

If Possible, Do Not Mark Me Absent Today: Analysis of Metafunctions in University Students' Emails to Their Professors

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Abstract—This study explores the language used in emails sent by university students at an Omani university to their professors. While numerous studies have examined this genre in various Arab universities, little research has analyzed both Arabic and English emails through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The study examines a sample of 170 authentic emails, written in Arabic and English, sent to a course instructor over the span of an academic year. The analysis is grounded in the premise that adult language is inherently multifunctional, with every utterance simultaneously fulfilling ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions in an integrated manner. The findings indicate that although students generally succeed in conveying their intentions, their emails often lack the expected level of formality and structural coherence in academic communication. These results highlight the need for increased awareness and instruction in email pragmatics within academic discourse.

Index Terms—Systemic Functional Linguistics, ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, textual metafunction, Arabic and English requests

I. INTRODUCTION

The predominant and widely acknowledged means of communication between university students and their professors outside the formal classroom setting is electronic mail (e-mail). Students frequently utilize email to correspond with their lecturers, primarily for the purpose of making inquiries or request for action. At the undergraduate level, these inquiries may pertain to various aspects such as seeking clarification on course materials, addressing questions related to assignments, examinations and assessments, inquiring about attendance and participation expectations, seeking information on professors' office hours, discussing personal matters impacting academic performance, or reporting technical issues. Instances where students forward draft papers to solicit feedback prior to final submission or communicate emergencies preventing them from meeting course requirements and consequently requesting an extension on assignment deadlines are common. The majority of these scenarios necessitate that students formulate appropriate requestive emails directed to their professors.

While overarching guidelines for email etiquette exist and are applicable across diverse cultural backgrounds, distinctions in linguistic etiquette emerge based on cultural norms, academic contexts, and expectations. The way students engage with their professors via email can be influenced by an array of cultural factors encompassing levels of formality, politeness, directness, forms of address, and communication norms. Despite existing research exploring requestive emails from Arab students to their professors, the extant literature predominantly investigates the pragmalinguistic aspects of this communication, with limited comprehensive analyses of this specific register. This present study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics framework to examine request emails by Omani university students, with the aim of comprehensively investigating the linguistic, social, cultural, textual, contextual, and semiotic factors influencing the realization of request speech acts within the higher education context. It is noteworthy that the official language of Oman is Arabic, while English serves as a foreign language and the primary medium of instruction for Science and Technology majors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A request constitutes a directive speech act, the formulation of which poses a potential threat to the negative face of the addressee in instances where language users neglect to align their linguistic expressions with the social variables delineated by the contextual parameters (Karapetjana & Roziņa, 2012). Extensive discourse has been dedicated to the examination of how students actualize this speech act when corresponding with their instructors and professors, with particular attention directed towards the nuanced facework employed to ameliorate the inherent imposition arising from the asymmetric power dynamics prevalent in the academic milieu. Within the context of the Arab world, pertinent publications addressing this issue predominantly concentrate on the linguistic resources utilized by university students in the articulation of this speech act, whether in English or Arabic. The primary emphasis of such inquiries lies in elucidating instances of pragmatic success or failure. This survey of related literature illustrates that the existing scholarly discourse has not extensively examined the nuanced textual and contextual intricacies inherent in the requestive speech act within

the Arabic academic context, utilizing an extensive framework such as Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This investigation endeavors to fill this scholarly gap and make a substantive contribution to the understanding of these intricacies. The following review of literature provides an overview of research on requests by Arab students conducted across diverse Arab countries with special focus on the research that has specifically investigated university students' request emails to their instructors.

In the UAE higher education context, Deveci and Hmida (2017) examined the request strategies employed by native and non-native English speakers when emailing their professors. The non-native speakers primarily included Emirati students, along with some from Jordan, Palestine, and Syria. The study's main findings revealed that Arab students did not completely adhere to the conventions of requestive email writing in terms of discourse structure and external modifiers in the target language. Deveci and Abbas (2023) assert that students' disregard for email genre conventions can lead to face-threatening situations in communication with university professors. Their study revealed that students frequently used direct request speech acts but often neglected expected discourse structures, such as including a subject line, expressing gratitude, or signing their names. While judges found the emails generally respectful, they deemed them inappropriate, primarily due to frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary.

Yousuf (2020) conducted an analysis of Arabic and English emails written by Qatar Community College students to their professors, concentrating on formal and grammatical aspects. The study highlighted linguistic and structural challenges in the emails written in both languages, identifying significant issues such as sentence structure, run-on sentences, fragments, incorrect forms, tense errors, spelling mistakes, and inaccuracies in grammar and punctuation.

Three studies in the Saudi higher education context examined students' emails to their instructors. Bulut (2007) explored the pragmatic features of authentic email messages composed in English by Saudi female graduate students to their male professors. The findings indicated that students predominantly utilized positive politeness strategies in their requests, while often employing address terms oriented towards negative politeness at the beginning of their messages. Danielewicz-Betz (2013) investigated student-faculty communication via email, highlighting the absence of clear guidelines that leads to inappropriate use of pragmatic markers, resulting in impoliteness and inappropriateness among participants who belong to three countries including Saudi Arabia. The study suggested that structured instruction in email etiquette is necessary for improvement. A lack of pragmatic competence was observed across all student groups, regardless of proficiency or seniority. However, explicit guidance on email writing and netiquette significantly enhanced the appropriateness and politeness of student-faculty interactions. Kuriri (2023) conducted a case study employing pragmatics to explore English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors' perceptions of students' emails. The instructors noted that the translation from Arabic, the students' first language, to English contributed to difficulties in composing appropriate emails. They emphasized that as students learn English, they should also be taught its pragmatic aspects, including proper email writing techniques.

The requests of Iraqi students have garnered the attention of researchers. Jamal (2022) conducted a quantitative and qualitative content and discourse analysis of emails from Iraqi EFL undergraduates to their lecturers, aiming to identify the politeness strategies employed. The study found that positive politeness strategies were the most common face-saving techniques used by students in their emails to instructors. Turki et al. (2022) explored the use of requests across different social relations in Iraqi and Australian academic contexts, focusing on five social categories. The findings indicated that Australian native speakers were generally more indirect, and thus more polite, in their requests compared to Iraqi non-native speakers when addressing individuals of higher authority. To examine and analyze the politeness strategies, levels of directness, and syntactic and lexical choices employed by both male and female Arab students (Iraqi, Jordanian, Yemeni and Libyan) in their email communications with lecturers, Krish and Salman (2016) observed that female students demonstrated a greater awareness of indirect politeness strategies compared to their male counterparts, who tended to rely more on direct ones accompanied by lexical politeness markers to reduce the degree of directness. In a study with similar findings, Alsout and Khedri (2019) studied the e-mails written by Libyan postgraduate students to their lecturers. Direct strategies also appeared more frequently than conventionally indirect strategies.

Surveying the Omani context to identify requestive practices in the academic setting has yielded a few relevant and insightful studies. Lenchuk and Ahmed (2019b) utilized Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) to investigate the strategies employed by Omani EFL learners when making requests to their professors. A noteworthy aspect of this study is its examination of English interlanguage requests without comparing them to the norms of native English speakers. The results obtained from the study indicate that, contrary to the claims made in much of the literature on requests in interlanguage pragmatics, EFL learners employ indirect strategies. These strategies are shaped by cultural scripts that prioritize values such as politeness, strong family ties, and tribal orientation in Omani society. The study underscores the significance of these communication strategies in fostering tolerance and sensitivity toward the communication styles of other cultures. The authors reiterate that the focus of investigation should shift to the interlanguage pragmatics rather than the common deficit model. Al Rahbi et al. (2023) and Rahman et al. (2015) compared the requests made by Omani EFL learners and English native speakers. The results showed that Omani EFL learners use fewer indirect strategies which are considered by the authors as inadequate and attributed them to their weak linguistic abilities. Both studies found that while native speakers tend to be indirect, Omani EFL learners are inclined to be direct in the strategies they use. Algryani and Al Jardani (2023a) examined the challenges present in Omani students' emails that hinder effective communication with their instructors. They determined that these emails frequently violate email etiquette, contain linguistic errors, and

exhibit features typical of texting and instant messaging. Consequently, they advocated educational measures to enhance students' skills in writing and interpreting professional emails.

In the reviewed literature, no study has employed the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework to analyze Arab students' emails when communicating with their instructors in either Arabic or English. Additionally, the majority of the surveyed literature has utilized Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) to gather data. This technique has been criticized for producing artificial responses, as participants imagine scenarios and respond based on these hypothetical situations, which may not accurately reflect real-life interactions. This study seeks to address a methodological and data-related gap in the literature by using the comprehensive framework of SFL to analyze naturally occurring data in both Arabic and English. Instead of focusing on the pragmalinguistic strategies and forms, the SFL-based investigation emphasizes the connection between form and meaning. I will attempt to look at Omani students' e-mail writing to their instructors as a process of "making meaning" that utilizes a variety of semiotic systems.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Speech Acts Analysis

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language and other semiotic systems are regarded as tools for creating meaning (Halliday, 1993). Meaning is generated through texts that reflect the linguistic choices of users within specific situational and cultural contexts. Lexico-grammatical choices play a crucial role in this process. SFL posits that meaning is constructed grammatically through three primary metafunctions in discourse: Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The ideational metafunction represents actions and addresses questions such as who does what, to whom, when, and where. The interpersonal metafunction involves the relationship between the speaker or writer and the listener or reader. Lastly, the textual metafunction deals with the organization and coherence of discourse sequences (Taguchi et al., 2021). This study will attempt to explore the choices made by Omani university students to create meaning through email discourse in the academic setting. The gathered data will be analyzed according to the three discourse metafunctions.

III. METHOD

The collected data were examined based on the meanings they produce at various levels of discourse. According to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, language is analyzed through the systematic enactment of three systems of meaning (Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual), rather than as an abstract formal entity. SFL provides a method for analyzing written language, such as e-mails, shifting away from the traditional focus on spoken interaction in L2 pragmatics research (Taguchi et al., 2021). Ryshina-Pankova (2019) notes that conventional analyses interpret data semantically using SFL concepts of genre, register, or the three metafunctions 'register', documenting their expression through specific lexico-grammatical systems outlined in. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG).

A. Participants

The data for this study was collected from a population of 170 Omani university male and female students hailing from various regions of the country. The participants comprised students majoring in English and those specializing in Education. While all participants are native Arabic speakers, some are also multilingual, speaking local languages classified under Modern South Arabian languages, which lack written systems. The sample emails were gathered over the two semesters of the 2023/2024 academic year that started in September and finished by the end of June. As the instructor, I did not mandate the language for e-mail communication, allowing students the freedom to choose between English and Arabic to capture the concept of "choice" in SFL. Consequently, the majority of English majors opted to write emails in English, whereas most Education students preferred to use Arabic.

B. Study Corpus and Instrument

The study sample comprises 170 authentic emails in both Arabic and English, sent to the instructor over the course of an entire academic year. These emails, which were selected for their content related to various requests concerning course management, were analyzed with the consent of the students obtained at the conclusion of each semester. This approach aimed to preserve the natural email writing style of the students, avoiding any bias or artificiality that might arise from appraisal concerns. For the purpose of facilitating text analysis, the emails were categorized based on their language (Arabic or English) and structured into a table with three columns: greeting, body, and closing.

C. Data Analysis

To investigate the ideational function 'field', this study will examine the grammatical choices that allow students to convey meanings about the world (requests) through their e-mails (experiential function) and how the clauses within texts are related (logical metafunction). To analyze the interpersonal function of students' e-mails 'tenor', the study will consider the grammatical choices enabling students to establish their complex and diverse interpersonal relationships with their instructors. To explore the textual function of students' e-mails 'mode', the study will scrutinize the grammatical systems responsible for managing the flow of discourse and creating text coherence and cohesion.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Ideational Meta-Function

Transitivity Processes

Part of the ideational function, which deals with the transmission of ideas is transitivity (Darani, 2014). The transitivity system mainly embodies three major processes: material, mental, and relational. The material process involves physical actions, where each verb representing such an action corresponds to a token within the transitivity system. They involve what is going on outside oneself. In English emails, material processes constitute 46% of the total transitivity system. The following examples from emails highlight clauses that demonstrate "doing" or "happening," showcasing actions and events.

1. Today **I can't attend** class for specific circumstances so Please **do not mark me** absent for today class.
2. Today **I can't attend** the class because of some reason, I hope **you don't mark me absent**.
3. **I will not be able to attend** today because I have a transportation problem.
4. **I would like to inform** you that I am absent from class today due to a circumstance. I hope **you will not record me** as absent.
5. I hope **you will excuse me** today.
6. **I am writing** to **seek your guidance** and expertise in verifying the correctness of our answers to a set of questions from.
7. Please **delete** one day of absence so that **I can make a petition and delete it** from the system.
8. I hope that **you** will be kind enough **not to record** me as absent today.
9. I **can't come** to class today.
10. **I will make a petition**, and I hope **you accept it**.

In the analysis of 95 English emails, the material process emerges as the most frequently employed transitivity process for constructing meaning. As indicated in the table below, this process appears 158 times, accounting for 46% of the transitivity processes identified. The actions in these emails typically involve verbs such as "attend," "inform," "excuse," "write," "delete," "make petition," "come," and others, which are commonly found in students' requests to their professors. The clause structure frequently observed in these processes follows the pattern: Circumstance (optional) + Participant (inherent) + Process (inherent) + Circumstance (optional). For instance, in the sentence, "Today I can't attend class for specific circumstances," "today" functions as the temporal circumstance, "I" serves as the participant, "can't attend class" represents the process, and "for specific circumstances" expresses the circumstantial element of "reason".

TABLE 1
ENGLISH E-MAILS (N=95)

Process Type	Material	Relational	Mental	Total
Frequency	158	101	86	345
Percentage	46%	29%	25%	100%

The second most frequently used transitivity processes in the English emails are relational processes, accounting for 101 occurrences, which represent 30% of the analyzed data. These processes involve states of being, becoming, and having and are expressed in two modes: attributive and identifying. In the attributive mode, the process describes an entity and involves two elements: the *Carrier* and the *Attribute*. The identifying processes identify one entity in terms of another and contain two participants: *Token* and *Value*. The following examples from the English e-mails illustrate both types of relational process:

- I (*Token*) have a transportation problem (*Value*).
- I (*Carrier*) am absent (*Attribute*) from class today.
- I (*Token*) am in the waiting list (*Value*).
- My health condition (*Carrier*) is these days bad (*Attribute*).
- I (*Carrier*) am sorry (*Attribute*) to be absent (*Attribute*) today.
- I (*Token*) have some questions to ask (*Value*).

Mental process is the least frequently used transitivity category in the English-emails data. It relates to internal experiences i.e. how we understand, perceive, feel about or desire something or someone (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In other words, mental processes encode the meanings of feeling or thinking. According to Simpson (1993), mental processes can be more precisely categorized into three types: perception processes (such as seeing and hearing), reaction processes (also known as affection or emotion, such as liking and hating), and cognitive processes (involving thinking and understanding). These mental processes involve two key participant roles: the *Senser*, which refers to the conscious entity engaging in perception, reaction, or thought, and the *Phenomenon*, which could be a person, tangible object, abstraction, or anything else that is perceived, reacted to, or contemplated. As the table shows, mental processes account for 86 occurrences which represent 25% of the analyzed data as illustrated in the following examples.

- I (*senser*) **hope** (*mental process*) you will excuse me (*phenomenon*).
- I (*senser*) **hope** (*mental process*) you will not record me as absent (*phenomenon*).
- I (*senser*) **highly value** (*mental process*) your insights (*phenomenon*).
- I (*senser*) have been **feeling** (*mental process*) **sick and tired** (*phenomenon*).

I (senser) **apologize** (*mental process*).

I (senser) **felt** (*mental process*) **sad** (*phenomenon*).

I (senser) would greatly **appreciate** (*mental process*) it if you could spare some time to review my work (*phenomenon*). The emotions of audience can be stirred by cognitive verbs choices (Kondowe, 2014).

In the 75 Arabic emails analyzed, 115 out of 262 clauses (44%) involve material processes. Like the English emails, these material process verbs are used to denote actions related to coursework, either performed by the students or requested of the instructors. The following examples illustrate this process type.

- اذا نزلت النتائج ف الموقع ارسلي لي نتيجتي هنا
- If you announce the results on the website, **send me mine** as an email?
- لا استطيع حضور محاضرة اليوم ، لاتسجلني غياب
- I cannot attend today's lecture. **Don't mark me absent**.
- أنا في الاختبار سويت اللي أقدر عليه... أتمنى منك تساعدني
- I did what I could in the exam. I hope **you help me**.
- دكتور ممكن ترسل الأشياء الي بتدخل في الفاينل إذا ما عليك امر
- Doctor, **could you share** the topics that will be included in the final exam. If you don't consider this request as a command.

TABLE 2
ARABIC E-MAILS (N=75)

Process	Material	Mental	Relational	Total
Number	115	78	69	262
Percentage	44%	30%	26%	100%

Interestingly, the second most frequently used transitivity category in Arabic e-mails is the mental processes which appeared in 78 occurrences representing 30% of the Arabic data. The following list of examples demonstrates the frequent choices of verbs used in the clauses to express the internal world of students' mind while requesting their instructors.

- أرجو الرد بسرعة وأرجو منك ان تتساعد معي!
- I **hope** you reply quickly, and I **hope** you help me!
- وأرجو منك حذف الغياب!
- And I **hope** you remove my absence.
- أرجو من فضلك مساعدتنا!
- I **hope** you kindly help us.
- يارب تفهمني أتمنى منك تساعدني!
- I pray to Almighty that you understand me. I **wish** you help me.
- جزاك الله خير أتمنى تتفهم وضعي!
- May Almighty Allah reward you with all good. I **wish** you understand my situation!
- أتمنى ان لا تسجلني فالغياب!
- I **wish** you don't mark me absent!
- أريد أنجح.
- I want to pass.

As shown in the above examples, the most common mental processes verbs that appeared in the collected data are *arjoo* meaning "I hope" (13 times), *atamanna* meaning "I wish" (13 times), and *oreed* meaning "I want" (11 times) which are commonly used by students in their requests to mean "I earnestly request you", "I wish", and "I want" respectively.

The least frequently used transitivity process is the relational category. They refer to the general notions of being, becoming and having. The verbs used to express this process relate two entities. The function of these processes is to encode a kind of relationship that exists between two participants. How these participants relate to each other is not like the case of material or mental processes. They don't affect each other in a physical sense. They rather signal that a relationship exists without suggesting that one participant affects the other in any way. This type of process was used frequently by the students to express the excuses they present in order to convince their instructors to accept their requests. The following examples demonstrate the dynamics of relational processes in Arabic data.

- عندي عذر مرضي.
- "I (token) have a medical excuse (value)."
- معي ظرف.
- "I (token) have an excuse (value)."
- عندي عائق مالي.
- "I (token) have a financial hardship (value)."
- مريضة وعندي إجازة مرضية.
- "I'm (token) sick (value) and I (token) have a sick leave (value)."
- كنت مع بنتي في المستشفى.

- “I (token) was in the hospital with my daughter (value).”
- عندي سؤال بخصوص العرض.
- “I (token) have a question regarding the presentation (value).”
- أنا خريجة يا دكتور.
- “Dr, I’m (token) a graduating student (value).”
- أنا من منطقة بعيدة عن صلالة.
- “I’m (token) from a place far from Salalah (value).”
- أنا حامل.
- “I’m (token) pregnant (value).”
- أنا بالجبيل.
- “I’m (token) in the mountain (value).”
- الوضع مرة صعب.
- “The situation (token) is very difficult (value).”

Relational processes, whether attributive or identifying, illustrate the relationship wherein "x possesses the attribute of y" (Bardi, 2008). This process involves two distinct participants: a Token, which serves as the entity being characterized, and a Value, which defines the Token by providing it with meaning, reference, function, status, or role (Halliday, 1994).

B. Interpersonal Meta-Function

The interpersonal meta-function allows us to engage with others, form connections, and convey our perspectives on various situations or occurrences. This meta-function addresses the notions of mood and modality, focusing on the dynamics between the speaker and the listener, as well as between the sender and the receiver of a message. It also considers the extent to which the speaker assumes responsibility for the actions or statements being communicated. Additionally, it examines the speaker's role in shaping the audience's perceptions according to their own beliefs or ideology (Hussain et al., 2021). The following aspects are considered to analyze the interpersonal metafunction in relation to the current research data: role relationships and power dynamics between students and their instructor, modality, mood choices, negotiation of social roles, tone and style, responsibility and commitment.

(a). Mood Choices

The selection of mood is influenced by the role the speaker assumes in a given speech context and the role they attribute to the listener. The declarative mood is generally used to provide information, the interrogative mood is employed to pose questions and usually seek information, while the imperative mood conveys a directive (Thompson, 1985). The table below shows the distribution of mood choices across both Arabic and English Data in this study.

TABLE 3
MOOD CHOICES ACROSS ARABIC AND ENGLISH DATA

Language	Arabic (n=75)	%	English (n=95)	%
Declarative Statements	34	46%	39	41%
Interrogative Statements	15	20%	17	18%
Imperative Statements	20	27%	24	25%
Miscellaneous	5	7%	15	16%

When a request is made in the declarative mood, it typically takes the form of a statement, often implying a request indirectly. This can be a way of softening the request or presenting it as a suggestion. This mood suggests a less direct approach, often used to maintain politeness or to imply that the person being asked has the option to agree or disagree. Almost 80% of the declarative statements in the students’ English emails start with “*I hope*” or “*I want*” followed by the request head act as illustrated in the following examples:

- *I hope you don't mark me absent.*
- *I hope you accept my petition.*
- *I wanted to check if you might delete some lessons.*

These examples indicate that the Omani university students use statements in the declarative mood to imply indirect requests and to mitigate the utterance imposing force on their instructors. Similarly, Arabic emails utilize the declarative mood though more frequently in 46% of the collected data. See the following examples:

- أرجو أن يترحل اختباري الى وقت آخر .
- *I hope my exam will be delayed until a later time.*
- يارب تفهمني أتمنى منك مساعدتي.
- *I Pray to Allah that you understand me. I hope you help me.*
- دكتور ما عليك أمر أريد أعرف درجتي.
- *Professor! A kind request- not an order. I want to know my marks.*

The use of Arabic verbs *arjoo*, *atamanna*, *ureed* and other strategies of expressing the declarative mood indicate how the Omani students respect their instructors’ position and prefer to use indirect requests to minimize imposition while communicating with them.

Requests made in the interrogative mood come in the form of questions, which can either be yes/no questions or WH-questions. This mood indicates that the student is aware of the power imbalance and is being deferential, seeking the professor's consent rather than assuming compliance. It's often perceived as polite and less imposing as illustrated in the following examples from both Arabic and English.

Arabic examples:

‘**ممکن** ما تسجلنا غياب؟’ **Is it possible** that you don't mark us absent?’

‘**ممکن** اعرف درجتي في الميّد؟’ **Can I know** my midterm exam mark?’

‘**ممکن** تخبرنا ايش writing رح بجي؟’ **Can you tell us** the expected writing topics?’

English examples:

Can you please put our grades on Moodle?

Can you tell me the grade please?

Can you send me the result of the first midterm?

The imperative mood is the least frequently used strategy of requesting as indicated in the table. It is obvious that there is not much variation in the linguistic strategies of making requests in the imperative mood. The modals *can* and *could* and their corresponding Arabic modal *mumken* are the only frequent choices to make interrogative requests by the Omani students in this study.

Requests in the imperative mood are direct commands or instructions, often without any explicit subject (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). This mood indicates a strong expectation that the request will be fulfilled. The imperative mood, when used by a student, can be interpreted as presumptuous. In a formal academic setting, this mood might be perceived as too direct or demanding, potentially disregarding the professor's authority. However, the inclusion of polite markers like "please" can mitigate the forcefulness of the imperative, making it more acceptable, especially in situations where the student is confident about the appropriateness of the request. This imperative mood choice appears in 23% of the Arabic e-mails and in 25% of the English e-mails. The difference in distribution is marginal and it indicates the same mindset of the students who belong to the same culture whether they think and communicate in Arabic or in English regardless of their level of proficiency. Although this strategy can be considered impolitely bold, the mitigators used to soften the request can maintain its politeness, a strategy which is commonly and acceptably used in Arabic as illustrated in the following examples from both data sets.

إذا ممکن ما تسجلني غياب.

If possible, don't mark me absent.

من فضلك ما تسجلني غياب.

Kindly, don't mark me absent.

رجاءا دكتور ساعدني أنجح.

I humbly request you, Professor. Help me pass.

دكتور أرجوك تعاون معاي.

Professor, please cooperate with me.

The bold parts of these utterances are the request head acts in the utterly imperative mood. The initial parts of the utterances contain polite softeners such as *'itha mumken* 'if possible', *min fadhlak* 'Could you be so kind as to', *raja'an Doctor* 'I humbly request you, doctor', *Doctor arjook* 'Doctor, I humbly request you'. In the English e-mails, we find similar strategies and choices as shown in the following examples.

Please delete one day of my absence.

Please do not record me as absent.

If possible, please do not mark me absent today.

Please excuse me and do not mark me as absent.

These external modifications and mitigators in both datasets make the request speech act less face-threatening and are considered as signs of deference to instructors. Although the above requests may sound polite to an Arabic native speaker, they may not seem so to people who come from other cultures.

(b). *Negotiation of Social Roles*

This section aims to examine how students position themselves in relation to their instructors within email communication. To achieve this goal, it is essential to determine who assumes responsibility in the interaction—the student (“I”) or the instructor (“You”). In the English data, where first and second-person pronouns can be readily identified, the analysis reveals that the pronoun “I” is used 226 times, while the pronoun “you” occurs 157 times. This disparity suggests that across the dataset, the pronoun “I,” representing the students writing the emails, is more prevalent than “you,” which refers to the instructor.

Given that the primary speech act under investigation is requesting, it is crucial to note that for a request to be persuasive and elicit sympathy, the requester often emphasizes themselves by presenting qualifications and reasons that may lead the instructor to respond favorably. For instance, consider this email from the collected data with the core message: *“I apologize for not attending today's class because I didn't feel well. I hope...”*. Here, the first-person pronoun “I” appears three times across three clauses, each fulfilling a significant mental meta-function—apology, justification, and desire, respectively. The request culminates in the expression of a core desire: *“you don't mark me absent,”* a clause that carries

a material meta-function with the desired action from the teacher. If the pronoun "you" is used more than once in such requests, it could potentially render them overly imposing.

(c). *Greetings and Address Forms*

In their email interactions with instructors, Arab students in this study employed a variety of greetings and address forms across both languages (Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2019b). In Arabic emails, the most common greeting was the traditional Muslim salutation "Assalamu Alaikum" ('peace be upon you'), followed by the address term "Doctor," a title frequently used by Arab university students when addressing their professors. The lemma "salam" (peace) and its related forms and collocations appeared in 65% of the Arabic data, signaling a formal tone. The prevalent use of this greeting and address form in more than half of the collected Arabic emails reflects students' respect for their instructors. In Arabic, addressing teachers by their occupational titles rather than by their given names conveys deference and politeness. Conversely, fewer greetings and address terms in the Arabic data were less formal, such as "Masa' al-Kheir" (good evening), or non-conventional and informal, such as opening the email with "Mister" transliterated as *مستتر*.

In the English data, the formal greeting expression "Dear" was the most frequently used, appearing in 26% of the emails. Similarly, "Hello" also appeared in 26% of the collected emails. Informal greetings such as "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "Good evening" were used in 22% of the emails, while "Hi" occurred in only 7%. A noteworthy aspect of the greeting speech act among Arabs is the formulaic question "How are you?" directed at the recipient. This question appeared 22 times, comprising 23% of the data. Its primary function is not to solicit detailed information about the interlocutor's well-being but rather to establish and maintain social rapport. It signals the speaker's intent to engage in social interaction and reinforces the social bond between participants. This phatic expression is very common in both formal and informal Arabic encounters.

In the English data, the course instructor was addressed with titles such as "Dr.," "Mister," "Doctor," "Sir," and "My dear teacher," typically followed by the instructor's name. Closings varied across both languages. In the Arabic data, culturally embedded expressions such as "Jazaka Allahu Khair" (May Allah reward you with goodness), "Saa'idni Allah Yikhalleek" (Help me; May Allah keep you safe), and "Allah Yitammenak" (May Allah reassure you) were common. In contrast, the English data featured informal and non-conventional closings, such as "Best" (occurring in 20% of the data), sometimes followed by "regards" or "wishes." Additionally, expressions of gratitude toward the instructor were used in 23% of the data. These various styles of opening, closing, and address forms in both languages highlight the interpersonal dimension of student-instructor interactions and underscore the role of culture in shaping students' communicative choices. The above presentation of results shows that the students in both data types lack appropriate training on the proper style that should be used in formal e-mail communication situations. Arabic e-mails are generally more polite than the English ones (Algryani & Al Jardani, 2023b).

C. *Textual Meta-Function*

Lastly, the context and language structures that convey the meanings within the text are elements of the textual meta-function which refers to how language organizes messages into coherent, meaningful discourse. It deals with how texts are structured to make sense within their context, ensuring cohesion and coherence. Essentially, it focuses on how information is arranged and how different parts of a text connect (Halliday, 2004). By examining the theme and rheme, one can see how clauses follow one another in thematic links. When multiple thematic links occur, a lexical chain is formed. Additionally, one can observe the use of conjunctions, which illustrate how different experiences are interrelated. All these resources enable the flow of messages in texts.

Textual meaning is achieved by the different patterns of theme in a given text. Theme is the point of departure and the rheme is the destination. The initial clause or clause complex in a text usually expresses new meanings and expressed in different manifestations (Qomariah, 2021).

In the current data of this study, it has been noticed that the students commence their emails with some kind of greeting followed by topic introduction, and usually end with a closing expression. Because of the urgency of the matter, usually requests related to attendance, assignments, or exams, they tend to structure the texts of their emails logically to maintain coherent structures. They some background, either before or after the core request speech act. The following samples from both Arabic and English emails illustrate this tendency.

TABLE 4
SAMPLE E-MAILS STRUCTURE

Opening/Salutation	Request	Closing
Good morning Dr,	Today I can't attend class for specific circumstances so please do not make me absent for today class.	Best, Zahra
Dear dr,	Today I can't attend the class because of some reason, I hope you don't mark me absent.	Best, Sara
Hello Doctor,	I apologize for my absence today because my children suffer from fever. I hope you will excuse me from being absent today for subjects 300 & 335.	No Closing
Dear Dr. Abdulwahid, how are you?	I would like to inform you that I am absent from class today due to a circumstance. I hope you will not record me as absent.	Best, Malak
Dear Dr. Abdulwahid,	I will not be able to attend this lecture due to an emergency, but I will attend the next lecture. If there is no problem, may you not mark me absent?	No Closing
السلام عليكم دكتور	انا طالبة معك من الشعبة 8 في مادة ENGL-204. بكرة ما أقرر احضر المحاضرة لأن عندي عذر مرضي	No Closing
دكتور	اليوم م استطيع احضر معي ظرف اذا ممكن م تسجلني غياب	Name
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته	دكتور اعتذر عن حضور كويز غذا لانني مريضه حرارتي 39.5 وعندي اجازة مرضيه فارجوا ان يترحل اختياري الي وقت آخر	مع خالص الشكر والتقدير
السلام عليكم مستر	لم اتمكن من الحضور بسبب المواصلات ف عادي م تسجل غياب؟	No Closing

As illustrated in the above table, both Arabic and English students' emails to their professors follow similar progression of moves: opening, request, and closing. Since the textual metafunction weaves the ideational and interpersonal meanings into a textual whole (Alyousef, 2016), the opening and closing sections have already been discussed under interpersonal metafunction. The core request also follows similar thematic progression in both Arabic and English data, moving from background information and justification to the performative speech act of requesting that anticipates a perlocutionary action on the part of the instructor. The most frequent conjunctions used to maintain the cohesion and coherence of the different components of the request speech act texts are *because/due to*, *so*, and *if* in the English data set; *bisabab* 'because/due to' and *lianna* 'because/due to' in the Arabic data set. The conjunction *because* is frequently used in both data sets to show the reason of student's absence from class. The conjunction links the reason with the core request statement which is the result. The conjunction *if* is a face-saving politeness strategy used by students to soften their requests and minimize imposition on instructor.

The **theme-rheme** structure in linguistics refers to how information is organized in a text. The theme is the starting point or what the sentence is about, while the rheme is the new information that adds to the theme. In both Arabic and English data sets of this study, requests often begin with polite markers ("I hope," "Could you," "Please", "أتمنى", "هل ممكن", "أتمنى", "من فضلك") as the theme, followed by the actual action being requested as the rheme (don't make me absent, take my circumstances into consideration, you won't mark me absent, لا تسجلني غياب, تفهم وضعي, تحذف غيابنا اليوم). In both Arabic and English, a request is a unit of information that consists of two elements: Given followed by New (Halliday, 2004). Each unit is parallel to a clause (Potter, 2016). The unit that precedes the core requests statements in the data of this study is either mood 'please' or circumstantial 'if possible' adjunct (Andersen & Holsting, 2018).

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of university students' emails to their professors through the lens of Halliday's three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. By applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research highlights how students construct meaning, establish relationships, and organize discourse in their academic email communication. The findings reveal that while students effectively convey their intentions, their emails sometimes lack the level of formality and structural coherence expected in academic settings. This underscores the need for greater awareness and instruction in email pragmatics within academic discourse.

A key contribution of this study lies in its demonstration of how the three metafunctions work together to provide a holistic view of student emails. The ideational metafunction captures the students' communicative goals and subject matter, while the interpersonal metafunction reflects their negotiation of power, politeness, and social distance with faculty members. The textual metafunction, in turn, reveals the extent to which students achieve coherence and cohesion in their writing. Together, these metafunctions provide valuable insights into the linguistic and pragmatic choices students make, highlighting areas where additional instruction can enhance their academic communication.

The implications of this study extend beyond linguistic analysis to practical applications in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and professional communication courses. Educators can use these insights to design targeted interventions that enhance students' awareness of audience expectations, politeness strategies, and discourse organization in academic emails. Furthermore, the study contributes to cross-cultural communication research by shedding light on how Arab students navigate linguistic and cultural norms in their interactions with professors. Future research may expand this analysis by comparing email communication across different cultural and institutional contexts to further refine strategies for effective academic correspondence.

In sum, this study reinforces the importance of explicit instruction in academic email writing and the value of SFL in uncovering the multifaceted nature of student-professor communication. By bridging linguistic analysis with pedagogical applications, it offers a pathway toward more effective and culturally informed academic discourse.

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