

Gender and Politeness in CMC

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Coffee, Tea or ...? : Gender and Politeness in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

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Abstract

Research shows that electronic communication has affected written language significantly. The increasing importance of use of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in organizations has multiple implications for use of written language at workplace.

This study focuses on the influence of gender and politeness on writing style in CMC, specifically work related emails, in the Indian context. Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) and Leech's maxims of Politeness have been used to analyze samples of 494 work related emails written by both men and women. On the basis of this analysis, an attempt has been made to study the relationship between gender, politeness and email content. On the basis of the data, it is concluded that:

1. Different politeness maxims across genders are used in work related emails.
2. Politeness maxims are used in clusters.
3. Variations in use of politeness maxims across genders are highest in directives.
4. Violations of politeness maxims are higher in men than in women.

Computer mediated Communication (CMC), is a mode of communicating written messages to people in all parts of the world via electronic mails (emails) and intranet. Today, CMC is being used as a convenient measure to construct a new type of social interaction beyond space barriers. CMC has become an important means of communication in most organizations, and has, at workplaces, changed the structure of communication channels; making emails and intranet the most commonly used mediums of communication. Various segments of the industry, commerce, government, academia, and the public are increasingly utilizing CMC as a virtual meeting place (Jaffe et al, 1995). Additionally, the use of CMC has made emails pervasive throughout work and personal environment (Kanfer, 1999). Graphics Visualization and Usability Laboratory at the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1998 (cited in Kanfer, 1999), estimated that emails are the most commonly used Internet applications. E-mails are the most recent in a long line of alternatives to face-to-face communication and are fast replacing the personal, hand-written letters of the nineteenth century and the telephone calls of the twentieth-century as the premier form of communication in the twenty-first century (NUA Internet Surveys, 1998).

Communication in face-to-face interaction etc. has been defined as exchange of ideas or information between two or more individuals (Kaul, 1988). Communication is usually linked to oral language and face-to-face communication, the only exception being phone conversation. CMC provides a link between oral and written communication, producing a "categorical change, which affects not only the notion of what the conversation is but the speaking-writing dichotomy as well" (Noblia, 1998). Use of CMC is not restricted to formal, organizational emails but is also widely used for informal communication. Garton (1995), Labaton (1995) noted that at work, some employees can chat privately while working side by side, leading to more intimacy. Such practices reduce the formality in CMC and are reflected in language, leading to a conversational

style of communication, with a personal note. While emails can be used for both formal and informal transmission of messages, we for the purpose of specificity, have restricted ourselves to a study of formal, organizational and task related emails.

Several studies before the 1990s on task oriented CMC focused on the “businesslike, depersonalized” aspect of the communication, not really looking at the emotional content (Liu, 2002). However, recent research has indicated that CMC can facilitate social emotional content eg Jacobson, 1999; Lea & Spears, 1991; Liu, 2002; Liu, Ginther, & Zelhart, 2001; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Rice, 1987 (cited in Liu, 2002) and inequalities of status and expertise are reduced in task oriented CMC. Research also indicates that the language and politeness in task oriented emails is very much context specific.

The complexity in studying emails has increased with the recent (1990s) advent of women in the organizations. Multiplicity of language use becomes tougher to define given the nature of CMC where the gender of the sender is not known. This is true, more specifically in emails across the globe where the reader is unable to decipher the gender of the sender by a study of the name. Which brings us to an interesting point, are there any significant differences between the communicating styles of men and women as reflected in the emails? Can emails be categorized as specifically male or female based on a reading of the content? Research (Tannen, 1990) proves that choice of syntax and language definitely varies across genders. While it is understandable and appreciable that communicating different patterns of the thought process require verbalization at varying levels, does the same hold true for emails as well? While there is evidence that, “cognitive tasks such as generation of ideas and discussion not resulting in group decision” needs less of “cooperation and collaboration” (McGrath, 1984; McGrath & Hollingshead, 1993; McGrath, Arrow, Gruenfeld, Hollingshead, & O'Connor, 1993, cited in Savicki, Lingenfelter and Kelley 1996) does the same also hold true for emails across genders in task oriented situations? Definitely it requires thought and analysis as the bandwidth of the content of the emails is much shorter than the traditional nineteenth century letters.

In task oriented emails, the purpose is to solicit cooperation through use of language/words or non-use of specific language patterns/words. To secure cooperation, politeness and its maxims, choice of words - explicit expressions of politeness- or politeness cues are used in securing cooperation in CMCs. Successful or effective communication/conversation necessitates that there be cooperation (Grice, 1975) between the interactants engaged in the process of communication. Several researchers ((Dubrovsky et al., 1991; Goffman, 1955; Brown and Levinson, 1978; Leech, 1983) have pointed out that cooperation pre-supposes the presence of politeness. While the interaction between cooperation and politeness holds good for interpersonal communication, is the link/interplay equally relevant in emails? In which situations are principles and maxims adhered and in which context are they violated? Are the principles applied in isolation or do they occur in groups or clusters? Additionally, are the principles and maxims universal? Would the same hold true across cultures and continents?

While the impact of politeness on cooperation and vice versa has been studied extensively, scant attention has been paid to violations of politeness principles and variations in choice of principles and clusters across genders. It makes interesting study to analyze the level/extent of politeness or type of principles used/abused to solicit cooperation in emails by males and females. Unfortunately, we are unaware of any literature on CMC in the Indian context that will provide an answer to the above mentioned questions and a study of the kind attempted will help contribute in particular to an understanding of CMC in the Indian subcontinent and cross cultural communication in general.

The focus of this paper is to study CMC and analyze its effect on the politeness maxims used by both men and women in India. An analysis of gender communication patterns in the use of politeness within CMC in India would lead to a better understanding of how men and women approach task oriented communication. This paper looks at the use of politeness through the maxims developed by Leech (1983). While these principles were developed for the purpose of analyzing language in context of verbal communication such as conversation, this paper attempts to extend these maxims towards the use of language in emails as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Significant work in the area of politeness was conducted by Brown and Levinson, who proposed the theory of politeness in 1978 which is linked with the dramaturgical theory of face proposed by Goffman (1955). Goffman posits that men and women are social actors on the stage of life, where they need to present a positive image (self) to the audience (others). To maintain this positive image, which is a reflection of their identity and esteem, they resort to techniques that support “face”. In this interaction or self- presentation process, politeness becomes a tool for assertion and recognition of the rights of others. Brown and Levinson extended discussion on the concept of “face” and maintained that there can be two types of face in an interaction: “positive face” and “negative face”. “Positive face” refers to the individual’s desire to be wanted, appreciated and acknowledged and the desire to have a positive face is reflected in people’s interaction with each other (Thomas, 1995). While gaining recognition is part of the psyche of the individual, an inherent desire to be allowed freedom, space and self-determination is reflective of the “negative face”.

Merrison (undated) argued that “various ‘sensitive’ behaviours are seen to mitigate threats – either threats to the success of the transaction or threats to face. Along the lines of Brown & Levinson’s (1987) notion of *face-threatening act* (FTA), the author introduces the term *transaction-threatening act* (TTA). Merrison postulates that when engaged in task-oriented dialogue, the person involved can be perceived as investing a lot of effort in being polite for securing cooperation.

In addition to the concept on “face”, politeness has also been studied as a principle with a set of maxims, essential for smooth flow of communication. Geoffrey Leech (1983) in an elaboration on Politeness Principle (PP) identified six Maxims: Tact Maxim (minimizing cost to the other and maximizing benefit to the other), Generosity Maxim (minimizing benefit to self and maximize cost to self), Approbation Maxim (minimize dispraise of the other and maximize praise of the other), Modesty Maxim (minimize praise of self, maximize dispraise of self), Agreement Maxim (minimize disagreement between self and the other and maximize agreement between self and other) and Sympathy Maxim (minimize antipathy between self and the other and maximize sympathy between self and other), in Principles of Pragmatics (1983). Leech had introduced these principles as a necessary compliment for Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP) which identified four Maxims of cooperation: Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner. For communicative effectiveness, the two principles of clarity and politeness/consideration often clash, arising as a response to the dictates of the situation. Excessive clarity can often give rise to brusqueness and excessive politeness, ambiguity (Morand and Ocker, 2002). A balance between the two is to be maintained for cooperation between the sender and the receiver. Leech (1983) argued that “PP has a greater binding force than CP”. If one is being rude and impolite, cooperation also would not follow. Thus the cooperative attitude required for Grice’s CP needs the observance of the PP. In this sense, the PP has a higher regulating role over the CP (Liu Renqing, 1987).

Leech (1983) cautions that a factor worth considering before beginning a discussion on politeness is that the term is relative. For instance, the Japanese and Chinese are considered to be more polite than the Europeans. So what would constitute as being 'impolite' in Japan, may be considered as 'polite' in another country.

Seeking cooperation through politeness is also reflected in written communication – be it through letters, faxes or through CMC. However, to understand the nuances involved in written communication through CMC, it is worth noting that written form of communication through CMC is significantly different from the written communication through letters, faxes etc. Research has shown that the style of writing in CMC significantly differs from the conventional mode of writing. Studies by Jaffe (1995), (Boudourides, 1995), Baron (1994), Collins (1984), etc posit that CMC has led to a distinct use of written language with emphasis on '**graphic representation of language**', grammatical markers and use of syntax, leading to an informal communication through emails.

According to Jaffe et al (1995), people using CMC tend to develop informal codes, referred as "emotext," which include "intentional spelling, lexical surrogates, grammatical markers, strategic capitalization, and visual arrangements of text characters". Use of "intentional misspelling" such as repetition of a vowel or a consonant which serves to highlight a particular word or a phrase such as "sssoooooo good!" Here, the writer resorts to 'graphic representation of words' by using alphabets to communicate a particular tone e.g. Thhhhaaaaaaankkk youuuu. Grammatical markers include gratuitous capitalization as well as repeated exclamation points and question marks to add affective emphasis. Various symbols such as smileys, emoticons etc are used to signify a particular feeling or state of mind. The language in CMC also includes an extensive list of acronyms like BTW for "by the way" (Boudourides, 1995).

Baron (1984, in Collins, 1992) notes that CMC appears to foster a distinctive conversational style. The use of syntax and the choice of words can evoke "conversational informality, emphasis, rhythm, and even vocalizations" (Yates and Orlikowski, 1993).

As language used in CMC is an extension of oral language and language used in the written text, an understanding of the various research perspectives on gender differences in written communication are important for a study on language variations across genders in emails. According to Lakoff (1975), women and men use English in several different ways. Women have a tendency to frequently use emotionally intensive adverbs such as "so," "terribly," "awfully," and "quite." Similarly, Eakins and Eakins (1978) stated that the language used by women includes more number of adjectives and adverbs that "connote triviality or unimportance" such as "sweet", "dreadful", "precious", and "darling". It has also been observed that wives make expressive statements such as "Ouch!" or "Darn!" (Soskin and John, 1963), while husbands tend to make directive and informative statements

Tannen (1990) notes that "women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence". Tannen further argues that such kind of communication can be like "cross-cultural communication", where there is a difference in style of conversation. This style of conversation allows females to avoid any kind of direct clash or conflict and thus leads to an atmosphere of "mutual consent" (Coates, 1996). Githens in her study of 1996 observed that filler words are commonly used by women and use of swear words are highly uncommon among women. Tannen categorizes women's talk as "interdependent" and "cooperative" whereas male conversational patterns express "independence" and assertions of vertically hierarchical power.

Similarly, differences have also been noted in the language used by men and women in CMC. According to Kaplan and Farrell, Tannen, and Leet-Peregrini (cited in Jaffe, 1995) women's messages are short and their participation is driven by their desire to keep the communication going than the desire to achieve consensus.

Not all researchers share a similar view. According to research by Michaelson and Pohl 2001 (cited in Swallowe, 2003), “rule of politeness governing face-to-face conversations seems to be less binding when there is no physical presence” and it is this “bodily presence of individuals [that] leads to a weakening of gender roles.” Additionally, Bunz and Campbell (2002) posited that demographics such as age, gender, frequency with which people use emails and the reasons for their use of emails, etc do not influence politeness accommodation in email.

Based on the research of differences between conventional forms of written communication and CMC, politeness and cooperation, it can be stated that the language used in CMC, especially emails at workplace, irrespective of gender take the form of ‘**intellectual written shorthand.**’ To further understand the nature of the ‘intellectual written shorthand’ through research and analysis, we have made a distinction between the communication that takes place simultaneously, such as internet chatting, and those exchanges which occur asynchronously, such as e-mails. The study focuses only on communication through emails and analyses 494 emails sent in the context of workplace.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS:

Cooperation through Politeness in CMC

CP has the function of regulating the words so that cooperation for task oriented communication is solicited, while PP stresses tactful expressions for effective, goal oriented communication. However, CMC creates an asymmetrical imbalance in the sender-receiver relationship: the sender can transmit information and get cooperation under way, but has no guarantee that the recipient has received the message (Riva and Galimberti, 1998) and will respond in a positive manner. Additionally, politeness “rules” differ depending on the situation (Argyle, 1992) in which or for which the message has been drafted. Differences in CMC arise because the communicators have a sense of anonymity which could encourage them, for example, to be impolite and express their hostility or resentment explicitly (Reid, 1995). This problem does not arise in dyadic communication as speakers adapt to the speech styles of the co-interactants for higher acceptance and better understanding.

Another important factor that affects the use of politeness in emails is the absence of “context cues”. According to Lea and Spears (1991) depersonalized interaction (as in the case of emails) leads to “less personal communication”. Often, we become secure in our anonymity and hence are less bound by social norms. Carnevale & Probst, 1997; Garton & Wellman, 1995; Weisband & Reining, 1995 (cited in Jessmer and Anderson, 2001) state that employees communicating with their supervisors through email might lose their supervisor’s sense of status and could end up in miscommunication. Chapman (1995) adds that when people are physically removed from each other, the level of politeness decreases considerably. In this context, two questions come to the fore: in situations where cooperation is uncertain, do the recipients respond with the same degree of politeness as initiated by the sender? Does the level/extent/degree of politeness affect the level of cooperation? Bunz and Campbell (2002) found that messages containing “both verbal and structural politeness indicators” elicited the most polite responses. They observed that email

recipients detect politeness indicators, and accommodate this politeness by including similar politeness indicators in their email responses.

In short, cooperation can be achieved by politeness markers and indicators. Interestingly, there is a sense of anonymity in CMC which can lead to an expression of impoliteness or hostility. These expressions are communicatively essential and important yet suitably underutilized in task oriented emails. Violations of protocol indicated by impolite markers and indicators are essentially absent in task oriented emails which target cooperation from the recipient.

Proposition 1: Specific forms of politeness (e.g.: tactful requests, agreements) will result in cooperation among team members/coworkers in CMC communication.

Gender and Politeness:

Politeness as a tool adds an important dimension to the study of gender and language in CMC. The term “gender”, as any other terminological choice, is laden with assumptions built on cultural roles and stereotypes developed over centuries and generations. Behavioural patterns across genders and perceptions are moulded by a psychological need and necessity to conform to the existing mindset of the larger milieu. The desire to gain acceptance in a supposedly male dominated market leads to a distinctively different style of writing.

In this form of writing, no matter what be the content, the end result or target to be achieved is measured in terms of cooperation. Individuals (men and women) writing emails derive enormous self validation, reaffirm their relationship to power and status, by extending requests to other members in the corporate arena. According to a research study on speech patterns of men and women and their relationship to status and power, it was found that there are differences in politeness patterns between men and women (Holmes, 1995). Holmes also noted that the more polite tone of women’s speech is often associated with submissive social roles. Women also communicate in a more tentative, hesitant manner. The major difference in writing gets reflected in adherence or violation of principles and maxims. This variation is undoubtedly more in the nature of laying emphasis rather than specifying intent.

While measures of satisfaction in achieving targets for both men and women are the same, the verbalization is different and more so in emails where the element of face-to-face interaction is missing. Gaining acceptance, agreement is the primary concern and varying degrees of politeness are adopted as per the levels of organizational acceptance according to the gender and not identity of the individual. In an experiment by Fishman (1980) one-third of the questions that women asked were tag questions. Other questions were requests for information or clarification. The study also revealed that women said "you know" five times more often than the men. Impolite messages, it was found, were usually authored by males, while females were the perceived authors of the polite messages (Jessmer and Anderson, 2001). Smith et al, 1997, (cited in Herring, 2000), have found that women are more likely to thank, appreciate and apologize, and to be upset by violations of politeness: they more often challenge offenders who violate online rules of conduct. In continuation with online rules of conduct, Herring (2000) noted that conventional “gender styles interact with the broader Internet context to create a public online climate that is generally less hospitable to women than to men”.

Proposition 2: Individuals writing CMC are aware of gender centric organizational acceptance and the composition of the mails is a reflection of the same.

Proposition 2a: Specific examples of adherence to politeness maxims is higher in women than in men.

Proposition 2b: Specific examples of violations of politeness maxims is higher in men than in women.

Gender and Language:

Researchers analyzing gender and language suggested that differences in language usage by men and women resulted from different socio-emotional factors. One implication is that perhaps language in CMC would vary considerably in task oriented situations

An analysis of conversations from an Internet Relay Chat Channel by Rodino in 1997 (cited in Jessmer and Anderson, 2001) showed that “women tend to make more use of qualifiers, exaggerations, extreme politeness, and tag questions while put-downs, strong assertions, and sarcasm characterize male language.” Witmer and Katzman (1997) found that women tend to use “graphical accents” more than men, which suggested an emotional tone in their messages.

Herring (1994) notes that the male style in CMC is characterized by “put-downs, strong, often contentious assertions, lengthy and/or frequent postings, self-promotion, and sarcasm”. These gender differences in CMC could also be explained by the research findings that men and women tend to use and understand language in different ways (Gefen and Straub, 1997). Women’s discourse also tends to be more tentative and socially oriented in contrast to men, who tend to be more categorical (Preisler, 1986). Furthermore, women show a proclivity to highlight cooperation in their discourse while men tend to be competitive (Coates, 1996).

More recent research, (Coates, 1996) grounded in same-sex and mixed-sex interaction and team patterns suggest that in real-life settings men and women use interaction patterns which are organizationally “fit” rather than gender specific. Implications of this research would automatically extend to CMC users who develop conventions and understandings that help them to establish bonds and ties and communication patterns that are organizationally correct rather than gender specific.

While the debate is still on concerning similarities and dissimilarities pertaining to differences/similarities in language usage across genders, reflected in the choice and use of politeness maxims, it is undoubtedly clear that politeness maxims reflected in language are used in clusters by both men and women. In majority of emails used by males or females, more than one maxim of politeness is operational which encompasses variations in language use.

Proposition 3: The choice of politeness maxims reflected in language use in CMC depends not only on the gender of the sender. Nature of tasks determines the choice of maxims which are found in clusters. Clusters of maxims (e.g.: Tact+ agreement; tact + approbation) in equal proportion, in both men and women, form an integral part of politeness in task oriented emails.

Explicit Expression of Politeness through Words (EEPW) in Directives:

Adhering to principles and maxims of politeness and the verbal manifestation of the same is a desired attribute in communicative competence, be it oral or written communication. Distinct from following these principles is an interesting study of words, used specifically in directives, which possess polite overtures. For instance, words like “please”, “kindly”, “sorry”, “relax” also

referred to as politeness indicators and markers (Trip, 1971) have positive, polite connotations and their choice heralds a message which solicits and gains cooperation.

Literature (S. Ervin Trip, 1971) on politeness studies these words in the context of negative or positive politeness. However, extending the study beyond positive and negative politeness, we have attempted a categorization of words which by their presence in a directive utterance change the impact of the message and make it more polite. For purpose of analysis and discussion we will refer to these terms as **'explicit expression of politeness through words' (EEPW)**.

Research shows that using directives in the context of workplace is not a "straightforward process" (Vine, 2001). Vine also argues that people use different "strategies" for directives, depending on the context. Ervin-Trip (1971) categorized directives into five categories – imperatives, embedded imperatives, statements of need, questions directives and hints. Trip claimed that directives are "especially rich in alternations" because the communication involves some sort of an action on the part of the recipient, which may involve "varying degrees of effort".

Interestingly, men and women use EEPW differently while writing directives in emails for securing cooperation. While women made more use of EEPW with reiterations of "please" and "kindly", men communicated the task more directly with phrases rather than EEPW like: "as mentioned, we are running late..." "I hope you check this mail ASAP and get things done..." etc. While men did use EEPW like "hope", the message conveyed more a sense of urgency rather than explicit politeness, leaving the recipient with no other option but to comply.

Proposition 4: In directives, typically identified as "task oriented", variations in use of EEPW across genders occurs: this choice provides important cues regarding the use of language by males and females in CMC.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, the authors sent emails to various organizations in India soliciting samples of work related emails. Additionally, students and colleagues were requested to share task oriented emails. 494 emails were received out of which 250 were written by men and 244 by women. All names were deleted from the emails. The gender, 'male' or 'female', of the sender was written on top of the mails to facilitate coding on the basis of gender.

Segregation of the emails on the basis of gender was manually conducted. Subsequently, emails were cut and pasted on a word document file and a number assigned to them for ease of identification. This was followed by the coding process. An independent coder, who had earlier experience of coding transcripts on gender and upward influence for the authors, completed the task of coding all the 494 emails. The measurement process was conducted in two stages. In the first stage the mails written by men and women were divided into directives and non-directives. Under these two categories the text was further coded by identifying words or clauses that were mutually agreed by the researchers as measures for politeness. The criterion for categorization of emails into different categories was based on adherence to different maxims of politeness. The mails were coded on the basis of the politeness maxims which were listed as tact, approbation, generosity, agreement, sympathy and modesty. The mails that did not fall in any of these categories were labeled as 'others' which were then analyzed by the researchers and different labels assigned.

The initial coding of 58 random mails was checked by the researchers for authenticity. When 100% agreement on the coding process was arrived at, the remaining emails were given to the coder who completed the task.

Once all emails were categorized, the researchers once again did a random check to ensure that the coding was done as per the requirements. It was found that in four cases, there was an error in identification of the gender of the sender. A re-run of the emails with the gender of the sender was conducted to ensure that the separation of the emails in the male and female category was accurate.

Satisfactory completion of the coding was followed by a manual counting of the politeness markers and a table prepared spelling out the details of the count.

DISCUSSION

Extensive research in the areas of politeness, gender and emails has stimulated researchers to study politeness used by men and women in emails. The present work is a continuation of existing research in the area of gender in email communication (Boneva et al., 2001; Thomson and Murachver, 2001) and includes the component of politeness in language use in emails across genders. The objective of the study is an investigation into the verbal manifestations of politeness maxims across genders for securing cooperation in work related or task oriented emails. It made an attempt to understand the choice of maxims used both in isolation and clusters by men and women. Additionally, the research also probed instances of violations of politeness maxims in emails written by males and females in a work situation. As the data comprised emails collected from Indian employees working in an Indian environment, claims made and findings posited are reflective of a select audience. The research thus provides a fresh perspective on the understanding of politeness used in emails across genders through application of principles and maxims, specifically cooperative and politeness principles in India. In future it may be possible to annotate a set of principles typical of an organization (multi national) for securing cooperation – which are not bound by gender or culture but are symptomatic of the needs of the organization.

In this study, 494 work related emails were collected from males and females. All mails had either a request (pertaining to work) to be made, job/task to be assigned, or information to be solicited. While all emails were task oriented, they varied in the degree and form of politeness. Some adhered to explicit politeness principles in the interest of securing cooperation, some indicated presence of more than one maxim of politeness, some made use of EEPW or politeness indicators as “Please”, “Thank you”, some directly violated the politeness maxims.

The emails collated were written in the context of work place, were task oriented in nature necessitating cooperation from the recipient. All these emails were divided into two categories: directives and non-directives. The purpose of dividing the emails into these two categories was simple. The linguistic connotations of the word “directives” have a commanding/ordering note which is not bound by politeness but is intrinsically status or hierarchy specific. Thus under the category of directives we clubbed emails in which the sender assigns a task to the recipient. Emails that contained messages which were of the nature of “seeking information” or “seeking tasks to be accomplished” were assigned to the non-directives category.

While formulating categories and indulging in categorization is important, the bottom line for any formal email exchange is to achieve goals and meet targets through cooperation with other members in the team or the organization. According to Hunt (1985) people communicate in the manner and extent to which they can attain the goals associated with the communication effort.

The interplay of politeness and cooperation is at its highest when targets and goals are at stake. A positive approach begets a positive response in all communication situations. As stated earlier, while engaging in task-oriented dialogue, the person involved can be perceived as investing a lot of effort in being polite for securing cooperation. Definitely, the argument holds true also for the purpose of this study, where analysis of emails revealed that task related emails, which require cooperation, also follow politeness principles. Thus the emails by both males as well as females sought cooperation by using politeness maxims in accordance with the first proposition - Specific forms of politeness (e.g.: tactful requests, agreements) will result in cooperation among team members/coworkers in CMC communication. Out of the 250 written by men, 121 used different maxims for the purpose of seeking tasks to be accomplished by members in the organization. Tact and approbation were two principles that were followed extensively by men, followed by agreement. 93 mails by women made use of maxims in which tact was followed maximum amount of time followed by approbation and agreement. However, the difference between the mails of men and women in the use of approbation is maximum. Men have used approbation in 34 instances while women have used it in 19 instances. This could probably be a result of the individual and cultural psyche of the writers, where praise and dispraise is essential for securing cooperation and promoting motivation in the Indian context. Triandis & Singelis had noted in 1998 (cited in Guodong and Jing, 2005) that "East Asian collectivists are especially eager to maintain harmonious relationships while individualists from the U. S. A. are more concerned with clearly giving opinions". The reason thus for adopting specific forms of politeness for securing cooperation can also be conceived as a feature typical of the workings of employees in the Indian sub-continent.

Emails written by women showed a higher degree of adherence to principles of politeness than those written by men. With more women entering into organizations and adopting a culture which is specifically male dominated, communication patterns –oral and written – are typically hesitant and non-demanding. Women are reported (Kaul, Ansari and Rai, 2005) to be high on instrumental dependency when interacting with members of the same or opposite sex. Additionally, literature on language patterns employed by women indicates hesitancy in approach, agreements and acceptance, acknowledgement (Fishman, 1980; Smith et al., 1997). The findings thus validate proposition 2a, namely, *specific examples of adherence to politeness maxims is higher in women than in men.*

It was interesting to note that there was a difference in adherence to politeness maxims by both men and women. The analysis of emails led to the following observations:

- Tact and Approbation were two positive politeness maxims used frequently in CMC by both men and women. However, it was found that there was high **persistence** of Approbation maxim among males.

Men used flattery more than women in their emails. The emails communicated praise and approval of the recipient's actions. However, this finding contradicts the existing literature which points towards the fact that as compared to men, women tend to praise and appreciate the recipient more (Herring, 1994). This again could be attributed to the cultural backdrop in which the emails were written where men take on the patronizing role and compliment frequently to motivate the team players/members.

The emails written by women showed hesitancy to openly contradict or disagree. The mails were more appeasing and tentative rather than firm and clear. The finding coincides with the existing literature that women tend to "qualify and justify their assertions have a tendency to apologize, express support of others, and in general, manifest an "aligned" orientation

towards their interlocutors” Hall 1996; Herring 1993, 1996b; Savicki et al. 1996, (cited in Herring, 2000).

An interesting finding from the analysis of the emails was the tendency or desire to bond with the recipient through written communication. A variation in this ‘bonding’ technique was found in the mails written by men and women. It was found that

- Men attempted ‘bonding’ through the use of Approbation
- Women attempted ‘bonding’ by making ‘**Inane talk**’ In other words, men played the role of the head in a patriarchic society, praising and motivating, which is typical of the Indian culture, and women indulged in ‘relationship building’ by inquiring about the well-being of the recipient, family members etc before moving on to work related topics. Adoption of this tactic is in line with the nurturing role assigned to women (Tannen, 1999) by researchers.

“I hope this finds you well. Haven't heard from you for some time now. Was wondering what is happening on the book front. In your last mail we had agreed on a February deadline.”

While the email has clearly been written to inquire about the adherence to a deadline, the author makes a point to inquire about the well being, instead of coming straight to the point. Such kind of ‘inane talk’ was used more frequently by females. Recent studies have looked at how CMC also involves some social-emotion-oriented communication, Jacobson, 1999; Lea & Spears, 1992; Utz, 2000; Walther, 1996; Walther & Tidwell, 1995; Walther & Burgoon, 1992 (cited in Liu, 2002). According to Murray (1988), “personal involvement” is dependent on the context and not the medium.

Probably these research findings can be attributed to the fact that in the present study maxims of sympathy, modesty and generosity was used in almost equal proportion by both men and women.

In the emails sent by men, while there was adherence to the politeness principle, violations of maxims were also witnessed. Instances of violations were in the nature of ‘**sarcastic politeness**’ or ‘**camouflaged politeness**’. In such emails, there was a dichotomy between the words used and the intent of the message. While the words indicated adherence to politeness maxims, the tone and the intent proved contradictory. For instance,

“I can't make a scrapbook as I am not comfortable with the idea. I have not done anything in this regard so far and I would be grateful if you could ask the professor to excuse me from this.”

Here, while the words “I would be grateful if you could...” suggest politeness and tact, there is a clear violation of the agreement maxim. The author is not willing to agree to the concept of writing/preparing a “scrapbook”. Clearly, the word “grateful”, in this context, is not being used in the literal sense. The author has expressed dissent and disagreement, albeit in a positive manner, by superficially or textually adhering to the tact principle.

It was found that such violations, though rare were present primarily in emails written by men, thus validating the second proposition, i.e. *specific examples of violations of politeness maxims are higher in men than in women*. This is typical of the findings by researchers (Herring, 1994) that aggression is characteristic of the communicating pattern and style of men.

Many of the emails revealed use of more than one maxim. In emails where the size of written communication or the number of words used to communicate a message is much less, we found more than one politeness maxim operational. In other words maxims were found in clusters. Interestingly all groupings of politeness maxims had ‘tact’ as a necessary second part to the cluster. Both men and women used tact in combination with approbation and agreement. The mail began with adherence to either approbation or agreement maxim and followed a request in a tactful manner. Interestingly it was found that together with clusters EEPWs were also used. These finding begins to make sense when we consider the nature of emails. All emails which made use of clusters fell in the category of seeing tasks from other people. To secure cooperation from members in the team or the organization for accomplishing a certain task involves excessive politeness. Probably in these instances clarity and politeness can never be at loggerheads. Both are important: the first for ascertaining that the magnitude of the task is correctly comprehended and the second for persuasion to complete a task. Use of EEPWs ensures that the request is loaded with politeness and chances of refusal are minimal. This finding validates the third proposition that clusters are not gender specific, but are contingent on the needs of the situation or the organization. However, what is important in the formation of these clusters is that the maxim of tact is in all situations observed for soliciting cooperation in task-oriented emails. Though we have no data to substantiate the point, but tentatively we can state that this feature could be country specific. Ideally if a task is to be requested, it is always the superior making the request. Hence minimal politeness with maximum clarity is required. Data from the emails, however proves contrary to the fact and reveals maximum politeness with average clarity as the requirement for securing cooperation in task seeking situations.

Directives were in the nature of assigning tasks. The data revealed some interesting conclusions. Men and women while assigning tasks were both tactful and ‘**atactful**’ or ‘untactful’. Women however, were more tactful while assigning tasks and men more ‘atactful’. Both men and women made use of EEPWs, like “requested”, “kindly”, “sincerely”, “please”, “can we”, “may we”, “suggested”, “grateful”, etc. at the time of assigning tasks in their ‘tactful’ mails, but since most of the emails written by women were ‘tactful’ in nature, obviously the use of EEPWs by women were also more. Men did not focus on being polite through EEPW (they used EEPW only in five instances) but were more oriented towards the task at hand in their ‘atactful’ mails. Thus, the fourth proposition, variations in use of politeness maxims across genders are highest in directives, was also validated. This finding however, contradicts the validation of the third proposition in which men were extremely polite while seeking tasks. Not only were clusters used but together with clusters EEPWs were also used. The difference is a result of the nature of cooperation that is attempted. In the case of clusters, the nature of the interaction was “task seeking”, but in the case of directives, it was a case of “assigning tasks”. The variation arose because of the interplay of power and status. Power and status (Tannen,1990) does play an important role in maximizing or minimizing role or politeness in emails for securing cooperation. Women were definitely more tactful in the use of directives and they also made use of EEPWs at the time of assigning tasks. Power and status does not change the use of language for women. Research indicates that they agree more than men (Coates, 1996; Tannen,1990) and speak a language of ‘bonding’ and intimacy.

The analysis revealed that politeness and cooperation are essential for communication, more specifically, computer mediated communication in which the physical absence of the sender and receiver begins a process rich in assumptions and perceptions. The accuracy of the assumptions and perceptions is translated into cooperation between the interactants. Use of politeness aids in galvanizing the process and securing maximum gain with minimum effort.

FUTURE AREAS OF STUDY

Study of CMC in the context of gender and politeness is still a fertile ground for future researchers. Considering the comparative novelty of the medium, the options and the possibilities of research and analysis are multiple. Additionally its intrinsic similarity with face-to-face communication and written communication and extrinsic dissimilarity with the existing mediums of communication make it a challenging area for research.

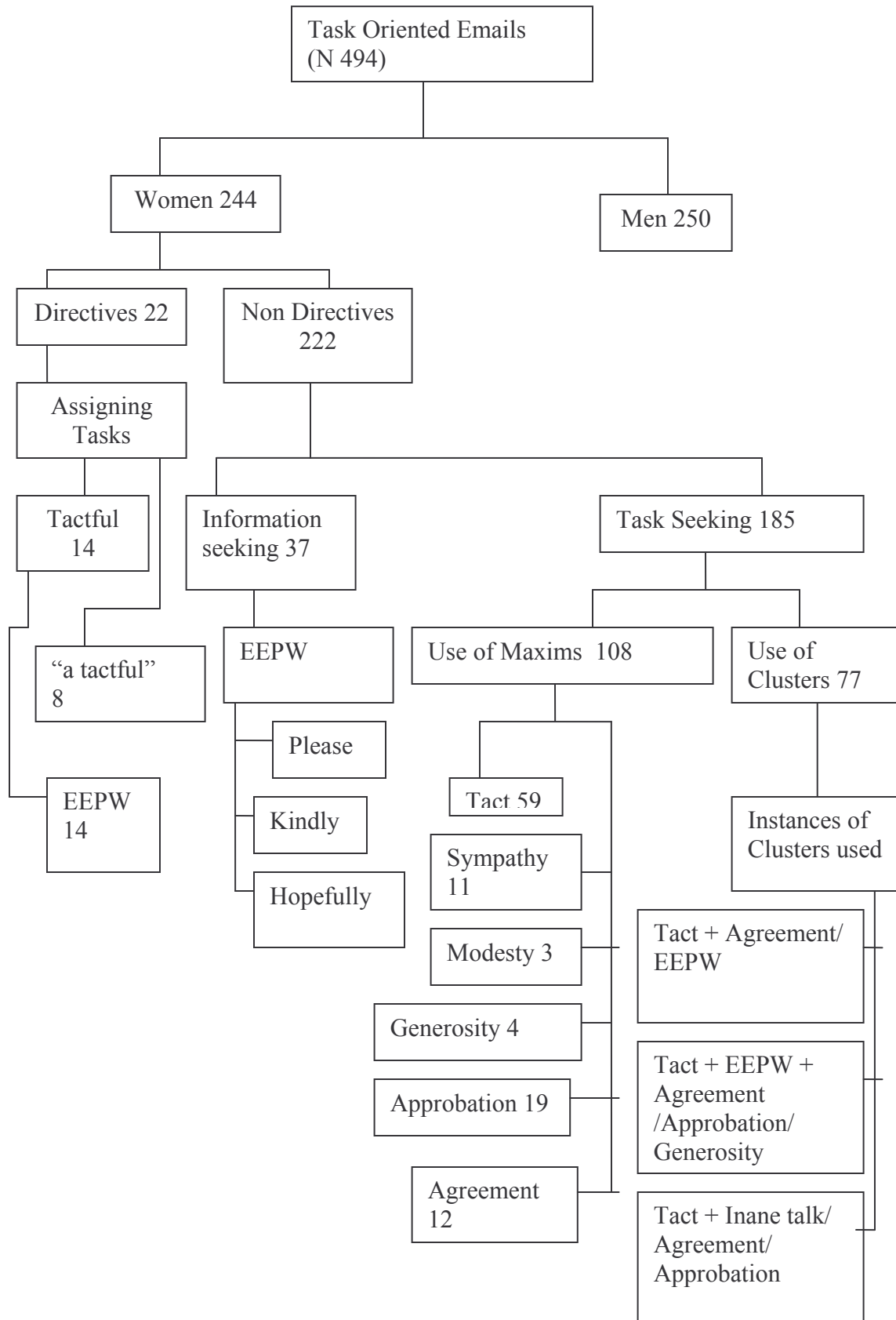
Future researchers can concentrate on these similarities and dissimilarities. One virgin area for research in oral communication is the disparity between the intent of the sender and the message transmitted. The same can be studied with respect to CMC where the internal meaning of the message or ‘between the lines’ message can be compared with the explicit rendering of the intent. How frequently is this means adopted? What is the impact of this dichotomy on the receiver? In the absence of the nonverbal clues is the receiver able to comprehend the magnitude of the disparity? Is the message suitably comprehended? Does the reader go by the written or the ‘unwritten’ message? The study can be well related to Grice’s theory of conversational implicature and the violations of maxims.

Another area of interest can be a study of ‘sarcastic politeness’ or ‘camouflaged politeness’. In such cases, the writer does not make explicitly violate politeness principles. Through sarcasm or cryptic remarks which are politeness indicators accomplishes the purpose of communicating an unpleasant or unacceptable message. There is further scope of analyzing the “clustered approach” for future study of politeness in CMC . More work needs to be done to ascertain if specific patterns in “clusters” can be found in email authors across the globe or if these patterns are restricted to a specific area or demographics.

Researchers interested in studying gender variations in emails can extensively study the role and impact of inane talk which can, with substantial data be an extension on the maxims of politeness. Securing a certain level of cooperation through inane talk can well be niche area for study in the language used by women in CMC

Finally, the study raises several issues related to CMC, gender and its effect on use of CP and PP.

1. Extent to which emphasis should be laid on intent and explicit expression.
2. Significance of use of specific/certain words
3. Universality of principles for writing emails
4. Relation between gender patterns in written language and CMC
5. Role of politeness in defining the quantum of cooperation in emails.



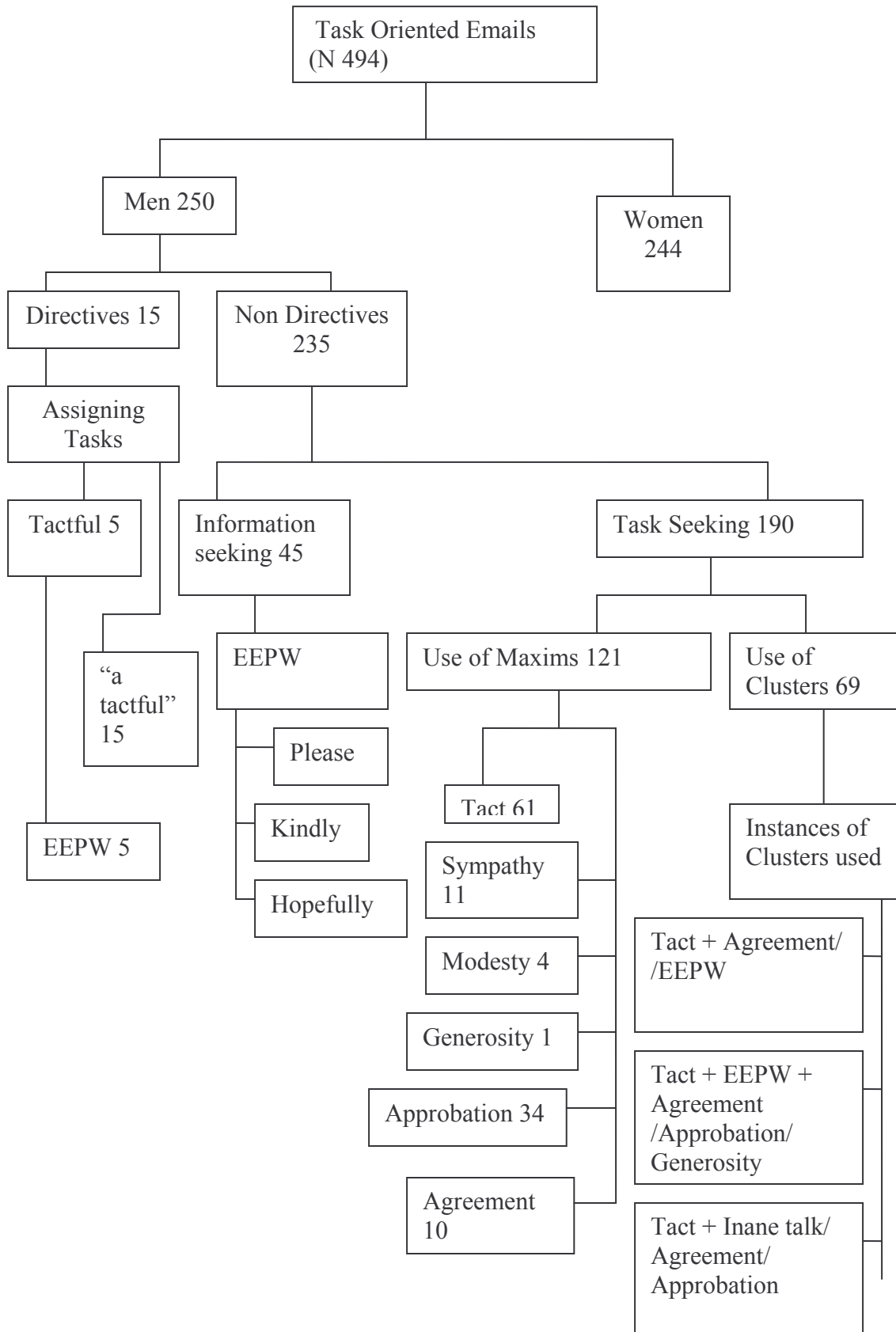


Table 1

Directives (assigning tasks)	Males	Females
Tactful	No. of instances – 5 Example “Please let me know who would like to participate. I will be happy to provide some pointers on preparing for the debate.”	No. of instances – 14 Example: “Would appreciate if you can please let me have your views so that I can forward the same to the PGP office.”
‘a-tactful’	No. of instances – 10 Example – “Ask the student to send a passport size picture of him along with the answers either by email, or he could send it to our office.”	No. of instances – 8 Example “I would like to know why the Tue review meeting on 19th was not organized.”
Use of EEPW (in tactful directives)	No. of instances – 5 Example - “However, since we have an early deadline today, I would really appreciate it if you could please get this done latest by 4.00 pm”	No. of instances – 14 Example – Would appreciate it if you could please let me have your views so that I could forward the same to the PGP office.

Table 2

Non Directives	Males 235	Females 244
Information Seeking	No. of instances – 45	No. of instances – 185
Task Seeking Use of maxims Use of clusters	No. of instances – 190	No. of instances – 37

Table 3

Information Seeking - atactful (EEPW)	Males	Females
Please/Kindly/Hopefully/ Gratefully	No. of instances – 45 Example – “Thank you for your reply. As requested, please find enclosed the following for your use.”	No. of instances – 185 Example – “Kindly do let me know if you would be interested to review any of these books.”

Table 4

Task Seeking (Use of Maxims)	Males 121	Females 108
Tact	No. of instances – 61 Example “Though the CP system does encourage people to talk in class, still it cannot supplement a full course and concentrated effort.”	No. of instances – 59 Example “I would simply need 15-20 minutes of your time in filling in this questionnaire.”
Sympathy	No. of instances – 11 Example “Now that you mention it, I do remember your name (and IIM) from the program. Israel (not only Eilat but also Tel Aviv, where I spent a night after the conference) was fabulous— too bad you missed it.”	No. of instances – 11 Example “I am saddened by the devastation that your country and so many others have suffered.”
Modesty	No. of instances – 4 Example “In case there are some concerns pl feel free to share them with us so >> that we can improve on the quality of the program”	No. of instances – 3 Example “Hence it (my writing) is not of best editorial quality”
Generosity	No. of instances – 1 Example “If you have any queries or need any additional information please feel free to contact me.”	No. of instances – 4 Example “I m ready to help in any case”
Approbation	No. of instances – 34 Example “The material reads well and if full of information that professionals and students would find very useful.”	No. of instances – 19 Example “You were easily the most impressive and most effective of the faculty who spent time with us during the program.”
Agreement	No. of instances – 10 Example “Yes, the February limit seems fine”	No. of instances – 12 Example “Life has become, as you rightly said one big meeting deadlines issue.”

Table 5

Task Seeking Use of Clusters	Male 69	Female 77
EEPW + Apology	No. of instances – 5 Example	No. of instances – 3 Example Firstly, I am sorry for the inconvenience caused. If it's okay with you we can meet at 8.30 today at CR-4. Just mail me and let me know if it's convenient for you. Thank you for considering my request.
EEPW + Generosity	No. of instances – 0 Example	No. of instances – 2 Example Please do let us know if there is anything that you would require in terms of multi media projector etc.
Apology + Tact	No. of instances – 16 Example Sorry to have read the message late	No. of instances – 10 Example I apologize for this inconvenience
EEPW + Tact	No. of instances – 10 Example It is hence suggested to the Community Members to kindly use the Residential Gate after 6 P.M. to avoid inconvenience.	No. of instances – 12 Example In the meantime we will be extremely grateful if you do not follow up with any further sales activities and approaches.
Apology + Approbation	No. of instances – 0 Example	No. of instances – 4 Example Thank you for the update. I apologise for the delay in response.
Bonding + Inane Talk	No. of instances – 15 Example Nice to see your mail. I was sure the programme would be good.	No. of instances – 35 Example Do get in touch next time you are in Ahmedabad.
Approbation + EEPW	No. of instances – 0 Example	No. of instances – 8 Example You have been extremely kind and understanding
Approbation + Agreement	No. of instances – 5 Example Fine, I look forward to hearing from you about your availability	No. of instances – 0 Example
EEPW + Agreement	No. of instances – 1 Example	No. of instances – 1 Example

Inane Talk + Tact	No. of instances – 3 Example Good to hear from you after a break. Happy to note that you are intensely pursuing your research work. Research work has its challenges in getting timely and relevant data .	No. of instances – 0 Example
Agreement + Tact	No. of instances – 3 Example Ok. Keeping this point in view, please do the needful.	No. of instances – 1 Example Thank you so much for your mail. We will wait for your response. Look forward to further interaction with you.
Altruistic Tact/ Humility	No. of instances – 1 Example BTW, when can I expect to receive the cover page designs & info on number of pages.	No. of instances – 0 Example
Sarcastic Politeness	No. of instances – 1 Example Sorry but i do not understand what is this persuasion scrapbook. Can you define it because i do not even start to work on this ? Thanks you very much.	No. of instances – 0 Example
Bonding + Agreement	No. of instances – 0 Example	No. of instances – 1 Example Yes, that will be fine. Oh, thanks for including me in all the mails.
Agreement + Tact + Sympathy + Apology	No. of instances – 1 Example I had submitted the hard copy in time and have also placed a soft copy on the submissions server. While I agree that this can not serve as an excuse for the error, I sincerely request you to consider my case. May I request you to grant me an appointment for discussing the same. Once again, I apologise for any inconvenience that I might have caused.	No. of instances – 0 Example
Approbation + Tact	No. of instances – 8 Example Thanx radhika for such an informative mail.I will definitely try and contact Krishnendu, if he will be helpful then I will clear many of my doubts.	No. of instances – 0 Example

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