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Analysis of grammatical metaphors of mood and politeness strategies in students to professor email requests

Imen Aribi

Abstract

The present study investigates the email requests written by a group of Tunisian postgraduate students in English to their professor. The lexico-grammatical choices made by requesters to enact personal/social relationship with the requestee and to realize request are examined. This research focuses on the SFL notion of interpersonal grammatical metaphor defined as “the phenomenon whereby a set of agnate forms is present in the language having different mappings between the semantic and the grammatical categories” (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, 7). Instances of interpersonal grammatical metaphors (GM) of mood are detected according to Halliday’s (1994) model. The study also examines the politeness strategies used by the writers of these emails from a pragmatic perspective following Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework. Results reveal that the participants resort to the use of GM of mood to show more politeness to reach certain communicative purposes. Results also show that the participants use both direct and indirect politeness strategies in their email requests but tend to be more indirect using positive and negative politeness strategies. The reason behind such inclination is to show their respect and deference to the emails’ recipient who has social power.

Keywords

Emails requests; interpersonal grammatical metaphor; politeness strategies; SFL; pragmatics

Introduction

Among many types of Computer-Mediated Communication, email has become a common interpersonal communication medium thanks to its various advantages such as rapidity and efficiency (Eslami 2013; Waldvogel 2005). As far as the academic setting is concerned, although most student-professor interactions occur in the classroom setting and during office hours, email has become a viable alternative means of communication, providing the convenience of obtaining clarification and feedback (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007). Emails between students and their teachers are frequently used to serve a requesting purpose when students request for appointments,

advice, and other course-related information to their professors (Tseng 2015). Writing email requests especially to social superiors requires a sophisticated use of language on the part of L2 learners since requesting is a type of face-threatening acts (FTA) (Tseng 2015). Email writers' ambivalence and uncertainty about how to encode communicative intents in this text-only medium tend to surface especially in hierarchical relationships, such as between students and faculty (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007). It is found that both native and non-native speakers are often faced with uncertainties regarding the lexico-grammatical choices in email interactions, especially in hierarchical relationships where the power asymmetry needs to be maintained (Barron 2003; Biesenbach - Lucas 2006; Crystal 2001). The use of language in creating the intended interaction in emails could be expressed by exploring interpersonal meaning.

According to Halliday (1994), the interpersonal meaning is expressed when language is used to maintain social relations, show attitudes, and influence others. Thus, analyzing this strand of meaning in the present corpus composed of email requests can provide information on how the email writers position themselves and maintain their relationship with their recipient who is their professor. Halliday (1994) points out that the interpersonal metafunction can be realized lexico-grammatically by systems of mood and modality. This study focuses on the mood system and does not cover that of modality. Whenever language is used to express the interpersonal meaning, there are two choices, namely the consistent or congruent coding and the incongruent way. Language can be expressed in a congruent way, and the non-congruent way of encoding language is referred to as grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999; Halliday 1998, 1994; Matthiessen 1995). A metaphor of mood is a kind of transfer or shift from one mood to another to realize the intended function. For example, people use the interrogative mood instead of the imperative to realize the command function. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the email requests written by a group of Tunisian postgraduate students to their professor and explore the interpersonal grammatical metaphors of mood.

A request is a directive speech act whose illocutionary purpose is to get the hearer to do something in circumstances in which it is not obvious that he/she will perform the action in the normal course of events (Searle 1969). Since the speech act of request is naturally a face-threatening act, it must be expressed as polite as possible in order not to lose face. This study investigates how students can keep up the social relationship with their teacher through their email requests by employing politeness strategies. Accordingly, it aims to examine the email requests written by a group of Tunisian postgraduate students to their professor through the analysis of interpersonal grammatical metaphors of mood and politeness strategies. The framework for analysis draws on systemic functional linguistics to study interpersonal metaphors and pragmatics to analyse the politeness strategies used in the corpus. Scholars have done a lot of research on interpersonal grammatical metaphors of mood in different discourses such as political discourse and advertising, (Sofyan & Wulan 2021; Fang 2019; Suhadi 2015) and politeness strategies in email requests (AlAfnan & Cruz-Rudio 2023; Bulut & Rababah 2007; Duthler 2006), but, to the researcher's knowledge, no study has been carried out on analyzing both interpersonal grammatical metaphors of mood and politeness strategies in students to professor email requests. Thus, this study seeks to fill in the gap in the literature.

1. Literature review

This section provides a general overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the study. It introduces the notion of email requests, and reviews the GM of mood. In addition, it presents Politeness Theory and reviews some previous studies on politeness strategies used in email requests.

1.1. Email requests

The email is considered as a genre that incorporates a specific understanding of how language is structured to achieve social purposes in particular contexts of use. Swales (1990, 58) defines genre as “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community”. In the institutional context, email requests have their distinctive structural

features, which include all those elements such as length, appearance, layout, orthographic conventions, graphics, etc.

Request is one of the speech acts that students primarily perform in their academic emails. Students always opt for requesting something from their interlocutors especially their teachers in order to achieve their purposes. Several studies revealed some communication purposes for which students use email requests with their professors including building a relationship, getting information/advice about course materials, negotiating late work policy, challenging grades, showing interest in and understanding of course material, and “getting on the instructor’s good side” (Martin et al. 1999, 160; Collins 1998; Payne 1997; Poling 1994, cited in Chen 2006).

Since a requester appeals to the requestee’s assistance, s/he is potentially threatening the requestee’s negative face (Umar 2004). Thus, speakers or writers tend to employ a variety of strategies to make sure their requests will be granted. For this reason, the participants may employ politeness strategies and grammatical metaphors of mood.

1.2. Grammatical metaphor of mood

Halliday (1994) views language as a system of meaning choices. That is, a speaker or a writer can choose a special form of language to express himself/herself based on his/her purposes, and different meanings are realized by different forms of language. Halliday (1985) points out that whenever language is used there are two choices. Speakers can either choose the form that is consistent or congruent to a fact or the non-congruent form. The use of language that is not congruent belongs to grammatical metaphor (henceforth GM) (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Halliday 1998; Halliday 1994; Halliday 1985). GM is the term used by Halliday (1994) to refer to meaning transference in grammar. Instead of the congruent realization of a norm, the metaphorical representation becomes the norm.

Halliday (1994) classifies grammatical metaphor into two types, ideational metaphor and interpersonal metaphor. Ideational metaphor is realized by transitivity and covers the use of process and nominalization, while interpersonal metaphor relates to mood

perspective and modality (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Halliday 1998; Halliday 1994b). This study covers the GM of mood but does not cover that of modality which refers to the use of clauses to replace modal verbs and modal adverbs to realize the modal meaning.

When people communicate, they intend to realize the speech functions. In normal conditions, there is correspondence between the speech function and the mood: the function of assertion is usually achieved by the indicative mood; the function of question is usually realized by the interrogative mood and the function of commands and offerings is achieved by the imperative mood (Halliday 1994). These realizations represent the congruent form of mood. However, when a non-congruent way of using moods is employed and the metaphorical representation becomes the norm, this refers to the metaphor of mood. For example, apart from imperative clauses (for example “Open the window!”) used to achieve the purpose of command, interrogative and declarative clauses are employed to achieve the same purpose. The following clauses are examples:

- i. Can you open the window?
- ii. I'd like you to open the window.

The interrogative clause in (i) and the declarative clause in (ii) are used to achieve the purpose of command. This kind of mismatch between Mood and speech roles is called the Mood metaphor (Chen & Zhang 2019). The aim of this study is to find out and describe the realizations of interpersonal metaphors of mood in email requests written by Tunisian postgraduate students of English. It also examines the politeness strategies used by email writers to show more politeness to reach certain communicative purposes.

1.3. Previous studies on GM of mood

Several studies were conducted to investigate the GM of mood in different discourses. Yang (2013) studies interpersonal GM in Spoken Chinese. The analysis showed that spoken Chinese had a preference for certain types of metaphorical expressions. The study also investigated the relationship between interpersonal GM in spoken Chinese and its immediate context of situation, demonstrating how the deployment of interpersonal grammatical

metaphor was affected by the topic of conversation and the social status between the speaker and the hearer.

Perdana and Saragih (2013) applied Halliday's theory of interpersonal metaphor to investigate a corpus of a spoken discourse in Bahasa Indonesia from a TV program. The analysis was based on the theory of interpersonal metaphor of both mood and modality. The result showed that the metaphor of mood was more dominantly used. According to the researchers, this dominance existed because the message was concerned with political interaction which used the patterns of mood.

Suhadi (2015) conducted a descriptive qualitative research which examined the extent to which the theory of Interpersonal Metaphor of mood postulated by Halliday (1994) is relevant to be applied to the verses of the Holy al-Qur'an. Results revealed that some verses of the Holy al-Qur'an used the transference of mood in conveying specific messages between God and humans.

Sofyan and Wulan (2021) investigated the interpersonal metaphor of mood in the novel 'All the Light We Cannot See'. Results of this study revealed that the most dominant transference was the command realized in declarative mood; followed by the statement realized in interrogative mood. The third metaphor found was the command expressed in interrogative mood; followed by the statement realized in imperative mood.

Fang (2019) studied the interpersonal metaphor of mood in public service advertisements. He maintained that tagged declaratives, rather than normal declaratives, made the statement more attractive and impressive. The modulated interrogative, rather than the normal imperative, made the command more impressive and persuasive.

1.4. Politeness Theory

One of the most influential models of politeness was developed by Brown and Levinson (1987, 1978). To cope with face threatening acts (FTA), individuals choose a suitable form of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) offer several choices as how a face-threatening situation should be handled and called them politeness strategies. Four politeness strategies to minimize the FTAs are proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987):

- The bald on-record strategy: The speaker does nothing to minimize threats to the hearer's face and reduce the impact of the FTAs as there is a high level of confidence among speakers being close friends or members of the same family. When the speaker goes on-record baldly, s/he uses direct and blunt terms with no attempt to soften the face-threatening act (E.g.: the use of the imperative mood).
- The positive politeness strategy: The speaker tries to minimize the distance between him and his/her hearer by expressing friendliness and group reciprocity and recognizing the hearer's desire to be respected. Strangers and people who are just starting a relationship tend to use this strategy.
- The negative politeness strategy: It recognizes the hearer's face and simultaneously acknowledges that the speaker is imposing something on his/her hearer. Some expressions could be used such as: 'I don't want to bother you but ...' or 'I was wondering if ...' in order to introduce bad news, request a favor or make a comment.
- Off record indirect strategy: The speaker tries to avoid the direct FTA by removing himself from any imposition. To say something off-record means performing an FTA indirectly. Examples of off-record or highly indirect strategies include hints, metaphors, etc.

1.5. Previous studies on politeness strategies in email requests

Several research studies analyzed the politeness strategies used to perform requests in different discourses but few studies investigated email requests using Brown and Levinson's (1987) model. For instance, Bulut and Rababah (2007) examined the requests of Saudi female graduate students' email messages written in English to their male professors. Requests were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) model and it was found that students usually preferred positive politeness strategies in their requests to address their professors. The authors noted that the participants' use of positive politeness strategies is an indication of the level of directness and explicitness.

Duthler (2006) compared the politeness strategies used in emails to voicemails when students had to make low and high imposition requests of a fictitious professor, and found differences in strategies within email between low and high-imposition requests, but no differences in voicemail messages, suggesting that email is more tailorable, though extraneous phrases were correlated with decreased perceived politeness.

AlAfnan and Cruz-Rudio (2023) compared politeness strategies used in Malaysian and Filipino student-teacher requesting emails. The researchers found that Malaysian university students used more direct requesting politeness strategies than their Filipino counterparts who tended to be more indirect. It was also revealed that Filipino students wrote longer requests with more strategies than Malaysian students.

In this context, this study aims to investigate how students perform their email requests to their professors through the analysis of the interpersonal GM of mood and politeness strategies to fill in the gap in the literature.

2. Research objective

The major objective of the present study is to investigate the use of the interpersonal GM of mood and to gain insights about the politeness strategies used in students to professor request emails.

3. Research questions

In light of the research goal, the current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- Do Tunisian postgraduate students use interpersonal grammatical metaphors of mood when writing email requests to their lecturer?
- What are the politeness strategies used by the participants to perform requests?
- Does social power have an influence on the lexicogrammatical choices of the participants in students to professor email requests?

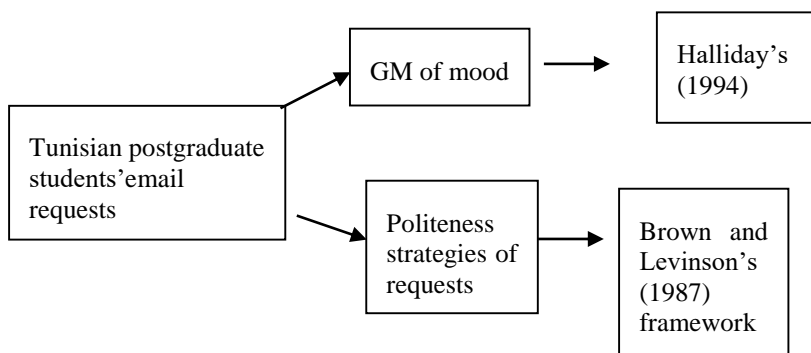
4. Methodology

The study examines the interpersonal GM of mood according to the classification of the interpersonal metaphor of mood proposed by Halliday (1994) in the requests emails written by a group of Tunisian postgraduate students in English to their professor. The types of GMs of mood are described. The interpersonal metaphor covers the three kinds of mood which are the indicative, interrogative and imperative. It further investigates the politeness strategies in the corpus under examination according to the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987).

The corpus of the present study is composed of 50 emails written in English by 10 Tunisian postgraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Letters and Humanities of Sfax, Tunisia to their professor. All of the participants are female. Each participant wrote 5 email requests. The participants' ages range between 23 and 28, so their mean age is 25.5. Their first language is Arabic. All of these students knew the professor personally. The receiver of the emails is a Tunisian male professor aged over 50. The students-professor relationship in this context could be described as friendly but formal.

The data were collected from the inbox of the researcher's colleague. The emails were naturally or spontaneously generated. That is, they are naturally occurring discourse as opposed to elicited discursive data. The gathered emails are student-initiated interactions, which await a response.

Figure 1: The scheme of analysis of Tunisian postgraduate students' email requests



5. Data analysis

This section presents the analysis of grammatical metaphors of mood and investigates the politeness strategies used in the corpus under examination.

5.1. Analysis of grammatical metaphors of mood

With regard to mood, Halliday (1994) distinguishes three major types of interactive functions. Statements are expressions which give information. In English, the congruent coding of statements is realized with a declarative. Questions are expressions which are used to ask about information. The interrogative mood is used to ask questions. Commands are expressions which ask someone to do something. The default type of commands is the imperative mood.

The findings of the present study reveal that there are 111 instances of GM of mood in the corpus under examination. As it can be seen from Table 1, the most used transference of mood is the interrogative to express commands (35.13%) followed by the declarative mood to express questions (27.92%). The third one is the transference of the declarative to express commands (25.22%). The fourth transference is the interrogative which is used to realize the declarative with 13 occurrences (11.71%). No occurrence of the imperative mood is found in the corpus to express either statements or questions.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of GM of mood

GM of mood	Number of occurrences	Percentage
Statement → interrogative	13	11.71%
Statement → imperative	0	0%
Command → interrogative	39	35.13%
Command → declarative	28	25.22%
Question → declarative	31	27.92%
Question → imperative	0	0%
Total	111	100

Here are some examples of transference of mood from congruent into incongruent coding in terms of the interpersonal metaphor of mood:

- *Statement realized with interrogative*

Example 1: “Is that the typical translation of it?”

When using this example, the email writer intends to mean “It is not the typical translation of it”. So, instead of using the declarative mood, she uses a question because she is not sure of the answer. The reason behind using this GM of mood is not to lose face.

- *Statement realized with imperative*

There is no occurrence of this transference of mood in the present corpus. The email writers do not opt for the use of the imperative mood because it is the most direct mood. They try to lessen the threat of any imposition and show their respect to the requestee. This finding is in contrast with Sofyan and Wulan (2021) who found 4% of the statements realized with the imperative when analyzing the novel ‘All the Light We Cannot See’.

- *Command realized with interrogative*

Example 2: “Could you send me the report as soon as possible, please?”

Example 3: “Would you mind correct my work?”

Example 4: “Can you help me finalize this section?”

As for example 2, the email writer requests her teacher to send a report by using the interrogative mood instead of using the imperative “send me the report as soon as possible!”

Questions starting with modals are employed to manifest ability (can/could), willingness (will/would), and mind (would you mind). The preference for this mood could be explained by the fact that it would be better to give the professor a wide range of options to do or not to do the request rather than impose on him doing it through the imperative mood. This finding is in line with Fang’s (2019) analysis of the realization of mood through interpersonal metaphor in English public service advertising texts. Fang (2019) found that the interrogative mood rather than the imperative one makes the

command more impressive and persuasive. Moreover, he stated that the audience may not feel that they are forced to help others and would take positive actions.

The aim behind the choice of the interrogative mood instead of the imperative one by the emails' writers is to lessen the imposition on the email receiver.

- *Command realized with declarative*

Example 5: "I would be grateful if you send it" instead of saying "send it"

Example 6: "It is recommended that you send it by email" instead of saying "send it by email"

Example 7: "I would appreciate it if you correct my work" instead of saying "correct my work".

The use of the declarative mood instead of the imperative one aims to lessen the threat of imposing the command and to politely achieve the function of asking the professor for help.

This finding is in line with Sofyan and Wulan (2021) who found 11 occurrences of declarative statements (44%) to express commands when investigating the GM of mood in a novel. In the corpus under examination, the use of expressions such as "I would appreciate" or "I would be grateful" used with the indicative mood to request for an action is utilized to modulate the request. This choice of mood and linguistic terms is employed because the ranking of imposition is high and the requestee is distant from the participants to attenuate the request. In the informal context, when talking to friends or with family members, the imperative mood is utilized. In the formal context or communication with strangers or socially superior persons, they opt to such kind of metaphorical use.

- *Question realized with declarative*

Example 8: "I want to know whether you have read my dissertation" instead of saying "Have you read my dissertation?"

Example 9: "I wonder whether there is a possibility to meet you" instead of saying "Is it possible to meet you?"

Example 10: “I need your help” instead of the congruent form “can you help me?”

Declarative sentences that start with ‘I want’, ‘I wonder’ or ‘I need’ in examples 8, 9 and 10 are employed to convey a “help-needed” tone which may help the participants to gain some attention from their addressee. The preference for the declarative mood with the choice of specific words such as ‘want’, ‘wonder’ and ‘need, is to lessen the threat of the request and to project the image of a needy and helpless student who needs the help of his/her teacher. The polite/indirect request is used to report peoples’ needs and expectations such as in examples 8, 9 and 10.

- *Question realized with imperative*

No occurrences of the imperative mood to express the interrogative one are found in the present corpus. This finding is in line with Sofyan and Wulan (2021) who does not find any sentence that has the pattern of this transference. However, it is in contrast with Suhadi (2015) who found instances of this transference in some verses of the holy Quran which could be attributed to the specificity of the genre of religious discourse. The main reason behind this choice is that the imperative mood can threaten relationships since they may affect the addressee’s autonomy, freedom of choice and freedom from imposition (Spencer-Oatey 2000; Brown & Levinson 1987).

5.2. Analysis of politeness strategies

The current study examines the present corpus to investigate the politeness strategies used by Tunisian postgraduate students using Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. Results reveal that the participants employ 62 requests and use different politeness strategies. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of politeness strategies in students' email requests

Politeness strategy	Number of occurrence	Percentage%
Bald on record	6	9.67%
positive	22	35.48%
negative	27	43.54%
Off-record indirect	7	11.29%

It is found that the participants employ different politeness strategies which could be classified as direct and indirect when requesting their professor via emails. As it is shown from Table 2, results reveal that 9.67% of the requests are realized by bald on record strategy and 35.48% of them represent positive politeness strategies. It is found that 43.54% are negative politeness strategies and 11.29% are realized by off-record indirect strategies.

- *Direct Politeness Strategy (Bald on record)*

In the corpus under study, only 6 occurrences of bald on record are found, representing 9.67% of the politeness strategies detected. However, it should be noted that when the bald record strategies are used, it is found that 5 out of 6 are softened by the use of the politeness marker 'please'. The bald on record strategy is the least used strategy. Brown and Levinson (1987,95) stated that the main reason for using the bald on-record strategy when interacting with someone is "whenever S wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy H's face, even to any degree, he will choose the bald on-record strategy."

Thus, when using the bald on-record strategy, the participants do not pay attention to either the positive or the negative face of the email receiver who is their professor. The use of the bald on-record strategy is viewed as a direct and impolite strategy, especially when requesting a socially superior person. Example 11: "please correct my draft". The use of 'please' has the effect of softening the imposition and appearing polite.

Positive politeness strategy

As it can be seen from the findings in Table 2, 22 occurrences (35.48%) of positive politeness strategies are found in the corpus. The use of positive politeness strategies is not only essentially redressive but is also used to maintain a friendly and cooperative atmosphere.

Example 12: 'I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.'

Example 13: 'I hope that you assist me in this issue.'

Example 14: 'I want to have an appointment with you.'

In examples 12, 13 and 14, the participants used the "be hopeful" tone or "wants and needs" statements as positive politeness techniques to mitigate the speech act of request and maintain a cooperative atmosphere with their professor. Whenever the participants use positive politeness, they somehow appeal to solidarity with their teacher.

Negative politeness strategy

The negative politeness strategy is the most used strategy by the email senders with a percentage of 43.54%. Doing redressive actions does not simply mitigate the degree of imposition, but attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA as it implies the unintentionality of such face threat (Brown & Levinson 1987, 317). In examples 15 and 16, the participants use negative politeness strategies.

Example 15: "I was wondering if you could correct the first part of my dissertation".

Example 16: "Sorry for bothering you but I would like to ask you for a meeting".

Negative politeness strategies, as used in examples 15 and 16, establish distance between the participants and their professor as an acknowledgment of individuality and freedom. This is commonly seen in communication between people of unequal power to not appear too imposing: especially towards the person having an authority. Having the least social power, the negative politeness

strategy would allow the participants to realize the request without imposing too much and impeding their professor's freedom.

- *Off-record indirect strategy*

Off-record indirect strategy is only used 7 times (11.29%). When using this strategy, students tend to be indirect to reduce or minimize the imposition on the email receiver. As explained by Brown and Levinson (1987), the off-record strategy uses indirect language to remove the possibility of the speaker imposing. When using this strategy, the participants' intentions are implied, and it is up to the email receiver to interpret them. The participants give hints and leave the interpretation to the addressee.

In example 17, the participant mentioned that she could not rely only on her knowledge in order to implicitly request the help of her teacher.

Example 17: 'that's an interesting topic, but I can't rely only on my knowledge to work on it'. When using this strategy in example 17, the writer entirely avoids performing the FTA in order to avoid the threat to the recipient's face because the ranking of imposition is estimated to be high (helping in doing the work).

6. Discussion

The analysis of the corpus under examination reveals that there are many instances of GM of mood (111 occurrences). However, there is no occurrence of the transference of statements with imperatives. This finding is in contrast with Suhadi (2015) who found all types of the interpersonal metaphor of mood in the Holy book due to the nature of the religious genre. It is also in contrast with Sofyan and Wulan (2021) who found 4% of the statements realized with the imperative when analyzing the novel 'All the Light We Cannot See'. The email writers do not opt for the use of the imperative mood because it is the most direct mood. They try to lessen the threat of any imposition and show their respect to their professor. The reason behind the use of the indicative or the interrogative mood instead of the imperative mood to express commands is the nature of the speech act of request which is a face threatening act. In the same vein, Fang (2019) asserts that using the

GM of mood makes the statements more attractive and commands more impressive and persuasive.

Furthermore, the impact of the social factors proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) leads the interlocutors to transfer from the imperative mood to the interrogative or indicative mood. The three social factors proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) include the social power. In the corpus under examination, the requestee (the professor) has social power over the requesters (the students). The second social factor is the social distance between the interlocutors. The relationship between the professor and the students is formal, so there is a social distance between them. The third social factor is the ranking of imposition of requests which is high in the corpus under study. Therefore, the flexible use of metaphors of mood could help the speaker to take these factors into consideration and to better understand the meaning of the interlocutors' words and make proper judgment on specific linguistic environment (Song 2018). The GM of mood helps listeners or readers to understand what people are trying to convey and makes their speech or writing more interesting and persuasive (Sofyan & Wulan 2021).

It is found that the interpersonal GM is often used as euphemistic expressions to show more politeness to reach certain communicative purposes. As for the advertisement genre, Fang (2019) asserts that the GMs of mood are used to lure the audience since these devices are more attractive and enable writers to achieve the aim of the public service advertisement. It can be said that the interpersonal GM is used in email communication for euphemism and politeness. In line with Song (2018), the proper usage of interpersonal GM is helpful to create a harmonious atmosphere, maintain a friendly communicative state, and ensure that the self-pride of the listener or receiver will not be hurt and that the communication will be fluently conducted.

Results also reveal that Tunisian postgraduate students use both direct and indirect politeness strategies in their email requests to their professor. On the one hand, bald-on strategies are often accompanied by mitigators to soften the request. On the other hand, more than half of the request strategies are expressed through redressive strategies of positive and negative politeness. The participants tend to employ more negative politeness strategies to show their respect and

deference to the hearer who is superior to them. Indirect request or negative politeness strategies are used to protect both of the requester and the requestees' faces. These findings are in line with AlAfnan and Cruz-Rudio (2023) who point out that the use of negative politeness strategies is prominent among Malaysian and Filipino students. However, by using positive politeness, students aim to establish solidarity with their teachers through the use of explanatory sentences and expressions of goodwill (AlAfnan & Cruz-Rudio 2023).

It should be noted that the participants in the corpus under study seem to be indirect in their requests. Among the factors that may influence the choice of politeness strategies is the students' Tunisian background where it is expected to be polite when speaking to a socially superior person. In the same context, Bulut and Rababah (2007) maintain that Saudi female graduate students employ both positive and negative polite requests to build rapport with their professors, and, thus, compensate for their absence of face-to-face interaction with them.

Thus, the participants resort to the use of the GM of mood and employ different politeness strategies to achieve their communicative purposes, mitigate the speech act of request, appear polite and show their respect to their professor who is socially superior to them. In line with Bloch (2002,132), success in communication depends on "the ability to express oneself using a variety of language forms and rhetorical strategies as well as to know when it is appropriate to use these different forms"

Conclusion

The present study investigates instances of GM of mood according to Halliday's (1994) model in the requests emails written by a group of Tunisian postgraduate students in English to their professor. The findings reveal that the participants resort to the use of GM of mood. The most used transference of mood is the interrogative to express commands followed by the declarative mood to express questions. The third one is the declarative to express commands. The fourth transference of mood is the interrogative which is used to realize the declarative. No occurrence of the imperative mood is found in the corpus to express either statements

or questions. It could be maintained that the use of the GM of mood enables the fluent communication between the email sender and the receiver and greatly strengthens politeness, not only maintaining the self-pride of the two parties, but also achieving the communicative purpose. GM expressions are used to show more politeness. The social factors of power, distance and ranking of imposition of the speech act of request have an influence on the transfer of moods.

This study further investigates the politeness strategies in the corpus under examination according to the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987). Results show that the participants use both direct and indirect politeness strategies in their email requests to their professor but tend to be more indirect using positive and negative politeness strategies. The reason behind such inclination is to show their respect and deference to the emails' recipient who is socially superior to them. This study is theoretically significant as it could support SFL theory proposed by Halliday (1994) and the pragmatic theory of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). It could also be beneficial practically as it contributes to enrich knowledge, skill or performance relating to the realization of the interpersonal metaphor of mood and the use of politeness strategies.

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