| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Politeness Strategies in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC): An Issue of University Professors and Students.

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| **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the politeness theory in the light of Austin & Searle's speech act theory as reflected in CMC between students and their lecturers or supervisors. Thus politeness aspects were analyzed as enacted in the five categories such as: Assertives, commisives, directives, expressives, and declaratives. The paper also examined politeness in other language aspects that are usually present in any form of communication, such as: Address phrases, meeting requests, request for reply, and adjunct phrases. The objective of this article was to shed light on the politeness strategies employed by the lecturers and students in their e-communication through Whatsapp and SMS (short messages or text messages) platforms. Fifty communications were downloaded from the lecturers' phones through their permission and the students', which were used as data for this study. Five lecturers and seven postgraduate students made the population of this study. The findings indicated that students seem to be comfortable using this mode of communication, and it is important to understand how students and lecturers make choices and how these choices affect the perception of the cultural appropriateness of CMCs. The results also revealed that elements of politeness greatly decrease in the follow-up messages, that is, messages that require some kind of response. From the study, lecturers adhered to formal language use as compared to the students in their communication.

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, the rapid diffusion of electronic media has led to a significant field of study: Computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC refers to person-to-person communication over computer networks (Pickering & King, 1995). It is generally understood to include technologies such as emails, computer conferencing, online discussion boards, Multiple User Dimension (MUDs) and MUD Object Oriented (MOOs), and more recently, online instant messaging and even short messages sent via cellphones. CMC has become a prevalent topic for research because of its widespread use and influences in interpersonal, organization, and pedagogical settings.

With the rapid advancement of technology, computer mediated communication (CMC) has developed into a worldwide medium of communication. The CMC, coined by Hiltz & Turoff (1993), refers to a mode of communication engaged through email, bulletin boards, Internal Relay Chat (IRC), chat rooms, and the World Wide Web. CMC is often touted as a way to build and promote interpersonal and social relationships, as earlier indicated; however, inappropriate online behaviours may put users in an uncomfortable or even dangerous position. On the internet, some people freely say what they want to and do what they want while using such communication tools. Thus the application of politeness strategies on the internet is an important issue.

Consequently, the process of communication is an essential part of human life because human society requires personal interactions (Song, 2012). Through language, humans make their demands known to others, express their feelings and opinions on various issues, and negotiate with others. Thus emails, whatsapp, and short messages have become a primary means of student-teacher communication. However, composing and responding to e-messages that are adequate pragmatically can be daunting for students. Constructing e-messages can be challenging due to the power dynamics between the lecturers and students; thus, the consequences are pragmatic failures. It is in this context that this paper aims to shed light on the politeness strategies employed by both postgraduate and undergraduate students in their e-communication via whatsapp and SMS with their supervisors or lecturers.

## 2. Literature review

Politeness in interaction can be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person's face, which means the public self–image of a person (Yule, 1997). Politeness as the expression of the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats is carried by face threatening acts towards others. Thus interaction that fosters interpersonal conflict is labelled 'Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). Brown & Levinson (1987) proposes that politeness is a way to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward the listeners. Therefore, being polite can be an attempt for the speaker to save their own face or the face of others to whom they are talking to.

Brown & Levinson (1987) argue that there are universal principles that underlie the construction of politeness. This introduces a new perspective to politeness by drawing attention to the similarities involved in the construction of polite utterances across differing languages and cultures. That is how polite expressions are modified depending on the social characteristics of the interlocutors and the situations they are in. Politeness provides a resource that participants may use to manage relationships. Thus participants are normally concerned with managing their face and social rights. Still further, Brown & Levinson (1987) refer to face as the need individuals have to be judged or evaluated positively. 'Quality face' is the desire to be judged positively in terms of personal qualities and social identity- this being the desire to be acknowledged in our social identity roles (for example, a pastor, a lawyer, son, mother, teacher, and many others), thus accounting for the public element neglected in Brown & Levinson's interpretation of the face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). The current study investigated how politeness strategies are envisaged in the students' interactions with the lecturers through CMC.

Kitade (2013:1) explains that CMC refers to 'any communication that occurs when human beings interact with one another through messages exchanged via network computers.' Email is a primary mode of CMC that is widely used in workplaces or offices, and education circles. Thus Kitade notes that email from students to their professors are one of the most common modes of CMC, and one of the main reasons why email has become so popular is that it can be used with relatively limited access to the internet technologies (Blake & Guillen,2020:76).

According to Canagarajah (2018), applied linguists have increasingly described how the global forces of technology and migration have impacted language use. In line with this, Cohen (2004) observes that students who use English as a second language opt to employ the language based on their cultural experiences, which in turn, leads to misinterpretations in their communication process. At times this may make them become unconsciously impolite or unfriendly in delivering the message. Therefore, to communicate effectively across cultures, learners must pay attention to the cultural differences that exist between the English language and theirs so as to acquaint themselves with politeness strategies as used in daily conversations of the English language.

Further, still, Hymes & Gumperz (1972) affirm that accuracy and appropriacy are fundamental aspects that learners should master or possess so as to achieve communicative goals. Thus pragmatic competence is viewed as an important foundation upon which English language users are expected to have mastery. In addition to this, Tanck (2002) states that grammatically 'fluent' learners are ascribed to be socially or culturally good speakers since they are presumed to have pragmatic competence, which gives rise to pragmatically acceptable utterances.

Lucas (2007:61) observes that all forms of e-communication, emails included, have become viable alternative means of communication, providing the convenience of obtaining clarification, feedback, and permission almost instantly when students need it. Since emails are Asynchronic Computer Mediated Communication (ACMC) and other forms, the person making the request is then divorced from both the temporal and physical space of the recipient, which means that a student's multilinguistic, communicative, and semiotic repertoire is not available to negotiate meaning. Shim (2013) contends that the ability to write polite, status-congruent academic emails is increasingly important.

Consequently, Codina (2018) indicates that elements in relation to politeness greatly decrease in follow-up emails (emails that require some kind of response). Thus a continued focus on e-communication and politeness in a spectrum of academic contexts could undercover the possible effects of e-communication on interpersonal relationships between students and their instructors or supervisors.

CMC is, therefore, communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers. It is either synchronous CMC, that is, the transferred message can be read immediately (in real time) or a while later (delayed time), what is known as asynchronous CMC (Herring, 1996:1). Synchronous communication takes place among two people in a face to face conversation or a conversation on the phone has its equivalent with CMC, in instant messaging or in chat rooms and similar platforms. This type of communication can be found in educational settings, at home, and in workplaces. However, asynchronous CMC is demonstrated in emails and computer conferencing. This communication enhances the exchange and sharing of information, thus providing a ground for smooth and agile communication (Crystal, 2001).

Research on CMC in emails has been explored by a number of researchers or studies (Herring, 2000, Holmes & Stubbs, 2003, Bou-France, 2011; 2013, Alafnan, 2014; Yeoh, 2014, among others). However, not much attention has been paid to short messages (SMS) communication, an aspect that this paper will explore to unravel how politeness is illustrated in this mode of CMC.

## 3. Objective
This paper is stimulated by a personal interest to examine the politeness strategies reflected through the language use of the lecturers/supervisors and students in their electronic communication**.**

## 4. Theory
The Speech Act Theory and Politeness theory were used to enhance understanding of the various politeness strategies. The Speech Act theory refers to the issue of politeness and is presumed as crucial in the area of pragmatics; proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), linguistic communication for them was not merely a way of transmitting information but a tool for achieving goals (Sifianou, 1999). Speech acts are acts that speakers realize by speaking, so to say, with words. The five categories of speech act that Searle (1979) suggested after reorganizing Austin's list are as follows as cited in Sifianou (1999:95):

a). Assertives – They are acts that are used to state something which can be either positive or negative. Their function is to describe states or events in the world, for example, through suggestions, complaints, explanations, and reporting, among others.

b). Directives – These are speech acts where the speaker commands the interlocutors to do something. Their function is to direct the addressee to perform an act of ordering, offering advice, or requesting.

c). Commisives- are also acts used to commit the speaker to a certain course of action. That is, they are ways for a speaker to make sure that they will do something in the future. They include acts such as promising, threatening, refusals, offers, and vows.

d). Expressives- These are utterances spoken to convey the speaker's emotions and feelings about themselves and the world around them. They include acts of thanking, apologizing, congratulating, and greeting.

e). Declaratives – They are speech acts that are used by the speaker to declare something that has the potential to bring about a change in the world. They function to change the status of the person or object referred to by performing the act successfully; these include: declarations, christening, and sentencing.

According to Leech (1983), Searle's categories of directives belong pre-eminently to negative politeness, while positive politeness is revealed in commissives and expressives. Assertives, with reference to politeness, are 'neutral,', and declaratives are institutional rather than personal action and thus cannot entail politeness at all (Sifianou 1999:95). Thus, the speech act theory is used to assign the e-massages their communicative functions, such as providing information, giving instructions, apologizing and giving suggestions in a single communicative event (Searle, 1979). Further still, in order to address pragmatic aspects of language use, the research of Brown & Levinson (1987) was employed by Searle (1979). In line with Brown & Levinson, individuals communicate in divergent ways by expressing different values differently. Though they express or communicate differently, they have something in common, that is, two basic needs: they aspire to be accepted and struggle to maintain control over their actions coupled with freedom so as not to be infringed by others.

From the foregoing, Leech's examination of the various speech acts highlights aspects found in  Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory which is the most eminent theory on politeness. It builds on three notions: Face, Face threatening acts (FTAs) and politeness strategies. The concept of 'face' wants can be either 'positive' or 'negative'. The positive face is reflected in a need to be liked and appreciated by others, that is, the consisted self-image or personality claimed by interactants. In general, positive politeness moves are delineated as expressions of informality and familiarity. Negative face is the basic claim to personal preserves and rights to non-distraction, which means freedom of action and freedom from imposition (the desire to preserve one's own freedom). Thus speakers or senders in CMC desire to preserve their social face in communication as well as in expressing their basic wants. They view politeness as a perplexing system for alleviating FTAs so as to get what they need. Sometimes utterances can be understood as potential face threats, be it suggestions, requests, or advice considering those that inhibit the recipient's freedom of response (Holmes, 1995).

## 5. Method

The qualitative method of data analysis was used in examining the various politeness strategies reflected in the lecturer-student conversations using CMC. Data for this study were collected from various whatsapp conversations or chats and short messages from both the students and lecturers. Data analysis was based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) model of politeness and concepts from Searle's (1979) five categories in the speech act theory as listed in Sifianou (1999:95) that is, this paper is confined to two major politeness strategies: positive and negative politeness strategies and assertives, directives, commisives, expressives and declaratives respectively. These five categories are a classification by Searle (1979) according to the purpose of different speech acts.

The study analyzed the conversations between five lecturers and seven postgraduate students who were available at the time of writing this article on a number of areas pertaining to their academic work while some of the e-messages were retrieved from the previous communications between lecturers and students. These postgraduate students had been supervised and taught by some of these lecturers. Ethical issues were observed by concealing with confidentiality the names of the participants by identifying them as students and lecturer or supervisor, respectively. Consent was obtained from the lecturers and students to evaluate their messages, and the lecturers forwarded the Messages to the researcher.

## 6. Discussion

The findings from the lecturers' and students' conversations or interactions through CMC in various contexts and in addressing varied issues indicated or revealed the use of varied politeness strategies depending on the subject matter under discussion. To begin with, the following is a short message exchange between the lecturer and the student on the submission of some term paper:

*Student: Sir, when should I submit the report?*

*Lecturer: I want that report on my desk by 3 p.m. tomorrow.*

*Student: Okay, thank you.*

From this communication, it can be observed that the use of the ***imperative or directive*** 'I want that report…' is clear yet brusquely offensive. However, the alternative *'if I am not asking too much, could you get me those reports around 3 p.m. tomorrow?* This statement is vague, and it is likely to diminish the report being done on time. This communication clearly indicates that clarity and consideration are opposing communication principles and often do clash. This means that to be polite entails being ambiguous since the straight forward responses or communication is, at times, offending. This clash between message clarity versus consideration is particularly crucial in organizational contexts where much application of CMC exists, and emphasis is put on productivity and performance goals (Lan, 2002). Thus from this SMS, it is clear that the lecturer used an imperative, which is a speech act that results in negative politeness. This act threatens the hearer's face, but at the same time, it is meant to instil some sense of hard work and discipline so as to bit the set time frame.

Secondly is the SMS communication between a student and his supervisor whereby the supervisor or the lecturer uses an **assertive**.

*Student: Hallo Dr. I am writing this to make a request on what we had talked with you over the phone to kindly assist me settle on a topic for my research. Thank you for the assistance you will accord me.*

*Supervisor: Hallo, thanks a lot for your message, and sorry for taking too long to reply. Right now, I am mixed up with some pending work. Let me clear it first then I will get back to you in the next two weeks.*

*Student: Thank you Prof.*

From this communication, the interactants make use of the speech act of assertives, whose major function is to describe the state or events in the world through asserting or claiming. Thus the use of assertives with reference to politeness is neutral, while declarations are institutional rather than personal actions. Therefore, particular circumstances and the people involved in this kind of speech act regulate the type and degree of politeness in that the lecturer in this context is in agreement that he has taken too long to give a response to the student's request, and thus he is asking for pardon. This apology is a FTA on the student because she actually needed a positive response to her request, which has not been honored. Still, further, the supervisor explains the reason why it has taken him long to respond. His response affirms the state of events on his part, that is, the use of an assertive 'right now I am mixed-up with some pending work…'. Therefore, it can be concluded that the prevailing circumstances enabled the lecturer to choose the kind of politeness tactic to use in addressing the student's concern. This is achieved by first acknowledging the reception of her message and tries to explain the delay in giving feedback.

The supervisor's reaction to the student's request is in line with Brown & Levinson (1987)'s argument that there are social determinants like distance, power, and the rating of imposition that people should evaluate when choosing politeness strategies

so as to hinder the threat to the face of the hearer or addressee. That is, the lecturer expressed himself in a professional manner to make the student understand his situation while at the same time maintaining the social distance, thus ensuring that he delivered his apology in the most appropriate manner and/or using polite language.

Thirdly is the use of **commissives,** whose function is to commit the speaker to a future course of action. This is illustrated in the following communication:

*Supervisor: Good morning (student's name); ensure you have submitted your progress record to the postgraduate committee this month; failure to do so, you might be deregistered.*

*Student: Thank you, Prof. I will do so by the end of this month*.

Commissives are usually in the form of promises and threats or giving of information that contains promises to do something or commitments of some kind. For instance, from the above communication, on one hand, the commissive *'I will do so by the end of this month'* clearly shows that the speaker intends to perform the task he has been assigned of submitting the report at the stated time in line with the utterance. Thus the speaker commits to submit the report. On the other hand, the supervisor's utterance serves as a kind of threat in that failure to submit the report there are consequences. The supervisor's utterance here serves as a warning to the student, which might be face threatening, but it is meant to keep the student alert of what is expected of him. The overall point in the use of commissives is the commitment to carry out a given task, and according to Leech (1983), commissives are used to reveal some kind of positive politeness. An aspect of positive politeness is manifested through the commitment that the student makes.

Fourthly is the use of expressives in SMS communications between students and lecturers or supervisors. Expressives, according to Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), are speech acts that function in expressing the speaker's attitudes and feelings about something, for example, pardoning, thanking, and congratulating, among others. They are utterances that are spoken to convey the speaker's emotions about themselves and the world around them. Depending on the situation, different expressives can be used to communicate different feelings, like thanking, apologizing, congratulating, and greeting. In this study, the use of expressives was realized as follows:

*1. Supervisor: Good morning (uses the student's first name); please find my comments on your work. Sorry for the delayed response.*

*Student: Thank you, Prof. Received.*

*2. Lecturer: Dear (the student's name), please find my comments for perusal.*

*Student: Thanks, doc; I have received.*

*Lecturer: You are welcome.*

*3. Lecturer: kindly find the attached documents*

*Student: Well received with thanks.*

From the above e-messages, it is evident that the interlocutors are using expressives as a form of positive politeness that is 'noticing and attending to the addressee and the addresser' through the use of formal salutation and or thanking. Thus speakers or senders of these messages through CMC desire to preserve their social face in communication as well as fulfilling their basic wants as humans in showing appreciation to whatever information has been relayed or the assistance accorded. This clearly indicates that individuals communicate in divergent ways by expressing different values differently. Though they express or communicate differently, they have something in common, that is, two basic needs in line with Brown & Levinson (1987). They aspire to be accepted and struggle to maintain control over their actions coupled with freedom so as not to infringe on others.

The acts of thanking in these e-communications are used to express gratitude. It is also a way of showing respect and kindness to the listeners or recipients, in this context, the supervisors or lecturers, by letting them know that the speaker appreciates what they have done.

Another form of expressives is the acts of greeting which is an expression of welcome or acknowledgement. Greetings were used in the following communications:

*1). Good morning (the student writes the lecturer's name); I have just misplaced all the attachments; I hope you will not mind sending me the documents again.*

*2). Lecturer: Good morning (the supervisor writes the student's name); please find my comments on your work.*

*Student: Good morning Prof.  I have received.*

*3). Supervisor: Good morning; I will look at your work and revert. Regards*

   *Student: good morning Dr. Thank you.*

*4). Supervisor: Dear (student's name), please find my comments for your perusal.*

   *Student: Thanks Doc. I have received.*

The above speech acts of greetings in each communication, though some are informal (1 & 4) and others formal (2 & 3), they are basically meant to build relations and, to some extent, narrow the social distance between the lecturers or supervisors and the students so as to share their concerns freely. That is, they are meant to create a conducive atmosphere where the interlocutors can interact freely. Redmond (2015) observes that in relation to the positive face, interlocutors desire to be accepted or acknowledged by others. In other words, greetings are speech acts that enhance the positive face of the interlocutors.

From the CMCs between students and their lecturers or supervisors, declaratives were not used or are not applicable in this context. Apart from these five categories of speech acts by Sifianou (1999), there were other linguistic aspects that were used or emanated from the communications of both the students and the lecturers in their CMC, which include:

1. Address phrases
2. Meeting requests
3. Requests for reply
4. Adjunct phrases

First, in terms of address phrases - they are forms of greetings at the beginning of any communication or message that is created by any communication participant. These phrases can be formal, informal, or absent in any communication. Informal address phrases include the use of the first names, nicknames, or slang terms such as; 'teacher', 'prof', 'doc', and others. Formal address phrases include the use of titles like; Dr, Ms, Mr, Professor, Mrs, and others, while other conversation participants did not use any of these. This use of address phrases was realized in the following CMCs between the students and the lecturers or supervisors.

Example1.  *Good afternoon Doc. Am almost through with my data collection, meanwhile am working on the collected data doing some transcriptions. I hope by the of this month; I will be done with the analysis.*

In example 1 above, this CMC indicates that it is a student who is communicating with his supervisor, thus making use of the informal phrase 'Doc', which is slang; according to Spolsky (1998), slang is a type of register used by the youth as an in-group speech. A kind of jargon that is marked by its rejection of formal rules, and it is marked to show solidarity. Slang has social functions as a sign of identity, membership, and solidarity.

From the foregoing, such kind of address is only used among the youth and colleagues to define the social situation they are in. Thus this form of address poses a threat to the positive face of the supervisor in question because it demonstrates some kind of disrespect for the supervisor keeping in mind that whatever subject that was under discussion required the writer (student) of the CMC to adhere to the formalities of language that are dictated by the subject or topic. The same applies to a situation where another student was asking for some assistance from the course lecturer:

*Student: Hi (uses the lecturer's first name). Could you please send me the notes for LAC 3215? Yours sincerely (student's name)*

*Lecturer: Kindly find as an attachment LAC 3215 notes for your perusal. Regards Dr…*

This clearly indicates that the student does not observe the decorum required when addressing individuals who deserve formal treatment; in return the lecturer adheres to the formalities of language use. The greeting 'Hi' also marks the use of slang which is not appropriate in this context. In a follow-up communication by the student, we notice the student making the same mistake:

*Student: Good morning (writes the lecturer's first name); I have lost all attachments; I hope 'u' won't mind sending me again.*

The student in these two contexts is a postgraduate student who, to some extent, assumes that her lecturers /supervisors are age mates, and thus, she can use any form of address to communicate without regard to their position, which in return dictates formalities in language use so as to pass the message. The other aspect that was also noted from this communication is the use of contracted forms in constructing CMC messages like; 'won't' in the above communication and the use of the short form 'u', which is not linguistically appropriate. This kind of usage is against the norms of English grammar and is actually an influence of computer language that has defied the rules of grammar. Such usages pose FTAs to the recipients of such forms of communication, which are ordinarily meant to be formal.

The other use of address phrases was formal in other communications, such as:

*Student: Good morning Dr. I have sent a copy of my revised thesis to you. Kindly go through and advise.*

*Supervisor: Good morning; I will look at your work and revert. Regards*.

Supervisor: Dear (student's name), please find my comments for your perusal.

Student: Thanks, Dr. I have received.

From these communications, the use of formal address forms is noticed, and even from the follow-up part of the conversation reveals aspects of politeness in language use. The student adhered to the formal use of language with his supervisors.

Second is the use of meeting requests and request for reply. A meeting request is a sentence that actually requests a meeting with a lecturer. The sentence requesting a reply is categorized as a request for reply (Spolsky, 1998).

Examples:

*a). Supervisor to student: Kindly, we need to meet and discuss your progress.*

*b) Supervisor: Please meet with me.*

*Student: Let me know when you are available, sir.*

*c). Student: Could you be on campus next week? I wish someone could explain some of these concepts in our research methods class.*

In the above conversations, the speakers are making requests in different ways, which enhances the use of different politeness strategies. One is the use of positive politeness, in that a request is designed to appeal to the connection or affinity between the speaker and receiver. Here the sender makes an assumption that because of the affinity between them, the receiver should comply with the request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, the use of a direct request accompanied with the word please, *'please meet me or please meet with me'* and *'let me know when you are available'*. The sender of this communication is optimistic that the receiver will give a positive response and or be available to assist him. Two, in the above communication, there is the use of negative politeness whereby a request is used to make an attempt to minimize its imposition. A request is usually face threatening because it is a kind of imposition to make the receiver act in some way. Thus in this conversation, the request is used indirectly using indirect forms such as questioning the hearer's ability, for example, could you? Or willingness to perform the act (would you?) was used by the students; for example, *could you be on campus next week?*

Further still, a request can be regarded as an off-record strategy when some type of non-conventional indirect form is used. This is usually expressed as a need and has characteristics of ambiguity and hinting Brown & Levinson (1987). For example, 'I wish someone could explain some concepts in our research method class.' This is an ambiguous way of communicating a request to meet by the speaker. In other words, the speaker chose to be ambiguous rather than posing a threat to the receiver by being direct and, to some extent, maintaining the social distance between her and the lecturer.

Lastly is the use of adjunct phrases, which are phrases or sentences that contain positive and negative politeness. Adjunct phrases that entail positive politeness include: small talk, greetings, humour, used identity markers, offers or promises to reciprocate, or providing reasons for making the request. In the communications between lectures/ supervisors and students, there was the use of both formal and informal greetings, for example; on one hand, Hi Doc –which is informal as compared to dear professor –a formal way of greetings that translates to positive politeness in the side of the student but to the receiver it is a FTA. On the other hand, greetings that are formal, for instance; Dear Dr. or professor represent negative politeness in that the speaker already acknowledges that there is a social gap that exists between the sender and the receiver, which does not require him or her to impose on the receiver thus maintaining the social distance which constitutes negative politeness.

## 7. Conclusion
From the study, the findings revealed that students employed politeness strategies because they were formal and polite when addressing their lecturers or supervisors in matters concerning their academic work. However, they failed to observe decorum in their opening greetings and even address their lectures using their first names. They were informal in some instances, thus not taking into consideration the power relations and/ or the social status that exists between them and their supervisors. In addition to this, other students used slang such; *Doc, Prof, 'u' instead of 'you' the contracted forms of words like won't instead of 'will not'*. These forms are used in informal contexts where the interlocutors are colleagues or acquaintances who use language to suit their in-group social needs, to show solidarity, or indicate that they are in-group members; thus, it should not be used to address people in formal contexts or communication situations.

From the findings, it can be concluded that out of five speech acts, four speech acts were present in the CMC of the students and their lecturers or supervisors as follows: First, imperatives were used in contexts that demanded giving and taking of instructions. Supervisors used imperatives that resulted in negative politeness. This kind of usage was meant to instill discipline in terms of meeting the set deadlines as stipulated by the lecturers. Second, the use of assertives which were in terms of apologies that, were FTAs because the receiver (students) expected a positive response to the various requests. However, the responses given by the lecturer or supervisor in connection with the delay affirmed the state of events or the commitments he had. This justifies the delay in sending feedback, thus satisfying the student's face wants.

Third, commissives, as one of the speech acts, were realized in the form of commitments and promises made by the interlocutors to execute a given task and/or fulfill it. Commissives were also in the form of warnings from lecturers to the students based on the deadlines for submitting their academic assignments. Therefore the use of commissives like commitments and promises revealed the use of positive politeness. Fourth, the findings ascertained that expressives were used to show gratitude, for example, thanking and greetings, which are an illustration of positive politeness. Still further, the findings showed that senders and receivers of e-messages had the desire to preserve their social face when communicating, thus fulfilling their basic wants as humans. This usage revealed the positive politeness of 'noticing and attending to the addressee's and addresser's needs'; thus, interlocutors aspire to be accepted and maintain control over their actions so as not to infringe others.

Lastly, apart from the speech acts, other linguistic aspects used in the CMC between lecturers and students include: address phrases, meeting requests, requests for reply, and adjunct phrases. The address phrases used were both formal and informal. The interlocutors' use of meeting requests resulted in the use of positive politeness since these requests were used to appeal to the connection or affinity between them, which made each of them to be optimistic about a positive response. The use of direct requests resulted in negative politeness in that they were used to minimize imposition. In some instances, indirectly questioning the receiver's willingness to meet. Further still, requests were used as off-record strategies when the sender of the message wanted to hint at something, which is an ambiguous way of communicating. Finally, the use of adjunct phrases in terms of greetings whereby formal greetings were used to mark negative politeness. The students acknowledged the existence of a social gap between themselves and the lecturers.

## 8. Limitations
The current study was limited to the analysis of whatsapp messages only in trying to understand how CMC works between university supervisors or professors and their students (postgraduate students).

## 9. Suggestions for future research
A comparative study can be done between undergraduate and postgraduate students and how they communicate with their professors using CMC. Further research can be done on other forms of CMC that are used by university professors and their students, looking at the disparities and the similarities therein.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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