So rude! The effects of non-native politeness in English emails on non-native peers

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Abstract:

In the current age of rapid globalisation, businesses and individuals alike gradually find themselves more and more compelled to operate in English – with differing degrees of fluency, both grammatically and pragmatically. A commonly reported result of non-nativeness is the lack of sensitivity to forms of politeness in speakers' production acts, a pragmatic shortcoming which typically results in relatively negative interpersonal evaluations; at least, when being judged by a native speaker. In this paper, it was explored how non-native speakers of English evaluated various request emails by non-native peers, as well as said peers' personal qualities, based on two variables: 1) the presence/absence of cues as to the sender's non-native origin, and 2) different forms of politeness modifications. The results showed that neither variable influenced the participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender or their ratings of various properties of the emails. This implies that the politeness modifications employed were not noticed by the participants, demonstrating a discrepancy between theory and real-life situations.

Keywords: EFL, politeness, interlanguage pragmatics, origin cues

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1. Introduction

Each year, the widespread influence of the English language expands exponentially, especially in the current age of rapid globalisation practices and online interconnectedness through digital media. In fact, English has adopted a major role in such a multitude of social settings that it is often unanimously referred to as *the* world language; or at the very least, as the most common go-to lingua franca, even among larger organisations such as the European Union and NATO (Crystal, 2003). The by now seemingly inherent importance of the language has resulted in considerable annual influxes of non-native speakers, with recent figures published by Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2021) estimating a total of 1.35 billion speakers of English throughout the world – as opposed to roughly 1.13 billion in 2020. Interestingly, over two thirds of these speakers are recognised to be second language learners, demonstrating an ever-growing interest in learning English, as well as a potentially perceived necessity due to the unassailable role of the language in everyday academic and business life. While these second language learners may be able to consistently get their point across to their interlocutors, various linguistic deviations inherent to the non-native origin of said learners typically persist, most commonly in the area of interlanguage pragmatics – that is, the way language is applied in varying contexts across different languages.

Previous research has suggested that politeness strategies are a fundamental linguistic device in English written production, given their absence may incur negative interpersonal evaluations by native speakers (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016), and that knowledge of a speaker's non-native origin may mitigate said negative evaluations (Vignovic & Thompson, 2010). Yet, to date, there exists very little research which provides evidence for these effects extending to non-native speakers evaluating non-native peers as well. The present study intended to investigate precisely that by means of an experiment exposing non-native English speakers to English emails, marked by different politeness strategies and the presence/absence of an indication of the non-native origin of their authors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 – Politeness among non-native speakers

A number of studies investigating the production of speech acts by L2 English speakers have demonstrated a lack of pragmatic awareness as regards politeness in their utterances (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Goudarzi, Ghonsooly, & Taghipour, 2015; Hendriks, 2008; Maier, 1992; Marazita, 2010; Paarlhati, 1998). One example is the study conducted by Hendriks (2008), which exposed the tendency of Dutch L2 speakers of English to use comparatively fewer and less elaborate politeness strategies in their request constructions than native speakers. Other studies would corroborate these findings and tie them to samples with different L1 backgrounds.

Japanese L2 speakers of English, for example, were demonstrated to use less varied politeness strategies as well, and they were, moreover, considerably more direct in their approach (Maier, 1992). Nepalese advanced learners of English showed a particular hesitancy to apply negative politeness strategies in their English conversations, and when they did apply them, they were found to overuse them, in turn disregarding other social factors such as power distance and solidarity (Marazita, 2010). Finnish ESL (English as a Second Language) students reportedly employed more negative strategies when making requests, while they generally used more positive strategies when expressing criticism. It was noted that on the whole, non-native speakers "showed sensitivity to the contextual restraints of the writing situation and mitigated the FTAs [(Face-Threatening Acts)] with different politeness strategies" (Paarlhati, 1998, p. 102). Interestingly, an inverse result was also found; one study investigating Iranian L2 speakers of English showed that these non-native speakers employed both positive and negative politeness strategies more frequently than native speakers, though social distance admittedly played a significant role (Goudarzi, Ghonsooly, & Taghipour, 2015).

In addition, in her experimental studies comparing the usage of different communication strategies among American and international students, Biesenbach-Lucas (2005; 2007) noted an elevated presence of "pragmatic infelicities . . . due to inappropriate mitigation and lack of status-congruent language use" (p. 27) in email communication – essentially, an incorrect application of politeness strategies, or ill-suited modes of address such as assuming a first-name basis with one's professors. Within this same sphere of academically oriented correspondence, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) observed a similar trend in student-lecturer communications. Non-native English-speaking students were found to be more direct in their manner of address towards lecturers, and their emails were relatively terse; their use of lexical and/or phrasal modifications as well as greetings was scarce, which British English lecturers reported finding abrupt or even downright rude. In reality, this can only be accredited to the unregulated nature of electronic correspondence: the severe lack of any guidelines for it in many university syllabi makes it so that native- and non-native speakers alike oftentimes find themselves at a loss as regards email writing conventions (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). According to Félix-Brasdefer, even something as seemingly basic as a message opening may therefore greatly differ:

". . . [S]tudents may strategically select linguistic expressions to initiate a message politely ('Dear Professor 'X', I hope you had a nice weekend'), or they can mitigate a request politely and respectfully (e.g. 'I *was wondering* if you *would* be willing to write a letter of recommendation'). Others simply address the professor by his/her first name, . . . and still others send messages with no introduction whatsoever." (2012, p. 90)

2.2 – Politeness modifications in speech acts

The above example has already somewhat demonstrated the linguistic choice-making that native speakers, but more so non-native speakers, must endure in order to form coherent and appropriate utterances. Speakers may opt to modify their requests in a way that the illocutionary force of their request is mitigated, and the hearer is thus less imposed on. The categorisation of modification acts is twofold, according to Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) – on the one hand, speakers may adapt their requests *internally* through means of syntactic or lexical/phrasal markers. The former entails mainly modal shifts, negations, or tag questions, as shown below[1]:

(1)   a. *Could you pass me that cup?* (as opposed to the unmodified form "Can you?")

      b. *You would**n't** be able to help me, **would you?*** (negation + tag question)

The latter includes a number of different means to adjust the politeness (e.g. "please"), tone (e.g. "maybe", "just"), and subject ("I was wondering…") of the posed request. The following sentences give examples of each:

(2)   a. *Can you give me a hand, **please***?

      b. *I was wondering if **maybe** you could **just** help me.*

On the other hand, speakers may instead modify their requests *externally*, meaning they include supplementary information outside of their request to put emphasis on the need for a positive response from their interlocutor. These supplements may include linguistic vehicles such as reasons and/or justifications for making the request, or rewards for accepting it:

(3)   a. *Could you help me up? I might have sprained my ankle.*

      b. *Can you move this table for me? I'll make you some coffee in return.*

The above division of speech act modifications has, additionally, been elaborated on in the years following the aforementioned publication by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). Several applications of this division have since been devised, among which is the one discussed in Hendriks (2010). She presents a condensed model containing four request strategies, each contrived through the application of various elements of internal request modification to so-called *ability strategies* – request constructions containing the verb "can", or any of its derivatives. By means of supplementing such an indirect strategy with the lexical modifier "possibly" and/or the lexico-syntactic combination "I was wondering if…", the politeness of the utterances is gradually augmented. This way, four stages of request modification were distinguished:

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[1] All examples were adapted from Hendriks (2010).

Request 1 (R1): 'Can you . . . ?' (unmodified ability strategy)

Request 2 (R2): 'Can you possibly . . . ?' (ability strategy modified with lexical modifier)

Request 3 (R3): 'I was wondering if you could . . .' (ability strategy modified with lexico-syntactic modifier + past tense modal)

Request 4 (R4): 'I was wondering if you could possibly . . .' (ability strategy modified with lexico-syntactic modifier + past tense modal + lexical modifier)

2.3 – Politeness and speaker evaluations

Despite the many linguistic devices available to speakers of English, several studies have shown that non-native speakers exhibit a distinct lack of variation as concerns the application of these different modifications. This finding is in itself a greatly interesting phenomenon which additionally gives rise to a different quandary: namely, how native speakers of the L2 in question – or other non-native speakers, for that matter – perceive these pragmatical shortcomings, and if this might in turn impact speaker perceptions. Previous research into the topic exists but is far from extensive.

One noteworthy study on the subject of (non-)native politeness perception is that by Vignovic and Thompson (2010), in which L1 English participants were exposed to emails containing either technical errors or etiquette deviations, supposedly written by a new colleague they would be collaborating with. In one condition, it was revealed that this colleague had a non-native cultural background, while in the other, no cultural background was given. Results showed that when this new colleague was known to have a non-native identity, the negative effects of their technical errors were significantly reduced, subsequently mitigating their loss of perceived intelligence and conscientiousness. However, curiously, a similar effect was not found for etiquette deviations; participants were affected equally negatively in both conditions when faced with this type of deviant language use. This suggests that etiquette deviations, or in slightly different terms, politeness errors, are regarded by native speakers as plain unacceptable regardless of the speaker's cultural background. It is, as such, an area of investigation that arguably merits more attention, as it is shown to be a crucial yet unintuitive facet of the English language.

The effects of non-native politeness errors on native speakers of English have also been elaborated on in a number of different studies. For Dutch-written English emails specifically, Hendriks (2010) found that English native speakers regarded non-native authors of emails with higher degrees of request modification more agreeable. The more elaborate non-natives speakers' requests were (e.g. "*I was wondering if you could possibly*" versus the unmodified construction "*Can you*"), the more likely said speakers were to be perceived positively. Additionally, one study by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) demonstrated a significant effect of the degree of various factors exhibited in non-native

English emails on the perception of their authors; those factors being 1) their degree of directness, 2) their degree of abruptness, 3) their degree of acknowledgement of imposition, and 4) the degree to which they allowed the recipient room for decision. As 1) and 2) increased – or 3) and 4) decreased – native English-speaking lecturers were shown to grow more critical of a non-native speaker's personal qualities, with the most extreme examples yielding comments nothing short of scathing. One especially direct email saw its author receive ratings of being "self-centered", "not at all smart", and "lacking in social interaction". These findings once more accentuate the insurmountable importance tethered to the unwritten rules of politeness.

Interestingly, this same study reported on the ratings of these non-native authors by other non-native speakers, specifically Cypriot Greek learners of English. What is striking about this aspect is the degree to which their ratings differed in comparison to the native English speakers: overall, the Cypriot learners were found to evaluate non-native authors more positively, in one particular instance describing the author as "polite", "showing respect", and "very analytical" where their native English lecturers were significantly more admonishing (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016). This judgment pattern appears to be in line with the argument posited by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) that ". . . [native speakers/]ESL learners and EFL[2] learners showed different degrees of sensitivity to pragmatic and grammatical errors" (p. 253), and thus beckons a rather important question: namely, how do other non-native speakers of English evaluate written production by non-native authors, as well as the authors' personal qualities, based on the type(s) of politeness modifications they apply? The present study aimed to establish an answer to this query through the following research questions:

RQ1: How do L2 English speakers differently evaluate the clarity, appropriateness, politeness, and reasonableness of non-native English emails when different politeness modifications are employed?

RQ2: How do L2 English speakers differently evaluate the likeability, status, competence, and hirability of non-native authors when different politeness modifications are employed?

In addition, the results brought forth by Vignovic and Thompson's 2010 study have given rise to another variable that is considered to be of major importance for the proposed study: that being the presence of any indication of the author's background. Henceforth labelled as "origin of the email sender", this variable comprises elements such as a mention of the email sender's name, or a plain mention of their nationality – effectively, cues concerning their cultural background. Results of the abovementioned study showed that when an author was known to have a non-native identity, the negative effects of their technical errors (i.e. orthographical or grammatical errors) were significantly reduced, subsequently mitigating their loss of perceived intelligence and competence. However,

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[2] English as a Foreign Language.

curiously, a similar effect was not found for etiquette deviations (i.e. inappropriate politeness strategies). Participants were affected equally negatively when faced with this type of deviant language use, giving inferior ratings to – among others – authors' agreeableness regardless of whether they had been made aware of the non-native identity of the author (Vignovic & Thompson, 2010). In summary, readers were reportedly more critical of non-native authors when their use of politeness strategies appeared deviant – yet these effects were reported for native speakers of English exclusively. This raises the question whether a similar effect occurs for non-native speakers, too, and whether this effect perhaps extends to evaluations of their written production as well. To ascertain this, the following, additional research questions were devised:

RQ3: To what extent does knowledge regarding the origin of non-native authors impact L2 English speakers' evaluations of said authors?

RQ4: To which extent does knowledge regarding the origin of non-native authors impact L2 English speakers' evaluations of said authors' emails?

3. Methodology

3.1 – Materials

Participants received stimulus material in the form of an English email containing a request for an internship at a fictive international company, Beta. These emails were reported to have been written by a student, and were identical in content save for one key sentence containing the actual request; namely, if the recipient of the email could inform the sender whether they were a suitable candidate for the position of intern based on their CV. This request was modified in three different ways, pertaining to various adaptations of the politeness strategies devised by Hendriks (2010):

Request Modification 1: "<u>Can you</u> look over my CV and tell me whether I am a suitable candidate for the internship?" (unmodified ability strategy)

Request Modification 2: "<u>Could you</u> look over my CV and tell me whether I am a suitable candidate for the internship?" (ability strategy modified with past tense modal)

Request Modification 3: "<u>Could you possibly</u> look over my CV and tell me whether I am a suitable candidate for the internship?" (ability strategy modified with past tense modal + lexical modifier)

The above request modifications comprised gradually increasing levels of politeness, each produced by the addition of past tense modals and/or lexical modifiers. These three degrees of politeness, which were each accommodated by a different email, served as the main independent variable for the present study. An overview of the modified emails can be found in Appendix A.

Additionally, in accordance with the results exposed by Vignovic and Thompson (2010), a second independent variable was established; that of the origin of the author. The aforementioned study suggested that the presence of cues as to the writer's cultural background, specifically a non-native background, would mitigate criticism by native readers – thus giving rise to the question whether this effect would extend to non-native speakers and their emails. To control for any such effects, a preliminary situation description was given to the participants before their exposure to the emails, in which the origin of the sender was either explicitly given by way of an indicator sentence ("*You have just received an e-mail from a Dutch student looking for an internship in your company*") or kept concealed by way of eliminating the origin in this same sentence. In terms of layout, the two situation descriptions were identical. An overview of the situation descriptions can be found in Appendix B.

3.2 – Subjects

In total, 267 participants were recruited. Criteria for the participants were that they were over 18 years of age, and that they were non-native speakers of English. These characteristics were controlled for by way of a pair of screening questions preliminary to the experiment, asking participants to indicate their age and mother tongue. If participants did not adhere to these criteria, they were directed to the end of the survey preliminarily – this was the case for 14 respondents, who were subsequently omitted from the final results. Moreover, 61 respondents failed to complete the full experiment, or indicated not consenting to the conditions pertinent to the present study, and were thus omitted as well.

Ultimately, a total of 192 candidates partook in the experiment (age: *M* = 25.84, *SD* = 9.14; range 18-73; 64.1% female). Over a fourth of the participants were Dutch (27.1%) and about a fifth were German (19.8%), whereas the remainder indicated having a different nationality (53.1%). The majority of the participants indicated being a student (56.3%) and never having been part of a hiring panel (80.2%), and additionally gave a personal estimation of communicating in English for about 10 hours on a weekly basis (*M* = 25.71, *SD* = 36.52; range 0-168 hours per week). Finally, approximately half of the participants reported currently doing or having done a Bachelor's degree (46.4%). Age ($F_{(5, 186)}$ = .704, *p* = .621), gender ($\chi^2_{(15)}$ = 21.25, *p* = .129), level of education ($\chi^2_{(30)}$ = 26.72, *p* = .638), hiring experience ($\chi^2_{(10)}$ = 10.24, *p* = .419), and estimated weekly hours of communication ($F_{(5, 186)}$ = .515, *p* = .764) were equally distributed along the different conditions.

3.3 – Design

The present study followed a 2 (sender origin) x 3 (levels of politeness) factorial design. The independent variable "sender origin" had two levels (given or hidden), while the variable "politeness" had three levels (low, medium, or high), leading to an experiment with six separate conditions. Two preliminary situation descriptions were created to distinguish the two levels of "sender origin", and three versions of the stimulus material, the internship request email, were created to distinguish the three levels of "request modification". Participants saw only one situation description and one version of the internship request email; thus, the experiment followed a between-subjects design.

3.4 – Instruments

The questionnaire employed for this experiment began with one of two situation descriptions followed by one of three internship request emails, depending on which condition the participants

were assigned to. After having read this description and one of the emails, participants were presented the accompanying questionnaire and requested to fill out the 7-point Likert scale questions (anchored by "strongly agree – strongly disagree") contained within. The questions pertained to a variety of dependent variables, including evaluations of perceived properties of the email such as its clarity, appropriateness, politeness, and reasonableness; but also interpersonal evaluations of the email sender such as their perceived likeability, status, competence, and hirability. Reliability of the scales was determined through Cronbach's α within this study, though composite means were calculated for all scales regardless of internal reliability.

3.4.1 – Variables: Content evaluation

Regarding the dependent variables pertinent to the properties of the email, the scales for *perceived clarity* (α = .78) and *perceived reasonableness* (α = .59) were adapted from Hendriks (2010) and Hoeken (1995). For the former, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the email was clear, well-structured, and informative. For the latter, they were asked whether they thought the person receiving this request would comply with it, whether the sender had, in their opinion, the right to make the request, and whether the recipient had, in their opinion, the obligation to fulfil the request.

The scales for *perceived politeness* (α = .62) were adapted from Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) and were modified marginally to fit 7-point Likert scales, as opposed to their original 5-point scaling. For this variable, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the email was polite, abrupt, acknowledged its imposition on the recipient, and whether it gave the recipient a lot of choice. The item "abrupt" was deliberately designed to keep its negative valence – in contrast to the rest of the items under this variable – in order to test for the attentiveness of the participants. Upon separate analysis of one particularly ambiguous item, the questionable reliability of this construct was increased to a near-adequate level of α = .68. The item taken separately was labelled *perceived imposition acknowledgement* and analysed individually.

Finally, the items under *perceived appropriateness* (α = .86) were completely novel, designed specifically for the purpose of the present research. For this variable, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the email was appropriate, professional, and disrespectful. As for the previous variable, the item "disrespectful" was deliberately designed to keep its negative valence.

3.4.2 – Variables: Sender evaluations

In regard to the dependent variables pertaining to the interpersonal evaluations of the email sender, three key constructs were identified: those being *perceived likeability*, *perceived status*, and *perceived competence*. Scales for these constructs were constructed based on previous research into interpersonal evaluations (Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois, & Pittam, 2001; Grondelaers, van Hout, & van Gent, 2019; Hendriks, 2010; Hendriks, van Meurs, & Hogervorst, 2014, 2016; Nejjari, Gerritsen, van der Haagen, & Korzilius, 2012), and were only marginally modified in certain cases for the express purpose of fitting a 7-point Likert scale.

For *perceived likeability*, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the sender of the email came off as credible, sympathetic, warm, unfriendly, humorous, tactful, polite, and irritating (α = .85). "Unfriendly" and "irritating" were purposely designed to retain their negative valence to, once again, test for the participants' attentiveness. For *perceived status*, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the sender of the email came off as authoritative, self-confident, and influential (α = .71). Finally, for *perceived competence*, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the sender of the email came off as reliable, intelligent, competent, hard-working, educated, and trustworthy (α = .92).

In addition to these variables, a fourth variable measuring perceived hirability, or the perceived likelihood of the candidate being hired, was established (α = .95). The scales for this variable were adapted from Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) and were modified to better fit an internship setting. For this variable, participants were asked to indicate whether they would recommend hiring the sender of the email, whether they would be satisfied if the sender of the email was invited for an interview, whether they felt favourably towards the sender of the email, whether the writer of the email would be an asset to the company, and whether there was, in their opinion, a high likelihood of the email sender being invited for an interview. An overview of all items of the various constructs can be found in Appendix C.

3.5 – Procedure

Participants were invited to take part largely by way of convenience sampling. Through a link to the online questionnaire presented in combination with an informal invitation from the researchers, participants were led to the online experiment environment, where they were first given general information about the proceedings of the experiment, whereafter they were asked to give their consent. An overview of this general information and the consent form can be found under Appendix D and E. If participants did not give their consent, they were thanked for their time and directly

debriefed by means of an automated message. Those who did give their consent were directed to a pair of screening questions, which required the participants to leave their age and mother tongue. If they indicated to be below 18 years of age or to have English as their mother tongue, they were preliminarily led to the end of the survey, thanked for their time, and given an explanation for the premature ending of the experiment, then debriefed by means of an automated message. Participants who adhered to the established criteria were allowed to continue the experiment, and were subsequently directed to the situation description, the stimulus material, and the questionnaire, where they were equally distributed to the various conditions by virtue of the survey platform's randomiser option.

Finally, after their completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to leave the additional demographic information exposed earlier (gender, employment status, etc.) before being subjected to a LexTALE test – an independent English proficiency test probing participants' vocabulary through exposure to existing or non-existing English words. The entire procedure took, on average, 38 minutes (SD = 18016.85), though this number was considerably skewed by various participants leaving the questionnaire open for a prolonged period of time.

3.6 – Statistical Treatment

To answer the aforementioned research questions, a series of two-way ANOVAs was employed to examine any potential differences between the various conditions and for any significant interactions between the two independent variables. In addition, in order to interpret one significant result more accurately, a one-way ANOVA and independent samples t-test were utilised. For all research questions, the leading factors were the type of politeness the participants were exposed to (Politeness; either low, medium, or high), as well as the origin of the email sender (Origin; either given or hidden).

4. Results

4.1 – Content Evaluation

The first series of statistical analyses aimed to establish whether the gradually increasing levels of politeness modifications employed in the various emails, as well as knowledge of the speaker's origin, influenced participants' ratings of the email's perceived clarity, appropriateness, politeness, and reasonableness. To confirm the existence of any such effects, the responses of the various groups pertaining to the six experiment conditions were compared to one another by means of multiple two-way ANOVAs.

4.1.1 – Perceived Clarity

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' ratings of the email's perceived clarity (F (1, 186) < 1), nor of Politeness on participants' ratings of the email's perceived clarity (F (2, 186) < 1). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) = 2.52, p = .083).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Clarity_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.4583	1.27774	32
	Medium	4.9222	1.16686	30
	High	4.5729	1.23345	32
	Total	4.6454	1.23064	94
Unknown	Low	5.0090	1.08436	37
	Medium	4.4731	1.34653	31
	High	4.7889	1.56710	30
	Total	4.7721	1.33470	98
Total	Low	4.7536	1.20138	69
	Medium	4.6940	1.27118	61
	High	4.6774	1.39733	62
	Total	4.7101	1.28303	192

4.1.2 – Perceived Appropriateness

A two-way analysis of variance Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' ratings of the email's perceived appropriateness (F (1, 186) < 1), nor of Politeness on participants' ratings of the email's perceived appropriateness (F (2, 186) < 1). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) = 1.74, p = .179).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Appropriateness_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.7188	1.52426	32
	Medium	5.2000	1.22114	30
	High	4.9062	1.44489	32
	Total	4.9362	1.40513	94
Unknown	Low	4.8919	1.44883	37
	Medium	4.6344	1.57375	31
	High	5.2556	1.44287	30
	Total	4.9218	1.49286	98
Total	Low	4.8116	1.47582	69
	Medium	4.9126	1.42842	61
	High	5.0753	1.44280	62
	Total	4.9288	1.44680	192

4.1.3 – Perceived Politeness

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' ratings of the email's perceived politeness (F (1, 186) = 2.36, p = .126), nor of Politeness on participants' ratings of the email's perceived politeness (F (2, 186) = 1.44, p = .239). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) = 1.31, p = .274).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Politeness_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.2083	1.12880	32
	Medium	4.6667	1.20979	30
	High	4.5729	1.20404	32
	Total	4.4787	1.18489	94
Unknown	Low	4.1622	1.07618	37
	Medium	4.0215	1.19857	31
	High	4.4889	1.16373	30
	Total	4.2177	1.14684	98
Total	Low	4.1836	1.09296	69
	Medium	4.3388	1.23752	61
	High	4.5323	1.17574	62
	Total	4.3455	1.16990	192

4.1.4 – Perceived Imposition Acknowledgement

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' ratings of the email's perceived imposition acknowledgement (F (1, 186) = 1.66, p = .199), nor of Politeness on participants' ratings of the email's perceived imposition acknowledgement (F (2, 186) < 1). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) < 1).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: I think this e-mail… - Acknowledges its impositic

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.22	1.237	32
	Medium	4.07	1.388	30
	High	4.44	1.134	32
	Total	4.24	1.250	94
Unknown	Low	4.46	1.406	37
	Medium	4.45	1.434	31
	High	4.53	1.074	30
	Total	4.48	1.310	98
Total	Low	4.35	1.326	69
	Medium	4.26	1.413	61
	High	4.48	1.098	62
	Total	4.36	1.283	192

4.1.5 – Perceived Reasonableness

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' ratings of the email's perceived reasonableness (F (1, 186) < 1), nor of Politeness on participants' ratings of the email's perceived reasonableness (F (2, 186) = 2.30, p = .104). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) = 1.03, p = .358).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Reasonableness_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	3.4896	1.17007	32
	Medium	4.0333	.85925	30
	High	4.0104	1.00709	32
	Total	3.8404	1.04353	94
Unknown	Low	3.7207	1.12358	37
	Medium	3.6989	1.33432	31
	High	4.0333	1.19818	30
	Total	3.8095	1.21276	98
Total	Low	3.6135	1.14279	69
	Medium	3.8634	1.12937	61
	High	4.0215	1.09457	62
	Total	3.8247	1.13023	192

4.2 – Sender evaluations

The second series of statistical analyses aimed to establish whether the gradually increasing levels of politeness modifications employed in the various emails, as well as knowledge of the speaker's origin, influenced participants' ratings of the email sender's perceived likeability, status, competence, and hirability. To confirm the existence of any such effects, the responses of the various groups pertaining to the six experiment conditions were compared to one another by means of multiple two-way ANOVAs.

<u>4.2.1 – Perceived Likeability</u>

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived likeability ($F_{(1, 186)} < 1$), nor of Politeness on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived likeability ($F_{(2, 186)} < 1$). However, the interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was statistically significant ($F_{(2, 186)} = 3.502$, $p = .032$).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Likeability_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.1523	.98309	32
	Medium	4.6583	.84648	30
	High	4.2695	1.03814	32
	Total	4.3537	.97527	94
Unknown	Low	4.3108	.95635	37
	Medium	4.0806	1.08135	31
	High	4.5833	1.08394	30
	Total	4.3214	1.04505	98
Total	Low	4.2373	.96495	69
	Medium	4.3648	1.00786	61
	High	4.4214	1.06361	62
	Total	4.3372	1.00898	192

Following this result, the data file was split based on Origin, and later based on Politeness, to allow for identification of the source of the interaction by way of multiple between-subjects analyses.

Descriptives

Likeability_Total

origin		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Known	Low	32	4.1523	.98309	.17379	3.7979	4.5068	2.38	5.88
	Medium	30	4.6583	.84648	.15454	4.3423	4.9744	2.88	6.25
	High	32	4.2695	1.03814	.18352	3.8952	4.6438	2.13	6.63
	Total	94	4.3537	.97527	.10059	4.1540	4.5535	2.13	6.63
Unknown	Low	37	4.3108	.95635	.15722	3.9919	4.6297	2.38	6.25
	Medium	31	4.0806	1.08135	.19422	3.6840	4.4773	2.25	6.25
	High	30	4.5833	1.08394	.19790	4.1786	4.9881	2.38	6.38
	Total	98	4.3214	1.04505	.10557	4.1119	4.5309	2.25	6.38

When the data file was split based on Origin, a one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of Politeness on the email sender's perceived likeability, neither for when origin cues were present (F (2, 91) = 2.33, p = .103) nor for when origin cues were absent (F (2, 95) = 1.80, p = .172).

Group Statistics

politeness		origin	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Low	Likeability_Total	Known	32	4.1523	.98309	.17379
		Unknown	37	4.3108	.95635	.15722
Medium	Likeability_Total	Known	30	4.6583	.84648	.15454
		Unknown	31	4.0806	1.08135	.19422
High	Likeability_Total	Known	32	4.2695	1.03814	.18352
		Unknown	30	4.5833	1.08394	.19790

When the data file was split based on Politeness, an independent samples t-test did not show a significant difference between participants exposed to the low-politeness emails (t (65.01) < 1), nor between participants exposed to the high-politeness emails, regardless of whether they knew the origin of the email sender or not (t (59.30) = 1.16, p = .125 / .250). However, it did show a significant difference between participants exposed to the medium-politeness emails who knew the origin of the sender (hereafter "group O^1"; t (56.56) = 2.33, p = .012) and participants exposed to the medium-politeness emails who did not know the origin of the sender (hereafter "group O^2"; t (56.56) = 2.33, p = .024) as regards the email sender's perceived likeability. Group O^1 was shown to evaluate the email senders' likeability more highly (M = 4.66, SD = 0.85) than group O^2 (M = 4.08, SD = 1.08).

4.2.2 – Perceived Status

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived status (F (1, 186) = 3.23, p = .074), nor of Politeness on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived status (F (2, 186) < 1). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) < 1).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Status_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.1042	.97067	32
	Medium	4.0444	1.23714	30
	High	3.8437	1.14217	32
	Total	3.9965	1.11307	94
Unknown	Low	4.4595	1.35481	37
	Medium	4.2688	1.09009	31
	High	4.1889	1.25238	30
	Total	4.3163	1.23742	98
Total	Low	4.2947	1.19713	69
	Medium	4.1585	1.16047	61
	High	4.0108	1.19953	62
	Total	4.1597	1.18599	192

4.2.3 – Perceived Competence

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived competence (F (1, 186) < 1), nor of Politeness on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived competence (F (2, 186) < 1). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) = 2.43, p = .090).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Competence_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	4.1615	1.05874	32
	Medium	4.5722	.87503	30
	High	4.2135	1.11300	32
	Total	4.3103	1.02874	94
Unknown	Low	4.4820	1.27704	37
	Medium	4.1667	1.23078	31
	High	4.6111	1.07152	30
	Total	4.4218	1.20428	98
Total	Low	4.3333	1.18335	69
	Medium	4.3661	1.08133	61
	High	4.4059	1.10250	62
	Total	4.3672	1.12025	192

4.2.4 – Perceived Hirability

A two-way analysis of variance with Origin and Politeness as factors showed no significant effect of Origin on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived hirability (F (1, 186) < 1), nor of Politeness on participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's perceived hirability (F (2, 186) = 1.44, p = .240). The interaction effect between Origin and Politeness was not statistically significant (F (2, 186) = 2.60, p = .077).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Hirability_Total

origin	politeness	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Known	Low	3.4750	1.25954	32
	Medium	4.3667	1.07007	30
	High	4.0438	1.19108	32
	Total	3.9532	1.22287	94
Unknown	Low	3.8919	1.46787	37
	Medium	3.7097	1.46409	31
	High	3.9800	1.49606	30
	Total	3.8612	1.46419	98
Total	Low	3.6986	1.38123	69
	Medium	4.0328	1.31716	61
	High	4.0129	1.33644	62
	Total	3.9063	1.34871	192

5. Conclusion

For the present study, four broad research questions were established. First of all, the effect of the first independent variable, Politeness, on the English emails' perceived clarity, appropriateness, politeness, and reasonableness was investigated. Following an analysis of the experiment groups' responses by way of a series of two-way ANOVAs, no significant differences were found between the various groups. This implies that the degree of politeness employed in the stimulus material, the English letter of request for an internship, did not affect the participants' perceptions of the email's clarity, appropriateness, politeness, and reasonableness. Participants' perceptions of these email properties were, consequently, found to be relatively equal across conditions.

Next, the effect of Politeness on L2 English speakers' interpersonal evaluations of the email senders, namely their perceived likeability, status, competence, and hirability, was examined. Following an analysis of the experiment groups' responses by way of another series of two-way ANOVAs, no significant differences were found between the various groups. This implies that the degree of politeness employed in the stimulus material did not affect the participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender's likeability, status, competence, and hirability. Participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email sender(s) were, consequently, found to be relatively equal.

Finally, the last pair of research questions investigated the effect of the second independent variable, Origin, and to what extent it affected interpersonal evaluations of the email senders as well as evaluations of their written production, namely the internship request emails. Following an analysis of the experiment groups' responses by way of yet another series of two-way ANOVAs, a significant difference was found for the perceived likeability of the speaker only, which was subsequently specified through an independent samples t-test. The outcome of said test was that participants who had read the medium-politeness emails perceived the email senders as relatively more likeable when they were aware of their origin, as opposed to when they were not aware of their origin. This implies that knowledge of the email sender's origin may affect non-native readers' perceptions of an email sender's likeability, consequently improving recipients' image of the sender. Participants' interpersonal evaluations of the email senders' status, competence, and hirability were, nonetheless, found to be relatively equal.

Section 6 - Discussion

6.1 – Findings

The results of the statistical analysis were unequivocal, in the sense that of the eight dependent variables examined, only one was found to have been rated significantly differently by a portion of the participants: likeability. The remaining seven saw no significant differences, including hirability, the central dependent variable within this study. This finding in itself has several considerable implications. By virtue of the present-day rapidly globalising labour market, more and more businesses, and thus recruiters, will turn to English as their lingua franca (Crystal, 2003), but most will not be native speakers of English themselves. This given has hereby been demonstrated to potentially be beneficial to non-native applicants, as non-native speakers have been shown to generally lack the pragmatic competence needed to distinguish between different types of nuanced politeness differences in real-life applications. In conclusion, the most important implication to acknowledge from the presented results is that non-native authors' chances of recruitment ostensibly are not impaired by a lack of appropriate politeness strategies – at least, when communicating with a non-native speaker.

The experiment central to this study had intentionally been designed to be as authentic as possible. Instead of showing the participants several emails for comparison, they were only given a singular email to accurately reflect a real-life situation; in an experimental setting, it may be possible to receive two to three nearly identical emails alongside each other, but this would never occur within a realistic (business) context. This more authentic approach enabled for equally authentic results, which convincingly connect the theory to practical applications. Theoretically speaking, the requests gradually grew more polite across the various versions of the email (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Hendriks, 2010), but in practice, this gradual increase was not perceived by the non-native participants in spite of their high average level of English. The mean LexTALE score of the participants was 81.88 (*SD* = 10.68), which would, according to the study by Lemhöfer and Broersma (2012), constitute an average English level of C1.

The present study has contributed to a deeper understanding of the perception of different politeness forms in English emails by non-native speakers of English, as well as to the knowledge already available on the topic of interpersonal evaluations formed as a result of said politeness strategies, which had previously almost exclusively focussed on native English evaluators (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016; Hendriks, 2010; Vignovic & Thompson, 2010; Winans, 2020). Previous research has posited that differences in politeness approaches in English production are oftentimes highly noticeable to native speakers, and that low-politeness forms in particular may even, at times, be labelled as highly rude or as a show of poor manners (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, 2016; Vignovic

& Thompson, 2010). Conversely, high-politeness forms may be labelled as especially agreeable by native speakers (Hendriks, 2010). Yet, the currently presented results suggest that such labels are not typically given by non-native speakers, as all experiment groups gave relatively similar answers for the items under "Politeness", as well as for the items under the other interpersonal evaluation constructs save likeability. This seems to corroborate findings published by Winans (2020), who, in his study on the differences in perceived politeness between non-native and native English speaker requests, found that on occasion, more politeness modifiers do not constitute a higher rate of perceived politeness at all. He demonstrated that both native and non-native English instructors often rated written production by non-native speakers of English as more polite than that of native speakers of English, despite the noticeable difference of politeness modifications between the two. The results presented today thus appear to especially cement the tendency of non-native speakers of English to differently perceive and evaluate politeness, in spite of their English level.

One possible explanation for this finding might be that the politeness markers were too brief to be noticed by the participants – what needs to be acknowledged is 1) that two of the three politeness levels only entailed a single word, which, in the context of a full-fledged email, is realistically a minimal aspect to appreciate, and that 2) the participants may not have been very much acquainted with English politeness habits despite their previously reported high average level of English. Alternatively, the fact that the request was only given towards the very end of the email might have led to the participants not paying as much heed to it as to the rest of the email, perhaps due to a gradual loss of attention. Ultimately, however, the hereby presented results do provide additional support for previous claims that native speakers and non-native speakers demonstrate different degrees of sensitivity to discrepancies in politeness approaches (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005, 2007; Marazita, 2010; Paarlhati, 1998). In particular, comparing the present results with those of aforementioned studies like the one by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) provides a convincing account of the tendency of non-native speakers to evaluate even theoretically low degrees of politeness in English emails as relatively polite, in stark contrast to native speakers.

Another noteworthy facet of the present results is the finding that the participants did not give differing interpersonal evaluations of the email sender(s) based on whether they knew they were a native speaker or not. Vignovic and Thompson (2010) found an opposing result for native speakers of English, namely that such knowledge of the origin of the speaker/author did influence their interpersonal evaluations. Their findings demonstrated a tendency among the native speakers to be more forgiving towards speakers that were known to be non-native, particularly as concerned their technical errors, in turn reducing any subsequent loss of perceived intelligence and conscientiousness. This result was applied to two of the research questions central to the present experiment in order to

investigate whether a similar effect existed for non-native speakers. A similar effect was not found, which has positive implications for non-native speakers of English, especially in online environments. Here, English is employed most commonly as a lingua franca due to the majority of its userbase being of non-native descent (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019). What can now be assumed, following the findings presented in this paper, is that in written conversations – such as chat-based communication – politeness deviations will likely not be negatively evaluated by other non-native speakers of English. This implies that, in written dialogue with non-native peers, non-native speakers of English may be safeguarded from any negative connotations politeness deviations typically incur.

6.2 – Limitations and Suggestions

What needs to be discussed when considering the implications of the hereby presented results is first and foremost a rather prevalent property of the participant sample employed for this experiment: its nationality composition. As exposed before, 53.1% of the participants (N = 102) indicated having a nationality that was not Dutch or German, in total tallying up to more than 30 different nationalities. This great diversity of evaluators, however, might chiefly have been nullified by the overwhelming number of Dutch and German respondents, seeing as most indicated nationalities only held a single participant. A more amplified presence of non-Dutch/German respondents may have produced more diverse results due to the way cultural values influence applicant preferences (Hofstede, 1984; Ma & Allen, 2009), which might subsequently have led to more significant results.

In addition, the resulting focus on Dutch and German participants may have led to an unintentional nuancing of the collected response sample. The Dutch participants in particular may have been laxer on the authors if their non-native origin was known; after all, the nationality used for said non-native authors was Dutch. Frequent exposure to typical Dutch errors in English written production may have led the Dutch participants to take a less critical stance and, therefore, to skew the interpersonal evaluations in favour of their fellow Dutchmen (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). Future research into this discipline might benefit from focussing on a sample composed of fewer different nationalities to find more specifically applicable results. Moreover, special emphasis should be placed on composing a sample with participants from a nationality which is not implied by any of the stimulus material, unlike the present study.

Furthermore, an important finding to note is that exactly two thirds of the participant sample, 66.7% (N = 128), indicated communicating in English for less than 20 hours on a weekly basis. Though not per se an indication of the sample's overall English proficiency, as demonstrated by the laudable average LexTALE score of 81.88 (SD = 10.68), the relative lack of contact with the language and its pragmatic tendencies might have led to the majority of the sample remaining oblivious to the various

politeness markers employed, in turn resulting in the non-significant results the present experiment has yielded as regards politeness. However, this conclusion is largely tentative and should therefore be tested in future research for confirmation. It is, additionally, believed that the present results still offer particularly insightful results as concerns the linguistic capability of a varied non-native speaker sample to perceive the finer nuances of English pragmatics.

Finally, another point of attention is the relatively low Cronbach's alpha value for the *perceived reasonableness* construct ($\alpha = .59$), and the fact it was, regardless of said value, still calculated into a composite variable for further analysis. The items under *perceived reasonableness* primarily served as a control variable which checked the influence of the politeness modifications on the perceived imposition of the posed request. Ideally, no influence should occur, which was the case for the present study. In retrospect, this result justifies the creation of a composite mean for the aforementioned construct – however, in order to further ascertain the reliability of the produced results, it is advised that future research find a method to improve the internal reliability of the *perceived reasonableness* scale.

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APPENDIX A: Emails with varying degrees of politeness

Email 1 (Request Modification 1)

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am approaching you to apply for a 6-month internship at Beta. Intrigued by the company as a whole and the sector in Europe, I am posing my candidature for the position of an intern. I believe my relevant skills and experience would be a good fit for this internship and I hope to have the opportunity to discuss in more detail how I could help support Beta's international marketing strategy. Can you look over my CV and tell me whether I am a suitable candidate for the internship?

Yours faithfully,
X

Email 2 (Request Modification 2)

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am approaching you to apply for a 6-month internship at Beta. Intrigued by the company as a whole and the sector in Europe, I am posing my candidature for the position of an intern. I believe my relevant skills and experience would be a good fit for this internship and I hope to have the opportunity to discuss in more detail how I could help support Beta's international marketing strategy. Could you look over my CV and tell me whether I am a suitable candidate for the internship?

Yours faithfully,
X

Email 3 (Request Modification 3)

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am approaching you to apply for a 6-month internship at Beta. Intrigued by the company as a whole and the sector in Europe, I am posing my candidature for the position of an intern. I believe my relevant skills and experience would be a good fit for this internship and I hope to have the opportunity to discuss in more detail how I could help support Beta's international marketing strategy. Could you possibly look over my CV and tell me whether I am a suitable candidate for the internship?

Yours faithfully,
X

APPENDIX B: Preliminary situation descriptions

Situation 1 (Sender origin given)

Imagine the following situation:

You are the head of the Human Resources division in a London-based multinational corporation named Beta. You are responsible for assessing and recruiting new interns for Beta's European divisions. You have just received an e-mail from a Dutch student looking for an internship in your company. Based on their e-mail, you are to determine whether they are a suitable candidate for a follow-up interview. Please read the following e-mail and fill in the questionnaire.

Situation 2 (Sender origin not given)

Imagine the following situation:

You are the head of the Human Resources division in a London-based multinational corporation named Beta. You are responsible for assessing and recruiting new interns for Beta's European divisions. You have just received an e-mail from a student looking for an internship in your company. Based on their e-mail, you are to determine whether they are a suitable candidate for a follow-up interview. Please read the following e-mail and fill in the questionnaire.

APPENDIX C: Questionnaire items

Clarity

I think this e-mail is...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Clear	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Well-structured	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Informative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appropriateness

I think this e-mail is...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Appropriate	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Professional	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Disrespectful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Politeness

I think this e-mail...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Is polite	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Is abrupt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Acknowledges its imposition on the receiver	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Gives the receiver a lot of choice	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Reasonableness

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is likely that the person who received this e-mail will comply with this request	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The writer of this e-mail has the right to make this request	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The receiver of this e-mail has the obligation to fulfill this request	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Likeability

In my opinion, the writer of this email seems...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Credible	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sympathetic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Warm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unfriendly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tactful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Polite	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Irritating	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Milan van der Wallen, s1042470, Bachelor's Thesis, IBC Program
Radboud University, 13/06/2022

Status

In my opinion, the writer of this email seems...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Authoritative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Self-confident	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Influential	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Competence

In my opinion, the writer of this email seems...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Intelligent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hard-working	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Educated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Hirability

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would recommend employing the writer of this email.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would feel satisfied if the writer of this email would be invited for an interview.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel favourably towards the writer of this email.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The writer of this email would be an asset to the company.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is a high likelihood of the writer of this email being invited for an interview.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

APPENDIX D: Information about the research study

Research Study: Evaluating E-mails

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking part in this study carried out by students of International Business Communication at the Radboud University as part of the Bachelor's thesis. Please read the following instructions carefully, as they provide information about the upcoming materials and questions.

You will be tasked with reading a description of a business situation and an accompanying English e-mail written by a student applying for an internship. You will then be asked to answer some questions about this email in a questionnaire. The entire process will take roughly 10 minutes.

The research data we collect during this study will be used by scientists as part of data sets, articles, and presentations. The anonymised research data is accessible to other scientists for a period of at least 10 years. When we share data with other researchers, these data cannot be traced back to you. All research and personal data are safely stored following the Radboud University guidelines.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. This means that you can withdraw your participation and consent at any time during the study, without giving a reason. Because the data is immediately anonymised, it is not possible to have your research data removed after the completion of the experiment.

If something is not clear, or you would like more information, please contact any one of the researchers:

Dobrawa Winiewska
Gui van der Beek
Laura Tarsa
Milan van der Wallen

APPENDIX E: Consent Form

Consent: please select your choice

Selecting the "I agree" option below indicates that:
- You have read the above information.
- You consent to participating in this research study as described in the above information.
- You understand how the data of the research study will be stored and how they will be used.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are at least 18 years of age.

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "I do not want to participate" button.

○ I agree (proceed to the questionnaire)
○ I do not want to participate

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APPENDIX F: Ethics Checklist

1. Is a health care institution involved in the research?

Explanation: A health care institution is involved if one of the following (A/B/C) is the case:

    A. One or more employees of a health care institution is/are involved in the research as principle or in the carrying out or execution of the research.

    B. The research takes place within the walls of the health care institution and should, following the nature of the research, generally not be carried out outside the institution.

    C. Patients / clients of the health care institution participate in the research (in the form of treatment).

        ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

        ☐ Yes → Did a Dutch Medical Institutional Review Board (MIRB) decide that the Wet Medisch Onderzoek (Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act) is not applicable?

        ☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

        ☐ No → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

2. Do grant providers wish the protocol to be assessed by a recognised MIRB?

        ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

        ☐ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

3. Does the research include medical-scientific research that might carry risks for the participant? ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

        ☐ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

Standard research method

4. Does this research fall under one of the stated standard research methods of the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies?

        ☒ Yes → 1. Standard Evaluation and Attitude Research → continue with questionnaire

        ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist

Participants

5. Is the participant population a healthy one?

        ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

        ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

6. Will the research be conducted amongst minors (<16 years of age) or amongst (legally) incapable persons?

        ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

        ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

Method

7. Is a method used that makes it possible to produce a coincidental finding that the participant should be informed of?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

8. Will participants undergo treatment or are they asked to perform certain behaviours that can lead to discomfort?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

9. Are the estimated risks connected to the research minimal?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

10. Are the participants offered a different compensation than the usual one?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

11. Should deception take place, does the procedure meet the standard requirements?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

12. Are the standard regulations regarding anonymity and privacy met?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

Conducting the research

13. Will the research be carried out at an external location (such as a school, hospital)?

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

      ☐ Yes→ Do you have/will you receive written permission from this institution?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

         ☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

14. Is there a contact person to whom participants can turn to with questions regarding the research and are they informed of this?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

15. Is it clear for participants where they can file complaints with regard to participating in the research and how these complaints will be dealt with?

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

16. Are the participants free to participate in the research, and to stop at any given point, whenever and for whatever reason they should wish to do so?

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

17. Before participating, are participants informed by means of an information document about the aim, nature and risks and objections of the study? (see explanation on informed consent and sample documents).

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

18. Do participants and/or their representatives sign a consent form? (see explanation on informed consent and sample documents.

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → checklist finished

APPENDIX G: Statement of Own Work

Student name: Milan van der Wallen
Student number: s1042470

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (https://www.ru.nl/facultyofarts/stip/rules-guidelines/rules/fraud-plagiarism/) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words.

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature:

Place and date: … , 13/06/2022