

# Politeness Strategies in Email Opening and Closing Moves by Saudi Female EFL Students

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**Abstract**—The current study examined 150 emails sent by Saudi female English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduate students to their instructor. Greetings (opening moves) and farewells (closing moves) were investigated, exploring how social and interactional factors affected the politeness strategies and language formality employed. The study analyzed the types of opening and closing moves and the students' ability to use formal forms, considering the formality of the context and their awareness of social distance. Most of the emails did not include opening and closing moves, suggesting a low awareness of politeness strategies. Opening moves were used more frequently than closing moves and when greetings were used in the opening moves, formal greetings were more frequent than less formal ones. Moreover, the use of greetings was affected by the students' first language. The paper concludes with recommendations to enhance EFL students' knowledge of politeness strategies.

**Index Terms**—emails, female, opening and closing moves, politeness strategies, sociopragmatics

## I. INTRODUCTION

Instructors and university students usually interact outside of classes via email (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018). Email interaction in academic settings between students and their instructors or professors is an important communication tool. This type of interaction serves several purposes including sending inquiries, making requests, sharing files, providing instructions, and explaining procedures (Briones & Liwanag, 2023). However, users may face challenges in digital discourse. This may be especially apparent with students if they lack familiarity with the appropriate language patterns or genres in digital communications, which can result in interaction failures (Sykes, 2021).

It is customary for formal emails to begin with a greeting (opening move) and end with a farewell (closing move). Greetings in emails are expected to be formal, especially if the emails are intended for formal purposes, such as those sent by students to their instructors, which is the situation under investigation in the current study. However, in certain cases, emails have no greetings at all, especially if they are sent to a group. For instance, the main use of emails within institutions could be to distribute information to staff members, meaning that personalized greetings are not required (Crystal, 2006).

According to Crystal (2006), although the asynchronous nature of emails means that students have sufficient time to write and edit their emails before sending them, they may also be affected by oral discourse and display some of its characteristics. Crystal (2006) attributed this to emails being recognized as a hybrid genre of speech and writing, meaning that they may contain features of written and oral communication. This could cause a problem if non-native students lack sufficient knowledge on how to appropriately address their instructors, potentially leading to impolite behavior if the students do not take into consideration certain variables such as social distance and the status of the interlocutors, especially in face-threatening acts (FTAs) such as requests (Salazar-Campillo & Codina-Espurz, 2019). In this context, Butler (2012) suggested that some professors may simply refuse to reply when faced with inappropriate emails sent by students. This could be attributed to pragmatic infelicities being “judged more harshly than mistakes in syntax, pronunciation, or lexis” (Krulatz, 2014, p. 19). Therefore, writing emails with the appropriate level of politeness etiquette requires both pragmalinguistic (understanding of the appropriate forms) and sociopragmatic (understanding of when these forms are contextually appropriate) knowledge (DiBartolomeo, 2021), which means that it can be a challenging task. Student–instructor communication imposes a high social distance, signifying a high level of formality. Consequently, students need to be aware of politeness strategies to ensure that the learning process is not hampered by unintentional FTAs (Almoaily, 2018). It is important to use the appropriate language in academic contexts, taking into consideration the hierarchical nature of relationships between students and academic staff. Thus, students should use linguistic markers that acknowledge the higher status of academic staff (Biesenbach Lucas, 2007). To ensure e-politeness etiquette, students need to consider pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic factors and choose suitable language. For students who are non-native speakers of English who are sending emails in a second or additional language, this appears to be particularly challenging (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Greetings (opening moves) and

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farewells (closing moves) used by non-native English students could vary according to their awareness of the e-politeness etiquette and formality of the situation, such as addressing their instructors in a university context. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic variation in the opening and closing sequences in email communication by addressing the following research questions:

1. How often do Saudi female EFL students use formal greetings and farewells in their emails to their instructors?
2. Do Saudi female EFL students use informal greetings and farewells in their emails to their instructors?
3. What type of opening and closing moves are most commonly used by students?

Moreover, the study examines the impact of Saudi female EFL students' first language and culture on their use of greetings and farewells. The current study will contribute to the body of research on opening and closing moves in email communication in the academic context. It will also add to the literature on gender differences in email communication by comparing the findings with those from previous studies conducted on male participants. The findings of this study might help students to learn how to compose emails appropriately.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. Greetings and Farewells in Emails

The body of emails includes certain components, some of which are obligatory and others optional. According to Crystal (2006), the obligatory element is the message itself and the interesting aspect is the degree "to which it is preceded by a greeting (or salutation, opening) and followed by a farewell (or signature, closing)" (Crystal, 2006, p. 104), which are the optional elements. Although the opening and closing moves are optional, they have important sociopragmatic roles. Opening sequences negotiate and establish the social relationship between the participants, while in closing sequences the participants work to accomplish a joint, negotiated termination of the social event (Albert & Kessler, 1978; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

Greetings in emails can take various forms, ranging from formal to informal to null greetings (Almoaily, 2018; Crystal, 2006). Crystal (2006, p. 106) classified greetings into the following categories:

1. General word such *Hi* and *Hello*.
2. General word followed by the sender ID such as *Hi* from *Janet*.
3. Intimate name alone as in *Janet*.
4. A combination of general word followed by intimate name as in *Hi Louis*.
5. Formal name: *Professor X*, *Professor* but general word followed by formal name is never used.
6. *Dear* followed by the intimate name as in *Dear David* or *Dear Dave*.
7. The whole name.
8. Title and surname as in *Dear Professor X*.

In a study by Almoaily (2018), students' email greetings were classified into three categories: formal greetings, less formal/informal greetings, and null greetings. According to Almoaily (2018), formal greetings consist of religious greetings (RG), time-related greetings (TRG), or *Dear* followed by an intimate name or title and surname (DX). The second type, which is less formal, comprises greetings such as *Greetings* (GR), *Hello* (H1), and *Hi* (H2) (Almoaily, 2018, p. 262).

Regarding farewells in emails, Codina-Espurz and Salazar-Campillo (2019) suggested that closing moves could include a *pre-closing statement* such as gratitude, apology, and appeal; *complimentary closes* such as expressions of regards or thanks, or a holiday greeting; a signature, which could consist of the sender's first name (FL) or both their first name and last name (FN+LN); or null closing  $\emptyset$ . The use of both informal or null greetings and null closing indicates a lack of awareness of positive face strategies (Almoaily, 2018).

### B. Politeness Strategies and Online Communication

Many research studies on politeness have been conducted from different perspectives in the fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics (Almoaily, 2018). Among these studies, Leech's (1983) politeness principle and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies are the most well-known approaches. Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) popular and highly influential politeness theory, based on Goffman's (1967) face theory, dominates the field of linguistic politeness and consists of two parts: the nature of politeness in spoken interactions and politeness strategies. Linking politeness to face, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) considered politeness to be a strategy for mitigating FTAs as part of a complex system. According to Brown and Levinson, upon entering any social relationship, people have to show awareness of face, a sense of self, public self-image, and the addressee. This model distinguishes between positive and negative face in addition to positive and negative politeness. Positive face is considered a universal goal and comprises a willingness to be respected and desired by others, while negative face involves individuals' desire to be free from imposition in their actions. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) elaborated that negative face is the notion of a formal politeness that does not impose on others. In contrast, positive face refers to wanting to obtain other people's admiration, as well as their approval. Brown and Levinson (1978) put forward five super-strategies for minimizing threats to face: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, off-record, and FTAs. Individuals use language that fulfills their need for appreciation and approval from others when employing positive politeness strategies.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers can select from five major strategies, which in ascending order correspond to the increased threat of FTAs. *Bald on-record* is the riskiest strategy, involving direct acts and the imperative mood (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The next strategy is *positive politeness*, which increases the positive face of the hearer through forms of endearment, as exemplified by Leech (2014, p. 33): *Give me a lift to the station—there's a dear*. Moreover, *negative politeness* involves reducing the threat to face through mitigation of the strength of imposition. While *off-record politeness* does not convey a clear act or a direct order, it uses a hint to give this meaning. This is shown in the example provided by Leech (2014, p. 33): *Oh dear, I'm late for my train again or are you driving to the station, by any chance?* This question is posed with the intention of the hearer giving the speaker a lift despite not being directly asked to do so. The final and least face-threatening strategy is *avoiding all face threats*, which can be achieved by not asking the hearer for anything.

However, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies have been subject to criticism. For example, rather than their politeness theory being universal, researchers have contended that it has a Western bias and so cannot be universally applied to all languages (Leech, 2014). The definition of face (positive and negative face) has also been subject to criticism. However, Brown and Levinson's approach has been widely used in analyses and cross-cultural research, and it is considered applicable to many cultures (Watts, 2003, p. 63).

Politeness in online communication is not achieved easily and it can be more challenging than face-to-face communication (Almoaily, 2018). A notable aspect of online communication, particularly in the context of asynchronous communication (email), is the development of "netiquette" (Zapata, 2003). This is a neologism that refers to etiquette on the network, encompassing rules of interaction and good manners in communication on the internet (Nikleva, 2017).

In online communication, especially in emails, it is important to follow the politeness strategies given that requests and providing information are the most important functions of emails. Most emails sent by students mainly focus on these two functions. Making a request is considered an FTA and places an imposition on the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, a number of strategies can be used to minimize the impact of imposition, such as justifying the reason for the request (Waldvogel, 2002). Another function of emails, which has lesser importance than making requests and giving information, is seeking information (Waldvogel, 2002). This function is frequently found in student emails seeking advice, opinions, or information about the content of the course. As in other forms of interactions, opening and closing moves in emails play an important social role, with the presence or absence of a greeting and the greeting type setting the tone for the ensuing email conversation (Waldvogel, 2007). For instance, the absence of a closing move could be perceived as impolite on the recipient's part, especially when the email is a request to a person occupying a higher social position (Salazar-Campillo, 2018). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, p. 138) noted, "Greetings and farewells offer formulas to ease the strain created for face by the beginnings and ends of interactions".

A number of studies have investigated politeness in emails, focusing on opening and closing moves. Some of the most relevant studies will be discussed in the following section.

### C. Previous Studies on the Opening and Closing Moves in Emails

Several studies have been conducted to identify the opening and closing moves employed by native and non-native speakers, showing substantial variation in the use of opening and closing sequences. For example, 92% of the emails in Gains' (1998) study in institutional settings had no opening move, while 54% of the emails in Lan's (2000) corpus also lacked an opening move. Murphy and Levy (2006), exploring exchanges among Australian and Korean academics, claimed that opening and closing moves enable the email sender to show politeness and formality. Bou-Franch (2011) examined opening and closing moves in three email exchanges, finding that there was more familiarity and informality in the shift from initial to subsequent emails. As the student-professor interaction developed, the opening and closing moves became less elaborate. These findings provide support for the absence of opening and closing moves potentially being perceived as impolite behavior, due to the asymmetric nature of lecturer-student emails.

Waldvogel (2007) collected email data from two different settings (an educational organization and a manufacturing plant), conducting a detailed examination of greetings and closing moves in relation to sociological variables such as the relative status of participants, their gender, and social distance. In the educational organization setting, the tone of opening and closing moves was more intimate and familiar, contrasting with the greater deference towards the recipient found in the manufacturing plant. In a study by Eslami (2013), Iranian non-native speakers of English were found to overuse opening and closing moves by incorporating small talk and phatic comments. Such features are associated with the Iranian culture but may be viewed as inappropriate in the university setting. Moreover, Salazar-Campillo (2018) examined opening and closing moves in initial emails sent by two groups of graduate students, one group writing in their native language of Spanish and the second group writing in English. Regardless of the language they wrote in, both groups lacked awareness of the required level of formality for opening moves in this type of email. Neither group was able to employ the expected level of deference to the professor, as the opening moves typically consisted of only a greeting or a greeting and the professor's first name. On the contrary, closing moves included status-appropriate politeness and respect regardless of the language used.

In another study, Almoaily (2018) investigated EFL students' awareness and use of greetings as a politeness marker, focusing on academic emails. The students sent the emails as an introduction to their supervisors and so were highly formal in tone due to the high social distance between the students and supervisors. Only a few emails included formal

greetings and most contained informal or null greetings. Almoaily suggested that students should be provided opportunities to engage in politeness etiquette training in order to build knowledge of politeness knowledge in formal emails.

In addition, Salazar-Campillo and Codina-Espurz (2019) examined politeness in opening and closing moves in first and follow-up emails to ascertain whether this variable affects students' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic ability when writing their emails. The opening moves tended to include a greeting and the professor's first name, and so were informal in tone. There were fewer politeness features in the closing moves, with this being particularly noticeable in follow-up emails. This lack of politeness in students' follow-up emails indicates that they may seek to establish a more egalitarian and close relationship, akin to that with family members, which the authors contended reflects a more conversational mode of communication.

Moreover, in a study examining emails sent by higher education students to their professors, Konuk (2021) found that the students had problems with punctuation and spelling, paragraph structure, language formality, contact information, and opening and closing statements.

Finally, Alemi and Maleknia (2023) explored whether non-native English-speaking university students adhere to verbal and structural politeness markers, including opening and closing moves, in academic email interactions. The findings revealed that the university students did not adhere to verbal or structural politeness cues in their emails. The authors attributed this to the students' lack of awareness of netiquette politeness.

The current study aims to analyze opening and closing moves found in emails sent by Saudi female EFL students in the Department of English Language and Literature at the College of Languages and Humanities in Ar Rass, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The emails will be analyzed to determine the Saudi female EFL students' awareness of politeness strategies when writing formal emails to their instructors, focusing on the appropriateness of opening and closing moves; to my knowledge, this has not been addressed before. The findings will be compared to those of male students in Almoaily (2018) and other previous studies.

### III. METHOD

In order to examine potential differences in email communication between students and their instructors, with a particular focus on greetings and farewells, 150 emails were collected to analyze the greetings and farewells (i.e., opening and closing moves) used by Saudi female EFL undergraduate students in the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, in Ar Rass, Qassim University. The students were in the sixth and seventh levels, corresponding to junior and senior university students. The students were expected to have adequate English language proficiency, considering their advanced academic levels and the fact that they were about to graduate. These 150 emails, which constitute the corpus of the study, were sent to me as their course instructor. The emails were either requests for information or seeking permission or else included information about course-related tasks, such as submitting assignments. The data gathered for the current study were hence spontaneous and naturally occurring, with the potential to accurately represent the politeness strategies employed by the students. This is in contrast to experimental studies, where participants are aware that their emails will be studied and so can avoid FTAs by using more politeness strategies (Almoaily, 2018). During the data collection, it was evident that some of the students preferred to use their first language, i.e., Arabic, when composing their emails, probably because the students were aware that I am also a native speaker of Arabic. Therefore, the emails collected were either written in English or in Arabic and sometimes a combination of both.

In analyzing the data, the categorization developed by Almoaily (2018) for analyzing the greeting moves has been adopted, while the categorization developed by Codina-Espurz and Salazar-Campillo (2019) will be considered for analyzing the farewell moves. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the categories for the opening and closing moves:

TABLE 1  
TYPES OF GREETING

Type	Formal greetings				Informal greetings				Null greeting
	Dear (Dr. X)	TRG + Dr. (FN)	RG	RG + TGR	Hello + Dr. FN	Hello	Hello + TRG	Hi + Dr.	Ø

TABLE 2  
TYPES OF CLOSING MOVES

Type	Pre-closing statement	Complimentary close	Signature		Null closing
			FN	FN+LN	

Table 1 shows that the greetings are classified into formal, informal, and null greetings. In the current study, formal greetings will be considered as a sign of a positive face strategy, whereas informal greetings are a sign of the student's lack of awareness of politeness strategies and formal greetings. Regarding closing moves, the emails will be examined to identify if they include pre-closing statements, a complimentary close, and a signature, either with the sender's first name (FN) or their first name and last name (FN+LN). A lack of these closing moves, i.e. null closing, will be considered as an FTA.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the production of greetings and farewells will be discussed in order to answer the research questions of the study. First, the greetings (opening moves) will be discussed followed by a discussion of the students' use of farewells (closing moves).

##### A. Greetings

The data analysis showed that greetings were used by some of the students to initiate emails to their university instructor. However, a null greeting with no opening move was the most frequent in the sample, representing 54% of the greeting moves (see Figure 1). Formal greetings in general were ranked second, representing 37% of the total. Informal greetings were used less frequently by the students, representing 9% of the total. These findings are consistent with those of Almoaily (2018), who also found that emails with a null greeting accounted for the highest portion of tokens.

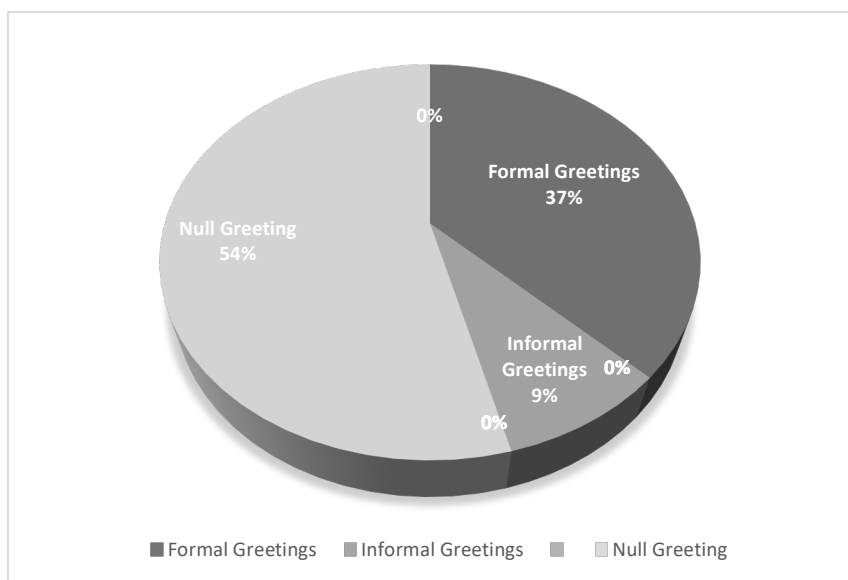


Figure 1. A Comparison of Greeting Moves

The analysis of formal greetings showed that the preferred greeting form was a time-related greeting expression followed by the title (TRG+title) (13 instances), as in *Good evening Dr.* or *Good afternoon doctor*. In some other instances, TRG was followed by the instructor's title and first name, which occurred eight times (e.g., *Good evening Dr. Majedah*). Also, time-related expressions occurred without the instructor's title and first name (5 instances), such as *Good morning*. It is worth mentioning that most of the time the students used TRG only in English. Only two TRG in Arabic were used, *ماجدة د. مساؤك د.* and *مساء الخير دكتورة ماجدة*, which both mean *good evening*.

The formal greeting which begins with *Dear* was ranked second. According to Crystal (2006), the structure is supposed to be *Dear* followed by a title and surname, as in *Dear Professor X*. However, this form was not used by the students. Instead, various forms were employed, such as *Dear* followed by the instructor's title and her first name, as in *Dear Dr. Majedah* (13 instances). Salazar-Campillo (2018) noted that *Dr. + instructor's first name* (for example, *Dr. Maria*) is not an acceptable construction in English, and nor is an incorrect academic title (*Mrs. + instructor's last name*). However, this could be an influence from the students' first language, as in Arabic this form is acceptable.

*Dear* followed by the title and the instructor's first name and surname was also found, as in *Dear Dr. Majedah Alaiyed* (4 instances). *Dear* followed by the word *doctor* with the instructor's name occurred only once. Similar to Almoaily (2018), no translation of the word *Dear*, i.e., *عزيزتي*, was found, probably because of the intimate sense of this word in Arabic.

Religious greetings were ranked third in the use of formal greetings, representing 16.1% of the total. These findings contradict those of Almoaily (2018), who found that this type of greeting was used more than *Dear X* and TRG by his male participants, who were also students. To explain this, the factor of gender could be taken into consideration. Males in general prefer to use religious greetings in their daily life, i.e., *السلام عليكم* (Peace be upon you), more than females, who use other types of greetings such as TRG or words like *Marhaba* (مرحبا), which means *welcome*. The religious greeting was written in Arabic in all the emails even if the students switched to using English in the rest of their emails.

There were a few instances of more than one greeting being used at the same time, such as using a religious greeting followed by a TRG. This could be influenced by oral discourse, as it is common to use both in oral speech; this aligns with Crystal (2006), who regarded emails to be a hybrid genre of speech and writing.

Regarding informal greetings, words such as *Hello* and *Hi* were used by the students, albeit infrequently, representing 9% of the total. For example, *Hello* followed by the title and first name of the instructor occurred 10 times, as in *Hello*

*Dr. Majedah. Hello* on its own occurred only once. Similarly, *Hi* followed by the title and the first name of the instructor occurred only once. One occurrence of *Hello* followed by a TRG was found, as in *Hello, good evening doctor*. Again, this could be attributed to the influence of speech on written emails.

Table 3 shows the distribution of greetings found in the study.

TABLE 3  
DISTRIBUTION AND NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES OF THE OPENING MOVES

Type	Formal greetings				Informal greetings				Null greeting Ø
	Dear (Dr. X)	TRG + Dr. (FN)	RG	RG + TGR	Hello + Dr. FN	Hello	Hello + TRG	Hi + Dr.	
No. of occurrences	18	26	9	3	10	1	1	1	81
Percentage	32.1%	46.4%	16.1%	4.6%	76.9%	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%	100%
Total percentage	37%				9%				54%

To sum up the analysis of opening moves, null greetings were commonly used, with a low occurrence of formal greetings and few instances of informal greetings. These findings indicate that the students lacked awareness of how to write formal emails even though the participants were at advanced academic levels.

### B. Farewells

The analysis of email farewells (closing moves, i.e., pre-closing, complimentary close, and signature) shows that they were less common than greetings (opening moves). While students may have started their emails with greetings, it was not necessarily the case that farewells were also found. Closing moves represented 34% of the total and null closing represented 66%, as can be seen in Figure 2. These findings contrast with the prior research of Bou-Franch (2011), who found that opening and closing moves were pervasive in the social events under study: opening moves were found in over 85% of emails, while closing moves were even more frequent and appeared in 97% of all emails. On the other hand, the findings from the current study agree with those of Waldvogel (2002), who found minimal use of farewells in her study of email use and practices in a large workplace.

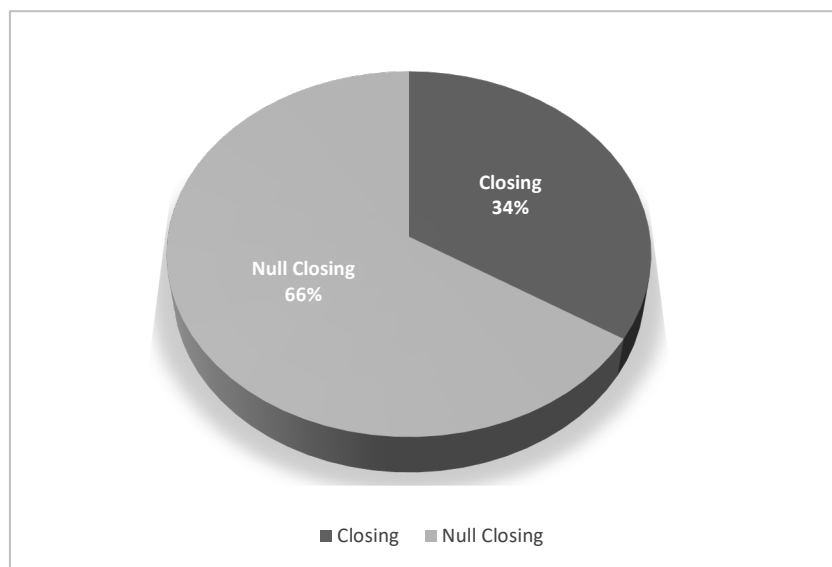


Figure 2. A Comparison Between Closing and Null-Closing Moves in Students' Emails

Closing moves were found in 51 emails, with variation in the forms used as sometimes the students ended their emails with a signature but with no pre-closing or complimentary close. In other cases, a pre-closing statement and complimentary close were used but with no signature. The distribution of closing and null-closing moves can be seen in Table 4.

TABLE 4  
DISTRIBUTION OF CLOSING AND NULL-CLOSING MOVES

Type	Pre-closing statement	Complimentary close	Signature		Null closing
			FN	FN+LN	
No. of occurrences	16	39	2	17	99
Percentage	10.6%	76.5%	3.9%	33.3%	66%

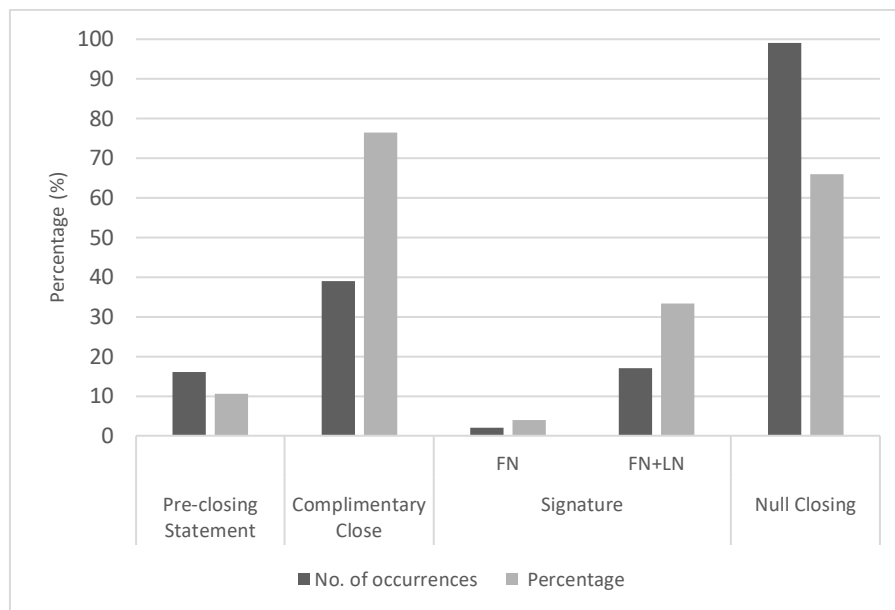


Figure 3. Distribution of Closing Moves

It is noteworthy that when farewells were used by the students, they were formal. The most common closing move was the complimentary one, produced in 39 emails and representing 76.5% of the closing moves found. The standard complimentary close *Thank you* and *Thanks* were the preferred formula, followed by *Regards*. The use of *Thanks* or *Thank you* is a polite form of behavior that reflects the students' awareness of the unequal relationship with their instructor; this finding is in line with Eslami (2013) and Salazar-Campillo (2018).

Ending the email with a signature was ranked second after the complimentary close, with the students writing their first and last name (16 instances). In five instances, the students added an extra closing statement before *Thanks*, such as *Have a nice day*. Pre-closing statements represented 10.6% of the closing moves, occurring 16 times. The most common pre-closing statements were those expressing apology, such as *Sorry to disturb you, I apologise for sending this e-mail*. Students used their first language to express their apology, as in *عذراً على الإزعاج* (I apologize for bothering you). The least common closing move was ending an email with the student's first name, which occurred only two times, representing 3.9% of the closing moves.

In summary, null greeting and null closing were commonly found in the emails analyzed in the current study. Moreover, the students used more greetings than farewells, with greetings found in 46% of the emails analyzed and farewells found in 34% of the sample. This aligns with Waldvogel's (2007) study of emails produced in an educational organization, where 59% contained greetings and 34% had closing moves. As found by Alemi and Maleknia (2023), the current study has found that there is a lack of awareness of politeness netiquette.

## V. CONCLUSION

In an analysis of 150 emails, the present study aimed to investigate Saudi female EFL students' awareness of formal greetings and farewells as a politeness strategy. The analysis of the opening and closing moves revealed a low occurrence of these moves by the Saudi female EFL students. Null greetings and null closing were common, as the majority of the students did not use any form of greetings or farewells in their emails. Considering the factor of gender, it is noteworthy that, in comparison with the male participants in Almoaily's (2018) study where the male participants preferred RG, the female participants in the current study displayed a higher usage of TRG than RG. In the current study, informal greetings were used but at a lower rate than formal greetings.

It is worth mentioning that no opening move was used with the instructor's first name without mentioning her degree title (i.e., Dr.). This indicates that the students were aware of the social distance between them and their instructor.

The findings indicate that the students had an inadequate knowledge of the politeness features within the academic email genre, alongside a lack of awareness of politeness netiquette. Moreover, the students' first language culture seemed to have an influence on to their use of politeness strategies. The findings thus underline the importance of providing students with training on politeness netiquette, including appropriate email greetings and closings. This is especially relevant in contexts with a high level of formality, such as when students email their instructors or supervisors who have a higher social status.

The research is necessarily limited in terms of the sample as it focused on Saudi female EFL undergraduate students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Qassim University. It also investigated politeness strategies found in what Crystal (2006) classified as optional components of email writing i.e. the opening and closing moves of

emails. All the emails were sent to me as their course instructor and probably included the use of the Arabic language because I am a native speaker of Arabic.

Some issues could be considered for further research, taking into account gender differences in the use of politeness strategies (FTA), such as requesting or seeking information in emails, especially by EFL students. Moreover, interviewing EFL students to ascertain their opinions of the challenges of employing politeness strategies in the correct context, as well as whether they are aware of the importance of politeness and politeness strategies in different interactions, could be helpful in identifying the appropriate method to overcome this problem. This would be very useful for determining gaps in students' knowledge and suggesting pedagogical methods to increase the students' proficiency in politeness strategies. This would also help the students to avoid impoliteness and pragmatic infelicities, thereby facilitating smoother communication with their instructors. A comparison of emails sent by Saudi males and females in a different workplace is also suggested as a future line of research.

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