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Politeness Strategies in Intercultural Communication: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT: This mixed-methods cross-cultural pragmatics study investigates how politeness strategies are produced, interpreted, and negotiated in sampled English-medium intercultural contexts. Grounded in speech act theory, politeness theory, the politeness principle, rapport management, intercultural pragmatics, and sociolinguistic approaches, the study examines how multilingual speakers manage requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, disagreement, address forms, mitigation, repair, and face-sensitive interaction. The study collected data from 168 participants across four broad analytical cohorts through discourse-completion tasks, role-play interactions, a politeness perception questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The research integrated ethical approval, informed consent, anonymization, and a documented data-audit procedure, and triangulated the quantitative and qualitative strands through a mixed-methods matrix. Quantitative analysis examined strategy frequency, speech-act distribution, contextual variation, group tendencies, and perceived politeness ratings; qualitative pragmatic analysis interpreted participant reasoning, communicative intentions, role-play choices, and metapragmatic explanations. The results indicate that politeness was not reducible to indirectness. Conventional indirectness dominated requests, mitigation was frequent in refusals, apologies commonly combined responsibility with explanation and repair, and compliments showed variable patterns of acceptance, deflection, and reciprocity. Perception ratings suggested that low-imposition peer contexts evaluated directness positively, while high-status and high-imposition contexts did not. Interview evidence showed that misunderstanding often emerged when participants evaluated clarity, respect, sincerity, and relational caution through different pragmatic expectations. The study contributes a Context-Sensitive Intercultural Politeness Model and argues for explicit pragmatic competence training in language education, business communication, and translation practice.

Keywords: politeness strategies; intercultural communication; pragmatics; speech acts; pragmatic competence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication is now a routine condition of academic, professional, digital, diplomatic, and migratory life. University students collaborate with peers from different linguistic backgrounds, employees negotiate with international colleagues, translators mediate meanings across languages, and service providers interact with clients whose expectations of respect, directness, and social distance may differ from their own. In such encounters, communication succeeds not only when speakers produce grammatically acceptable utterances, but also when they manage interpersonal meaning in ways that others can recognize as appropriate. Pragmatics is therefore central to intercultural communication because it examines how language performs actions, how intentions are inferred, and how meaning depends on social context. Speech act theory established that utterances do not simply describe reality; they perform actions

such as requesting, apologizing, refusing, thanking, promising, disagreeing, and complimenting [1], [2]. In intercultural settings, these actions become especially delicate because the same form may carry different relational meanings across communities.

Politeness remains one of the most visible and easily misunderstood dimensions of pragmatic competence. Brown and Levinson's account of face-threatening acts remains foundational because it explains why speakers often soften requests, avoid open disagreement, provide reasons, or choose indirect strategies when an utterance may threaten the hearer's freedom of action or desire for approval [3]. Leech's politeness principle further emphasizes that communicative tact, generosity, agreement, modesty, and sympathy help regulate interpersonal relations [4]. These perspectives show that politeness is not a decorative feature of language; it is part of how speakers manage social relations. However, subsequent work has shown that politeness cannot be treated as a universal formula. Cultural expectations, interactional history, social role, relational distance, and local norms of appropriateness shape the meaning of a polite expression.

Intercultural politeness research has therefore moved from searching for universal rules toward examining how speakers negotiate rapport and identity across cultural boundaries. Spencer-Oatey's rapport management approach is particularly relevant because it explains politeness through face, sociality rights, interactional goals, and relational expectations [5]. Kádár and Haugh argue that politeness is a social evaluation rather than a fixed property of particular expressions [6]. A speaker may intend an utterance as polite, but the recipient may evaluate it as distant, unclear, excessive, intrusive, or insincere. Kecskes's work on intercultural pragmatics also stresses that meaning emerges from the interaction between prior cultural knowledge, current context, and emergent common ground [7]. This perspective matters because intercultural communication requires speakers to interpret not only what is said, but why it is said that way.

Recent work in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics emphasizes that culture alone cannot explain communicative behavior. Cultural norms matter, but they interact with individual agency, multilingual experience, institutional setting, language proficiency, professional role, and the immediate goals of the encounter [8], [9]. A speaker may deliberately choose a more direct form to avoid ambiguity in a professional setting, or a more indirect form to protect relational harmony in a high-imposition request. Similarly, language learners may use formulas that are pragmatically conventional in a textbook but unsuitable in a particular intercultural encounter. Applied pragmatics research therefore increasingly focuses on pragmatic awareness, reflection, and adaptive competence rather than the imitation of a single native-speaker norm [10], [11]. This is especially relevant for English-medium intercultural communication, where speakers may share English without sharing the same pragmatic background.

This study addresses this issue through a mixed-methods, cross-cultural pragmatic design. It examines how multilingual speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds produce and evaluate politeness strategies in discourse-completion tasks, role-play interactions, politeness perception questionnaires, and interviews. The study focuses on requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, and interactional disagreement because these speech acts frequently involve face management and relational risk. The purpose is not to rank groups as more or less polite, but to explain how power, distance, imposition, social norms, institutional role, and communicative goals shape pragmatic choices.

The study's originality lies in linking production, perception, interaction, and interpretation in a single evidence-based mixed-methods framework. Many studies examine one speech act, one cultural comparison, or one method. This study brings together multiple speech acts, four data sources, quantitative strategy analysis, perception ratings, role-play interaction, and interview-based interpretation. It moves beyond describing differences by explaining why speakers choose particular strategies, how listeners evaluate them, and where intercultural misunderstandings may arise. In doing so, the study contributes to pragmatics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, language education, translation studies, and professional communication by presenting a context-sensitive account of politeness as a negotiated intercultural practice.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The first problem is pragmatic mismatch. Intercultural speakers may share a working language but not the same expectations about what counts as respectful, clear, sincere, appropriately indirect, or relationally safe. Misunderstandings therefore emerge not only from grammar or vocabulary but also from differences

in how participants interpret speech acts. Participants may understand a request, apology, refusal, compliment, or disagreement differently when they assign different weight to power, social distance, imposition, hierarchy, solidarity, or institutional role.

The second problem is pedagogical. Language teaching still gives substantial attention to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency, while pragmatic competence receives less systematic treatment. Learners may know how to form a request or apology grammatically but may not know how to adjust the utterance to listener status, the weight of imposition, degree of familiarity, or institutional setting. This can make speakers sound unintentionally rude, distant, over-apologetic, overly informal, or unclear, even with adequate linguistic proficiency.

The third problem is methodological. Researchers have often studied politeness using single data sources, such as discourse-completion tasks alone, or through broad cultural explanations with insufficient attention to situated interpretation. Because politeness involves production, perception, interaction, and evaluation, a rigorous design needs to integrate elicited speech acts, role-play interaction, perception ratings, and qualitative explanations. This study responds to this problem by examining not only which strategies participants use, but also how and why those strategies are interpreted as polite, impolite, appropriate, risky, clear, or relationally sensitive.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study investigates how participants produce, interpret, and negotiate politeness strategies in intercultural communication, with particular attention to the relationship between pragmatic strategy choice, cultural-pragmatic expectations, social variables, listener evaluation, and communicative outcome. The objectives are:

- To identify the main politeness strategies used by multilingual speakers in English-medium intercultural communication tasks.
- To analyze how directness, indirectness, mitigation, address forms, explanations, apologies, requests, compliments, refusals, repair, and alternative offers are realized across speech acts and broad analytical cohorts.
- To examine how power, distance, imposition, institutional role, and cultural-pragmatic expectations influence perceptions of politeness and appropriateness.
- To explain sources of intercultural pragmatic misunderstanding by integrating quantitative strategy patterns with qualitative participant interpretations.
- To present a Context-Sensitive Intercultural Politeness Model with implications for pragmatic competence, language education, business communication, and translation training.

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1. What politeness strategies are most frequently used in intercultural communication across requests, apologies, compliments, refusals, and disagreement scenarios?
- RQ2. How do speakers use directness, indirectness, mitigation, address terms, explanations, repair, and alternative-offer strategies across intercultural contexts?
- RQ3. How do power, distance, imposition, and cultural-pragmatic expectations influence perceptions of politeness and appropriateness?
- RQ4. What pragmatic misunderstandings emerge when participants interpret politeness strategies through different cultural-pragmatic expectations?
- RQ5. What theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications do the findings have for intercultural pragmatics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, business communication, and translation training?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. SPEECH ACTS AND PRAGMATIC MEANING

Speech act theory provides a foundation for analyzing politeness by explaining how speakers perform social actions through language. Requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, disagreements, and offers are not only grammatical structures; they are actions that create obligations, display relational alignment, threaten or protect face, and organize social expectations [1], [2]. In intercultural communication, participants may not understand the force of a speech act the same way. A refusal may be expressed through explanation rather than an explicit negative answer; a request may be expressed through a preparatory question; an apology may require repair or compensation to be judged sincere. For this reason, speech-act analysis is essential to identifying the pragmatic work particular linguistic forms perform.

Speech act theory matters for this study because it connects utterance form with communicative function. Politeness strategies cannot be analyzed solely as lexical choices such as "please" or "sorry." A complete pragmatic analysis asks what action is being performed, what relational risk is involved, what social variables shape the utterance, and how the listener evaluates it. This study therefore treats speech acts as the primary units through which politeness is operationalized and compared.

2. POLITENESS THEORY AND RAPPORT MANAGEMENT

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory remains one of the most influential accounts of how speakers manage face-threatening acts [3]. The distinction between positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and bald-on-record forms provides a useful vocabulary for examining how speakers balance solidarity, autonomy, clarity, and relational protection. Leech's politeness principle adds a complementary perspective by emphasizing communicative maxims such as tact, generosity, agreement, modesty, approbation, and sympathy [4]. These frameworks are not applied here as rigid universal categories; rather, they provide analytical tools for identifying how speakers reduce imposition, display respect, maintain harmony, or negotiate interpersonal alignment.

Rapport management theory extends politeness research by linking politeness to face, rights, obligations, and interactional goals [5]. This is particularly relevant for intercultural communication because participants may disagree on which rights and obligations apply in a given situation. Kádár and Haugh's social-evaluative view also emphasizes that participants and observers judge politeness, rather than simply encoding it in utterances [6]. These approaches support the present study's emphasis on both production and perception.

3. INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Intercultural pragmatics explains how speakers from different backgrounds create meaning when they do not fully share expectations, norms, and communicative histories [7]. It avoids the simplistic assumption that culture determines behavior in a fixed way. Instead, it treats intercultural interaction as a process in which participants draw on prior cultural knowledge while negotiating meaning in the immediate context. Cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics research has shown that pragmatic interpretation depends on both culturally familiar routines and emergent interactional understanding [8]. In this view, politeness is not transferred automatically from one language to another; it must be adapted to the participants, setting, task, and relationship.

Recent work on intercultural politeness emphasizes that speakers manage relations across cultures by interpreting both linguistic forms and social meanings [9]. Pragmatic competence is therefore not simply the ability to memorize polite formulas. It includes recognizing imposition, inferring expectations, choosing appropriate levels of directness, repairing misunderstandings, and explaining intentions when norms differ. Applied research on second language pragmatics has increasingly called for teaching pragmatic awareness rather than presenting one variety of English as the only acceptable model [10], [11]. This study builds on that view by analyzing pragmatic choices in English-medium intercultural communication.

4. PEDAGOGICAL PRAGMATICS AND INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

Pedagogical pragmatics has shown that learners need opportunities to notice how speech acts are performed and interpreted in context. Research on L2 Japanese demonstrates that learners benefit from comparing their expectations with authentic examples and reflecting on relational meanings rather than memorizing isolated formulas [12]. Pragmatic awareness is central because learners often transfer politeness norms from their first language into additional-language communication. Such transfer is not always problematic, but it may create misunderstanding when the hearer interprets the utterance through different norms. Research on developing pragmatic awareness has therefore emphasized reflection, comparison, and situated interpretation [13].

For intercultural language education, this means teaching politeness through role-play, discourse-completion tasks, metapragmatic discussion, authentic scenarios, and feedback on alternative formulations. Learners should examine how the same speech act changes when power, social distance, urgency, institutional role, and imposition change. This pedagogical orientation also has implications for translation and business communication, where literal translation of polite language may fail if the relational meaning is not adapted to the target context.

5. METHODS IN CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS

Discourse-completion tasks remain widely used in pragmatics because they allow researchers to compare responses to controlled scenarios [14]. Their value lies in eliciting comparable data across participants, but they also have limitations because written responses may not fully capture hesitation, turn-taking, repair, and interactional negotiation. Ogiermann therefore emphasizes that DCTs should be interpreted as elicited pragmatic data rather than as complete substitutes for naturally occurring conversation [15]. Broader methodological work in pragmatics likewise recommends careful scenario design, transparent coding, and triangulation across data sources [16].

The present study follows a mixed-methods logic because politeness involves both measurable patterns and interpretive meanings. Mixed-methods research is appropriate when quantitative results show distributions and relationships while qualitative data explain participant reasoning and contextual interpretation [17]. Thematic analysis strengthens the qualitative component by systematically identifying recurring meanings while maintaining trustworthiness through transparent coding, reflexive memoing, and evidence-linked interpretation [18]. Accordingly, the study combines DCTs, role-play, questionnaire ratings, and interviews to produce a more robust account of intercultural politeness.

6. EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON SPEECH ACTS, ELF, AND INTERCULTURAL POLITENESS

Empirical studies confirm that politeness strategies vary across speech acts and cultural-pragmatic contexts, but they also show that the choice of data source affects interpretation. Studies of Middle Eastern and Libyan EFL learners show that requests, suggestions, and apologies often combine direct acts, explanations, apology markers, and supportive moves, with pragmatic realization shaped by both English proficiency and sociocultural norms [19], [20]. Cross-cultural work on apology speech acts similarly shows that apology formulas, responsibility, and repair strategies vary across communities and situations [21]. These studies are useful because they identify speech-act patterns, but they often rely heavily on elicited responses and therefore benefit from being paired with perception and interview data.

Recent task-based pragmatics research indicates that oral speech-act production is affected by social distance, power, and imposition [22]. Refusal research across American and Russian communicative cultures shows that mitigation, explanation, and indirectness are central to managing the face-threat created by declining an invitation [23]. Digital data also provide evidence that politeness varies across platforms and languages. A large-scale study of English Twitter and Mandarin Weibo shows that computational analysis can identify cross-cultural differences in politeness markers, though these differences require careful interpretation because platform norms also shape expression [24].

Recent scholarship has also broadened the field's theoretical and pedagogical reach. Practical work on teaching and testing second-language pragmatics emphasizes the need to connect speech-act performance to context-sensitive interpretation [25]. Broader syntheses of second-language pragmatics further stress that pragmatic development should be examined across production, evaluation, and social meaning [26].

Intercultural pragmatics scholarship likewise shows that politeness needs to be analyzed through multilingual negotiation rather than fixed national templates [27]. Research on reciprocity highlights that (im)politeness judgments depend on expectations of mutual responsiveness [28]. Related metapragmatic studies show how intercultural uncertainty shapes relationship management across cultures [29]. Institutional interaction research further demonstrates the role of rapport management in professional communication [30]. These lines of work are reinforced by broader theorizing on (im)politeness and sociopragmatics, which links social variables, evaluation, and interactional interpretation [31], [32].

Additional recent work supports a broader, multi-source approach. Research on apology strategies in institutional emails by Chinese learners of English shows that naturalistic written data can reveal formula combinations and responsibility strategies that DCTs may simplify [33]. Research on English as a Business Lingua Franca shows that power, gender, and language background shape request strategies in corporate emails, demonstrating the relevance of politeness beyond classroom settings [34]. ELF-focused pragmatics also emphasizes that intercultural English communication depends on adaptive common ground rather than native-speaker conformity [35], [36]. Meta-analytic evidence on second-language pragmatics instruction shows that instruction can develop pragmatic competence, but effects depend on task type, outcome measure, and instructional design [37]. Sociopragmatic work further supports the need to connect social variables with interactional interpretation when examining intercultural encounters [38].

7. SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH POSITIONING

The literature shows that politeness is best understood as a pragmatic, relational, and socially evaluated phenomenon. Foundational theory explains face, speech acts, indirectness, and relational risk, while contemporary intercultural pragmatics emphasizes negotiated meaning, cultural expectations, participant evaluation, and emergent common ground. Empirical studies show that speech acts differ in strategy selection and that learners or multilingual speakers may experience pragmatic mismatch when norms are not shared.

Three gaps remain. First, many studies focus on one speech act rather than comparing requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, and disagreement in one design. Second, production data often aren't integrated with perception ratings, role-play interaction, and interview explanations. Third, pedagogical implications are sometimes stated without being connected to specific pragmatic evidence. This study addresses these gaps through a mixed-methods cross-cultural analysis that links strategy distribution, perception, interactional adaptation, participant interpretation, and applied implications.

Table 1. Critical literature-review synthesis and study positioning.

Research strand	Representative references	Key contribution	Limitation addressed in this study
Foundational pragmatics	[1]-[7]	Explains speech acts, face, politeness principles, rapport, and intercultural meaning.	Integrates these theories into one empirical production-perception design.
Intercultural pragmatics and teaching	[8]-[13], [35]-[38]	Shows that pragmatic competence is adaptive, socially situated, and teachable.	Connects pragmatic awareness to multiple speech acts and participant explanations.
Methodological triangulation	[14]-[18]	Supports DCTs, mixed methods, thematic analysis, and research trustworthiness.	Uses DCTs with role-play, questionnaires, and interviews rather than one source.
Empirical speech-act studies	[19]-[24], [33], [34]	Documents variations in requests, apologies, refusals, digital politeness,	Compares production, perception, interaction, and

	and business lingua franca communication.	interpretation across broad analytical cohorts.

V. RESEARCH GAP AND STUDY CONTRIBUTION

1. RESEARCH GAP

The research gap is not that pragmatics has ignored politeness. The gap is the need for integrated, evidence-linked research that examines politeness as production, perception, interaction, and interpretation simultaneously. Studies that use only elicited written tasks may identify likely strategies but cannot fully explain interactional adaptation. Studies that use only interviews may reveal beliefs but cannot show how speakers formulate speech acts. Studies that focus on one cultural comparison may produce useful local insight but may not explain how power, distance, imposition, and speech-act type interact across broader intercultural settings.

A second gap concerns the relationship between intercultural politeness and applied practice. Language education, translation training, and professional communication all require pragmatic competence, but pedagogical recommendations are often broad. Teachers and trainers need clearer evidence about which speech acts create risk, which strategies are interpreted positively or negatively, and how speakers explain their choices. This study addresses that gap by connecting DCT production, role-play interaction, perception ratings, and interview interpretation to a practical model of pragmatic competence.

2. STUDY CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes by integrating theoretical, methodological, and applied dimensions. Theoretically, it brings together politeness theory, rapport management, intercultural pragmatics, and sociolinguistic attention to social variables. Methodologically, it combines DCTs, role-play, perception questionnaires, and interviews, thereby strengthening the relationship between controlled comparison and participant interpretation. Pedagogically, it translates findings into concrete implications for teaching speech acts, developing pragmatic awareness, training professionals, and improving translation of politeness-sensitive interaction.

The study's main contribution is the Context-Sensitive Intercultural Politeness Model. The model treats politeness as a negotiated relationship between linguistic form, social action, cultural-pragmatic expectation, and listener evaluation. It avoids presenting one group as more polite than another and instead explains how different speakers may prioritize clarity, deference, solidarity, modesty, efficiency, hierarchy, or relational caution in different ways.

VI. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework integrates six perspectives. Speech act theory identifies the communicative actions utterances perform. Politeness theory explains how speakers manage face-threatening acts through directness, indirectness, mitigation, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Leech's politeness principle explains how speakers use tact, agreement, modesty, sympathy, and approbation to manage interpersonal relations. Rapport management theory broadens the analysis by including face, sociality rights, obligations, and interactional goals. Intercultural pragmatics explains how speakers negotiate pragmatic meaning when they do not share the same cultural-pragmatic background. Sociolinguistic frameworks explain how power, distance, age, status, gender, institutional role, and community norms shape pragmatic choice.

The framework distinguishes theoretical concepts from measured variables. Theoretical concepts include face, rapport, pragmatic competence, sociality rights, and cultural-pragmatic expectations. The measured variables include speech-act type, strategy category, directness level, mitigation marker, address use, supportive move, power relation, social distance, imposition level, cohort, and perception rating. This distinction helps prevent the framework from becoming only descriptive and allows the empirical analysis to trace how concepts are operationalized in coding and statistical analysis.

The framework treats politeness strategies as the outcome of interaction among four layers: cultural values and norms, social variables, speech-act requirements, and listener evaluation. A request, apology, refusal, or compliment becomes polite or impolite not because of a single word, but because the expression fits or violates expectations in context. The model therefore supports analysis of how participants select strategies, how they evaluate them, and how misunderstandings emerge when they assign different meanings to the same form.

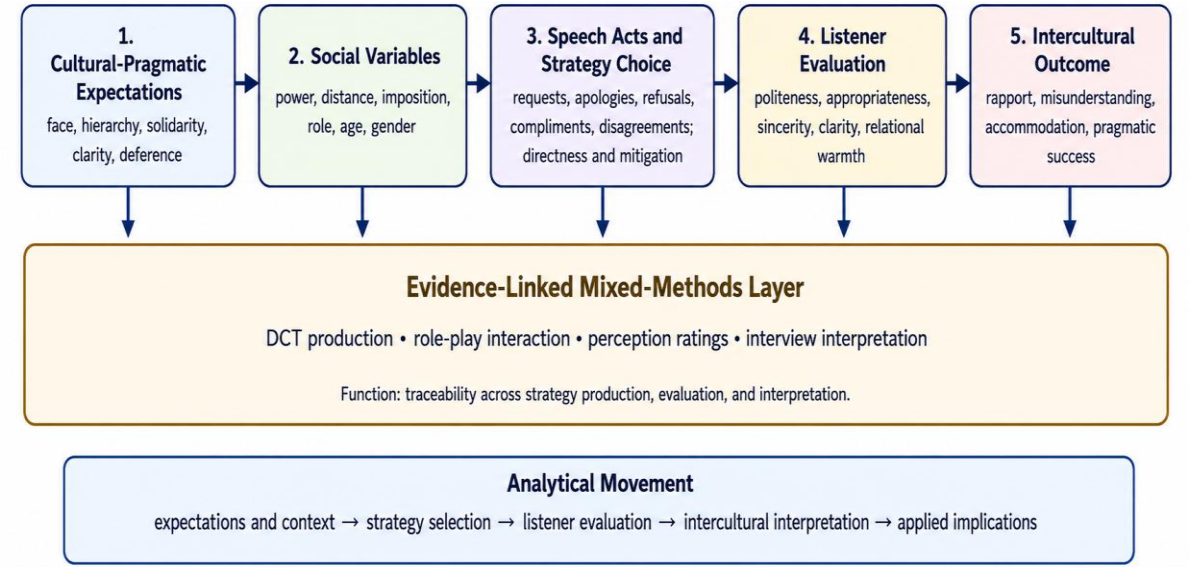


FIGURE 1. Context-sensitive intercultural politeness model.

Figure 1 presents the analytical movement from cultural-pragmatic expectations and social variables to speech acts, strategy choice, listener evaluation, intercultural outcome, and applied interpretation. The lower evidence layer shows how DCT production, role-play interaction, perception ratings, and interview interpretation support traceability across the mixed-methods design.

Table 2. Theory-to-variable alignment for the intercultural politeness framework.

Framework component	Theoretical concept	Measured variable / indicator	Operational use in this study
Speech act theory	Language as social action	Speech act type; request, apology, compliment, refusal, disagreement	Identifies the action performed by each response or interactional episode.
Politeness theory	Face-threat and mitigation	Directness level, mitigation marker, supportive move	Codes how participants reduce imposition or manage face.
Rapport management	Face, rights, obligations, interactional goals	Perceived appropriateness, relational warmth, repair strategy	Explains relational expectations and listener evaluation.
Intercultural pragmatics	Negotiated meaning across backgrounds	Participant interpretation, pragmatic mismatch, adaptation	Interprets misunderstanding and adaptive pragmatic competence.
Sociolinguistics	Power, distance, status, community norms	Power relation, social distance, institutional role, cohort	Explains variation across social contexts without essentializing groups.

VII. METHODOLOGY

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a mixed-methods cross-cultural pragmatic design. The quantitative component examined strategy frequency, distribution across speech acts, group variation, contextual effects, and perception ratings. The qualitative component interpreted role-play extracts, interview narratives, and participants' metapragmatic explanations. This design was selected because politeness is both patterned and interpretive: frequencies can show which strategies are common, but interviews and interactional analysis were needed to explain why participants considered certain strategies respectful, excessive, unclear, sincere, or inappropriate.

The design followed an explanatory integration logic. First, we coded DCT and role-play responses for politeness strategies. Second, questionnaire data measured participants' perceptions of politeness, appropriateness, sincerity, clarity, respectfulness, relational warmth, and communicative effectiveness. Third, interviews were used to explain the reasoning behind strategy selection and evaluation. Finally, the study compared quantitative and qualitative results in a mixed-methods matrix organized around the research questions.

2. DATA-COLLECTION CONTEXT AND RECRUITMENT

We collected data in English-medium university and professional communication contexts where participants regularly interacted with speakers from other linguistic backgrounds. Recruitment took place through university language centers, postgraduate networks, translator-training groups, and professional communication workshops. The sampling frame targeted multilingual adults with regular intercultural communication experience rather than monolingual participants with limited exposure to intercultural English use.

We recruited participants through stratified purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were: age 18 or older; regular English-medium intercultural communication for at least one year; willingness to complete all instruments; and at least upper-intermediate English proficiency, confirmed through institutional placement, documented study/work experience, or self-report supported by educational background. Exclusion criteria included incomplete instrument responses, missing consent, insufficient English proficiency to complete the task, or unusable audio recordings.

3. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING ADEQUACY

We recruited 168 multilingual speakers and assigned them to four broad analytical cohorts of equal size: Arabic-speaking participants, East Asian participants, European participants, and Latin American participants. Each cohort included 42 participants. The cohort labels were used for comparing sample tendencies, not for treating culture as a fixed identity. Participants included undergraduate students, postgraduate students, teachers, translators, and early-career professionals. Ages ranged from 19 to 38 years. The sample included 92 female participants, 73 male participants, and 3 participants who preferred not to report gender.

The quantitative sample was sufficient for descriptive frequency analysis, chi-square comparisons, ANOVA-based perception comparisons, and regression modeling with a moderate number of predictors. With 168 participants and 2,016 DCT responses, the dataset allowed comparisons across speech acts, contexts, and broad analytical cohorts while avoiding very small cell sizes in the main analyses. The interview sample of 32 participants was sufficient for cross-profile qualitative explanation because it included eight participants from each cohort and was used to explain quantitative patterns rather than to claim cultural representativeness.

Table 3. Participant profile and sampling structure.

Cohort	n	Gender distribution	Age range	Education/professional profile	English proficiency evidence

Arabic-speaking group	42	23 F; 18 M; 1 undisclosed	19-36	University, translation, service, and professional interaction	Upper-intermediate or above by placement/self-report plus English-medium experience
East Asian group	42	24 F; 17 M; 1 undisclosed	19-38	University, international exchange, business, and online interaction	Upper-intermediate or above by placement/self-report plus English-medium experience
European group	42	21 F; 20 M; 1 undisclosed	20-37	Academic, professional, and mobility-related interaction	Upper-intermediate or above by placement/self-report plus English-medium experience
Latin American group	42	24 F; 18 M	19-35	University, workplace, and intercultural social communication	Upper-intermediate or above by placement/self-report plus English-medium experience
Total	168	92 F; 73 M; 3 undisclosed	19-38	Multilingual participants in English-medium intercultural settings	All met inclusion criteria

4. INSTRUMENTS

Four instruments were used. The first was a discourse-completion task containing twelve scenarios: three requests, two apologies, two refusals, two compliment-response situations, two disagreement situations, and one service encounter. Scenarios varied systematically by power relation, social distance, and degree of imposition. The second instrument was a role-play protocol containing four interactive tasks: requesting assistance from a higher-status interlocutor, refusing a peer invitation, apologizing for a professional delay, and responding to a compliment in an academic setting. Each role-play lasted approximately three to five minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The third instrument was a politeness perception questionnaire with 32 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale. Items measured perceived politeness, appropriateness, sincerity, clarity, respectfulness, relational warmth, and communicative effectiveness. The fourth instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol lasting approximately 25-35 minutes. It explored participants' interpretations of directness, indirectness, apology, refusal, address forms, disagreement, and intercultural misunderstanding. Two applied linguistics specialists reviewed the instruments, and we piloted them with 18 multilingual speakers before the main study.

Table 4. Instruments, data sources, and analytical functions.

Instrument	Data produced	Item/task structure	Reliability/quality evidence	Analytical function
DCT scenarios	2,016 written responses	12 scenarios balanced by speech act, power, distance, and imposition	Expert review and pilot testing	Comparable speech-act production across controlled contexts
Role-play tasks	672 interactional episodes	4 tasks, 3-5 minutes each	Audio recording, transcription, coding review	Interactional adaptation, turn-taking, repair, and mitigation
Perception questionnaire	168 rating sets	32 Likert items; seven-point scale	Full alpha = .89; subscales = .78-.86	Perceived politeness, appropriateness, clarity, sincerity, warmth, effectiveness
Semi-structured interviews	32 interviews	25-35 minutes; 8 participants per cohort	Thematic coding and evidence matrix	Metapragmatic explanation and cultural interpretation

5. CODING FRAMEWORK

We coded DCT and role-play responses for directness level, strategy type, supportive moves, and relational orientation. Direct strategies included imperatives, explicit refusals, or unmitigated disagreement. Conventionally indirect strategies included preparatory questions, modalized requests, hedged refusals, and formulaic apologies. Mitigation included please, maybe, I was wondering, if possible, just, perhaps, sorry to ask, and similar softening devices. Supportive moves included explanation, gratitude, apology, offers of repair, alternative suggestions, compliment returns, and relational openings. Address strategies included titles, professional labels, kinship-like terms, formal names, and respectful openings.

A second coding layer classified pragmatic function: imposition reduction, deference, solidarity, accountability, sincerity display, conflict avoidance, relational repair, and clarity management. Two coders independently coded 20% of the dataset. Intercoder agreement was .86 for speech-act identification and .82 for strategy category. We resolved disagreements through discussion and codebook refinement. We analyzed qualitative interview data thematically using repeated reading, initial coding, category development, and evidence-linked interpretation.

Table 5. Speech-act and politeness-strategy coding framework with examples.

Speech act	Main coding categories	Examples of linguistic indicators	Representative coded example
Requests	Directness, mitigation, preparation, gratitude, explanation	Could you; I was wondering; please; if possible; I need	I was wondering if I could have one more day to submit the form.
Apologies	IFID, responsibility, explanation, repair, promise	Sorry; I apologize; it was my mistake; I will fix it	I apologize for the delay; it was my responsibility, and I will send it today.
Refusals	Indirect refusal, apology, reason, alternative, gratitude	I wish I could; unfortunately; maybe next time	Thank you for inviting me; unfortunately I cannot attend, but I hope to join next time.
Compliments	Acceptance, modesty, deflection, return, explanation	Thank you; it was nothing; you too; I was lucky	Thank you, I appreciate that; your presentation was also very clear.

Disagreement	Hedge, partial agreement, reason, softened contrast	I see your point, but maybe I am not sure	I see your point, but I wonder if another option might work better.

6. ETHICS, DATA STORAGE, AND QUALITY CRITERIA

The host institution's research ethics committee approved the study before data collection. All participants received an information sheet and provided informed consent before completing the instruments. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw without penalty. The team anonymized role-play recordings and interview transcripts and handled cultural background carefully to avoid stereotyping or ranking groups.

The research team stored data in password-protected files accessible only to them. We removed identifiers from transcripts and replaced them with participant codes. The audit trail included scenario versions, codebook iterations, coding decisions, coder notes, disagreement resolutions, and mixed-methods integration matrices. We strengthened quality through pilot testing, expert review, transparent coding, intercoder agreement, triangulation across four instruments, and clear alignment among research questions, instruments, codes, and findings.

VIII. STATISTICAL AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis used descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, chi-square tests for group and speech-act differences, one-way ANOVA for perception ratings, Tukey post-hoc comparisons, and regression models predicting politeness perception from strategy type, imposition, power relation, social distance, intercultural experience, and analytical cohort. We reported effect sizes using Cramer's V, eta-squared, and standardized beta coefficients. Missing data were minimal because we excluded incomplete cases during screening; we handled item-level missingness below 2% with scale-mean substitution only when at least 80% of a subscale was completed. We checked framework assumptions through residual plots, normality inspection, multicollinearity screening, and influence diagnostics.

Qualitative pragmatic analysis examined selected DCT responses, role-play turns, and interview extracts. The analysis focused on how participants justified their choices, interpreted the same strategy differently, and described intercultural misunderstanding. The study then integrated qualitative findings with quantitative patterns to explain why particular strategies were more frequent or more positively evaluated in specific contexts. The integration procedure compared results by research question rather than treating the quantitative and qualitative strands as separate studies.

Table 6. Statistical analysis summary and model diagnostics.

Analysis	Test/statistic	Result	Effect size / model fit	Interpretation
Strategy distribution across speech acts	Chi-square	$\chi^2(20, N = 2688) = 312.74, p < .001$	Cramer's V = .24	Strategy choice differed meaningfully by speech act.
Group tendency in strategy use	Chi-square	$\chi^2(15, N = 2688) = 96.83, p < .001$	Cramer's V = .11	Cohort differences were statistically significant but modest.
Perception ratings by strategy	ANOVA	$F(2, 501) = 46.29, p < .001$	$\eta^2 = .16$	Mitigated and conventionally indirect strategies were rated higher overall.
Perception ratings by context	ANOVA	$F(3, 501) = 39.74, p < .001$	$\eta^2 = .19$	High imposition and status difference

				changed evaluations strongly.
Regression predicting politeness rating	Multiple regression	R^2 = .42; adjusted R^2 = .40; F(6, 661) = 79.64, p < .001	VIF range = 1.12-1.84	Strategy type, imposition, power, and social distance predicted evaluation.
Reliability of questionnaire	Cronbach's alpha	Full scale = .89; subscales = .78-.86	Acceptable to strong	Perception scale showed adequate internal consistency.

IX. FINDINGS

The quantitative results identify strategy distributions across speech acts, broad analytical cohorts, and contextual conditions. The qualitative results explain how participants interpreted politeness, why they selected particular strategies, and where intercultural misunderstanding emerged.

1. STRATEGY DISTRIBUTION ACROSS SPEECH ACTS

RQ1 asked which politeness strategies participants used most often. Across all DCT and role-play responses, conventional indirectness was the most common strategy in requests, appearing in 46.8% of request responses. Mitigation was even more prominent when supportive moves were counted, appearing in 61.4% of requests and 74.1% of refusals. Direct forms were not absent, but they appeared mainly in low-imposition peer contexts or in tasks where clarity and urgency were emphasized. Apologies often combined an explicit apology marker with an explanation and repair, while compliment responses varied, ranging from acceptance to modest deflection to reciprocal complimenting.

A DCT request from P08 demonstrates the conventionally indirect pattern: "I was wondering if it would be possible to submit the document tomorrow because I had a technical problem today." The utterance combines a preparatory structure, mitigation, and an account. A role-play refusal from P27 shows a common refusal sequence: "Thank you for asking me; I would like to come, but I already promised my family. Maybe we can meet another day." This response combines appreciation, indirect refusal, explanation, and alternative suggestion.

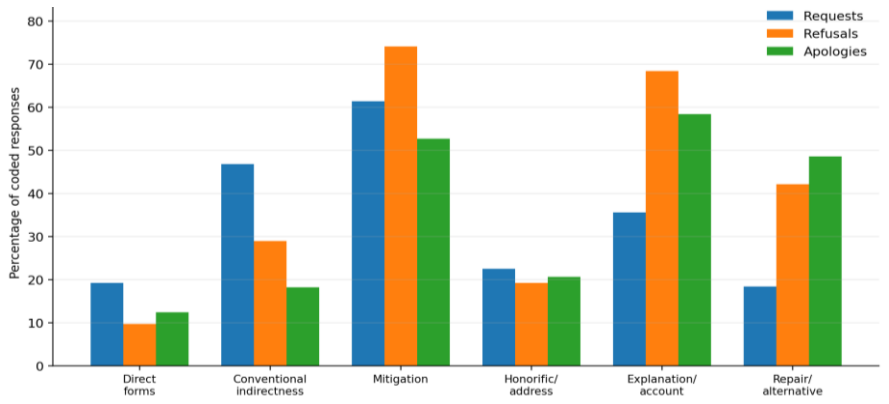


FIGURE 2. Distribution of politeness strategies across selected speech acts.

2. REALIZATION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES

RQ2 focused on how participants realized these strategies. Participants commonly formulated requests through modalized questions such as Could you, Would it be possible, or I was wondering if. Refusals were often produced through a sequence of gratitude, apology, explanation, and alternative suggestion. Apologies

often followed a three-part structure: an explicit apology, an account of the problem, and an offer of repair. Compliment responses varied more: some participants preferred direct acceptance, while others used modesty, downgrading, or reciprocal complimenting to avoid seeming self-praising. Address forms appeared most frequently in high-status and institutional scenarios.

A role-play apology from P14 demonstrates accountability plus repair: "I am very sorry for sending the file late. I misunderstood the deadline, but I have corrected it and attached the final version now." A compliment response from P33 demonstrates reciprocity: "Thank you, that means a lot; I also liked how clearly you explained your examples." These extracts show that politeness was often produced through multi-part sequences rather than isolated formulae.

3. CONTEXTUAL AND PERCEPTION EFFECTS

RQ3 examined contextual influences on perception. Perception ratings showed that direct requests were evaluated more positively in low-imposition peer contexts (M = 5.21 on a seven-point scale) than in high-imposition status-difference contexts (M = 3.02). Conventionally indirect requests received consistently higher ratings in high-imposition conditions (M = 5.86), while mitigated forms received the highest ratings when power distance and imposition were both high (M = 6.10). Tukey post-hoc comparisons indicated that mitigated forms were rated significantly higher than direct forms in high-imposition and status-difference contexts.

Group comparisons showed differences in tendency rather than absolute opposition. The East Asian cohort used more deference-oriented openings and indirect refusal sequences in high-status scenarios. The Arabic-speaking cohort used more relational preliminaries, explanations, apology-plus-repair combinations, and solidarity-oriented expressions. The European cohort showed higher tolerance for concise conventionally indirect forms and more directness in low-imposition contexts. The Latin American cohort showed frequent positive-politeness moves, relational warmth, and reciprocal complimenting. These patterns reflect sample tendencies shaped by cultural-pragmatic expectations and intercultural experience.

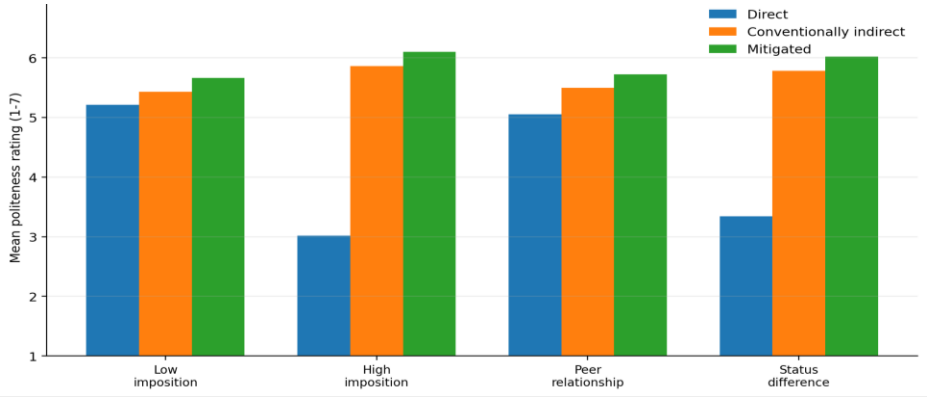


FIGURE 3. Perceived politeness by strategy and contextual condition.

Table 7. Summary of major politeness-strategy findings with statistical evidence.

Speech act	Most frequent strategy pattern	Percentage / mean pattern	Statistical evidence	Interpretive meaning
Requests	Conventional indirectness + mitigation	46.8% indirect; 61.4% mitigated	χ^2 contribution strongest for requests	Speakers balanced clarity with imposition reduction.
Apologies	IFID + explanation + repair	48.6% used full repair sequence	Mean sincerity rating = 5.92	Sincerity was linked to accountability and solution.
Refusals	Apology + reason + alternative	74.1% included mitigation	High mitigation frequency across cohorts	Refusals required face-saving and relational continuity.
Compliments	Acceptance, deflection, reciprocity	34.7% acceptance; 29.8% deflection	Cohort variation modest	Self-praise avoidance varied across participants.
Disagreement	Partial agreement + hedge + reason	62.5% softened disagreement	High status scenarios increased hedging	Speakers reduced conflict while preserving opinion.

4. INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATIC MISUNDERSTANDING

RQ4 addressed pragmatic misunderstanding. Interview data showed that misunderstanding often emerged when participants evaluated the same form through different expectations. Some participants reported that directness signaled honesty and efficiency, while others viewed it as relationally risky. Some viewed lengthy explanations as respectful and face-saving, while others interpreted them as avoidance or lack of clarity. Several participants said they learned to adapt by adding a brief explanation before refusing, softening disagreement, or checking whether the listener preferred direct communication.

P19 explained: "In my language, giving a reason before saying no is a way to protect the relationship. In English meetings, some people want the answer first, so I learned to say no politely and then explain." P31 reported: "When someone says only 'I cannot,' I understand the message, but I feel the relationship is not considered." P04 offered a contrasting view: "Too many soft words can make me unsure what the person really wants. I prefer polite but clear." These extracts show that successful intercultural politeness involves adaptive pragmatic judgment, not a single universal strategy.

Table 8. Qualitative themes with participant-coded extracts.

Theme	Direct evidence	Pragmatic significance
Politeness as relational safety	P12: "I use more explanation because I do not want the other person to feel rejected."	Politeness protects interpersonal relations, not only face in a narrow sense.
Directness as double-valued	P04: "A direct answer is helpful, but only if the situation is equal and not sensitive."	Strategy value depends on power, imposition, and setting.
Refusal as relational work	P19: "I say no with a reason because silence or a short no feels too cold."	Refusal sequences manage rejection and relationship at the same time.

Address uncertainty	P26: "I was not sure whether first name was friendly or disrespectful with a senior person."	Address forms index hierarchy, familiarity, and institutional expectations.
Adaptive pragmatic competence	P31: "I learned to explain my intention when someone misunderstood my politeness."	Intercultural competence requires flexibility rather than formula memorization.

X. DISCUSSION

The results show that intercultural politeness cannot be reduced to a simple contrast between direct and indirect communication. Although conventional indirectness was the most common request strategy and mitigation was frequent in refusals, the meaning of these strategies depended on context. Directness was not always impolite; in peer contexts and low-imposition tasks, participants often evaluated direct forms as efficient and sincere. Conversely, indirectness was not always successful; some participants viewed long or highly indirect refusals as unclear, evasive, or difficult to interpret. This finding supports the social-evaluative view of politeness, which argues that politeness is judged in context rather than mechanically encoded in a form [6].

The findings also support the central insight of intercultural pragmatics: speakers enter interaction with prior expectations, but meaning is negotiated in the immediate context [7], [8]. Participants did not simply reproduce cultural scripts. Many adjusted their language according to role, familiarity, urgency, and perceived listener preference. For example, some participants used more direct strategies in professional tasks because they believed clarity mattered, but they added apologies, explanations, or expressions of gratitude when the imposition increased. Others preferred indirectness in high-status situations but reported learning to use clearer formulations in English-medium contexts to avoid misunderstandings. This pattern shows that intercultural politeness is dynamic rather than static.

The study extends Brown and Levinson's model by confirming that face-threat remains a useful analytical concept, especially in requests, refusals, and disagreement [3]. However, the data also show that participants interpret face-threat through local expectations. A refusal threatens the requester's desire for acceptance, but participants differed in how much explanation was needed to make the refusal acceptable. An apology may protect face, but only if the listener judges it as sincere and proportionate. A compliment response may express modesty, gratitude, solidarity, or discomfort, depending on the respondent's cultural-pragmatic orientation. Thus, politeness theory is most useful when combined with rapport management and intercultural pragmatics [5], [9].

The findings are also consistent with recent empirical research on speech acts, ELF pragmatics, and professional communication. Studies of requests and apologies by EFL learners show that learners often combine formulaic strategies with explanations and supportive moves, but they may differ from expected target-language norms [19], [20]. The present study adds that such differences should not be treated only as deficiencies; they may reflect alternative cultural-pragmatic expectations. Studies of refusal and apology strategies also show that mitigation and repair are central to maintaining face, yet the present findings show that listeners do not evaluate these strategies independently of context [21], [23], [33]. The results also support BELF research showing that power, role, and workplace expectations shape professional request strategies [34].

Alternative explanations must be considered. Strategy choice may have been influenced not only by cultural-pragmatic norms but also by English proficiency, institutional experience, age, professional role, prior exposure to international communication, personality, and comfort with role-play tasks. Participants with more English-medium professional experience may have developed stronger calibration of directness. Participants with greater classroom exposure to English pragmatics may have recognized DCT expectations more easily. These factors do not undermine the findings, but they show why cultural cohorts should be interpreted as broad sample tendencies rather than fixed cultural identities.

The qualitative findings clarify why pragmatic misunderstanding occurs. Competing values often drove misunderstandings: clarity versus deference, efficiency versus relational caution, modesty versus confidence, and sincerity versus formulaic politeness. One participant might interpret a short refusal as

honest, while another might hear it as dismissive. One might interpret an elaborate apology as sincere, while another might hear it as excessive or defensive. These findings suggest that pragmatic competence includes the ability to recognize when norms may differ, ask for clarification, and repair interaction. Teaching learners that one expression is polite and another is impolite is not enough; they need to learn to evaluate contexts and negotiate meaning.

The results have implications for English as a lingua franca and international professional communication. English-medium intercultural communication often involves speakers who do not share the same first language or the same politeness conventions. In such contexts, pragmatic success depends on flexible accommodation rather than strict conformity to native-speaker norms [35], [36]. Participants in this study frequently combined resources from their own cultural backgrounds with strategies they associated with international English communication. Treat this hybridity as pragmatic creativity rather than a deficiency, while still requiring awareness, because not all interlocutors interpret hybrid forms the same way.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings support explicit pragmatic instruction, but they do not prove that any classroom intervention is effective. The implications should therefore be treated as evidence-informed recommendations. Learners should practice producing the same speech act under different conditions of power, distance, and imposition. They should compare multiple possible requests, refusals, apologies, and compliments and discuss how each version might be interpreted. Research on second-language pragmatics instruction indicates that instruction can improve pragmatic performance, but future intervention studies are needed to test whether the activities described here improve intercultural politeness competence over time [37].

XI. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The first theoretical contribution is the Context-Sensitive Intercultural Politeness Model. The model integrates speech acts, politeness strategies, social variables, cultural-pragmatic expectations, listener evaluation, and communicative outcomes. It shows that strategy type alone cannot explain politeness. Directness, indirectness, address forms, mitigation, apologies, and explanations become meaningful only when interpreted in relation to speech act, social role, imposition, institutional setting, and cultural-pragmatic expectation.

The second contribution is to pragmatic competence theory. The findings show that pragmatic competence involves adaptive judgment, not only knowledge of conventional formulas. Competent intercultural speakers can select strategies, monitor listener response, explain intentions, repair misunderstanding, and shift between clarity and relational sensitivity. This expands the pedagogical understanding of pragmatic competence from accurate production to reflexive and negotiated communication.

The third contribution is sociolinguistic. The study shows that politeness is shaped by power, distance, status, institutional role, and group expectations, but also that individuals creatively adapt these norms in intercultural settings. Politeness therefore operates at the intersection of social structure and interactional agency.

XII. PRACTICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

For language education, the findings suggest teaching pragmatic competence systematically. Teachers can use DCT comparison tasks in which learners write several versions of the same request or refusal for different power and distance conditions. After the performance, role-play reflection can help learners explain why they chose a particular strategy and how different interlocutors might evaluate it. Refusal reformulation tasks can ask learners to revise a direct refusal into versions that include gratitude, explanation, apology, or alternative suggestion. Apology repair tasks can help learners distinguish between saying sorry, accepting responsibility, giving an account, and offering repair.

For business and professional communication, the study recommends training in calibrating directness, apologies, refusals, disagreements, and address conventions. Professionals working internationally should learn to recognize when direct communication is valued and when additional relational work is needed.

Intercultural email analysis can help professionals compare concise, mitigated, and highly elaborated forms of requests, refusals, and reminders. They should also learn repair strategies such as clarifying intention, acknowledging possible misunderstanding, and offering alternative formulations.

In translation and interpreting, treat politeness as pragmatic meaning rather than literal form. Translators need to consider whether a direct equivalent preserves the intended relationship, status, and degree of imposition. Honorifics, apologies, and refusals often require pragmatic adaptation because the target language may encode respect differently. These implications are evidence-informed recommendations and should be tested in future classroom and professional-training interventions.

Table 9. Practical implications linked to empirical findings.

Applied area	Recommended practice	Direct link to findings
Language education	Use DCT comparison, role-play reflection, refusal reformulation, and apology repair tasks.	Strategy value changed by power, distance, and imposition.
Business communication	Train directness calibration, apology, disagreement, and repair strategies.	Directness was effective in some contexts but risky in high-imposition settings.
Translation training	Translate politeness pragmatically rather than literally.	Address forms, apologies, and refusals carried culture-sensitive meanings.
Intercultural training	Use role-play reflection, email analysis, and metapragmatic discussion.	Participants emphasized interpretation, adaptation, and repair.

XIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has limitations. First, the analytical cohorts are broad categories and cannot represent all variation within Arabic-speaking, East Asian, European, or Latin American communities. Second, the sampling was purposive rather than random. Third, DCTs provide controlled comparability but cannot fully reproduce the pressure, hesitation, and repair work of spontaneous interaction. Fourth, role-plays are more interactional than DCTs but remain structured elicitation contexts. Fifth, perception questionnaires simplify judgment into numerical ratings, even though politeness evaluation is complex and context-sensitive. Sixth, the study focuses on English-medium intercultural communication and does not fully examine how politeness strategies operate when participants communicate in other languages.

Future research should examine naturally occurring intercultural interactions in workplaces, universities, healthcare settings, online platforms, and diplomatic or institutional contexts. Longitudinal research could investigate how pragmatic competence develops through instruction and intercultural experience. Classroom intervention studies could test whether explicit pragmatics instruction improves learners' ability to manage requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, and disagreements. Further research should also examine digital politeness, multilingual code-switching, translation of honorifics, multimodal politeness, and the relationship between politeness and identity negotiation.

XIV. CONCLUSION

This study examined politeness strategies in intercultural communication from a pragmatic and mixed-methods perspective. It showed that politeness is not a universal list of fixed expressions, nor is it reducible to indirectness. Rather, politeness is constructed through the interaction of speech-act type, strategy choice, social relationship, cultural-pragmatic expectation, and listener evaluation. The findings indicated that conventional indirectness was common in requests, mitigation was especially important in refusals, apologies often required explanation and repair, compliments involved variable responses, and disagreement was frequently softened through hedging and partial agreement.

The study also demonstrated that intercultural misunderstanding often arises when participants interpret the same strategy through different pragmatic expectations. Directness may signal efficiency to one speaker but abruptness to another. Indirectness may signal respect in one context but vagueness in another. Address forms may mark respect, distance, or uncertainty, while their absence may be heard as either friendliness or disrespect. Such findings show why pragmatic competence is essential in intercultural communication. Speakers need awareness, flexibility, and the ability to repair meaning when expectations differ.

The study's central contribution is the Context-Sensitive Intercultural Politeness Model, which links cultural-pragmatic expectations, social variables, speech acts, politeness strategies, listener evaluation, and communicative outcomes. The model strengthens theoretical understanding of politeness as relational negotiation and offers practical value for language education, business communication, translation training, and intercultural competence development. Its value is both methodological and theoretical because it shows how DCT production, role-play interaction, perception ratings, and interview interpretation can be integrated. Future empirical and intervention studies should test the model's transferability in natural workplace interactions, multilingual corpora, online communication, and classroom pragmatics instruction.

Author Contributions

The author conducted the conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, investigation, writing, review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

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Data Availability

The dataset will be available from the author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Appendices

1. APPENDIX A. DISCOURSE-COMPLETION TASK SCENARIOS

Participants wrote what they would say in each situation. The scenarios were balanced by speech act, social distance, power relation, and imposition level.

Appendix Table A1. Discourse-completion task scenarios and coding focus.

Item	Speech act	Context	Participant prompt	Primary coding focus
A1	Request	Low-imposition peer context	Ask a classmate to send yesterday's seminar notes.	Directness, mitigation, gratitude
A2	Request	High-imposition senior context	Ask a senior academic coordinator to extend a submission deadline because of a documented problem.	Conventionally indirect request, explanation, deference
A3	Request	Professional context	Ask an international colleague to revise a shared report before a meeting.	Clarity, politeness marker, professional tone
A4	Apology	Peer context	Apologize for missing a planned study meeting.	IFID, explanation, repair
A5	Apology	Higher-status context	Apologize to a supervisor for submitting a document late.	Responsibility, explanation, repair
A6	Refusal	Peer invitation	Refuse a friend's invitation because of another commitment.	Gratitude, reason, alternative
A7	Refusal	Professional request	Refuse a colleague's request for help because of workload pressure.	Mitigation, apology, professional justification
A8	Compliment response	Academic peer context	Respond to a compliment about your presentation.	Acceptance, modesty, reciprocity
A9	Compliment response	Senior professional context	Respond to a senior person complimenting your written report.	Deference, gratitude, modesty
A10	Disagreement	Peer discussion	Disagree with a classmate during a group task.	Hedge, partial agreement, reason
A11	Disagreement	Status difference	Politely express a different view from a supervisor or manager.	Softened contrast, evidence, deference
A12	Service encounter	Institutional correction request	Ask a service provider to correct a mistake in a formal document.	Clarity, respect, repair request

2. *APPENDIX B. ROLE-PLAY PROTOCOL*

We used role-plays to observe interactional adaptation, turn-taking, clarification, mitigation, and repair. Each role-play lasted approximately three to five minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed for coding.

Appendix Table B1. Role-play protocol and interactional focus.

Task	Interactional situation	Role instruction	Observed pragmatic focus
B1	Requesting assistance from a higher-status interlocutor	Participant A needs an extension or additional guidance; Participant B acts as a senior academic or manager.	Request formulation, mitigation, explanation, response to authority
B2	Refusing a peer invitation	Participant A invites Participant B to an event; Participant B refuses while preserving the relationship.	Refusal sequence, gratitude, apology, alternative offer
B3	Apologizing for a professional delay	Participant A explains a delayed task; Participant B requests clarification and a solution.	Responsibility, sincerity, explanation, repair
B4	Responding to an academic compliment	Participant A compliments Participant B; Participant B responds and continues the interaction.	Acceptance, modesty, reciprocity, continuation

3. *APPENDIX C. POLITENESS PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS*

Participants rated each item on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. We reverse-coded items to reduce response-set bias.

Appendix Table C1. Politeness perception questionnaire items.

Item	Construct	Questionnaire statement
1	Politeness	The utterance sounds polite in this context.
2	Appropriateness	The utterance is appropriate for the relationship between the speakers.
3	Sincerity	The speaker sounds sincere.
4	Clarity	The speaker communicates clearly.
5	Respectfulness	The utterance shows respect.
6	Relational warmth	The utterance maintains relational warmth.
7	Imposition management	The speaker avoids unnecessary pressure on the listener.
8	Explanation	The speaker provides enough explanation.
9	Indirectness control	The speaker is not overly indirect.
10	Effectiveness	The utterance would be effective in an intercultural setting.
11	Address	The address form is appropriate.
12	Request strength	The request is not too demanding.
13	Refusal management	The refusal protects the relationship.
14	Apology responsibility	The apology accepts responsibility.
15	Compliment response	The compliment response sounds natural.
16	Disagreement	The disagreement is expressed respectfully.
17	Professional context	The utterance would be acceptable in a professional context.
18	Peer context	The utterance would be acceptable in a peer context.

Item	Construct	Questionnaire statement
19	Balance	The speaker balances clarity and politeness.
20	Imposition fit	The strategy fits the imposition level.
21	Status management	The speaker handles status difference appropriately.
22	Relational risk	The speaker avoids sounding dismissive.
23	Excessiveness	The speaker avoids sounding excessive.
24	Response space	The utterance allows the listener to respond comfortably.
25	Intention	The speaker's intention is easy to understand.
26	Misunderstanding prevention	The strategy could prevent misunderstanding.
27	Reverse coded	The expression is too direct.
28	Reverse coded	The expression is too vague.
29	Reverse coded	The expression may sound insincere.
30	Reverse coded	The expression creates unnecessary distance.
31	Face management	The speaker manages face appropriately.
32	Rapport	The utterance supports intercultural rapport.

4. APPENDIX D. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide elicited metapragmatic explanations of directness, indirectness, address choice, apology, refusal, compliment response, disagreement, and intercultural adaptation. Follow-up questions were used when participants gave brief or unclear responses.

- When do you prefer direct communication in English-medium intercultural contexts?
- When do you prefer indirect or softened communication?
- How do you decide whether to use titles, first names, or other address forms?
- Can you describe a time when a request or refusal was misunderstood?
- What makes an apology sound sincere to you?
- How do you usually respond to compliments in intercultural settings?
- What makes disagreement sound respectful or disrespectful?
- Have you changed your politeness strategies because of intercultural experience?
- What should language teachers include when teaching politeness and pragmatic competence?
- What advice would you give to someone communicating across cultures in English?

5. APPENDIX E. CODING RUBRIC AND CODEBOOK EXTRACT

The coding rubric was used for DCT responses and role-play transcripts. Each response could receive more than one code when the utterance contained multiple pragmatic moves.

Appendix Table E1. Coding rubric and codebook extract.

Coding dimension	Code	Operational definition	Representative indicator
Directness level	DIR-1 Direct; DIR-2 conventionally indirect; DIR-3 highly indirect/off-record	Classifies the relationship between linguistic form and pragmatic force.	"Send me the file" = DIR-1; "Could you send me the file?" = DIR-2
Mitigation	MIT	Marks linguistic softening of imposition or disagreement.	please, maybe, perhaps, if possible, I was wondering
Supportive move	SUP	Adds explanation, gratitude, apology, or relational opening before/after the head act.	Thank you for inviting me, but...
Repair	REP	Offers correction, compensation, future	I will send the revised file today.

Coding dimension	Code	Operational definition	Representative indicator
		action, or solution after a problem.	
Address strategy	ADR	Uses title, professional label, first name, or respectful opening.	Professor, Dr., Dear Manager, first-name address
Positive politeness	POS	Builds solidarity, warmth, appreciation, or common ground.	I really appreciate your help.
Negative politeness	NEG	Acknowledges autonomy, imposition, or listener burden.	I don't want to take up too much of your time.
Metapragmatic explanation	META	Participant explains why a strategy was selected or how it may be interpreted.	I used an explanation because a short refusal sounds cold.

6. *APPENDIX F. INTERCODER RELIABILITY SHEET*

A 20% independently coded sample was used to evaluate coding consistency. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, review of local context, and refinement of the codebook.

Appendix Table F1. Intercoder agreement and reliability notes.

Coding area	Reliability sample	Agreement / procedure	Resolution note
Speech-act identification	20% of DCT and role-play data	0.86	High agreement; minor ambiguity between refusal and disagreement sequences.
Strategy category	20% of DCT and role-play data	0.82	Acceptable agreement; most disagreements concerned multiple supportive moves.
Directness level	20% of coded responses	0.84	Agreement improved after clarifying highly indirect/off-record cases.
Qualitative theme coding	Interview subset from each cohort	Consensus review	Themes were checked against direct extracts and revised where evidence was weak.
Mixed-methods integration	RQ-based matrix	Audit check	We compared quantitative patterns, qualitative explanations, and interpretations by research question.

7. APPENDIX G. SAMPLE CODED EXTRACTS

The following anonymized extracts demonstrate how responses were coded. Extracts are shortened to preserve participant confidentiality while retaining the relevant pragmatic evidence.

Appendix Table G1. Sample coded extracts and interpretation.

Participant	Context	Extract	Codes	Interpretive note
P08	High-imposition request	I was wondering if I could submit the document tomorrow because I had a technical problem today.	DIR-2; MIT; SUP-EXPL	Conventionally indirect request with mitigation and account-giving.
P27	Peer refusal	Thank you for asking me; I would like to come, but I already promised my family. Maybe we can meet another day.	SUP-GRAT; REF; MIT; ALT	Refusal protects rapport through gratitude, reason, and alternative offer.
P14	Professional apology	I am very sorry for sending the file late. I misunderstood the deadline, but I have corrected it and attached the final version now.	IFID; RESP; REP	Apology combines explicit regret, responsibility, and repair.
P33	Compliment response	Thank you, that means a lot; I also liked how clearly you explained your examples.	ACC; POS; RECIP	Compliment response balances acceptance with reciprocal appreciation.
P04	Interview reflection	Too many soft words can make me unsure what the person really wants. I prefer polite but clear.	META; CLARITY	Participant interprets excessive indirectness as possible ambiguity.
P31	Interview reflection	I learned to explain my intention when someone misunderstood my politeness.	META; ADAPT; REP	Participant links intercultural competence to repair and metapragmatic explanation.