THE ACQUISITION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES BY AFGHAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

by

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Abstract

Using the framework for politeness developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), this research evaluates the production of politeness strategies by sophomore and senior EFL learners in Afghanistan by focusing on the language used in letters of inquiry. Twenty eight letters emailed by Afghan students at Balkh University were surveyed by thirteen native American English speakers. Each letter was surveyed by six different American participants who gave their perspectives about the effectiveness and politeness of the language used in the letters by the students.

The American participants' evaluations of politeness were compared with actual linguistic features employed, including the word choice in the salutation and closing, the use of indirect language, and politeness markers (e.g. thank you or other expressions of appreciation). The results show that a relationship between proficiency and politeness exists, consistent with the findings of Tanaka and Kawade (1982) who found that second language learners acquire both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge as the learning of the target language progresses. In addition, this study describes the linguistic behavior perceived as most polite by the native speakers and reflects on possible instructional implications.

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Dedication

To my husband and his parents: Feraidun Quraishi, Abdul Shokour Quraishi and Mahbooba Quraishi who looked after my children and supported me while I was completing my Master's Degree.

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

1.0 Personal Experience with L2 Politeness

This research was motivated by my experience when I first arrived in a native English speaking environment. Although I had studied English for many years, I realized that there were still many skills to learn. Two years ago when I had just arrived in the USA, I observed some differences in the formulating of requests between native American English speakers and Afghan EFL learners. For example, I noticed that although both American and Afghan interlocutors prefer to formulate a request indirectly, there were differences. In formulating requests, Afghans present two or more reasons before and sometimes after the request. As an illustration, one day I went to a librarian in order to request an article. I said, "Hello. I went to the databases many times. I found similar articles, but maybe since I do not have experience in this issue …." The librarian cut me off and asked, "How can I help you?" This experience was repeated many times in the library, health center, and classrooms which caused me to become curious about how to formulate a request politely, effectively, and in a manner that would be well received by a native speaker.

Additionally, studying second language acquisition courses and living in an English-speaking environment increased my interest in the area of language use, particularly in pragmatics. Pragmatics is the study of language use in a social context. It examines the appropriateness of language in different situations, and among distinct interlocutors. According to Bardovi-Harlig (2003), pragmatics involves "speech acts, conversational structure, conversational implicature, conversation management, discourse organization, and sociolinguistic aspects of language use such as choice of address forms" (p.37). I realized that learning American English pragmatics was the means of improving my interaction with native

speakers. Additionally, I became interested in the possibility of helping my EFL students with acquiring English pragmatic skills. I became enthused about sharing with them the knowledge that I was gaining in courses and through living in the environment. Thus, I decided to study the pragmatics of formulating a request in American English through academic research. Questions that motivated my initial research were as follows:

1. What is politeness?

2. Are polite requests formulated differently across cultures?

3. How may an interlocutor be considered polite?

1.1 The Importance of Politeness Strategies in Effective Communication

This study examines the use of politeness strategies and the effectiveness of communication in the written requests of Afghan EFL learners in letters of inquiry. Brown and Levinson (1978) and Lee (2004) state that politeness is universal because all cultures share norms of linguistic politeness, yet it is also culturally variable since what is polite in one culture may not be judged polite in another. In order to be polite, a learner must have the ability to communicate his/her idea effectively. Conversely, effectiveness of communication may be influenced by politeness strategies, as a polite utterance may have a more successful result than an impolite one.

To explore the relationship between politeness and effectiveness in communicating ideas, this study analyzes requests that were written by Afghans and consequently evaluated for effectiveness and politeness according to native American English speakers. The American English native speakers' evaluations reveal how Afghan EFL learners are perceived by native speakers and the degree to which they effectively use pragmatics in conveying their message. From my own experience as an Afghan living in the United States and as an EFL teacher,

Afghan EFL learners need acquisition of pragmatic knowledge in order to convey their messages politely and accurately.

English, as an international language, is crucial to global communication. Prior to 1979, the year Afghanistan was invaded by Russia, a large number of English-speaking people, including American and British teachers, taught English in high schools in Afghanistan. After 1979, all systems of education were less developed (Totakhil, 2003). Along with other areas of education, English education declined. This may be partially attributed to the fact that, after 1979, the number of Russian speakers increased because of the close relationship between the two countries. Another reason that the educational system, and English instruction in particular, suffered in Afghanistan was the negative influence of three decades of constant warfare: education was discouraged and schools were burned; economic problems and the loss of family members forced many to work at a young age. Recent political changes have altered Afghan attitudes about education, as knowledge and education have become increasingly important (Sultani, 2004). Although the number of English speakers has increased recently in Afghanistan, Afghan EFL learners exhibit gaps in their English knowledge and particularly in the use of certain pragmatic features.

The acquisition of pragmatic features of a second language (L2) is challenging unless the learner is in contact with native speakers of the language (Lee, 2004). Very few Afghan EFL learners have the opportunity to have face-to-face interaction with American native speakers. Some pragmatic features are not easy for Afghan EFL learners to acquire and use fluently due to differences in the authentic use of these two languages. For example, native Afghan Dari speakers value indirectness while in American culture directness, clarity of message and being right to the point are valued. (Hall, 1976). For example, in formulating a request, Afghans use

many external modifications before and sometimes after the request (e.g. they usually use pre-request statements and sometimes give reasons after the request.) Due to these types of differences in the production of politeness strategies between Dari and American English, I became interested in studying how Afghan EFL learners acquire and use pragmatic features of English.

Second language instruction in Afghanistan has traditionally taken place in lecture-dominated classrooms. Unfortunately, pragmatics is generally taught through the memorization of lists of phrases in conversation courses in Afghanistan. Pragmatic uses are memorized by the students (e.g. 'thank you' is formal and 'thanks' is informal, 'hello' is formal and 'hi' is informal, the answer to 'hello' is 'hello') and these memorized rules are followed in conversations in the classroom. It is challenging for Afghan EFL learners to interpret the authentic utilization of pragmatics because pragmatic instruction is not contextualized. In decontextualized instruction, learners have difficulty using politeness strategies appropriately due to the lack of the co-text (words that surround an utterance and provide meaning to it), situational context (the situations in which an utterance occurs) and cultural context (the culturally important features of the situation). All of these contexts are important, but, according to Thornbury (2008), the lack of understanding of the cultural context interferes most with effective communication.

Many other factors make authentic English teaching and learning challenging in Afghanistan: methodology (grammar translation method), class size (between 35-200 students), lack of teaching materials and props, the number of class sessions per week (two sessions of 50 minutes each is common), and finally the students' relatively advanced age (11-12 years old) when they begin learning English. As an EFL learner and teacher, I experienced how difficult it

is to learn English pragmatics authentically and deploy it intuitively because English was taught deductively. Authentic input, and interaction, is of importance in learning pragmatics (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2005, and Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 2005), but is lacking in many Afghan classrooms.

This research illuminates the need for improved pragmatic instruction. Knowing how Afghan EFL learners are perceived by native American English speakers helps me have a clear idea of the desired results when teaching pragmatics and politeness strategies. Analyzing the letters used in this study, along with the evaluations, exposes gaps that need to be addressed in the classroom. For example, one important feature of pragmatics is directness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) and Bergmann, et al. (2007) speech acts may be either direct or indirect. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that direct speech acts occur when the speaker's message is exactly conveyed by his words while indirect acts are conveyed by giving hints or employing general rather than specific speech. In indirect speech acts, the speaker has the desire that the interactant should understand what he/she intends to say even though the words do not directly convey what the speaker means. Culturally acceptable indirect speech acts build up an appropriate relationship and maintain a level of politeness with which interlocutors are comfortable. These pragmatic issues are difficult for a non-native speaker to learn in an EFL classroom. From both my experience in an English-speaking culture and my thesis project, I hope to identify effective and ineffective use of pragmatics as perceived by native speakers and see how they impact communication. From observing the gaps identified in this study. I hope to formulate better strategies for teaching pragmatics. By looking specifically at the pragmatic skills Afghan EFL learners are lacking, more effective and explicit instruction can be implemented. To carry out this goal I will use my experience and this research as the basis for

continued study of various politeness and pragmatic traits in both Dari and English after my graduation.

1.2 Research Questions

The application of politeness strategies is very important in second language acquisition because it is socially significant, yet complicated and culturally different. In order to observe how native speakers of Dari use American English politeness strategies, this research will focus on politeness used in letters of inquiry. It will concentrate on measuring native Americans' perception of Afghan EFL learners' writing in order to discover how capably the Afghans use politeness strategies in letter writing in an academic setting. Lee (2004), Suh (1999), and Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) have carried out similar research. Questions guiding this research include:

1. What characteristics do native speakers perceive as contributing to effective writing?
2. What characteristics do native speakers perceive as contributing to politeness?
3. Are politeness and effectiveness in communicating ideas correlated?
4. How can we help EFL students to perfect strategies for polite requests?

Politeness contributes to respectful interaction by showing consideration and deference towards others (Watts, 2003). Politeness also generates social connections among interlocutors and permits a particular form of social cooperation (Benjamins, 2004). Both Watts (2003) and Benjamins (2004) state that politeness cultivates a comfortable atmosphere in communication and makes interaction more effective.

This research is a cross-cultural study of written requests for information in letters of inquiry. Written communication is an exchange of information through symbols and signs

(AbiSamra, 2003); however, polite written communication moves beyond the lexical and syntactic knowledge of a learner. Particularly in intercultural communication, it is necessary to consider that different cultures have different textual features which include their strategies of argumentation and degrees of directness and politeness (Rentel, 2005).

Requesting information was selected as the focus of this study since it plays an important role in communication. In particular, requests involve L2 interactions between students and teacher or students and students, occur often in daily interaction. Thus, it is vital that L2 learners learn to formulate requests appropriately. This research concentrates on written information requests or inquiries made by EFL learners and the perception of politeness attributed to those requests by native speakers. As with other speech acts, when making requests, native language and native language culture may play an important role in the production of politeness strategies in intercultural communication. Therefore, examining the politeness strategies of both English and Dari is helpful to establish the context of this study.

1.3 Dari

Dari, an Indo-European language, is one of two official languages in Afghanistan. It is the native language of Tajiks and Hazaras, among other ethnic groups (Robson et al., 2002). Most Afghans from other ethnic groups in northern and central Afghanistan can communicate in Dari because it is one of the official languages in Afghanistan (The World Fact book CIA, 2009). The Afghan participants in this study native Dari speakers.

1.4 Politeness in Dari

Dari and Iranian Persian are two varieties of the same language although the syntax and phonemic systems vary somewhat. Afghanistan and Iran were formerly one country. They

inhabit the same geographic region in Asia and share a border and a common history. Considering these common roots, politeness strategies can be assumed to be similar in both languages. Due to the three-decade war in Afghanistan, there is little research available on Dari so Persian sources are used as evidence in some parts of this research.

Salmani-Nodoushan (2008) distinguishes four characteristics that are representative of politeness in Iran: *Ehteram* (respect), *Adab* (politeness), *Mehman Nawazi* (hospitality) *Tawazo* (humility) and *Tashrifat* (being formal and ceremonious). Politeness strategies and formal register are used when the interlocutors are socially distant, and people are more polite in relation to the gravity of the threat they are about to make to another's face. The concept of "face" implies two basic wishes of every person: to have the agreement or the approval of the other party (positive face), and to not be stopped by the other party even though disagreement or disapproval exists (negative face). Speech acts may be perceived as threatening when the face wants of interlocutors are not considered (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Followings are some politeness strategies in Dari:

- Appreciation statements, expressions which expresses gratitude. (e.g., 'Thank you very much', 'I appreciate…') (Hillman, 1981).
- Politeness markers, (e.g., 'please') (Hillman, 1981).
- Questioning or hedging; Preparatory statement by which permission for making a request is asked (e.g., 'Is it possible…?', 'May I ask...?') (Akbari, 2002).
- Uses of indirect language to avoid an imperative sentence and create more answer options for the addressee (e.g., 'I would appreciate if…' and 'I wish you could ...') (Akbari, 2002).

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- Hints, (e.g., 'It is rainy today.' 'I have to go to my class.' as a preface to 'I would like a ride.') (Akbari, 2002)

- Alteration of subject pronoun 'you' (i.e., *to* to *shoma*). In polite Dari, people generally do not use the word *to* (singular form of *you*) even when addressing an individual, but rather employ *shoma,* the plural form which signals respect. *Shoma* is used when hierarchy of age, social rank, and distance exists between interactants, while *to* is used to signal solidarity. This usage is emphasized by Akbari (2002) and Hillman (1981) as they state that the plural form of 'you' for a single interactant reveals a sign of respect in Persian, and the singular 'you' is a sign of solidarity.

1.5 Politeness in American English

House and Kasper (1981) in their study of elicited role plays identified some politeness strategies in English. Although, the strategies identified by House and Kasper were common to oral interaction, they still serve to provide a general idea of politeness strategies used in English and are presented below:

- Politeness markers (e.g., 'please', tag questions and 'would you…?')

- Play-downs: Syntactic devices that tone down the perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the addressee (e.g., 'would it be a good idea…?')

- Consultative devices: Structures by which the addressee's collaboration is sought (e.g., 'would you mind…?')

- Hedges: Adverbs by which an option is left to the addressee (e.g., 'sort of,' 'somehow')

- Understaters: Adverbials or adverbial modifiers that underrepresent the propositional content (e.g., 'a little' and 'a second')

- Downtoners: Adverbs by which the impact of the speaker is adapted (e.g., 'just, possibly')

- Committers: Subject + thinking verbs that lower the degree of commitment (e.g., 'I think', 'I believe')

- Forewarning: A strategy (that could be expressed by different structures) in which the speaker gives warning ahead of time that s/he will go against the generally accepted principle (e.g., 'you may find this a bit boring, but' or 'I would never criticize you; however…')

- Hesitators: Pauses filled with non-lexical phonetic materials that express uncertainty about proper word choice (e.g., 'ah', 'uhh')

- Scope-stators: Personal views that express subjective opinions (e.g., 'I am afraid', 'I am disappointed')

- Agent avoiders: Proposals that criticize the addressee using some generalized agent (e.g., 'People don't do X').

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are universal politeness strategies. Akbari (2002) concurs that these "universal" politeness strategies are employed in Persian. For example, both American English and Dari speakers use politeness markers and other politeness strategies. The interactants in both languages make more statements before a request. These statements are intended to allow the requestee to intuitively anticipate the request before one of the direct strategies (e.g., I want…, or I need…) has to be employed. It is not unusual for the requestee to respond to the need of the requester without a direct request being made. None of

the English strategies prevent the speaker from making a direct request. They are generally used with the direct request to soften it.

Additionally, Tanaka and Kawade (1982) state that interrogative sentences are more polite than statements in English, and that the least polite sentence type is the imperative. Dari speakers may consider interrogatives to be the most polite and imperatives the least, but research has not been conducted on this subject.

Research shows that although there are universal pragmatic and politeness strategies, the manner in which these strategies are used differs across cultures (Taleghani Nikazm 2006, Mir-Fernandez 1994, Tanaka and Kawade 1982). Since Afghan native speakers of Dari who are EFL learners are the letter writers, some of the politeness strategies noted in 1.3 and 1.4 are expected to appear in the letters.

1.6 Summary

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter Two provides a review of previous research concerning how politeness is defined and viewed across cultures. Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this study. Chapter Four summarizes and discusses the findings while Chapter Five critically examines the methodology used. Chapter Six reviews the findings of this study and recommends possible avenues for further research.

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the concept of face as described by Brown and Levinson (1987), and politeness as an element of language use. It then includes a discussion of previous cross-cultural studies of differences in requests and politeness across cultures.

2.1 The Concept of Face

Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss two concepts as central to a theory of politeness: the concept of face, and face threatening acts in particular, and the notion of politeness strategies. These concepts will be applied in this study. Brown and Levinson define 'face' as a "self image" which involves an individual's emotions. In communication this 'self image' is maintained, protected or lost. Maintaining each others' 'face' is a mutual desire in communication. This is done by recognizing the wants of other interactants and understanding their desires.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains which acts or speech acts threaten face, which acts or speech acts protect face, which people have the right to protect face and to be admired and those people who are more vulnerable to the concept of face.

They define speech acts using two parameters. Their first distinction is that "face" can be negative or positive. Positive "face" is the desire to have the approval or agreement of others while, negative face is the desire not to be imposed upon. The second distinction is whether the threatening is to a speaker's face or to the listener's face. That is, face is evaluated from both the speaker and hearer's perspectives.

Mir-Fernandez (1994) states that the notion of face involves personal decisions about required values for effective communication. Every individual is a member of a particular

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society; as a result, she or he is responsible for successful communication. Thus, face is a reflection of culture and an element which is used to compare and contrast cultural values.

Brown and Levinson (1987) theorize that the concept of positive and negative face is universal, but it is also the subject of cultural elaboration in any community. For example, Afghan Dari-speakers consider the notion of face in expressing politeness strategies. The literal translation of face is *roy* in Dari which is the root for many words referring to face threatening acts. Adjectives such as *biroy* and *por-roy,* are attributed to both speakers and addressees who do not protect the face of the other party and do not allow more options for the other party. The adjective *roy-natan* is attributed to people who say anything they want even though what they say is not appropriate. Conversely, the adjective *kamroy* is a positive concept and is characteristic of people who cannot make or reject requests because they are willing to protect the other parties' face. For example, there are two roommates and even though one person is feeling cold she lets the roommate open the window and does not reject the request, but she herself would never request opening the window if she knows that her roommate is feeling cold.

Speech acts that threaten an addressee's positive face are those which indicate lack of care for the addressee's desires or disagreement with the addressee's wants; for example, the expression of disapproval, criticism, disagreement, accusation, insult, challenges. On the other hand, acts that threaten the addressee's negative face are those where the speaker involves the addressee in speech acts such as advice, threats, promises, warnings, suggestions, and requests.

The focus of this study is limited to 'requests' which are potentially face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson 1987 and Taleghani-Nikazm 2006). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a request is also a speech act that predicates some future act. In a request the recipient of the message is stressed to do or avoid doing an action. Felix-Brasdefer (2005) defines a request

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as a "directive act" which starts with face negotiation in communication.

2.2 Politeness

Politeness is one characteristic of language use and is in essence consideration of others and showing concern about how to behave with others appropriately according to their social status and social norms. (Brown, 2001)

Since there are two different types of 'face' (e.g. wants) to be considered, there are two types of politeness. When the speaker believes an act to be undesirable for the addressee there is a need for respectful expressions, control and avoidance (negative politeness). When the speaker believes that considering, and admiring the addressee's feelings maintains their relationship there is a need for positive politeness. (Brown 2001). Brown and Levinson (1987) state that positive politeness strategies decrease the distance between interlocutors while negative politeness strategies highlight social distance. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson attribute negative politeness strategies to Western cultures. Thus, one would expect Afghan EFL learners who are not members of Western cultures to use more positive politeness strategies than negative ones.

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that people can be polite based on the two notions, face (positive and negative as defined before), and rationality. Rationality is the ability to use linguistic means to achieve a communicative goal. Brown and Levinson (1987) define rationality as "a precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends". For example, "if A says 'What time it is?', and B replies '(Well) the postman's been already', then A assumes that what B said was rationally oriented to what A said, and hence A derives from B's utterance the inference that it is, say, past 11 a.m." (p.58). In order to be polite and achieve one's communicative goal, one must demonstrate effective use of language which is different in oral and written communication. In written communication since the contextual clues

are not involved, the language should be more explicit. For example, the requester should use politeness devices because there are no paralinguistic clues such as facial expressions, tone of voice and body language.

Brown (2001) states that politeness is necessary for building and keeping social relationships and three factors influence the degree of politeness: people tend to be more polite to social superiors; people tend to be more polite to others that they do not know, and people tend to be more polite when making higher impositions. In this study, when examining the strategies that Afghan EFL learners use to formulate their request, it is relevant to consider the fact that the interactant is a social superior and the requesters do not know him.

It should be noted that even though the notion of face is universal, the means used to maintain peoples' face is different across cultures (Mir-Fernandez, 199). As previously noted, a request is a face threatening act in which the requester threatens the negative face of an interactant of the message. In order to observe how requests are formulated across cultures and thereby the use of politeness strategies, research about requests are reviewed in the subsequent section. A review of literature shows many cross-cultural studies of requests, for example, research by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007), Tanaka and Kawade (1982), and Lee (1999). The present study is cross-cultural in that it focuses on the perception by American native speakers of production of politeness strategies in letters of inquiry or request for information by Afghan EFL learners.

2.3 Politeness and Formulation of Requests across Cultures

Indirectness is another feature that relates to politeness in formulating requests in particular situations. Felix-Brasdefer (2005) examined indirectness and politeness in requests made by Mexican university students, considering pragma-linguistic information employed

during a request sequence, including head acts (the request itself; e.g., "Would you mind giving me a ride?") and external modifications (elements preceding or following the request; e.g., "It is rainy today.") in both formal and informal circumstances. He organized five situations in which requesters and requestees had different social distance and power in each. The situations were classified according to hierarchy, deference and solidarity. He discovered that interlocutors that are more distant expressed requests more indirectly. For example, only 19% of the members of a peer group (and therefore less distant interlocutors) expressed requests indirectly. Felix-Brasdefer surmises that only the close relationship between members of the same peer group leads to the use of direct strategies. Similarly, in Afghan culture, people "talk around" or speak indirectly about the issues. They do not request what is needed explicitly, particularly when the interlocutors are socially distant. For example, if someone is socially distant from the requestee and needs a ride, he requests it indirectly: "It is raining. I need to go to class. It is late. Are you going to school?" If the recipient of the request comprehends the message, the requester has no need to explicitly request a ride and could continue to convey messages indirectly. Salmani-Nodoushan (2008) in his study of indirectness in the speech acts of requests among the native speakers of Persian states that in situations where there is social distance between interlocutors, direct requests are very rare. However, in situations where there is no social distance, Persian native speakers frequently use direct requests. Since the interlocutors of the proposed research are socially distant, indirect speech acts are expected to be used in their requests.

In a similar pragmatic analysis of social politeness, Suh (1999) studied the politeness of native speakers of American English (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) in the situations where interlocutors had different social and psychological distance. Social distance refers to variables such as age, sex and social status and psychological distance refers to the way one

person perceives another in relation to himself. Suh found that there was no significant difference in the use of politeness between the NSs and NNSs, since they all used "can you" and "will you" as moderate polite strategies and "I would appreciate" and "would you" as the most polite strategy. Since "I would appreciate" is more indirect and "would you" gives the requestee an opportunity to say either yes or no, they are considered to be more polite than direct questions of "can you" and "will you." The only difference revealed was in the situation where the interlocutors were socially and psychologically close (the request was from a requester to his close friend) because the NSs used the moderate politeness strategy of "can you" and NNSs used the least polite strategy of "imperative." The NNSs maximized cost upon the requestee or they imposed upon the requestee by use of the "imperative". These linguistic structures (e.g. "I would appreciate" and "would you" as the most polite strategies vs. "can you", "will you" and imperative sentences) appear in the letters studied here and are considered in this study. As was mentioned above, Afghans are hypothesized to be more indirect with polite requests particularly when the interlocutors are socially distant.

Lee (2004) analyzed written requests in emails sent by adult Chinese learners of English to their Chinese-speaking English teachers and monolingual English-speaking teachers in order to investigate cross-cultural influences on linguistic choice and request strategies. The participants did not use any imperative structures in their emails to teachers of either cultural background. They addressed the Chinese-speaking teachers with "Dear (first name)" and used more hedges and explicit performatives (e.g. "Is it possible", "I hope", "I would like to") with Chinese-speaking teachers. The students used more syntactic down graders (e.g., "Would you") and a higher frequency rate of politeness markers (e.g. "please") with their monolingual English-speaking teachers. The strategies used reveal that the Chinese learners are respectful to both

Chinese and English teachers. They obey the traditional teacher-student hierarchy common to Chinese culture where politeness is a normative value (rule-governed) rather than an instrument to accomplish a goal, especially in hierarchical situations. In Chinese culture, polite letters should have a standard format and content so that only the personal information will vary from one letter to another. However, non-republic Chinese who had had more contacts with English speakers used requestive hints (facts, reasons, and backgrounds) before the request. They employed different ideas about making requests after contact with English speakers. In consequence, Lee discovered that contact of non-republic Chinese with native speakers of the target language caused them to have a tendency to give facts and reasons before the request. The current research attempted to investigate the influence of L1 culture on the production of L2 politeness strategies as L2 cultural knowledge is vital for acquisition of politeness strategies in a language.

Another cross-cultural study of requests was done by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007). She studied the formulation of low-and high-imposition requests (inconvenient requests): making an appointment, asking for feedback on work, and requesting extensions for due dates. Participants were native American English speakers, and native Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese and Thailand speakers who were all TESOL graduate students. She found that students employed more direct strategies for lower imposition requests than for high imposition requests. Both non-native and native speakers (NSs and NNSs) of American English used polite language, but different strategies to achieve politeness. For example, the NSs expressed politeness by past tense in the lowest imposition requests (appointments) but NNSs used the past tense and other politeness devices as well. The NNSs used fewer direct requests for the higher imposition requests (feedback); however, NSs used direct and indirect requests equally for the higher imposition

requests. NSs used lexical modifiers (e.g. "please") with the highest imposition requests (extensions); however, the NNSs did not use these at all since they used indirect requests. Overall, Biesenbach-Lucas concludes that non-native speakers may run the risk of not being perceived as appropriately polite. In this study, native perceptions of non-native politeness are measured by asking native speakers to read and evaluate the letters sent by Afghan participants. The native speakers' ratings and comments reveal the degree of politeness of the Afghan EFL learners and the comments also reveal the gaps in the use of politeness strategies by the learners.

2.4 Effectiveness in Letter Writing

The genre of a letter creates expectations in the reader of the text, in this case the expectations that an American reader has for a letter of inquiry. Jenkins and Hinds' (1987) examination of textbooks in different languages on letter writing reveals that the form of a letter will not necessarily be changed by the language used in the letter. The textbooks admonish the business letter writers to be precise, specific, and clear. These textbooks suggest similar elements for a business letters across languages. For example, the elements in business letters in American English are similar to Japanese business letters:

American: 1. Salutation

2. Body

3. Complimentary close

Japanese: 1. Opening remarks

2. Body

3. Ending

In their contrastive study of American, French, and Japanese business letters Jenkins and Hinds (1987) discovered that American letters are longer and the content is more

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individualized due to American letters being considered open-role and the writer of the letter having liberty of thoughts and informality. In addition, in American letters, suggestions and ideas should be explicit, Seglin and Coleman (2002), Basye (1998), and DeVries (1994) attribute qualities such as properly expressed, simple, clear, natural, accurate, and right to the point to effective letters. DeVries (1994) also identifies consistent writing style, and the use of the active voice in effective messages. Moreover, she suggests that a writer should always consider the reader (the person to whom the letter is written) and address the reader personally; this idea will resurface when the American perceptions of Afghan politeness in the letters of inquiry is discussed in Chapter 4.

2.5 Goal of the Study and Hypotheses

SLA research has focused recently on interlanguage and pragmatic knowledge of second language learners (Mir-Fernandez, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Taleghani-Nekazm, 2006). Politeness in requests appears in many such studies conducted in a cross-cultural study design. However, this prior research did not examine the correlation between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness in requests. Furthermore, these pragmatic studies were not conducted with Afghan EFL learners. The research in this study focuses on perceptions of native American English speakers about the degree of effectiveness in communicating ideas and the politeness of letters written by Afghan EFL learners in order to test the following hypotheses:

1. Letters receiving high ratings of effectiveness will be rated high in politeness.

2. Low proficiency students will receive low ratings of politeness.

This study examines the relation between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness in the requestive production of Afghan EFL learners. Its purpose is to discover the

deficiencies in politeness production of those learners while making requests and to find out if those deficiencies are caused by lack of pragmatic knowledge, linguistic knowledge, or both.

2.6 Summary

This chapter illustrated the concept of politeness and the notion of face, and then reviewed cross-cultural studies of requests. Chapter Three summarizes the study design, including information about the participants, the data collection and the data evaluation.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The methodology used in this study involves two phases: Letter writing by Afghan EFLstudents in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan and the evaluation of those letters by native American English speakers in Manhattan, Kansas. This chapter will discuss the study design, the participants, and the method of data collection.

3.1 Study Design

This section explains each phase of the study in detail. It discusses the tasks given to both groups of participants and the purpose of those tasks.

3.1.1 Phase 1

In the original design of this study, each Afghan participant completed two tasks (attached as Appendices A and B) and a language background questionnaire (attached as Appendix C). In order to collect authentic data, the concept under study, politeness strategies, was not mentioned to the participants in the informed consent form (attached as Appendix D), or in either of the task instructions, so the participants were unaware of the exact points which were to be studied in the experiment. This method helps to obtain more natural data because lack of prior knowledge of the goal of the study prevents undue influence on the linguistic behavior of the participants. After the participants sent the letters by email, they were informed through debriefing forms (attached as Appendix E) that the focus of this study was on politeness strategies used in letters of request for information.

The first task was selected in order to elicit data for use in analyzing politeness strategies

in letters of inquiry. In the task, the participants were asked to imagine that they were interested in pursuing a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Kansas State University. They read information indicating that scholarships were available at Kansas State University for international students who met certain criteria. The participants were asked to send a professional letter by email to the Head of the relevant academic unit, Dr. C., in which they requested information on the TEFL M.A. Program and any available scholarships. They were asked to include the following information (as indicated in the task instructions in Appendix A): who they were, their concerns and questions about courses, length of study, instructors, scholarships, housing, and the deadline for applications. The task did reflect a somewhat authentic study opportunity in that many of these students were eligible to compete for semester-long English study at K-State and possible admittance to the M.A. program.

Immediately after the first email was sent, the second task was introduced to the participants. The second task was selected to elicit data in order to analyze the use of politeness strategies in letters of complaint. In this task, the participants were told to imagine that they previously sent a letter to Dr. C., but had not received a response in two months. They then wrote a second letter requesting a response to their previous letter, and expressing their need to receive this information quickly so that they could make a decision about applying to the university.

In both tasks, the participants had to decide how to express their requests, according to their background knowledge or natural inclination. Although writing is typically considered an offline activity, the time limit made the activity more spontaneous and unedited. After completing the two tasks, the Afghan participants were given a language background questionnaire (see Appendix C). The questionnaire collected demographic information as well as information about their English language background, email and letter writing experience, and

how polite they considered themselves to be.

These written tasks were selected because they were an efficient manner of collecting and receiving data in Afghanistan. This was the only option for collecting data due to problems such as limited access to electricity and the Internet. Videotaping was not possible as many women in Afghanistan do not wish to be videotaped. Email is a prompt and safe method by which data may be received without any change. Due to the low transmission strength of the Internet from Afghanistan and limited access to computers, other technologies that could be used for linguistic data collection (e.g., Skype) were not as feasible. Students' access to technology is limited, and special arrangements with university administration had to be made to gain access to the facilities during the school day. Additionally, time constraints (30 minutes per task) were imposed due to having to conduct data collection between scheduled class sessions. While it is recognized that the data collection method employed here may not result in completely authentic letters of inquiry, this method (i.e. via email) did facilitate the study of Afghan EFL students who are in Afghanistan.

Two types of letters were selected in order to compare the inquiry as a positive and the complaint as a negative task. Letters of inquiry (i.e., requesting information) are easier to compose than letters of complaint. The students may perform the task with a lower level of anxiety. A complaint task is more challenging for the student because, due to the status of the recipient, the student is required to request politely that the problem be resolved, without expressing displeasure with the requestee. In addition if the complaint is serious, the requester might want to increase the level of explicitness in his or her criticism. The complainers might change the tone in spoken language or change the word choice in written language to express greater emotion, or frustration (See chapter five for a discussion of the genuineness of the

participants' behavior).

One rationale for selecting the second writing task was curiosity to discover if, when students are dissatisfied about a matter, they can express their complaint politely and how they negotiate meaning when doing so. Another purpose was to discover if the Afghan students were more polite in letters of complaint or in letters of inquiry. In the end, only the letters of inquiry were analyzed in the results chapter as methodological issues impaired the data collected with the letters of complaint (See Chapter Five for further discussion).

It should also be mentioned that two of the letters of inquiry were excluded from this study as they were truncated (i.e. stopped before their completion and sent) most likely due to time constraints. The following is an example of a truncated letter:

1. Dr. C.
    Head of ML Department

    My name is Abdul Walid and my father name is Abdul Wahed. Iam one of the student of literature faculty in English Department second year and I want to finish the my master degree in USA and this is one of my dream. I have some question about giving scholarship in this university.

    1) How is the process of education?
    2) Who support us?
    3) How much will be the expenses?
    4) How can I apply for master degree?
    5) How is the living on there?
    6) What is the rule of teaching?
    7)

As seen in Example 1, the writer of the letter was not able to complete the conveyance of his ideas. Thus, these two letters were deemed insufficient to evaluate.

3.1.2 Phase 2

The letters of inquiry were distributed to the evaluators (the American participants) in order to determine how effectively native speakers of Dari use American English politeness strategies and to what degree the participants are perceived as polite when they negotiate and

interact with English native speakers. The perceptions of the Americans reveal whether these Afghan EFL students are communicatively competent and effective negotiators. Their perceptions also reveal any gaps in the use of politeness strategies in requests, and highlight features that are polite in Dari and not considered polite in American English. For example, the expression of "I am waiting unexpectedly" which is used after the request for information by one of the participants was perceived as demanding in American English. Of the six evaluators that rated the letter, two of them commented that the phrase was "demanding" and two of them thought the phrase "rude". However, '*Ma bisabrana montazer astom'* 'I am waiting unexpectedly' is a positive expression in Dari as it reveals the enthusiasm of the student about pursuing his education in the context of requesting information for a scholarship.

After completing the informed consent form (attached as Appendix F), the Americans were given a questionnaire, which asked for information about them and their language background (see Appendix G). They were then given 10-14 emails, a task instruction (Appendix H) and copies of a survey (see Appendix I) to complete for each letter. They were asked to consider the politeness level of the writer from a native English speaker's perspective. The questionnaire considered some factors crucial to a letter, such as the effectiveness in communicating an idea, the use of an appropriate salutation and closing, the indirectness of the language used and the evaluator's perception of the writer's politeness. A ten-point rating scale, where ten was an excellent rating, was used to assign a response to each of these questions. In addition, the Americans were asked to comment on the indirectness and politeness features of each letter.

3.2 Participants

Both sets of participants in the study included male and female individuals who were between the ages of 18 and 34 and who are currently studying at university. All participation was voluntary. In this study, the term "participants" refers to the Afghan participants and "evaluators" refers to the American participants. The participants were all native speakers of Dari who study EFL. The evaluators were American English native speakers who are graduate and undergraduate students.

3.2.1 Afghan participants

The Afghan participants were 30 EFL students at Balkh University, which was established in 1986 in Mazar-i-Sharif, a city in northern Afghanistan. These students are undergraduates in the English department, part of the College of Literatures and Humanities. The English department was established in 1990, its students now number over 300.

Of the 12 sophomore and 18 senior participants, 24 were male and 6 were female. The seniors were my former students as I taught them grammar as sophomores. As part of the normal English undergraduate major curriculum, the sophomore students study literature, writing, reading comprehension, conversation, general foundations (a course which provides elementary information about the four language skills), pronunciation and grammar in English, along with coursework in Dari, Pashto, history, and Islamic studies. The senior students have these same classes as well as linguistics, teaching methods and research methods in English.

At the time that they participated in this research, both sophomore and senior participants had received instruction over the following aspects of letter writing:

- The differences between friendly and business letters

- Formal and informal types of invitation, the acceptance and rejection of an invitation, letters to pen pals, and thank you notes

- How to address an envelope

- How to revise and proofread a letter.

- The participants had received pragmatic instruction in:

- Greetings

- Introducing themselves and other interactants

- Opening a conversation

- Appreciating and giving thanks

- Apologizing

- Leave-taking

- Complaining

As previously mentioned, a deductive method was used for teaching the above pragmatic interactions. Another source through which the students acquired some pragmatic knowledge was by being exposed to formulaic and grammatical pragmatic strategies. For example, when grammatical structures (e.g.' would you mind…' 'could you please…') were taught, the text books and teachers pointed that these structures are used to formulate polite requests. Similarly, in teaching tenses, along with the other usages, the lecture notes included pragmatic use of the tense with examples (e.g.' I wanted to have a piece of chalk' is more polite than I want to have a piece of chalk').

EFL learners in Afghanistan are interested in American movies and English TV channels which may help them acquire English pragmatic knowledge. Thus, this pragmatic instruction of

teaching conversation or grammar in a deductive manner may have been supplemented by video and audio input.

3.2.2 American evaluators

The second phase of the experiment was accomplished by a total of 13 (*N=6* male and *N*=7 female) American graduate and undergraduate (*N*=10/13) students who are enrolled in various fields of study, such as   science (*N*=4/13 biology, nursing, nutrition and dietetics), business (*N*=5/13), and the humanities (*N*=5/13), at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. The second phase of the experiment was done at the end of the spring academic semester, 2009 and all the students were busy with finals. Many instructors were asked to request that their students participate in evaluating the inquiry letters. It was also announced by placing flyers on the boards of different colleges. The committee members of this thesis also helped in finding the participants. The participants were not trained formally; they were simply given the task instructions (in Appendix H). This was done to measure their initial, intuitive reactions to the language used in the letters.

3.3 Data Collection

Since this research involved human subjects, it was crucial to have Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before the study. The IRB form, along with all documents to be used with both sets of participants (the informed consent form, the language background questionnaires, the task instructions, debriefing form (see as Appendices E and J), and the evaluation survey for the American students, as well as the unaffiliated investigator's approval form) were submitted to the IRB office at Kansas State University on January 9, 2009.

Once IRB approval was received, data collection commenced on February 13, 2009. The English Department Head at Balkh University served as the unaffiliated investigator; he administered the two tasks following all the rules and requirements of the IRB.

3.4 Evaluation of the Data: Perceptions of Politeness

The Americans' perspective is the most important criterion in this research because it tells how Afghan EFL learners are perceived by native speakers of American English. Furthermore, the authentic use of language requires pragmatic knowledge, which is illuminated by the native speakers' perspectives on letters of inquiry. The collected data was coded based on the five factors considered in the evaluators' questionnaire. Each factor is now explained in detail in the following subsections.

3.4.1 Effectiveness in communicating purpose or meaning

According to Basye (1998), effective letters are short, simple, and include a topic sentence. Seglin and Coleman (2002) also attribute traits such as unambiguous, short, direct and clear to effective letters while Jenkins and Hinds (1987) state that it is universal that letters comprise three important elements: salutation, body, and closing. These ideas, in concert with the evaluators' comments, were used as guidelines in this study for defining effectiveness in communicating. Various American evaluators in this study, when evaluating "ineffective" letters, commented on the lack of organization, grammatical or mechanical errors, confusing speech, and choppy sentences, all of which seemed to influence effectiveness in communicating ideas in a letter.

3.4.2 Appropriate salutation

A proper salutation varies according to the context of the letter. Seglin and Coleman (2002) state that 'Dear' is a standard salutation component in American English. However, choice of different salutations in formal letters depends on the context, or to whom the letter is addressed. 'To whom it may concern,' 'Dear+ title + surname,' or 'Dear Sir or Madam,' are examples of proper salutations for formal letters.

3.4.3 Appropriate closing

American formal letters also use specific expressions for closing the letters, including 'Sincerely', 'Regards', or 'Thank you for your time' (Seglin and Coleman 2002).

3.4.4 Perception of directness

The fourth item on the evaluators' questionnaire was the perceived indirectness of the Afghan participant's language. Due to the unclear wording of the question, evaluators understood the purpose of the question in different ways (this is discussed further in Chapter Five). Because of this confusion, this question did not receive consistent comments. As a result, the data for the question were not analyzed in this study.

3.4.5 Perception of politeness

The perception of politeness by the English native speakers is the most important variable of this study, as the main goal of this study is to examine the successful or unsuccessful use of politeness strategies in requests. This question asked for a summative rating that could be used to compare one letter to another and to compare the ratings of effectiveness with those for politeness.

3.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology, the study design and the participants. Chapter Five will critically analyze the methodology employed. But first, in the next chapter, the findings of the study are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER 4 - Discussion of the Results

4.0 Introduction

This chapter begins by explaining the method of data analysis, describing the steps taken to assign final ratings for individual questions on each letter. Then, taking into consideration the comments of the evaluators, the common characteristics of the effective and ineffective letters are discussed and contrasted, then the same is done for polite and impolite letters.

The ratings of the evaluators for politeness and effectiveness will be shown to support the following hypotheses:

1. Letters receiving high ratings of effectiveness will be rated high in politeness.

2. Low proficiency students will receive low ratings of politeness.

Finally, impolite but highly effective letters are examined to elicit the gaps that the Afghan students have in expressing politeness. The chapter is concluded with a summary of findings and how they relate to the hypotheses.

4.1 Scoring the Letters

Data in this study were analyzed based on the survey questionnaire used by the evaluators (the American participants) when they read the letters sent by the Afghan participants. The questionnaire consisted of five main questions and two supplementary questions (see Appendix I). For the first five questions used to rate the letters, the evaluators were asked to assign a rating using a scale from one-to-ten. On these five questions, the evaluators were asked to rate the level of the Afghan participants' effectiveness in communicating their purpose, their use of an appropriate opening and closing, their use of indirect language, and the Americans' perceptions of the writer's politeness. On the two supplementary questions, the evaluators commented on

elements in the letters that led to their ratings for indirectness and politeness on Questions 4 and 5. Each letter was rated by six evaluators.

Upon receiving the completed questionnaires from the different evaluators, averages for each particular evaluator's ratings on individual questions needed to be tabulated in order to compare ratings given by different evaluators. First, to find the average rating for each evaluator on a particular question, the ratings assigned on that question for all the letters rated were totaled and then the total divided by the number of letters that the evaluator had read in order to find the average rating awarded by that evaluator for that question. For example, evaluator 1 rated 13 letters. Column 2 (labeled E1) of Table 1 displays the 13 ratings given by evaluator 1 on Question 1.

Number of Letters rated	E 1	E 4	E6	E 8	E11	E13
1	3	8	8	7	8	4
2	3	9	9	7	7	2
3	4	8	9	7	8	5
4	5	7	7	2	6	5
5	5	7	8	6	10	3
6	5	6	6	6	7	9
7	6	7	8	7	7	6
8	6	9	8	4	7	3
9	7	6	7	4	7	4
10	8	5	8	8	7	6
11	9	8	9	8	8	6
12	9	7	9	3	6	3
13	10	6	5			3
14						4
Total	80	93	101	69	88	63
Average	6.15	7.15	7.77	5.75	7.33	4.50

Table 1 : Ratings of question 1 by the six evaluators who rated letter 18

These 13 ratings were then totaled, and the sum of 80 divided by 13 (the number of letters that Evaluator 1 read) which gave the average of 6.15. In a similar vein, Table 1 also shows the ratings awarded on Question 1 by all evaluators who read Letter 18. As seen in Table 1, each evaluator did not necessarily read the same number of letters or the same letters.

This process was repeated for each evaluator in order to determine the average rating they had assigned for each of the first five questions (those employing a scale from one-to-ten). This was done to determine if they interpreted the ten-point scale in similar ways and also to allow for comparison of the ratings across evaluators as the scores for individual letters were then assessed to see if they deviated from the evaluator's average in either a positive or negative way.

The raw rating for individual questions from each letter was compared with the average rating that the evaluator had awarded on that question for all the letters that they read. For example, on letter 18, evaluator 1 awarded question 1 an 8 (see Q1 Raw Rating in Table 2). The average rating that evaluator 1 awarded question 1 on the letters that he rated was a 6.15 (see column 4 in Table 2). By comparing the raw rating with the average rating given on that question by that evaluator, one can determine if the letter was considered below average or above average. To quantify that score, the raw rating was subtracted from the average rating, producing a score that shows how far off the average score this letter was for Question 1 for that evaluator. The last column of Table 2 displays these scores; for example, Question 1 for Letter 18 was 1.85 points above the average score awarded by Evaluator 1 for Question 1 while it was .23 above average for Evaluator 8. In this column, a positive indicates that the letter was considered above average by the evaluator. A negative number indicates that it was below average. To normalize all of the

evaluators' ratings on Questions 1-5 for all of the letters, the aforementioned process was followed (as shown in Table 2 for Question 1 on Letter 18). The scores for that question were then totaled and divided by the number of raters to assign a "score" for that question (for example, Question 1 for Letter (18) received a score of .73 indicating that it was considered slightly above average by the majority of evaluators).

Letter 18	Evaluators	Q1 Raw Rating	Q1 Average Rating	Scores
	1	8	6.15	1.85
	4	8	7.15	0.85
	6	8	7.77	0.23
	8	7	5.75	1.25
	11	8	7.33	0.67
	13	4	4.50	-0.50
			TOTAL Q1	4.35
			Average	0.73

Table 2 : Averages and final rating for Question 1, Letter 18

These results were compared across letters to indicate the ranking of the letters in the categories of politeness and effectiveness in communicating ideas. By using this multi-step process, a tendency to rate high or low by a given evaluator did not influence the comparison of letters' ratings because the letters' ratings were compared to the average score given by that evaluator rather than the evaluators' ratings compared directly to one another. This process helps to standardize the ratings used to rank the letters.

4.2. Effectiveness in Communicating the Purpose or Idea

Evaluators assigned a rating based on the following item (1) from the evaluators'
questionnaire:

1. "Effectiveness in communicating purpose or meaning (that is, can you understand what
    the person wants to accomplish with this letter?)."

Letters	Overall politeness score	Category
31	2.10	High
19	1.65	
28	1.62	
38	1.43	
52	1.39	
32	1.02	
39	0.84	
18	0.73	
34	0.70	
21	0.64	
30	0.58	
23	0.33	Mid
53	0.29	
22	0.11	
46	0.09	
36	0.03	
44	-0.02	
40	-0.13	
41	-0.16	
35	-0.38	
24	-0.85	Low
27	-1.18	
54	-1.46	
48	-1.52	
33	-1.67	
50	-1.71	
29	-2.47	
37	-2.58	

Table 3 : Overall effectiveness scores

After calculating the overall scores for Question 1 the letters, were ranked in three categories of high, middle and low effectiveness (see Table 3 page 37). A cutoff of -/+.50 was used to determine the middle category. As 0 indicates average, scores of -0.50 to, + 0.50 do not indicate extraordinary effectiveness or ineffectiveness. Table 3 displays the rankings for all of the letters on effectiveness in communicating ideas.

In this study the letters which fall in the high category are called 'highly effective' letters and those which fall in the low category are 'ineffective' letters. The highly effective and ineffective letters were examined for characteristics that might have influenced their scores. The letters that fell in the middle are not discussed, since the evaluators rated the letters as being neither highly effective nor ineffective.

4.2.1 Highly effective letters

The six characteristics of the highly effective letters are presented in Table 4. These letters also demonstrate the writers' understanding of lexical, mechanical, grammatical, and pragmatic knowledge which contribute to the effectiveness and clarity of the letters.

Characteristic	Example from letters	N
Appropriate Salutation	"Dear Sir,"	10/11
Introduction of writer	"My name is Karim Sadiq son of Naim Sadiq one of the student of Balkh University."	11/11
Statement of purpose	"I have gotten some information about master's degree scholorship and I am so enthusiastic to participate in this scholorship."	8/11
Request for information	In fact, I respectfully want to know all information about these scholarships that how can be probably contacted for the interview?"	11/11
Appropriate closing	"With best regards,"	9/11
Direct	"It was completely to the point."	9/11

Table 4 : Common characteristics of 11 highly effective letters

Table 4 was organized based on the evaluators' comments on the eleven highly effective inquiry letters and on an observation of the letters relative to their comments. There is a relationship between the evaluators' comments, the observation of the letters, and suggested points for effective letters by DeVries (1994), Basye (1998) Seglin and Coleman (2002). The common characteristics are displayed in the first column of Table 4, followed by examples from the letters in the second column. The third column indicates the number of highly effective letters that displayed this characteristic.

The evaluators' comments showed that including an appropriate salutation is of importance; they used expressions such as: "The person used a good salutation and closing", and "Seemed Sweet, polite and had proper salutation." to communicate the reasons for the ratings that they awarded. Example 2 displays the salutation from Letter (31), which was commonly used in the highly effective letters.

2. "Dear Sir,"

Ten of the eleven (N=10/11) highly effective letters included a proper salutation such as "Dear Sir," "Dear R. C.,", and "To whom it may concern:" In Example 2 the salutation is appropriate according to its lexical and mechanical (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) status. The example does not include any errors of word choice, punctuation or capitalization.

Since it was the first time that the addressee received letters from the writers, the introduction of the writer was required and is commented on by the evaluators as: "Told about himself" and "Introduced self, told why interested and asked questions". Example 3 is one from of the highly effective letters, Letters (38):

3. "I'm Karim Sadiq senior student of English department,literature faculty,Balkh university, Afghanistan."

Although Example 3 includes some minor errors, it is concise as the writer conveyed a lot of information in one sentence. All of the highly effective letters included the writer's introduction which made the letter's tone positive. Seglin and Coleman (2002) note that mentioning the name of the writer positively changes the tone of a letter.

The evaluators also commented on the effectiveness of the statement of purpose and making clear requests for information by expressions such as: "Asked for the information he needed", "It was clear what information he wanted", "Very clear language- explained exactly what he wants and why" , and "Gave enough information to get response." These characteristics are embodied in Examples 4 and 5.

4. "I have gotten some information about master's degree scholorship and I am so enthusiastic to participate in this scholorship."

5. "In fact, I respectfully want to know all information about these scholarships that how can be probably contacted for the interview?"

The main goal of the letters in this study is to request information and all the highly effective letters included this request appropriately and clearly. Eight of the eleven (*N*=8/11) highly effective letters included the reason why the writer was requesting information. Basye (1998) notes that a writer should understand the objective of the task and determine what the exact goal is and how it is accomplished.

Example 6 below is a sample of closings used in the highly effective letters.

6. "With best regards,"

As indicated in Table 4, highly effective letters included an appropriate closing (*N*=9/11) which is another element perceived as important by the evaluators, as the comments communicate: "good closing and salutation.", "More like a letter proper closing and salutation." Example 6 additionally does not include any mechanical error. Other proper closings of

"Sincerely" and "Respectfully" were used to close the highly effective letters. Cross-culturally, the elements of business letters are similar (e.g., salutation, body and closing) (Jenkins and Hinds 1987), so this may have aided in the successful inclusion of salutations and closing in these letters.

Basye (1998) and Seglin and Coleman (2002) consider directness as one of the crucial characteristics of effective letters. Nine of eleven (*N*=9/11) highly effective letters were quite direct which is perceived to be appropriate by the evaluators as follows: "Very enthusiastic about project -> Very direct," "He was polite and direct". Example 7 is an instance of directness in a letter since although the body of the letter is only three lines; it includes nearly all the required information and is right to the point.

7. "I am Maryam Sadiq daughter of M. Naim Sadiq senior student of Balkh University. As I heard about your scholarship for English students. I will be thankful if I could recieve more information about your scholarship.I look faraword to recieve your reply."

Thus, the findings reveal that the highly effective letters included an introduction of the writer, a statement of purpose, a successful request for information, direct language, and proper salutations and closings. These characteristics made them clear and effective. The next section now examines the ineffective letters by comparing then to the effective letters.

4.2.2 A comparison of highly effective and ineffective letters

A comparison of the characteristics of highly effective and ineffective letters reveals that the writers of ineffective letters attempted to include some of the same characteristics of the highly effective letters. However, the evaluators did not appear to recognize these efforts at 'effectiveness" as the evaluators' comments center more on mechanical and structural elements

of writing in the ineffective letters. For example in Letter (24), the writer introduces himself as shown in Example 8.

> 8. I'm karim , the second year student in literature faculty of Balikh University in Afghanistan.

However, his introductory sentence includes mechanical errors as the writer did not capitalize the first letter of 'Karim', and misspelled the word 'Balkh'. Example 8 also includes grammatical errors such as the use of the article 'the' rather than 'a' before the word 'second' and its omission before the word 'literature'.

Similarly, in most of the ineffective letters (*N=7/8)*, an attempt was made at including a statement of purpose as in Example 9:

> 9. At first i want to achieve my masterys in united stade so i want to achive my masterys i know these details.

Example 9 indicates that the writer understands that there should be a statement of purpose before requesting the information. However, due to his low level of English proficiency, the sentence communicates that after he achieves his Master's degree he needs the information. Furthermore, there are mechanical errors such as: He did not capitalize 'I', he misspelled and did not capitalize the initial letters in the 'United States', the article 'the' is needed before 'United States' and 'At first' is not needed in the beginning of the sentence.

Attempts at requesting information also occurred in all the ineffective letters; however, a large number of mechanical errors were observed, as indicated in Example 10.

> 10. I need to know about details, why this schulership give as?
> where we will continue the lessens? payment of money? from whre
> are the teachers?

Example 10 reveals that in addition to many mechanical errors, the request included three expressions that interfere with meaning and confuse the reader. For example, the expression

"why this schulership give as?" is confusing, and so is the expression "payment of money" which is very general and could refer to the questions of how, when, or how much do we pay, or do we have to pay? Again, the writer understands what to inquire, but language usage problems (grammatical and syntactic, respectively) make the request confusing and ineffective.

The ineffective letters show similar mechanical and lexical errors with salutations, closings and directness, as in Examples 11, 12, 13 and 14.

11. "To whom it may corncernt":

12. "To home it may concern"

13. "Recently"

14. "I'm karim, the second year student in literature faculty of Balikh University in Afghanistan. because of constracting my country and making my future, I need to get the high degree of knowlege, so i want to continue my mastering there, I hope that you be agree with me and I need to know about details,"

Examples 11 and 12 reveal that the writers understood that "To whom it may concern" is a proper salutation, but the lexical and mechanical errors make its use less effective. Example 13 has a 'lexical error' because "recently" does not convey the information expected of a closing. Example 14 is an attempt to write a direct letter. It might have been effective if it had not consisted of a run-on sentence without any appropriate commas and periods to separate the content.

If one considers the attempts at 'effective' characteristics in the ineffective letters and compares them with highly effective letters, the comparison reveals most of the highly effective letters either do not have any errors or the few errors that they include are minor and do not interfere with meaning. As a result, these minor errors did not influence the evaluators' judgments about rating the letters as highly effective. The writers of the ineffective letters had

the knowledge of how to write a letter, but their low level of English proficiency kept them from being perceived as effective letter writers, further discussed in the following section by analyzing the evaluators' comments.

4.2.3 Evaluators' comments on ineffective letters

According to the evaluators' comments and observation of the letters, the most common characteristic of the eight ineffective letters springs from language usage problems that apparently obscure meaning. The errors are here categorized based on classifications used by AbiSamra (2003) and Saville-Troike (2006).

Error category	Types of errors
Mechanical errors	Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
Grammatical errors	Prepositions, articles, reported speech, singular/plural, adjectives, relative clauses, irregular verbs, tenses, and possessive case
Lexical errors	Word choice
Syntactic errors	Coordination, sentence structure, noun and pronoun and word order

Table 5 : Types of errors

The mechanical errors are errors of form and convention which do not seriously interfere with the meaning, but make the letter less valid and appropriate. Grammatical errors are a lack or misuse of specific elements. Some of the errors are minor but others create confusion. Lexical errors hinder the clarity of the message because the word used has a different meaning than was intended. Syntactic errors, such as run on sentences also make the message less clear. Table 6 and the discussion following show how these errors are factors that contribute to the perceived ineffectiveness of the letters in this study.

The first column of Table 6 (page 36) displays the common characteristics of ineffective letters. The second column portrays examples from the letters and the last column shows the number of ineffective letters with those errors. Letters with mechanical errors were defined as those with more than five spelling, punctuation and capitalization mistakes. Similarly letters with grammatical errors were defined as those with more than five mistakes in the use of prepositions and articles. Letters with one or more word choice error or run-on sentence were defined as having lexical or syntactic errors, respectively. This quantity difference is because the opportunities for making mechanical and grammatical errors are greater than for making lexical and syntactic errors. It is also because lexical and syntactic errors have more impact and interfere more with meaning, especially in such a brief letter.

Characteristic	Example from Letters	N

Mechanical errors:
--spelling
--punctuation
 	
--capitalization
	"I want to know about these <u>ditails</u>:"
	"Dr.R<u>.</u>
	    Modem Languages
	    Department Head."
	"<u>i</u> am student in <u>lit</u>erature <u>fac</u>ulty English Department.."
		8/8

grammatical errors: --preposition errors --article errors	"I 'v gotten information about some scholarships <u>in</u> the Kansas University" "I need to get <u>the</u> high degree of knowledge."	8/8
Lexical errors: --word choice	"c:place of <u>sating</u>?"	7/8
Syntactic errors: --run on sentences	"When i was cheak internet i faced about scholership and i got so happy <u>so</u> exactly i would like to attend in Master scholership,"	7/8

Table 6 : Common characteristics of eight ineffective letters

The letters with mechanical errors were commented on by the evaluators with phrases such as: "Many spelling errors", "awful grammar/ spelling"; "A lot of misused punctuation/grammar", "grammar/ punctuation"; "He didn't capitalize and format properly." Examples 15, 16, and 17 as well as those displayed in the table display this type of errors.

15. I am looking <u>faraword</u> to hear from you."

16. "dear sir."

17. <u>my</u> name is <u>kairm sadiq</u>. <u>i</u> am a senior of <u>e</u>nglish <u>d</u>epartment of <u>b</u>alkh <u>u</u>niversity

In Example 15, which refers to a spelling error, the writer misspelled the word 'forward'. In Example, 16 the writer used a period rather than a 'comma' and in Example 17, the underlined words required capitalization but the writer did not capitalize any of the words. Mechanical errors create confusion for the reader while accurate language mechanics contribute to the comprehension on the side of the reader (DeVries, 1994).

The evaluators also insisted on the importance of grammatical accuracy as they said, "awful grammar", and "Doesn't seem impolite just bad grammar." The underlined parts of Examples 18 and 19 portray instances of common grammatical errors among all the ineffective letters.

18. "I <u>am st</u>udent in literature faculty English Department,

19. "I am a senior <u>of</u> english department balkh university

In Example 18 the word 'student' needs the indefinite article 'a' before it. Example 19 reveals that the writer misused the preposition 'of' rather than 'in' as well as the article 'the' before 'English'. Numerous grammatical errors were considered strikingly negative and seemed to have hindered the clarity of the message. Seglin and Coleman (2002) state that if writers follow grammar rules closely, their writings are consistent and understandable.

The use of appropriate word choice is significant in writing. However, most ineffective letters (*N*=7/8) included lexical errors, as pointed out by evaluators: "misuses some words", "Many words were misspelled or misused". The underlined part of Example 20 indicates the lexical error of using 'mastering' rather than 'studies'. Basye (1998) emphasizes the importance of accurate word choice to avoid miscommunication.

20. "…,so I want to continue my <u>mastering</u> there. …"

Seven of eight (*N*=7/8) ineffective letters included syntactic errors caused by lack of punctuation as indicated in Example 21. The letters were commented on by expressions such as: "run-on a sentence makes it hard to comprehend", "Did not add punctuation"

21. "I 'm Kairm A., student of Literature and Humanities, English Dep. Faculty in Balkh University <u>and I</u> 'v gotten information about some scholarships in the Kansas University <u>then</u> I would appreciate and thank if you give me with detailed information regarding the process of studying in M.A. degree above mentioned University."

It is observed in Example 21 that the whole body of the letter is a run-on sentence and it does not include any punctuation. According to Seglin and Coleman (2002), punctuation is very important in written discourse as it divides the groups of words and facilitates both expressing and interpreting meaning.

Seglin and Coleman (2002) note that clarity in letters is significant and state that the aim of a letter is that the addressees should understand the message of the letter. Even though some errors do not reduce the effectiveness of a letter, multiple errors and errors of more than one convention seem to have a cumulative effect. The discussed quality and quantity of errors in the eight ineffective letters lead to the ambiguity of the message and shows that unclear requests cannot be effective. Thus, observation of the letters' language use shows that the perceived highly effective and ineffective letters in this study are different.

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Table 7 below presents the overall politeness scores, which is discussed in the next section.

Letters	Overall politeness score	Category
52	2.46	High
31	1.94	
38	1.51	
30	1.51	
35	1.47	
34	1.28	
32	1.11	
54	0.69	
22	0.51	
50	0.45	Middle
44	0.32	
39	0.11	
53	0.02	
48	-0.01	
37	-0.06	
28	-0.07	
33	-0.19	
46	-0.24	
41	-0.31	
18	-0.38	
23	-0.59	Low
36	-0.88	
19	-1.00	
24	-1.01	
29	-1.22	
40	-1.88	
21	-3.03	
27	-3.68	

Table 7 : Overall politeness scores

4.3 Politeness of Letters

The evaluators also rated their perception of the politeness of the letters' authors, based on the following question: "Does this person seem polite to you?" The question was followed by a ten-point rating scale. Additional feedback on politeness was gathered by the question, "Which elements in the letter determined your ratings on question 5 (politeness)?" Each letter was again rated by six evaluators. The same process of score calculation was followed (as described in 4.1. Scoring the Letters) and then the letters were ranked for politeness. (See Table 7, page 48.)

In Table 7 the letters that fell in the high category of politeness is called highly polite letters and those fell in the lowest category of politeness is called impolite letters.

4.3.1 Politeness

The nine highly polite letters' common characteristics are displayed in Table 8: these characteristics are arranged based on the positive and negative politeness strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) and the evaluators' comments.

Characteristic	Example from Letters	N
Was conventionally indirect	"I would be very glad if you give me information with details about process of this program."	9/9
Noticed and attended to interactant	"I will be thankful if I could recieve more information about your scholarship."	9/9
Appropriate salutation	"To whom it may concern:"	9/9
Appropriate closing	"Sincerely,"	9/9

Table 8 : Common characteristics of nine highly- polite letters

The first column of Table 8 indicates the common characteristics in the nine highly polite letters; the second column includes examples from the letters and the last column shows the number of letters that included the characteristics. 'Be conventionally indirect' is a subcategory

of the first negative politeness strategy 'Be direct' acknowledged by Brown and Levinson (1987). In this strategy, the speaker experiences a conflict between being direct and maintaining the interactant's negative face. The tension is resolved by using the accepted indirect strategies, which are not ambiguous (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The requests in all of the highly polite letters were conventionally indirect as illustrated in Example 22.

22. "Would you mind please give me some information about the university?"

In Example 22, a question rather than an imperative or statement is used, as is the expression 'would you mind' and the politeness marker 'please': all of these make the request conventionally indirect and polite, and were specifically noted by evaluators. In the other highly-polite letters, formulaic expressions like "I would appreciate", "I would be thankful," "I would be grateful" were used to communicate requests in an indirect manner (cf. Suh,1999). In addition, literature in respect to the use of politeness strategies reveals that interrogative mood is more polite than declarations, and the most impolite sentence structure is imperative (Suh 1999, Tanaka and Kawade 1982, and Watts 2003).

The second common characteristic in nine highly polite letters was 'Notice and attend to interactant' a positive politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1987). According to this strategy, the speaker should note anything that the hearer expects him or her to note and approve it. In this case, the writers of all the highly polite letters noticed the value of the time and trouble of the interactant, as Example 23 reveals:

23. "so it would be yours kindness, if some major information and details would be send to me"

The writer expressed his gratitude with expressions such as: "it would be your kindness" as once again noticed explicitly by the evaluator: "'He seems to consider 'to your kindness' for

the info to be sent to him." Other expressions of the writer's gratitude were: "I would appreciate and thank", "I will be happy if…" and "I would be very glad…." Tanaka and Kawade (1982), in their study of native and non-native speakers of English, discovered that politeness in English increases as a speaker allows for freedom of thought and action by the addressee. This basically means that the level of politeness is increased by decreasing the level of imposition. Based on their findings, Tanaka and Kawade categorized politeness strategies including "I would appreciate" and "Would you" as some of the most polite strategies.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) compared the formulation of requests by native speakers of American English and Asian non-native speakers. In his study he discovered that in a request for feedback, the native speakers used embedded constructions and non-contracted 'I would' while non-native speakers used more direct, non- embedded structures. For example, native speakers used "I would appreciate any comments…" and "Any comments would be appreciated." However, non-native speakers used statements such as "I appreciate your comments." In the present study, (N=8/9) of the highly polite letters used the politeness marker of "would" in expressing their appreciation and their requests. This shows native-like proficiency in formulating a polite request.

The last two common characteristics of highly polite letters are the inclusion of an appropriate salutation and closing which were previously discussed from the perspective of effectiveness. Evaluators marked the opening and closing of the highly polite letters as one or two of the reasons for rating them high in politeness as communicated in the comments: "Very polite with detailed greeting and closing." and "Dear Sir' + 'sincerely yours' help a lot.". According to Waldvogel (2007), the greeting and closing of letters are from the category of politeness markers since they are oriented to the addressee's face. The writers can express

respect, distance and relationship via the opening and closing which usually cannot be expressed in the body of the letters (124). Lee (2004) in her naturalistic inquiry into request strategies in emails from Chinese students to their Chinese-speaking English teachers and monolingual English-speaking teachers discovered that the students were polite to both Chinese and English teachers. However, she discovered that more than 90% of the students used 'Dear + first name' with the Chinese-speaking English teachers. In this study two-thirds (N=6/9) of the highly polite letters included "Dear Sir," or "Dear Sir or Madam," appropriately formal salutations due to the distance between the interlocutors. All of the highly polite letters were closed with the polite expressions of 'Best regards', 'Regards' or 'Sincerely', once again all appropriate closings for a formal letter.

In conclusion, three sets of evidence support the high ratings that the highly polite letters received: the politeness strategies discovered by research, the comments of the evaluators, and the analyst's observation of the letters. In order to contrast the difference between highly polite and impolite letters, the same types of characteristics are observed in the eight impolite letters.

4.3.2 Impolite letters

Using the evaluators' comments, and the politeness strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) Table 9 was organized to examine the same polite characteristics in the eight impolite letters.

Characteristics	N
Was conventionally indirect	2/8
Noticed and attended to interactant	1/8
Appropriate salutation	5/8
Appropriate closing	5/8

Table 9 : Common characteristics of eight impolite letters

In order to compare closely, the first column of Table 9 shows the common characteristics discussed in the nine highly polite letters while the second column indicates the number of impolite letters that exhibited a particular characteristic. Only two of eight impolite letters were conventionally indirect. That is, six of the eight writers of the impolite letters used direct strategies for requesting information, as shown in Example 24.

24. "I want to have information about the available scholarship."

Example 24 represents the most common request strategy used in the impolite letters. In these six letters, the writers formulated their requests with a 'want statement', a direct strategy. In addition, these six letters were writer oriented. Jenkins and Hinds (1987) in their cross-cultural study of business letters discovered that American business letters are reader-oriented: that is, the writers use the pronoun 'you' rather than 'I'. However, French and Japanese business letters are writer-oriented. Being writer oriented and using the 'want statements' are two of the features that may have influenced the ratings of impolite letters.

In only one of the impolite letters did the writer notice and attend to the interactant's positive face. That is, just one writer appreciated the time and trouble of the recipient of the message. However, most of the impolite letters ($N=7/8$) did not express appreciation as in Example 25 where this statement appears as the final sentence of the letter, followed by the closing 'recently' and the author's name and surname.

25. "I am waiting you unexpectedly."

Other expressions, such as "I am waiting to you." with no expressed 'thank you', appeared in these six impolite letters. This resulted in the evaluators expressing comments such as: "Is very direct, doesn't really take the time to thank the person he is writing to for getting him the information" or "Didn't seem thankful".

The salutation and closing of the letters do not show any striking difference between highly polite and impolite letters as the majority of impolite letters (*N*=5/8) included an appropriate salutation and closing. However, Examples 26 and 27 indicate inappropriate salutations and closings that some of the impolite letters employed:

26. "To: Dr. C., head of modern languages department"

27. "Recently: Karim Ahmad Sadiq"

Lack of appreciation, being writer oriented and lack of elements to soften the request made the writers of the eight impolite letters appear demanding, inconsiderate and impolite as evidenced by the evaluators' comments: "Demanding, not considerate" and "far too demanding". Thus, most of the writers of impolite letters did not consider the interactant's positive and negative 'face'. In the following section, the strategies that might have helped the eight impolite letters be more polite are discussed.

4.3.3 Possible ways to increase the level of politeness

In this section, possible strategies that could have changed the perception of impoliteness are discussed. To contribute to the perception of politeness, one or more of the following lexical or syntactic devices suggested by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) might have softened the requests of the impolite letters (See Table 10 page 55). For instance, if the syntactic modifiers are added to Example 24, "I want to have information about the available scholarship." the tone of the sentence is changed contributing to the perception of politeness. (e.g., 'I would like to have some information about the scholarship please.' or 'I wanted to have some information about the scholarship.')

Lexical and syntactic devices used to express politeness	
Syntactic Modifier	past tense
Lexical modifier	politeness marker e.g., 'please' downtowner e.g., 'possibly' understater e.g., ' just' commiter e.g.,'I think' consultative devices e.g., is there a chance hedges e.g., some, somehow

Table 10 : Lexical and syntactic devices

In addition, most of the writers of impolite letters needed to appreciate the time and trouble of the interactant so that they attended to and noticed the interactant in the body or in the closing of the letter. The writers did not attempt to save the interactant's positive or negative face, they just considered their own wants. According to the evaluators' comments, literature, and observation of the letters themselves, the impolite letters lacked linguistic devices that contribute to the politeness of a letter. In other words, the writers lacked pragmatic knowledge of how to formulate a polite request. After comparing the salutation and closing of highly polite and impolite letters, one can conclude that salutations and closings make the tone of a letter more considerate. However, salutations and closings do not cause the entire letter to be perceived as polite if the body of the letter is not polite.

4.3.4 Politeness and effectiveness
Of the nine highly polite letters, six were also perceived as highly effective. In order to compare the letters clearly, Table 11 displays the score for politeness (Row 1) and effectiveness (Row 2) for these letters. This suggests a relationship between effective communication and politeness (one of the hypotheses of this study).

Score	Letter 52	Letter 31	Letter 38	Letter 30	Letter 34	Letter 32
Politeness	2.46	1.94	1.51	1.51	1.28	1.11
Effectiveness	1.39	2.10	1.43	0.58	0.70	1.02

Table 11 : Highly polite and highly effective letters

Likewise, of the eight impolite letters, three were perceived as ineffective by the evaluators as shown in Table 12.

Score	Letter 24	Letter 29	Letter 27
Impoliteness	-1.01	-1.22	-3.68
Ineffectiveness	-0.85	-2.47	-1.18

Table 12 : Impolite and ineffective letters

These findings are similar to those of Tanaka and Kawade (1982) as Tanaka and Kawade found that native speakers and advanced EFL learners were aware of varying degrees of politeness. They concluded that there is a connection between advanced learners and native speakers, since when the learning process progresses, the learners gain both pragmatic and linguistic competence. This study also suggests a connection between these two features.

4.3.5 Impolite and highly effective letters

Two of the perceived highly effective letters were also considered impolite by the evaluators. These letters' scores are displayed in Table 13.

Score	Letter 19	Letter 21
Impoliteness	-1.00	-3.03
Effectiveness	1.65	0.64

Table 13 : Impolite and highly effective letters

These two letters have below average scores in politeness while their effectiveness scores are above average. An observation of the letters reveals that both of the letters include the perceived common characteristics of a highly effective letter such as an appropriate salutation, a statement of purpose, a request for information, an appropriate closing, and directness. However, both of the letters lacked all the politeness devices (e.g., politeness markers, downtoners, understaters, committers, consultative devices, and hedges) that soften such requests and this "fault" was noted by the evaluators in this study. In spite of their effectiveness, the lack of these politeness devices makes them too direct and shows that the requestee did not notice and attend to the interactant's positive face.

The evaluators' comments also reveal that the letters were effective, as they were direct and clear, but not polite. "It was completely to the point" and "It is nicely organized" are clearly distinguishable as comments about content while "Clear lack of 'thanks'" and "Kind of just demands the information without any thanks or concern to whom he is sending it to" are comments on the letters' impoliteness.

Thus, the evaluators' comments show that the letters could communicate the idea of requesting information effectively; however, the evaluators are just as aware that the writers did not consider the interactant's positive and negative face. These findings reveal that although effectiveness and politeness are two related skills, they are not one single skill. Writers may have both; however, there are writers who have but one of these two skills. If politeness and effectiveness in communicating an idea are two related, but separate, features of a language, then they should both be explicitly taught. Teaching of pragmatics in the SL classroom is also suggested by Suh (1999) and Lee (2004), who acknowledge the influence of an academic setting

in facilitating the learning of how to formulate a polite request in an effective communication. Pedagogical applications are discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter (Chapter six).

4.4 Summary

In this chapter the method of data analysis and results were discussed. Common characteristics of highly effective and ineffective letters were grouped based on the evaluators' comments and were illustrated. Similarly, taking into consideration the comments of the evaluators, the common characteristics of highly polite and impolite letters were discussed. Then the comparisons of highly polite and highly effective, impolite and ineffective, and highly effective letters led to the findings that effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are related as ($N=6/9$) of the highly effective letters were perceived also as highly polite and ($N=3/8$) of the impolite letters were also perceived as ineffective. It was also discovered that although effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are two correlated features of a language, they are not one single skill as ($N=2/8$) of impolite letters were perceived as highly effective. Chapter Five critiques the methodology used in this study and thereby suggests some possible changes to consider and improve future research.

CHAPTER 5 - Critique of the Methodology

5.0 Introduction

This chapter critiques the methodology used in the present study. Chapter Three described the methodology used to obtain the results reported in this study. Here, certain aspects of the methodology are critiqued, in particular the method of collecting the letters inquiry to the survey question intended to examine the feature of directness in the letters of inquiry and the problems incurred with the letters of complaints. It further suggests changes to the methodology that might have more clearly established the relationship between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness.

5.1 Letters of inquiry

There is no way to ensure that these data reflect cross-cultural influences in the formulation of requests because no data is available on how requests are formed in Dari although there is data available for English. In the future one could do research on request in Dari and compare that analysis with the findings on English. By comparing the Dari request, the English request, and the EFL learners' request in English, first language influences on the formulation of requests in English could be identified.

As discussed earlier, the infrastructure at Balkh University was not ideal for the purpose of this experiment. The students were given a limited amount of time (30 minutes each) to write letters of inquiry and complaint due to institutional constraints. There was no computer lab available for the students inside the university to do the tasks. The Afghan participants left the university to do the experiment during a class period. In Afghanistan there are three consecutive class periods in each school day. That is, one class follows the other, and there is a break of 10

minutes between periods. The participants had permission to leave for the experiment during one period of 50 minutes. Adding the breaks, they had a total of 70 minutes. This does not reflect the typical time frame employed for writing such a letter as one would write numerous drafts and refine the language in a letter of inquiry for international study. The letters received as data in this study are the initial attempt of the writers at such a task. It would be interesting in future research to measure how the letters changed if students were permitted the time to carefully craft multiple draft.

5.2 Letters of complaint

This research originated as a study of language and culture to evaluate and compare the production of politeness strategies by Afghan EFL learners in letters of inquiry as a "positive" exercise, and letters of complaint as a more "negative" task. Both the letters of inquiry and of complaint were to have been given to evaluators to be rated in order to evaluate the hypothesis that the inquiry tasks would be perceived as more polite than the complaint tasks. Both the inquiry and complaint letters were sent by the Afghan participants. However, the letters of complaint were not evaluated or analyzed; the reasons are discussed below:

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that a complaint is an intrinsically face threatening act that threatens the addressee's positive and negative face wants, as a complaint shows that the requester does not concern himself or herself with the addressee's feelings and desires. In a complaint, the speaker does not agree with one or more acts of the addressee. The complaint letters reveal that the students understood the concept of making a complaint, yet the task was unsuccessful.

The students' low level of proficiency was the first cause for the unsatisfactory data collected from the letters of complaint. The letters of inquiry were much more successful than the complaints because inquiry is a simpler task compared to making complaints. According to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, intermediate learners are able to express their ideas without using memorized information and are creative in their production. Their discourse is constructed of simple sentences with some variations. They are able to ask questions and respond to them. They have a minimal level of sociolinguistic competence which enables them to interact with routine situations such as greetings (Omaggio, 1999). However, the level of proficiency of advanced learners is much higher. For example, they are capable of producing paragraphs which are constructed with complex sentences. When advanced learners encounter a "survival situation" which is complicated, for example, "an unsatisfactory hotel room" they are able to communicate their thoughts to resolve the problem. Furthermore, the sociolinguistic competence level of advanced learners is higher compared to that of intermediate learners and their productions reveal that the advanced L2 learners are sensitive to register and aptness of certain expressions in particular contexts (Omaggio, 1999).

The description of the ACTFL Proficiency Guideline for intermediate and advanced levels shows that the Afghan EFL learners' proficiency level was appropriate for writing letters of inquiry; however, the students' proficiency level was lower than that needed to construct letters of complaint. The following letter exemplifies an unsuccessful complaint letter due to the low level proficiency of the writer.

28. To Dr C. head of that modern languages Department
    Excuse me Sir i want to know why you did not reply my email? this is about
    two months that i sent you an email and uyou dint reply me

Mechanical errors, lack of capitalization and punctuation and grammatical errors are apparent in the letter. In addition, the low level of pragmatic knowledge is evident, as the letter does not include either a proper salutation or a closing. Furthermore, it lacks politeness strategies such as being conventionally indirect or noticing and attending to the interactant's positive face.

Brown and Levinson (1987), state that a complaint threatens the positive face of an interactant. Expressing a complaint indicates that the speaker probably does not care about the interactant's face wants, as the speaker has a dissatisfied evaluation from the interactant's positive face. Thus, the above discussions reveal that making a complaint is surrounded with a complicated context which includes the need to convey a message politely, because the speaker should be polite although he/she does not save the interactant's face. Due to this sophisticated situation the speaker needs a higher level of pragmatic knowledge and general proficiency to perform the complaint task. Although both inquiry and complaint tasks were fulfilled in an imaginary situation, the difficulty of the complaint task along with the imaginary situation contributed to some careless replies that were not well considered. Evidence would suggest that the students did not take this task seriously:

29. Dare Dr.C.!
As you know better I have sent on email two months ago.
Can you say the reason that why you didnt reply it?
I wast my time and wrote you on email. I hoped to get some infarmation about.
Why you dont have any care about it? You are looking so reekless becareful!

If one were to conduct another study involving complaints by students at Balkh University, one should consider the following points:

1. A proficiency test should precede selection of students for such a study so that the participants' level of proficiency meets the requirements of the task.

2. An authentic context should be used so that students have a high motivation for writing appropriate letters and the letters should be addressed to one of the authorities of Balkh University.

5.3 Indirectness

In the evaluation of the letters of inquiry, the fourth item on the evaluators' questionnaire was the perceived directness of the Afghan participant's language. This question was not used in the analysis because the evaluators appeared to be confused as the question did not define directness (e.g., what the evaluators were measuring with directness). They understood it in a different way than it was intended. The purpose of the question was to observe indirectness as a politeness strategy, but only some of the evaluators' comments showed that they considered indirectness as a politeness strategy, while many of the evaluators' comments showed that they considered directness and indirectness as an issue of accuracy and effectiveness in communicating. The question was phrased as shown in Example 30.

30. What is your perception of the language used in this letter?

Very direct   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Very indirect

The following examples, 31-35 are some of the evaluators' comments in response to this question, which show they were evaluating language mechanics:

31. Awful grammar

32. The letter was a little hard to understand due to the sentence structure

33. Many spelling errors

34. Some incorrect spelling

35. The grammar just threw me off a bit, confusing me.

The question referred to a linguistic definition of language's directness, but the evaluators were not students of language or linguistics. The question should have been stated more specifically and clearly. For example, the question could be changed as shown in Example 36.

36. (Very direct = to the point, blunt   Very indirect = vague, flowery)

Very direct   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Very indirect

5.4 Summary

In conclusion, the extent of the study and data was limited due to the above mentioned shortcomings. First of all, a review of ACTFL proficiency levels Omaggio (1999) reveals that writing letters of complaint requires an advanced proficiency level, while writing letters of inquiry is possible for an intermediate learner. In addition, limitation in the infrastructure and other institutional constrains contributed to artificial time limitations while the imaginary scenario made it difficult for the participants to behave as they would in a real life situation. Golato (2003) states that if a researcher wants to study language use, he or she should analyze naturally occurring data. Secondly, in the question used to evaluate the directness of a letter as a means of politeness, the concept of directness should have been defined for the evaluators. They did not respond appropriately to that question and the data they produced were not analyzed in this study. However, it is still believed that these findings serve as a preliminary step towards defining how learners' behaviors in formulating written requests are perceived by native speakers, and that these findings have pedagogical implications (to be discussed in Chapter 6).

Chapter Six also reviews the findings of this study and recommends possible future research.

CHAPTER 6 - Conclusion

6.0 Findings

Intercultural communication may be problematic in both spoken and written forms. However, informal, face-to-face oral communication may be less complicated than written because clarification and negotiation is possible due to the influence of factors such as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice and context or setting. Written communication is made more complex due to the absence of these factors. This is especially important when the writer and reader are not only from different cultures and speak different languages, but also have never met each other. For example, in formulating a request, the interactants of different cultures who have never met each other have different distance and power, and the request is usually formulated in a conventionally indirect manner as a negative politeness strategy which is a signal of politeness (Felix-Brasdefer, 2005 and Salmani Nodoushan, 2008). Thereby, the requester protects negative face of the requestee (Brown and Levinson 1987).

This study investigated the relationship between politeness and effectiveness in communicating ideas by analyzing if Afghan EFL learners were perceived as polite when making written requests of an English native speaker. The data examined in this study were few in number, consisting of 28 letters of inquiry written by 28 Afghan EFL students and evaluated by 13 American English native speakers. Each letter was evaluated by six American evaluators. Thus, while informative, the findings suggested by this study would need to be corroborated through a larger-scale study.

A close comparison of ratings of effectiveness and politeness revealed that a strong relationship between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness exists. It also revealed that even though politeness and effectiveness in communicating ideas are related, they are two

different skills. The finding of this study is similar to results found by Tanaka and Kawade (1982) as they found a high correlation between politeness and level of proficiency.

6.1 Implications for Pedagogy

The focus of this study was to describe the relationship between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness. The findings, though small in scale, have highlighted important features of politeness and effectiveness in letters of request. They reveal that effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are two related skills of a language. That is, as learning progresses, L2 learners acquire pragmatic and linguistic knowledge. The findings of this study also reveal that although effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are related, they are not one single skill. Some learners have both, but others do not. That is, there are learners who are capable of communicating their ideas effectively; however, they lack pragmatic knowledge. This gap highlights the significance of explicit instruction in increasing the pragmatic ability of the students. Bardovi-Harlig (2003) states that teaching pragmatics by increasing the pragmatic knowledge of the learners enables them to use and interpret socially appropriate language in a particular situation. Other work that emphasizes the role of instruction in promoting pragmatic competence are the studies of request sequences by Taleghani-Nikazm (2005); raising the pragmatic awareness of the language learners by Eslami-Rasekh, (2005); politeness awareness, by Watts (2003), and pragmatic awareness development in the second language by Kaspar and Rose (2002).

Specific pragmatic strategies for writing polite requests are indicated from the data collected in this study. From this study, I learned that while writing a letter to American interlocutors the writers should prefer the reader-oriented style as it is perceived as more effective and polite. The salutation and closing of a letter are important because they convey the

writers' emotions, formality and politeness. Being conventionally indirect is an acceptable strategy for making the request more polite and thereby effective. 'Thank you' and other appreciation expressions are of importance in a polite and effective letter to show that the writer is attending to the time and trouble of the recipient of the message. Knowledge of these skills and strategies can be used to teach the subtle points that should be considered while communicating interculturally (e.g., for formulating a request, they should first consider the interactant's wants and then their own desires). This knowledge will support my goal of helping learners become communicatively competent as I try to reinforce both their linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. This in turn will help them to develop a higher level of confidence in their communication abilities.

Afghan EFL students will benefit from attention to these strategies in instruction. They should also be aware of cultural and linguistic differences that might influence their communication efforts.

6.2 Avenues for Future Research

Although it was not formally discussed, anecdotal evidence shows some first language cultural influence in introductions, and closings of the letters. For example, while introducing themselves some of the students mentioned their fathers' names (e.g., "I am Maryam sadiq daughter of Naim Sadiq, student in Balkh University English Department"). This manner of introduction is an influence from Afghan culture because in Afghanistan it is common to mention one's father's name in an introduction.

Another first language influence observed in the letters was closing the letters with expressions such as: "I am waiting unexpectedly" or "I am waiting for your reply." In Afghan culture when a student inquires for information about a scholarship, or other information, such

expressions reveal the student's enthusiasm. It is to be pointed out that these expressions are polite in Dari but they are not formal. For example, in a formal context where interactants have social and psychological distance, if a learner closes the letter with such an expression, it would not be appropriate. In American culture, the use of such expressions is not positive as the evaluators perceived such letters as demanding, rude and inconsiderate. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), uses of such expressions are interpreted by the addressee as a lack of consideration for the addressee's negative face. Thus, such expressions are considered informal yet polite in Dari but impolite and inconsiderate in English.

Taleghani-Nikazm (1999) states "…to communicate effectively in a foreign language students need to be aware of significant differences between their own culture patterns and those common in the foreign language" (p.215). In future research, I plan to study the formulation of requests by Afghan EFL learners in Dari in order to observe how a request is formulated in Dari by Afghan EFL learners. A research project will be designed so that the same students will write requests for information in letters of inquiry for their Dari teacher in Dari and for one of their English teachers in English. This project will highlight their shortcomings in use of pragmatic strategies and how they might be related to native-language strategies, low proficiency, or lack of pragmatic knowledge. According to Taleghani Nikazm (2006), authentic data is of importance for studying pragmatic actions (cf. Bradovi-harling and Hartford 2005, and Golato 2003, Bardovi-Harling and Hartford 1997, Blum-Kulka et al 1989). . In this future project in order to make the data more authentic, two field trips will be arranged for the students to apply for. The students will be asked to inquire for information about the field trips both in Dari and English.

Closely researching the gaps in pragmatic use of Afghan EFL learners will offer motivation and support for incorporating teaching strategies that are effective in developing

pragmatic skills. Pragmatic learning is culturally dependent and should be studied explicitly with the target cultures and languages.

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Appendix A - Afghan Task 1

Task # 1   Participant #..................

Inquiry Email:

Imagine that you are interested in pursuing a Master's degree in English at Kansas State University. You read on the university's webpage that scholarships are available for international students if they meet certain criteria.   Write a professional letter to the Modern Languages Department head, Dr. R. C., requesting information on the Teaching English as a Foreign Language M.A. Program and any available scholarships.

You might include the following information: Who you are, your concerns and questions about courses, length of study, instructors, scholarships, housing, and the deadline for applications.

Email the letter to: C.@ksu.edu

Thank you for your cooperation and participation!

Appendix B - Afghan Task 2

Task # 2   Participant #..................

Complaint Email:

You previously sent a letter to the head of the Modern Languages Department to inquire about pursuing a Master's degree at Kansas State and the availability of scholarships. However, you have not received any response in two months. Write a second letter requesting a response to your previous letter, as well as your need to receive this information quickly so that you can make a decision about applying to the university.

Email the letter to: C.@ksu.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation and participation!

Appendix C - Afghan Language Back Questionnaire

Participant # ……………………

1. Age**:**   a.18 – 25   b. 26 – 45   c .46 -55

2. Sex**:**   a. Male   b. Female

3. University level: a. sophomore   b. Senior

4. For how long have you studied English including the courses you are taking at Balkh University?

      a. 1-2 years   b. 3-4 years   c. 5-6 years   d. More than 6 years

5. How many English writing courses have you taken?

    a.   1   b. 2   c. 3   d. 4.   e. More than 4

6. How long have you used or heard English as a means of communication?

    a.   more than 1 year, but less than 2 years

    b.   more than 2 years, but less than 3 years

    c.   more than 3 years, but less than 5 years

    d.   5 years or more

7. How long have you been using email communication?

    a.   Less than one year

    b.   1-2 years

    c.   For more than 2 years

8. Have you ever formally studied letter writing?

    a.   Yes   b. No

9. How well do you think you write in English?

    a. Very well

    b. Well

    c. Average

    d. Not very well

    e. Poorly

10. How important is it to be polite to people that you do not know?

    a. Very important

    b. somewhat important

    c. A little important

    d. Not important

11. Compared to others, do you consider yourself to be (choose one):

    a. Less polite

    b. Equally polite

    c. More polite

Appendix D - Afghan Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Foreign Language Use and Production

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:You are invited to participate in a project that looks at how people learn English as a foreign language. My name is **Abdul Haq Haqiq,** the Head of the English Department at Balkh University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are currently learning English as a second language.

If you decide to participate in this study, I will give you instructions for two tasks: one for writing a letter of inquiry and the other for a letter of complaint. I will also ask you to complete a brief questionnaire providing information about yourself and your background studying English. Completing these three tasks will take about two hours if you decide to participate in this study.

Any **risks** (i.e. physical, psychological, social, or legal) involved in this study are minimal and are comparable to risks in everyday life.

There is **no cost** to you for participating **nor** will you receive **any payment** for your participation in this study. However, this project hopes to provide you with an indirect benefit by contributing to knowledge of how people learn English.

Please note that **any information obtained by this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission**. More specifically, all written as well as computer files will be coded so that no personally identifying information is on the label or the file name. Any analysis of the written documents will use code names and numbers. No personally identifying information will be included in the analysis of your answers, thus your anonymity will be ensured. All materials will be kept in a secure place such as a locked file cabinet; all data files will be stored on a computer that requires password access. All of your written answers in this research project

and any photocopies will be used <u>for research and data analysis purposes only</u>. The data files will not be

released to anyone, including other researchers, without your written permission (you can give your

consent to this below).

Following analysis, **the answers will be kept in a secure place for possible further research purposes or destroyed if no longer needed for research**. In the future, very brief excerpts of the answers and analysis might be used for research publications if you give your consent to this below. All data used for these purposes will be coded to ensure the protection of your identity.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with me or Kansas

State University. **You are under no obligation to participate in this study.** You are free to (a)

discontinue participation in the study at any time, (b) request that already written answers be destroyed

and thus excluded from the study.

<u>Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described. You understand that this project is for research. You also understand that you are free to withdraw your consent at any time and stop participating at any time after signing this form without explanation and without consequences (without penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which you may otherwise be entitled).</u>
If you have any **questions about this study** now, please ask me. If you need additional

information later, please do not hesitate to contact **Sona Quraishi** or **Mary T. Copple,** her thesis advisor

.You can reach Sona Quraishi at 785 304 3309, e-mail: homaira@ksu,edu, and Dr. Copple at: 785-532-

1924, E-mail: <u>mcopple@ksu.edu</u>. Should you have any **questions regarding your rights as a research**

subject, you can contact: Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203

Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224 *or* Jerry Jaax, Associate

Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State

University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

You may keep a copy of this same form.

_____
Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator/Outside Collaborator   Date

Please answer the following questions by checking a response and by signing your initials:

I grant the investigator permission to **share with students (researchers in training)** in the field excerpts of the data in the classroom.

        [   ] yes   [   ] no   _____

                                           Initials

I grant the investigator permission to **share with other researchers** in the field excerpts of the transcribed data.

        [   ] yes   [   ] no   _____

                                           Initials

I grant the investigators permission to use the written excerpts at professional meetings and in professional publications. Any name or place references will be changed.

        [   ] yes   [   ] no   _____

Appendix E - Afghan Debriefing

Debriefing (Afghan)

Dear Participant:

Thank you very much for your participation in this study. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from this research project. Even after the study is completed, you can request that your letters not be used.

When signing the consent form, you were informed that this study focuses on English as a foreign or second language. The research focus was given in very broad terms so that knowledge about the specific details of what we are investigating would not influence your behavior in the answers. The **precise nature of the study** is to analyze EFL students' use of polite language in letters of inquiry and complaint.

If you have further questions at this time, you may ask me now. Thank you once again for your help in completing this project.

Appendix F - American Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:

You are invited to participate in a project that looks at how effective people are in making requests. My name is **Sona Quraishi/** A graduate student in Modern Languages Department Kansas State University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a native speaker of English and a student at Kansas State University.

If you decide to participate in this study, There will be an open discussion about woman, work and their life challenges. This will take about 2 hours if you decide to participate in this study.

Any **risks** (i.e. physical, psychological, social, or legal) involved in this study are minimal and are comparable to risks in everyday life.

There is **no cost** to you for participating **nor** will you receive **any payment** for your participation in this study. However, this project hopes to provide you with an indirect benefit by contributing to knowledge of how people manipulate language to express politeness.

Please note that **any information obtained by this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission**. More specifically, all written as well as computer files will be coded so that no personally identifying information is on the label or the file name. Any analysis of the written documents will use code names and numbers. No personally identifying information will be included in the analysis of your answers, thus your anonymity will be ensured. All materials will be kept in a secure place such as a locked file cabinet; all data files will be stored on a computer that requires password access. All of your written answers in this research project and any photocopies will be used <u>for research and data analysis purposes only</u>. The data files will not be released to anyone, including other researchers, without your written permission (you can give your consent to this below).

Following analysis, **the answers will be kept in a secure place for possible further research purposes or destroyed if no longer needed for research**. In the future, very brief excerpts of the answers and analysis might be used for research publications if you give your consent to this below. All data used for these purposes will be coded to ensure the protection of your identity.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with me or Kansas State

University. **You are under no obligation to participate in this study.** You are free to (a) discontinue

participation in the study at any time, (b) request that already written answers be destroyed and thus excluded from

the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described. You understand that this project is for research. You also understand that you are free to withdraw your consent at any time and stop participating at any time after signing this form without explanation and without consequences (without penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which you may otherwise be entitled).

If you have any **questions about this study** now, please ask me. If you need additional information later,

please do not hesitate to contact **Sona Quraishi** or **Mary T. Copple,** her thesis advisor .You can reach Sona

Quraishi at 785 304 3309, e-mail: homaira@ksu,edu, and Dr. Copple at: 785-532-1924, E-mail: mcopple@ksu.edu.

Should you have any **questions regarding your rights as a research subject**, you can contact: Rick Scheidt, Chair,

Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS

66506, (785) 532-3224 *or* Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian,

203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

You may keep a copy of this same form.

_____
Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator/Outside Collaborator   Date

Please answer the following questions by checking a response and by signing your initials:

I grant the investigator permission to **share with students (researchers in training)** in the field excerpts of the data in the classroom.
    [ ] yes   [ ] no   _____
                                    Initials
I grant the investigator permission to **share with other researchers** in the field excerpts of the transcribed data.
    [ ] yes   [ ] no   _____

                                    Initials

I grant the investigators permission to use the written excerpts at professional meetings and in professional publications. Any name or place references will be changed.

[   ] yes   [ ] no   _____

Appendix G - American Language Background Questionnaire

Language Background Questionnaire (K-State)

Participant # …………………………

2. **Age :** a.18 – 25   b. 26 - 45   c .46 -55   d. 56 or older

3. **Sex:**   a. Male   b. Female

4. **Status:** a. Freshman   b. Sophomore   c. Junior   d. Senior   e. other

5. In which department do you study?   _____

6. How many languages do you speak or read fluently?

   b. 1   b. 2   c. 3   d. more than 3

7. Which of the following languages have you studied?(Circle all that apply)

   a. English   b. Spanish   c. French   d. German   e. other_____

8. Have you ever lived outside the USA?

   a. Yes   b. No

   If yes how long?

   a. 8 weeks or less   b. 2 months to a year   c. 1 to 3 years   d. other

   If yes which country/countries? _____

Appendix H - American Task Instruction

Task Instructions

Dear Participant,
You have been invited to participate in a research study analyzing letters of inquiry and complaint. In order to do this, you will be given two multiple- choice questionnaires. One asks information about you and your language background, and the other will be used to survey the letters. You will receive 15- 20 letters to survey. There will be one survey questionnaire for each letter. Completing the surveys will take you about two hours. This research will be part of a Master's thesis.

If you have any further questions at this point, please don't hesitate to ask. You may also contact me (homaira@ksu.edu or 785-304-3309) afterwards.

Thank you for your participation and cooperation!

Appendix I - American Survey Questionnaire

K-State Participant Code _____

Letter of Participant #_____

PART A:

Using the following scale as a guide, please rate the components of the letter.

```
1---------------------------5---------------------------10
Very poor              Acceptable            Excellent
```

1. Effectiveness in communicating purpose or meaning (that is, can you understand what the person want to accomplish with this letter?)

    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Appropriate salutation (greeting)

    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Appropriate closing

    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Using the scale indicated for each question, rate the following additional aspects of the letter.

4. What is your perception of the language used in this letter?

    Very direct   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Very indirect

5. Does this person seem polite to you?

    Least polite   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Most polite

PART B:

Additional comments/observations:

1. Which elements in the letter determined your rating on question 4?

2. Which elements in the letter determined your rating on question 5?

Appendix J - American Debriefing

Debriefing (K-State)

Dear Participant:

Thank you very much for your participation in this study. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from this research project even after the study is completed. You can request that your surveys not be used.

When signing the consent form, you were informed that this study focuses on English as a foreign or second language. The research focus was given in very broad terms so that knowledge about the specific details of what we are investigating would not influence your behavior in the answers. The **precise nature of the study** is to analyze EFL students' use of polite language in letters of inquiry and how successful they are at conveying politeness from a native speaker's perspective.

If you have further questions at this time, you may ask me now. Thank you once again for your help in completing this project.