

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: EVALUATING PRAGMATIC FAILURE AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DISCOURSE

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Abstract. *This study investigates how non-native English business professionals execute indirect speech acts, hedging, and politeness strategies compared to native executive expectations.*

Using a convergent mixed-methods framework pairing multimodal discourse analysis of negotiations with quantitative executive perception ratings, the project maps zones of pragmatic friction to inform cross-cultural pragmatics theory and business English pedagogy.

1. Introduction & Statement of Problem

English as a lingua franca (ELF) in international business prioritizes pragmatic effectiveness over mere structural correctness (Seidlhofer, 2011). In corporate interactions, failing to align with cultural norms of indirectness, deference, and politeness can break negotiations and damage key professional relationships (Thomas, 1983; House, 2000).

Non-native English speakers frequently transfer native-language politeness structures into business English, leading to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic failure (Thomas, 1983). Even when syntactically accurate, these transfers can be perceived as blunt, evasive, or insincere (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Taguchi, 2012).

Despite existing work on general cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), empirical research remains scarce regarding how implicit politeness strategies operate within contemporary international business negotiations.

2. Central Thesis Statement

Cross-cultural pragmatic failure in international business settings stems primarily from divergent cognitive scripts regarding implicit politeness. Specifically, while non-native English speakers utilize culturally transferrable indirectness markers to project respect and avoid confrontation, native English corporate evaluators frequently misinterpret these strategies as ambiguous, non-committal, or uncooperative due to unexamined native sociopragmatic expectations.

3. Key Research Questions

1. **Pragmalinguistic Execution:** What specific linguistic markers (e.g., hedging, modal verbs, indirect speech acts) do non-native English professionals employ to convey politeness and manage face during business negotiations (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Taguchi, 2012)?

2. **Perceptual Divergence:** How do native English-speaking business executives evaluate the professional competence, trustworthiness, and clarity of non-native speakers executing implicit politeness strategies (Spencer-Oatey, 2008)?

3. **Applied Frameworks:** How can empirical findings on pragmatic friction be integrated into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Business English curricula to improve cross-cultural communicative competence (Kasper & Rose, 2002)?

4. Proposed Methodology

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) combining corpus-based discourse analysis with quantitative perception testing across two cohorts (N = 60 total):

- **Group A (Non-Native L2, n=30):** International business managers (CEFR B2–C1) in multinational corporations. Data: Simulated negotiation recordings, post-task interviews.
- **Group B (Native L1, n=30):** Corporate executives and senior managers (Native English). Data: Evaluative rating scales, qualitative perception feedback.

4.1 Quantitative Measures

• **Pragmatic Assessment Scales:** Native-speaking executives rate recorded negotiation excerpts on 7-point Likert scales measuring perceived politeness, directness, professional authority, and clarity (Taguchi, 2012).

• **Frequency & Distribution Analysis:** Quantitative coding of specific politeness markers—including mitigation devices, softeners, and indirect refusal strategies—analyzed via corpus software AntConc (Anthony, 2022).

4.2 Qualitative Measures

• **Multimodal Discourse Analysis:** Fine-grained analysis of transcribed negotiation sessions utilizing Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and Rapport Management Frameworks (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) to examine turn-taking, hedging, and indirect speech act execution.

• **Retrospective Verbal Protocols:** Semi-structured interviews with participants to extract explicit awareness of their intended pragmatic goals versus perceived outcomes (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

5. Significance & Expected Contribution

This research advances cross-cultural pragmatics and international business communication by (1) expanding Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management model within global trade contexts, and (2) directly informing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training programs by replacing rigid grammatical instruction with practical pragmatic awareness modules.

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