative words used and the position at which the head act of the designated request was written. Question 9 asked the rater to judge whether the position of the head act was appropriate. Question 10 asked the rater to indicate his/her own preference for the position of the head act in relation to two other pieces of information: 1) preparing the addressee for the coming request, and 2) providing background information about the request.

In Question 11 and Question 12, the rater was asked to indicate his/her opinion about the "negative" elements used in the letter. Question 11 asked the rater whether he/she thought the "negative" words were useful, neutral, or counter-productive. Question 12 asked the rater to indicate his/her inclination to use negative/positive words.

Question 13 asked the teacher to rate the appropriateness of the amount of information contained in the letter.

Question 14 asked the teacher to rate the overall appropriateness of the letter. Further, the rater was asked to indicate the main factors influencing his/her overall rating. A list showing the four pragmatic variables and the related sub-categories was provided. This question functioned as a check for the consistency of the ratings to previous questions given by a teacher. When inconsistency was found, further questions would be asked in the interview to confirm his/her ratings. The checking mechanism follows:

Example 1

A rater chose a “1” for Question 14 (about the overall appropriateness of the letter) from the five-point Likert scale, where “1” means “very inappropriate” and “5” means “completely appropriate”, and he/she chose “amount of information” as the most important factor influencing his/her overall rating of the whole letter. Then his/her ratings of Question 13, which asked him/her about the appropriateness of the amount of information contained in the letter, would be double-checked. If the rating he/she gave to “amount of information” was “1” or “2”, the ratings of Question 14 and Question 13 would be considered to be consistent. On the other hand, if his/her rating of Question 13 was “4” or “5”, the rater would be asked in the interview to confirm the ratings he/she gave to Question 13 and Question 14 and to justify his/her final ratings. During this process, the rater was allowed to re-read the letter, if necessary.

Example 2

A rater chose a “4” for Question 14 (about the overall appropriateness of the letter) from the five-point Likert scale, and he/she chose “Level of politeness” as the most important factor for his/her overall rating of the whole letter. Then his/her ratings of Question 1, which asked him/her to rate the underlined politeness expressions, would be double-checked. If most of the ratings he/she gave to the politeness expressions were “4” or “5+”, which means “polite” and “very polite” respectively, the ratings of Question 14 and Question 1 would be considered to be consistent. On the other hand, if most of his/her ratings of Question 1 were “1”, “2”, or “3”, which means “very impolite”, “impolite” and “neither polite and impolite”, the rater would be asked in the interview to confirm the ratings given to Question 1 and Question 14 and to justify his/her final ratings.

Since “politeness” also involved Question 3, which concerned the rater’s judgment of the quality of the supportive moves used in the letter, the rating given to Question 3 would also be double-checked. If his/her rating of Question 3 was “4” or “5”, where “5” means “completely appropriate”, the ratings of Question 14 and Question 3 would be considered to be consistent. On the other hand, if his/her rating of Question 3 was “1”, “2”, or “3”, where “1” means “very inappropriate”, the rater would be asked in the interview to confirm his ratings given to Question 3 and Question 14 and to justify his/her final ratings.

A list of related questions for checking the consistency of ratings

All the questions that were related, and therefore could be used for checking the consistency of ratings, follow:

Politeness

Question 1 and Question 4 and Question 14

Question 2 and Question 3 and Question 14

Question 3 and Question 4 and Question 14

Question 2 and Question 5 and Question 6

Formality

Question 7 and Question 14

Directness/indirectness

Question 9 and Question 14

Question 11 and Question 14

Question 9 and Question 10

Question 11 and Question 12

Amount of information

Question 13 and Question 14

The issues of validity and reliability of the research tools used in this study

(A) Validity

(1) The three request topics

The choice of the three request topics for the writing task was based on the authentic formal requests made to the department head and a teacher of the ELC. In the ELC students' daily academic life, it is fairly common for them to encounter these three situations and to make such requests. Therefore, the letters produced by the student participants in the present study should be a valid representation of their pragmatic performance as far as the selection of writing topics was concerned. If the student writers had been given hypothetical situations that were not within the scope of their life experience, the validity of the findings would have been questionable. For example, one such hypothetical situation could be: "Imagine that you were a teacher working in the ELC and that you were disturbed by the constant ringing of the mobile phone of the colleague sitting next to you. Make a request to your colleague asking him/her not to leave his/her mobile phones unattended during the period when s/he is not at the desk." This writing topic might produce findings that are questionable in terms of validity because the politeness strategies to be used among teachers are not generally within the life experience of students.

(2) The Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

To be sure that the raters would have a correct understanding of the fourteen questions and the terms used in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire, individual briefing sessions lasting about twenty minutes were conducted with each of raters before they began to rate the twelve letters.

In addition, each of the completed pragmatic questionnaires was scrutinized by the interviewer at least one day before the interview. When misunderstanding or lack of understanding of a certain question was suspected, explanation about that question would be provided in the interview, and following further consideration the rater would be asked to confirm his/her rating.

(B) Reliability of the ratings and comments provided in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

Similarly, the ratings and the written comments a rater provided in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaires were scrutinized at least one day before the interview, and the raters were required to reconsider questions showing inconsistent ratings.

As discussed earlier, related questions were set in such a way that inconsistency could be noted. When inconsistency was found, raters were told in the interview that they could either maintain their original ratings or modify their ratings by referring to the script. However, in either case,

they were required to justify their final decisions. By checking the consistency of the ratings before the interviews and by requiring the teachers to justify or to modify their ratings during the interviews, the reliability of the findings should have been ensured to some extent.

This method to confirm the reliability of the pragmatic judgment task was modified from Chen's (1996, p.65) method. In her study using a Discourse Completion Task, in which different hypothetical situations were provided to the participants for their consideration, the interviewer read aloud the scenarios and responses to the interviewees and asked them to rate all the items again. The method of test and retest was partially adopted in the this study: only the questions that showed inconsistent or unreasonable ratings, rather than all the questions, were attempted again by the interviewees Time constraints would not have allowed the teacher participants in this study to attempt all fourteen pragmatic questions again, no matter whether this was done in the interview or before the interview in their own time.

6. Data collection: soliciting and interviewing teacher participants

In May 2006, e-mails were sent to sixteen teachers (eight native speakers of Cantonese and eight native speakers of English from the U.K.) teaching in the English Language Centre of the City University of Hong Kong to solicit their participation. Participants were offered HK$400 for rating twelve letters and for attending an interview (Appendix J). In the first round of the attempt to solicit participation, three Cantonese females, four Cantonese male teachers, two female British teachers and two male British teachers

replied positively. Further e-mails sent in two more rounds successfully enlisted a total of sixteen teachers.

Starting from 15 June 2006, each of the sixteen raters was given a rating pack containing: 1) twelve letters, 2) twelve corresponding Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaires on which to record the ratings (one questionnaire for one letter), 3) one handout explaining the concepts of supportive moves and the criteria for selecting negative words, and 4) one Personal Background Questionnaire on which to supply his/her personal information, e.g., the variety of English s/he thinks s/he speaks and his/her age (Appendix K). Another Personal Background Questionnaire was distributed to the teacher participants to collect further personal background information in September 2007 (Appendix L).

A 20-minute briefing session was conducted for each of the raters to explain both the materials in the pack and the fourteen questions in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire so that each rater could understand the questions as well as the terms used in the questionnaire. Individual sessions had to be arranged because it was difficult to find a common time suitable to all sixteen raters.

After the briefing session, and during their free time, raters started rating the twelve letters. The average time raters reported to have spent on the rating task was about three hours. After each rater finished the rating task, an interview was arranged with him/her. Each rater was required to return the

completed questionnaires at least one day before the interview, so that there would be sufficient time for the ratings and comments to be scrutinized for the preparation of the questions to be asked in the interview.

The interviews (audiotaped using a portable minidisk recorder, model no. MZ-R70), were held in Rm D of the English Language Centre between June 27, 2006 and August 31, 2006. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. In the interviews, raters were told:

1) I was interested in the reasons for their ratings because this study would involve both quantitative and qualitative analysis.
2) Questions would be asked to clarify any unclear handwriting and inconsistent ratings that were observed. In the case that inconsistent ratings were found, raters were told that they could maintain their original ratings, or they could change the ratings during the interviews; however, they were told that in either case they would be required to provide reasons for their final decisions.
3) In the case that a rater forgot to supply some information required in the pragmatic questionnaire, s/he would be asked to supply the missing answers in the interview. Sufficient time would be given for him/her to read the letter again.

It is likely that the raters talked to each other during the long duration of the interviews; this could have been a problem. However, since the interviews were individualized based on the actual responses supplied by the raters, the probability of inter-rater bias having an effect on the results was negligible.

7. Unexpected technical problems

Technical problems with the minidisk recorder

For Rater 10, part of the interview was not successfully recorded because of some unexpected technical problems. Her comments for the earlier part of the interview (involving the first five letters, namely: Letter 7, Letter 8, Letter 1, Letter 4, and Letter 10) were accidentally erased. Her comments made in the interview were reconstructed based on the interview notes taken (written on the pragmatic questionnaire) and the set of letters assigned to her. Fortunately, the interview notes were clear enough to permit the reconstruction of her comments.

The reconstructed comments were written in bold print in the tapescript of her interview.

8. Data analysis

The sixteen interviews were transcribed. Since the tapescripts of the sixteen interviews constitute 268 pages, the full documentation is not appended, but it is stored in another file entitled Transcriptions of interviews[1].

The comments made by the sixteen teachers have been summarized in the part reporting the qualitative findings concerning Research Question 1 and Research Question 2.

The ratings, the written comments from the pragmatic questionnaires, and the oral comments from the interviews were recorded in templates for easy observation of the differences and similarities between Cantonese and British raters. Since the compiled data file was about 340 pages long, the full documentation of the file is not appended, but it is stored in a separate folder entitled Compiled Data File[2].

The ratings were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. The written comments from the pragmatic questionnaires and the oral comments from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

B. Research focus 2: Measuring students' pragmatic performance

Both experimental and authentic data were used to examine students' pragmatic performance.

1. Measuring students' pragmatic performance using experimental data

a. Independent variables

The English proficiency of participants

The English proficiency level of the participants was determined on the basis of their results in the subject "Use of English" in the Hong Kong A-level Examinations. Request letters written by participants of two proficiency levels (A/B-grade subjects versus E-grade subjects) were examined. A-grade participants were chosen because they were supposed to have the highest English proficiency level as defined by the Hong Kong

education system. B-grade participants were chosen since there were not enough A-grade participants in the class of the teacher who agreed to help with the data collection of this study. E-grade participants were chosen because they represented the weakest group. In order to examine the effects of language proficiency on participants' pragmatic performance more effectively, the two groups separated by the greatest differences were selected.

b. Dependent variables

The pragmatic variables to be examined using experimental data

1) "Politeness" was investigated by examining the politeness expressions introducing head acts and supportive moves used.
2) "Directness" was investigated by examining the position of the head act of the designated request and the number of negative words used.
3) "Amount of information" was examined by counting the number of words in the script.
4) "Formality" was investigated by examining expressions violating formality and features of formality.

c. Student participants

The student participants were native Cantonese-speaking Year 1 students from two universities. One group of students was comprised of twenty Year 1 university students majoring in English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. They scored Grade A/B in the Hong Kong A-level English Examination in the subject "Use of English". The other group consisted of

twenty Year 1 university students taking English Enhancement Courses offered by the English Language Centre (ELC) at the City University of Hong Kong. They scored Grade E in the Hong Kong A-level English Examination in the subject "Use of English".

Each of the twenty A/B-grade students wrote three letters in class, as did the twenty E-grade students. A total of 120 scripts was produced.

d. Instrumentation of the experimental data

Modes of discourse

Letters were chosen in this study to examine students' pragmatic performance in making formal written requests. E-mails were not used for testing Hypothesis 3 because e-mails are often associated with informality possibly because of the implied urgency in sending messages by e-mail (refer to an earlier section entitled "Language features of E-mails as a CMC sub-variety" [Chapter 1, Section B, Part 7] for a detailed discussion of features of e-mail messages). The language used in e-mails, as a result, is often informal. Because of the prevalence of informal elements in the e-mail discourse, e-mails do not seem to be appropriate for determining whether students can write with appropriately in terms of formality. In other words, even if an e-mail were found to be characterized by informal features, it would be hard to determine whether the informal features were the result of the students' inability to write formally or whether it was the result of their perception that e-mail language is essentially by definition informal. Unlike e-mails, letters are generally used for both formal and

informal communication and therefore are not associated with informality only, so the letter discourse was chosen in this study for the purpose of determining whether the students in this study would be able to write with appropriate formality features for the formal requests specified in the writing task.

The three topics chosen

The same three topics as those used to elicit the sixteen raters' pragmatic judgments were provided to each of the student writers. The first topic was about a special request made to the department head of the ELC to allow him/her to pass a course regardless of the writer's poor attendance rate; the second topic was about a request made to a teacher for her assistance in proofreading the writer's job application letter; the third topic was about a request made to a teacher for her consent to be interviewed for the writer's project.

The order of the three topics was randomized to avoid ordering effects. Three versions of the writing tasks were produced. In Version One, the first topic was "Attendance", the second topic was "Proofreading", and the third topic was "Interview". In Version 2, the first topic was "Proofreading", the second topic "Attendance", and the third one "Interview". In Version 3, the first topic was "Interview", the second topic was "Proofreading", and the last topic was "Attendance".

Twenty sets of scripts, each containing three letters, were obtained from the A/B-grade students and E-grade students respectively (Table 6).

Table 6 The makeup of the scripts collected from two groups of students

	A/B-grade students	**E-grade students**
Topic: Attendance	20 letters	20 letters
Topic: Proofreading	20 letters	20 letters
Topic: Interview	20 letters	20 letters
Total	60 letters	60 letters

e. Data collection for experimental data

A/B-grade student

On January 8, 2007, 42 Year 1 students studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong participated in the present research study. Each of them wrote three request letters in class. They were taking the course "Grammar Structure of English" offered by the English Department. Twenty of the students majored in English and twenty-two of them majored in Language Education. Three of them were male and 39 were female. Students' voluntary participation was solicited in the first hour of the 2-hour lesson. There were 47 students in the class, and 42 sets of scripts were collected.

In selecting the twenty sets of scripts for data analysis, the scripts written by A-grade students were chosen first, followed by those written by B-grade students. A total of eighteen females and two males were selected based

on this criterion. Among these twenty students, five were A-grade students and fifteen were B-grade students. All the A-grade students were females.

Despite the predominance of females, English majors had to be chosen in this study because a very proficient group was needed for this research focus.

E-grade students

In February 2007, three full-time teachers and one part-time teacher teaching the course "Written Language" offered by the English Language Centre of the City University of Hong Kong agreed to help with the present study upon receiving an e-mail requesting their assistance.

An instruction sheet (Appendix M) about the procedure for administering the writing task in class was provided and was also explained to each of four teachers face to face.

In class, the teachers solicited their students' participation in this study. For all seven classes (with about sixteen students in each class), the writing tasks were completed in the fourth week of the course. Those students who did not wish to write for the research study were given the option of completing a reading task taken from their course booklet. A total of 86 sets of letters, each containing three letters, were collected. Among these scripts, 13 sets could not be used because: a) the scripts were written by Year 2 or Year 3 students, b) some of the personal information required in

the questionnaire was incomplete, and c) only one or two letters were completed in the allotted time.

Among the 73 usable sets of scripts, 22 sets were written by female students and 51 sets by male students. See Appendix N for the breakdown of the scripts obtained from all the E-grade students. Through random sampling, 18 sets of scripts written by female students and 2 sets of scripts written by male students were obtained. The ratio of 18 females to 2 males was based on the combination of males and females in the group consisting of A/B-grade students (Table 7).

Table 7 The makeup of student participants in each of the two groups

A/B-grade students	**E-grade students**
18 females 2 male	18 females 2 male

f. Unexpected technical problems

The original research design stipulated that students would be given sixty minutes to finish the three letters; however, the teacher who promised to help collect data from A/B-grade students decided to modify the research design to suit his own research purpose on the day when data were to be collected. He gave his students twenty minutes for the first letter, eighteen minutes for the second letter and fifteen minutes for the third one. His explanation for his decision to adopt the pattern of diminishing time was that he was interested in comparing students' performance in writing three letters of similar nature when given less and less time. Since some

students were observed to be able to finish the first letter in just ten minutes, he believed the reduction of a few minutes should not cause great problems to the research findings of this study.

Although Grade-A/B students were given diminishing time for writing the three letters, it was decided that E-grade students should still be given twenty minutes for writing each letter, as had been planned in the original research design. Reducing the time allowed for the second and the third letters might cause Grade-E students, who were the weaker group, to fail to finish all three letters, which in turn would cause a deficiency in the usable scripts from E-grade students.

Fortunately, the reduction of time for the second and the third letters for A/B-grade students did not seem to have noticeable effects on A-grade students' pragmatic performance. As can be seen from the results of data analysis (Chapter 4), A/B-grade students still performed significantly better than E/grade students in terms of pragmatic performance even when given a shorter time for writing the second and third letters. If there had been no significant differences between these two groups of students in pragmatic performance, the reduction of time for the second and the third letters might have been a strong intervening variable.

g. Data analysis of the experimental data

The student scripts were tabulated using Template 1 for categorizing "politeness", "directness" and "amount of information". Template 2a was used for categorizing "formality". A separate template was created for "formality" because this pragmatic dimension subsumed thirteen sub-categories, which were grouped together under two main categories "violations of formality" and "features of formality". The frequencies of the sub-categories of Template 1 and Template 2a were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS.

Detailed explanations about the measures for the four pragmatic aspects follow:

(A) Politeness

As can be seen in Template 1, "politeness" subsumed two dimensions: "politeness expressions introducing head acts" and "supportive moves". "Politeness expressions introducing head acts" consisted of expressions for mitigating the assertive force of a head act. Expressions for strengthening the assertive force of a head act were not included in the analysis because whether the use of a strengthening expression could make a letter more polite is uncertain, depending on the exact terms used and on the addressees' perceptions the words used. For example, the use of "very much hope" in the expression "I very much hope that you can help me" might not be considered to be useful in increasing the politeness of the letter;

on the other hand, a desire that is expressed too strongly might be viewed as imposing or impolite. Therefore, only mitigating expressions were analyzed in this study.

Template 1 was modified from the analysis framework by Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995), b) Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) Project, c) Suh (1999b) and d) Chen (1996) based on the actual expressions used by the student writers in this study. The sub-categories within mitigating expressions were listed in Chapter 1 (Section 2) and repeated below for easy reference:

(1) Expressions for mitigating the assertive force of a head act

- Modals for polite request -- “would”, “could” and “may”;
- Past tense tone softeners;
- Politeness marker “please” occurring in question form, e.g., “Would you please proofread the job application form?”;
- The use of “a bit”, “a little”, “somehow” to mitigate the size of the request;
- Involving the addressee directly, bidding for cooperation; e.g., “Do you think you could…?”;
- The use of words such as “possible”, “possibly” to modulate the impact of the request on the addressee;
- The use of the word “mind”;

- The use of the word “appreciate” or other word forms of the same word;
- The use of the word “grateful”, “gratitude” as in “I would be grateful if you could”;
- The use of the word “honored”, “honor”;
- The use of the word “pleasure” as in “It is my pleasure to invite you.”;
- The use of the word “glad” as in “I am glad to invite you to be my interviewee.”;
- The use of the word “nice” as in “It would be nice if you could be my interviewee.”;
- The use of the word “helpful” as in “It would be helpful if you could proofread the letter.”;
- The use of the word “thankful” or “thank you” as in “I would be thankful if you could proofread the letter.”;
- The use of the word “kindly” and “kind” as in “Please kindly reply to me whether you would be my interviewee.” and as in “It would be most kind of you if you could be my interviewee”.

(2) Supportive moves

The sub-categories within supportive moves were listed in Chapter 1 (Section 2) and repeated below for easy reference:

- Preparing the addressee for the coming request;
- Minimizing the force of imposition of the request;
- Acknowledging the imposition of the request;

- Showing the effort made;
- Complimenting the addressee;
- Showing thankfulness;
- Pointing out the importance of the request;
- Apologizing;
- Offering compensation;
- Pointing out the negative consequences of refusal to the author;
- Pointing out the benefits the author would gain if the request were approved;
- Asking for forgiveness;
- Giving options to the addressee;
- Showing sincerity;
- Showing appreciation;
- Showing regret;
- Recognition of and response to the greater authority of the addressee;
- Making a promise;
- Making a personal appeal.

The recognition of a certain supportive move was based on the meaning a single word or a group of words expressed. For example, the word "favor" in "Please do me a favor." implied that the request was extra work for the addressee; therefore, the supportive move of "acknowledging imposition" was counted. An example of the supportive move of "acknowledgment of imposition" expressed by a group of words was: "I know it is not your responsibility to proofread a student's job application letter". See

Appendix O for more examples of what constitutes a certain type of supportive move.

Only the number of types of supportive moves was counted, while the total frequency of a certain type of supportive move was not counted. For example, a student wrote "I would be GRATEFUL if you could help me.", and "THANK YOU for your KIND attention". The three expressions (as shown in caps) showing the occurrence of the supportive move of "thankful" were not tabulated three times; rather, they were regarded as representing only one single type of supportive move.

If that student also used the supportive moves of "minimizing imposition", "showing benefit", "showing negative consequences", and "showing effort put in", five types of supportive moves would be recorded.

The reason for the decision not to count the frequency of a certain type of supportive move was that in some situations it would be very difficult to decide how many supportive moves of the same type were used. For example, in the following two sentences, were there three supportive moves of "minimizing imposition"? Or were there four such supportive moves, if "only" and “simple” were counted as two different supportive moves? Or was there only one such supportive move, if the overall purpose of the whole paragraph was regarded as one single attempt to minimize imposition?

”The interview will take ONLY FIFTEEN MINUTES, and ONLY SIMPLE questions will be asked. Below are my free times, and YOU COULD CHOOSE THE ONES CONVENIENT TO YOU.”

Another reason for not counting all the expressions showing the same type of supportive move was that this calculation would produce inflated figures because some students wrote similar expressions (e.g., "sorry", "apologize" and “I am very sorry.”) in the same letter. Because of the repeated attempts to perform the same supportive move, the sum of the frequency of each supportive move would have blurred the picture of whether a high figure was the result of more varieties of supportive moves used or the result of repeated attempts of the same supportive move. Therefore, it seemed that counting the number of types of supportive moves used was more appropriate that counting all the expressions indicating the same type of supportive move.

(B) Directness

“Directness” was examined using the following two measures: 1) the position of the head act of the designated request, and 2) the number of negative words used.

(1) The position of the head act of the request

The position of the head act of the request specified in the writing topic was identified by using one of the following plans:

Plan 1: “Preparing” + “Background” + “Request”

Plan 2 : “Preparing” + “Request” + “Background”

Plan 3: “Background” + “Request”

Plan 4: “Request” + “Background”

An explanation of the elements of the four plans follows:

“Preparing”

The requester prepares his/her addressee for the ensuing request by announcing that he or she will make a request, by asking about the potential availability of the addressee for carrying out the request, or by asking for the addressee’s permission to make the request – without however giving away the nature or the content of the request.

E.g., *May I ask you to do me a favor?*

“Background information”

The writer provides “background information” about the nature of the request. Examples follow in Table 8:

Table 8 Examples of "background information"

Topic	**Examples of "background information" (taken from students' scripts)**
1. Requesting the department head to give special consideration for the unsatisfactory attendance rate.	Information about the course taken and the situation about the attendance, for example, "I am taking the Spoken Language course. However, due to some personal reasons, I could not attend the lessons punctually and I was failed in the attendance requirement of the Spoken Language Course."
2. Requesting a teacher to proofread a job application letter	Information about the need to ask someone to proofread the job application letter, for example, "I am now applying for my favorite job. As a decent and precise job application letter is very important to decide the success or not in this application."
3. Requesting a teacher to be the interviewee	Information about the need to conduct such an interview, example, "As one of my English course required, I have to invite a native speaker of English to do an interview with me for a project."

Two pieces of Information NOT counted as "background information"

Two pieces of information – a student's name and his/her major – were not counted as "background information". Most of the student writers started their letters by giving their names and majors in the first or first two

sentences, for example, “My name is Amy Chan, a Year 1 student majoring Computer Science”. Counting these two bits of information as “background information” would require most of the letters to be classified as Plan 3 (“background” + “request”), which in turn would fail to reflect the differences in students’ preferences for the position of the head act. An initial inspection of the data revealed that some students differed from other students in that some of them put the head acts after they had provided “background information” (such as the examples in the Table 8 above), while others put “background information” before the head acts, although both groups also provided their names and majors at beginning of the letters.

“Request”

The term “request” here means that request designated in the writing topic. The letter writers in this study might make several minor requests related to the request designated in the writing topic. Some of these minor requests were general, such as “Could you do me a favor?” when they prepared the addressee for the coming request; some were specific, such as “Would you call me back?” when they wanted to ask the addressee to call them for a reply. For the analysis of the position of the head act of a request letter, only the expression that indicated the specific request required in the writing topic were included. For example, requests such as “I would like to invite you to attend an interview.” were included in the analysis, whereas the expression “Would you please call me at 2356 6778?” was not. The purpose of writing that request letter was to ask for an interview, so asking the addressee to return the phone call was just a small step related to the

purpose of the letter.

The students in this study often did not organize their ideas in such a way that the four plans listed above could fit conveniently. For example, after they provided some background information about the need for a request and stated the request (Plan 3), they would add further details about the need for making such a request and/or they would repeat the request in other positions. In cases such as this, categorization was approached in the following manner:

Once the elements listed in one of the four plans were detected in the earliest possible part of the letter, the plan number was decided based on the sequence in which these elements occurred. For example, a student started by giving the background about the need to request a teacher to proofread his/her job application job, and then went on to state the designated request. The plan number determined would be Plan 3, even though the participant later added more information about the need for such a request and/or repeat the designated request in other positions in the letter.

(2) The number of negative words used

A requester may present some negative messages directly by using words with negative connotations, such as “If I cannot drop the course, I will end up having a fail in the assessment, which will pull down my GPA [Grade Point Average]”. Alternatively, the requester may modify his or her wording in the hope of creating a positive tone of the letter, which in turn

might help him or her to obtain a favorable response because of the overall pleasant effect of the letter. For example, the earlier sentence can be re-cast in a way that anticipates a more positive outcome, e.g., “If I can study another course I am more interested in, my GPA can remain high.”

In identifying negative words in a letter, not all negative words were included in the corpus for analysis. Only the expressions that showed opinions were included, whereas the reasons for the request were not. For example, in the sentence “Unfortunately, I do not know any native speakers of English”, “unfortunately” was included in the corpus of negative words, but the fact that “I do not know any native speakers of English” was not. One more example is that in the sentence “If you are unable to do this, however, I completely understand”, “unable” was included in the corpus of negative words, whereas “ill” and “hospitalized” in the sentence “My mother has been ill and hospitalized for one month.” were not.

(C) Amount of information

The amount of information was indicated by the overall length of a letter or an e-mail. See Appendix P for the rules concerning word count.

(D) Formality

“Formality” subsumed two categories: 1) violations of formality, and 2) features of formality. The sub-categories of these two groups were listed in Chapter 1 (Section C, Part 2d) and repeated below:

(1) Violations of formality

For all the items in the sub-categories, the raw frequencies were counted and keyed into the SPSS data file. While it might be true that the raw frequency of “I”, “i”, and “u” might automatically be greater for A/B-grade students since they were more likely to write longer scripts than E-grade students did, raw frequency was still chosen as the unit of tabulation after the consideration of the problems with other possible options (refer to Chapter 1, Section C, Part 2d for an explanation of why occurrences of “I” were considered to violate formality):

Using percentages with the total length of a script as the divisor

A possible way to address the problem that a longer script might produce more uses of “I”, “i”, or “u” would be to divide the raw frequency of each of these sub-categories by the total number of words in the script. However, this would involve doing the same for all the sub-categories under “violations of formality” because it would also be possible that a longer script could involve more uses of the contracted form. However, doing this would distort the figures for some of the sub-categories. For example, it was doubtful whether there would be more instances of omission of the subject “I” in expressions like “I look forward to seeing you” in a longer script. Therefore for consistency and to avoid distorting figures, a more appropriate way would be to count the raw frequency of all the sub-categories within “violations of formality”.

Using percentages with the number of sentences as the divisor

Using the number of sentences as the divisor would result in different quotients depending on whether two clauses were expressed in one or two sentences. For example, in the sentence "I have been absent for ten hours because I have had an accident", there are two "I"s. If the raw frequency of "I" were divided by the number of sentences, the quotient would be "2" (2 "I" to be divided by 1 "sentence"); however, if the student broke that sentence into two, as in "I have been absent for ten hours. I have had an accident", the quotient would be 1 (2 "I" to be divided by 2 "sentences"). Apparently, using the number of sentences as the divisor would be problematic because the numbers of "I"s in both versions are the same -- two "I"s.

Using percentages with the number of T-units as the divisor

Similarly, using "T-unit" as the denominator would be misleading. In the first version of the previous sentence, the quotient would be 2 (2 "I"s to be divided by 1 "T-unit"). However, in the second version, the quotient would be 1 (2 "I"s to be divided by 2 "T-units"). Again, the numbers of "I" in both versions are the same – two "I"s. Therefore using "T-unit" as the divisor would also be misleading.

The option of setting an arbitrary length for controlling the length of a script

One way to control the possible effect that the length of a script might have on the frequency of the sub-categories measuring formality would be to set a word limit, after which the script would not be analyzed. However, the appearance of some supportive moves, such as “compliments”, “acknowledging imposition”, might appear in the later part of a script, so setting a certain word limit for a script would distort the figures.

Because of the problems with other options, raw frequency was used as the unit of tabulation. This decision was further confirmed after the consideration of the following three situations:

Situation A: If the number of instances showing violation of formality found in the scripts written by A/B-grade students (named as A/B scripts hereafter) was significantly LOWER than that found in the scripts written Grade E students (named as E scripts hereafter), a strong claim could be made about the stronger pragmatic ability of A/B-grade students because the number of instances showing violation of formality was still lower regardless of the possible greater letter length.

Situation B: When the instances showing violation of formality found in A/B scripts were LOWER (but not significantly) than those found in the E scripts, a weak claim could be made about the stronger pragmatic ability of

A/B grade students.

Situation C: If the instances showing violation of formality found in A/B scripts were significantly GREATER than those found in the E scripts, it would be inconclusive whether the greater number was due to a longer script or due to the poorer pragmatic knowledge of A/B grade students.

Although Situation C – the most unfavorable one out of the three situations – might occur, it was still necessary to use raw frequency as the unit of tabulation for the reasons previously discussed.

(2) Features of formality

The sub-categories under "features of formality" were listed in Chapter 1 (Section 2) and repeated below for easy reference:

- Use of modal verbs "would", "could" and "may" to introduce a head act
- Complexity of sentence structure, using Mean T-unit length (MTL) as a measure

The rules used in this study to handle some irregularities regarding the count of T-units are provided in Appendix Q.

2. Measuring students' pragmatic performance using authentic data

a. Independent variables

Genre – The authentic letters and authentic e-mails written by E-grade students were used to determine whether E-grade students wrote in only one register in both genres when making formal request.

Considerations concerning the choice of the letter and e-mail genre

The choice of the letter genre was based on the assumption that it should be a valid genre to be used for examining whether L2 learners would be able to write in a formal register for the formal requests specified in the writing task. As discussed earlier, letters are generally used for both formal and informal communication, and competent writers write formal letters or informal letters depending on various factors, such as the nature of the request and their relationship to the addressee. Therefore, letters should be the appropriate genre to examine whether students in this study are aware of the need to use a formal register when responding to the three formal requests in this study. The e-mail genre was chosen for examination in this study because it has been a highly popular mode of communication between students and teachers over the past ten years. If it were found that there were no significant differences across the two genres in terms of pragmatic measures, it could be concluded that E-grade subjects in this study used only one register to write the messages, no matter whether the messages were conveyed via the letter or e-mail genre.

Regarding the choice of the e-mail genre, it might be argued that e-mails do not seem to be a valid genre for examining students' awareness of the existence of a formal register because the genre itself is often associated with informal language. Therefore, even if a student were to use informal language in making a formal request, it would not necessarily mean that the student was unaware of the existence of a formal register; rather, the student might think that the language used in an e-mail should be informal. Further, it may be argued that an informal register may be preferable to a formal one if the message is conveyed via e-mail. Despite these concerns, the e-mail genre was still chosen for examination because it was considered that it would be interesting to investigate the features of the register used in authentic e-mails written by L2 learners of English.

b. Dependent variables

Only "formality" was examined with the authentic data.

c. Student participants, data collection and instrumentation

Forty authentic letters and forty authentic e-mails were chosen from the messages sent to the department head of the ELC between 2004 and 2007. Two topics were involved with these eighty scripts: one focused on the request concerning their unsatisfactory attendance rates, and the other was focused on the request concerning the re-scheduling of their examination dates.

Choosing the topics for the authentic letters

The following method was used to generate the topics based on which eighty scripts were chosen from the pile of authentic letters/e-mails collected:

Three main categories could be used to classify the authentic scripts submitted to the department head of the ELC:

- Requesting special consideration for having failed to meet the minimum attendance requirement (requesting the permission either to sit for the final exam despite the unsatisfactory attendance rate or to drop the course after the official add-drop period was over)
- Requesting to have the end-of-course examination rescheduled owing to various personal reasons that made the student unable to attend the original examination,
- Miscellaneous topics

To control the possible effects that a number of different topics might have on students' pragmatic performance more fully, only the scripts of the first two topics were included in this study.

In the selection process, Year 1 students' scripts were given preference because a formal register could be the result of increasing maturity among the subject population rather than the result of the genre in which the message was conveyed. However, Year 2 students' scripts had to be

included for the topic of “Attendance” because of an insufficient supply of Year 1 scripts (Table 9).

Table 9 The makeup of authentic e-mails and authentic letters

	Authentic letters	**Authentic e-mails**
Topic: Special consideration for having failed to meet the minimum attendance rate	20 [All the scripts requesting permission to sit for the final exam] [12 scripts written by Year 1 students; 6 scripts written by Year2/3 students; 2 scripts could not be identified by students' year (Year 2/3 or Year 1 students) (The scripts written by Year 2/3 students needed to be included in the analysis because there was an insufficient supply of scripts from Year 1 students.)	20 [15 scripts requesting permission to attend the final exam; 5 scripts requesting "late drop" of a course] [13 scripts written by Year 1 students; 3 scripts written by Year2/3 students; 4 scripts could not be identified by students' year (Year 2/3 or Year 1 students) (The scripts written by Year 2/3 students needed to be included in the analysis because there was an insufficient supply of scripts from Year 1 students.)
Topic: Examination rescheduling	20 (All the scripts were written by Year 1 students)	20 (All the scripts were written by Year 1 students)
Total	40	40

Means of identifying a Year 1 or Year 2/3 script

The following means was employed to determine whether a script was written by a Year 1 or Year 2/3 student when the writer had not provided this information in the script.

Basically, the course a writer mentioned in the script was used as the indicator of whether s/he was a Year 1 or Year 2/3 student. A script in which an elective course was mentioned was not chosen (had there been an adequate number of Year 1 scripts) because electives were more likely to be taken by Year 2/3 students, whereas a script mentioning a core course was used because core courses were usually taken by Year 1 students. Examples of core courses were: “Spoken Language” (for Bachelor’s Degree), “Written Language” (for Bachelor’s Degree), “College Writing” (for Associate Degree), “College Speaking” (for Associate Degree) and “Reading & Listening” (for Associate Degree); examples of elective courses were: “Current Issues”, and “Pronunciation”.

While there was no absolute guarantee that core courses would be taken by Year 1 students, there was a very high probability that students taking core courses were Year 1 students because Year 1 students were assigned to take one of the core courses in the first semester in the first year of their university education.

d. Unexpected technical problems

As Table 9 shows, there were not enough authentic scripts written by Year 1 students for the "attendance" topic, so eight letters and seven e-mails from Year 2/3 students had to be used. In the original design of this study, the factor of maturity was meant to be controlled by using only scripts from Year 1 students since one or two more years of university education might contribute to a higher level of pragmatic performance.

Fortunately, the inclusion of scripts from Year 2/3 students did not seem to have any noticeable effect on the findings perhaps because the numbers of Year2/3 scripts added to both genres were essentially equivalent: eight scripts for letters and seven scripts for e-mails. It is also possible that one or two years of university education did not appear very useful in improving students' pragmatic performance, especially among students who were not English majors. Perhaps the combination of Year 1 and Year 2/3 scripts for each genre need not have been controlled in the first place.

e. Data analysis of the authentic data

For the authentic data, only the formality level between the letter genre and the e-mail genre was examined for the confirmation of Hypothesis 4. The analysis of other pragmatic aspects in Template 1, namely, "politeness", "directness", and "amount of information", was not repeated with the authentic data. Template 2b was used.

Template 2b differed from Template 2a in that sub-category 8_11 (“problems with the closing salutation including inappropriate choice of the closing salutation, inappropriate spelling and upper/lower case of “Yours sincerely”, and the use of one’s own first name”) was removed because, in some of the authentic scripts, the closing salutations (including the names of the letter writers) were deliberately erased by the General Office of the ELC in order to protect the privacy of the letter/e-mail writers.

The frequencies of the sub-categories in Template 2b were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS.

Comparing the forty authentic letters with the forty authentic e-mails provided an answer to the question of whether E/grade students wrote in only one register in both the authentic letters and authentic e-mails; however, whether the register used tended towards the informal end involved the inspection of the findings obtained in the previous two parts of this research study: the part comparing A/B-grade students with E-grade students, and the part examining the sixteen raters’ pragmatic judgments of students’ pragmatic performance. The inspection of findings from these parts provided some clues to the question being addressed.

C. Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of data entry and data analysis

1. Ensuring the accuracy of entering teacher and student data into SPSS

a. Teacher data

The data collected from the 192 copies (16 teachers, each completing 12 questionnaires) of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire were first transferred to templates to compile the qualitative and quantitative feedback from the 16 raters. Using the template to organize the data facilitated easy data entry to the SPSS data file and easy recognition of the patterns of the teachers' qualitative feedback.

Subsequently, the data organized in the template were keyed into the SPSS data file. Each bit of information keyed into the SPSS data file was double-checked immediately against the hard copy of the template.

Finally, the SPSS data file was printed out, and all the data recorded in the hard copy of the SPSS data file were scrutinized to see whether there were any such irregularities as missing data due to human errors before statistical tests were run.

b. Student data

The data collected from the 120 letters written under experimental condition and the 80 authentic scripts were tabulated using Template 1, Template 2a, and Template 2b. The information recorded in the hard copies of the completed templates was transferred to the SPSS data file. Each bit of information keyed in the SPSS data file was double-checked immediately against that the hard copy of the template before the next bit of information was keyed in.

Subsequently, the SPSS data file was printed out, and all the data recorded were scrutinized to see whether there were any such irregularities as missing data due to human errors before statistical tests were run.

2. Ensuring the reliability of the outcome of categorization

The categorization was done by me only. The reasons for having only one person doing the categorization were twofold:

- It would be too costly to involve even one more person in tabulating 120 scripts and 80 authentic scripts.
- The process of tabulation, which inherently involved setting some rules about how to classify any given structure, was circular in the sense that rules set previously needed to be modified to accommodate unexpected instances found in new scripts. After any given rule had been modified, it was necessary to re-tabulate the scripts previously analyzed using the modified rule. For example, to decide whether a

supportive move should be counted as “showing regret” or as “apologizing”, the whole script had to be read again and each supportive move had to be re-considered.

The exploratory nature of this tabulation task made it difficult to involve another person in the process. First, it would be difficult to find a person who would be available at any time when a new rule had to be set. The need to wait for a meeting time would delay the whole process of data analysis. Second, the reliability of the results of categorization would be higher with only one person tabulating all the scripts than having a team of two or three people because the element of subjectivity, which would inevitably exist in the process of categorization, would be hard to eliminate even with the existence of a training session to explain the rules of how to categorize any given linguistic structure.

While the analysis was done by only one person, the following measures were taken to ensure the reliability of the findings:

- Each item in the analysis framework (i.e., such as the use of “could” to introduce a head act) was counted at least twice to assure that the same figure was obtained. In fact, it was not uncommon for a script to be tabulated more than twice, especially when any given rule regarding the structures appearing in the script had been modified.

- On average, each script was checked against the rules established for this study about four times over a period of about two months between April 2007 and June 2007.

D. Pilot tests for the research tools

1. The three writing topics

In January 2005, the first version (Appendix R) of the three writing topics was given to four classes of students taking "Language Skills for Research Projects" offered by the ELC of the City University of Hong Kong. The four classes were taught by two teachers, each one teaching two classes. There were about sixteen students in each class, and the students' voluntary participation was solicited. In the pilot test, students were given about 40 minutes to complete the three letters. No specification was made regarding how much time should be assigned to each letter.

The following modifications were made after the pilot test based on the teachers' feedback and the students' performance on the letters:

- The writing time was extended to 60 minutes.
- It was suggested that each letter should be given about 20 minutes.
- Class teachers were reminded of the necessity to encourage students to finish all three letters and were asked to inform the students that if a student finished only two letters, his/her data would be eliminated from the study.
- The importance of writing politely, which was the research focus of this study, was stated explicitly in the writing instruction because it

was assumed possible that students were not aware of the importance of writing politely, although it was stated in the instruction that the addressees were the department head and their teachers. The instruction added to each of the writing topics was: "The success of such a request will obviously depend upon its being phrased as politely as possible."

2. The Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire and the Personal Background Questionnaire

In early June 2006, three pilot tests for the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire and the Personal Background Questionnaire were conducted with three teachers who worked in the ELC. On 1 June 2006, the first pilot test was conducted in a classroom with a British female teacher who worked in the ELC. On 6 June 2006, a second pilot test was conducted in a classroom with a Cantonese female teacher. On 13 June 2006, the third pilot test was conducted in the ELC Conference Room with a Cantonese female teacher.

No male teachers were involved in the pilot tests because, owing to the small number of male teachers available in the department, male teachers in the ELC had to be reserved for the actual rating task.

The teacher who participated in the first pilot test was provided with the twelve letters, the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaires, and the Personal Background Questionnaire. After she finished rating the letters, she

returned the completed questionnaires to the researcher. An arrangement for an interview with the resercher was then made. After the interview, the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire and the Personal Judgment Background questionnaire were modified based on her comments and suggestions. The same procedure was adopted for the second and third pilot tests.

Second drafts of the two questionnaires were produced after the first pilot test. Third drafts of the two questionnaires were produced after the second pilot test. Final versions of the two questionnaires were produced after the third pilot test.

The three drafts of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire are shown in Appendix S and the three drafts of the Personal Background Questionnaire are shown in Appendix T. The interviews for these three pilot tests were also transcribed.

a. The major modifications made to the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire after the first pilot test

- For Question 1, the rating of "5" (meaning "excessively polite") was modified to "5+" (meaning "very polite, showing approval") and "5-" (meaning "unnaturally polite, showing disapproval".
- For Question 3, the term "request strategies" was replaced with the term "supportive moves". The meaning of the term "supportive move" was also provided.

- For Question 9, the term “exact request” was replaced with the term “head act”. The meaning of the term “head act” was also provided.
- For Question 11, the scale of “1 – 2 –3 – 4 - 5” for the opinions about the use of negative words was changed to the categories of “U” (meaning “useful”), “CP” (meaning “counter-productive”) and “N” (meaning “neither useful nor counter-productive”). In addition, instead of asking for the overall opinions about all the negative words underlined, the raters were required to give individual comments for each of the underlined words.
- For Question 14, the factors influencing the raters’ overall ratings for the whole letter were added for more information about the decision making process.

b. The major modifications made to the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire after the second pilot test

- Question 3 (about the appropriateness of the supportive moves) was divided into two questions: one about the quantity of the supportive moves, and the other about the quality of the supportive moves.
- For Question 14, the condition “if the rating is below 3” in “If the rating is below 3, please tick the box(es) that show the main reason(s) for your rating” was deleted. This was meant to lower the possibility that some raters might give a rating of “4” or above merely to avoid having to answer the following question, which was to indicate the main factors influencing their decisions.
- For Question 14, more categories were provided in the list.

c. The major modifications made to the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire after the third pilot test

For Question 14, the categories influencing the raters' overall ratings were streamlined. Only four categories, which were the four pragmatic dimensions to be examined, remained.

d. The major modifications made to the Personal Background Questionnaire after three pilot tests

- The question about the rater's nationality was deleted. The reason is that nationality did not seem to have a close relationship with the first language a rater speaks.
- The first language of a rater's students was included in the questionnaire. It was assumed that this information might be useful for the interpretation of researching findings.

These modifications were made after the first pilot test, and no further modification was made after the second and third pilot tests.

Notes

1. https://eportal.cityu.edu.hk/bbcswebdav/users/elkwaipe/2008%20April%20Transcriptions%20of%20interviews/One%20document%20containing%2016%20interviews%20and%20three%20pilot%20interviews.doc

2. https://eportal.cityu.edu.hk/bbcswebdav/users/elkwaipe/2008%20April%20Compiled%20Data%20File/Compiled%20Data%20File.doc

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

All findings arrived at are based entirely on the data in this study, and therefore apply exclusively to them. It should also be borne in mind that these conclusions do not extend, except very tentatively, beyond these data.

Teacher data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, whereas the student data were analyzed only quantitatively. The section presenting quantitative findings about the teacher data (for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2) and the student data (for Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4) will be reported first, followed by the section "Supplementary Analysis", which includes two parts: 1) analysis of the pragmatic performance in the six letters written by two B/C-grade working adults and two E-grade students, 2) qualitative findings about Questions 1 and 2. Part of the qualitative findings concerning Question 1 will be used to supplement the quantitative findings of Question 4, and the qualitative findings regarding Question 2 will constitute pedagogical suggestions for EFL teachers. Since these findings are not directly related to the testing of the four research hypotheses in this study, they will be presented here as supplementary information. In other words, the research represented in this dissertation is intended as a contribution to scholarship; however, in keeping with the focus of the professional doctorate, the motivation for this research is drawn essentially from the practical concern of teaching L2 learners. Given that consideration, I have devised a set of supplementary analyses attached to the thesis. It is my intent in the near future to compile a textbook for teachers presenting some of this information in an easily accessible form.

This chapter will contain only objective findings, summaries and brief explanations of the meaning of the results obtained. Detailed explanations of the meaning of these results and speculations underlying causes will be presented in Chapter 5 (Discussion).

A. Quantitative findings related to Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 states that there are no significant differences between native Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers (CSTs) and native English-speaking EFL teachers (ESTs) in terms of pragmatic judgment.

For the twelve questions analyzed quantitatively, eight questions (Questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13 and 14) measured sixteen teachers' judgments on the pragmatic performance of twelve letters in terms of the scores and categories they assigned to the letters. The remaining four questions (Questions 5, 6, 10 and 12) examined the pragmatic preferences of sixteen teachers in terms of supportive moves, writing plans and negative/positive words they would use if they were to write the letters for the three topics themselves. Findings about the teachers' judgments on the twelve letters will be presented first, followed by the findings concerning their own writing preferences.

1. Individual questions

Question 3 The appropriateness of supportive moves

Table 10 shows that the mean score reported by CSTs for the appropriateness of the supportive moves (M=3.13, SD=1.207) was not significantly different (t=-0.664, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.508) from that reported by ESTs (M=3.24, SD=1.185) at $p < 0.05$.

Table 10 Differences in the mean scores reported by CSTs and ESTs for the appropriateness of supportive moves as shown by *t* tests

	Group Mean	***SD***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
CSTs	3.13	1.207	-0.664	190	0.508 (NOT SIGN)
ESTs	3.24	1.185			

Question 4 Overall politeness of the letter

The frequencies of the six categories indicating different levels of politeness chosen by CSTs and ESTs were subjected to a Proportional t test (Table 11).

Table 11 Differences in the frequencies of politeness categories chosen by CSTs and ESTs as shown by Proportional *t* test at 95% confidence level

Table 11a "Very impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
3.1	3.1	0.00	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 11b "Impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
13.5	17.7	0.63	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 11c "Neither polite nor impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
19.8	15.6	0.76	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 11d "Polite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
35.4	30.2	0.77	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 11e "Very polite showing approval"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
21.9	15.6	1.12	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 11f "Unnaturally polite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
6.3	17.7	2.43	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

As can be seen from Table 11, CSTs and ESTs showed no significance differences in the numbers of letters they classified into the five politeness categories at 95% confidence level: "very impolite" (CSTs:3.1%; ESTs: 3.1%; z=0.00), "impolite" (CSTs:13.5%; ESTs:17.7%; z=0.63), "neither polite nor impolite" (CSTs:19.8%; ESTs:15.6%; z=0.76), "polite"

(CSTs:35.4%; ESTs:30.2%; z=0.77), and “very polite” (CSTs:21.9%; ESTs:15.6%; z=1.12).

However, the number of letters classified as “unnaturally polite” by ESTs (17.7%) was significantly greater (z=2.43, p<0.05) than that by CSTs (6.3%).

Question 7 Register classification

As can be seen from Table 12, the numbers of letters classified by CSTs as “formal” (58.3%), “informal” (17.7%), and “hard to categorize” (24%) were not significantly different (z=0.57, z=0.16, and z=0.51 respectively) from those of the letters classified by ESTs as “formal” (53.1%), “informal” (18.8%), and “hard to categorize” (28.1%) at 95% confidence level.

Table 12 Differences in "formality/informality" categories chosen by CSTs and ESTs as shown by Proportional *t* test at 95% confidence level

Table 12a “Formal”

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	N2						
60	60		99%	95%	90%	80%	68%
P1	P2	Z-VALUE	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
58.3	53.1	0.57	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

Table 12b "Informal"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
17.7	18.8	0.16	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

Table 12c "Hard to categorize"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
24	28.1	0.51	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

Question 8 Appropriateness of the register

As can be seen from Table 13, the mean score reported by CSTs (M=3.2, SD=1.253) for the appropriateness of the register was not significantly different (t=0.527, df=189.759, 2-tailed p=0.599) from that of ESTs (M=3.1, SD=1.209) at $p<0.05$.

Table 13 Differences in the mean scores reported by CSTs and ESTs for the appropriateness of the register as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
CSTs	3.2	1.253	0.527	189.759	0.599 (NOT SIGN)
ESTs	3.1	1.209			

Question 9 Appropriateness of the position of the head act

As can be seen in Table 14, the mean score reported by CSTs for the appropriateness of the position of the head act (M=3.20, SD=1.130) was not significantly different (t=0.061, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.952) from that reported by ESTs (M=3.19, SD=1.242) at $p<0.05$.

Table 14 Differences in the mean scores reported for the appropriateness of the position of the head act by CSTs and ESTs as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
CSTs	3.20	1.130	0.061	190	0.952 (NOT SIGN)
ESTs	3.19	1.242			

Question 11 Usefulness of "negative" elements

A total of 21 "negative" expressions used in the twelve letters were provided to the sixteen teachers to classify into three categories ("useful", "counter-productive" and "neutral"). The frequencies and percentages of the three categories chosen are shown in Appendix U (total frequencies and percentages for 21 "negative" expressions) and Appendix V (individual frequencies and percentages for each "negative" expression).

As can be seen from Table 15a, the number of "negative" expressions classified by CSTs as "useful" (35.2%) was not significantly different (z=1.79) from that by ESTs (26.2%) at the 95% confidence level.

As can be seen from Table 15b, the number of “negative” expressions classified by ESTs as “counter-productive” (47.6%) was significantly greater (z=2.31) than that by CSTs (35.2%) at the 95% confidence level.

As can be seen from Table 15c, the number of “negative” expressions classified by CSTs as “neutral” (29.8%) was not significantly different (z=0.73) from that by ESTs (26.2%) at the 95% confidence level.

Table 15 Differences in the three categories chosen by CSTs and ESTs concerning the usefulness of “negative” expressions, as shown by Proportional *t* tests at 95% confidence level

Table 15a “Useful”

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
168	168		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
35.2	26.2	1.79	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 15b “Counter-productive”

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
168	168		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
35.2	47.6	2.31	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Table 15c "Neutral"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
168	168		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
29.8	26.2	0.73	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1=CSTs, Sample 2=ESTs)

Question 11: Summary of the findings

There were no significant differences in the numbers of "negative" expressions classified as "useful" and "neutral" between CSTs and ESTs; however, the number of "negative" expressions classified by ESTs as "counter-productive" was significantly greater than that by CSTs at the 95% confidence level.

Question 13 Amount of information

As can be seen from Table 16, the mean score reported by CSTs for the appropriateness of the amount of information in a letter (M=3.13, SD=1.207) was not significantly different (t=-0.058, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.954) from that reported by ESTs (M=3.14, SD=1.278) at $p<0.05$.

Table 16 Differences in the mean scores reported by CSTs and ESTs for the appropriateness of the amount of information in a letter as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
CSTs	3.13	1.207	-0.058	190	0.954 (NOT SIGN)
ESTs	3.14	1.278			

Question 14 Overall appropriateness of a letter

As can be seen from Table 17, the mean score reported by CSTs for the overall appropriateness of the letter (M=3.03, SD=1.252) was not significantly different (t=-0.697, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.487) from that reported by ESTs (M=3.16, SD=1.234) at $p<0.05$.

Table 17 Differences in the mean scores reported for the overall appropriateness of a letter by CSTs and ESTs as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
CSTs	3.03	1.252	-0.697	190	0.487 (NOT SIGN)
ESTs	3.16	1.234			

Question 5 Supportive move regarded as most important

Q5 asked each teacher to choose the six most important supportive moves (hereafter referred to as SMs) from a list of twelve. Each of the sixteen teachers ranked the six options from “1” to “6” (“1” meaning “the most important SM”, and “6” meaning “the least important SM”).

Only the findings about SMs ranked “1” will be reported. Findings regarding SMs ranked “2” to “6” will not be presented because analyzing each of the six rankings would not only expand the process of data analysis but also complicate the findings, especially when considering the findings regarding each of the three topics will be reported individually and comparisons will be made between CSTs and ESTs as well as between female teachers and male teachers. Reporting the SMs ranked “1” is considered to be sufficient to show the general preferences of sixteen teachers regarding the most important SMs they would use if they were to write the letters.

When each of three topics was considered individually, the results of Proportional *t* test for a certain SM will be presented only when there is a significant difference between two groups of teachers because listing twelve tables showing Proportional *t* test results for each of three topics would make this part excessively long.

Findings about the numbers of SMs ranked “1” by CSTs and ESTs are shown in Table 18 (in raw frequencies) and Table 19 (in percentages).

The conversion from raw frequencies to percentages is necessary to allow the use of the Proportional *t* test. The denominator is 8 when each topic is considered individually. The reason that 8 is the denominator is that, for each topic, a total of eight CSTs ranked a certain SM “1”, so the total

number of SMs ranked “1” was eight, although the choice of SM could be different for each teacher. Other ratings such as those for “2”, “3” or “4”, had they been counted, would also have the same total number of 8. However, the total number for rating “5” or “6” might be less than 8 because some teaches chose only four or five SMs (rather than six) as the most important SMs.

Table 18 The SMs ranked “1” (the most important) by CSTs and ESTs (in raw frequencies)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**C**	2	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	E	5	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Topic 2	**C**	3	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
	E	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Topic 3	**C**	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
	E	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0

(“**C”** - CSTs; “**E”** - ESTs)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness)

Table 19 The SMs ranked "1"(the most important) by CSTs and ESTs (in percentages)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**C**	25	12.5	0	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	12.5	0
	E	62.5	0	0	12.5	0	0	12.5	0	0	0	12.5	0
Topic 2	**C**	37.5	25	0	12.5	0	0	12.5	0	0	12.5	0	0
	E	50	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12.5	12.5	0
Topic 3	**C**	50	0	0	12.5	12.5	0	0	0	0	25	0	0
	E	37.5	12.5	0	0	0	12.5	12.5	0	0	25	0	0

("**C**" - CSTs; "**E**" - ESTs)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness)

As can be seen from Table 20, there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for all twelve SMs ranked "1" (the most important) at the 95% confidence level for Topic 1, Topic 2 and Topic 3. (The SMs rated as most important by at least two teachers out of sixteen are listed in Appendix CC.)

Table 20 Differences in the supportive moves ranked "1" (the most important) by CSTs and ESTs, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
SM 1	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 2	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 3	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 4	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 5	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 6	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 8	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 9	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 10	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 11	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 12	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At 95% confidence level)

Question 5: Summary of findings

There were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for all twelve SMs ranked "1" (the most important) for Topic 1, Topic 2 and Topic 3.

Question 6 The supportive moves teachers would definitely not use

Q6 asked each of the sixteen teachers to choose the SMs they would definitely not use if they were to write the three letters from the list provided in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire. They could choose more than one SM from the list provided.

The findings about SMs chosen by CSTs and ESTs as the SMs they would definitely not use are shown in Table 21 (in raw frequencies) and Table 22 (in percentages).

Table 21 The SMs chosen by CSTs and ESTs as the SMs they would definitely not use (in raw frequencies)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**C**	0	1	2	0	4	3	0	1	3	0	0	2
	E	0	0	3	0	4	1	0	0	6	0	1	8
Topic 2	**C**	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3	7	0	5	5
	E	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	2	4	0	3	7
Topic 3	**C**	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	6	0	5	6
	E	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	4	2	0	6	8

("**C**" - CSTs; "**E**" - ESTs)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness

Table 22 The SMs chosen by CSTs and ESTs as the SMs they would definitely not use (in percentages)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**C**	0	12.5	25	0	50	37.5	0	12.5	37.5	0	0	25
	E	0	0	37.5	0	50	12.5	0	0	75	0	12.5	100
Topic 2	**C**	0	0	0	0	25	12.5	0	37.5	87.5	0	62.5	62.5
	E	0	0	37.5	0	25	0	0	25	50	0	37.5	87.5
Topic 3	**C**	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	50	75	0	62.5	75
	E	0	0	0	0	50	12.5	0	50	25	0	75	100

("**C**" - CSTs; "**E**" - ESTs)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness

As can be seen from Table 23, the SMs chosen by CSTs and ESTS as the SMs they themselves would not use if they were to write for three topics were not significantly different except for "forgiveness" for Topic 1 and "compensation" for Topic 3. For Topic 1, significantly more ESTs (100%) chose SM12 ("forgiveness") as the SM they would definitely not use than did CSTs (25%) at the 99% confidence level (z=3.10) **(**Table 24). For Topic 3, as can be seen from Table 25, SM 9 ("compensation") was chosen by significantly more CSTs (75%) than by ESTs (25%) at 95% confidence level (z=2.00).

Table 23 Differences in the supportive moves chosen by CSTs and ESTs as the SMs they themselves would not use, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3
SM 1	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 2	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 3	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 4	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 5	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 6	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 8	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 9	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	SIGN
SM 10	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 11	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 12	SIGN	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At 95% confidence level)

Table 24 Topic 1 SM12

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
8	8		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
25	100	3.10	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

Table 25 Topic 3 SM 9

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	N2						
8	8		99%	95%	90%	80%	68%
P1	P2	Z-VALUE	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
75	25	2.00	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

Question 6: Summary of the findings

For Topic 1, significantly more ESTs chose SM12 ("forgiveness") as a SM they would definitely not use than did CSTs.

For Topic 2, there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for each of the SMs chosen as a SM they would definitely not use.

For Topic 3, significantly more CSTs chose SM 9 ("compensation") as a SM they would definitely not use than did ESTs.

Question 10 Writing plans preferred by sixteen teachers

Q10 asked each teacher to choose the writing plan s/he would prefer to use if he/she were to write the letter. Each teacher indicated his/her choice from the four options provided in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire.

In Plan 1 ("preparing" + "background" + "request"), the writer starts the letter by preparing the reader for the coming request, then s/he proceeds to provide some background information about the request, and finally s/he

asks for what s/he wants from the addressee.

In Plan 2 (“preparing” + “request” + “background”), the writer starts the letter by preparing the reader for the coming request, then s/he asks for what s/he wants from the addressee, and finally s/he provides some background information about the request.

In Plan 3 (“background” +”request”), the writer starts the letter by providing some background information about the request, and then s/he proceeds to ask for what s/he wants from the addressee.

In Plan 4 (“request” + “background”), the writer starts the letter by asking for what s/he wants from the addressee, and then s/he provides some background information about the request.

Findings about writing plans chosen by CSTs and ESTs as the plans they would use for each of three topics are shown in Table 26.

Table 26 Writing plans chosen by CSTs and ESTs as the plan they would use (in both raw frequencies and percentages)

		Writing plans			
		Plan 1	**Plan 2**	**Plan 3**	**Plan 4**
Topic 1	**C**	1/8=12.5%	3/8=37.5%	1/8=12.5%	3/8=37.5%
	E	1/8=12.5%	6/8=75%	0/8=0%	1/8=12.5%
Topic 2	**C**	1/8=25%	3/8=37.5%	1/8=12.5%	3/8=25%
	E	0/8=0%	8/8=100%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%
Topic 3	**C**	3/8=37.5%	3/8=37.5%	0/8=0%	2/8=25%
	E	1/8=12.5%	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%

("**C**" - CSTs; "**E**" - ESTs)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

As can be seen from Table 27, there is no significant difference between CSTs and ESTs for each of the writing plans at the 95% confidence level for Topic 1. However, significantly more ESTs (100%) chose Plan 2 than did CSTs (37.5%) for Topic 2 (z=2.70) at the 99% confidence level (Table 28). Similarly, significantly more ESTs (87.5%) chose Plan 2 than did CSTs (37.5%) for Topic 3 (z=2.07) at the 95% confidence level (Table 29).

Table 27 Differences in the numbers of CSTs and ESTs preferring the four writing plans for the three topics, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
Plan 1	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
Plan 2	NOT SIGN*	SIGN	SIGN
Plan 3	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
Plan 4	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At the 95% confidence level)

Table 28 Topic 2 Plan 2

Sample1	**Sample2**		**CONFIDENCE LEVEL**				
N1	**N2**						
8	8		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
37.5	100	2.70	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

Table 29 Topic 3 Plan 2

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
8	8		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
37.5	87.5	2.07	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = CSTs, Sample 2 = ESTs)

The dominant plan chosen by CSTs and ESTs for each of the three topics

As can be seen from Table 26**,** for each of the three topics, Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of ESTs (**Topic 1**: 75%; **Topic 2**: 100%; **Topic 3:** 87.5%). However, for each of the three writing topics, no single plan was chosen by the majority of CSTs (**Topic 1**: 12.5% for Plan 1, 37.5% for Plan 2, 12.5% for Plan 3, 37.5% for Plan 4; **Topic 2**: 25% for Plan 1, 37.5% for Plan 2, 12.5% for Plan 3, 25% for Plan 4; **Topic 3**: 37.5% for Plan 1, 37.5% for Plan 2, 0% for Plan 3, 25% for Plan 4).

A category is considered to have been chosen by the "majority" of teachers in a group if the first and the second highest percentages of teachers who chose that category show a significant difference at the 95% confidence level, as shown by Proportional *t* test.

For example, for Topic 2, Plan 2 was chosen by 50% of female teachers, but this percentage was not counted as representing the majority of female teachers because there was no significant difference between “50%” (the first highest percentage) and “12.5%” (the second highest percentage) at the 95% confidence level **(**Table 30**).**

Table 30 The difference between two percentages for a sample containing eight participants, as shown by Proportional *t* test

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
8	8		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
50	12.5	1.62	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

Question 10: Summary of findings

For Topic 1, there was no significant difference between CSTs and ESTs for each of the writing plans.

For Topics 2 and 3, Plan 2 was chosen by significantly more ESTs than by CSTs. Plan 2 was the only plan that showed a significant difference between CSTs and ESTs for these two topics.

For each of the three writing topics, Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of ESTs, but no single plan was chosen by the majority of CSTs.

Question 12 Tendency to use negative/positive words

Findings about the choices made by CSTs and ESTs regarding their inclination to use negative/positive words (in both raw frequencies and percentages) are shown in Table 31**.**

Table 31 Choices made by CSTs and ESTs regarding their inclination to use negative/positive words (in both raw frequencies and percentages)

		Tendency to use negative/positive words		
		"Would use as many positive words as possible"	**"Not necessary to use positive words to express ideas that can be said directly by using negative words"**	**"Other"**
Topic 1	**C**	5/8=62.5%	1/8=12.5%	2/8=25%
	E	6/8=75%	2/8=25%	0/8=0%
Topic 2	**C**	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	1/8=12.5%
	E	8/8=100%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%
Topic 3	**C**	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	1/8=12.5%
	E	8/8=100%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%

("**C**" - CSTs; "**E**" - ESTs)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

As can be seen from Table 32**,** there are no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs in their choices regarding the tendency to use negative/positive words for Topic 1, Topic 2 and Topic 3 at the 95% confidence level.

Table 32 The differences in the tendency to use negative/positive words between CSTs and ESTs, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
"Would use as many positive words as possible"	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
"Not necessary to use positive words to express ideas that can be said directly by using negative words"	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
"Other"	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At the 95% confidence level)

As can be seen from Table 31, the category "use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of CSTs and ESTs for each of the three topics (**CSTs:** .62.5% for Topic 1, 87.5% for Topic 2, 87.5% for Topic 3; **ESTs:** 75% for Topic 1, 100% for Topic 2, 100% for Topic 3).

Question 12: Summary of findings

For Topics 1, 2 and 3, there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs in their choices regarding the tendency to use negative/positive words.

For each of the three topics, the category "use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of CSTs and ESTs.

2. Summary and the meaning of results concerning Hypothesis 1

a. Summary

- **Questions measuring teachers' judgments on twelve letters**

There were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs in their judgments on the twelve letters regarding the following aspects:

Appropriateness of supportive moves (Question 3);

Classification of register (Question 7);

Appropriateness of the register (Question 8);

Appropriateness of the position of the head acts (Question 9);

Amount of information (Question 13);

Overall appropriateness of letters (Question 14).

However, for Question 4 ("overall politeness of the letters"), the number of letters classified as "unnaturally polite" by ESTs was significantly greater than that by CSTs. There were no significant differences in the remaining five politeness categories ("very polite", "polite", "neither polite nor impolite", "impolite" and "very impolite") between CSTs and ESTs.

For Question 11 ("usefulness of 'negative' expressions"), the number of "negative" expressions classified as "counter-productive" by ESTs was significantly greater than that by CSTs. There were no significant differences in the remaining two categories ("useful" and "neutral") between CSTs and ESTs.

- **Questions measuring teachers' preferences for supportive moves, writing plans and the tendency to use negative/positive words**

Question 5

There were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for all SMs ranked "1" ("the most important") for all three topics.

Question 12

There were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs regarding their tendency to use negative/positive words for all three topics.

The category "would use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of CSTs and ESTs.

However, CSTs and ESTs differed significantly in at least one of the categories for the remaining two questions measuring their pragmatic preferences if they were to write the three letters.

Question 6

For Topic 1, SM 12 ("forgiveness") was chosen by significantly more ESTs than by CSTs as a SM they would definitely not use.

For Topic 2, there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for each of the SMs chosen as the SMs they would definitely not use for Topic 2.

For Topic 3, SM 9 (“compensation”) was chosen by significantly more CSTs than by ESTs as a SM they would definitely not use.

Question 10

For Topic 1, there was no significant difference between CSTs and ESTs for each of the writing plans.

For Topics 2 and 3, Plan 2 was chosen by significantly more ESTs than by CSTs. Plan 2 was the only plan that showed a significant difference between CSTs and ESTs for these two topics.

For each of three topics, Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of ESTs; however, no plan was chosen by the majority of CSTs.

b. The meaning of results for Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed.

The findings suggest the most advanced language group of L2 learners in this study (i.e., CSTs) have achieved native-like pragmatic competence as far as their judgments on some pragmatic aspects are concerned. However, the differences between this group and the ESTs in some aspects of their pragmatic judgments (e.g., what constitutes “unnaturally polite” expressions) suggest that some pragmatic considerations might be culturally specific.

Detailed discussion about meaning of results and speculation underlying causes will be presented in Chapter 5.

B. Quantitative findings related to Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 states that there are no significant differences between female and male EFL teachers in their pragmatic judgment.

1. Individual questions

Question 3 Appropriateness of supportive moves

Table 33 shows that the mean score reported by female teachers for the appropriateness of supportive moves (M=3.14, SD=1.295) is not significantly different (t=-0.543, df=184.662, 2-tailed p=0.588) from that reported by male teachers (M=3.23, SD=1.090) at $p<0.05$.

Table 33 Differences in the scores reported by female and male teachers for the appropriateness of supportive moves as shown by *t* tests

	Group Mean	***SD***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Females	3.14	1.295	-0.543	184.662	0.588 (NOT SIGN)
Males	3.23	1.090			

Question 4 Overall politeness of the letter

The frequencies of six politeness categories chosen by female and male teachers were subjected to a Proportional *t* test (Table 34).

Table 34 Differences in the "politeness" categories chosen by female and male teachers as shown by Proportional *t* tests at 95% confidence level

Table 34 a "Very impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
5.2	1	1.68	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 34 b "Impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
13.5	17.7	0.80	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 34 c "Neither polite nor impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
16.7	18.8	0.38	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 34 d "Polite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
34.4	31.3	0.46	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 34 e "Very polite showing approval"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
20.8	16.7	0.73	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 34 f "Unnaturally polite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
96	96		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
9.4	14.6	1.11	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

As can be seen from Table 34, female and male teachers show no significant differences in the numbers of letters they classified into six politeness categories at 95% confidence level: "very impolite" (females: 5.2%; males:1.0%; z=1.68), "impolite" (females: 13.5%; males: 17.7; z=0.80), "neither polite nor impolite" (females: 16.7%; males: 18.8%; z=0.38),

"polite" (females: 34.4%; males: 31.3%; z=0.46), "very polite showing approval" (females: 20.8%; males:16.7%; z=0.73), and "unnaturally polite" (females: 9.4%; males; 14.6%; z=1.11).

Question 7 Register classification

As can be seen from Table 35, the numbers of letters classified by female teachers as "formal" (47.9%), and "informal" (17.7%) are not significantly different (z=1.72 and z=0.16 respectively) from those classified by male teachers as "formal" (63.5%), and "informal" (18.8%) at 95% confidence level.

However, the number of letters classified as "hard to categorize as either formal or informal" by female teachers (34.4%) is significantly greater (z=2.08) than that by male teachers (17.7%) at 95% confidence level.

Table 35 Differences in "formality/informality" categories chosen by female and male teachers as shown by Proportional *t* tests at 95% confidence level

Table 35a "Formal"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
47.9	63.5	1.72	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 35b "Informal"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
17.7	18.8	0.16	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Table 35c "Hard to categorize as either formal or informal"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
34.4	17.7	2.08	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

Question 8 Appropriateness of the register

As can be seen from Table 36, the mean score reported by female teachers (M=3.09, SD=1.266) for the appropriateness of the register is not significantly different (t=-0.645, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.520) from that reported by male teachers (M=3.21, SD=1.196) at $p<0.05$.

Table 36 Differences in the mean scores reported by female and male teachers for the appropriateness of the register as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Females	3.09	1.266	-0.645	190	0.520 (NOT SIGN)
Males	3.21	1.196			

Question 9 Appropriateness of the position of the head act

As can be seen from Table 37, the mean score reported by female teachers for the appropriateness of the position of the head act (M=3.20, SD=1.130) is not significantly different (t=-1.036 , df=177.212 , 2-tailed p=0.301) from that reported by male teachers (M=3.19, SD=1.242) at $p<0.05$.

Table 37 Differences in the mean scores reported by female and male teachers for the appropriateness of the position of the head act as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Females	3.20	1.130	-1.036	177.212	0.301 (NOT SIGN)
Males	3.19	1.242			

Question 11 Usefulness of "negative" expressions

The raw frequencies and total percentages of the three categories chosen by female and male teachers are shown in Appendix U**.**

As can be seen from Table 38a, the number of "negative" expressions classified by female teachers as "useful" (33.3%) is not significantly different (z=1.09) from that by male teachers (27.8%) at the 95% confidence level.

As can be seen from Table 38b, the number of "negative" expressions classified by female teachers as "counter-productive" (44.6%) is not significantly different (z=0.98) from that by male teachers (39.3%) at the

95% confidence level.

As can be seen from Table 38c, the number of “negative” expressions classified by male teachers as “neutral” (32.7%) is significantly greater (z=2.20) than that by female teachers (22%) at the 95% confidence level.

Table 38 Differences in the three categories chosen by CSTs and ESTs concerning the usefulness of “negative” expressions, as shown by Proportional *t* tests at 95% confidence level

Table 38a “Useful”

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	N2						
168	168		99%	95%	90%	80%	68%
P1	P2	Z-VALUE	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
33.3	27.8	1.09	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=female teachers, Sample 2=male teachers)

Table 38b “Counter-productive”

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	N2						
168	168		99%	95%	90%	80%	68%
P1	P2	Z-VALUE	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
44.6	39.3	0.98	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1=female teachers, Sample 2=male teachers)

Table 38c "Neutral"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
168	168		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
22	32.7	2.20	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=female teachers, Sample 2=male teachers)

Question 11: Summary of the findings about

There were no significant differences in the numbers of "negative" expressions classified as "useful" and "counter-productive" between female and male teachers; however, the number of "negative" expressions classified by male teachers as "neutral" is significantly greater (z=1.79) than that by female teachers at the 95% confidence level.

Question 13 Amount of information

As can be seen from Table 39, the mean score reported by female teachers for the appropriateness of the amount of information in a letter (M=3.00, SD=1.273) is not significantly different (t=-1.459, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.146) from that reported by male teachers (M=3.26, SD=1.199).

Table 39 Differences in the mean scores reported by female and male teachers for the appropriateness of the amount of information as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Females	3.00	1.273	-1.459	190	0.146 (NOT SIGN)
Males	3.26	1.199			

Question 14 Overall appropriateness of the letter

As can be seen from Table 40, the mean score reported by female teachers for the overall appropriateness of the letter (M=2.98, SD=1.24) is not significantly different (t=-1.281, df=190, 2-tailed p=0.202) from that reported by male teachers (M=3.21, SD=1.239) at $p<0.05$.

Table 40 Differences in the mean scores reported by female and male teachers for the overall appropriateness of the letter as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Females	2.98	1.240	-1.281	190	0.202 (NOT SIGN)
Males	3.21	1.239			

Question 5 Supportive move regarded as most important

Findings about the numbers of SMs ranked “1” (the most important) by female and male teachers are shown in Table 41 (in raw frequencies) and Table 42 (in percentages).

Table 41 The SMs ranked "1" (the most important) by female and male teachers (in raw frequencies)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**F**	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
	M	4	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Topic 2	**F**	3	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
	M	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Topic 3	**F**	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
	M	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0

("**F**" – female teachers; "**M**" – male teachers)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness)

Table 42 The SMs ranked "1" (the most important) by female and male teachers (in percentages)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**F**	37.5	12.5	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0
	M	50	0	0	37.5	0	0	12.5	0	0	0	0	0
Topic 2	**F**	37.5	25	0	12.5	0	0	12.5	0	0	12.5	0	0
	M	50	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12.5	12.5	0
Topic 3	**F**	37.5	12.5	0	12.5	12.5	0	0	0	0	25	0	0
	M	50	0	0	0	0	12.5	12.5	0	0	25	0	0

("**F**" – female teachers; "**M**" – male teachers)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness)

As can be seen from Table 43, there were no significant differences between female and male teachers for all twelve SMs ranked "1" (the most important) at the 95% confidence level for Topic 1, Topic 2 and Topic 3.

Table 43 Differences in the supportive moves ranked "1" (the most important) by female and male teachers, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
SM 1	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 2	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 3	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 4	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 5	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 6	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 8	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 9	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 10	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 11	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 12	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At 95% confidence level)

Summary of findings for Question 5

There were no significant differences between female and male teachers for all twelve SMs ranked "1" (the most important) for Topic 1, Topic 2 and Topic 3.

Question 6 The supportive moves teachers would definitely not use

Findings about SMs chosen by female and male teachers as the SMs they would definitely not use if they were to write the three letters are shown in Table 44 (in raw frequencies) and Table 45 (in percentages).

Table 44 SMs chosen by female and male teachers as the SMs they would definitely not use (in raw frequencies)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**F**	0	0	2	0	4	3	0	1	4	0	0	5
	M	0	1	3	0	4	1	0	0	5	0	1	5
Topic 2	**F**	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	4	4	0	4	6
	M	0	0	2	0	3	1	0	1	7	0	4	6
Topic 3	**F**	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	4	4	0	5	7
	M	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	4	4	0	6	7

(“**F**” – female teachers; “**M**” – male teachers)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness

Table 45 SMs chosen by female and male teachers as the SMs they would definitely not use (in percentages)

		Supportive moves											
		SM 1	**SM 2**	**SM 3**	**SM 4**	**SM 5**	**SM 6**	**SM 7**	**SM 8**	**SM 9**	**SM 10**	**SM 11**	**SM 12**
Topic 1	**F**	0	0	25	0	50	37.5	0	12.5	50	0	0	62.5
	M	0	12.5	37.5	0	50	12.5	0	0	62.5	0	12.5	62.5
Topic 2	**F**	0	0	12.5	0	12.5	0	0	50	50	0	50	75
	M	0	0	25	0	37.5	12.5	0	12.5	87.5	0	50	75
Topic 3	**F**	0	0	12.5	0	25	0	0	50	50	0	62.5	87.5
	M	0	0	0	0	8	12.5	0	50	50	0	75	87.5

("**F**" – female teachers; "**M**" – male teachers)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

(**SM1** – Preparing; **SM2** – Acknowledging imposition; **SM3**- Minimizing imposition; **SM4** – Effort put in; **SM5** – Compliments; **SM6** – Benefits; **SM7** – Importance; **SM8** – Negative consequences; **SM9** – Compensation; **SM10** – Thankfulness; **SM11** – Apologizing; **SM12** – Forgiveness

As can be seen from Table 46, there were no significant differences between female and male teachers for each of the SMs chosen as the SM they would definitely not use for all three topics at the 95% confidence level.

Table 46 Differences in the supportive moves chosen by female and male teachers as the SMs they themselves would not use, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
SM 1	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 2	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 3	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 4	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 5	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 6	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 7	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 8	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 9	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 10	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 11	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
SM 12	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At the 95% confidence level)

Question 6: Summary of the findings about

None of the SMs chosen by female and male teachers as the SMs they would definitely not use were significantly different at the 95% confidence level for all three topics.

Question 10 Preferred Writing plans

Findings about writing plans chosen by female and male and teachers as the plans they would use are shown in Table 47.

Table 47 Writing plans chosen by female and male teachers as the plan they would use (in both raw frequencies and percentages)

		Writing plans			
		Plan 1	**Plan 2**	**Plan 3**	**Plan 4**
Topic 1	**F**	2/8=25%	3/8=37.5%	0/8=0%	3/8=37.5%
	M	0/8=0%	6/8=75%	1/8=12.5%	1/8=12.5%
Topic 2	**F**	1/8=12.5%	4/8=50%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%
	M	1/8=12.5%	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%
Topic 3	**F**	3/8=37.5%	3/8=37.5%	0/8=0%	2/8=25%
	M	1/8=12.5%	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%

("**F**" – female teachers; "**M**" – male teachers)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

As can be seen from Table 48, there was no significant difference between female and male teachers for each of the writing plans at the 95% confidence level for Topic 1 and Topic 2. However, significantly more male teachers (87.5%%) chose Plan 2 than did female teachers (37.5%%) for Topic 3 (z=2.70) at the 95% confidence level (Table 49).

Plan 2 was the only plan that showed a significant difference between female and male teachers at the 95% confidence level for Topic 3.

Table 48 Differences in the numbers of female and male teachers preferring the four writing plans for the three topics, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
Plan 1	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
Plan 2	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	SIGN
Plan 3	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
Plan 4	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At the 95% confidence level)

Table 49 Topic 3 Plan 2

Sample1	**Sample2**		**CONFIDENCE LEVEL**				
N1	**N2**						
8	8		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
37.5	87.5	2.07	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1 = female teachers, Sample 2 = male teachers)

The dominant plan chosen by female and male teachers for each of the three topics

As can be seen from Table 47**,** for each of the three topics, Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of male teachers (**Topic 1**: 75%; **Topic 2**: 87.5%; **Topic 3**: 87.5%). However, for each of the three writing topics, no plan was chosen by the majority of female teachers (**Topic 1**: 25% for Plan 1, 37.5% for Plan 2, 0% for Plan 3, 37.5% for Plan 4; **Topic 2**: 12.5% for Plan 1, 50% for Plan 2, 0% for Plan 3, 0% for Plan 4; **Topic 3**: 37.5% for Plan 1, 37.5% for Plan 2, 0% for Plan 3, 25% for Plan 4).

Question 10: Summary of findings about

For Topics 1 and 2, there were no significant differences between female and male teachers in their preferences for each of the writing plans.

For Topic 3, Plan 2 was chosen by significantly more male teachers than by female teachers. Plan 2 was the only plan that showed a significant difference between female and male teachers for Topic 3.

For all three topics, Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of male teachers; however, no plan was identified as the plan preferred by the majority of female teachers.

Question 12 Tendency to use negative/positive words

Findings about the choices made by female and male teachers regarding their inclination to use negative/positive words (in both raw frequencies and percentages) are shown in Table 50**.**

Table 50 Choices made by female and male teachers regarding their inclination to use negative/positive words (in both raw frequencies and percentages)

		Tendency to use negative/positive words		
		"Would use as many positive words as possible"	**"Not necessary to use positive words to replace negative words"**	**"Other"**
Topic 1	**F**	5/8=62.5%	2/8=25%	1/8=12.5%
	M	6/8=75%	1/8=12.5%	1/8=12.5%
Topic 2	**F**	8/8=100%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%
	M	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	1/8=12.5%
Topic 3	**F**	7/8=87.5%	0/8=0%	1/8=12.5%
	M	8/8=100%	0/8=0%	0/8=0%

("**F**" – female teachers; "**M**" – male teachers)

(**Topic 1** – Attendance; **Topic 2** – Proofreading; **Topic 3** – Interview)

As can be seen from Table 51**,** there were no significant differences between female and male teachers in their choices regarding the tendency to use negative/positive words for Topic 1, Topic 2 and Topic 3 at the 95% confidence level.

Table 51 The differences in the tendency to use negative/positive words between female and male teachers, as shown by Proportional *t* test

	Topic 1	**Topic 2**	**Topic 3**
"Would use as many positive words as possible"	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
"Not necessary to use positive words to express ideas that can be said directly by using negative words"	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*
"Other"	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*	NOT SIGN*

(* At the 95% confidence level)

As can be seen from Table 50, the category "use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of female and male teachers for each of the three topics (**Females:** 62.5% for Topic 1, 100% for Topic 2, 87.5% for Topic 3; **males:** 75% for Topic 1, 87.5% for Topic 2, 100% for Topic 3).

Question 12: Summary of findings about

For Topics 1, 2 and 3, there were no significant differences between female and male teachers in their choices regarding the tendency to use negative/positive words.

For each of the three topics, the category "use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of female and male teachers.

2. Summary and meaning of results concerning Hypothesis 2

a. Summary

- **Questions measuring teachers' judgments on twelve letters**

There were no significant differences between female and male teachers in their judgments on the twelve letters regarding the following aspects:

Appropriateness of supportive moves (Question 3);
Overall politeness of the letters (Question 4);
Appropriateness of the register (Question 8);
Appropriateness of the position of the head acts (Question 9);
Amount of information (Question 13);
Overall appropriateness of letters (Question 14).

However, for Question 7 ("classification of register"), the number of letters classified as "hard to categorize" by female teachers was significantly greater than that by male teachers. There were no significant differences in the remaining two categories ("formal" and "informal") between female and male teachers.

For Question 11 ("usefulness of 'negative' expressions"), the number of "negative" expressions classified as "neutral" by male teachers was significantly greater than that by female teachers. There were no significant differences in the remaining two categories ("useful" and "counter-productive") between female and male teachers.

- **Questions measuring teachers' preferences for supportive moves, writing plans and the tendency to use negative/positive words:**

For all three topics, there were no significant differences between male and female teachers in the following questions:

The most important supportive moves (Question 5);
The supportive moves teachers themselves would definitely not use (Question 6);
The tendency to use negative/positive words (Question 12).

However, female and male teachers differed significantly in Question 10 ("preferences for writing plans") for Topic 3. Significantly more male teachers preferred Plan 2 for Topic 3; however, there were no significant differences between female and male teachers for Topics 1 and 2.

To sum up, the three items that show significant differences are: 1) the sub-category "hard categorize as either formal or informal", 2) the writing plans they preferred to use for Topic 3, and 3) the number of "negative" expressions classified as "neutral".

For all three topics, Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of male teachers; however, no single plan was identified as the plan preferred by the majority of female teachers.

The category “use many positive words as possible” was chosen by the majority of female and male teachers.

b. The meaning of results for Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 was partially confirmed.

The non-significance in the judgments between female and male teachers on nine out of twelve questions analyzed quantitatively suggests that on the whole gender makes no major difference as far as pragmatic judgment is concerned.

Detailed discussion of the meaning of these results and speculation about causes will be provided in Chapter 5.

C. Quantitative findings related to Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 states that there are significant differences between A/B-grade students and E-grade students in terms of pragmatic performance.

“Pragmatic performance” was measured by examining the following four main categories: 1) “politeness”, 2) “directness”, 3) “amount of information”, and 4) “formality”. The sub-categories within these four main categories were listed in Template 1 and Template 2a, which were used to analyze the letters written under experimental condition by A/B-grade students and E-grade students. The descriptions of categories in Template

1 and Template 2a follow:

1. Individual categories

Categories and sub-categories in Template 1

Template 1 includes the first three main categories: “politeness”, “directness”, and “amount of information”. “Politeness” includes two sub-categories: 1) expression introducing head acts, and 2) supportive moves. “Directness” also includes two sub-categories: 1) the position of the head act, and 2) the use of negative words. “Amount of information” is measured by counting the total number of words in a script. Further sub-categories within these categories follow:

Politeness

Expressions introducing head acts

Category 1(1) to Category 1(18) contains politeness expressions used to mitigate the assertive force of a head act.

Supportive moves

Category 2(1) to Category 2(19) contains the types of supportive move.

Directness

Category 3 contains the writing plan used by the letter writer. Category 4 contains the number of negative words used.

Amount of information

Category 5 contains the total number of words in a script.

Categories and sub-categories in Template 2a

Template 2a includes the fourth main category – "formality". "Formality" subsumes two categories: 1) violation of formality, and 2) features of formality. Further sub-categories within these categories follow:

Category 6(1) to Category 6(11) contains expressions showing violation of formality. Category 7(1) to Category 7(2) contains expressions showing features of formality.

Findings about individual categories related to Hypothesis 3 will be reported in turn, followed by the summary of all findings.

Category 1 Mitigating expressions used by A/B-grade and E-grade students

As can be seen from Table 52, instances of mitigating expressions used by A/B-grade students (M=2.53, SD=0.982) are significantly greater (t=-4.839, df=77.066, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those used by E-grade students (M=0.87, SD=2.480) at $p<0.005$.

Table 52 Differences in instances of mitigating expressions used by A/B-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
A/B-grade students	2.53	2.480	-4.839	77.066	0.000 (SIGN)
E-grade students	0.87	0.982			

Sub-categories within mitigating expressions showing statistically significant differences

As can be seen from Table 53, instances of "would" in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=1.12, SD=1.316) are significantly greater (t=-3.403, df=88.082, 2-tailed p=0.001) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.47, SD=0.676) at $p<0.005$.

Instances of "could" in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.38, SD=0.640) are significantly greater (t=-3.814, df=72.716, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.05, SD=0.220) at $p<0.005$.

Instances of "grateful and other related forms" in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.22, SD=0.454) are significantly greater (t=-3.693, df=59.000, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.00, SD=0.000) at $p<0.005$.

Instances of “kindly” in the letters written by A/B-grade students (*M*=0.50, *SD*=0.813) are significantly greater (*t*=-4.340, *df*=64.835, 2-tailed *p*=0.000) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (*M*=0.03, *SD*=0.181) at *p*<0.005.

Table 53 Differences in the sub-categories within mitigating expressions (showing statistical significance) used by A/B-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Would	A/B-grade students	1.12	1.316	-3.403	88.082	0.001 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.47	0.676			
Could	A/B-grade students	0.38	0.640	-3.814	72.716	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.05	0.220			
“Grateful and other related forms”	A/B-grade students	0.22	0.454	-3.693	59.000	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.00	0.000			
Kindly	A/B-grade students	0.50	0.813	-4.340	64.835	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.03	0.181			

Sub-categories within mitigating expressions not showing statistically significant differences

As can be seen from Table 54, instances of the following mitigating expressions appearing in the letters written by A/B-grade students and those by E-grade students did not show any significant differences at the 95% confidence level:

- “May”,
- “Please” in the question form,
- “Possibly/possible”,
- “Mind”,
- “Appreciate” and related forms,
- “Honored” and related forms,
- “Pleasure” and related forms,
- “Glad” and related forms,
- “Nice” and related forms,
- “Helpful”,
- “Obliged”,
- “Favor”.

Table 54 Differences in the sub-categories within mitigating expressions (not showing statistical significance) used by A/B-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
"may"	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	-0.000	118	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.02	0.129			
"please" in the question form	A/B-grade students	0.00	0.000	1.351	59.000	0.179 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.05	0.287			
"possibly/possible"	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	-0.100	59.000	0.319 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.00	0.000			
"mind"	A/B-grade students	0.07	0.252	-0.8332	118	0.407 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.02	0.181			
"appreciate" and related forms	A/B-grade students	0.05	0.129	-1.762	59.000	0.081 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.00	0.000			
"honored" and related forms	A/B-grade students	0.03	0.181	-0.581	118	0.563 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.02	0.129			
"pleasure" and related forms	A/B-grade students	0.07	0.252	0.000	118	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.07	0.312			

“glad” and related forms	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	0.000	118	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.02	0.129			
“nice” and related forms	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	1.370	88.604	0.174 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.07	0.252			
“helpful”	A/B-grade students	0.00	0.000	*t*=1	59.000	0.319 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.02	0.129			
“obliged”	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	-1.000	59.000	0.319 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.00	0.000			
“favor”	A/B-grade students	0.05	0.287	-1.351	59.000	0.179 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.00	0.000			

Expressions not used by both A/B-grade students and E-grade students

“Past tense softener”, “a bit”, “do you think”, and “thankful” were not used by any of the A/B-grade students or E-grade students, and the *t*-value could not be computed because the standard deviation of both groups was zero.

Category 2 The types of supportive move used by A/B-grade students and E-grade students

As can be seen from Table 55, the number of types of supportive move in the letters written by A/B-grade students (*M*=4.02, *SD*=1.578) is

significantly greater (t=-4.822, df=118, 2-tailed p=0.000) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=2.62, SD=1.563) at p<0.005.

Table 55 Differences in the numbers of types of supportive move used by A/B-grade students and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	***SD***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
A/B-grade students	4.02	1.578	-4.822	118	0.000 (SIGN)
E-grade students	2.62	1.563			

Sub-categories within supportive moves showing statistically significant differences

As can be seen from Table 56, there are significant differences in the frequency of each of the following types of supportive move between the letters written by A/B-grade students and those by E-grade students:

"Acknowledging imposition"

The frequency of the supportive move "acknowledging imposition" in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.63, SD=0.486) is significantly greater (t=-3.210, df=118, 2-tailed p=0.002) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.35, SD=0.481) at p<0.005.

“Effort”

The frequency of the supportive move “effort” in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.40, SD=0.494) is significantly greater (t=-3.168, df=107.890, 2-tailed p=0.002) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.15, SD=0.360) at $p<0.005$.

“Thankful”

The frequency of the supportive move “thankful” in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.90, SD=0.303) is significantly greater (t=-3.608, df=98.760, 2-tailed p=0.000) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.63, SD=0.486) at $p<0.005$.

“Importance”

The frequency of the supportive move “importance” in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.23, SD=0.427) is significantly greater (t=-2.28, df=101.617, 2-tailed p=0.024) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.08, SD=0.279) at $p<0.05$.

“Sincerity”

The frequency of the supportive move “sincerity” in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.23, SD=0.427) is significantly greater (t=-4.238, df=59.000, 2-tailed p=0.000) than in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.00, SD=0.000) at $p<0.0005$.

“Regret”

The frequency of the supportive move “regret” in letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.12, SD=0.324) is significantly greater (t=-2.316, df=59.000, 2-tailed p=0.022) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.03, SD=0.181) $p<0.05$.

Table 56 Differences in the frequency of each type of supportive move (showing statistical significance) between the letters written by A/B-grade students and those written by E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
"Acknowledging imposition"	A/B-grade students	0.63	0.486	-3.210	118	0.002 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.35	0.481			
"Effort"	A/B-grade students	0.40	0.494	-3.168	107.890	0.002 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.15	0.360			
"Thankful"	A/B-grade students	0.90	0.303	-3.608	98.760	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.63	0.486			
"Importance"	A/B-grade students	0.23	0.427	-2.28	101.617	0.024 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.08	0.279			
"Sincerity"	A/B-grade students	0.23	0.427	-4.238	59.000	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.00	0.000			
"Regret"	A/B-grade students	0.12	0.324	-2.316	59.000	0.022 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.03	0.181			

Sub-categories within supportive moves not showing statistically significant differences

As can be seen from Table 57, there are no significant differences in the frequency of each of the following types of supportive move between the letters written by A/B-grade students and those written by E-grade students at the 95% confidence level:

- “Preparing”,
- “Minimizing”,
- “Compliments”,
- “Apology”,
- “Negative consequences”,
- “Benefits”,
- “Forgive”,
- “Giving options”,
- “Appreciation”,
- “Recognition of authority”,
- “Promise”,
- “Making a personal appeal”.

Table 57 Differences in the frequency of each type of supportive move (not showing statistical significance) between the letters written by A/B-grade students and those written by E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
"Preparing"	A/B-grade students	0.07	0.252	0.000	118	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.07	0.252			
"Minimizing"	A/B-grade students	0.45	0.502	1.156	114.771	0.250 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.237	0.427			
"Compliments"	A/B-grade students	0.45	0.502	1.114	117.791	0.267 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.35	0.481			
"Apology"	A/B-grade students	0.45	0.502	-1.114	117.791	0.267 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.35	0.481			
"Negative consequences"	A/B-grade students	0.13	0.343	-1.585	100.494	0.116 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.05	0.220			
"Benefits"	A/B-grade students	0.28	0.454	-0.410	118	0.0683 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.25	0.437			
"Forgive"	A/B-grade students	0.00	0.000	-1.114	59.000	0.267 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.03	0.181			
"Giving options"	A/B-grade students	0.13	0.343	1.426	118	0.156 (NOT

	E-grade students	0.08	0.279			SIGN)
"Appreciation"	A/B-grade students	0.07	0.252	0.344	118	0.732 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.08	0.279			
"Recognition of authority"	A/B-grade students	0.12	0.324	-1.740	92.609	0.084 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.03	0.181			
"Promise"	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	-0.581	118	0.563 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.03	0.181			
"Making a personal appeal"	A/B-grade students	0.00	0.000	1.426	59.000	0.156 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.03	0.181			

Sub-categories within supportive moves not used by any of the A/B-grade or E-grade students

"Compensation"

The supportive move "compensation" was not used by any of the A/B-grade students or E-grade students, and the *t* value could not be computed because the standard deviation of both groups was zero.

Category 3 The position of the head act

Table 58 shows:

Plan 1

The number of the letters written by A/B-grade students using Plan 1 (6.7%) is not significantly different (z=0.00) from that of the letters written by E-grade students using Plan 1 (6.7%) at the 95% confidence level.

Plan 2

The number of letters written by A/B-grade students using Plan 2 (0%) is not significantly different (z=1.42) from that of the letters written by E-grade students using Plan 2 (3.3%) at the 95% confidence level.

Plan 3

The number of letters written by A/B-grade students using Plan 3 (40%) is not significantly different (z=0.19) from that of the letters written by E-grade students using Plan 3 (41.7%) at the 95% confidence level.

Plan 4

The number of letters written by A/B-grade students using Plan 4 (53.3%) is not significantly different (z=0.55) from that of the letters written by E-grade students using Plan 4 (48.3%) at the 95% confidence level.

Table 58 Differences in the plans chosen by A/B-grade and E-grade students as shown by Proportional *t* test

Table 58a Plan 1 (preparing – background – request)

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
6.7	6.7	0.00	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1= E-grade students, Sample 2=A/B-grade students)

Table 58b Plan 2 (preparing – request – background)

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
3.3	0	1.42	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1= E-grade students, Sample 2=A/B-grade students)

Table 58c Plan 3 (background – request)

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
41.7	40	0.19	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1= E-grade students, Sample 2=A/B-grade students)

Table 58d Plan 4 (request – background)

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
60	60		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
48.3	53.3	0.55	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN

(Sample 1= E-grade students, Sample 2=A/B-grade students)

The most preferred plan for A/B-grade and E-grade students

As can be seen from Table 58**,** overall, Plans 3 and 4 were two dominant plans for both groups of students (**A/B-grade students**: Plan 1: 6.7%; Plan 2: 0%; Plan 3: 40%; Plan 4: 53.3%; **E-grade students**: Plan 1: 6.7%; Plan 2: 3.3%; Plan 3: 41.7%; Plan 4: 48.3%).

No single plan was identified as the plan preferred by the majority of students for both A/B-grade and E-grade students.

Category 4 Negative words

As can be seen from Table 59, instances of negative words used by A/B-grade students (M=0.67, SD=1.003) are not significantly different (t=0.644, df=118, 2-tailed p=0.521) from those used by E-grade students (M=0.55, SD=0.982).

Table 59 Differences in instances of negative words used by A/B-grade students and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
A/B-grade students	0.67	1.003	0.644	118	0.521 (NOT SIGN)
E-grade students	0.55	0.982			

Category 5 Amount of information

As can be seen in Table 60, the mean length of the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=142.05, SD=47.085) is significantly greater (t=-2.175, df=96.335, 2-tailed p=0.032) than that of the letters written by E-grade students (M=126.65, SD=28.119) at $p<0.05$.

Table 60 Differences in the mean length of the letters written by A/B-grade students and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
A/B-grade students	142.05	47.085	-2.175	96.335	0.032 (SIGN)
E-grade students	126.65	28.119			

Category 6 Violation of formality

As can be seen in Table 61, total instances of expressions showing violation of formality in the letters written made by A/B-grade students (M=8.85, SD=3.483) are significantly lower (t=3.461, df=116, 2-tailed p=0.001) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=11.12, SD=3.644) at $p<0.005$.

Table 61 Differences in total instances of expressions showing violation of formality in the letters written by A/B-grade students and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
A/B-grade students	8.85	3.483	3.461	116	0.001 (SIGN)
E-grade students	11.12	3.644			

Sub-categories within "violation of formality" showing statistically significant differences

The following three sub-categories show significant differences (Table 62):

Contracted form

Instances of contracted forms in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.03, SD=0.181) are significantly lower (t=2.618, df=71.050, 2-tailed p=0.011) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.23, SD=0.563).

Total instances of inappropriate opening salutations

Total instances of inappropriate opening salutations in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.12, SD=0.324) are significantly lower (t=6.290, df=98.342, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.62, SD=0.524).

The Breakdown of "inappropriate opening salutations"

There are nine minor categories under "inappropriate opening salutations".

a. Minor categories showing statistically significant differences

The following minor categories showed significant differences:

- Full name with title

  Total instances of using a recipient's full name with a title in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.05, SD=0.220) are significantly lower (t=2.960, df=88.269, 2-tailed p=0.004) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.23, SD=0.427).

- Full name without title

  Total instances of using a recipient's full name without a title in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.05, SD=0.220) are significantly lower (t=3.169, df=87.091, 2-tailed p=0.002) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.25, SD=0.437).

b. Minor categories not showing statistically significant differences

- First name only with title
- First name only without title

c. Minor categories not used by any of the students in the two groups

- Title only with prefix “dear”;
- Title only without prefix “dear”;
- Use of “Dear Sir/Madam”;
- The use of “To whom it may concern”;
- Absence of any salutation.

Total instances of inappropriate closing salutations

Total instances of inappropriate closing salutations written by A/B-grade students (M=0.32, SD=0.469) are significantly lower (t=5.460, df=118, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those by E-grade students (M=0.87, SD=0.623).

The Breakdown of "inappropriate closing salutations"

There are three minor categories under "inappropriate closing salutation".

a. Minor categories showing statistically significant differences

- Inappropriate spelling and upper/lower case of "Yours sincerely"

  Total instances of "inappropriate spelling and upper/lower case of 'Yours sincerely'" in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.00, SD=0.000) are significantly lower (t=4.622, df=47.000, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those in the letters by E-grade students (M=0.31, SD=0.468).

- Using one's own first name

  Total instances of "using one's own first name" in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.10, SD=0.303) are significantly lower (t=4.215, df=97.425, 2-tailed p=0.000) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.42, SD=0.497).

b. Minor categories not showing statistically significant differences

- Inappropriate choice of the closing salutation

  Total instances of “inappropriate use of closing salutation” in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.22, SD=0.415) are significantly lower (t=-0.223, df=118, 2-tailed p=0.824) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.20, SD=0.403).

Table 62 Differences in the sub-categories within "violation of formality" (showing statistical significance) used by A/B-grade students and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

			Group Mean	S*D*	*t* value	*df*	2-tailed *p*
Contracted form		A/B-grade students	0.03	0.181	2.618	71.050	0.011 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.23	0.563			
Total instances of inappropriate opening salutations		A/B-grade students	0.12	0.324	6.290	98.342	0.000 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.62	0.524			
	Full name with a title	A/B-grade students	0.05	0.220	2.960	88.269	0.004 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.23	0.427			
	Full name without a title	A/B-grade students	0.05	0.220	3.169	87.091	0.002 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.25	0.437			
	First name only with a title	A/B-grade students	0.00	0.000	1.762	59.0001	0.083 (NOT SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.05	0.220			
	First name only without a title	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	1.681	83.202	0.096 (NOT SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.08	0.220			

Total instances of inappropriate closing salutations	A/B-grade students	0.32	0.469	5.460	118	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.87	0.623			
Wrong spelling and upper/lower case of "Yours sincerely"	A/B-grade students	0.00	0.000	4.622	47.000	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.31	0.468			
Using one's own first name	A/B-grade students	0.10	0.303	4.215	97.425	0.000 (SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.42	0.497			
The wrong choice of the closing salutation	A/B-grade students	0.22	0.415	-0.223	118	0.824 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.20	0.403			

Sub-categories within "violation of formality" without statistically significant differences

According to Table 63, instances of the following sub-categories in the letters written by A/B-grade students are not significantly different from those in the letters written by E-grade students:

- Use of I,
- Informal words and phrases,

- Imperative structure,
- Omission of the subject “I” in structures like “I look forward to”.

Sub-categories within “violation of formality” not used by A/B-grade and E-grade students

“Use of lower case ‘I’”, “use of lower case ‘u’”, “abbreviated form ‘yr’”, and “symbols” were not used by any of the A/B-grade students or E-grade students, and the *t*-value could not be computed because the standard deviation of both groups was zero.

Table 63 Differences in the sub-categories within "violation of formality" (not showing statistical significance) in the letters written by A/B-grade students and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Use of I	A/B-grade students	7.533.	3.5628	0.764	118	0.446 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	8.033	3.6063			
Informal words and phrases	A/B-grade students	0.55	0.769	0.000	118	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.55	0.723			
The imperative structure	A/B-grade students	0.38	0.585	0.605	118	0.547 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.45	0.622			
The omission of the subject "I" in structures like "I look forward to"	A/B-grade students	0.10	0.303	0.565	118	0.573 (NOT SIGN)
	E-grade students	0.13	0.343			

Category 7: Features of formality

There are two sub-categories within "features of formality": i) the total number of formal modal verbs, and ii) complexity of sentence structure.

The total number of formal modal verbs

As can be seen from Table 64, total instances of formal modals used by A/B-grade students (*M*=1.52, *SD*=1.662) are significantly greater (*t*=-4.040, *df*=81.780, 2-tailed *p*=0.000) than those used by E-grade students (*M*=0.57, *SD*=0.745).

Sub-categories within "formal modal verbs"

Table 64 shows:

Would

Instances of "would" used in the letters written by A/B-grade students (*M*=1.12, *SD*=1.316) are significantly greater (*t*=-3.457, *df*=84.213, 2-tailed *p*=0.001) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (*M*=0.47, *SD*=0.623).

Could

Instances of "could" used in the letters written by A/B-grade students (*M*=0.38, *SD*=0.640) are significantly greater (*t*=-3.814, *df*=72.716, 2-tailed *p*=0.000) than those by E-grade students (*M*=0.05, *SD*=0.220).

May

Instances of “may” used in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=0.02, SD=0.129) are not significantly different (t=0.000, df=118, 2-tailed p=1.000) than those in the letters written by E-grade students (M=0.02, SD=0.129).

Complexity of sentence structure

The mean T-unit length in the letters written by A/B-grade students (M=15.362, SD=3.5774) is significantly greater (t=-7.187, df=87.235, 2-tailed p=0.0000) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=11.643, SD=1.8059).

Table 64 Differences in features of formality in letters written by A/B-grade

			Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
The total number of formal modal verbs		A/B-grade students	1.52	1.662	-4.040	81.780	0.000 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.57	0.745			
	Would	A/B-grade students	1.12	1.316	-3.457	84.213	0.001 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.47	0.623			
	Could	A/B-grade students	0.38	0.640	-3.814	72.716	0.000 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.05	0.220			

	May	A/B-grade students	0.02	0.129	0.000	118	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
		E-grade students	0.02	0.129			
Complexity of sentence structure		A/B-grade students	15.362	3.5774	-7.187	87.235	0.0000 (SIGN)
		E-grade students	11.643	1.8059			

2. Summary and the meaning of results concerning Hypothesis 3

a. Summary (Hypothesis 3)

A/B-grade students performed significantly differently from E-grade students in three of the four categories ("politeness", "directness", "amount of information" and "formality") used to measure students' pragmatic performance. The three categories showing significant differences were: "politeness", "amount of information" and "formality".

- **"Politeness"**

  The number of mitigating expressions

  The number of mitigating expressions used in the letters written by A/B-grade students was significantly greater than that in the letters written by E-grade student.

  A breakdown of mitigating expressions showed that A/B-grade students wrote significantly more instances of "would", "could" and "grateful" and "kindly" than E-grade students; however, there were no significant differences in the instances of "may", "please"

(in the question form), “possible/possibly”, “mind”, “appreciate”, “honored”, “pleasure”, “glad”, “nice”, “helpful”, “obliged” and “favor” between the two groups. “Past tense softener” was not used by any of the A/B-grade and E-grade students.

Types of supportive move

The number of types of supportive moves in the letters written by A/B-grade students was significantly greater than that in the letters written by E-grade students.

A breakdown of the types of supportive moves used in the letters showed that A/B-grade students used significantly more supportive moves of the following types: “acknowledging imposition”, “effort”, “thankfulness”, “importance”, “sincerity” and “regret”.

- **“Directness”**

The preferences for the position of head acts

Overall, Plans 3 and 4 were two dominant plans for both groups of students. Plan 4 was chosen by the highest percentage of students for both groups, followed by Plan 3. Plan 4 was chosen by 53.3% of A/B-grade students and by 48.3% of E-grade students; Plan 3 was chosen by 40% of A/B-grade students and by 41.7% of E-grade students. (The difference between the numbers of students who chose the two plans was not significant at the 95% confidence level.)

The number of negative words used

Instances of negative words used by A/B-grade students were not significantly different from those used by E-grade students.

- **"Amount of information"**

  A/B-grade students wrote significantly more words in their letters than E-grade students did.

- **"Formality"**

  Violation of formality

  Total instances of expressions showing violation of formality in the letters written by A/B-grade students were significantly lower than those in the letters written by E-grade students.

A breakdown of the sub-categories showed that the use of "contracted form", "total instances of inappropriate opening salutations" and "total instances of inappropriate closing salutations" in the letters written by A/B-grade students were significantly lower than those written in the letters written by E-grade students.

A breakdown of the category "opening salutations" revealed that it is common for E-grade students to address the recipient by their full name with or without the title (i.e., Dear Mary Smith or Dear Miss Mary Smith). Perhaps those students think that full names are more

polite and formal than only first names; consequently, they should use full names even in opening salutations.

The breakdown of the category “closing salutations” showed that the majority of E-grade students made mistakes regarding the spelling and the use of upper/lower case in the closing salutation “Yours sincerely” (e.g., the lower case “y”, the upper case “s”, missing the letter “s” in the word “yours”). E-grade students also ended their letters using only their first names.

Features of formality

Total instances of formal modals

Total instances of formal modals used by A/B-grade students were significantly greater than those used by E-grade students.

A breakdown of sub-categories show that instances of “would” and “could” used in the letters written by A/B-grade students were significantly greater than those in the letters written by E-grade students. However, there was no significant difference in instances of “may” between the letters written by the two groups of students.

Complexity of sentence structure

The mean T-unit length in the letters written by A/B-grade students was significantly greater than that in the letters written by E-grade students.

b. Meaning of results (Hypothesis 3)

Hypothesis 3 was partially confirmed.

The findings that pragmatic performance of A/B-grade students was different from that of E-grade students in the aspects of “politeness”, “amount of information” and “formality” suggest that as the English proficiency of L2 learners improves, their pragmatic performance seems to improve. However, the preferences of L2 learners in relation to “directness” (i.e., the writing plan preferred and the number of negative words used) do not seem to change as students’ proficiency in English improves.

Further discussion about meaning of results and speculation of causes will be provided in Chapter 5.

D. Quantitative findings related to Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 states that there are no significant differences in formality between the letters and the e-mails written by E-grade students. The dimension of "formality" subsumes two categories: "violation of formality" and "features of formality".

1. Individual categories

Category 1: Violation of formality

As can be seen from Table 65, total instances of violation of formality in the authentic letters written by E-grade students (*M*=11.2, *SD*=6.125) are not significantly different (*t*=-1.801, *df*=78, 2-tailed *p*=0.075) from those in the authentic e-mails written by the students of the same proficiency level (*M*=13.65, *SD*=5.974).

Table 65 Differences in total instances showing violation of formality in the authentic letters and authentic e-mails written by E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Total instances of violation of formality	Authentic letters	11.2	6.125	-1.801	78	0.075 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	13.65	5.974			

Sub-categories within "violation of formality"

Table 66 shows that there are no significant differences in all ten sub-categories within "violation of formality" at $p<0.05$. The ten sub-categories showing no significant differences follow:

- Use of "I"
- Use of lower case "i"
- Use of lower case "u"
- Contracted form
- Abbreviated form "yr"
- Symbols
- Informal words and phrases
- Imperative structure
- Omission of subject "I"
- Total instances of inappropriate opening salutations

The breakdown of the nine minor categories subsumed in the category of "total instances of inappropriate opening salutations" showing no significant differences follow (Table 66):

- First name only with the title
- First name only without title
- Full name with title
- Full name without title

- Title only with “dear”
- Title only without “dear’
- “Dear Sir/Madam”
- “To whom it may concern”
- Absence of any salutation

Table 66 Differences in the sub-categories within "violation of formality" in the authentic letters and authentic e-mails written by E-grade students as shown by *t* test

		Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
Use of "I"	Authentic letters	8.550	4.8196	-1.392	78,	0.168 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	10.151	5.4422			
Use of lower case "i"	Authentic letters	0.450	1.8940	-0.588	1.8940	0.588 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	0.675	1.5087			
Use of lower case "u"	Authentic letters	0.025	0.1581	0.000	78	1.000 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	0.025	0.1581			
Contracted form	Authentic letters	0.70	1.043	-0.986	78	0.327 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	0.98	1.423			
Abbreviated form "yr"	Authentic letters	0.00	0.000	-1.000	39	0.323 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	0.03	0.158			
Symbols	Authentic letters	0.05	0.316	1.000	39	0.323 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	0.00	0.000			
Informal words and phrases	Authentic letters	0.08	0.267	-1.535	51.065	0.131 (NOT SIGN)
	Authentic e-mails	0.25	0.670			

Imperative structure		Authentic letters	0.30	0.608	-1.562	78	0.122 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.53	0.679			
Omission of subject “I”		Authentic letters	0.18	0.594	-0.397	78	0.692 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.23	0.530			
Total instances of inappropriate opening salutations		Authentic letters	0.83	0.446	0.758	78	0.451 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.75	0.439			
	First name only with title	Authentic letters	0.00	0.000	-1.000	39	0.323 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.03	0.158			
	First name only without title	Authentic letters	0.05	0.221	-1.183	67.499	0.241 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.13	0.335			
	Full name with title	Authentic letters	0.23	0.423	0.553	78	0.582 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.18	0.385			
	Full name without title	Authentic letters	0.15	0.362	1.056	71.746	0.295 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.08	0.267			

	Title only with “dear”	Authentic letters	0.08	0.267	-0.739	78	0.462 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.13	0.335			
	Title only without “dear”	Authentic letters	0.03	0.158	1.000	39	0.323 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.00	0.000			
	“Dear Sir/Madam”	Authentic letters	0.30	0.464	1.027	76.01	0.308 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.20	0.405			
	“To whom it may concern”	Authentic letters	0.00	0.000	-1.000	39	0.323 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.03	0.158			
	Absence of any salutation	Authentic letters	0.05	0.221	0.582	78	0.562 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.03	0.158			

Category 2: Features of formality

The total number of formal modal verbs

As can be seen from Table 67, total instances of formal modal verbs used (i.e., “would”, “could” and “may”) in the authentic letters written by E-grade students (*M*=0.23, *SD*=0.423) are not significantly different (*t*=-o.641, *df*=78, 2-tailed *p*=0.524) from those in the authentic e-mails

written by students of the same proficiency level (M=0.30, SD=0.608).

Complexity of sentence structure

The mean T-unit length of the authentic letters written by E-grade students (M=12.554, SD=3.7962) is not significantly different (t=0.891, df=78, 2-tailed p=0.376) from that of the authentic e-mails written by students of the same proficiency level (M=11.925, SD=2.3511).

Table 67 Differences in features of formality in the authentic letters and authentic e-mails written by E-grade students as shown by *t* test

			Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
The total number of formal modal verbs		Authentic letters	0.23	0.423	-o.641	78	0.524 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.30	0.608			
	Would	Authentic letters	0.18	0.385	-0.713	78	0.478 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.25	0.543			
	Could	Authentic letters	0.03	0.158	-1.020,	63.394	0.312 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.08	0.267			
	May	Authentic letters	0.03	0.158	-0.582	78	0.562 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	0.05	0.221			
Complexity of sentence structure		Authentic letters	12.554	3.7962	0.891	78	0.376 (NOT SIGN)
		Authentic e-mails	11.925	2.3511			

2. Summary and the meaning of results concerning Hypothesis 4

a. Summary (Hypothesis 4)

Total instances of violation of formality in the authentic letters written by E-grade students are not significantly different from those in the authentic e-mails written by students of the same proficiency level. All ten sub-categories within "violation of formality" show no significant differences between the two modes of discourse.

Both of the two sub-categories within "features of formality" ("total instances of formal modal verbs" and "mean-unit length") do not show significant differences between the authentic letters and the authentic e-mails written by E-grade students.

b. Meaning of results (Hypothesis 4)

Hypothesis 4 was confirmed.

The findings suggest that the authentic letters and authentic e-mails written by E-grade students show the same features of formality, meaning that E-grade students used only the same level of formality in both letters and e-mails.

Based on the following reasoning, the language used in the authentic letters and in the authentic e-mails is probably best characterized as informal. As shown in the supplementary analysis of the pragmatic performance in the

six letters written by two E-grade students and two B/C-grade students, as judged by sixteen teachers, the percentage of the “informal” category assigned to the three letters written by the two E-grade students is 58.3%, whereas the percentage of the “informal” category assigned to the three letters written by B/C-grade students is only 2.1% (see the Section E below for details). This finding suggests that the three letters written by E-grade students are judged to be informal by the sixteen teachers. Based on this finding, it can be inferred that the language used in the authentic letters written by E-grade students is also likely to be informal because the three authentic letters judged by sixteen teachers and the 40 authentic letters collected for testing Hypothesis 4 were written by students from similar backgrounds (showing the same language proficiency level and taking ELC courses). The inference that the authentic letters are informal leads to the possible conclusion that the authentic e-mails are also informal because there is no significant difference in formality between the authentic letters and the authentic e-mails.

E. Findings of supplementary analysis

The supplementary analysis in this part will include two parts: 1) analysis of the pragmatic performance in the six letters written by two B/C-grade working adults and two E-grade students, 2) qualitative findings about Questions 1 and 2. Part of the qualitative findings concerning Question 1 will be used to supplement the quantitative findings of Question 4, and the qualitative findings regarding Question 2 will constitute pedagogical suggestions for EFL teachers.

1. The scores reported by the sixteen teachers for the six letters written by two B/C-grade working adults and two E-grade students

While it is reasonable to interpret the significant differences in pragmatic performance between A/B-grade students and E-grade students as indicating that A/B-grade students can perform more appropriately than E-grade students, the supplementary analysis presented below provides further support to this interpretation.

In the supplementary analysis, the ratings given by sixteen teachers to the three letters written by two E-grade students and to the three letters written by two B/C-grade working adults were analyzed. The six letters analyzed for this purpose are actually taken from the twelve letters used to elicit the sixteen teachers' pragmatic judgments for examining Hypothesis 1. If the pragmatic performance of these two B/C-grade working adults is judged to be more appropriate than that of the two E-grade students, it is probable that the A/B-grade students in this study also performed significantly more appropriately than E-grade students because A/B-grade students' English proficiency level was higher than that of B/C-grade students by at least one grade. However, the findings are only tentative and serve merely as information for reference when the differences in pragmatic performance between A/B-grade and E-grade students are interpreted for the following reasons:

- Only six scripts written by four participants were analyzed.

- The two B/C-grade holders were working adults with about eight years' working experience, whereas the two E-grade holders were Year 1 students.

The questions that involve sixteen teachers' ratings (Questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 13 and 14) were analyzed.

a. Individual questions

Question 3 Appropriateness of the supportive moves

As can be seen in Table 68, the mean score for the appropriateness of supportive moves given to B/C-grade students (M=3.52, SD=1.288) is significantly greater (t=-4.741, df=94, 2-tailed p=0.000) than that given to E-grade students (M=2.44, SD=0.920) at $p<0.005$.

Table 68 Differences in the mean scores given to the appropriateness of supportive moves used by B/C-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
B/C-grade students	3.52	1.288	-4.741	94	0.000 (SIGN)
E-grade students	2.44	0.920			

Question 4 Overall politeness of the letter

The frequencies of the six categories of "politeness" were subjected to a Proportional *t* test, and the findings are presented in Tables 69a to 69f.

The findings of Table 69 follow:

"Unnaturally polite": 4.2% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "unnaturally polite" by the raters, whereas 22.9% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were rated as "unnaturally polite".

"Very polite": None of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "very polite", whereas 29.2% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

"Polite": 20.8% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "polite", whereas 39.6% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

"Neither polite nor impolite": 27.1% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "neither polite nor impolite", whereas only 6.3% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

“Impolite”: 37.5% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as “impolite”, whereas only 2.1% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

“Very impolite”: 10.4% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as “very impolite”, whereas none of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

The differences between two groups of students for all six categories are significant at the 95% confidence level (“unnaturally polite”: z=2.68; “very polite”: z=4.05; “polite”: z=2.01; “neither polite nor impolite”: z=2.73; “impolite”: z=4.35; “very impolite”: z=2.29,).

This finding shows that on the whole the “impolite” and “very impolite” categories were assigned mainly to letters written by E-grade students and the “polite”, “very polite” and “unnaturally polite” categories were assigned mainly to letters written by B/C-grade students.

Table 69 Differences in the politeness categories assigned to the B/C-grade letters and the E-grade letters as shown by Proportional *t* tests at 95% confidence level

Table 69a "Unnaturally polite showing disapproval"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
4.2	22.9	2.68	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 69b "Very polite showing approval"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
0	29.2	4.05	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 69c "Polite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
20.8	39.6	2.01	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 69d "Neither polite nor impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
27.1	6.3	2.73	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 69e "Impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
37.5	2.1	4.35	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 69f "Very impolite"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
10.4	0	2.29	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Question 7 Register classification

Findings in Table 70 follow:

"Formal": 6.3% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "formal", whereas 85.4% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

"Informal": 58.3% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "informal", whereas only 2.1% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

"Hard to categorize": 35.4% of the letters written by E-grade students were categorized as "hard to categorize", whereas only 12.5% of the letters written by B/C-grade students were assigned this category.

The differences between two groups of students for all three categories are significant at the 95% confidence level ("formal": z=7.78; "informal": z=6.00; "hard to categorize": 2.63).

This finding shows that on the whole the "informal" category was assigned mainly to letters written by E-grade students and the "formal" category was assigned mainly to letters written by B/C-grade students.

Table 70 Differences in the formality/informality categories assigned to the letters written by B/C-grade and by E-grade letters as shown by Proportional *t* tests at 95% confidence level

Table 70a "Formal"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
6.3	85.4	7.78	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 70b "Informal"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
58.3	2.1	6.00	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Table 70c "Hard to categorize"

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
48	48		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
35.4	12.5	2.63	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

(Sample 1=E-grade students; sample 2=B/C-grade students)

Question 8 Appropriateness of the register used

Table 71 shows that the mean score for the appropriateness of the register in the letters written by B/C-grade letters (*M*=3.69, *SD*=1.095) is significantly higher (*t*=-8.366, *df*=94, 2-tailed *p*=0.000) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (*M*=2.06, *SD*=0.783) at *p*<0.005.

Table 71 Differences in the mean scores for the appropriateness of the register used by B/C-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
B/C-grade students	3.69	1.095	-8.366	94	0.000 (SIGN)
E-grade students	2.06	0.783			

Question 9 Appropriateness of the position of the head act

Table 72 shows that the mean score for the appropriateness of the position of the head act in the letters written by B/C-grade letters (*M*=3.56, *SD*=1.219) is significantly higher (*t*=-3.457, *df*=94, 2-tailed *p*=0.001) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (*M*=2.77, *SD*=1.016) at *p*<0.005.

Table 72 Differences in the mean scores for the appropriateness of the position of the head act in the letters written by B/C-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
B/C-grade students	3.56	1.219	-3.457	94	0.001 (SIGN)
E-grade students	2.77	1.016			

Question 13 Appropriateness of amount of information

Table 73 shows that the mean score for the appropriateness of the amount of information in the letters written by B/C-grade letters (M=3.29, SD=1.352) is significantly higher (t=-4.324, df=85.635, 2-tailed p=0.000) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=2.25, SD=0.978) at $p<0.005$.

Table 73 Differences in the mean scores for the appropriateness of the amount of information in the letters written by B/C-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
B/C-grade students	3.29	1.352	-4.324	85.635	0.000 (SIGN)
E-grade students	2.25	0.978			

Question 14 Overall appropriateness of the letter

Table 74 shows that the mean score for the overall appropriateness of the letters written by B/C-grade letters (M=3.71, SD=1.148) is significantly higher (t=-8.261, df=83.822, 2-tailed p=0.000) than that in the letters written by E-grade students (M=2.04, SD=0.798) at $p<0.005$.

Table 74 Differences in the mean scores for the overall appropriateness of the letters written by B/C-grade and E-grade students as shown by *t* test

	Group Mean	**S*D***	***t* value**	***df***	**2-tailed *p***
B/C-grade students	3.71	1.148	-8.261	83.822	0.000 (SIGN)
E-grade students	2.04	0.798			

b. Summary and meaning of results

Summary (Supplementary Analysis)

The mean score for the appropriateness of supportive moves given to letters written by B/C-grade students was significantly greater than that given to letters written by E-grade students.

On the whole the “impolite” and “very impolite” categories were assigned mainly to letters written by E-grade students; the “polite”, “very polite” and “unnaturally polite” categories were assigned mainly to letters written by B/C-grade students.

On the whole, the “informal” category was assigned mainly to letters written by E-grade students and the “formal” category was assigned mainly to letters written by B/C-grade students.

The mean score for the appropriateness of the register in the letters written by B/C-grade students was significantly higher than that in the letters written by E-grade students.

The mean score for the appropriateness of the position of the head act in the letters written by B/C-grade students was significantly higher than that in the letters written by E-grade students.

The mean score for the appropriateness of the amount of information in the letters written by B/C-grade students was significantly higher than that in the letters written by E-grade students.

The mean score for the appropriateness of the letters written by B/C-grade students was significantly higher than that of the letters written by E-grade students.

Meaning of results (Supplementary Analysis)

The findings suggest that the letters written by B/C-grade students were judged to be significantly more appropriate in the following aspects:

- Supportive moves used;
- Register used;

- Position of the head act;
- Amount of information provided;
- Overall effect in terms of achieving the purpose of the letters.

The letters written by B/C-grade students were also judged to be more formal and more polite than those written by E-grade students.

The higher ratings achieved by B/C-grade students in the above-mentioned pragmatic aspects seem to suggest that as L2 learners' English proficiency improves, their pragmatic performance also improves.

2. Qualitative findings concerning Questions 1 and 2

The analysis in this part attempts to answer Research Questions 5.

Research Question 5: Qualitatively, what characteristics of a written formal request are considered appropriate by EFL teachers?

To answer this research question, Question 1 (dealing with politeness levels of individual expressions used to introduce head acts) and Question 2 (concerning inappropriate supportive moves) in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively.

The qualitative analysis conducted in this study is based on the quantitative findings about Question 3 ("appropriateness of supportive moves") and Question 4 ("politeness of the letters) for Hypotheses 1 and 2. The

quantitative findings in relation to Questions 3 and 4 are repeated below for easy reference:

For Question 3, it was found that there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs and between female and male teachers in the mean scores they assigned to the twelve letters.

For Question 4, it was found that the number of letters classified as "unnaturally polite" by ESTs is significantly greater than that by CSTs; however, CSTs and ESTs show no significant differences in the numbers of letters they classified into the remaining five politeness categories: "very polite", "polite", "neither polite nor impolite", "impolite" or "very impolite" at the 95% confidence level. It was also found that there were no significant differences between female and male teachers for each of the six politeness categories.

In the following analysis, where two groups of teachers showed no significant differences (as indicated by the related quantitative findings), their comments were reported as one coherent group, but where two groups of teachers showed significant differences, their differential responses were reported. Doing so is not intended to imply that the opinions of one group are more valid than the opinions of the other group, nor should teachers and students assume that the opinions of native speakers of English are more useful than the opinions of non-native speakers of English because they live in a community in which both actually exist. Teachers and students, while

they should be aware of the differences, should decide which they wish to emulate – local or metropolitan varieties.

Based on this principle, for the politeness category “unnaturally polite” (Question 1), the sixteen teachers were regarded as two separate groups (8 CSTs and 8 ESTs): the “unnaturally polite” expressions chosen by a minimum of 2 CSTs or 2 ESTs were included in the analysis. For the remaining five politeness categories and Question 2 (“appropriateness of supportive moves”), the sixteen teachers were treated as one coherent group containing 16 teachers: the supportive moves identified by a minimum of two teachers were included in the analysis.

Setting the minimum level of two teachers for a group of eight and two teachers for a group of sixteen is a decision based on confidence levels indicated by a Proportional *t* test. This Proportional *t* test (Table 75**)** shows that for a sample containing 8 subjects, the difference between 2 teachers (2/8=25%) and zero teacher (0/8=0%) is significant at the 80% confidence level; Table 76 shows that for a sample containing 16 subjects, the difference between 2 teachers (2/16=12.5%) and zero teacher (0/8=0%) is significant at the 80% confidence level.

Table 75 The confidence levels for samples containing 8 participants in each group

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
8	8		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
25	0	1.51	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

Table 76 The confidence levels for samples containing 16 participants in each group

Sample1	Sample2		CONFIDENCE LEVEL				
N1	**N2**						
16	16		**99%**	**95%**	**90%**	**80%**	**68%**
P1	**P2**	**Z-VALUE**	2.54	1.96	1.64	1.28	1.00
12.5	0	1.46	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	NOT SIGN	SIGN	SIGN

A preliminary inspection of data showed that if a higher percentage of teachers were chosen, the data meeting the criterion would be diminished to a great extent. In order to strike a balance between the representation of findings and the data that can be used, the minimum number of two teachers was decided on.

a. Politeness levels of individual expressions (Question 1)

A total of 47 politeness expressions used to introduce head acts were underlined in the twelve letters provided to sixteen teachers for them to rate (Table 77). "5-" means "unnaturally polite", "5+" means "very polite", "4" means "polite", "3" means "neither polite nor impolite", "2" means "impolite" and "1" means "very impolite".

Table 77 Politeness expressions underlined in the twelve letters to elicit teachers' pragmatic judgments

Letter number	**Politeness expressions introducing head acts**
Letter 1	1. I am taking the liberty of addressing you to request your assistance in a matter that is of the greatest importance to me.
	2. May I impose on you to look over my letter and make any changes you believe will enhance my letter?
	3. I hope you can find it possible to assist me in this matter.
Letter 2	4. I hope you will do me the favor of allowing me to interview you for the class project.
	5. Would you kindly let me have a list of the times when you might be available during the next week?
Letter 3	6. I hope you can grant me special dispensation under the circumstances.
Letter 4	7. May I request your permission to let me pass the "spoken language" course?
	8. I was wondering if you could perhaps consider my situation as a special case and grant me your permission.

	9. I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that I have finished all the course assessments despite the attendance problems.
	10. I would really appreciate it if you could understand the hassle caused to the family members when one's mother is seriously ill.
	11. I would really be grateful if you could let me pass the attendance requirement.
Letter 5	12. Would it be possible for you to proofread my job application letter?
	13. I look forward to receiving your favorable reply.
Letter 6	14. I think I would need your help for the data collection for a project related to this course.
	15. May I invite you to be one of the interviewees for my research?
	16. I am writing to you in the hope of getting your help.
	17. Would you mind calling me at xxxx xxxx or writing back to me stating the time and the venue that you prefer 18. if you could kindly agree to provide assistance to my project?
	19. Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Letter 7	20. Seek for your help.
	21. Please forgive me.
	22. Arrange a special consideration for me to pass the course if my course work and exam is fair.
	23. Do not fail me because of the attendance.
	24. Feel free to contact me at xxxx xxxx to ask more about this.
	25. Hope that you can help me about this.
Letter 8	26. I am writing a letter to seek your help.
	27. I would like to invite you to proofread my job application letter.
	28. Please do me a favor to help me
	29. Please help me.
	30. I really longing for your good news.
Letter 9	31. Can you do me a favor?
	32. Let me interview you not only for my project also for my English study too.
	33. Please arrange a time
	34. I really want you can do this interview.
Letter 10	35. I would therefore be most grateful if you could spare approximately one-hour from your busy schedule to share with me your valuable working experience in Hong Kong.

	36. I hope I would have the chance to meeting with you.
	It would be most kind of you if our interview could be fixed in any of the afternoons from Monday to Saturday from 2:30 p.m.
	37. Please reach me at xxxx xxxx or xxxxxx@unimail.com anytime.
Letter 11	38. I am writing to plead that special consideration be given when the English department decides whether I should be given a “pass” in the course.
	39. I hope you would understand and appreciate that I had in fact tried my very best to come back to school whenever I could find somebody to look after my younger brother in my place.
	40. I would be most grateful if the Department could consider this as a special case and let me pass the Course.
	41. Please do not hesitate to contact me.
	42. I look forward to your favorable reply.
Letter 12	43. I am writing to ask your goodself for a favor.
	44. It is only under these circumstances that I have written this letter to you boldly asking you for a favor, namely, to proofread my job application letter.

	45. If it so happens that you can spare your valuable time to assist me on this occasion, I would be extremely grateful for that.
	46. You may contact me at any time at xxxx xxxx.
	47. I look forward to your favorable reply.

Treating the sixteen teachers as one coherent group

The purpose of the analysis performed for this question is to find out what qualities of the expressions listed in Table 77 are considered “very polite”, “polite”, “neither polite nor impolite”, “impolite” or “very impolite” by the sixteen teachers in this study. Qualities comprising these five politeness categories will be presented below based on sixteen teachers’ written comments provided in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire as well as their oral comments provided in the interviews following the completion of the questionnaire. The comments compiled in this section have been reconstructed based on the full version of the written comments and the oral comments provided by the sixteen teachers so that the comments to be presented are concise, complete in sentence structure and consistent in format. To view the original comments made by teachers concerning Question 1, please go to the section related to Question 1 (pp.1-72) in the Compiled Data File.

(A) Individual categories

“Very polite”

No common quality was mentioned by at least two teachers for the expressions they considered “very polite”.

“Polite”

Table 78 shows the qualities mentioned by at least two teachers for the expressions they considered “polite”:

Table 78 "Polite"

Qualities	**Rater**	**Example of politeness expressions considered by raters to have demonstrated this quality**	**Comments made by raters**
1. Expressions containing modals denoting politeness	**Rater 5 (M)**	I hope I would have the chance	"Would" is a little more tentative than "will".
	Rater 10 (F)	You may contact me at any time at 2345 5677.	"May" is a polite form of "can" in this particular context. It can be used with "you", not just in "may I".
2. Expressions providing options	**Rater 8 (M)**	You may contact me at any time	You may call me or you may not. I give you an option.
	Rater 13 (M)	If it so happens that you can your valuable time	Although the word "valuable" makes it unnaturally polite, it is good to suggest a way out for the reader to say "no".

According to Table 78, expressions with the following qualities were considered as "polite" by at least two teachers (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of raters who highlighted that particular quality):

- Expressions containing modals denoting politeness (2)

  (E.g., "I hope I would have the chance")

- Expressions providing options (2)

  (E.g., “If it so happens that you can spare you valuable time to assist me on this occasion, I would be extremely grateful for that”)

“Neither polite nor impolite”

No comments were made by any of the sixteen teachers regarding what qualities comprise the category “neither polite nor impolite”

“Impolite”

The following qualities were considered “impolite” by at least two of the sixteen teachers (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of raters who highlighted that particular quality): (See Appendix W for the related comments made by raters.)

- Expressions being informal (8)

  (e.g., “Please reach me”);
- Expressions expressing an imperative tone/being too direct (6)

  (e.g., “Do not fail me”);
- Expressions suggesting self-centeredness (3)

  (e.g., “Let me interview you”);
- Expressions suggesting wrong hierarchy (3)

  (e.g., “Feel free to contact me”);
- Expressions that are presumptuous (3)

  (e.g., “I think I would need help for the data collection”);

- Expressions suggesting the request being a small one (2)

  (e.g., “Please do me a favor”);
- Expressions asking the addressee to treat the writer’s case as a special one (2)

  (e.g., “Arrange a special consideration for me”);
- Expressions being too short (2)

  (e.g., “Please help me”);
- Expressions suggesting responsibility/more work on the part of the addressee to take follow-up action (2)

  (e.g., “Please arrange a time”);
- Expressions containing modal verbs suggesting permission from the writer is needed (2)

  (e.g., “You may contact me”).

“Very impolite”

No common quality was mentioned by at least two teachers for expressions considered “very impolite”.

Treating the sixteen teachers as two separate groups (8 CSTs and 8 ESTs)

"Unnaturally polite"

The numbers of CSTs and ESTs who chose the category "unnaturally polite" will be contrasted. Of all the politeness expressions regarded as "unnaturally polite" (see Question 1 in the Compiled Data File**)**, only the expressions showing a difference of two or more teachers, (i.e., at least 25% of eight teachers) choosing this politeness category will be presented (Table 79).

Table 79 “Unnaturally polite” expressions showing a difference of 2 teachers choosing this category between CSTs and ESTs

	Number of CSTs	**Number of ESTs**	**Difference**
1. I hope you can find it possible to assist me in this matter.	3	1	2
2. Would you kindly let me have a list of the times when you might be available during the next week?	0	2	2
3. May I request your permission to let me pass the “spoken language” course?	1	4	3
4. I was wondering if you could perhaps consider my situation as a special case and grant me your permission.	0	3	3
5. May I invite you to be one of the interviewees for my research?	1	4	3
6. if you could kindly agree to provide assistance to my project?	0	5	5
7. Please forgive me.	1	7	6
8. I would like to invite you to proofread my job application letter.	0	2	2
9. I am writing to ask your goodself for a favor.	4	7	3

10. If it so happens that you can spare your valuable time to assist me on this occasion,	3	7	4

Table 79 shows:

"Please forgive me"

"Please forgive me" is the expression about which ESTs and CSTs differed the most (with a difference of 6 teachers). Only one CST regarded this expression as "unnaturally polite", but seven ESTs chose this politeness category.

The CST who regarded the expression "Please forgive me" as unnaturally polite did not comment explicitly on why they thought the use of "forgive" was "unnaturally polite", but three ESTs who had commented on the politeness of this word said that the word "forgive" was "debasing" and "kowtowing" (the use of the word "forgive" to be too kowtowing and too strong [Rater 9]; using the word "forgive" is overly polite [Rater 12]; it is debasing to ask for forgiveness [Rater 14]). (P.32, Question 1, Compiled Data File**).**

It is interesting to note the similarity between teachers' choices concerning "politeness" and their choices concerning "usefulness" for the expression "Please forgive me". The expression "Please forgive me" used in Letter 7 was regarded as "unnaturally polite" by the majority of ESTs (7 out of 8); only 1 CST considered it "unnaturally polite"; among the remaining 7 CSTs,

4 regarded the use of “Please forgive me” as “polite”, and 3 regarded the expression as “neither polite nor impolite” (P.32, Question 1, Compiled Data File**).** Coincidentally, the pattern showing the numbers of CSTs and ESTs choosing “counter-productive”, “useful” and “neutral” was similar to that showing the numbers of CSTs and ESTs choosing “unnaturally polite”, “polite”, and “neither polite nor impolite”: this expression was considered “counter-productive” by the majority of ESTs (7 out of 8); it was not regarded as “counter-productive” by any of the CSTs; 4 CSTs regarded the expression as “useful” and 4 CSTs regarded that expression as “neutral” **(**pp.283-284, Question 11, Compiled Data File**).**

Three ESTs (Raters 10, 12 and 14) who had commented on the usefulness of this expression associated the use of the term “forgive” with “sin” and “confession to a priest”, whereas the two CSTs who had commented on this word said that the use of the term “forgive” reflected that the student knew it was wrong to miss the lessons, thus making the use of the term “forgive” acceptable because the writer was interrupting the addressee **(**pp.283-284, Question 11, Compiled Data File**).** The comments suggest that CSTs regarded the use of the expression “please forgive me” as appropriate, but ESTs considered the use inappropriate to the context.

“If you could kindly

“If you could kindly agree to provide assistance to my project” is the expression showing the second highest difference (a difference of 5 teachers). Five ESTs considered this expression as “unnaturally polite”, but none of the CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comments ESTs gave were: “kindly” on its own is already very polite, and “could kindly” is not only overly polite but also old-fashioned (Rater 12); “kindly” is overly polite (Rater 15); “if you could kindly agree” is too humble (Rater 16).

If it so happens that you can spare your valuable time

“If it so happens that you can spare your valuable time to assist me on this occasion” is the expression showing the third highest difference (a difference of 4 teachers). Seven ESTs considered this expression as “unnaturally polite”, but only three CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comments provided by ESTs were: the word “valuable” is unnaturally polite (Rater 13); “if it so happens” is so indirect that it is unnecessary; the expression is trying to impress the addressee and over-flattering” (Rater 14); the expression is too indirect and too wordy (Rater 15). A comment from one CST was: “valuable” is very redundant; when the word “spare” is used, the addressee’s time is already upgraded (Rater 3).

May I request your permission

"May I request your permission to let me pass the "spoken language" course" is the expression showing the fourth highest difference (a difference of 3 teachers). Four ESTs considered this expression as "unnaturally polite", but only one of the CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comments provided by ESTs were: This expression is over-formalized in a college context (Rater 9); the combination of "request" and "may" makes the expression excessive (Rater 16). The comment provided by the CST is similar to the comment made by Rater 16: the string of words, namely, "may", "request", "permission" and "let" makes the expression unnaturally polite (Rater 7)

I was wondering if you could perhaps

"I was wondering if you could perhaps consider my situation as a special case and grant me your permission" is the expression also showing a difference of three teachers. Three ESTs regarded this expression as "unnaturally polite", but none of the CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comment provided by one ESTs was: "I was wondering" is informal; the whole effect is too much when "I was wondering if" and "If you could perhaps consider" are used together (Rater 16).

I am writing to ask your goodself

"I am writing to ask your goodself for a favor" is the expression also showing a difference of three teachers. Seven ESTs regarded this expression as "unnaturally polite", but only four of the CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comments provided by ESTs are: This expression is humorous and old-fashioned; "goodself" is over-emphasizing the politeness factor (Rater 14); this expression is very old-fashioned (Rater 15). No comments were provided by CSTs regarding this expression.

I would like to invite you

"I would like to invite you to proofread my job application letter" is the expression showing a difference of two teachers. Two ESTs regarded this expression as "unnaturally polite", but none of the CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comments provided by ESTs are: Usually this word is used for inviting the addressee to do something nice, not some jobs (Rater 16); "invite" is used to invite the addressee to a party or basically something in his/her favor (Rater 11).

I hope you can find it possible

"I hope you can find it possible to assist me in this matter" is the only expression regarded as "unnaturally polite" by more CSTs than ESTs (with a difference of 2 teachers). Only one EST regarded this expression as "unnaturally polite", but three CSTs chose this politeness category.

The comments provided by the only EST are: The whole tone is too much, not necessary and redundant. The comments provided by CSTs are: "I hope you may assist me in this matter" is a more appropriate expression than "can find it possible"; it is not a matter of ability; "find it useful" is more appropriate than "find it possible".

The previous findings mean that more CSTs held a positive opinion about the following expressions than did ESTs:

- Expressions asking for forgiveness, for example, "please forgive me";
- Expressions emphasizing the importance of the addressee's time, for example, "your valuable time";
- Expressions containing the word "kindly", for example, "if you could kindly";
- Expressions that are indirect/redundant, for example, "if it so happens";
- Expressions that contain more than one word showing politeness, for example, "May I request your permission" and "I was wondering if you could perhaps";

- Expressions suggesting the superiority of the addressee, for example, "your goodself" and "I would like to invite you".

However, more ESTs perceived the expression "I hope you find it possible" positively than did CSTs.

It is essential to note that, in the previous analysis, what was compared was the numbers of CSTs and ESTs who chose the category "unnaturally polite" for individual expressions, not the qualities of "unnaturally polite" expressions, as mentioned by the two groups of teachers. The main reason for abstaining from the comparison of the qualities of expressions results from the fact that not all expressions had been commented on by all sixteen teachers. In the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire, some teachers did not comment on the politeness expression they rated. As a result, the expressions provided with comments in a teacher's Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire might be different from those in another teacher's Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire; further, in the interviews following the completion of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire, the limited time available did not permit the interviewer to ask the interviewees to justify all their ratings. It follows that a certain quality of the politeness category "unnaturally polite" might have been mentioned by at least one of the ESTs, but it might not have been mentioned by any of the CSTS and vice versa. However, this does not necessarily mean that this particular quality was not considered important by either of the groups because other politeness categories might have better captured a teacher's attention when s/he was completing the

Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire or attending the interview, and s/he may therefore have concentrated on commenting on those politeness categories.

The absence of comments for some “unnaturally polite” expressions would make the comparison of the qualities indicated two groups of teachers misleading, so only the numbers of CSTs and ESTs who chose “unnaturally polite” was compared.

(B) Summary of the qualitative findings concerning Question 1

“Very polite”

No common quality was mentioned by at least two CSTs (2/8=25%) or two ESTs (2/8=25%) for expressions considered “very polite”.

“Polite”

- Expressions containing modals denoting politeness
  (e.g., “I hope I would have the chance”);
- Expressions providing options
  (e.g., “If it so happens that you can spare your valuable time to assist me on this occasion, I would be extremely grateful for that”).

“Impolite”

- Expressions being informal;
  (e.g, “Please reach me”)
- Expressions expressing an imperative tone/being too direct
  (e.g., “Do not fail me”);

- Expressions suggesting self-centeredness

  (e.g., “Let me interview you”);
- Expressions suggesting wrong hierarchy

  (e.g., “Feel free to contact me”);
- Expressions that are presumptuous

  (e.g., “I think I would need help for the data collection”);
- Expressions suggesting the request being a small one

  (e.g., “Please do me a favor”);
- Expressions asking the addressee to treat the writer’s case as a special one

  (e.g., “Arrange a special consideration for me”);
- Expressions being too short

  (e.g., “Please help me”);
- Expressions suggesting responsibility/more work on the part of the addressee to take follow-up action

  (e.g., “Please arrange a time”);
- Expressions containing modal verbs suggesting permission from the writer is needed

  (e.g., “You may contact me”).

“Very impolite”

No common quality was mentioned by at least two CSTs (2/8=25%) or two ESTs (2/8=25%) for expressions considered “very impolite”.

“Unnaturally polite”

More CSTs held a more positive opinion about the following expressions than ESTs:

- Expressions asking for forgiveness, for example, “please forgive me”;
- Expressions emphasizing the importance of the addressee’s time, for example, “your valuable time”;
- Expressions containing the word “kindly”, for example, “if you could kindly”;
- Expressions that are indirect/redundant, for example, “if it so happens”;
- Expressions that contain more than one word showing politeness, for example, “May I request your permission” and “I was wondering if you could perhaps”;
- Expressions suggesting the superiority of the addressee, for example, “your goodself” and “I would like to invite you”.

However, more ESTs perceived the expression “I hope you find it possible” positively than CSTs.

b. Inappropriate supportive moves (Question 2)

Question 2 asked the sixteen teachers to identify inappropriate supportive moves (hereafter referred to as ISMs) used in the twelve letters provided. In the interviews following the completion of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire, teachers were required to provide reasons for the ISMs.

The purpose of the analysis performed for this question is to find out what supportive moves (hereafter referred as SMs) are considered inappropriate by the sixteen teachers in this study. The ISMs presented below are those identified by at least two teachers, and the reasons for the inappropriateness are summarized from the teachers' written comments (put in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire) and their oral comments (provided in the interviews following the completion of the questionnaire). The comments included in this chapter have been reconstructed based on the full version of the teachers' written comments and oral comments **(**Compiled Data File**)** so that the comments reported in this chapter are concise, complete in sentence structure and consistent in format.

(A) Individual topics

Topic 1 (Attendance)

Inappropriate SMs identified by sixteen teachers

The ISMs identified by at least 2 teachers for Topic 1 and the reasons suggested are provided as follows (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of teachers who identified that ISM): (See Appendix X for the related comments made by raters.)

Item 1) Claiming that the writer's teacher can attest his/her diligence (3)

Reasons: a) making an unsubstantiated assumption that the teacher will attest to the writer's diligence, and b) referring the addressee to an inappropriate source of information.

Item 2) Asking the addressee to waive the attendance requirement (3)

Reasons: a) not offering any suggestion to make up for the poor attendance, b) asking for a free pass of the course, and c) being presumptive.

Item 3) Using minimizers and vague terms (3)

Reasons: a) trying to make the situation less serious, b) being too indirect.

Item 4) Asking the addressee to call the writer if s/he wants to know more information (4)

Reasons: a) suggesting that the writer has not attempted to supply all necessary information, b) not considering the time the addressee has to use to call the writer, and c) not considering that it should be left to the addressee to decide whether or not to call the writer by just providing the phone number.

Item 5) Telling the addressee that the writer is "stuck in trouble" (6)

Reasons: creating a negative impact on the quality of the effort the writer has put into the writing when such basic words as "stuck" and "trouble" are used.

Item 6) Telling the addressee the details of the attendance requirement (2)

Reasons: not necessary to make such a point for the person who knows the rule very well.

Item 7) Telling the addressee that the writer assumes s/he knows well about the situation by using the expression "as you well know"(2)

Reasons: sounding arrogant.

Item 8) Claiming that the writer is not disrespectful to the course (3)

Reasons: a) not useful because vague answers can be provided by anyone who does not meet the attendance requirement, b) wasting the addressee's time to read irrelevant information, especially that put at the beginning of a letter.

Item 9) Reminding the addressee of his/her discretionary powers (4)

Reasons: a) not appropriate to tell the addressee not to follow rules, and b) imposing on the addressee.

Item 10) Asking for sympathy (3)

Reasons: a) useless making the addressee feel guilty because of failing the writer, and b) not focusing on what the writer can do about his/her poor attendance.

Item 11) Making excessive promises (3)

Reasons: a) being exaggerated, b) being too broad, and c) being demeaning.

Topic 2 (Proofreading)

ISMs identified by sixteen teachers

The ISMs identified by at least 2 teachers for Topic 2 and the reasons suggested are provided as follows (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of teachers who identified that ISM): (See Appendix Y for the related comments made by raters.)

Item 1) Over-emphasizing the importance of having the letter proofread (5)

Reasons: a) lacking in evidence to justify the importance, b) being self-important, c) lacking in consideration about the imposition on the addressee, d) using the expression “benefit me”, which has negative connotations, and e) being redundant to mention the importance of having the letter proofread.

Item 2) Suggesting compensation, especially when the writer lacks financial means (7)

Reasons: a) assuming that the addressee would expect some financial rewards for proofreading a student's job application letter, and b) suggesting compensation despite the writer's lack of financial resources.

Item 3) Mentioning the writer's unhappiness if s/he cannot get the job (6)

Reasons: a) making the addressee feel bad by saying that the writer may not get the job if the addressee does not help, and b) assuming that the addressee will care about the writer's unhappiness.

Item 4) Asking the addressee to do the writer a favor (3)

Reasons: suggesting that the request is unimportant by using the informal word "favor".

Item 5) Implying that the proofreading is an easy job (4)

Reasons: minimizing the imposition by using the expressions "only" and "a few minutes" rather than letting the addressee perceive the job of proofreading from his/her viewpoint.

Item 6) Mentioning the writer's failure to find a job (4)

Reasons: hinting at the possibility that grammatical mistakes in the letter may not be the main reason why the writer cannot get a job.

Item 7) Mentioning the difficulty of job hunting in general (3)

Reasons: providing irrelevant information as far as the writer's case is concerned.

Item 8) Offering insincere compliments (4)

Reasons: a) offering compliments on the post rather than on the person holding the post, b) offering flattering remarks for the purpose of receiving assistance, and c) offering compliments not based on concrete evidence.

Item 9) Stating that nobody but the addressee can help (6)

Reasons: a) making the addressee feel guilty, and b) shifting the duty onto the addressee.

Item 10) Asking the addressee to reply to the writer if help is not offered (2)

Reasons: a) imposing on the addressee if s/he is required to reply to the writer explaining why s/he does not want to help, and b) not necessary for the addressee to reply to a stranger who asks for help.

Item 11) Telling the addressee that the writer assumes s/he knows well about the situation by using the expression "as you well know" (2)

Reasons: a) not necessary for the writer to supply further information if the writer assumes that the addressee already knows the information well, and b) implying that the addressee is going to deny something.

Item 12) Repeating the request (2)

Reasons: not necessary to repeat the same request in a letter.

Topic 3 (Interviews)

ISMs identified by sixteen teachers

The ISMs identified by at least 2 teachers for Topic 3 and the reasons suggested are provided as follows (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of teachers who identified that ISM): (See Appendix Z for the related comments made by raters.)

Item 1) Suggesting compensation, especially when the writer lacks financial resources (5)

Reasons: not necessary to mention compensation if the student cannot afford the financial resources.

Item 2) Expecting the addressee to provide a list of times (4)

Reasons: not the addressee's responsibility to provide a list of times..

Item 3) Saying that the addressee was chosen from a list arbitrarily (10)

Reasons: a) arrogant and imposing, and b) not mentioning from what source the writer gets the name of the addressee.

Item 4) Telling the addressee that the writer is trying to be candid (6)

Reasons: a) not appropriate for writing to someone the writer does not know, b) sounding like an employer talking to an employee, and c) sounding like the writer is going to reveal some dark secrets.

Item 5) Telling the addressee that the writer will inform him/her the time and venue to meet (2)

Reasons: sounding like the writer is in charge and can make decisions.

Item 6) Asking the addressee to contact the writer by phone (4)

Reasons: a) taking it for granted that the addressee will help, b) being too direct, and c) using the inappropriate means of communication (phoning is personal; e-mails and letters are more appropriate).

Item 7) Mentioning the improvement of the writer's English as one of the interview outcomes (4)

Reasons: a) sounding like the writer wants to get a free private lesson in English, and b) imposing too many duties on the addressee.

(B) Summary of findings concerning Question 2

ISMs mentioned by sixteen teachers

Topic 1

- Claiming that the writer's teacher can attest his/her diligence;
- Asking the addressee to waive the attendance requirement;
- Using minimizers and vague terms;
- Asking the addressee to call the writer if s/he wants to know more information;
- Telling the addressee that the writer is "stuck in trouble";
- Telling the addressee the details of the attendance requirement;
- Telling the addressee that the writer assumes s/he knows well about the situation by using the expression "as you well know";
- Claiming that the writer is not disrespectful to the course;
- Reminding the addressee of his/her discretionary powers;
- Asking for sympathy;
- Making excessive promises.

Topic 2

- Over-emphasizing the importance of having the letter proofread;
- Suggesting compensation, especially when the writer lacks financial means;
- Mentioning the writer's unhappiness if s/he cannot get the job;
- Asking the addressee to do the writer a favor;
- Implying that the proofreading is an easy job;
- Mentioning the writer's failure to find a job;
- Mentioning the difficulty of job hunting in general;
- Offering insincere compliments;
- Stating that nobody but the addressee can help;
- Asking the addressee to reply to the writer if help is not offered;
- Using the expression "as you well know";
- Repeating the request.

Topic 3

- Suggesting compensation, especially when the writer lacks financial resources;
- Expecting the addressee to provide a list of times;
- Saying that the addressee was chosen from a list arbitrarily;
- Telling the addressee that the writer is trying to be candid;
- Telling the addressee that the writer will inform him/her of the time and venue to meet;
- Asking the addressee to contact the writer by phone;

- Mentioning the improvement of the writer’s English as one of the interview outcomes.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

There are two main parts in this chapter. The first part focuses on the discussion of the findings concerning each of four hypotheses including interpretation of the meaning of results and speculation about causes. For Hypotheses 1 and 2, the findings about sixteen teachers' judgments on the twelve letters will be discussed first; the findings about their pragmatic preferences if they themselves were to write the three letters will be discussed afterwards. The second part is concerned with limitations of this study.

A. Discussion about findings concerning four hypotheses

1. Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed. Among the twelve questions analyzed quantitatively, eight questions did not show significant differences between CSTs and ESTs.

The eight questions that did not show significant differences between CSTs and ESTs are:

- Appropriateness of supportive moves (Question 3);
- Classification of register (Question 7);
- Appropriateness of the register (Question 8);
- Appropriateness of the position of the head acts (Question 9);
- Amount of information (Question 13);

- Overall appropriateness of letters (Question 14);
- The most important supportive move (Question 5); and
- The tendency to use negative/positive words (Question 12).

The four questions that showed significant differences between CSTs and ESTs are:

- Overall politeness of the letters – the sub-category "unnaturally polite" expressions (Question 4);
- Usefulness of "negative' expressions" (Question 11);
- The supportive moves that would definitely not be used (Question 6);
- Writing plans (Question 10).

The lack of significant differences in the pragmatic judgments between CSTs and ESTs on eight of the twelve questions analyzed quantitatively for twelve letters of request suggests that it is possible for advanced learners of English to achieve native-like pragmatic judgment at least to some extent. However, the differences in four aspects of their pragmatic judgments (i.e., what constitutes "unnaturally polite" expressions, the perception of the usefulness of "negative" elements, the supportive moves they themselves would definitely not use and their preferred writing plans) suggest that certain pragmatic considerations might be influenced respectively by Cantonese and British cultures. The differences in four pragmatic aspects are perhaps the result of the difference in Cantonese and British cultures regarding how speakers of these two languages perceive the relative power between the addressee and the requester as well as in what constitutes a

written formal request in terms of politeness expressions, supportive moves, writing plans and use of negative/positive words.

The finding that there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs on eight of the twelve questions is in agreement with some previous findings to the effect that it is possible for L2 learners who are proficient in the target language and who have long-term exposure to the target culture to acquire native-like pragmatic competence to some extent (e.g., Clankie, 1993; Nakajima, 1997; Tanaka, 1988;). The reason why some previous studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Harada, 1996; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992) conclude that even advanced L2 learners of English have difficulty with English pragmatics could be that the subjects in those studies were mainly university students, whereas the subjects in this study were EFL teachers, whose education qualifications (88% of them had a second degree in language teaching) and whose exposure to the L2 culture (for an average of ten years) in a working environment where English is used as the medium of communication should have played an important role in their acquisition of the English pragmatics in terms of judging the pragmatic performance in the twelve letters of requests.

That CSTs in this study differed from ESTs in four pragmatic aspects agrees with the finding of some previous studies to the effect that L2 learners often differed from NSs of English in their pragmatic choices (e.g., Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Welz, 1990; De Kadi, 1992; Harada, 1996; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). The discussions about the views of CSTs and ESTs on

“unnaturally polite” expressions, “negative” expressions and about their own pragmatic preferences follow:

a. “Unnaturally polite” expressions and the usefulness of “negative” expressions

The numbers of expressions judged by CSTs to be “unnaturally polite” and to be “counter-productive” were significantly lower than those judged by ESTs. The findings that more ESTs regarded some politeness expressions as “unnaturally polite” concurs with one of the findings obtained by Harada (1996) to the effect that the average rating (7 points out of 10) given to the expression “I’d appreciate it if you could get me the salt” by native American speakers in her study was lower than that (9 points out of 10) given by the advanced Japanese ESL learners; the rating given by the American speakers was also lower than that (9.5 points out of 10) given by the intermediate Japanese ESL learners. Some of the American speakers regarded that expression as being too polite for requesting salt and thus being somehow sarcastic.

It is possible to speculate about the reasons why ESTs and CSTs differed in their views of what constitutes “unnaturally polite” and “counter-productive” expressions:

1) CSTs might expect a requester to be very polite to the addressee who is an acquaintance of the writer in the contexts specified in the three writing topics, and they therefore did not consider the expressions used

in the letters “unnaturally polite” on the whole. This kind of expectation might be connected to Chinese culture in the domain of classrooms, where teachers are always perceived as seniors with great authority.

2) The perceptions of the use of the speech act “forgiveness” could be different between CSTs and ESTs. Three ESTs who had commented on the usefulness of this expression associated the use of the term “forgive” with “sin” and “confession to a priest”, whereas the two CSTs who had commented on this word said that the use of the term “forgive” reflected that the student knew it was wrong to miss the lessons, thus making the use of the term “forgive” acceptable because the writer was interrupting the addressee (Compiled Data File, Question 11, pp.283-285).

3) The four CSTs who considered the expression “Please forgive me” polite did not explicitly comment on the expression. However, from the similarity between teachers’ choices concerning “politeness” and their choices concerning “usefulness” for the expression “Please forgive me”, it can be inferred that CSTs and ESTs tended to relate “usefulness” with “politeness” in their interpretation of the word “forgive”. For raw figures showing the sub-categories within “politeness” and “usefulness” chosen by CSTs and ESTs, please refer

to Table 79 Chapter 4, Section E, Part 2a). The similarity in the pattern provides some clues to the reasons why four CSTs considered the use of “forgive” to be “polite”: since the word was “useful” in their opinion, the word was deemed as “polite”.

That CSTs and ESTs tended to relate “usefulness” with “politeness” when they interpreted the word “forgive” might also provide some clues as to why fewer “negative” expressions were regarded as “counter-productive” by CSTs than by ESTs. However, more research is needed to investigate the relationship between “usefulness” and “politeness” in these sorts of English expressions as perceived by NSs of Cantonese and NSs of English.

4) The perceptions of the effect of using words like “kindly” and “valuable” might be different between CSTs and ESTs. For example, the expression “if you could kindly” was considered “unnaturally polite” by five ESTs on the grounds that this expression was old-fashioned and too humble, but none of the CTSs regarded the use of this word as “unnaturally polite”.

Two possible reasons might explain the differences in the opinions of CSTs and ESTs about “unnaturally polite” expressions. First, CSTs might prefer to maintain their own opinions despite their awareness of the views of ESTs. Second, CSTs might be unaware of the opinion commonly held by ESTs. The implications for both possibilities follow:

The first possibility

The first possibility is that CSTs do not agree with the opinion of ESTs regarding what constitutes "unnaturally polite" expressions. If this is the case, L2 learners of English should be made aware of the differences between CSTs and ESTs regarding politeness expressions to be used when writing to people who speak different first languages, since using politeness expressions considered appropriate by addressees may increase the chances for them to approve a request. It follows that the comments made by NSs of Cantonese on some politeness expressions commonly-used by Cantonese learners of English should be collected and incorporated into related teaching materials used in secondary/tertiary institutions. It would not be sufficient for L2 learners of English to know the English pragmatics acceptable to only NSs of English in a world where more and more people who do not speak English as their first language hold senior positions in organizations and who are responsible for responding to the requests made by their students or by their subordinates. L2 learners of English should be aware of the possibility that some expressions considered "unnaturally polite" by NSs of English may be perceived positively by NSs of Cantonese. The qualitative findings concerning Question 1 have revealed some examples regarded as "unnaturally polite" by fewer CSTs than by ESTs (with a difference of at least two teachers). Further research could be conducted in this regard to find out which particular politeness expressions viewed as "unnaturally polite" by NSs of English are perceived positively by NSs of Cantonese.

The second possibility

The second possibility is that CSTs are not aware of the views held by ESTs regarding “unnaturally polite” expressions. If this is the case, does it mean that L2 learners of English would need to live in an L1 environment for a very long time -- since childhood -- if they were to develop a sense of “unnaturalness” for some expressions considered “unnaturally polite” by NSs of English? Does it also mean that the language environment of Hong Kong, where English is spoken as a foreign/second language, is not conducive to the acquisition of complete native-like pragmatic competence no matter how much effort L2 learners have invested? If the answers to these two questions are affirmative, what could be done within the constraints of an L2 environment to enrich the pragmatic knowledge of L2 learners regarding what expressions, especially those commonly used by Cantonese-speaking students, are viewed as “unnaturally polite” by NSs of English?

There will be no easy answer to these questions; however, if the opinions of NSs of English about some politeness expressions commonly used in Hong Kong are further explored, and the comments made by NSs of English who speak different varieties of English are included in teaching materials used for the English pragmatics in secondary or tertiary institution, the awareness of L2 learners of “unnaturally polite expressions” might be increased, which in turn could narrow the gap between advanced learners of English and NSs of English in their pragmatic judgment on “unnaturally polite” expressions,

although cultural factors may still play a significant role in shaping the pragmatic development of L2 learners. Future research is needed to investigate these issues further both on theoretical and empirical levels.

b. Pragmatic preferences of CSTs and ESTs

(A) Supportive moves

For Topic 1 (“attendance”), significantly more ESTs chose the supportive move “asking for forgiveness” than did CSTs as the supportive moves they themselves would definitely not use if they were to write about the topic of “attendance”. However, there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for the topics “proofreading” and “interview”. The differences across topics suggest that the supportive moves not preferred by the sixteen teachers are topic-specific. For the topic of “attendance”, ESTs did not seem to consider the failure to meet the attendance requirement such a serious mistake that the requesters should ask for “forgiveness”. However, CSTs interpreted the speech act of “asking for forgiveness” as showing repentance, and they perceived this speech act positively in the context of Topic 1. The reason why CSTs perceived the act of showing repentance as positive could be that, in Chinese culture, the showing of sincere remorse may serve to lighten punishment. According to Article 78 of the criminal law used in the mainland China, "The punishment of a criminal sentenced to ... fixed term imprisonment may be commuted if, while serving his sentence, he conscientiously observes prison regulations... and shows true repentance" (Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council, 2001, p.17). The strategy of asking for forgiveness was found in another

study. Eslamirasekh (1993) found that native Persian-speaking students used the expression “forgive me tremendously” frequently in making requests. Eslamirasekh regarded the use of this expression as fulfilling the function of showing positive politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1978) and softening the impact of the direct approach used in the Persian language (p.97). *Positive politeness*, or *solidarity politeness* (Scollon & Scollon, 1983) is expressed by using such verbal strategies as emphasizing in-group membership, whereas *negative politeness* is manifested by verbal strategies that express the effort not to be understood to be imposing (Brown & Levinson 1978). Eslamirasekh (1993) explained that the seeking of forgiveness stems from the value of group orientation in Iranian culture, where the acknowledgment of one’s status as a member of the group has greater importance in determining the norms of interaction than do considerations of individual freedom, and the politeness strategy used would express more of the positive politeness than negative politeness.

Statements of apologies -- another kind of statements close to statements of forgiveness -- were used frequently in Japanese culture. According to Coulmas (1981), apology expressions seem to be used much more frequently in Japanese than in Western cultures, and it is a common for Japanese students of English to apologize where no such acts would be anticipated in a Western community (p. 82). Tames (1981) believed that Japanese might be more a culture of apology rather than one of gratitude. Harada (1996) also found that 60% (p.56) of the Japanese males and 90% of the females (p.59) surveyed used the statement of regret “I am sorry” to show humility and modesty as an indirect expression of gratitude for a

hypothetical situation involving the speaker borrowing a book late in the evening. The use of apologies also seems to be favored by Koreans. Kim (1995) found that the Korean ESL learners in her study overused apologies (p.79). While studies investigating the use of apologies in Japanese and Korean cultures are readily available, studies investigating the usefulness and appropriateness of seeking forgiveness as a politeness strategy in Chinese culture seem to be relatively rare. Further research in this area is needed for a better understanding of why forgiveness is widely accepted by CSTs as a positive supportive move in such contexts as those specified in this study. Future research could also investigate whether or not apologetic statements are generally favored by native speakers of three Asian languages (i.e., Chinese, Japanese and Korean) in making polite requests and the reasons behind that practice.

For Topic 3 ("interview"), significantly more CSTs chose the supportive move "compensation" as the supportive move they themselves would definitely not use. The finding seems to suggest that NSs of Cantonese are repulsed by the idea of being paid by a student for doing an interview. That accepting financial compensation appears to be beyond the comfort level of CSTs might be related to how Cantonese teachers perceived their roles as teachers in general and how they perceived the act of being offered compensation by someone whose income is significantly below theirs. CSTs might have perceived the acceptance of financial compensation from a student as a face-threatening act. According to Nash (1983), face principles are observed very differently by Chinese and by Americans.

"The notion of face is prevalent and deeply rooted in Chinese culture; people take great offense in any loss of face, and efforts are regularly made to avoid face-risking situations" (Chen, 1996, p.9). Probably, since CSTs would not find it appropriate to accept financial reward from a student, they chose "compensation" as the supportive move they themselves would not use if they were to write a letter to request an addressee for an interview.

(B) Writing plans

Plan 2 ("preparing" + "the head act of a request" + "background") was chosen by the majority of ESTs for all three topics. This suggests that ESTs preferred to be prepared for the ensuing request first regardless of the nature of the request. The nature of the request in Topic 1 and that in the requests in Topics 2 and 3 were different. Topic 1 could be regarded as a routine request because, in the ELC, it is a common practice for students to write letters to the department head for their special requests, such as late add-drop of a course, postponement of an examination or exemption for an unsatisfactory attendance rate; therefore, the force of imposition might not have been regarded as strong in terms of the time and the effort the department head has to invest as far as the execution of the request is concerned. On the other hand, the force of imposition implied in Topics 2 and 3 might have been seen as greater than that implied in Topic 1 because it would probably take comparatively more time and greater effort to proofread an application letter or to attend an interview than to make a decision of whether or not to waive the attendance requirement for a particular student. That ESTs chose Plan 2 for all three requests suggests

that “preparing” might be a supportive move considered universally important by ESTs.

The finding that ESTs preferred to be prepared first agrees with the findings of several studies. Most ESTs in this study were found to prefer a plan showing the rhetorical move “preparing” at the beginning of a letter (i.e., Plan 2 [“preparing” + “request” + “background”]). In their “Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project” (CCSARP), Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) found that indirect strategies, such as the use of “preparator” and “precommitment”, constituted a dominant pattern preferred by NSs of English. ESTs’ preference for the non-assumption of compliance also agrees with the findings obtained by Matsumoto (1988) and Wierzbicka (1985). Matsumoto and Wierzbicka found that, in the Western world, politeness is usually associated with negative or deference strategies, which leave the hearer the options for noncompliance. Kim (1995) also found that 53% of the NSs of English in her study preferred the use of “preparator” (p.74).

In addition, the finding that ESTs preferred Plan 2 (i.e., “preparing” + “request” + “background”) to Plan 4 (i.e., “preparing” + “background” + “request”) shows that ESTs wished to be informed of the purpose of the letter before they were provided with the background information concerning the request. Knowing the purpose of a letter might save their time in processing the information of the letter. Virtenen and Maricic (2000) held a similar view. Virtenen and Maricic found that the strategy of

placing request before justification “represents the Anglo-American rhetoric, where the readers’ time and effort are highly valued” (p.139).

On the other hand, since no plan could be identified as the plan preferred by the majority of CSTs, the preference of CSTs regarding their favorite writing plans remains undefined.

The lack of a dominant plan among CSTs could be the result of the diversification of education backgrounds in terms of the places where they had obtained their first and/or second degrees. The related information about their educational backgrounds follows (i.e., the figure in parenthesis indicates the number of CSTs who had studied in that place):

First degree: HK (2), UK (2), Canada (3), the USA (1)
Second degree: HK (2), UK (4), Canada (1)
(One of the CSTs does not have a second degree.)

CSTs might have been influenced by the varieties of English they had been exposed to and the cultures associated with these varieties of English. Perhaps because of the heterogeneity of their language backgrounds, CSTs did not demonstrate a dominant pattern concerning the writing plans they would use.

(C) Tendency to use negative/positive words

The findings that there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for all three categories concerning the teachers' tendency to use negative/positive words for all three topics suggest that CSTs and ESTS are similar in their views regarding the use of negative/positive words. Since the category "use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of CSTs and ESTs, L2 learners of English should be advised that positive words are preferred over negative words by both NSs of English and NSs of Cantonese.

2. Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 was partially confirmed. The lack of significant differences in the judgments between female and male teachers on nine out of twelve questions analyzed quantitatively suggest that, on the whole, gender is not a major factor influencing an addressee's pragmatic judgment.

The nine questions that did not show significant differences between female and male teachers are:

- Appropriateness of supportive moves (Question 3);
- Overall politeness of the letter (Question 4);
- Appropriateness of the register (Question 8);
- Appropriateness of the position of the head acts (Question 9);
- Amount of information (Question 13);
- Overall appropriateness of letters (Question 14);

- The most important supportive move (Question 5);
- The supportive moves that would definitely not be used (Question 6);
- The tendency to use negative/positive words (Question 12).

The three items that show significant differences are:

- Classification of register (Question 7) -- the sub-category “hard to categorize as either formal or informal”;
- Writing plan preferred for Topic 3 (Question 10);
- Usefulness of “negative expressions” (Question 11) -- the number of “negative” expressions classified as “neutral”.

The significant differences in these three aspects between female and male teachers suggest that: 1) female teachers might be more attentive to the mixture of both informal and formal expressions and sentence structures in a letter, and 2) a male addressee might prefer to be prepared for the ensuing request for a topic they perceive as showing a strong force of imposition, and 3) more male teachers than female teachers took a neutral view on “negative” expressions.

The findings that female and male teachers showed no significant differences in most of the pragmatic measures are in line with the researcher’s expectation, which was based on the inconclusiveness of previous findings on the effects that gender has on language use (see the discussion in Chapter 1, Section B, Part 4). The findings of this study that there were no significant differences in “amount of information” and in “the

tendency to use negative/positive words" between female and males teachers agree with some of the findings of Smeltzer and Werbal's (1986) study and those of Sterkel's (1988) study. Smeltzer and Werbal (1986) and Sterkel (1988) found that there were no differences in the number of words and the number of negative words used in the letters written by female and male students. My study examined the judgments of female and male teachers on the number of words and the "negative" expressions used in the letters written by other people, where the studies conducted by Smeltzer and Werbal (1986) and Sterkel (1988) examined the productive aspect of female and male students. Although the comparison may not be totally valid, the resemblance provides some link between this study and previous research studies that have been consulted.

a. Sub-category "hard to categorize as either 'formal' or 'informal'"

The comments provided by female teachers in this study regarding why they found some of the letters hard to categorize as either "formal" or "informal" were mainly concerned with the incompatibility of formal and informal expressions in a letter. For example, Rater 2 pointed out the incompatibility of expressions when justifying her choice for Letter 7: *"Seek your help" in itself is not too bad, but it starts by telling you that "I stuck in trouble"*; Rater 3 gave a reason along the same line: *Writing sounds causal at places*. From these comments, it can be seen that a mixture of both informal and formal expressions and sentence structures in a letter is more apparent to females or more undesirable from the feminine point of view.

b. Writing plans

It was found that significantly more male teachers preferred Plan 2 for Topic 3, while there were no significant differences between female and male teachers in the writing plans they chose for Topics 1 and 2. The force of imposition implied in Topic 3 might have been perceived by male teachers as the greatest of the three topics because of the comparatively longer time and greater effort involved with attending an interview. A possible reason why female teachers did not consider it necessary to use Plan 2 for Topic 3 might be because they did not consider the time and effort involved in attending an interview excessive, and so the force of imposition was not regarded as strong.

For all three topics, the majority of male teachers chose Plan 2; however, no plan was identified as the plan preferred by the majority of female teachers.

The lack of a dominant plan among female teachers could be the result of individual variations rather than the result of diversified education backgrounds in terms of the places where they obtained their first and/or second degree since the education backgrounds of male CSTs were as diversified as those of female teachers. The related information follows (i.e., the figure in parenthesis indicates the number of CSTs who had studied in that place):

Male teachers:

First degree: UK (2), Canada (1), the USA (1)

Second degree: HK (2), UK (2)

Female teachers:

First degree: HK (1), UK (1), Canada (2)

Second degree: HK (1), UK (2)

3. Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 was partially confirmed.

The finding that the pragmatic performance of A/B-grade students was different from that of E-grade students in the aspects of "politeness", "amount of information" and "formality" shows that A/B-grade students were able to write letters containing more mitigating politeness expressions, providing more information and showing more formal features. However, the finding that both A/B-grade and E-grade students showed the same pattern regarding "directness" in terms of the position of the head acts and the use of negative words suggests that the preferences of L2 learners in relation to "directness" do not seem to change as students' proficiency in English improves.

The following discussion will first focus on the categories that showed no significant differences between two groups of students:

- The mitigating expressions “may” and “possibly/possibly”;
- The two sub-categories within “directness” (i.e., the position of the head act and
  use of “negative words”).

Subsequently, discussion will focus on the categories that showed significant differences between two groups of students:

- Politeness (including the mitigating expressions “would”, “could”, “kindly” and
  “grateful” together with supportive moves),
- Amount of information,
- Formality.

a. Categories showing no significant differences

(A) The use of the modal verb “may”

The use of the formal modal verb – “may” – did not distinguish the two groups of students.

The possible reasons why instances of the modal verb “may” showed no significant difference between A/B-grade students and E-grade students follow:

According to the comments of some of the sixteen teachers, the word “may” might not be the appropriate modal verb to be used in the contexts specified in the three writing topics. Two examples with teachers’ comments are noted:

Example 1

“May I request your permission to let me pass the Spoken Language course?” (Letter 4)

Six out of sixteen teachers (37.5%) (Raters 5, 7, 9, 14, 15 and 16) considered the use of the word “may” in this sentence inappropriate. Two of them provided comments:

Rater 9

The usage is over formalized. It is a bit unnatural because it is in a college context.

Rater 5

It is overly polite. If it is overly polite, it can be counter-productive.

Example 2

“May I invite you to be one of the interviewers for my research?” (Letter 6)

Five out of sixteen teachers (31%) (Raters 5, 9, 11, 15 and 16) considered the use of the word “may” in this sentence inappropriate. One of them provided a comment:

Rater 12

“May” is not appropriate because the writer is not asking for permission to invite someone. “Would like” is more appropriate.

The possible incompatibility of the modal verb “may” with the contexts of the three writing topics might explain the few rare instances of the word “may” in the letters written by A/B-grade students and by E-grade students, assuming that students were aware of the inappropriateness of the use of this modal verb. The mean number of instances of the word “may” used by A/B-grade students and by E-grade students was much lower than that of the modal verbs “would” and “could” (the mean number of instances of the word “may” used by A/B-grade students was 0.02, whereas that for the words “would” and “could” was 1.12 and 0.38 respectively; the mean number of instances of the word “may” used by E-grade students was 0.02, whereas that for the words “would” and “could” was 0.47 and 0.05 respectively.

However, more than half of the sixteen teachers considered the usage of the modal verb “may” in the previous two examples “polite” and gave the rating “4” or “5+” (meaning “polite” and “very polite” respectively). In the first

example, ten teachers out sixteen (62.5%) assigned the rating “4” or “5+” (Raters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13). In Example 2, ten teachers out of sixteen (62.5%) gave the rating “4” or “5+” (Raters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14). One teacher (Rater 12) gave the rating “3” (meaning “neither polite nor impolite”. Since 62.5% of teachers considered the use of the modal verb “may” polite, the rare instances of this modal verb in the letters written by the two groups of students might indicate that the word “may” is a modal verb seldom used by A/B-grade students and E-grade students. The reason for the infrequent usage might be due to students’ unfamiliarity with this modal verb; it seems natural for a student not to use an unfamiliar word, either deliberately or unintentionally. Students may want to avoid making mistakes, or unfamiliar words simply do not appear in a student’s mind when s/he is writing.

The infrequent use of the word “may” for both A/B-grade and E-grade students might in turn indicate that this modal verb poses difficulty not only to students who have poor proficiency in English but also to students who have good proficiency in the target language. The difficulty L2 learners have with the modal verb “may” has not been explored in this study, but one possible reason could be that the students in this study had been exposed to such formulaic expressions as “Would you do me a favor?”, “Could you do me a favor?”, “I would be grateful”, “I would like to”, but they had not been

exposed to stock phrases containing “may” in request expressions like those in the context of the three topics. Thus, the occurrence of the modal verb “may” was rare in their experience and was consequently not available to them.

(B) The use of “possible/possibly”

The expression “would it be possible” (one of the expressions in Letter 5 used to elicit sixteen teachers’ pragmatic judgments) was rated by the majority of teachers (15/16=93.8%) in this study as “very polite (5+)” or “polite (4)”. This finding draws support from Kim’s (1995) study in which she found that the expression “would it be possible” in making requests was commonly used by NSs of English while Korean speakers in her study of Korean ESL learners performing the speech act of requesting did not do so.

A/B-grade students and E-grade students in this study, however, seldom used the term “possibly/possible”. The mean instance of the term “possible/possibly” was 0.02 for A/B-grade students, and there was a total absence of these two words in the letters written by E-grade students. The scarce instances of the term “possible/possibly” suggest that these words are probably seldom used by both groups of students to mitigate the force of imposition and that epistemic adverbs are difficult for the students in this study to learn. It is also possible that the co-occurrence of “would” and “possible/possibly” is the root of the problem. The difficulty among NNSs of English in using “possibly/possible” and other modality devices (e.g., the use of parentheticals [e.g., “I guess”], adverbs [e.g., “probably”, “possibly”,

“certainly”] and adjectives [e.g., “possible”, “sure”]) were also evidenced in other studies. Karkkainen (1992) found that Finnish students used fewer adverbs than did NSs of English. She concluded that English modal auxiliaries and epistemic adverbs are difficult for foreign students to learn.

(C) Position of the head act

A/B-grade students and E-grade students showed the same features of “directness”: the numbers of students who chose Plans 3 and 4 (the two plans chosen by the highest percentages of students in both groups) were not significantly different; the numbers of negative words used were not significantly different either. The same features of “directness” demonstrated by two groups of students suggest that features of “directness” in their letters do not seem to change as the proficiency of L2 learners of English improves.

The finding that both A/B-grade students and E-grade students favored a writing plan that did not involve the rhetorical supportive move “preparing” agrees with Kim’s (1995) findings. In this study, the two writing plans chosen by most A/B-grade students and E-grade students were Plan 3 and Plan 4. The common feature between these two plans is that neither contained the rhetorical move “preparing”. This finding probably means that both A/B-grade and E-grade students did not consider it important to prepare the addressee for the coming request before they announced the nature of the request. In her study of Korean ESL learners performing the speech act of requesting, Kim (1995) also found that neither of the two

Korean groups used any “preparator”(p.74). The term “preparator” used in Kim’s (1995) study and the term “preparing” used in my study refer to the same kind of supportive move (i.e., the supportive move placed before a head act to mitigate the assertive force of a request [e.g., “I have a request to make”, Kim 1995, p.72])[1]. The similarity between the finding in my study and that in Kim’s (1995) study seems to suggest that both native speakers of Cantonese and of Korean do not consider it necessary to prepare an addressee for the coming request.

When the actual differences (though not significant at the 95% confidence level) between the numbers of students who chose Plan 3 and Plan 4 were considered, the opposite of what some researchers (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kong, 1998; Trosborg, 1995) found was observed. Kong (1998) argued that as far as the rhetorical patterns manifested in letters of request are concerned, Eastern cultures such as the Chinese culture prefer the inductive move pattern (“justification–request”) while the Anglo-American culture favors the deductive move pattern (“request-justification”). However, my study found that slightly more E-grade students (48.3%) used Plan 4 (which is similar to the deductive move pattern) than did those (41.7%) who used Plan 3 (which is similar to the inductive move pattern); also, slightly more A/B-grade students (53.3%) used Plan 4 (which is similar to the deductive move pattern) than did those (48.3%) who used Plan 3 (which is similar to the inductive move pattern). That is to say, the Cantonese-speaking students in this study regardless of their language proficiency levels tended to choose the deductive move

pattern ("request-justification") – a rhetorical plan believed to be in accordance with the thematic salience favored by individuals from the Anglo-American culture (i.e., putting the statement of request first, Kong, 1998). The reason for the discrepancy between the finding of this study and the rhetorical pattern expected of Eastern culture (e.g., by Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kong, 1998; Trosborg, 1995) might be that, like NSs of English, NSs of Cantonese regard the move of announcing the head act of a request before providing background information (i.e., the deductive move pattern) as an appropriate way to show politeness. According to Leech (1983), the most important kind of politeness in English-speaking societies "is covered by the operation of the tact maxim" (p.107). There are two sides to the tact maxim – that is – minimizing the cost to the hearer (the negative side) and maximizing the benefit to the hearer (the positive side) (p.109). The head act positioned in the front paragraph allows the addressee to know the intention of the writer as soon as s/he begins to read the letter. Thus, putting the head act of a request at the beginning of a letter can be interpreted as an act intended to minimize the reading time required of the addressee (that is, the "cost" in Leech's terms). Using the deductive move plan could, therefore, be interpreted as a tactful strategy used by the students who chose Plan 4 in this study to realize politeness, if viewed from the perspective of the tact maxim. This speculation concurs with Virtanen and Maricic's (2000) explanation about the findings in their study. Virtanen and Maricic (2000) explained that the greater number of messages using the deductive move pattern ("request – justification") in their study indicated "a view of politeness in which the requester is very

much aware of imposing on the addressee's time" (p.139). In their study, they found that more messages in their study used the deductive move pattern ("request – justification"). Eight out of the fourteen messages posted on Linguist List (an edited person-to-person international mailing list) were ordered using the deductive move pattern ("request-justification"), while 6 out of 14 were ordered using the inductive move pattern ("justification- request").

(D) Use of negative/positive words

The fact that significant differences were not found concerning the instances of negative words used between A/B-grade and E-grade students might be explained in the following way: the tendency to use negative words might be influenced to a great extent by the culture of a given first language. Since both groups of students are native speakers of Cantonese who have lived in Hong Kong for approximately the same amount of time, the possible influence of the Cantonese culture on their pragmatic judgment, if any, should be similar. However, exactly how the Chinese culture influences the inclination to use negative words needs to be investigated in additional research studies.

b. Categories showing significant differences

(A) "Would" and "could"

The finding that E-grade students used significantly fewer instances of the modal verbs "would" and "could" than did A/B-grade students suggests that it is not general practice for E-grade students to use these two modal verbs

to make polite requests. The infrequent use of the modals “would” and “could” by E-grade students in turn might be due to their difficulty with these two modal auxiliaries. Kim (1995) also found her subjects used the modal verb “can” in places where “could” was more appropriate. In her study of Korean ESL students performing the speech act of request, she found that 47% of the Korean students limited the requests to “Can I”, while NSs of English in her study used expressions mitigated with consultative devices, such as “Would be it alright to…?” and “Do you think I could…?”. Karkkainen (1992) also found that Finnish students in her study used fewer modal verbs than did NSs of English in a spoken task that involved discussions with NSs of English about some designated issues. Other studies before Karkkainen’s (1992) study had also found that English modal auxiliaries are hard for foreign students to learn; for example, Holmes (1982) found that French and Dutch students had difficulty with modal auxiliaries.

The difficulty of L2 learners with modal verbs might originate from the multiple meanings of modal verbs. According to Karkkainen (1992), a single modal verb may have both an epistemic meaning and a non-epistemic (or root) meaning, or even several non-epistemic meanings; further, it may have several meanings simultaneously within a single structure. *Epistemic modality*, according to Karkkainen (1992), refers to “the modal expressions that convey the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by him/her” (p.198). However, modal auxiliaries are frequently ambiguous at the semantic level between an epistemic and a non-epistemic (root) meaning; it is almost impossible to say even in context whether a

certain occurrence is epistemic or not (Karkkainen, 1992, p.211). Perhaps it is due to the complexity of the usage of modal verbs that L2 learners tend to avoid using them.

(B) "Kindly"

More instances of the term "kindly" appeared in the letters written by A/B-grade students than in the letters written by E-grade students, and the difference between the two groups in their use of this word was significant. The significant difference in instances of "kindly" between A/B-grade and E-grade students suggests that "kindly" was commonly used by A/B-grade students, but not by E-grade students. However, the use of the term "kindly" in the expression "Would you kindly" and the expression "If you could kindly" were regarded as "unnaturally polite" by two of the ESTs, and impolite by one. The opinions of the sixteen teachers about the word "kindly" follow:

"Would you kindly"

"Unnaturally polite" – 2 ESTs teachers (25%) (Raters 12 and 15)

"Impolite" – 1 EST teacher (12.5%) (Rater 9)

"Polite" or "very polite" – 5 ESTs (62.5%) and all 8 CSTs (100%)

"If you could kindly"

"Unnaturally polite" -- 5 ESTs (62.5%) (Raters 9, 12, 14, 15, 16)

"Polite" or "very polite" – 3 ESTs (37.5%) and all 8 CSTs (100%)

The differences in the opinions of CSTs and ESTs concerning the usage of the expressions “Would you kindly” and “If you could kindly” indicate that these two expressions were not unanimously perceived as positive. L2 learners of English should be made aware of the different opinions. The use of the two expressions probably constitutes an appropriate choice if students write to native Cantonese-speaking addressees (100% of CSTs considered both expressions “polite” or “very polite”). However, these two expressions would generally not be an appropriate choice for native English-speaking addressees (25% and 62.5% of ESTs considered these two expressions “unnaturally polite” respectively, and one EST considered “would you kindly” to be impolite).

(C) Supportive moves

Letters written by A/B-grade students contained significantly more types of supportive move than those in the letters written by E-grade students. The findings suggest that the types of supportive move familiar to E-grades students were comparatively limited, and that E-grades students might not be familiar with the use of some supportive moves which could increase the odds of receiving a positive reply from the addressee, such as the supportive moves “acknowledging imposition”, “emphasizing effort put in” and “showing regret”.

The lack of variety in the supportive moves used might be due to E-grades students' inadequate exposure to sample letters of request supplemented with explicit instructions about various supportive moves considered appropriate by NSs of Cantonese and NSs of English.

(D) Amount of information

The finding that A/B-grade students wrote significantly more words in their letters than did E-grade students suggests that E-grade students probably did not know what information would be regarded as salient by the addressee concerning the three writing topics. This is perhaps due to their limited exposure to request letters. Other possible reasons are:

1) their language ability might have limited what they would have liked to express;
2) their motivation to write informative letters might have been poorer than that of A/B-grade students;
3) their interest in learning the English language in the first place might be weaker.

(E) Formality

The findings that the writing of A/B-grade students showed more features of formality and less violations of formality than did that of E-grade students suggest that E-grade students might not be aware of the degree of informality associated with such grammatical structures as contracted forms. It is also likely that they were not aware that some expressions and sentence

structures are often viewed as denoting formality and some are viewed as denoting informality. The discussions about the sub-categories within "formality" that showed significant differences between two groups of students follow:

(1) Opening and closing salutations

The findings about "opening salutations" and "closing salutations" suggest that E-grade students lack adequate knowledge of how to recognize differences in social position (e.g., teacher vs. student), how to address a recipient and how to identify themselves. The reason why E-grade students addressed the recipients by their full name with or without their titles (i.e., Dear Mary Smith or Dear Miss Mary Smith) could be that full names looked more formal than first names alone, so the students thought they should use full names even in the opening salutations. In closing salutations, the use of their first names suggests that they probably do not understand the implied relationship between the writer and the addressee when only first names are used. The inappropriate usages by E-grade students over closing salutations (i.e., misspelling the word "sincerely", using lower case for "y" in "yours", using upper case for "s" in "sincerely" and using only their first names to identify themselves) could be the result of their lack of attention to details. It is possible that E-grade students did not pay close attention to the mechanics involved with opening salutations and closing salutations owing to their lack of interest in the English language; it is also possible that they had not had sufficient training concerning the conventions of opening and closing salutations, including the

basics and the implied relationship when the first name of the writer/addressee is used.

(2) Mean T-unit length

The finding that A/B-grade students can write longer T-units suggests that A/B-grade students are more skillful in embedding different ideas in one sentence, whereas E-grade students are able to combine comparatively fewer ideas in one sentence. Two reasons might explain why E-grade students wrote much shorter sentences. First, they might be lacking in control of linguistic devices to string ideas together in one sentence. Second, they might not be aware that longer sentences are better associated with formality than shorter sentences, as indicated by some of the sixteen teachers in this study; therefore, the students did not attempt to write longer sentences even if they had had the linguistic means to do so.

4. Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 was confirmed.

The finding that there were no significant differences in formality between the letter and the e-mail discourse written by E-grade students has two implications.

First, as explained in Chapter 4, it was inferred that both the letter discourse and the e-mail discourse tend towards the informal end; this finding implies that E-grade students in this study were unable to produce messages that

could match the formal nature of the requests in the writing task. The lack of formality in the authentic letters and the authentic e-mails written by E-grade students might be due to the increasing tendency for young people to use text messages, ICQ and MSN to communicate with each other. These messages require conversational informality, perhaps because of the implied urgency of these messages and the informality of the content. However, the finding that E-grade students failed to switch to formal language even when the occasion demanded it might indicate that they were not aware of the existence of formal and informal language features and the necessity to write with an appropriate formality that was compatible with the nature of the request. On the other hand, it is also possible that E-grade students were actually aware of the existence of the formal and informal use of the English language (i.e., they could differentiate between a formal letter and an informal letter if they were required to identify the formality used in a sample letter), but they simply did not possess adequate linguistic means that would allow them to produce letters that were formal enough to suit the occasion – i.e., they had "passive" control of the differences between formal and informal use of the language, but they could not "actively" produce a letter that was consistent in formality throughout the letter.

The second implication of the finding that as far as E-grade students are concerned there were no significant differences in formality between the letter and the e-mail discourse is that the medium of communication might exert no effect on the formality of the genre Request for Permission in a professional setting. Perhaps E-grade students just focused on the content

and composed request messages without any conscious awareness of the conventions (if any) that govern the language style of a letter or an e-mail. The question of whether or not it is necessary to use an appropriate level of formality to match the text-type might not even have occurred to the E-grade students at all. It follows that perhaps the effects of communicating through a CMC sub-variety (i.e., e-mails) and through a non CMC sub-variety (i.e., letters) on the formality of the genre Request for Permission might be better examined by using subjects who have demonstrated on other occasions that they are capable of switching from formality to informality to suit the nature of different writing tasks. With the subjects' proven ability to handle formality/informality in response to occasions of different levels of formality, the effects of communication channels on the formality of the genre Request for Permission could be examined more clearly.

The effect of communicating a formal message via e-mail on the formality of the message is worth further investigation. Androutsopoulos (2006) maintained that it is "empirically questionable whether in fact anything like a 'language of e-mails' exists because the vast diversity of settings and purposes of e-mail use outweigh any common linguistic features" (p.420). While it is conceivable that e-mail language for personal interactions is conversational, it remains unknown whether the formality of a message written for a formal purpose will be influenced by the communication system (e.g., the e-mail system) through which the message is conveyed. Androutsopoulos (2006) found that the language use in chat sessions

devised for tutorials, in political talk, or in praying sessions was found to be different from “e-chat” style; “non-standard usage” in chat sessions with politicians is also sparse (p.421). Based on that finding, there is reason to speculate that the genre Request of Permission in a professional setting will probably retain features of formality if the message is written by a person who has proven himself/herself to be capable of handling formality/informality in response to occasions of different levels of formality regardless of the channel of communication in which the message is conveyed. The issue of how the formality of the genre Request for Permission responds to different channels of communication is certainly worth further examination.

B. Limitations of this study

1) The components of the twelve letters used to elicit teachers’ pragmatic judgments

Two B/C-grade working adults rather than two Year-1 A/B-grade students wrote three of the twelve letters used to elicit teachers’ pragmatic judgments. At first, it was planned to obtain three letters written by A/B-grade students to form part of the twelve letters, so that the components of letters to be used to examine teachers’ pragmatic judgments and students’ pragmatic performance would be the same for both sets of letters; that is, both sets of letters would consist of letters from A/B-grade students and E-grade students,

The findings about the teachers’ judgments on A/B-grade students would

have been useful because they were planned to be used to confirm the direction of possible differences in the pragmatic performance in the letters written by A/B-grade and E-grade students. However, A/B-grade students were not available at the time when the Pragmatic Judgment Task was being prepared because the teacher who agreed to help collect data from A/B-grade students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong said that he had not been assigned to teach Year 1 students in that term. As a result, other sources had to be relied on, and the two B/C-grade holders who helped to write the letters were the best sources available at that time. Despite the fact that using B/C-grade students was not the original intent in the research design, the use of the two B/C-grade students did not affect the analysis of Hypothesis 1 because the twelve letters were used only to elicit comments from sixteen teachers. The maturity and working experience of these two working adults in fact were advantageous as far as eliciting teachers' comments is concerned because their writing added variety to the input in terms of word choice, sentence structures, supportive moves and other pragmatic aspects, which in turn would help elicit richer input from the sixteen teachers.

2) Categorization of letters written by A/B-grade students and E-grade students

One problem caused by using letters written by B/C-grade students for the Pragmatic Judgment Task is that A/B-grade students' letters were not judged by the sixteen teachers in this study, so the pragmatic performance of A/B-grade students could only be inferred from teachers' judgments on the

letters written by the two B/C-grade working adults.

The 120 letters written by A/B-grade and E-grade students were not planned to be rated by the sixteen teachers in the research design of this study because it would have been too costly to provide financial compensation to the teacher participants for them to rate these letters. The amount of time involved in marking 120 letters in addition to that used to rate the twelve letters and to undergo an interview might also have deterred them from participating in this study. Based on these considerations, the 120 letters were categorized only by me with the aim of objectively showing differences in the categories measuring pragmatic performance. The findings of categorization, therefore, present only an inventory of the categories used by two groups of students; the findings cannot offer value judgments on the relative efficacy of the skills inventoried. The value judgments on the pragmatic performance in the letters written by the two groups of students had to be inferred from the findings obtained in the supplementary analysis involving two E-grade students and two B/C-grade working adults.

3) Comments collected from sixteen teachers

In this study, only the numbers of expressions rated as “unnaturally polite” by two groups of teachers were compared, but the comments related to these expressions were not. The numbers of “unnaturally polite” expressions chosen by CSTs and ESTs were comparable because for each designated expression a rating was obtained from each teacher and all missing ratings

were re-supplied by teachers in the interview following the completion of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire. However, the comments made on each expression were not equal in number because not all sixteen teachers commented on each of the expressions, and the time constraints in the interviews did not permit the interviewer to pursue a reason for each of the ratings assigned. As a consequence, comments collected did not represent the opinions held by only CSTs or by only ESTs since the absence of comments from a certain group of teachers does not mean that group of teachers did not hold the same opinion as that mentioned by the other group. For example, if three ESTs regarded the expression "I am writing to plead" as "debasing" but none of CSTs commented on this expression (although some of them also indicated that this expression was inappropriate by underlining it in the letter), it would be misleading to conclude that "debasing" was the reason why ESTs considered the expressions "unnaturally polite" without mentioning the comments made by CSTs. The lack of comments from CSTs on that expression might result from the distraction from other structures that interested them more and/or from insufficient time in the interviews to solicit their comments for a particular rating. If the comments made by two groups of teachers had been comparable, the findings would have been more informative. Future research could attempt to compare the comments made by two groups of teachers by asking teachers to justify every rating.

4) Ordering effect of the twelve supportive moves as shown in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

The order in which the twelve supportive moves appeared in Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire was not randomized for the copies given to the sixteen teachers. The findings that there were no significant differences between CSTs and ESTs for each of the supportive moves they ranked "1" (the most important) might be the result of the ordering effect. However, the significant differences between CSTs and ESTs in the supportive moves teachers themselves would definitely not use ("forgiveness" and "compensation") seemed to suggest that the ordering effect might not have been serious. If the ordering effect had been strong enough, there would not have been significant differences in these supportive moves between CSTs and ESTs. However, the significant differences only in these two supportive moves could not prove that the choices made by CSTs and ESTs concerning other supportive moves had not been affected by the fixed order of the twelve supportive moves. Therefore, the order of the twelve supportive moves presented in the questionnaires should be randomized in future research studies to avoid any possible effects that might result from the fixed order.

5) Sample size of teacher participants in relation to Question 5 in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

Only sixteen teachers participated in this study, but they were asked to choose the six most important supportive moves from a list of twelve

(Question 5). The provision of a list containing as many as twelve supportive moves diminished the number of teachers who ranked a SM “1”, “2”, “3”, 4”, “5” or “6”. Further, the need to choose six most important SMs also diminished the number of teachers choosing a particular SM. Perhaps as a consequence of the instruction for Question 5, most of the supportive moves ranked “1” by CSTs and ESTs were chosen by fewer than 4 teachers. According to the Proportional *t* test, the difference between four instances and zero instances of an item is significant at the 95% confidence level for two samples containing 8 subjects each. However, most of the SMs ranked “1” in this study were chosen by fewer than 4 CSTs or 4 ESTs. It follows that the insignificant difference in each of the supportive moves ranked “1” by CSTs and ESTs might have been the result of the low frequencies caused by the nature of the question.

If the sample size of teachers in this study had been greater, the findings would have been more representative. However, eight CSTs and 8 ESTs constituted the maximum numbers of CSTs and ESTs that could have been mobilized in the ELC. Further, considering the enormous amount time needed to do both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the sixteen teachers constituted the maximum numbers of teachers that could have been handled.

Future studies could incorporate the same twelve supportive moves. However, teacher participants could be asked to choose only the three most important supportive moves rather six, and the sample population of teachers could be enlarged to thirty-two teachers (16 CSTs and 16 ESTs).

For a sample containing 16 subjects, the difference between 4 instances and zero instance is still significant at the 95% confidence level, but the 4 instances account for only 25% of the sample, whereas in a sample containing only 8 subjects, 4 instance accounts for 50% of the sample.

6) Using E-grade students' authentic scripts to investigate the effect of channels of communication on the formality of the genre Request for Permission

Since E-grade students are likely to be weak at formal and informal use of language, using them as subjects to examine the effect of channels of communication (via e-mail vs. by letter) on the formality of the genre Request for Permission might not have been a very good choice. However, authentic requests written in the form of e-mails and letters expressing the same kinds of requests were hard to obtain. Therefore, authentic scripts written by the weak students (i.e., those students in the department where I work) had to be used. Despite the possibility that E-grade students were deficient in their knowledge of the formal/informal distinction in the English language, the findings in this study still provided some clues to the effects of CMC on the formality of the genre Request for Permission as far as weak L2 learners are concerned.

Notes

1. The term *"preparing"* used in my study and the term *"preparator"* used in Kim's (1995) study were both taken from the coding scheme developed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989).

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

This chapter contains two sections: 1) summary of main findings, and 2) recommendations for future research and for classroom teaching.

A. Summary of main findings

While the limitations of this study restrict the generalizability of the findings obtained, there has been sufficient demonstration of overlaps with other research presented in the review of the literature to call attention to some implications of this research. While E-grade students were not able to produce formal written requests, A/B-grade students were able to provide more information related to the three requests, to use more mitigating expressions, to provide more types of supportive moves and to demonstrate more features of formality than did E-grade students. The finding suggests that, as the English proficiency of L2 learners improves from Grade E to Grade A/B, their pragmatic performance also seems to improve. Similarly, Cantonese-speaking EFL teachers were found to make pragmatic judgments similar to those of English-speaking British teachers in all pragmatic measures except their opinions about “unnaturally polite” expressions, “counter-productive” expressions and two aspects involving their own pragmatic preferences (i.e., supportive moves and the position of the head act of a request). The finding suggests that it is possible for very proficient NNSs of English, (such as the EFL teachers in this study who have lived in an English-speaking country for an average of five years and who have worked in an English-speaking environment – i.e, the ELC – for an average

of ten years), to achieve native-like pragmatic judgments in most aspects, except for their views on several pragmatic considerations, which might have been deeply influenced by the culture of the Cantonese-speaking teachers.

Another focus of the qualitative analysis performed in this study aimed at finding out what characteristics of letters of request were regarded as appropriate/inappropriate by the sixteen teachers as a whole. The qualitative analysis was performed to supplement the quantitative findings that showed no significant differences between two groups of teachers. The items subjected to qualitative analysis included five politeness categories and supportive moves identified as inappropriate for the three writing topics used in this study (Questions 1 and 2). Researchers and ESF/EFL teachers are referred to that section for examples of "very polite" and "impolite" expressions as well as inappropriate supportive moves.

B. Recommendations for future research and for classroom teaching

1. Suggestions for further research

The following suggestions include: 1) suggestions for new directions for future research in order to explore avenues open but not pursued in this research, and 2) suggestions for future research studies aiming at replicating this study in order to confirm (or disconfirm) its findings.

a. Suggestions for new directions for future research in order to explore avenues opened but not pursued in this research

i) Pragmatic transfer and pragmatic competence

The theory of pragmatic transfer and pragmatic competence could be further explored. Specifically, the negative effects of pragmatic transfer on the acquisition of English pragmatics by L2 learners could be further examined by using subjects who have native-like linguistic competence. While much of the previous research (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Harada, 1996; Hoffman-Hicks, 1992) confirm that, even at the advanced level, L2 learners have difficulty with English pragmatics, it should be noted that the subjects used in many previous research studies were university students who either were taking language courses, or were exempted from taking language courses. Future research could involve working adults who are very proficient in English (e.g., who are language teachers or who work in environments in which English is used as the medium of communication) to investigate whether there is a threshold along the continuum of language proficiency beyond which the effect of pragmatic transfer is insignificant.

ii) Direction of pragmatic consciousness-raising

The direction of pragmatic consciousness-raising could be re-examined. The solution to the question of how to minimize the likelihood of pragmatic failures, which Thomas (1983) regards as resulting from sociolinguistic transfer, does not seem to lie in unilaterally teaching L2 learners to use the strategies perceived as conventionally polite in English pragmatics; rather, the direction of pragmatic consciousness-raising might need to shift to

raising the awareness of both NSs and NNSs of English that the meanings attached to directness/indirectness by speakers of different first languages in terms of politeness are probably different: while Western cultures may associate indirectness with politeness, some non-Western cultures do not deem direct requests impolite. Degree of indirectness was linked to degree of politeness as a linguistic universal for the seven languages (Australian English, American English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German and Hebrew) examined in Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper's (1989) study (i.e., CCSARP). However, direct requests constitute common practice in the realization of the speech act of requesting and they even receive high politeness rating in some non-western cultures -- for example, Zulu culture (de Kadt 1992), Persian culture (Eslamirasekh 1993), Israeli culture (Blum-Kulka, Danet & Gerson., 1985) and Polish culture (Wierzbicka 1985). Eslamirasekh (1993) point out that the general level of directness in Persian-speaking society is very high; in the Persian data he collected, 70% of requests are phrased as impositives (most direct), more than 25% are phrased as conventionally indirect, and only about 4% are hints. While the choices of directness levels may be different among speakers of different first language, there is evidence to suggest that indirectness and politeness do not necessarily correlate with each other universally or for any given culture (Blum-Kulka, 1987). Consequently, there seems to be a need for NSs and NNSs of English to be aware of the politeness strategies used by other language groups.

As a pre-requisite to the suggested bi-directional approach of promoting inter-cultural pragmatic awareness, it is necessary to investigate the degree of acceptance of inter-cultural variation among interlocutors performing the speech act of requesting. One of the findings of this study showed that ESTs considered the letters written by E-grade students impolite/very impolite partly because of the directness of the messages, although clearly it was not the intention of the E-grade students to be impolite (assuming that they were following the instruction of the writing task and that normal power relations should preclude rudeness). Likewise, Kubota's (1996) study highlights the problem concerned with the acceptance of inter-cultural variation among interlocutors performing the speech act of requesting. Kubota found that Americans learning Japanese were unwilling to accept the norms of the target language. Although they were aware of the rules governing Japanese language style, they did not necessarily try to follow them, seeking instead a non-offensive style within which they were comfortable. Kubota concludes that the target norms are not necessarily the learners' goal. Two questions remain to be answered in relation to the different perceptions of the politeness strategies used by individuals speaking different first languages: 1) How can speakers of a certain language be convinced to accept the directness/indirectness used by their interlocutors to show politeness? For example, how can a NS of English be convinced that the expression "Do not fail me" written by a Cantonese-speaking student in this study is meant to be a polite expression rather than a rude command? 2) Whose pragmatics should be followed in

the communication between a L2 learner of a target language and the NS of that target language? For example, in this study, it was found that CSTs considered it useful to ask for forgiveness in the context of the topic "attendance", but ESTs considered it inappropriate to ask for forgiveness in that context. In view of the different opinions about the usefulness of asking for forgiveness, should the writer who is learning to write an English request letter to a Cantonese-speaking addressee be advised to use the strategy of asking for forgiveness in the context of the topic "attendance"? Given that the language in use is English, but the addressee is a Cantonese-speaking individual, should the Cantonese or English pragmatics be observed by the writer?

While there is no simple answer to these two questions, a feasible approach might be to sensitize both the interlocutors performing the speech act of requesting to context-based variations in language use and to the roles of variables that help determine the variations (Rose, 1994). Interlocutors need to understand that at least two sets of variables affect requestive behavior: 1) cultural, and 2) situational-contextual (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989, p.151). Six social factors were identified by Blum-Kulka and House (1989):

1) the relative dominance of the request relative to the hearer;

2) the relative social distance between the interlocutors;

3) the hearer's degree of obligation in carrying out the request;

4) the speaker's right in issuing the request;

5) the estimated degree of difficulty the speaker had in making the request;

6) the estimated likelihood of compliance on the part of the hearer.

Blum-Kulka & House (1989) found statistically significant cross-cultural differences in the relative weight assigned to the six parameters in some social situations among speakers of three languages (Hebrew, German and Argentinian English). For example, in the situation involving a student asking his roommate to clean up the kitchen the latter had left in a mess the night before, the addressee was perceived as less obliging and as having a lower chance for compliance by Germans than did the Israelis and Argentinians (p.143). In addition to social factors, situational-contextual factors also need to be considered. That is, social factors need to be perceived relative to specific situations (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989, p.151). For example, the dominance relation between two students was perceived as being different in different situations. In the situation involving the borrowing of notes, the rating concerning "dominance" was 1.80, and that in the situation involving the cleaning up of a kitchen was 2.02 (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989, p.142). Sensitizing NSs and NNSs of English to these two

sets of variables might help reduce pragmatic failures.

To sum up, the direction for future research regarding the raising of pragmatic consciousness is twofold. First, future research could investigate the degree of understanding and acceptance of direct/indirect politeness strategies among speakers of different first languages by examining both social and situational-contextual variables. Second, future research could study the effectiveness of using a bi-directional approach, which aims at making NSs and NNSs of English aware of how other groups perceive social and situational/contextual variables in relation to the speech act of requesting and what linguistic strategies the other group uses to show politeness. While it is highly unlikely that pragmatic failures will be eliminated totally by adopting a bi-directional approach, exposing both NSs and NNSs of English to the pragmatics of the languages used by the speaker and by the hearer could at least increase interlocutors' understanding of the politeness strategies used by people speaking different first languages. The understanding in this regard might increase interlocutors' tolerance of each other, which in turn might reduce the likelihood of interlocutors' stereotyping each other using terms such as "rude", "abrupt", or "uncaring". Of course, this study acknowledges that it is simply unlikely to increase student sensitivity to the nuances of language, especially across the L1/L2 border; nevertheless, if the proposed approach succeeds with some reasonable fraction of the student population, it will certainly be worth the effort.

iii) Apologetic statements used to show politeness

As discussed in the section entitled "Pragmatic preferences of CSTs and ESTs" in Chapter 5 (Section A, Part 1b), apologetic statements are generally favored by native speakers of some non-western languages (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Persian) in making polite requests. Eslamirasekh (1993) regards the use of mitigating elements (e.g., "excuse me", "forgive me tremendously") by native Persian speakers in the study as showing positive politeness/solidarity politeness, which in turn is regarded by Eslamirasekh (1993) as stemming from the value of group orientation. She explains that, in cultures like the Iranian culture, "the acknowledgment of one's status as a member of the group has greater importance in determining the norms of interaction than considerations of individual freedom" (p. 97). Coulmas (1981) finds that apology expressions are used much more frequently in Japanese than in Western languages. The frequent use of apology in Japanese and Korean has also been reported in the studies conducted by Harada (1996), Kim (1995) and Tames (1981). Future research could involve native speakers of these non-Western languages to further investigate the use of apology, regret and forgiveness for achieving politeness and the possible link between the usage of these speech acts and cultural orientation as group solidarity.

iv) The formality of the genre Request for Permission as conveyed in CMC and non-CMC sub-varieties

Future research could further examine the effects of using CMC sub-varieties on the formality of the genre Request for Permission. Genres are regarded as dynamic rhetorical forms which change over time in response to the needs of the participants (Virtanen & Maricic 2000, p.129); genre mixing is regarded as an essential characteristic of genre dynamics (Bhatia 1997). Swales (1990) defines genres of communication in terms of shared purpose and common conventions of content and style within a discourse community. In view of this dynamic view of genre, it would be interesting to investigate whether messages that are composed for a formal purpose by a certain discourse community still retain formal features when the messages are conveyed through e-mail -- a CMC sub-variety widely used currently for both interactional and transactional purposes. While it is conceivable that e-mail language for personal interactions is conversational, it is still unknown whether the formality of a message written for a formal transactional purpose will be influenced by the communication system through which the message is conveyed. The possible emergence of newly-established conventions in a certain genre used by a discourse community in response to the variables in a certain social context deserves further investigation.

b. Suggestions for future research studies aiming at replicating this study in order to confirm (or disconfirm) its findings

i) Including teachers speaking other varieties of English

Future research could examine the pragmatic judgments made by teachers who speak different varieties of English. Comparisons could be made to see whether there are significant differences between NSs of British English, Australian English, American English, Canadian English and other major varieties of English in the ratings they give to sample request letters. It would be interesting to investigate whether NSs of English who speak different varieties of English will differ significantly in their pragmatic judgments on what constitutes a formal polite letter.

ii) Measuring the pragmatic performance of CSTs

Instead of examining the pragmatic judgment of CSTs, their pragmatic performance could be compared with that of ESTs. In this study, CSTs were asked to indicate their pragmatic preferences if they were to write the three letters, but they were not required to write the letters. The pragmatic preferences indicated by choosing from a list of options may be different from the actual performance in their letters. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine whether there are significant differences in the letters written by two groups of teachers by categorizing the letters using the pragmatic measures developed in this study.

iii) Using authentic letters and e-mails written by A/B-grade students

The letters and e-mails written by A/B-grade students for making authentic requests could be examined. In this study, only the authentic letters and e-mails from E-grade students were used to examine the register they used in their authentic scripts. What features of formality would be present in the authentic scripts written by students who show good proficiency of English for a formal purpose? Would the features of formality be different between the letter discourse and the e-mail discourse? It would be interesting to examine the pragmatic performance of students showing a strong proficiency level of English using authentic letters and e-mails.

iv) Providing more instances of "unnaturally polite" expressions, inappropriate supportive moves and "negative" words considered "counter-productive/useful"

Future research could aim at providing more instances of the following: 1) expressions viewed as "unnaturally polite" by NSs of English and/or NSs of Cantonese, 2) supportive moves considered inappropriate by NSs of Cantonese and/or NSs of English for various writing topics, and 3) "negative" words considered "counter-productive" or "useful" by NSs of Cantonese and/or NSs of English. This study provided some examples based on three writing topics used, and the lists of examples could be augmented, so that L2 students could be provided with more specific examples of language expressions and supportive moves considered appropriate/ inappropriate.

v) Including CSTs studying in the same country for their first/second degrees

Writing Plan 2 was chosen by the majority of ESTs, but no plan could be identified as the dominant plan for CSTs. Future research could include CSTs who have studied in the same place for their first and/or second degrees to confirm whether the sites of study are one of the factors influencing their preferences for the writing plans in relation to the position of the head act of a request.

vi) Enlarging the sample sizes of A/B-grade and E-grade students to confirm the insignificant difference in "directness"

A/B-grade students performed significantly differently from E-grade students for all four pragmatic variables except "directness". The letters written by A/B-grade and E-grade students using Plans 3 and 4 were not significantly different for each of the plans, and the numbers of "negative" words used were not significantly different either. Future research could confirm the insignificance of findings about "directness" by involving more A/B-grade and E-grade students. Further research studies could also investigate whether the preference of Cantonese speakers for a plan has been influenced by the Cantonese culture, and in what ways (if the answer to the previous question is affirmative) the Cantonese culture is linked to the preference for the position of the head act of a request.

vii) Arranging teachers to rate the letters written by A/B-grade students and E-grade students

The 120 letters written by A/B-grade and E-grade students in this study were not rated. One problem resulting from this was that the judgment on the pragmatic performance of A/B-grade students and E-grade could only be inferred from the ratings assigned by the sixteen teachers to the letters written by the two B/C-grade working adults and two E-grade students. Future researchers could arrange all letters written by A/B-grade and E-grade students to be rated by teacher participants.

viii) Comments to be collected for each of the ratings

In this study only the numbers of expressions rated as “unnaturally polite” by two groups of teachers were compared, but the comments related to these expressions were not (see the section entitled “Limitations of this study” in Chapter 5 for reasons [Section B]). If the comments made by two groups of teachers had been comparable, the findings would have been more informative in terms of the representation of the comments generated from each group of teachers. Future research could attempt to compare the comments made by two groups of teachers by asking teachers to justify every rating.

ix) Avoiding the ordering effect of the twelve supportive moves as shown in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

The order in which the twelve supportive moves appeared in Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire was not randomized for the copies given to the sixteen teachers. The choices made by the teacher participants might have been influenced by the fixed order of the twelve supportive moves. Therefore, future research studies should randomize the order of the twelve supportive moves to avoid any possible effects that might result from the fixed order.

x) Sample size of teacher participants in relation to Question 5 in the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

Most of the SMs ranked "1" in this study were chosen by less than 4 CSTs or 4 ESTs (see the section entitled "Limitations of this study" in Chapter 5 for reasons [Section B, Point 5]). Future studies could keep the list of twelve supportive moves because the provision of the twelve supportive moves would allow more types of supportive moves to be examined. However, teacher participants could be asked to choose only three most important supportive moves rather six, and the sample population of teachers could be enlarged to thirty-two teachers (16 CSTs and 16 ESTs).

xi) Using subjects proficient in formal/informal use of the English language to examine the effect of channels of communication on the formality of the genre Request for Information

Perhaps the effects of communicating through a CMC sub-variety (i.e.**,** e-mails) and through a non CMC sub-variety (i.e.**,** letters) on the formality of the genre Request for Permission can be better examined by using subjects who have demonstrated on other occasions that they are capable of switching from formality to informality to suit the nature of different writing tasks. With the subjects' proven ability to handle formality/informality in response to occasions of different levels of formality, the effects of communication channels on the formality of the genre Request for Permission can be better examined.

2. Suggestions for classroom teaching

a. The first language of the addressee

L2 learners of English should be made aware of the need to know the first-language background of their addressees speak because NSs of Cantonese and NSs of English are different in some aspects of their pragmatic judgments, such as what constitutes "unnaturally polite" expressions, "counter-productive" expressions and inappropriate supportive moves.

In this study the supportive move "forgiveness" was regarded as "unnaturally polite" and "counter-productive" by the majority of ESTs for context like erring in one's attendance requirement, but half of CSTS

considered this supportive move “polite” and “useful” for the same context. L2 learners of English should also be made aware of the difference of the opinion between CSTs and ESTs regarding the situation in which unemployed students offer money to teachers when making such requests as proofreading. CSTs might be insulted by being offered money for helping students – given that they are paid salaries for doing so as part of their work (see the related findings in Chapter 4 [Section A, Part 1, Question 6]). More examples of expressions perceived as “unnaturally polite” and “counter-productive” by more ESTs than by CSTs were listed in Appendix AA and Appendix BB respectively. It is recommended that more expressions regarded as “unnaturally polite” and “counter-productive” by NSs of English who speak different varieties of English be included in teaching materials concerning the teaching of English pragmatics in secondary or tertiary institutions. Exposing L2 learners to these examples and related comments would be useful to alert students to the first language their addressees speak and the differences in the opinions held by speakers of different first languages. Electronic corpus collections – e.g., the Longman Lancaster corpus (30m wds), the British National Corpus (100m wds), the Oxford American English corpus (40m wds), The Bank of English (200m wds), and the Cambridge Language Survey (100m wds) – might be appropriate sources for examples.

Regarding the position of the head act of a request, since the preference of Cantonese-speaking students was different from that of ESTs (who preferred a writing plan with the element of “preparing”), L2 of English could be

reminded that, when writing letters of request to NSs of British English, it would be more appropriate to adopt a writing plan that prepares the addressee first before the nature and the background of the request are revealed. The most preferred writing plan for NSs of Cantonese remains unknown; thus, it is not possible to offer contrastive information. (See the related findings in Chapter 4 [Section 1, Part 1, Question 10].)

With respect to the tendency to use negative/positive words, L2 learners of English could be made aware that positive words are always preferred over negative words when making written requests to both native Cantonese-speaking addressees and native English-speaking British addressees. Students might benefit from doing exercises that require them to use positive words to replace negative words and vice versa; they can also benefit from discussion about the effects of using positive or negative words.

Although it would probably increase the chance for a request to be approved if linguistic expressions, supportive moves and the writing plan that are agreeable to the addressee were used, students should be made aware that the need to note the differences in the pragmatic opinions between NSs of English and NSs of Cantonese does not imply that the opinions of one group are more valid than the opinions of the other group, nor should teachers and students assume that the opinions of native speakers of English are more useful than the opinions of non-native speakers of English because they live in a community in which native and non-native speakers of English actually

co-exist. Teachers and students, while they should be aware of the differences, should decide which they wish to emulate--local or metropolitan varieties. Additionally, the differences in pragmatic opinions are not static; rather, they are likely to chance with respect to the generation of respondents, the gender of respondents, and a range of other variables.

b. The gender of the addressee

It has been observed that female teachers seemed to be more sensitive to mixed levels of formality and informality than did male teachers; consequently, L2 learners of English should be made aware of the importance of writing in a consistent register, especially when writing to female addressees. If students are to write in one consistent register, then they should be made aware of the levels of formality of different words and sentences structures.

Regarding male and female preferences concerning writing plans, the majority of male teachers chose Plan 2 for all three topics in this study; however, no plan was identified as the plan preferred by the majority of female teachers. Based on this, L2 learners of English could be made aware that they should normally prepare a male addressee for the ensuing request before they make known the nature of the request and provide background information about the request.

With respect to the tendency to use negative/positive words, the category "use as many positive words as possible" was chosen by the majority of female and male teachers. L2 learners of English could be made aware that positive words are generally preferable regardless of the gender of the addressees.

c. Students' pragmatic performance

Concerning mitigating expressions, students showing poor proficiency in English should be instructed in the use of formal modal verbs ("would" and "could") for making formal requests, considering that the frequency of these modal verbs in the letters written by E-grade students was significantly lower than that in the letters written A/B-grade students. On the other hand, students showing strong and weak proficiency alike could be instructed in the use of the modal verb "may" and the use of "possible/possibly" in structures like "would it be possible".

In addition, what constitutes politeness and impoliteness in written expression should be explained to students, so that they can avoid inadvertently writing "impolite" expressions unknowingly. Examples of these expressions and related comments are provided in the section about qualitative findings concerning Question 1.

Regarding supportive moves, students should be made aware of what constitutes the most important supportive moves and what makes inappropriate supportive moves for the three writing topics from the perspectives of CSTs and ESTs. The supportive moves ranked "1" by at least two teachers (2/16=12.5%) are provided in Appendix CC**;** examples of inappropriate supportive moves identified by the sixteen teachers in this study are provided in the qualitative findings concerning Question 2 in Chapter 4.

With respect to the information to be included in a formal written request, L2 learners should be guided by providing basic information appropriate for a particular request topic. It is probably inappropriate to assume that L2 learners know what information is essential for a particular topic. The comments from sixteen teachers on Question 13 (Compiled Data File, pp.304-321) concerning missing and unnecessary information provide some ideas about what information could be recommended to L2 learners for the three writing topics used in this study. The comments have been further compiled and listed in Appendix DD.

Finally, L2 learners should be made aware of the existence of formal/informal usage in the English language and the necessity to write with a degree of formality that is appropriate to the occasion. In other words, they should be trained to differentiate informal expressions from formal expressions and to be able to decide on the use of

formality/informality on a given occasion. To help L2 learners become aware of the existence of the formal and informal usage in the English language and the necessity to use language showing appropriate features of formality/informality to suit an occasion, teachers could concentrate their efforts on two aspects. First, students could be made aware of the formal/informal nature of different occasions by noting contextual elements related to a request; for example, the background of the addressee (age, gender, first language, social position) and the force of imposition of the request. Second, the formality level of expressions appearing in different genres, (e.g., song lyrics, news in English, conversations in TV programs) could be explained to students, since it may not be within L2 learners' knowledge that idioms, phrasal verbs and conversational words used in these genres are generally regarded as informal by NSs of English.

As far as the production of formal messages is concerned, students could be made aware of the use of such linguistic structures as formal modal verbs and complex sentence structures (features of formality cited by some of the sixteen teachers in this study), so that it will be possible for such students to write letters showing appropriate levels of formality.

Additionally, common expressions regarded as informal by EFL teachers could be provided for students' reference. For example, some of the sixteen teachers held the opinion that the use of the expression "do me a favor" implies a close relationship while the use of the expression "feel free" involves a hierarchical relationship -- that is, the writer places

him/herself higher in a hierarchy than the recipient. More examples of expressions, sentence structures and supportive moves considered informal by at least two of the sixteen teachers are provided in Appendix EE**.** The lists were compiled based on the information related to Questions 2, 7 and 8 in the Compiled Data File.

In addition to drawing L2 learners' attention to formal/informal language, appropriate opening/closing salutations to achieve formality/informality could be another teaching focus. It is important for teachers to realize that opening salutations and closing salutations are not as easy as they appear for students showing poor proficiency in English. Different ways to address the recipient, to refer to the writer himself/herself and the relationship implied could constitute part of the teaching materials.

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Appendix A Template 1
"Politeness", "Directness" and "Amount of information"
(For analyzing experimental data)

E2-1-

Politeness				**Directness**				**Info**
Politeness Expressions introducing head acts **[Modified from the analysis framework by Sue (1999b) & Chen (1996)]**		**Supportive moves**		**Position of hd act** **(5. Plan #)**		**-ve words** **(6. Number of negative words used)**		**7. The length of the script)**
1. Expressions to <u>mitigate</u> the assertive force of head act								
1-1) Modals for polite request	would		4_1) Preparing					
	could							
	may							
1_2) PT tone softener								
1_3) Politeness marker "please" occurring in question form. E.g., "Would you *please* proofread my letter?"			4_2) Mini E.g., "A bit" "A little" "Somehow"					

1_4) The use of *"a bit"* *"a little"* *"somehow"* to mitigate the size of the request		4_3) Acknow E.g., "Favor" "Inconvenience"				
1_5) Involving the requestee directly, bidding for cooperation. E.g., *"Do you think* you could …?"		4_4) Effort				
1_6) The use of words such as *"possible"* *"possibly"* to modulate the impact of a request on the addressee		4_5) Complim E.g., "Honored" "Honor" "Pleased" "Pleasure" "Glad to invite you"[1] "Valuable"[2]				
1_7) The use of the word *"mind"*		4_6)Thankful E.g., "Grateful" "obliged" "Kindly"[3] "Kind"[4] "Kindness"[5] "Please" "Nice"[6]				
1_8) The use of the word *"appreciate"* or other word forms of the same word		4_7) Importance				

1_9) The use of the word *"grateful", "gratitude" as in "I would be grateful if you could"*		4_8) Apolog E.g., "Sorry" "Apologize"				
1_10) The use of the word *"honored", "honor"*		4_9) Compensa				
1_11) The use of word *"pleasure", as in "It is my pleasure to invite you"*		4_10) -ve conseq				
1_12) The use of the word *"glad" as in "I am glad to invite you to be my interviewee"*		4_11) Benefits				
1_13) The use of the word *"nice" as in "It would be nice if you could be my interviewee"*		4_12) Forgive E.g., "Forgive"				
1_14) The use of the word *"helpful" as in "It would be helpful if you could proofread the letter."*		4_13) Giving options E.g., "Possible" "Possibly" "Mind"				

1_15) The use of the word *"thankful" or "thank you" as in "I would be thankful if you could proofread the letter."*		4_14) Sincerity E.g., "Sincerely" "Earnestly"				
1_16) The use of the word *"kindly" and "kind" as in "Please kindly reply to me whether you would be my interviewee" and as in "It would be most kind of you if you could be interviewee"*		4_15) Appreciation E.g, "Appreciate" "Appreciation"				
1_17) The use of the word *"obliged"* as in *"I would be obliged if you could proofread my application letter."*		4_16) Regret E.g., "Regretful" "Sorry"[7]				

1_18) The use of the word *“favor”* as in *“I was asking for a favor of your kindly consideration of not failing me.”*		4_17) Recognition of and response to greater authority of the recipient E.g. "Beg", "Plead" "Grant me the permission"				
		4_18) Promise				
		4_19) Making a personal appeal E.g., “You are the only person I can go to.”				

Notes about the elements in Template 1

"Politeness expressions introducing head acts"

Some politeness expressions were classified into different categories of supportive moves depending on the contexts in which they occurred. Examples are provided below:

1. The word *"glad"* itself does not constitute a compliment, but the phrase "glad to invite you" constitutes a does as in *"I am glad to invite you to proofread my job application letter."*

2. *"Valuable"* in the sentence *"I hope you will give me a valuable chance to pass the course"* was classified as "recognition of and response to greater authority of the recipient", but the word *"valuable"* in the sentences *"I am writing to request your valuable special consideration to allow me to pass the course"* and *"Your valuable opinion would help use a lot"* was classified as "compliment'.
   The reason was that the first usage was to modify the word "chance", but the last two usages were used to modify the interviewee.

3. *"Kindly"* as in *"I would like to ask you if you would kindly help me*" was regarded as the supportive move of "Thankful".

4. *"Kind"* as in "*It would be kind of you if you would be my interviewee"* or *"Thank you for your kind attention"* was regarded as the supportive move of "Thankful".

   However, *"kind"* in *"My classmate said that you are very kind"* was categorized as an expression showing "compliment".

5. "Kindness" as in *"I would be grateful for your kindness"* was regarded as the supportive move of "Thankful".

6. *"Nice"* as in *"It would be nice if you can do me favor"* was regarded as the supportive move of "Thankful".

   However, *"nice"* in *"My classmate said that you are very nice"* was categorized as an expression showing "compliment"]

7. Since *"sorry"* was also regarded as a politeness expression for the supportive move of “Apology”, the method of substitution was used in order to draw a line between the usage of “apology” and “regret”: the word *"apologize"* or *"regret"* would be put in a certain expression written by a student containing the word *"sorry"* to see which meaning is more appropriate.

   For example, a student wrote *"First of all, I am very sorry for the insufficient attendance. I confess that I was not well informed of the minimum attendance requirement before. Students can only be absent for 7 hours, but I have been absent for 10 hours. The reason for my frequent absence is that I have a rather weak body..."*. The usage of *“sorry”* was regarded as "APOLOGY".

   Another student wrote, *"I am sorry to say that the requirement is not fulfilled as I have been absent for 10 hours. This is due to the heavy responsibility and workload that I have been taking in the Fencing Club..."*.
   The usage of *"sorry"* was regarded as "REGRET" because the whole expression *"I am sorry to say"* could be replaced by *"I regret to say..."*, but it could not be replaced by *"I apologize to say that ..."*.

In addition, only the expressions introducing the head act of a request were included in the analysis. The politeness expressions introducing other speech acts were not included in the analysis. For example, the word "would" in the sentence "I would like to apologize" was not counted as a politeness expression to introduce a request. The reason was that this sentence seemed to be expressing another speech act - the speech act of "apology", not "request". However, "would" in "I would like to ask you to proofread my application letter" was considered as an expression to introduce a request.

Similarly, the word "would" in "I would like to explain the reason why I have been absent for 10 hours" was NOT counted as an expression introducing the head act of a request because the intention of the writer did not seem to be a request - asking for an action to be performed by the message recipient. Rather, he/she was just trying to state the purpose of

his/her writing.

Of course, it might be argued that the two speech acts above indirectly require an action upon the recipient. For example, the hearer had to listen to the apology and to listen to the reason. However, there was a need to set a criterion that an explicit request was needed for any politeness expressions to be included in the analysis in order to be consistent and objective.

Appendix B Template 2a
"Formality"
(For analyzing experimental student data)

VIOLATIONS OF FORMALITY	
8_1) The of "I" as the subject of a main clause or/and a subordinate clause	
8_2) The use of lower case "i" for "I"	
8_3) The use of lower case "u" for "you"	
8_4) All contracted forms—can't don't etc.	
8_5) Abbreviated forms (e.g. "Yr" for "your")	
8_6) Use of symbols – e.g., &, :-), :-(	
8_7) Informal words and phrases, especially words from slang or other most informal registers	
8_8) The use of the imperative structure: all commands addressed to the reader requiring action	
8_9) Omission of the sentence subject "I" in expressions like "I look forward to seeing you"	

8_10) Problems with the opening salutation such as the use of first name only with or without the title or the prefix “dear” (e.g., "Dear Mary", "Mary"), the use of the full name with or without the title or the prefix “dear” (e.g, "Dear Mary Brown", "Mary Brown), the use of the prefab "Dear Sir/Madam"		
8_11) Problems with the closing salutation including the wrong choice of the closing salutation, the wrong spelling and upper/lower case of “Yours sincerely”, and the use of one’s own first name		
FEATURES OF FORMALITY		
9_1) Use of modal verbs “would” and “may” to introduce a head act	Would	
	Could	
	May	
9_2) Complexity of sentence structures, using T-unit a measure	(The length of T-units = letter length / number of T-units)	

Appendix C Template 2b
"Formality"
(For analyzing <u>authentic</u> student data)

VIOLATIONS OF FORMALITY	
8_1) The use of "I" as the subject of a main clause or/and a subordinate clause	
8_2) The use of lower case "i" for "I"	
8_3) The use of lower case "u" for "you"	
8_4) All contracted forms—can't don't etc.	
8_5) Abbreviated forms (e.g. "Yr" for "your")	
8_6) Use of symbols – e.g., &, :-), :-(	
8_7) Informal words and phrases, especially words from slang or other most informal registers	
8_8) The use of the imperative structure: all commands addressed to the reader requiring action	
8_9) Omission of the sentence subject "I" in expressions like "I look forward to seeing you"	

8_10) Problems with the opening salutation such as the use of first name only with or without the title or the prefix “dear” (e.g., "Dear Mary", "Mary"), the use of the full name with or without the title or the prefix “dear” (e.g, "Dear Mary Brown", "Mary Brown), the use of the prefab "Dear Sir/Madam"		
FEATURES OF FORMALITY		
9_1) Use of modal verbs “would” and “may” to introduce a head act	Would	
	Could	
	May	
9_2) Complexity of sentence structures, using T-unit as a measure	(The length of T-units = letter length / number of T-units)	

Appendix D The Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

The present researcher is interested in your opinion about the request letters written by the participants in this study in terms of the following four aspects of pragmatic competence: 1) politeness, 2) formality/informality, 3) directness/indirectness, and 4) amount of information.

There are altogether twelve letters and twelve rating sheets. Read the corresponding letter for each rating sheet and complete the rating sheet by following the instructions given. Please be aware that, for some of the questions, you need to write your ratings on the scripts, not on the rating sheets.

Letter No. ___	**Questions/Tasks**
Politeness	***1. Referring to the script, how polite do you think the expressions underlined in the letter are? ON THE SCRIPT, please write "1", "2", "3" or "4", "5+", or "5-" under EACH of the underlined expressions.*** *"1" means "Very impolite"* *"2" means "Impolite"* *"3" means "Neither polite nor impolite"* *"4" means "Polite"* *"5+" means "Very polite" ("+" showing "approval")* *"5-" means "Unnaturally polite" ("-" showing "disapproval")* ***2. Referring to the script, did you find any supportive moves* you did not approve of? ON THE SCRIPT, use a red pen to underline ALL the supportive moves you feel inappropriately used.*** ** When rating the "supportive moves", please note that your rating should be based on content only; the linguistic form of the expressions used should NOT be a factor for consideration when answering this question. Please also note that different people may have different views about how appropriate the supportive moves listed in Handout B are.*

Checklist: Please tick as appropriate.

☐ *I have underlined the inappropriate supportive moves on the script.*

☐ *I did not find any inappropriate supportive moves in the letter.*

3. Referring to the script, overall, how appropriate do you think the supportive moves used by the writer are in terms of quality? Please refer to the notes in Question 2 about supportive moves, if needed.

Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate

Reason(s) for your rating: _____

4. Referring to the letter, overall, how polite do you think the letter is when considering the phrases introducing the head acts (those underlined in the text for you) and the supportive moves used by the writer? Circle your answer below.

Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate

If your answer is 5, please tick as appropriate:

☐ 5+

☐ 5-

"1" means "Very impolite"
"2" means "Impolite"
"3" means "Neither polite nor impolite"
"4" means "Polite"
"5+" means "Very polite" ("+" showing "approval")
"5-" means "Unnaturally polite" ("-" showing "disapproval"

Reason(s) for your rating: _____

5. If you were to write this letter, which of the following supportive moves do you think would be the most important? From the list below, choose the SIX most important moves and rank them in ascending order, where "1" indicates "the most

	important and "6" indicates "the least important". Write your ratings in the boxes. ☐ *1) Preparing the requestee for the coming request* *(E.G., I would like to seek your help.)* ☐ *2) Acknowledging imposition.* *(E.G., I understand this is an imposition.)* ☐ *3) Minimizing the imposition* *(E.G., it will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter.)* ☐ *4) Making the request reasonable by showing the effort put in by the letter writer* *(E.G., I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive requirements.)* ☐ *5) Complimenting the requestee* *(E.G., my classmates say that you are very helpful.)* ☐ *6) Showing the benefits if the request is complied* *(E.G., your help will surely increase the chance of getting the job.)* ☐ *7) Pointing out the importance of the request* *(E.G., I would like to seek your assistance in a matter that is of utmost importance to me.)* ☐ *8) Showing negative consequences* *(E.G., I may lose the good job.)* ☐ *9) Promise of compensation or mention of the intended compensation* *(E.G., I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation.)*

	☐ *10) Showing thankfulness* *(E.G., thank you for ...)* ☐ *11) Apologizing* *(E.G., I am terribly sorry that ...)* ☐ *12) Asking for forgiveness* *(E.G., please forgive me.)* ☐ *Other strategies you would prefer to use:* _____ ***6. If you were to write this letter, are there any supportive moves listed above that you would definitely NOT use? Write the numbers indicating the categories on the lines below:*** _____
Formality/informality	***7. Is the register of this request letter formal or informal?*** ***Please tick your answer.*** ☐ *Formal* ☐ *Informal* ☐ *Difficult to categorize this letter as either "formal" or "informal"* *Reason(s):* _____ ***8. How appropriate do you think the register adopted by the writer is?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____

Directness/indirectness	***9. Do you think the writer has put the head act* of the request asked in the writing topic in an appropriate position of the letter?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____ ****<u>The head act has been capitalized in the letter for your easy reference.</u> Please refer to Handout B for the explanation of "Head act".*** ***10. If you were to write this request, which of the following writing plans would you use? Please tick the box.*** ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) →background information about yourself → the exact request* ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) → the exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Background information about yourself→ the exact request* ☐ *The exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Other (please specify:)* _____ _

	11. <u>For a letter with some "negative elements" highlighted in bold print:</u> ***Referring to the script, how useful do you think the "negative elements" are in increasing the chance of getting the request complied with? On the script and under EACH of the words in bold print, write "U", "CP", or "N":*** ***"U" means "useful"*** ***"CP" means "counter-productive"*** ***"N" means " neither useful nor counter-productive"*** ***(If needed, you might refer to Handout C for what counts as "negative elements".)*** ***Checklist - Please tick the box:*** ☐ I have written "U" ,"CP" and/or "N" under the words in bold print. ☐ There is no word in bold print in this letter. ***12. I f you were to write this letter, which of the following would be your decision regarding the use of "negative elements"?*** ☐ *I would try to use as many positive words as possible in the hope that a positive tone of the letter can help achieve the purpose of the letter because of the overall pleasant effect created* ☐ *I do not think it is necessary to use positive words to express ideas that can be said directly by using negative words.* ☐ *Other (please specify):* _____

Amount of information	***13. Referring to the letter, how appropriate do you think the amount of information given is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your answer.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____
Overall appropriateness of the letter	***14. Referring to the letter, overall, how appropriate do you think the letter is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your answer.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* ***Please tick the box(es) that show the MAIN factor(s) influencing your ratings.*** ***If you have ticked more than one box, please rank your choices in ascending order, where "1" indicates "the most important" and "4" indicates "the least important". Put your ratings beside the boxes.*** ☐ Level of politeness ☐ *Expressions introducing a request* ☐ *Supportive moves* ☐ *Level of formality/informality* ☐ *Level of directness/indirectness* ☐ *Position of the head act of the request* ☐ *Use of negative elements* ☐ *Amount of information* ☐ *Other (please specify):*_____

Please go to the next script

Appendix E A Trial Version of the Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire

Please read the following situations that take place in Hong Kong and write a response in the blank after "I would say". Respond as you would in an actual conversation. Pay attention to the following three factors while composing your answers: 1) Are you familiar with the person whom you are going to talk to? 2) Does he/she have more social power than you? 3) The time and effort involved for the person in the scenario to help you, the time and effort involved for you to help the person in the scenario, and the time and effort involved for the person in the scenario to make up for the mistake you have made.

"-power" means that you have LESS social power than the person you are going to talk to.

"+power" means that you have MORE social power than the person you are going to talk to.

"= power" means that you and the person you are going to talk have the SAME social position.

"-familiarity" means that you have contact with him/her for the sake of academic needs only; there is NO social, friendly interaction outside the realm of study.

"+familiarity" means that you HAVE SOCIAL, FRIENDLY INTERACTIONS with him/her in addition to the contact involved in academic study.

For all the twelve situations below, imagine that you are a 19-year-old year 1 student at university and you must use English to talk to the people in the situations because they are all native speakers of English.

1. You are taking the course "University Spoken Language". You would like to ask your English native-speaking tutor, who is about 40 years old, to proofread your job application letter. You plan to ask him/her for the help at the 15-minute break between lessons. **("-familiarity"; "-power")**

   I would say:

   _____

   _____

   _____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your tutor to help you.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

2. You are teaching a 16-year-old American teenager drawing as your part-time job. To complete a project for one of your core subjects, you need to ask your student to help you distribute 100 questionnaires to his native English-speaking schoolmates. You plan to ask your student for the help at the 15-minute break between the drawing lessons. **("-familiarity"; "+ power")**

   I would say:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your student to help you.

   1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

   ("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

3. You are taking an elective course "Introduction to Japanese". You have not been able to attend one of the lectures so you need to borrow the notes taken by one of your classmates. In the next lesson, sitting next to you is a 19-year-old American student, who has been in the same discussion group with you for one time. You plan to ask him/her for the help at the 15-minute break between lessons. **("-familiarity"; "= power")**

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your classmate to help you.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

4. You are taking a course "Introduction to Japanese". You have not been able to attend one of the lectures so you want to borrow the notes taken by your cousin, who is also taking this elective course. Your cousin, a 19-year-old American Chinese, is now an exchange student at the same university as you.

   Your cousin has been your best companion since childhood. You often go sightseeing with him during his visits to Hong Kong and he always stays in your flat over night. Actually, he comes to Hong Kong every summer with his parents because they need to attend the annual birthday dinner of your grandfather.

   In the next week, when you see your cousin in class, you want to ask him/her for the help at the 15-minute break between lessons.
   ("+familiarity"; "= power")

   I would say:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your cousin to help you.

   1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

   ("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

5. You are taking the course “University Spoken English”. Your native English-speaking tutor, who is about 40 years old, asked you a few days ago to help him/her distribute 200 questionnaires to your schoolmates for his/her doctoral research. You don’t want to help because of the amount of time and possible trouble involved. You plan to tell him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons that you will not be able to help.
(“-familiarity”; “- power”)

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for you to help your tutor.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

(“1” indicates “A very small request”; “5” indicates “Too much to ask for”)

6. You are teaching a 16-year-old American teenager drawing as your part-time job. He/she asked you a few days ago to help him re-write two Chinese essays, which actually are his school assignments. You don’t want to mark extra written work, which is not your duty. You plan to tell him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons that you will not be able to help.
(“-familiarity”; “+ power”)

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for you to help your student.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

7. You are taking an elective course "Introduction to Japanese". One of your classmates, who is a 19-year-old American and who has been in the same discussion group with you for one time, asked you a few days ago to lend him/her your notes because he/she was absent in last week's lesson. You attend classes regularly and take good notes. Since you have to compete with the rest of the class to earn a good grade, you don't feel like sharing the results of your hard work with classmates. You plan to tell him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons that you will not be able to help. **("-familiarity"; "= power")**

   I would say:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for you to help your classmate.

   1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

   ("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

8. 9-year-old cousin, who is an American Chinese, is studying at the same university as you for his one-year exchange program. Your cousin has been your best companion since childhood. You often go sightseeing with him during his visits to Hong Kong and he always stays in your flat over night. Actually, he comes to Hong Kong every summer with his parents because they need to attend the annual birthday dinner of your grandfather.

   He needs to submit a 20-page report in two days' time. A few days ago, he/she told you that he/she was not good at typing and had no time to do it. Knowing that you would be free in these days, he/she asked you to help him/her type the report. Although he/she has been your best

companion since childhood, you do not feel like helping him/her because you don't like typing. You plan to tell him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons that you will not be able to help. **("+familiarity"; "=power")**

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for you to help your cousin.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

9. You have forgotten to attend a consultation session with you 40-year-old tutor, who is a native speaker of English. The meeting was scheduled to be one hour long and to be held in your tutor's office last week. The purpose of the consultation was to obtain your tutor's feedback on your writing assessment. You plan to apologize to him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons. **("-familiarity"; "- power")**

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your tutor to make up for the consultation session.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

10. You are teaching a 16-year-old American teenager drawing as your part-time job. You forgot to attend one extra lesson last week. That lesson was supposed to be one hour long and to be held in your student's flat. You plan to apologize to him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons. **("-familiarity"; "+ power")**

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your student to make up for the extra lesson.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

11. You are taking an elective course "Introduction to Japanese". You volunteered to buy a course textbook, which costs HK$300, for your classmates at a discount rate of 20% for bulk purchase. A few weeks ago, you sent your classmates an email and you recorded 34 responses. But actually there should be 35 responses. You overlooked one of the return emails from your classmates. That classmate would have to pay the full cost and travel to the bookshop in a faraway place to buy that book himself/herself. You do not want to give your copy to him/her because you think you have already spent much time ordering books for your classmates and you need the book urgently.

The classmate who has been left out is an American, who is of the same age as you. He/she has been your discussion group mate for only one time. You plan to apologize to him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons. **("-familiarity"; "= power")**

I would say:

_____

_____

_____

The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your classmate to buy the textbook himself / herself.

1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

12. You are taking an elective course "Introduction to Japanese". You volunteered to buy a course textbook, which costs HK$300, for your classmates at a discount rate of 20% for bulk purchase. A few weeks ago, you sent your classmates an email and you recorded 34 responses. But actually there should be 35 responses. You overlooked one of the return emails from your classmates. That classmate would have to pay the full cost and travel to the bookshop in a faraway place to buy that book himself/herself. You do not want to give your copy to him/her because you think you have already spent much time ordering books for your classmates and your need the book urgently.

    The classmate who has been left out is your cousin, a 19-year-old American Chinese and an exchange student at the same university as you. Your cousin has been your best companion since childhood. You often go sightseeing with him during his visits to Hong Kong and he always stays in your flat over night. Actually, he comes to Hong Kong every summer with his parents because they need to attend the annual birthday dinner of your grandfather.

    You intend to apologize to him/her at the 15-minute break between lessons.

    ("+familiarity"; "= power")

    I would say:

    _____

    _____

    _____

    The following scale shows how much time and effort are involved for your cousin to buy the textbook himself / herself.

    1 *2* *3* *4* √***5***

    ("1" indicates "A very small request"; "5" indicates "Too much to ask for")

Please supply your personal information below because it will be very useful to the researcher when analyzing data. Thank you!

Your native language is _____

Age: _____

Gender: M ( ) F ( )

Education Level: Undergraduate: (Please tick as appropriate)
____Undergraduate: ___Year 1 ___Year 2 ___Year3
____Degree holder:

A-Level Examination in the subject of "Use of English": (Please write the letter for your grade) Grade: _____

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix F Sample of the Metapragmatic Judgment Task Questionnaire designed by Chen (1996)

Given the following four situations, how appropriate do you consider each of their responses (A-F) to be? Give each response in each situation a rating, by circling one of the five numbers on the scale besides it. Then, in the space provided below each response, state the reason(s) why you gave the response such a rating (i.e.,
Why you think the response is (very) appropriate or why you are undecided about its appropriateness.)

1 Very Inappropriate
2 Inappropriate
3 Undecided
4 Appropriate
5 Very appropriate

Situation One: W attends classes regularly and takes good notes. One person in W's class who doesn't show up very often asks to borrow W's notes. Since W has to compete with the rest of the class to earn a good grade, W doesn't feel like sharing the results of his/her hard work with someone who does not work for it. W says,

A) "If I lend my notes to you, it is unfair to me and others who come to class regularly.
1 2 3 4 5
Reason(s):
_____

_____

_____

B) "I think you should think about what you are doing."
1 2 3 4 5
Reason(s):
_____

_____

_____

C) "I need them to study from. Maybe someone in your class can lend you the notes. Sorry.

1 2 3 4 5

Reason(s):

_____

_____

_____

D) "You should have taken notes by yourself!"

1 2 3 4 5

Reason(s):

_____

_____

_____

E) "If you had been in class, they (the notes) would make sense to you.

1 2 3 4 5

Reason(s):

_____

_____

_____

F) “I’m not sure my notes will help you because they relate so closely to what was said or done in class. I really would rather not have them all copied. Is there one particular class that you need some notes on?”

1 2 3 4 5

Reason(s):

_____

_____

_____

Appendix G Three topics used in the writing task

Total time: One hour

Request 1 (Suggested time: 20 minutes)

You have failed the attendance requirement of the English course (Spoken Language) you are taking. The minimum attendance requirement is 80%, which means that you can be absent for at most 7 hours only. You have been absent for 10 hours. You plan to write a letter to the department head (named Betty Black) to request that special consideration be given to let you pass the course.

Background information for your reference

- You have not had any contact with your department head before.
- She is about 40 years old, and she speaks English as her first language.
- The success of such a request will obviously depend upon its being phrased as politely as possible

Request 2 (Suggested time: 20 minutes)

You need to find someone to proofread your job application letter. You are very interested in the job to be applied for, but you are very concerned about possible grammatical mistakes in the letter. You would like to ask the language adviser of the Self-access Centre of your department to do the proofreading for you. You plan to write a letter to her for your request.

Background information for your reference

- You have not had any contact with her before.
- She is about 40 years old, and she speaks English as her first language.
- The language advisor (named Susan Smith) does not have the responsibility to proofread your job application letters, so you are actually asking her to do you a favor.
- The success of such a request will obviously depend upon its being phrased as politely as possible

Request 3 (Suggested time: 20 minutes)

You are taking an English course, which requires you to interview a native speaker of English for a project. You have got a name list of all the tutors in the English Language Centre, and you plan to write a letter to one of them. The tutor you have chosen from the list is a female (named Mary Brown).

Background information for your reference

- You have not had any contact with her before.
- She is about 40 years old, and she speaks English as her first language.
- The success of such a request will obviously depend upon its being phrased as politely as possible

END OF TASK

Appendix H Version One of the twelve letters used to elicit teachers' pragmatic judgments

Version One (Please DO NOT rearrange the file but simply to read the papers in the order presented.)

Letter 5

Dear Ms Smith,

I am a Year-3 student majoring in Electronic Engineering at this university. I am going to apply for a job, but I am **not sure** whether my job application letter is grammatically correct. My friends who have been counseled by you told me that you are very enthusiastic about helping students, so I would like to ask you to do me a favor. WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO PROOFREAD MY JOB APPLICATION LETTER?

I know that proofreading is by no means the duty of a Language Learning Advisor, and I know that what I am asking for is outside your job duty. I also know that I should check my grammatical mistakes by myself by using dictionaries and grammar books. I have tried all these means, but I am still not sure if the letter is error free.

The letter is only about 200 words long, and it is clearly typed. I guess it will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter, but

your correction will benefit me tremendously.

I am **sorry** for asking you do what is outside your responsibility, but getting this job is of utmost importance to me. Actually, I have been waiting for a job like this one for quite a long time. The **loss** of this job because of the possible grammatical mistakes in the letter will surely make me very **unhappy** for many years.

I would really be grateful if you could spend a few minutes to proofread my job application letter.

I look forward to receiving your favorable reply.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 4

Dear Ms Black,

My attendance is a bit below the minimum requirement. MAY I REQUEST YOUR PERMISSION TO LET ME PASS THE "SPOKEN LANGUAGE" COURSE? I was wondering if you could perhaps consider my situation as a special case and grant me your permission.

My name is Sandy Wong (Student I.D. 1233455), and I am taking the course "Spoken Language" in Sem B 2005-2006. In about January 2006, my mother had a stroke, and partially lost her language and her walking ability. My siblings and I had to visit her in the hospital frequently, and talked to the doctors about the treatments she needed to undergo. That was the reason why I had to be absent from class more often than what was allowed., that is, ten hours instead of seven, the maximum amount of time allowed.

I am **terribly sorry** about not having been able to meet the attendance requirement, but I am willing to do whatever things you would like me to do in order to make up for the hours missed.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that I have finished all the course assessments despite the attendance problems. It would be a great **pity** for me if I **failed** the course just because of my attendance falling short of the requirement. I understand that students have to follow the regulations of a course such as attendance requirement in addition to passing the assessments, but I would really appreciate it if you could understand the hassle caused to the family members when one's mother is seriously ill.

I would really be grateful if you could let me pass the attendance requirement.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 1

Dear Ms. Smith,

Although we have never met, I am taking the liberty of addressing you to request your assistance in a matter that is of the greatest importance to me. Recently, I have written a letter of application for a position for which I sincerely would like to be considered. Despite the excellence of my training at the City College of Hong Kong, I am **uncertain** about the quality of my language skills in English and in the genre of job-application letters. MAY I IMPOSE ON YOU TO LOOK OVER MY LETTER AND MAKE ANY CHANGES YOU BELIEVE WILL ENHANCE MY LETTER? I understand that my request falls outside your normal duties; I **fear** that I **lack** the resources to offer you compensation for your efforts. Despite these constraints, I hope you can find it possible to assist me in this matter.

Thank you in advance for your kindness.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 6

Dear Ms Brown,

I am a Year 1 student taking the course "Research Skills" offered by this university. I think I would need your help for the data collection for a project related to this course. MAY I INVITE YOU TO BE ONE OF THE INTERVIEWEES FOR MY RESEARCH? The interview will take 30 minutes, and I can come over to your office at the time convenient to you.

The title of my research project is "The problems encountered by native speakers of English teaching at the universities in Hong Kong". Since you have taught at this university for more than three years, your opinion on this topic for sure will be of enormous use to us. My classmates who have been taught by you said that you are very kind and willing to help students, so I am writing to you in the hope of getting your help.

Your participation in this research will not only help us, but also help teachers who are native speakers of English because we will make recommendations to the university concerning whether more resources should be provided to help expatriate teachers adjust to the new teaching

environment here.

I would really appreciate it if you could spend about 30 minutes with me. Would you mind calling me at 98763453 or writing back to me stating the time and the venue that you prefer, if you could kindly agree to provide assistance to my project?

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 9

Dear Mary,

I am a year 2 student who are taking a ELC course in this year. For the course I took, it requests me to interview a native speaker to finish a research project. When I know I have such kind of job to do, in my mind it appears your name which is the one I want to interview. As I know you are a ELC tutor, can you do me a favor, LET ME INTERVIEW YOU NOT ONLY FOR MY PROJECT ALSO FOR MY ENGLISH STUDY TOO. Please arrange a time when you are free to have this interview. I REALLY WANT YOU CAN DO THIS INTERVIEW.

Best wishes,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 7

Dear Betty,

I am a year 2 student who are taking a spoken language course in this year. But I **stuck** in a **trouble** now and seek for your help. My situation is that: for the minimum requirement of your English course is 80% which is at most 7 hours, but I need to absent for 10 hours because of the illness, I really cannot attend some of the class during this difficult period. I promise that in the rest of the classes I will not absent anymore, Please **forgive** me and ARRANGE A SPECIAL CONSIDERATION FOR ME TO PASS THE COURSE IF MY COURSE WORK AND EXAM IS FAIR. DO NOT **FAIL** ME BECAUSE OF THE ATTENDANCE. If you want to know more about my condition, feel free to contact me at 9998 3241 to ask more about this. Hope that you can help me about this.

Best wishes,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 10

Dear Ms. Brown,

I am a first year Social Sciences student in the University and am currently taking a one-year English course at the English Language Centre. Attributable to 30% of the final grading in the course, the course requires each of us to submit before the end of June a project on a self-chosen topic which involves interviewing a native English speaker. My topic selected is 'Foreigners working in Hong Kong'.

From the English Language Centre website, I understand that you have been working in Hong Kong since 1996. I WOULD THEREFORE BE MOST GRATEFUL IF YOU COULD SPARE APPROXIMATELY ONE-HOUR FROM YOUR BUSY SCHEDULE TO SHARE WITH ME YOUR VALUABLE WORKING EXPERIENCE IN HONG KONG, especially during the historical time in 1997 when the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned from the British to the people's republic of china. A preliminary list of questions which I have prepared for the interview is enclosed for your reference.

An interview with you would add value to my project, I hope I would have the chance to meeting with you.

If an interview with you could be arranged, it would be most kind of you if our interview could be fixed in any of the afternoons from Monday to Saturday from 2:30 p.m. as I have morning lectures throughout the week this Semester, however, arrangements can certainly be made if a morning session better fit in your timetable.

If you have any question, please reach me at 9876 5432 or vickyli@unimail.com anytime. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 12

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am a final-year student of your Department and am writing to ask your goodself for a favour.

As you well know, students who are in their final year of studies in the Department usually start looking for jobs in around this time of the year. What **troubles** them is that it is **not easy** at all to find a job which they like. Indeed, this is one of the most important decisions which they have to make in their lives because success in their careers depends much on whether they have chosen the right job at the beginning of their working lives.

I am no exception. I have spent much time in hunting for the right job in the last few months but to no avail.

I am glad that after a lot of hard work, I have found what I truly believe to be the best and the most suitable job opportunity. It is a post in a multi-national company. Enclosed please find the advertisement posted by that company in the South China Morning Post.

I must say I am extremely interested in that job. IT IS ONLY UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT I HAVE WRITTEN THIS LETTER TO YOU BOLDLY ASKING YOU FOR A FAVOUR, NAMELY, TO PROOFREAD MY JOB APPLICATION LETTER. While I have re-read that letter many times, trying to make sure that it does not contain any grammatical mistake, I consider it advisable if that could be confirmed one more time by somebody who is really skilful in the English language. As you are the language adviser of the Self-access Centre of our department,

I think you must be the most appropriate person whom I should turn to.

I totally understand that you are already very busy in your work with the Self-access Centre and it is really not your responsibility to proofread students' application letters. Therefore if for whatever reason you take the view that you are **unable** or **should not** accede to my request, please do not hesitate to let me know.

However, if it so happens that you can spare your valuable time to assist me on this occasion, I would be extremely grateful for that. That would no doubt enhance the chance of my successfully getting this job which I really want. In case you are able to help, my draft application letter is enclosed for your comment.

Should you have any enquiries, you may contact me at any time at 12341234.

Thank you for your kind attention and I look forward to your favourable reply.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 11

Dear Ms. Black,

I am a student of the English course (spoken language) and AM WRITING TO PLEAD THAT SPECIAL CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN WHEN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT DECIDES WHETHER I SHOULD BE GIVEN A "PASS" IN THE COURSE.

As you well know, the total number of hours of the Course was 35 and according to the Course Guidelines, any student must have attained a minimum attendance of 80% before he could pass the Course.

In my case, I have attended around 71% of the Course (that is, 25 hours). I must admit that I have failed to meet the minimum attendance requirement. However, my absence does not indicate that I have paid no respect to the Course. As a matter of fact, during the last 6 months, my younger brother was quite ill. Since all the other family members had to go to work and earn a living, I was the only one who could look after him at home. As a result, I could not spend as much time as I wish for the Course.

I hope you would understand and appreciate that I had in fact tried my very best to come back to school whenever I could find somebody to look after my younger brother in my place. However, as I have explained above, it is very difficult for me to do so.

I understand that the Department retains a discretion to let students pass the Course despite the fact that the minimum attendance requirement is not met. In view of my personal circumstances, I would be most grateful if

the Department could consider this as a special case and let me pass the Course. In the event that the Department considers that I should complete further assignments so as to make up for the lost hours, I am most happy to do so.

Should you or the Department have any enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your kind attention and I look forward to your favourable reply.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 2

Ms. Brown,

In an English course in which I am presently enrolled, the class has been assigned the task of interviewing a native speaker of English. **Unfortunately**, there are no native speakers of English among my friends and classmates. Let me be quite candid. I requested a list of all the native speakers of English employed in the English Language Centre. Obviously, none of these individuals are known to me. The choice of your name is entirely **arbitrary**. NEVERTHELESS, I HOPE YOU WILL DO ME THE FAVOR OF ALLOWING ME TO INTERVIEW YOU FOR THE CLASS PROJECT. I understand that this is an imposition, and I **fear** that I **lack** the resources to offer you compensation for your time. If you were willing to be my subject, would you kindly let me have a list of the times when you might be available during the next week? I'll try to find a convenient time for both of us, and I'll let you know as soon as possible when and where we might meet. Thank you in advance for your kindness in agreeing to be interviewed.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 3

Dear Mrs Black,

A most **unfortunate** situation has developed, causing me to write this special appeal to you. As I understand it, the minimum attendance requirement for successful completion of the Spoken Language course in which I am enrolled is 80%. **Regrettably**, my number of absences slightly exceeds this limit. The cause of my absence was the illness of my mother; she was hospitalized for several weeks. Her illness required my presence at home to look after my younger sister and to tend to other matters that my mother would normally have taken care of. I realize that presence in class in a course in spoken language is essential, but I hope you can grant me special dispensation under the circumstances. As I'm sure my teacher will attest, I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive course requirements. Considering the special circumstances, I HOPE YOU CAN ALLOW ME TO RECEIVE A PASSING GRADE FOR THE COURSE BASED SOLELY ON MY LANGUAGE SKILLS RATHER THAN ON MY ATTENDANCE.

Thank you for giving this matter your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Letter 8

Dear Susan,

I am Alan, one of the year 2 students of Accountancy major. I am writing a letter to seek your help. As I know you are the language adviser of the Self-access Centre, I WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO PROOFREAD MY JOB APPLICATION LETTER. Although the request of me is not your duty, I really concern of the job and I **afraid** that my letter contain many grammatical mistakes which cause me to **lost** this opportunity to apply this job. Please do me a favor to help me, besides you I **cannot find others** to help me, please help me. I really longing for your good news.

Best wishes,

- *The expressions used to introduce a head act are underlined. If the imperative mood is used for the head act, the imperative structure is underlined.*
- *Negative words are in bold print.*
- *The exact head act of the request asked for in the writing topic is capitalized.*

Appendix I First language, gender and the version of the twelve letters assigned to each of the sixteen raters

	First Language	**Gender**	**Version of the twelve letters assigned to**
Rater 1	Cantonese	Female	1
Rater 2	Cantonese	Female	2
Rater 3	Cantonese	Female	3
Rater 4	Cantonese	Female	4
Rater 5	Cantonese	Male	5
Rater 6	Cantonese	Male	6
Rater 7	Cantonese	Male	7
Rater 8	Cantonese	Male	8
Rater 9	British English	Female	9
Rater 10	British English	Female	10
Rater 11	British English	Female	11
Rater 12	British English	Female	12
Rater 13	British English	Male	13
Rater 14	British English	Male	14
Rater 15	British English	Male	15
Rater 16	British English	Male	16

Appendix J The letter soliciting participation of teachers in this study

A study of the pragmatic competence of adult Cantonese-speaking learners of English in performing the speech act of written requests and the pragmatic judgment made by two groups of ESL teachers

You are invited to participate in a study of how university students write request letters in terms of request strategies and politeness expressions used and how two groups of English teachers judge the requests written by students.

The study is being conducted by Ms Fiona Siu Kwai-peng (e-mail fiona.siu@cityu.edu.hk, or telephone (852) 2784 4468) as part of a research project to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Applied Linguistics at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. The research is being supervised by Professor Christopher N. Candlin (chris.candlin@ling.mq.edu.au, telephone +61 2 9850 9181) and Dr Peter Roger (peter.roger@ling.mq.edu.au, telephone +61 2 9850 9650) in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to rate twelve request letters ranged from about 90 words to 300 words using the questionnaire given (about 14 questions); you will also be interviewed for your opinion regarding your ratings. The estimated time to rate the letters is about one hour in total, and the interview is about 30 minutes long. Before the rating, there will be a 10-minute briefing session. You will be paid HK$400 for rating the twelve letters and for attending the interview. Payment of HK$400 will be made upon the completion of both tasks (rating the twelve letters and attending the interview with the researcher).

The interview will be recorded using audio tapes for the purpose of transcription.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the researcher and supervisors named above will have access to the raw data. The findings will from part of the researcher's thesis for her Doctor of Applied Linguistics degree, and may also be presented at academic conferences or published as journal articles. If any language expressions in the written requests are to be quoted for the purpose of analysis, participants will be identified by a letter or number code only.

Rating the twelve request letters and attending the interview will be taken as consent to participate.

If you would like feedback on the findings of this research, this can be obtained by e-mailing Ms Fiona Siu at the e-mail address provided above.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone: 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix K Personal Background Questionnaire (Part 1)

Please fill in the blanks below. The information you provide will be of great use to the present researcher in the process of interpreting the data to be collected.

Please tick as appropriate and fill in the blanks.

1. What is your native language?

☐ **Cantonese** ☐ **English** ☐ **Other (please specify):** _____

2. If English is your native language, in your opinion, which variety of English do you speak?

☐ American English ☐ British English
☐ Australian English ☐ New Zealand English
☐ Canadian English ☐ Other (please specify): _____

3. Have you ever lived in a country where English is spoken as the first language?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. If your answer to Question 3 is affirmative, in which country have you lived and for how many years?

I have lived in _____ for _____ years.

5. Age range: ☐ **25-35** ☐ **36-45** ☐ **46-55** ☐**56-65**

6. Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

7. Your teaching experience: (You might tick more than one item on the list.)

☐ I have taught English as a full-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a first language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a full-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a foreign/second language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a first language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a foreign/second language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

Appendix L The Personal Background Questionnaire (Part 2)

Dear Teacher,

Thank you very much for your kind assistance with my doctoral dissertation last summer. Since my supervisors have required me to supply more information about the teacher participants, I would be most grateful if you could complete the questionnaire below, seal it in the envelope provided and return it directly to me or put the envelope in my pigeon-hole. It is NOT necessary for you to put your name in questionnaire. Only aggregate information will appear in my dissertation, and you will NOT be identified. I will NOT share the information with any of my colleagues either.

A) Your experience of learning English **(Please tick as appropriate)**

1) Did you learn English as a first or second/foreign language in your primary education?

☐ As a first language ☐ As a second/foreign language

For how long did you study English? _____

2) Did you learn English as a first or second/foreign language in your secondary education?

☐ As a first language ☐ As a second/foreign language

For how long did you study English? _____

3) Your first degree

Degree title: _____

Field of study:_____

Duration of instruction: _____

Place of study: _____

4) Your second degree (if applicable)

Degree title: _____

Field of study:_____

Duration of instruction: _____

Place of study: _____

Your third degree (if applicable)

Degree title: _____

Field of study: _____

Duration of instruction:_____

Place of study: _____

B) <u>Results in public examinations in relation to the subject of English</u>

☐ "Use of English" in the Hong Kong A-level examinations (Grade: _____)

☐ TOEFL (Exam results: _____)

☐ TOIC: (Exam results: _____)

☐ Other: (Exam results: _____)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH INDEED FOR YOUR KIND ASSISTANCE!

Appendix M Instruction sheet provided to teachers for administering the writing task

Dear Teacher,

Below are the instructions for conducting the writing tasks for my research project. I would appreciate it if you could follow them exactly for consistency in administering the tasks.

Sequence	**Documents to be distributed and timing each letter**	**Information to be announced**
Soliciting participation from students ↓	Distribute the following two documents to students: 1) The information sheet about my research 2) The three writing topics Allow 2 minutes for students to read through the two pages.	In order to motivate students to participate in the research project, I will provide the following feedback to the participants in the coming one or two weeks: 1) General comments about students' writing performance, 2) Sample letters
Filling out the questionnaire (1 minute) ↓		**Announcement:** IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH, PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO FILL IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

Writing the first letter ↓		**Announcement:** NOW YOU HAVE 20 MINUTES TO WRITE THE FIRST LETTER AND YOUR TIME STARTS NOW. YOU MUST STOP WHEN TIME IS UP.
↓	**When there is 5 minutes left:**	**Announcement:** You now have 5 minutes left.
↓	**At the end of 20 minutes:**	**Announcement:** TIME IS UP. NOW YOU MUST STOP WRITING THE FIRST LETTER. YOU NOW HAVE 20 MINUTES TO WRITE THE SECOND LETTER. YOU MUST STOP WHEN TIME IS UP.
Writing the second letter ↓	**Repeat the same announcements when there is 5 minutes left and at the end of 20 minutes.**	
Writing the third letter ↓	**Repeat the same announcements when there is 5 minutes left and at the end of 20 minutes.**	

N.B.

1. For those who do NOT agree to write for the research, I have prepared an article for the Supplementary Reading Section in the Teacher' Booklet. They could be asked to read the article and write a summary of 150 words. I can mark the summaries if they want some feedback. Alternatively, you could make your own arrangement.
2. No dictionaries are allowed.
3. Please start the writing at the beginning of the lesson when most students have arrived, if possible.
4. If a student does NOT have full 20 minutes for writing each letter, for example, being late, or having left the classroom for various reasons (e.g., going to the washroom, talking on the phone), please put his/her script in another pile after collection.

Thank you very much indeed for your kind assistance with my research project.

Appendix N The breakdown of the scripts collected by four teachers

	Number of scripts collected	**Number of usable scripts**
Teacher 1 (Teaching one class)	12	6 (6 males, 0 females)
Teacher 2 (Teaching 2 classes)	25	22 (20 males, 2 females)
Teacher 3 (Teaching 2 classes)	23	21 (17 males, 4 females)
Teacher 4 (Teaching 2 classes)	26	24 (8 males, 16 females)

Appendix O Examples of expressions regarded as a certain type of support move

Type of Supportive Move	Examples
Acknowledging imposition	I know that I should have failed the attendance requirement because I have exceeded the maximum number of hours allowed.
Minimizing imposition	The interview will take only 15 minutes. The interview will take 15 minutes. [The short duration of 15 minutes for an interview was also regarded as an attempt to minimize imposition. An arbitrary limit of fifteen minutes was set as the time duration to be regarded as an attempt to minimize imposition.] The interview could be held in a place convenient to.
Effort	I have finished all the assignments required. I am willing to do extra work to compensate for the loss of class hours.
Compensation [Only when a student writer mentioned financial reward would the expression be counted as "compensation"]	I am sorry that I do not have the financial resources to compensation you.
Benefit	Your proofreading can help me give a good impression to the future employer.

Importance	Your proofreading would be very important to me. It is my dream to get this job. [“I am very interested in this job” was not counted as showing “importance”.] [In order to distinguish “Importance” from “Benefit”, the word “importance” or “important” should be present, or the meaning of importance should be conveyed.]
Thankful	Thank you. I would be grateful if you could help me. It would be nice if you could help me.

The information to be counted as "effort" for the three topics

Examples of information that was categorized as "effort" in three topics:

	Topic: Attendance	Topic: Proofreading	Topic: Interview
Information categorized as "effort"	"I am very willing and active to learn and I have handed in all assignments on time."	"I have written the letter and proofread it on my own."	"This is a project about the daily life and work of the interviewee. We would like to interview her about the life in Hong Kong, the work in University, her social contact with the local people in Hong Kong and her points of views towards the student and the education system." [The mention of questions to be asked in the interview showed the effort which a student had put into the preparation work for the interview.]

Appendix P Rules followed in counting the overall length of a letter

1) Short form – counted as 2 words	E.g., Don't (2 words)
2) "80%" – counted as 1 word	
3) "Year 1" – counted as 2 words	
4) The eight digits of a phone number – counted as 1 word	E.g., 9567 3446 (1 word)
5) If a figure is expressed in Arabic numeral, it is counted as 1 word.	E.g., "15" (1 word) "21" (1 word)
6) Hyphenated word – counted as 2 words	
7) The abbreviated form of a word or an acronym – counted as 1 word	E.g., SAC (1 word)
8) E-mail address – counted as 1 word	
9) Date – counted as 2 or 3 words depending on whether the year has been included	E.g., 5 July 2006 (3 words) E.g. 5 July (2 words)
10) Course code – counted as 1 word	E.g., EL0224 (1 word)
11) Each letter was counted at least two times to make sure the word count was accurate. If different figures were obtained in these times, the letter would be	

counted again until the accuracy was confirmed. 12) The subject line of a letter or an e-mail is not counted. 13) The word “E-mail”, “E mail” is counted as 1 word because the word is often written as “Email”. 14) “Sem A” was counted as 2 words because of the space between “Sem” and “A”. 15) Information listed in point form was also counted.	E.g., Phone number: 67713378 E mail: peggy.chan@ctiyu.edu.hk (5 words)

Appendix Q Rules followed in counting the number of T-units

Each bit of information listed in point form was counted as 1 T-unit	E.g., Phone number: 67713378 E mail: peggy.chan@ctiyu.edu.hk (Total: 2 T-units)

Appendix R The first draft of the three writing topics use in the pilot test

Request 1

You have failed the attendance requirement of the English course (Spoken Language) you are taking. The minimum attendance requirement is 80%, which means that you can be absent for at most 7 hours only. You have been absent for 10 hours. You plan to write a letter to the department head (named Betty Black) to request that special consideration be given to let you pass the course.

Background information for your reference

- You have not had any contact with your department head before.
- She is about 40 years old, and she speaks English as her first language.

Request 2

You need to find someone to proofread your job application letter. You are very interested in the job to be applied for, but you are very concerned about possible grammatical mistakes in the letter. You would like to ask the language adviser of the Self-access Centre of your department to do the proofreading for you. You plan to write a letter to her for your request.

Background information for your reference

- The language advisor (named Susan Smith) doe not have the responsibility to proofread your job application letters, so you are actually asking her to do you a favor.
- You have not had any contact with her before.
- She is about 40 years old, and she speaks English as her first language.

Request 3

You are taking an English course, which requires you to interview a native speaker of English for a project. You have got a name list of all the tutors in the English Language Centre, and you plan write a letter to one of them. The tutor you have chosen from the list is a female (named Mary Brown).

Background information for your reference

- You have not had any contact with her before.
- She is about 40 years old, and she speaks English as her first language.

Appendix S Three drafts of the Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

The first version of the pragmatic questionnaire

The present researcher is interested in your opinion about the request letters written by the participants in this study in terms of the following four aspects of pragmatic competence: 1) politeness, 2) formality/informality, 3) directness/indirectness, and 4) amount of information.

There are altogether twelve letters and twelve rating sheets. Read the corresponding letter for each rating sheet and complete the rating sheet by following the instructions given.

Letter No. ____	**Ratings** **(Please circle the number)**
Politeness	***1. How polite do you think the expressions underlined in the letter are? Please indicate your rating beside each of the underlined expressions in the letter.*** *Very impolite* 1 *Impolite* 2 *Neither polite nor impolite* 3 *Polite* 4 *Excessively polite* 5 ***3. If you were to write this letter, which of the following strategies do you think would be the most important? From the list below, choose the SIX most important strategies and rank them in ascending order, where "1" indicates "the most important and "6" indicates "the least important". Write your ratings in the boxes.*** ☐ *1) Preparing the requestee for the coming request* *(E.g., I would like to seek your help.)* ☐ 2) *Acknowledging imposition.*

	(E.g., I understand this is an imposition.) ☐ *3) Minimizing the imposition* *(E.g., It will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter.)* ☐ *4) Making the request reasonable by showing the effort put in by the letter writer* *(E.g. I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive requirements.)* ☐ *5) Complimenting the requestee* *(E.g., My classmates say that you are very helpful.)* ☐ 6) *Showing the benefits if the request is complied* *(E.g. Your help will surely increase the chance of getting the job.)* ☐ 7) *Showing negative consequences* *(E.g., I may lose the good job.)* ☐ *8) Promise of compensation or mention of the intended compensation* *(E.g., I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation.)* ☐ 9) *Showing thankfulness* *(E.g., Thank you for …)* ☐ *10). Apologizing* *(E.g., I am terribly sorry that …)* ☐ *11) Asking for forgiveness* *(E.g., Please forgive me.)* ☐ *Other strategies you would prefer to use:* _____ ***4. For the request strategies listed above, are there any strategies***

	you would definitely NOT use if you were to write this letter? Write the numbers indicating the categories on the lines below: _____ ***5. In the letter, how appropriate do you think the request strategies used by the writers are?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* ***5. If your rating is below 3, which strategy(ies) used by the writer is/are most INAPPROPRIATE in your opinion? Use a red pen to underline it/ them in the letter.*** ***6. On the whole, how polite do you think the letter is?*** *Very impolite 1* *Impolite 2* *Neither polite or impolite 3* *Polite 4* *Excessively polite 5*
Formality/informality	***7. Is the register of this request letter formal or informal?*** ***Please circle your answer.*** *Formal / informal* *If you find it difficult to categorize this letter as either "formal" or "informal", please provide a brief explanation:* _____ _____ ***8 . How appropriate do you think the register adopted by the writer is?***

	Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate
Directness/indirectness	***9. Do you think the writer has put the exact request asked in the writing topic in an appropriate position of the letter? (The request has been capitalized in the letter for your easy reference.)*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* ***10. If you were to write this request, which of the following writing plans would you use? Please tick the box.*** ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) →background information about yourself → the exact request* ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) → the exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Background information about yourself→ the exact request* ☐ *The exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Other (please specify:)* _____ _

	11. <u>For a letter with some negative elements highlighted in bold print:</u> ***How appropriate do you think it is for the writer to include the negative elements in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Please circle your choice.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* ***12. I f you were to write this letter, which of the following would be your decision regarding the use of "negative elements"?*** ***Please refer to Handout B for the explanation of what counts and does not count as "negative elements" for the purpose of this study. Please tick the box below.*** ☐ *Use the same "negative elements" and in the same way as those present in bold in the letter* ☐ *Use "negative elements" but in a way that is different from the letter* Please specify the sorts of "negative elements" you would use and how you would use them: _____ _____ _____ _____ ☐ *Avoid the use of "negative elements" altogether in this letter in the hope that a positive image can help more in achieving the purpose of the letter than a letter with a negative tone?* ☐ *Other (please specify:)* _____
Amount of information	***13. How appropriate do you think the amount of information given is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your***

	answer. *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate*
Overall appropriateness of the letter	***14. On the whole, how appropriate do you think the letter is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate*

Please go to the next script.

The second version of the pragmatic questionnaire

The present researcher is interested in your opinion about the request letters written by the participants in this study in terms of the following four aspects of pragmatic competence: 1) politeness, 2) formality/informality, 3) directness/indirectness, and 4) amount of information.

There are altogether twelve letters and twelve rating sheets. Read the corresponding letter for each rating sheet and complete the rating sheet by following the instructions given. Please be aware that, for some of the questions, you need to write your ratings on the scripts, not on the rating sheets.

Letter No. ____	**Questions/Tasks**
Politeness	***1. Referring to the script, how polite do you think the expressions underlined in the letter are? ON THE SCRIPT, please write "1", "2", "3" or "4", "5+", or "5-" under EACH of the underlined expressions.*** *"1" means "Very impolite"* *"2" means "Impolite"* *"3" means "Neither polite nor impolite"* *"4" means "Polite"* *"5+" means "Very polite" ("+" showing "approval")* *"5-" means "Unnaturally polite" ("-" showing "disapproval")* ***2. Referring to the script, did you find any supportive moves* you did not approve of? ON THE SCRIPT, use a red pen to underline ALL the supportive moves you feel inappropriately used.*** **** "Supportive moves" are content-wise, and examples are given in Handout B; different people have different views about how appropriate the supportive moves listed in Handout B are; the linguistic form of the expressions used should NOT be a factor for consideration when answering this question.*** ***Checklist: Please tick as appropriate.***

	☐ *I have underlined the inappropriate supportive moves on the script.* ☐ *I did not find any inappropriate supportive moves in the letter.* ***3. <u>Referring to the script, overall, how appropriate do you think the supportive moves used by the writer are in terms of quantity? Please refer to the notes in Question 2 about "supportive moves", if needed.</u>*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *I f your rating is below 3, please tick the box that shows the reason:* ☐ *Too few supportive moves used* ☐ *Too many supportive moves used* ☐ *Other (please specify:) _____* *4. **<u>Referring to the script, overall, how appropriate do you think the supportive moves used by the writer are in terms of quality? Please refer to the notes in Question 2 about supportive moves, if needed.</u>*** *<u>Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate</u>* ***5. If you were to write this letter, which of the following supportive moves do you think would be the most important? From the list below, choose the SIX most important moves and rank them in ascending order, where "1" indicates "the most important and "6" indicates "the least important". Write your ratings in the boxes.*** ☐ *1) Preparing the requestee for the coming request* *(E.g., I would like to seek your help.)* ☐ *2) Acknowledging imposition.* *(E.g., I understand this is an imposition.)* ☐ *3) Minimizing the imposition*

	(E.g., It will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter.) ☐ *4) Making the request reasonable by showing the effort put in by the letter writer* *(E.g. I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive requirements.)* ☐ *5) Complimenting the requestee* *(E.g., My classmates say that you are very helpful.)* ☐ *6) Showing the benefits if the request is complied* *(E.g. Your help will surely increase the chance of getting the job.)* ☐ *7) Pointing out the importance of the request* *(E.g., I would like to seek your assistance in a matter that is of utmost importance to me.)* ☐ *8) Showing negative consequences* *(E.g., I may lose the good job.)* ☐ *9) Promise of compensation or mention of the intended compensation* *(E.g., I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation.)* ☐ *10) Showing thankfulness* *(E.g., Thank you for …)* ☐ *11). Apologizing* *(E.g., I am terribly sorry that …)* ☐ *12) Asking for forgiveness* *(E.g., Please forgive me.)* ☐ *Other strategies you would prefer to use:* _____

	6. If you were to write this letter, are there any supportive moves listed above that you would definitely NOT use? Write the numbers indicating the categories on the lines below: _____
Formality/informality	***7. Is the register of this request letter formal or informal?*** ***Please tick your answer.*** ☐ *Formal* ☐ *Informal* ☐ *Difficult to categorize this letter as either "formal" or "informal"* *Reason(s):* _____ ***8. How appropriate do you think the register adopted by the writer is?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____
Directness/indirectness	***9. Do you think the writer has put the head act* of the request asked in the writing topic in an appropriate position of the letter?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____ ****The head act has been capitalized in the letter for your easy reference.*** **** Please refer to Handout B for the explanation of "Head act".*** ***10. If you were to write this request, which of the following writing plans would you use? Please tick the box.*** ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would*

	like to seek your help in a matter) →background information about yourself → the exact request ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) → the exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Background information about yourself→ the exact request* ☐ *The exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Other (please specify:)* _____ _
	<u>11. For a letter with some "negative elements" highlighted in bold print:</u> ***Referring to the script, how useful do you think the "negative elements" are in increasing the chance of getting the request complied with? On the script and under EACH of the words in bold print, write "U", "CP", or "N":*** ***"U" means "useful"*** ***"CP" means "counter-productive"*** ***"N" means " neither useful nor counter-productive"*** ***(If needed, you might refer to Handout C for what counts as "negative elements".)*** ***Checklist - Please tick the box:*** ☐ I have written "U" ,"CP" and/or "N" under the words in bold print. ☐ There is no word in bold print in this letter. ***12. I f you were to write this letter, which of the following would be your decision regarding the use of "negative elements"?*** ***(If needed, you could refer to Handout C for what counts as***

	"negative elements".) ☐ *I would try to use as many positive words as possible in the hope that a positive tone of the letter can help achieve the purpose of the letter because of the overall pleasant effect created* ☐ I do not think it is necessary to use positive words to express ideas that can be said directly by using negative words. ☐ Other (please specify): _____
Amount of information	***13. Referring to the letter, how appropriate do you think the amount of information given is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your answer.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____
Overall appropriateness of the letter	***14. Referring to the letter, overall, how appropriate do you think the letter is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your answer.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* ***If the rating is below 3, please tick the box(es) that show the MAIN reason(s) for your rating:*** ☐ *Inappropriate expressions introducing a request* ☐ *Inappropriate supportive moves* ☐ *Inappropriate level of formality/informality*

	☐ *Inappropriate level of directness/indirectness* ☐*Inappropriate position of the head act of the request* ☐*Inappropriate use of negative elements* ☐ *Inadequate information provided* ☐ *Too much information provided* *Please tick the box:* ☐ *The information provided is unnecessary for the targeted audience* ☐ *The information provided is too detailed although relevant to the topic* ☐ *Other (please specify):*_____

Please go to the next script.

The third version of the pragmatic questionnaire

Pragmatic Judgment Questionnaire

The present researcher is interested in your opinion about the request letters written by the participants in this study in terms of the following four aspects of pragmatic competence: 1) politeness, 2) formality/informality, 3) directness/indirectness, and 4) amount of information.

There are altogether twelve letters and twelve rating sheets. Read the corresponding letter for each rating sheet and complete the rating sheet by following the instructions given. Please be aware that, for some of the questions, you need to write your ratings on the scripts, not on the rating sheets.

Letter No. ____	**Questions/Tasks**
Politeness	***1. Referring to the script, how polite do you think the expressions underlined in the letter are? ON THE SCRIPT, please write "1", "2", "3" or "4", "5+", or "5-" under EACH of the underlined expressions.*** *"1" means "Very impolite"* *"2" means "Impolite"* *"3" means "Neither polite nor impolite"* *"4" means "Polite"* *"5+" means "Very polite" ("+" showing "approval")* *"5-" means "Unnaturally polite" ("-" showing "disapproval")* ***2. Referring to the script, did you find any supportive moves* you did not approve of? ON THE SCRIPT, use a red pen to underline ALL the supportive moves you feel inappropriately used.*** ** When rating the "supportive moves", please note that your rating should be based on content only; the linguistic form of the expressions used should NOT be a factor for consideration when answering this question. Please also note that different people may have different views about how appropriate the supportive*

	moves listed in Handout B are. ***Checklist: Please tick as appropriate.*** ☐ *I have underlined the inappropriate supportive moves on the script.* ☐ *I did not find any inappropriate supportive moves in the letter.* ***3. Referring to the script, overall, how appropriate do you think the supportive moves used by the writer are in terms of quality? Please refer to the notes in Question 2 about supportive moves, if needed.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating: _____* ***4. If you were to write this letter, which of the following supportive moves do you think would be the most important? From the list below, choose the SIX most important moves and rank them in ascending order, where "1" indicates "the most important and "6" indicates "the least important". Write your ratings in the boxes.*** ☐ *1) Preparing the requestee for the coming request* *(E.g., I would like to seek your help.)* ☐ *2) Acknowledging imposition.* *(E.g., I understand this is an imposition.)* ☐ *3) Minimizing the imposition* *(E.g., It will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter.)* ☐ *4) Making the request reasonable by showing the effort put in by the letter writer* *(E.g. I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive requirements.)*

	☐ *5) Complimenting the requestee* *(E.g., My classmates say that you are very helpful.)* ☐ *6) Showing the benefits if the request is complied* *(E.g. Your help will surely increase the chance of getting the job.)* ☐ *7) Pointing out the importance of the request* *(E.g., I would like to seek your assistance in a matter that is of utmost importance to me.)* ☐ *8) Showing negative consequences* *(E.g., I may lose the good job.)* ☐ *9) Promise of compensation or mention of the intended compensation* *(E.g., I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation.)* ☐ *10) Showing thankfulness* *(E.g., Thank you for …)* ☐ *11). Apologizing* *(E.g., I am terribly sorry that …)* ☐ *12) Asking for forgiveness* *(E.g., Please forgive me.)* ☐ *Other strategies you would prefer to use:* _____ ***5. If you were to write this letter, are there any supportive moves listed above that you would definitely NOT use? Write the numbers indicating the categories on the lines below:***

	_____ ***6. Referring to the letter, overall, how polite do you think the letter is? Circle your answer below.*** 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 If your answer is 5, please tick as appropriate: ☐ 5+ ☐ 5- *Reason(s) for your rating: _____* *"1" means "Very impolite"* *"2" means "Impolite"* *"3" means "Neither polite nor impolite"* *"4" means "Polite"* *"5+" means "Very polite" ("+" showing "approval")* *"5-" means "Unnaturally polite" ("-" showing "disapproval")*
Formality/informality	***7. Is the register of this request letter formal or informal?*** ***Please tick your answer.*** ☐ *Formal* ☐ *Informal* ☐ *Difficult to categorize this letter as either "formal" or "informal"* *Reason(s): _____* ***8. How appropriate do you think the register adopted by the writer is?*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____
Directness/indirectness	***9. Do you think the writer has put the head act* of the request asked in the writing topic in an appropriate position of the***

	letter? *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____ ****<u>The head act has been capitalized in the letter for your easy reference.</u> Please refer to Handout B for the explanation of "Head act".*** ***10. If you were to write this request, which of the following writing plans would you use? Please tick the box.*** ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) →background information about yourself → the exact request* ☐ *Preparing the requestee for the coming request (e.g. I would like to seek your help in a matter) → the exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Background information about yourself→ the exact request* ☐ *The exact request → background information about yourself* ☐ *Other (please specify:)* _____ _
	11. <u>For a letter with some "negative elements" highlighted in bold print:</u> ***Referring to the script, how useful do you think the "negative elements" are in increasing the chance of getting the request complied with? On the script and under EACH of the words in***

	bold print, write "U", "CP", or "N": ***"U" means "useful"*** ***"CP" means "counter-productive"*** ***"N" means " neither useful nor counter-productive"*** ***(If needed, you might refer to Handout C for what counts as "negative elements".)*** ***Checklist - Please tick the box:*** ☐ I have written "U" ,"CP" and/or "N" under the words in bold print. ☐ There is no word in bold print in this letter. ***12. I f you were to write this letter, which of the following would be your decision regarding the use of "negative elements"?*** ***(If needed, you could refer to Handout C for what counts as "negative elements".)*** ☐ *I would try to use as many positive words as possible in the hope that a positive tone of the letter can help achieve the purpose of the letter because of the overall pleasant effect created* ☐ *I do not think it is necessary to use positive words to express ideas that can be said directly by using negative words.* ☐ *Other (please specify):* _____
Amount of information	***13. Referring to the letter, how appropriate do you think the amount of information given is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your answer.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* *Reason(s) for your rating:* _____

Overall appropriateness of the letter	***14 . Referring to the letter, overall, how appropriate do you think the letter is in terms of achieving the purpose of the letter? Circle your answer.*** *Very inappropriate 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Completely appropriate* ***Please tick the box(es) that show the MAIN factor(s) influencing your rating:*** ☐ Level of politeness ☐ *Expressions introducing a request* ☐ *Supportive moves* ☐ *Level of formality/informality* ☐ *Level of directness/indirectness* ☐ *Position of the head act of the request* ☐ *Use of negative elements* ☐ *Amount of information* ☐ *Other (please specify):* _____

Please go to the next script.

Appendix T Three drafts of the Personal Background Information Questionnaire (Part 1)

First version of the Background Questionnaire (Part 1) for raters

PLEASE FILL IN THE BLANKS BELOW. THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE WILL BE OF GREAT USE TO THE PRESENT RESEARCHER IN THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETING THE DATA TO BE COLLECTED.

Please tick as appropriate and fill in the blanks.

1. What is your native language?

☐ Cantonese

☐ English

☐ Other (please specify): _____

2. If English is your native language, in your opinion, which variety of English do you speak?

☐ American English

☐ British English

☐ Australian English

☐ New Zealand English

☐ Canadian English

☐ Other (please specify): _____

3. What is your nationality? _____

4. For how many years <u>have you lived</u> in a country where English is spoken as the first language? _____ years

5. Age range: ☐ 25-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐56-65

6. Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

7. Your teaching experience:

(You might tick more than one item from the list.)

☐ I <u>have taught</u> English as a <u>full-time</u> teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a <u>first</u> language for _____ year(s)

☐ I <u>have taught</u> English as a <u>full-time</u> teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a <u>foreign/second</u> language for

_____ year(s)

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a first language for _____ year(s)

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a foreign/second language for _____ year(s)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH INDEED!

Second version of the Background Questionnaire (Part 1) for raters

Please fill in the blanks below. The information you provide will be of great use to the present researcher in the process of interpreting the data to be collected.

Please tick as appropriate and fill in the blanks.

1. What is your native language?

☐ Cantonese ☐ English ☐ Other (please specify): _____

2. If English is your native language, in your opinion, which variety of English do you speak?

☐ American English ☐ British English
☐ Australian English ☐ New Zealand English
☐ Canadian English ☐ Other (please specify): _____

3. <u>Have</u> you ever <u>lived</u> in a country where English is spoken as the first language?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. If your answer to Question 3 is affirmative, in which country have you lived and for how many years?

I have lived in _____ for _____ years.

5. Age range: ☐ 25-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐56-65

6. Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

7. Your teaching experience: (You might tick more than one item on the list.)

☐ I <u>have taught</u> English as a <u>full-time</u> teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a <u>first</u> language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I <u>have taught</u> English as a <u>full-time</u> teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a <u>foreign/second</u> language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a first language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a foreign/second language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH INDEED!

Third version of the Background Questionnaire (Part 1) for raters

Please fill in the blanks below. The information you provide will be of great use to the present researcher in the process of interpreting the data to be collected.
Please tick as appropriate and fill in the blanks.

1. What is your native language?
☐ Cantonese ☐ English ☐ Other (please specify): _____

2. If English is your native language, in your opinion, which variety of English do you speak?
☐ American English ☐ British English
☐ Australian English ☐ New Zealand English
☐ Canadian English ☐ Other (please specify): _____

3. Have you ever lived in a country where English is spoken as the first language?
☐ Yes ☐ No

4. If your answer to Question 3 is affirmative, in which country have you lived and for how many years?
I have lived in _____ for _____ years.

5. Age range: ☐ 25-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐56-65

6. Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

7. Your teaching experience: (You might tick more than one item on the list.)
☐ I have taught English as a full-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a first language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a full-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a foreign/second language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a first language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

☐ I have taught English as a part-time teacher at a tertiary institution in a country where English is spoken as a foreign/second language for _____ year(s)
Place(s) where you have taught: _____
First language(s) of your students: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH INDEED!

Appendix U The total raw frequencies and percentages of the three categories ("useful", "counter-productive" and "neutral") chosen by the sixteen teachers for 21 "negative" expressions (Question 11)

	CSTs			ETSs			Females			Males		
	U	CP	N	U	CP	N	U	CP	N	U	CP	N
Total (raw frequencies)	59	59	50	44	80	44	56	75	37	47	66	55
Total (percentages=x/168*)	35.2	35.2	29.8	26.2	47.6	26.2	33.3	44.6	22	27.8	39.3	32.7

("U" – Useful; "CP" – Counter-productive; "N" – Neutral)

(* The reason for 168 (21x8) to be the denominator is that there are 21 "negative" expressions and there are 8 raters.)

Appendix V The raw frequencies of the categories "U", "N" and "CP" for each "negative" expression (Question 11)

1. I am uncertain about the quality of my language skills

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	5	3	4	4
N	1	5	2	4
CP	2	0	2	0

("U"- "useful"; "CP"- "counter-productive"; "N"- "neutral")

(The number underlined indicates the category showing the highest percentage within a group)

2. I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation for your efforts

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	1	1	2	0
N	3	3	3	3
CP	4	4	3	5

("U"- "useful"; "CP"- "counter-productive"; "N"- "neutral")

(The number underlined indicates the category showing the highest percentage within a group)

3. I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation for your efforts

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	2	3	4	1
N	3	3	2	4
CP	3	2	2	3

("U"- "useful"; "CP"- "counter-productive"; "N"- "neutral")

(The number underlined indicates the category showing the highest percentage within a group)

4. Unfortunately there are no native speakers of English among my friends and classmates

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	3	2	1	4
N	2	1	1	2
CP	3	5	6	2

("U"- "useful"; "CP"- "counter-productive"; "N"- "neutral")

(The number underlined indicates the category showing the highest percentage within a group)

5. The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	0	0	0	0
N	2	0	1	1
CP	**6**	**8**	**7**	**7**

("U"- "useful"; "CP"- "counter-productive"; "N"- "neutral")

(The number underlined indicates the category showing the highest percentage within a group)

6. A most unfortunate situation has developed

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	3	3	3	3
N	3	2	2	3
CP	2	3	3	2

("U"- "useful"; "CP"- "counter-productive"; "N"- "neutral")

(The number underlined indicates the category showing the highest percentage within a group)

7. Regrettably, my number of absences slightly exceeds this limit.

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	3	7	5	5
N	3	0	1	2
CP	2	1	2	0

8. It would be a great pity for me

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	2	2	2	2
N	2	2	1	3
CP	4	4	5	3

9. If I failed the course

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	3	2	2	3
N	3	4	4	3
CP	2	2	2	2

10. I am not sure whether my job application letter is grammatically correct

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	5	6	5	6
N	3	2	3	2
CP	0	0	0	0

11. I am sorry for asking you to do what is outside your responsibility

Table 94 I am **sorry** for asking you to do what is outside your responsibility

	CSTs	**ESTs**	**Female teachers**	**Male teachers**
U	5	5	6	4
N	2	1	2	1
CP	1	2	0	0

12. The loss of this job because of the possible grammatical mistakes

	CSTs	**ESTs**	**Female teachers**	**Male teachers**
U	2	1	3	0
N	2	3	2	3
CP	4	4	3	5

13. Will surely make me very unhappy for many years

	CSTs	**ESTs**	**Female teachers**	**Male teachers**
U	2	0	2	0
N	0	0	0	0
CP	6	8	6	8

14. Stuck

Table 97 Stuck

	CSTs	**ESTs**	**Female teachers**	**Male teachers**
U	2	1	2	1
N	2	2	0	4
CP	4	5	6	3

15. Trouble

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	2	1	2	1
N	3	2	1	4
CP	3	5	5	3

16. Please forgive me

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	4	0	2	2
N	4	1	3	2
CP	0	7	3	4

17. I afraid that my letter contain many grammatical mistakes

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	4	4	4	4
N	1	4	1	4
CP	3	0	3	0

18. cause me to lost this opportunity to apply this job

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	3	1	2	2
N	1	3	3	1
CP	4	4	3	5

19. I cannot find others to help me

	CSTs	ESTs	Female teachers	Male teachers
U	1	0	0	1
N	3	0	2	1
CP	4	8	6	6

20. What troubles them is that it is <u>not easy</u> to find a job which they like

	CSTs	**ESTs**	**Female teachers**	**Male teachers**
U	3	1	2	2
N	3	5	3	5
CP	2	2	3	1

21. Therefore if for whatever reason you take the view that you are <u>unable</u> or should not accede to my request

	CSTs	**ESTs**	**Female teachers**	**Male teachers**
U	4	1	3	2
N	2	1	0	3
CP	2	6	5	3

Appendix W Qualities mentioned by at least two teachers for the expressions they considered "impolite

"Impolite"

Qualities	**Rater**	**Example of politeness expressions considered by raters to have demonstrated this quality**	**Comments made by raters**
1. Expressions suggesting self-centeredness	**Rater 2 (F)**	Let me interview you	The writer has to consider whether the addressee is busy or not.
	Rater 7 (M)	I was wondering if you could perhaps	"I was wondering" is self-centered. The decision should be made by Ms Black. I do not think students should make wild guesses. It is not very polite to make judgment on other people. "I was wondering if I could" would be more appropriate.

	Rater 7 (M)	I think I would need your help for the data collection of my project	The writer is asking somebody to do him/her a favor, so it should be Ms Black who does the thinking, not the student.
	Rater 14 (M)	I think I would need your help for the data collection of my project	It is a lack of consideration for other people. It is a self-centered approach. There is too much attention on “me”, not mentioning the reader. “I” and “I” just focus on my need. A better approach would be “Would it be possible for you to help” or either talking from the angle of the reader or involve both parties, e.g., “I would be grateful if you could”.
3. Expressions being informal	**Rater 2 (F)**	Feel free to contact me at 9991 3458.	When writing to a teacher, a student is feeling too free when s/he uses this kind of language.
	Rater 6 (M)	Feel free to contact me at 9991 3458.	“Feel free” is too informal.

	Rater 6 (M)	Please help me	"Please help me" is very conversational. It is used only between friends.
	Rater 7 (M)	I was wondering if you could perhaps	"I was wondering" is not a formal way to introduce something so important.
	Rater 9 (F)	Please do me a favor	"Do me a favor" is very informal usage of language. It is used between friends.
	Rater 11 (F)	Feel free to contact me at 9991 3458.	"Feel free" is colloquial, so it is not a polite way of saying it. The right way should be "Please contact me if you need to ask more about this". "Feel free" is what you would say to a friend.
	Rater 12 (F)	Please do me a favor	It is very informal and is used between friends.
	Rater 15 (M)	Do not fail me	It is very informal.
	Rater 16 (M)	Let me interview you	This expression is informal.
	Rater 16 (M)	I really want you can	The expression is informal.

	Rater 16 (M)	Please reach me	This expression is very informal.
3. Expressions suggesting wrong hierarchy	**Rater 6 (M)**	Please do not hesitate to contact me	This expression should be used from a person in an upper position to a person in a lower position.
	Rater 11 (F)	Feel free to contact me at 9991 3458.	The writer is asking for a favor, not the other way round.
	Rater 12 (F)	Feel free to contact me at 9991 3458.	"Feel free to call me" is more like if the writer is helping the addressee or more informal. The expression is more for downward communication, not upward.
4. Expressions that are presumptuous	**Rater 2 (F)**	Please arrange a time	It seems that the student is taking it for granted that the addressee will arrange a time when s/he is free. The student is assuming the teacher would be free.
	Rater 5 (M)	I think I would need help for the data collection of my project	It seems imposing as if there is an assumption that help will be offered by Ms Brown.

	Rater 9 (F)	Please do me a favor	It suggests that the writer's expecting the answer to be "yes".
5. Expressions suggesting the request being a small one	**Rater 9 (F)**	Please do me a favor	It is something that friends would say over something small.
	Rater 11 (F)	Please do me a favor.	This expression is used for a simple request.
6. Expressions asking the addressee to treat the writer's case as a special one	**Rater 8 (M)**	Arrange a special consideration for me	"Arrange" sounds polite, but "arranging a special consideration for me" makes it difficult for the teachers.

	Rater 12 (F)	Arrange a special consideration for me	The writer is asking the addressee for a special consideration. S/he is asking the addressee to break the rules and to do something that is not normally permissible, so it is a bit rude. The word “special” is inappropriate. It is the wrong word. A better expression is “It is due to my circumstances, I would like you to consider, reconsider my attendance. That is what the writer is asking for. It is not special. It is just like an appeal.
7. Expressions expressing an imperative tone/being too direct	**Rater 5**	Do not fail me	Using imperative is not appropriate in this kind of letter.
	Rater 7	Do not fail me	“Do not fail me” is a kind of pleading. It is also impolite. There is no subject. For this kind of letter, it is better not to use imperative.

	Rater 9 (F)	Let me interview you	“Let me” is very strong and aggressive. A better way would be “Could I possibly interview you?” or “I would like to interview you”.
	Rater 11 (F)	Do not fail me	It is an order.

	Rater 14 (M)	Please arrange a time	The expression is too commanding. The addressee is doing the writer a favor, and yet the writer is telling the addressee to schedule a time. It is fine if the writer requests it, but "arrange it" doesn't sound proper. Changing to "let me know" would be moving in the right direction, as in "Could you please or please could you let me know when you are free". A more formal way would be "Please tell me or inform me when you are free." "Could you please" is better than "please". The relationship is too direct.

	Rater 15 (M)	Please arrange a time	There is too much imperative here. The addressee is told to do something. The writer has to say in a different way like "I know you are busy. Can I suggest Monday afternoon or something?" "Please arrange a time" is like coming from a boss or somebody from authority.
	Rater 15 (M)	Do not fail me	The expression is too direct.
	Rater 15 (M)	Please arrange a time	The expression is too direct.
8. Expressions being too short	**Rater 9 (F)**	Please help me.	The expression is too short. A better way would be "I would really appreciate it if you could help me in this matter", "I would very much appreciate it".
	Rater 15 (M)	Please arrange a time	The expression is too short.

9. Expressions suggesting responsibility/more work on the part of the addressee to take follow-up action	**Rater 7 (M)**	Please arrange a time	This expression is suggesting that it is the addressee's responsibility to arrange a time, just like the expression "Please be punctual" is suggesting that it is the addressee's responsibility to be punctual.
	Rater 14 (M)	Please arrange a time	The verb "arrange" suggests more obligation/more work for the addressee.
10. Expressions containing modal verbs suggesting permission from the writer is needed	**Rater 5 (M)**	You may contact me	"You may" is like a command. Perhaps it is not so polite.
	Rater 14 (M)	You may contact me	This expression sounds like giving permission to contact the writer.

Appendix X ISMs as reported by sixteen teachers for Topic 1

"M" stands for male teachers; "F" stands for female teachers.

Raters 1-4 are Cantonese-speaking female teachers;

Raters 5-8 are Cantonese-speaking male teachers;

Raters 9-12 are English-speaking British female teachers;

Raters 13-16 are English-speaking British male teachers.

ISMs	**Rater**	**Expressions underlined by raters**	**Comments made by raters**
1. Claiming that the writer's teacher can attest his/her diligence	**Rater 4 (F)**	*As I am sure my teacher will attest, I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive course requirement (Letter 3)*	How can the writer be so sure that his/her teacher can say s/he has worked very hard and mastered most of the substantive course. The writer is a bit over the top. Writing this on behalf of the teacher is very inappropriate.
	Rater 7 (M)	*As I am sure my teacher will attest (Letter 3)*	If the writer has got enough evidence attached, the addressee should refer to the information that the writer has provided rather than asking someone else to prove that s/he is hardworking.

	Rater 14 (M)	*As I am sure my teacher will attest, I have worked very hard and have mastered most of the substantive course requirement. Considering the special (Letter 3)*	It is presumptive to say this.
2. Asking the addressee to waive the attendance requirement	**Rater 7 (M)**	*Based solely on my language skills rather than on my attendance (Letter 3)*	Whether a student should be passed is not to be judged by the student. It is the rule.
	Rater 14 (M)	*Allow me to receive a passing grade for the course based solely on my language skills rather than on my attendance (Letter 3)*	The writer is asking for a free pass/break regulations.
	Rater 14 (M)	*A special case and let me pass the course (Letter 11)*	It is asking too much of the addressee. Alternatively, the writer could say “let me make up in another class” or something like that to fulfill the requirement.

	Rater 16 (M)	*Grant me special dispensation under the circumstances (Letter 3)*	It is presumptive to say this.
3. Using minimizers/vague terms	**Rater 5 (M)**	*A bit below (Letter 4)*	There are not enough details.
	Rater 8 (M)	*Regrettably, my number of absences slightly exceeds this limit (Letter 3)*	"Slightly" doesn't make sense. The writer is below the attendance requirement. S/he should not make it any less serious.
	Rater 15 (M)	*My number of absences slightly exceeds this limit (Letter 3)*	The writer is being indirect. Why not just tell the addressee how many hours s/he missed? It would be better to say that "I have a problem. I have missed five hours, but there is a very good reason for this."
	Rater 15 (M)	*My attendance is a bit below the minimum requirement (Letter 4)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

4. Asking the addressee to call the writer if s/he wants more information	**Rater 1 (F)**	*If you want to know more about my condition, feel free (Letter 7)*	When writing this letter, the writer should know what kind of information s/he needs to include in the letter. The addressee does not need to seek further information from the writer. The writer could say, "If you think you need more information, or if there are things that I should supply in this letter, please let me know, contact me or something like this. I will supply that as soon as possible."
	Rater 4 (F)	*If you want to know more about my condition, feel free to contact me at xxxx xxxx to ask more about this (Letter 7)*	Why should the teacher contact the writer for more information? More information actually should be provided in the letter. The writer does not seem to consider the time factor.

	Rater 7 (M)	*To ask more about this (Letter 7)*	Supplying the writer's contact phone is enough. It is up to the address to call the writer or not. So this is redundant. It is the responsibility of the writer to provide all the necessary information.
	Rater 16 (M)	*If you want to know more about my condition (Letter 7)*	The writer could say, "If I can provide more information, please do not hesitate to contact me." or "I am very happy to give you more information should you require." It is showing willingness and not saying, "You have got to find out about me". It is "I am happy to help"; "I am happy to tell you". It is a stock phrase, but it is finishing on a cooperative note.
5. Telling the addressee that the	**Rater 2 (F)**	*Stuck in trouble (Letter 7)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

writer is "stuck in trouble"	**Rater 8 (M)**	*Stuck in trouble (Letter 7)*	**[**No comments were provided. **]**
	Rater 13 (M)	*Stuck in trouble (Letter 7)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 14 (M)	*Stuck in trouble (Letter 7)*	"Stuck" and "trouble" are both very basic words and fundamental statements. They are not very positive and eloquent. This expression just gives a negative impact, not only for the situation, but also for the quality of the effort put into the writing. If that letter meant something, the writer could get help or could at least explore alternatives.
	Rater 15 (M)	*Stuck in trouble (Letter 7)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 16 (M)	*Stuck in trouble (Letter 7)*	This expression is too informal.

6. Telling the addressee the details of the attendance requirement	**Rater 1 (F)**	*As you well know, the total number of hours of the course was 35 and according to the Course Guidelines, any student must have attained a minimum attendance of 80% before he could pass the course (Letter 11)*	It is not necessary to make such a point for the person who knows the rule very well.
	Rater 9 (F)	*The total number of hours of the course was 35 and according to the Course Guidelines, any student must have attained a minimum attendance of 80% before he could pass the course (Letter 11)*	Of course, the addressee would already know this because she is a course director. The writer has just been irritating. S/he should just get to the point.
7. Telling the addressee that the writer assumes s/he knows well about the situation by using the expression "as you well know"	**Rater 9 (F)**	*As you well know (Letter 11)*	The phrase "as you well know' is just arrogant.
	Rater 10 (F)	*As you well know (Letter 11)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

8. Claiming that the writer is not disrespectful to the course	**Rater 7 (M)**	*I have paid no respect to the course (Letter 11)*	This kind of answer can be provided by anyone who does not meet the attendance requirement, so it is not very specific. So if someone writes something like this, it will not help at all.
	Rater 9 (F)	*However, my absence does not indicate that I have paid no respe*ct to the course *(Letter 11)*	This expression means nothing. The whole explanation is too long. Unfortunately, it is right at the beginning of a letter.
	Rater 16 (M)	*Does not indicate that I have paid no respect to the course (Letter 11)*	Of course, everyone should take the course seriously. Why is the writer telling the addressee this? It is irrelevant information and wasting the addressee's time to read.

9. Reminding the addressee of his/her discretionary powers	**Rater 5 (M)**	*I understand that the department retains a discretion to let students pass the course despite the fact the minimum attendance requirement is not met (Letter 11)*	This expression sounds a bit imposing on the addressee. The writer has noticed the addressee's discretionary powers to let students pass, so the addressee should give this chance to the writer.
	Rater 6 (M)	*I understand the department retains a discretion (Letter 11)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 13 (M)	*I understand that the Department retains a discretion to let students pass the course despite the fact that the minimum attendance requirement is not met (Letter 11)*	Maybe it is not good to tell the staff that they do not need to follow the rules.

	Rater 16 (M)	*Consider my situation as a special case and grant me your permission (Letter 4)*	The addressee would not like to be reminded of the authority to make exceptions, particularly from the person who is asking the favor from him/her.
10. Asking for sympathy	**Rater 3 (F)**	*It would be a great pity for me if I failed the course just because of my attendance falling short of the requirement (Letter 4)*	The writer has already failed the attendance, so there is no use making people guilty just because people fail him/her and saying "it is a great pity".
	Rater 5 (M)	*It would be a great pity for me if I failed the course (Letter 4)*	The expression relies on the sympathy of the addressee; it is imposing if s/he is talking about being sympathetic here.

	Rater 5 (M)	*The hassle caused to the family members when one's mother is seriously ill (Letter 4)*	The writer is saying that the addressee must be or has to be sympathetic to the writer. The addressee should understand the hassle if a student's mother is ill. It is like the writer is asking the question "Is the addressee cold-blooded?"
	Rater 14 (M)	*Understand the hassle caused to the family members when (Letter 4)*	The writer should be focusing more on what s/he can do to solve the problem rather than focusing on the pity factor.
11. Making excessive promises	**Rater 5 (M)**	*I am willing to do whatever (Letter 4)*	Probably this promise sounds exaggerating.
	Rater 15 (M)	*I am willing to do whatever things you would like me to do in order to make up for the hours missed (Letter 4)*	This promise is too broad. It is like carrying your books or something; it is demeaning.

	Rater 16 (M)	*I am willing to do whatever you would like me to do*	This expression is excessive and almost humorous. Is this person willing to do whatever the addressee likes? Even something illegal?

Appendix Y ISMs as reported by sixteen teachers for Topic 2

"M" stands for male teachers; "F" stands for female teachers.

Raters 1-4 are Cantonese-speaking female teachers;

Raters 5-8 are Cantonese-speaking male teachers;

Raters 9-12 are English-speaking British female teachers;

Raters 13-16 are English-speaking British male teachers.

ISMs	Rater	Expressions underlined by raters	Comments made by raters
1. Over-emphasizing the importance of having the letter proofread	**Rater 1 (F)**	*Getting this job is of utmost importance to me (Letter 5)*	There is no reason given to back up this.
	Rater 4 (F)	*Your assistance in a matter that is of the greatest importance to me (Letter 1)*	The addressee should have provided enough information to illustrate to the addressee why this request is so important.
	Rater 4 (F)	*That could be confirmed one more time by somebody who is really skilful in the English language (Letter 12)*	The writer is saying that this job is so important to him/her, so s/he really needs to find someone to help him/her to write a good application letter. The purpose of the letter is so clear. It is based entirely on his/her selfish interest rather than thinking of imposing on the teacher.

	Rater 5 (M)	*I must say I am extremely interested in that job (Letter 12)*	It is redundant.
	Rater 5 (M)	*Getting this job is of utmost importance to me (Letter 5)*	It is self-centered.
	Rater 5 (M)	*Your correction will benefit me tremendously (Letter 4)*	It is not necessary to mention that it is of tremendous benefits to the writer, but s/he should just thank Ms Smith like "I would be most grateful for your tremendous help." The word "benefit" has some negative connotations.
	Rater 14 (M)	*Your assistance in a matter that is of the greatest importance to me (Letter 1)*	It is self-important.
	Rater 16 (M)	*Really concern of the job (Letter8)*	This expression is not necessary. S/he applies for the job, so s/he wants the job anyway.

2. Suggesting compensation, especially when the writer lacks financial means	**Rater 4 (F)**	*I fear I lack the resources to offer you compensation for your efforts (Letter 1)*	There is an assumption that the addressee would expect something back, and this is offensive.
	Rater 5 (M)	*[Same as above]*	The writer is writing to a teacher, so s/he would not expect to be offered some kind of financial compensation. This sounds very businesslike and inappropriate.
	Rater 6 (M)	*[Same as above]*	If the writer does not have any gifts or anything, s/he just does not have to say it.
	Rater 8 (M)	*[Same as above]*	If the writer does not have money, s/he does not have to tell the addressee.
	Rater 9 (F)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 10 (F)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

	Rater 11 (F)	*[Same as above]*	It is not appropriate to offer compensation. If the writer cannot offer compensation, there is no need for him/her to say s/he cannot.
3. Mentioning the writer's unhappiness if s/he cannot get the job	**Rater 1 (F)**	*The loss of this job because of the possible grammatical mistakes in the letter will surely make me very unhappy for many years (Letter 5)*	It is threatening. If the letter is not proofread, the consequence will be the loss of the job. The addressee has been threatened.
	Rater 8 (M)	*Will surely make me very unhappy for many years (Letter 5)*	It is not the addressee's business to care about whether the writer would be unhappy for many years.
	Rater 8 (M)	*I really concern of the job and I afraid that my letter contain many grammatical mistakes which cause me to lost this opportunity to apply this job (Letter 8)*	The writer is really concerned about the job, but it is not the addressee's business to care about this. The student should just concentrate on his/her proofreading ability instead of "I want to get the job".

	Rater 10 (F)	*Unhappy (Letter 5)*	By saying "surely make me very unhappy for many years", the writer is putting things onto the addressee. The writer is saying that the addressee can make him/her happy because the addressee will correct this letter.
	Rater 12 (F)	*I really concern of the job (Letter 8)*	This expression is emotional, trying to make the addressee feel bad. If the addressee does not help the writer, the writer is going to lose his/her job.
	Rater 13 (M)	*The loss of this job because of the possible grammatical mistakes will surely make me unhappy for many years*	This expression is so exaggerated. It has negative connotations.
4. Asking the addressee to do the writer a favor	**Rater 5 (M)**	*Do me a favor (Letter 5)*	It is too informal. It is counter-productive.
	Rater 9 (F)	*I would like to ask you to do me a favor (Letter 5)*	American slang. It suggests that the request is unimportant.

	Rater 14 (M)	*Do me a favor (Letter 5)*	With the information regarding the relationship between the writer and the addressee, this expression is too informal.
5. Implying that the proofreading is an easy job for the addressee	**Rater 6 (M)**	*About 200 words* *Clearly* *Only a few minutes (Letter 5)*	The letter is only about 200 words, it is short and clear, and it only takes a few minutes to finish reading it. That means that the addressee should be able to spare a few minutes.
	Rater 7 (M)	*Only (Letter 5)*	Why "only"? The writer should simply say, "My letter is about 200 words". That would be more honest and natural. It is not the writer who can make judgment whether the letter is short or not.

	Rater 9 (F)	*I guess it will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter (Letter 5)*	"I guess it will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter" suggests lack of respect. And also they really do not know how long it is going to take.
	Rater 16 (M)	*I guess it will only take you a few minutes to finish reading this letter (Letter 5)*	The writer does not know how long it takes to do this letter. S/he is also minimizing the imposition.
6. Mentioning the writer's failure to find a job	**Rater 2 (F)**	*I have spent much time in hunting for the right job in the last few months but to no avail (Letter 12)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 5 (M)	*I have spent much time in hunting for the right job in the last few months but to no avail (Letter 12)*	This person may make the addressee think that there is something wrong with the writer rather than just the application letter because s/he has been looking for job for several months.

	Rater 7 (M)	*I have spent much time in hunting for the right job in the lasts few months but to no avail (Letter 12)*	This would not help to get the sympathy of Ms**.** Smith. There are thousands of reasons, so this is something negative rather than positive.
	Rater 11 (F)	*I have spent much time in hunting for the right job in the last few months but to no avail (Letter 12)*	Basically the problem here is that people do not like his/her CV. It is probably not because of the grammatical mistakes.
7. Mentioning the difficulty of job hunting in general	**Rater 2 (F)**	*It is not easy at all to find a job which they like (Letter 12)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 4 (F)	*What troubles them is that it is not easy at all to find a job which they like (Letter 12)*	"It is not easy to find a job" is totally irrelevant. It does not apply to the writer.
	Rater 4 (F)	*Success in their career depends much on whether they have chosen the right job at the beginning of their working lives (Letter 12)*	It is about people looking for jobs in general, not about the writer.
	Rater 5 (M)	*As you well know….a multi-national company (Letter 12)*	The description is too long-winded and mostly irrelevant.

8. Making insincere compliments	**Rater 10 (F)**	*You must be the most important person (Letter 12)*	The student is saying that the addressee is a language advisor, so s/he must be better. It is not a compliment because it is not about the addressee, but it is about the addressee's job.
	Rater 11 (F)	*By somebody who is really skillful in the English language (Letter 12)*	It is sucking up.
	Rater 13 (M)	*Could be confirmed one more time by somebody who is really skilful in the English language (Letter 12)*	There is too much flattery. When one person is not asking for something in return, compliments are suitable; compliments can be given when one is sincere and honest.
	Rater 16 (M)	*My friends who have been counseled by you told me that you are very enthusiastic about helping students (Letter 5)*	It is unnecessary and it is like a compliment. If compliments are sincere, that is fine. If the student wrote, "I have a friend you taught, and he said that you like to help students", it is probably O.K.

	Rater 16 (M)	*I think you must be the most appropriate person whom I should turn to (Letter 12)*	It is like the writer wants something from the addressee, so the writer is complimenting him/her.
	Rater 16 (M)	*Who is really skillful in the English language (Letter 12)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
9. Stating that nobody but the addressee can help	**Rater 1 (F)**	*Cannot find others (Letter 8)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 4 (F)	*Cannot find others (Letter 8)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 5 (M)	*Besides, I cannot find others to help me (Letter 8)*	The writer is really desperate.
	Rater 7 (M)	*[Same as above.]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 9 (F)	*Cannot find others (Letter 8)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 10 (F)	*Besides you, I cannot find others to help me (Letter 8)*	The student is trying to make the addressee feel guilty and shifting the duty onto the addressee.

10. Asking the addressee to reply to the writer if help is not offered	**Rater 9 (F)**	*Therefore if for whatever reason you take the view that you are unable or should not accede to my request, please do not hesitate to let me know (Letter 12)*	It is probably inappropriate for the writer to ask the addressee, who is a complete stranger to the writer, to reply to him/her if the addressee does not want to help, as in "Can you write to me that you don't?" The student probably is not asking just the addressee for help, but also asking some other teachers, so it is not necessary for the addressee to reply. If the addressee knew the writer, s/he would feel obliged to reply, even if the answer was "no". S/he would make an excuse then.

	Rater 15 (M)	*[Same as above.]*	The addressee may not even want to explain that s/he cannot help because as soon as the addressee enters a dialogue, s/he may end up doing what the student wants. It seems like an imposition if the addressee needs to inform the writer why s/he cannot help. A better way might be, "If you cant' help, I can understand."
11. Telling the addressee that the writer assumes s/he knows well about the situation by using the expression "as you well know"	**Rater 10 (F)**	*As you well know (Letter 12)*	If the addressee knows what the writer is going to say, why is the writer telling him/her the information in the following sentence?
	Rater 15 (M)	*[Same as above.]*	"As you know" would be fine. "As you well know" is like the addressee is denying something.

12. Repeating the request	**Rater 9 (F)**	*I am sorry for asking you to do what is outside…for many years* [the whole paragraph] *(Letter 5)*	It is repetition here. The writer has already said by no means it is the duty of the language advisor to proofread his/her job letter.
	Rater 14 (M)	*Do me a favor (Letter 5)*	The student has written "Would it be possible for you to proofread my job application letter". That would be sufficient.

Appendix Z ISMs as reported by sixteen teachers for Topic 3

"M" stands for male teachers; "F" stands for female teachers.

Raters 1-4 are Cantonese-speaking female teachers;

Raters 5-8 are Cantonese-speaking male teachers;

Raters 9-12 are English-speaking British female teachers;

Raters 13-16 are English-speaking British male teachers.

ISMs	Rater	Expressions underlined by raters	Comments made by raters
1. Suggesting compensation, especially when the writer lacks financial resources	**Rater 1 (F)**	*I understand that this is an imposition, and I fear that I lack the resources to offer you compensation for your time (Letter 2)*	If the student does not have the resources, s/he does not have to mention it. It is inappropriate to suggest compensation unless the writer wants to let the person know that s/he has considered this as valuable. A positive approach would be: "I really value your support in helping with the project. However, I have no way to compensate your time etc., or the course does not provide students with the funding."

	Rater 4 (F)	*I fear I lack the resources to offer you compensation for your time (Letter 2)*	[No comments were provided.]
	Rater 6 (M)	*I lack the resources to compensate you (Letter 2)*	[No comments were provided.]
	Rater 9 (F)	*[Same as above]*	If the writer is not willing to pay, s/he should keep quiet because s/he sounds really defensive. If the writer is willing to pay, s/he would put it right at the beginning of the paragraph because it might get the teacher's attention.
	Rater 11 (F)	*I fear I lack the resources to offer you compensation for your time (Letter 2)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
2. Expecting the addressee to provide a list of times	**Rater 1 (F)**	*Let me have a list of the times when you might be available (Letter 2)*	A wrong move to expect the reader to give "a list of the times".

	Rater 4 (F)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**.
	Rater 13 (M)	*[Same as above]*	The writer should offer the times first of all.
	Rater 16 (M)	*[Same as above]*	The addressee has got to supply some information, so it means more work for the teacher.
3. Saying that the addressee was chosen from a list arbitrarily	**Rater 3 (F)**	*I requested a list of all the native speakers of English employed in the English Language Centre (Letter 2)* *Obviously, none of these individuals are known to me. The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	If somebody writes this letter, it means the writer just picks you at random. What does it mean? Is the addressee the lucky one or the unlucky one? If the student wants the addressee's help, at least s/he would have done a little bit of research about who should ask, who should not ask rather than saying that the writer has dumped ten letters into ten pigeon-holes. That is a bit too arrogant.
	Rater 4 (F)	*Your choice of name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

	Rater 6 (M)	*Obviously, none of these individuals are known to me. The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 7 (M)	*Unfortunately, there are no native speakers of English among my friends and classmates (Letter 2)* *The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	The student chooses Ms Brown because s/he has no choice. It is better to present why the student chooses the addressee rather than why s/he does not choose other people.
	Rater 9 (F)	*I requested a list of all the native speakers of English employed in the English Language Centre. Obviously, none of these individuals are known to me. The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary.*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 10 (F)	*Your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

	Rater 11 (F)	*I requested a list of all the native speakers of English employed in the English Language Centre.* *Obviously, none of these individuals are known to me. The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 13 (M)	*Your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)*	The writer is not interested in the addressee; the writer chooses the addressee not because s/he is recommended; is the addressee the lucky one or unlucky?
	Rater 15 (M)	*None of these individuals are known to me (Letter 2)*	The writer should not tell the addressee this. The writer has picked the addressee out, but s/he does not know why.

	Rater 16 (M)	*The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary (Letter 2)* *Obviously all these individuals are unknown to me (Letter 2)*	The writer is saying that anybody would do. It is very high-handed to say this.
	Rater 7 (M)	*In my mind, it appears that your name which is the one I want to interview (Letter 9)*	It is not very logical and polite to say the addressee's name happens to be on the list, so the writer wants to interview him/her.
	Rater 7 (M)	*As you know, you are an ELC tutor (Letter 9)*	The choice seems not to be controlled by the student. The student has no choice.
	Rater 9 (F)	*In my mind, it appears that your name which is the one I want to interview (Letter 9)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 11 (F)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 15 (M)	*[Same as above]*	It does not make sense why the addressee is selected.

	Rater 16 (M)	*[Same as above]*	The students wants to interview the addressee because no one else is available. The student could say where s/he has got the name from, e.g., from a book or something, so then the addressee who has never heard of the student will know from where s/he has got the contact details from.
4. Telling the addressee that the writer is trying to be candid	**Rater 3 (F)**	*Let me be quite candid (Letter 2)*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 9 (F)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 10 (F)	*[Same as above]*	Not appropriate for somebody the writer does not know.
	Rater 11 (F)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 15 (M)	*[Same as above]*	That is really a boss talking to an employee.

	Rater 16 (M)	*[Same as above]*	It is as though the writer is revealing some dark secrets. The person reading a letter would hope that the writer tells him/her everything and all the facts.
5. Telling the addressee that the writer will inform him/her the time and venue to meet	**Rater 4 (F)**	*I'll let you know as soon as possible when and where we might meet*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 5 (M)	*[Same as above]* ***(Letter 2)***	"I'll let you know as soon as possible" is very impolite. It is like the writer is in charge. S/he makes the decisions. S/he will let the addressee know rather than asking the other person when would be a convenient time. It is counter-productive. The writer should ask the person what time and place would be most appropriate.
6.Asking the addressee to contact the writer	**Rater 5 (M)**	*Would you mind calling me at xxxx xxxx*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**

by phone	**Rater 6 (M)**	*[Same as above]*	In the context, asking the addressee to call the student back to state the time and venue is taking it for granted. A better way could be "I can be contacted at".
	Rater 11 (F)	*[Same as above]*	The expression is too direct.
	Rater 13 (M)	*[Same as above]*	Phoning is personal; e-mails and letters are more appropriate. Another way to write is, "To contact me, you can write or e-mail me. Here is my phone number".
7. Mentioning the improvement of the writer's English as one of the interview outcomes	**Rater 2 (F)**	*Also for my English study (Letter 9)*	Socializing or practicing oral English can be one of the outcome, but the writer should not put it down

	Rater 3 (F)	*[Same as above]*	It is sometimes the Chinese mentality. The student is trying to make addressee so important and s/he is responsible for so many things, so the addressee must help the writer. It is imposing to include too many duties.
	Rater 6 (M)	*[Same as above]*	**[**No comments were provided.**]**
	Rater 14 (M)	*[Same as above]*	The main task is to interview a teacher, but then it sounds like once the student has made that contact, s/he wants to maintain it and get private free lessons after that.

Appendix AA "Unnaturally polite" expressions showing a difference of 2 teachers between CSTs and ESTs

	Number of CSTs	**Number of ESTs**	**Difference**
Expressions considered "unnaturally polite" by more ESTs than did CSTs			
1. I am taking the liberty of addressing you	3	5	2
2. Would you kindly let me have a list of the times when you might be available during the next week?	0	2	2
3. May I request your permission to let me pass the "spoken language" course?	1	4	3
4. I was wondering if you could perhaps consider my situation as a special case and grant me your permission.	0	3	3
5. May I invite you to be one of the interviewees for my research?	1	4	3
6. if you could kindly agree to provide assistance to my project?	0	5	5
7. Please forgive me.	1	8	7
8. I would like to invite you to proofread my job application letter.	0	2	2
9. I am writing to ask your goodself for a favor.	4	7	3

10. If it so happens that you can spare your valuable time to assist me on this occasion,	3	7	4
Expressions considered "unnaturally polite" by more CSTs than did ESTs			
11. I hope you can find it possible to assist me in this matter.	3	1	2

Appendix BB "Counter-productive" expressions showing a difference of 2 teachers between CSTs and ESTs

Expression	Number of CSTs	Number of ESTs	Difference
Expressions considered "counter-productive" by more ESTs than did CSTs			
1. Unfortunately there are no native speakers of English among my friends and classmates (Expression 4)	3	5	2
2. The choice of your name is entirely arbitrary (Expression 5)	6	8	2
3. Will surely make me very unhappy for many years (Expression 13)	6	8	2
4. Trouble (Expression 15)	3	5	2
5. Please forgive me (Expression 16)	0	7	7
6. I cannot find others to help me (Expression 19)	4	8	4
7. Therefore if for whatever reason you take the view that you are unable or should not accede to my request (Expression 21)	2	6	4

Expressions considered "counter-productive" by more CSTs than did ESTs			
1. I am uncertain about the quality of my language skills (Expression 1)	2	0	2
7. I afraid that my letter contain many grammatical mistakes (Expression 17)	3	0	3

Appendix CC SMs ranked as most important by at least two teachers out of sixteen

The supportive moves ranked “1” (the most important) are presented in descending order (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of teachers choosing that supportive move):

Topic 1
“Preparing” (7)
“Effort put in” (5)
“Apologizing” (2)

Topic 2
“Preparing” (7)
“Acknowledging imposition” (4)
“Thankfulness” (2)

Topic 3
“Preparing” (7)
“Thankfulness” (4)

Appendix DD Comments made by sixteen teachers concerning missing and unnecessary information for the three writing topics (Question 13)

"Attendance"

Missing information

- The information about the writer's class information, such as the session number and the name of the class teacher (Rater 1) and the number of hours missing for the attendance (Rater 13)
- Proofs such as doctors' certificates (Raters 1, 2 and 12)
- The nature of the disease, or at least the name of the disease (e.g, my arm is broken, I had TB (Raters 2, 3, 6, 8, 11 and 12)
- The exact duration of the period when his/her family member was ill (Raters 1 and 6)

Unnecessary information

- Too much information about the illness of the writer's mother (Raters 14 and 16)

Proofreading

Missing information

- The nature of the job the writer is applying (Raters 11 and 13)
- Reason(s) why proofreading is so important to the writer (Raters 8 and 10)
- Reason(s) why the addressee should help the writer (Raters 4 and 10)
- Contact information about the writer, such as his/her e-mail addresses, contact phone numbers (Raters 1and 2) and the surname of the writer (Rater 10)

Unnecessary information

- Mentioning that the writer has used dictionaries and grammar books to check mistakes (reason: if the writer has done these, why is the help of the addressee still needed?) (Raters 6 and 11)
- The job advertisement (Rater 4, 5 and 6)

“Interview”

Missing information

- Purpose of the research (Raters 2 and 16)
- The title/objective of the project (Raters 6 and 7)
- Expected length of the interview (Raters 1, 2 and 3)
- The list of interview questions (Raters 4 and 13)
- The use of findings (Raters 4 and 16)
- Information about the possible time and venue of the interview (Raters 8 and 13)

Appendix EE Examples of expressions, sentence structures and supportive moves considered informal by at least two of the sixteen teachers

Expressions

- "My attendance is a bit below the requirement." (Raters 1and 12)
- "I am terribly sorry about not having been able to meet the requirement." (Raters 1, 6 and 16)
- "I guess it will take you only a few minutes to finish reading the letter. (Raters 10 and 12)
- If you want to know more about my condition, feel free to contact me at xxxx xxxx to ask more about this." (Raters 1 and 6)
- "But I stuck in trouble now and seek your help." (Raters 2 and 8)
- "Please do me a favor to help me." (Raters 13 and 16)
- "I would really appreciate it if you could understand the hassle caused to one's family members" (Raters 5 and 6)

Sentence structures

- The imperative structure (e.g., "Do not fail me." "Please reach me.") (Raters 5, 6, 7, 14, 15 and 16)
- Omission of sentence subject in expressions like "Hope that you can help about this." (Raters 5 and 6)
- Simple phrasing (Raters 14 and 15)
- Repeated attempts to begin a sentence with the first person "I" (Raters 7 and 11)

Other aspects of a letter

- Making personal appeals (e.g., "I really longing for your good news." "Please help me") (Raters 2, 6 and 16)
- Addressing the recipient by his/her first name (Raters 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 14)
- Using "Best wishes" in the closing salutation (Raters 1, 6, 8 and 14)
- End the end with only the first name of the writer (Raters 1 and 13)