

## **Contrastive Rhetoric: Investigating Politeness and Intimacy in Business Email Communications in Four Asian Countries**

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### **Abstract**

511 commercial emails from four Asian countries, namely China, Pakistan, India, and Iran have been analyzed in a mixed-method design. The focus of the study is on the two features of politeness and intimacy. In the quantitative analysis, the model proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) and that of Coulmas (2005) which have drawn upon the features of indirectness in requesting and the length of letters as the indicators of politeness are used. In the qualitative and descriptive analysis formality in salutation and opening clause as well as the use of abbreviated forms are taken into account. The result shows that Iranians use the most polite style in their business letters, while Chinese use the most intimate discourse. On the other hand, Indians use both the least polite and intimate style in their business letters. Pakistanis' use of polite and intimate style is not as conspicuous as that of Iranians and Chinese respectively. The findings are hoped to help better inter-cultural understanding, especially with respect to written rhetorical characteristics.

**Keywords:** Contrastive Rhetoric; Politeness; Intimacy; Cross Cultural Communication; Email Communication.

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## **1. Introduction**

Cross-cultural studies have always helped our understanding of individuals involved in international communication. Such studies, especially in the area of relentless international interactions and communication, seem quite influential in enhancing global understanding of different cultures.

Related to the issue of intercultural understanding is understanding of the strategies of politeness among different cultures. In the past two decades, politeness has become an important area of research in cross-cultural pragmatics. The interests in this area can be seen partly as a result of economical, political and social relations among different countries in the international milieu (Gimenez, 2000). Brown and Levinson's theory has proved to be a popular choice for comparisons of politeness phenomena in different cultures since its republication in 1987.

In this paper, with a mixed design, the researchers have focused on the question of intercultural politeness and intimacy in business email communication of four Asian countries, namely Iran, China, Pakistan, and India. In doing so, first the relevant literature of email communication and cross-cultural studies on different dimensions of communication both in face-to-face interaction and via email are reviewed. Then, the theoretical framework of the study, namely the influential model of

politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), and the one proposed by Coulmas (2005) are explained with examples for clarification.

As for the purpose of the present study, in the method part, a corpus of 511 emails from aforementioned Asian countries has been investigated through discourse analytic techniques. In order to investigate the politeness strategies used in the business letters of the four countries, the researchers have based their analysis on the model for politeness.

The work is trying to address the following research questions:

Is there any difference among politeness strategies used by the four countries of Iran, China, Pakistan, and India?

Is there any difference among the degree of intimacy in business emails of the four countries of Iran, China, Pakistan, and India?

There are some limiting factors about the data used for the present study. Most of the emails were sent to the same recipient, i.e., the Iranian company, and senders were from five commercial companies. However, the emails were collected from the archive the Iranian commercial company in the last two years.

## **2. Research Background**

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, email became the main channel of communication between companies and workplaces. Email is now a fact

of life in many commercial companies, where it has largely replaced written memos and much telephone and face-to-face interactions. In some business workplaces in the corporate world, email has become the primary communication medium and many of today's commercial enterprises could no longer function without it. It plays an important role in the transmission of information and, in general, in dealing with everyday correspondence at work (Waldvogel, 2007). The main advantage of email over other modes of communication is that it enables people to communicate speedily the same information to many others in diverse locations and time zones. Furthermore, easy access to the record of emails makes them a convenient means of documentation. On the whole, recent research is showing increasingly that email is capable of conveying rich information (Fedderholdt, 2001).

A bulk of research has been done on different aspects of emails and email communication in various contexts, like education context and business context. As one clear example, in his study, Waldvogel (2007) investigated greetings and closings as distinctive stylistic features of business email, in terms of the relationships that exist between their form and use, the workplace or organizational culture, and the sociolinguistic variables of status, social distance, and gender of interlocutors. Focusing on greetings and

closings, he explored some of the ways in which email communication in four workplaces contributed to the construction of aspects of social and professional identity and provided indications of the nature of the workplace culture and its current climate. The absence or presence of a greeting and the type of greeting set the tone for the email conversation that follows. "Greeting is one means by which a writer constructs his or her social and professional identity and relationship with the addressee(s). Closing can help consolidate the relationship and establish a relational basis for future encounters" (p. 138).

Intercultural communication defined by Samovar et al (1998) as "communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event" (p. 48) has also fascinated many researchers in the area of email communication.

In a comprehensive study done on forty Asian and European countries, including Iran, Pakistan and India, Geert Hofstede, referred to in Samovar et al (1998), identified four value dimensions that have a significant impact on behavior in all cultures. These dimensions, he believes, are individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity and femininity. In his analyses, Hofstede ranked the forty countries based on the four aforementioned criteria. Since his

classification has been one of the earliest classifications, it has been used as a source for many consequent researches. Based on his classification of Individualism and collectivism, India ranked 21 out of 40, which was lower than Iran which ranked 24. Pakistan in this classification ranked 38, meaning that India is a country which promoted individualism much more than Pakistan or even Iran.

In the analysis of uncertainty avoidance, Pakistan ranked eighteenth out of 40 much lower than Iran which ranked 23 and India which ranked 34. This proves that Pakistanis do not like uncertainty in usual communications. Also, in the analysis of masculinity and femininity, there was not significant difference among the three countries. Finally, in the analysis of power distance, India ranked fourth whereas Iran and Pakistan ranked 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> respectively.

Other types of analysis have been on the concepts of High-context as apposed to Low-Context (Hall & Hall, 1990). Halls define these two terms in the following manner:

A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicitly transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. (Hall 1976 cited in Samovar et al., 1998)

Based on this definition, for example, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean are considered High-Context cultures while American and German is considered Lower-Context cultures. That is to say that in Chinese “for most of the transactions in daily life they do not require, nor do they expect, much in depth background information.” (p.79) Meaning, therefore is not necessarily contained in words but is provided through gesture, the use of space, and even silence.

The studies related to formality and informality, Samovar et al., have found that there are cultures in that highly value formality. “In Egypt, Turkey, and Iran, the student-teacher relationship is very formal. In contrast, they believe that the relationship between student-teacher is completely relaxed.” (p.82)

Related to cross-cultural studies are the researches in the field of contrastive rhetoric. Research from contrastive rhetoric suggests that cultural influences play a strong role in students’ writing (Kaplan, 1967). Different studies have been done on contrastive rhetoric. In her study of high school teachers and students, Hirose (2003) found that native English and Chinese writers differed in what they valued as effective writing and employed different strategies. For example, the Chinese perspective of good writing consisted of having a moral message, whereas Americans tended to value exploration of self. While Americans see

borrowing extensively from another text as plagiarism, violations of honor and morals, Chinese writers see borrowing as flattering to the writer of the original text. Kobayashi (2005) interviewed 20 EFL writers in Taiwan and reported that many Taiwanese writers preferred memorization and imitation as writing strategies, as opposed to Americans' encouragement of developing the individual voice. He found that their writing tended to reflect the relative values of collectivist versus individualistic societies. Features such as indirectness, use of proverbs, and consideration for the family and the society tended to show up in Taiwanese students' writing. In contrast, personal disclosure and assertiveness were reflected in US students' work.

Also, among cross-cultural studies are the studies on politeness strategies used by different cultures in international communications. How email writers express relational aspects of communication, namely concern for and interest in others (positive politeness) together with consideration for the need of others not to be imposed upon (negative politeness), has been addressed only very incidentally in the literature to date, (Murray, 2000). "The absence of politeness markers could leave readers uncertain about the illocutionary force of the request or annoyed at the impoliteness and perhaps the inappropriate assumption of authority" (Ibid: 75).

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Coulmas's interpretation of politeness

In her book *Sociolinguistics, the study of speaker's choice*, Florian Coulmas explains that we must consider a distinction between commonsense meaning of politeness and theoretical concept of politeness. While common sense notion of politeness refers to "the assessment of behavior in everyday life of by members of the speech community in question on the basis of that community's social values, theoretical notion of politeness is concerned with the general conditions and the behavioral and linguistic means of realizing politeness" (Coulmas, 2005: 85). That is to say that a theoretical notion of politeness must strive to be culturally neutral and suitable to uncover universal mechanisms of linguistic politeness differentiation (Ibid). Also, she maintains that politeness is always a dimension of dialogic contextualized speech, not attributable directly either to the speaker or the speech itself.

She then introduces a couple of strategies, employed by speakers of a language, which can implicate politeness. Among these strategies, she says, are *indirectness* and *the use of long speech* and *elaborate words* (which are the base of the second phase of the method part current article), *syntactic devices*, (e.g. informal expressions, abbreviations, etc., which are the base of the third phase of the method part of the

current article), *address and reference* (which are the base of the fourth phase of the method section of current study).

In the next section, we focus specifically on the influential model for politeness studies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), which would be the base of the first phase of analysis in this article.

### 3.2 Brown and Levinson's politeness theory

In his comprehensive review of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Peter Longcope, summarizing their model, defines face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Longcope, 1995: 70.). They then divide face into two separate, but related aspects- positive face and negative face- which they define in terms of wants that every person knows every other person has, and knows are in his best interest to, at least partially, satisfy. Longcope then goes on with explaining positive as apposed to negative face: "positive face concerns the desire to be appreciated and approved by selected others. Negative face concerns a person's want to be unimpeded and free from imposition" (P.71). When an act of verbal or non-verbal communication runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker, based on this theory, this is called a face threatening act (FTA).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Brown and Levinson base their theory on the

acceptance of the two assumptions stated above, that is, every body has both negative face and positive face, and both of these aspects are, at times threatened by another.

Another assumption Brown and Levinson make, as Longcope (1995) mentions, is that the speaker is endowed with a precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends. These assumptions are crucial to their theory because they believe that a person will consider the best politeness strategy possible before performing a FTA (Ibid). Brown and Levinson propose that when confronted with the need to perform a FTA, the individual must choose between performing the FTA in the most direct and efficient manner, or attempting to mitigate the effect of the FTA on the hearer's positive/negative face (Duthler 2006).

The strategies which they discuss, based on the review of (Longcope 1995), can be grouped into five super strategies which are given as below: (the higher the number of strategy, the more polite it is).

Do the FTA:

On record

- (1) Without redressive action, badly with redressive action
- (2) Positive politeness
- (3) Negative politeness
- B. (4) off record
- (5) Don't do the FTA

The term “on record” is used when an expression has “one unambiguously attributable intention with which witness would concur”; on the other hand, the term “off record” is used when an expression can have “more than one unambiguously attributable intention” (ibid: 73)

Based on this model, therefore, the act of borrowing someone’s car can be stated in the following ways, depending on the level of politeness on the part of the speaker:

- (1) Lend me your car, tomorrow!
- (2) Hey, that’s a new suit you have on! Is it new? (...) By the way, may I borrow your car, tomorrow?
- (3) You couldn’t by any chance lend me your car, could you?
- (4) I need to pick up my friend at the airport tomorrow, but I don’t have a car”
- (5) Not asking for any thing

#### **4. Methodology**

##### **4.1. Data**

The data collected for this study is based on one of the researcher’s long-term personal experience as an interpreter of an international commercial company involved in steel industry and dealing with many Asian countries such as China, India, Bangladesh, Singapore and Pakistan among others. However, for the purpose of the current study, the researchers, having been in direct contact with these countries for about one year, have observed

some specific contrasts between Iranian business emails and those of Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani businessmen. In order to do a proper contrastive analysis as many as 511 business emails were selected from the correspondence of several manufacturing plants in China, India, and Pakistan, and a few trading companies in Iran from mid 2007 to mid 2008. Most of the letters are either enquiry or request for information along with their replies.

##### **4.2. Pragmatic Analysis**

Based on the literature for politeness and intimacy, there are several factors accounting for these two factors. Brown & Levinson in their influential work in 1987 have already proposed a model for investigating politeness. Other factors as indicators of politeness, based on Coulmas (2005), are address terms and length in rhetorical structure. As for intimacy, the interpretation of these works notify that the more informal a letter the more intimate it is. Thus, the use of abbreviations and long greetings are considered as factors which can be related to informality, hence intimacy. The analyses were done in four phases as follows:

###### **4.2.1. Phase I**

In this phase, first, in order to find a scientific data, the researchers based their analysis on the model for politeness proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). In so doing, 50 request letters

from each country were given to two different individuals for rating from 1 to 5 based on the degree of directness as proposed by Brown & Levinson’s theory. One of the raters was a commercial manager of a manufacturing company in Philippine with near native like command of English. The other one was a post graduate student of linguistics at Allameh University of Tehran. The assumption was that one rater had a first hand experience with commercial letters and so had an intuitive impression of (in)directness in business letters, and the other one had the theoretical knowledge of rhetorical structures and knowledge of politeness strategies. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores by two raters for each country.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics of Scores of two Raters

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
China1	50	1.00	5.00	2.3200	.97813
China2	50	1.00	4.00	2.4000	.83299
Pakistan1	50	1.00	5.00	2.9800	.89191
Pakistan2	50	1.00	5.00	3.0000	.85714
India1	50	1.00	4.00	1.9000	.86307
India2	50	1.00	4.00	1.8400	.79179
Iran1	50	2.00	5.00	3.5800	.75835
Iran2	50	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.83299
Valid N(list wise)	50				

Then, by calculating the correlation coefficient of the two sets of scores obtained by the two

raters, the reliability of the scores was measured to be assured about consistency in scorings. Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient of the two sets of scores as the indicator of inter-rater reliability.

**Table 2** Reliability of Scores

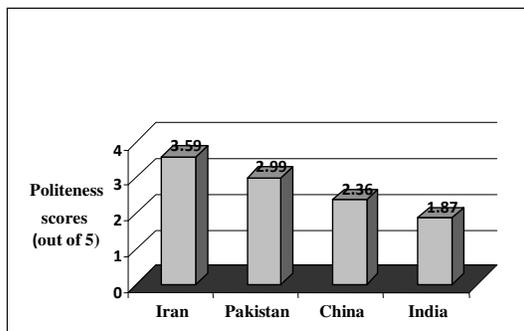
Country	Inter-rater reliability
China	0.792
Pakistan	0.774
India	0.812
Iran	0.827

Finally, as it can be seen in Table 3, the mean scores, as the indicator of politeness scores, were calculated. The mean score is, in fact, the average of the mean scores obtained by each rater.

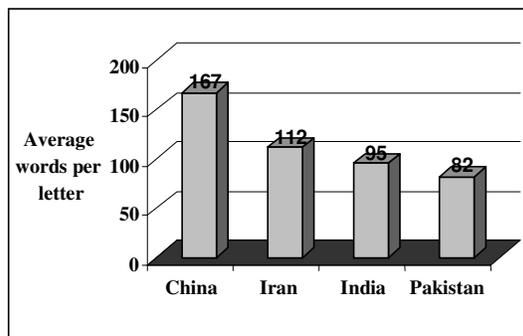
**Table 3** Politeness scores for Letters of each country

Country	Mean Score (Politeness Score)
China	2.36
Pakistan	2.99
India	1.87
Iran	3.59

Graph 1 represents the difference visually:



Graph 2 depicts the visual difference:



Graph I Visual representation of politeness scores for the letters of each country based on Brown & Levinson’s model for politeness

Graph 2 Visual representations of average words per letter for each country

4.2.2. Phase II

In the second phase, the researchers drawing upon the proposed strategies of politeness by Coulmas (2005) have focused on the strategy of length as an indicator of politeness in writing letters. The assumption is that the longer the email, the more polite it is. In so doing, a corpus of 511 business emails, including 141 Chinese, 112 Indian, 122 Pakistani, and 136 Iranian was randomly selected. Table 4 shows the results of the word counts:

Table 4 Average Length of Letters

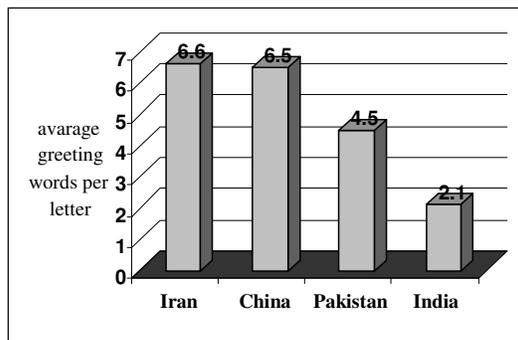
Country	Number of letters	Total words	Length of letters (Words per letter)
China	141	23547	167
India	112	10640	95
Pakistan	122	10004	82
Iran	136	15232	112
Total	511		

Then, the frequency of greeting words in the opening clause of each letter was calculated. Table V shows the total number of letter in which greetings were used as well as the length of greetings per each letter.

Table 5 Average Number of Greetings Words per letter

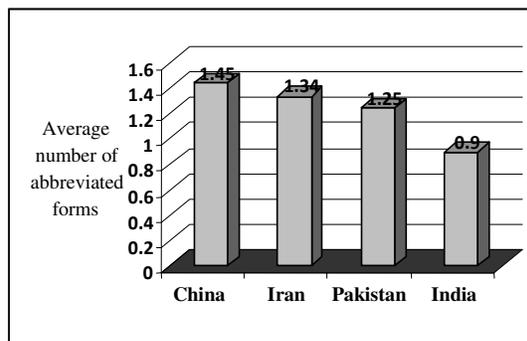
Country	Greeting in the opening clause (Number)	Length of greetings (Words per letter)
China	92	6.5
India	48	2.1
Pakistan	54	4.5
Iran	114	6.6

**Graph 3** represents the visual difference of greetings for each of the four countries.



**Graph 3** Visual Representation of Average Greeting Words per letter.

**Graph 4** can help us in better representation of the difference:



**Graph 4** Visual Representation of Frequency of Abbreviated form per letter

**4.2.3. Phase III**

Based on Coulmas (2005), another factors related to informality, and hence intimacy, is the use of rhetorical structures such as abbreviated forms (Rgds for regards). Therefore, the next analysis was to calculate the average use of abbreviated forms, and Table VI shows the result of such an analysis.

**Table 6** Frequency of Abbreviated Forms

Country	Number of letters containing abbreviated forms	Average number abbreviated form per letter
China	92	1.45
India	48	0.9
Pakistan	54	1.25
Iran	114	1.34

**4.2.4. Phase IV**

The final analysis was done on the types and number of salutations in the letters of the four countries, since, based on Coulmas (2005), the use of address terms shows the degree of informality and intimacy. Table VII shows the result of this analysis:

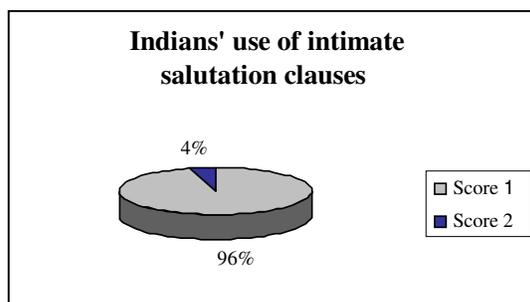
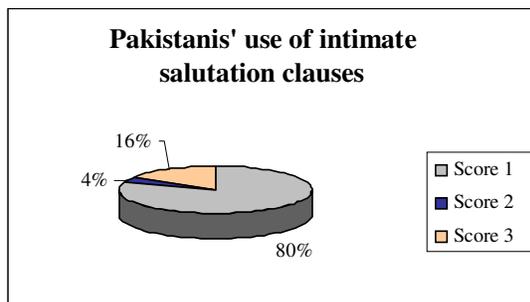
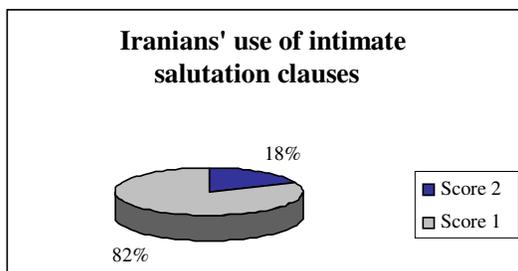
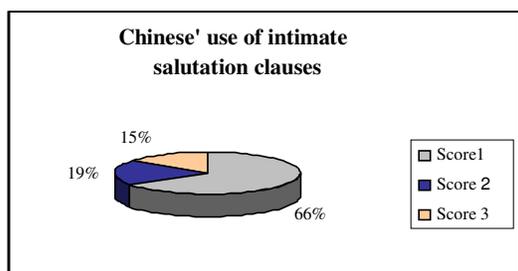
**Table 7** Salutation Clauses

Country	China	India	Pakistan	Iran
Dear Sir	14	11	5	38
Dear Sirs	8	0	9	14
Dear Mr. X	53	18	65	59
Dear X	21	0	0	0
Mr. X	0	12	0	0
My dear Mr. X	10	0	4	0
Hello Mr. X	17	0	0	25
Hello Sirs	0	5	0	0
Dear brother	0	0	10	0
My dear brother	0	0	8	0
Dear respectful manager	0	5	0	0
Kind Attn.	7	6	0	0
No salutation	6	56	11	0

Based on Coulmas (2005) the degree of intimacy in these address terms differ with respect to the degree of formality in them. Here, for the purpose of convenience, the degree of intimacy of informality in these salutation clauses was scored by the same raters from 1 to 3. Because of shortage of space here the mean scores obtained for the most used salutation clauses are classified as follows:

Salutation Clause	Degree of Intimacy
My dear brother, Dear brother, Dear X	3
My dear Mr. X, Hello Mr. X, Hello Sirs	2
Dear Mr., Mr. X, Dear Sirs, Dear Sir, Dear respectful manager, Kind Attn, No Salutation	1

Based on this classification, the emails can be graphically represented in pie charts as follows:



Graph 5 Visual Representation of Use of Intimate Salutation Clauses

### 5. Results

The result of the first phase of the analyses, as reported in the table III and the graph I, indicates that Iranian people used the most polite style in their business letter writing. Pakistani people use the second most polite stylistic features. Chinese did not have significant difference in their politeness scores with Pakistani people; however, Indians came out to use least polite style in this classification. The significant difference was observed between the politeness score of Iranian business letters and those of Indians. Also, Pakistani business letters scored considerably higher than Indian business letters. The score of politeness

for Iranian emails was 1.72 above those of Indians whose score was 1.12 less than Pakistani emails.

In the second phase, as it can be seen in table IV and graph II, the average length of the letter of the four countries has been compared. As the data shows the Chinese are reported to write longest letters which were considerably longer than that of the other countries in this analysis. Iranians, Indians, and Pakistani emails, in order, came out the other lengthiest letters. However the difference was not really significant.

Also, in the analysis of the greetings in the opening clause, as it is shown in table V, Iranians used greetings in the opening clause of most of their letters, (114 out of 136), while in Indians and Pakistani emails less greetings were observed. Chinese, however, used greetings in the opening clause of their emails considerably more than Indians and Pakistani people.

Another interesting finding, which is reported in table V and graph III, was that, Iranians used highest number of words in their greeting which, although very close to those of Chinese, was significantly higher than those of Pakistani and Indian counterparts. Indians used the minimum number of words per each letter, the average being as little as 2.1 words per letter, which compared to that of Iranian emails (6.6) or Chinese (6.5), is considerably lower.

In the third phase, the numbers of letters in which the abbreviated forms, like *Rgds* for Regards or *tnx* for thanks, have been used were calculated. Also, the average number of abbreviated forms per each letter was calculated. As it is shown in table VI, Iranians and then Chinese used abbreviations in higher number of their letters compared to those of Indians and Pakistanis. However, Chinese used the highest number of abbreviated forms in each of their letters (the average of 1.45 abbreviations). While the Indians used the lowest number of abbreviations, Iranians' and Pakistanis' use of abbreviations were so close to that of Chinese.

Finally, in the analysis of the types of number of specific salutation clauses, most of the letters contained formal salutation clauses. However, after rating the degree of intimacy from 1 to 3, as we can see in table VII and graph V the most intimate salutation clauses were used by Chinese, while Pakistan, Iran, and India were the other ranks in this classification.

## **6. Discussion**

As the results obtained from the four phases of analysis indicates, we can conclude that Iranians have used the most polite styles in their writings. This was the overall interpretation of the score of politeness and the relative length of their letters and greetings in the opening clauses. This high amount of politeness in the

letters of Iranian people can be related to their Persian culture. One of the traditional cultural values of Iranians is what can be called formalities. Basically, Iranians are not so direct in their requests and rounding around the bush is a paramount feature of their culture. When it comes to international and intercultural communication this becomes even more salient. For example the following sentences were observed in the emails of Iranian businessmen:

*\_While thanking you for your inquiry, Regret to advise you that unfortunately shipment through container will cause some inconvenience for your good self and us ...*

Such a message in Indian letters would be said simply as “Right now, we can not do containerized shipment”

*\_ With an especial thanks to your kind attention and with a big apologize I regret to inform you that due to some freight problems the seller can not issue a P/I for you within next 10-15 days.*

This sentence in Indian emails is said simply as “Unfortunately, issuing P/I is not possible within the next two weeks”

Another important feather of Iranian emails is exaggeration in appreciation of the addressee right from the beginning. The following samples help better understanding of the case:

*\_While thanking you for your inquiry, ...*

*\_Thank you for your offer for Galvanized Steel Pipes in your letter dated Feb, 20, 2008. Please kindly be informed that...*

*\_ Many thanks for your kind attention ....*

*\_We appreciate your cordial reply,...*

*\_Respectfully, it is highly appreciated if you investigate...*

*\_We appreciate your kind cooperation and follow-up in all the steps of this business...*

Indian email correspondence is more direct and frank. The following examples illustrate the point:

*\_ Referring to your Fax / Email of 19th Dec. Our bank is unable to accept any of the bank mention by you as L/c advising bank.*

In this example, the person is answering a request. As it is apparent, the negative response is not accompanied by any such terms as *regretfully, unfortunately, we are sorry to say that*, etc.

*\_ All other changes have been made in the P/I, No more discussion on this point...*

In this example, which is the answer of previously made request, the person is directly threatening the face of the receiver.

Once again it must be emphasized that the concept of politeness here is different with the customary use of the term which we subscribe to people. Here, politeness refers to appropriate linguistic devices and stylistic features used by people from different cultures in written correspondence with people from other cultures. It is by no mean correct to attribute the feature of politeness or impoliteness to people of these cultures.

## 7. Conclusion

The present paper has explored in an illustrative rather than exhaustive manner the distinctive language and style of e-mails as a means of communication in the correspondence of four Asian countries. There are many unavoidable and unalienable problems in such cross-cultural studies. First and foremost, in most of cultural studies we study cultures from the perspective of our observations and our conclusions are tainted by our personal and cultural orientations.

The second problem, and specially accounting for current study, is that the data used in such studies is usually too small to make any firm generalizations or to conclude that business e-mail communication in international context represents culture specific patterns of language use. Besides, even if the e-mails analyzed can be said to exemplify the use of e-mails in business, they are taken from the same source, or limited sources, and mostly sent to the same receiver, thus not allowing for a more exhaustive cross-sectional analysis of business e-mail practices.

Finally, there is a note of caution in order here; as we are continuously educated about our culture, yet most of what we learn absorbs without being aware of culture is both vague and specific; it is both all of the individual and part of an individual. Put in slightly different terms, we are much more than our culture. Each

human being is unique, and each is shaped by countless factors, culture being one of them. At any given moments, our behavior is the product of millions of years of evolution; our genetic characteristics; the social groups we have been in; our gender, age, individual history, political affiliation, perception of others, and current circumstances and many other factors. We must keep in mind that we are individuals, and therefore, the values and behaviors of a particular culture may not be the values and behaviors of all the individuals within that culture.

The last, but for sure not the least point, however, is that such problems must not disappoint us in improving our understanding of specific dimensions of different cultures, especially in the era which we have the motto of a global village.

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## بررسی مؤدب بودن و صمیمیت در ایمیل های تجاری چهار کشور آسیایی

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۵۱۱ ایمیل تجاری از چهار کشور آسیایی چین، پاکستان، هند و ایران در یک بررسی کمی کیفی مورد تحلیل قرار گرفته اند. مطالعه بر روی دو ویژگی مؤدب بودن و صمیمیت انجام شده است. در بررسی کمی، مدل براون و لوینسن (۱۹۸۷) و کولماس (۲۰۰۵) که غیر مستقیم بودن در درخواست و طول نامه را مبنای مؤدب بودن می دانند استفاده شده اند. در بررسی کیفی و توصیفی نیز میزان رسمیت در سلام و احوالپرسی و جمله آغازین نامه و همینطور استفاده از اختصارات مورد ارزیابی قرار گرفته شده اند. نتایج نشان می دهد که ایرانی ها مؤدب ترین و چینی ها صمیمی ترین گفتمان را سبک نامه نگاری داشته اند. از سوی دیگر هندی ها کمترین میزان مؤدب بودن و صمیمیت را در نامه های خود نشان داده اند. همینطور میزان مؤدب بودن و صمیمیت در نامه نگاری تجاری پاکستانی ها به ترتیب از ایرانی ها و چینی ها کمتر بود. یافته های این تحقیق می تواند به درک بهتر ارتباطات بین فرهنگی و مخصوصاً ویژگی های نوشتاری کمک کند.

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