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Accommodating Politeness Indicators in Personal Electronic Mail Messages

Ulla Bunz
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication
Rutgers University
4 Huntington Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA
Email: bunz@scils.rutgers.edu.

&

Scott W. Campbell
Assistant Professor
College of Communication
Hawaii Pacific University
1132 Bishop Street, Suite 504
Honolulu, HI 96813
Email: scamp10343@aol.com

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Abstract

Email has become a common form of interaction between both individuals and groups in the online environment, and much research has investigated the way it is used (i.e., Herring, 1994; 1996). Some recent research specifically investigates the use of emoticons in email (Walther & D'Addario, 2001), and gender in email (Boneva, Kraut & Frohlich, 2001; Thomson et al. 2001). This study has investigated politeness accommodation in email. The underlying question was: If people receive a message written with a certain level of politeness, will they respond with a similar level of politeness? This study was based on Buzzanell et al.'s (1996) research of politeness accommodation with telephone messages. This research was conducted at a large, U.S. Midwestern university. Response rate was high at 81% (n=121). Each subject received one of four versions of a message, asking the subject for his or her reason in participating in the study, and a six-question email questionnaire for demographic information. The subjects' written answers were analyzed as main source of data. Results indicated that subjects accommodated to verbal markers in the body of a message, and to greetings. In addition, results showed that messages containing both verbal and structural politeness indicators elicited the most polite responses. This research provides a foundation for explaining issues of relationship forming, response lag, communication accommodation in an electronic environment, and more.

Just as history was given shape with advances in oral, written, and print media, the present is taking shape with electronic media. Out of the development and rapid expansion of electronic media, a significant new field of study has emerged—computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC “refers to person-to-person communication . . . over computer networks” (Pickering & King, 1995, p. 479). The systems that support CMC “include electronic mail, computer conferencing, computer bulletin boards . . . and related media” (Rice, 1987, p. 69).

CMC has become a prevalent topic for research because of its widespread use and influences in interpersonal, organizational, and pedagogical settings. The evolution of the computer from a gigantic, expensive, computational gadget to a small, affordable, personal tool has allowed CMC to become a popular way to communicate with friends, relatives, and even strangers distributed all over the planet. Thus, the scope of communication theory building needs

to be expanded to gain an understanding of how people manage interpersonal communication in CMC contexts.

Over the last 30 years, interpersonal communication theory has made vast contributions to explaining and predicting communicative behavior. The observations that serve as the foundation for interpersonal theories are primarily based on face-to-face (FtF) interaction, and to a smaller extent on telephone interactions. While it is important that communication theories are considered in FtF settings, it is also important that these theories are considered in computer-mediated settings. The present investigation will help advance communication theory by expanding the scope of the principles of communication accommodation theory (CAT) into a computer-mediated environment.

Research shows there are, indeed, communicative effects of using CMC to interact with others. For example, studies suggest that CMC can foster the use of flagrant and hostile language, known as “flaming,” and messages reflecting status equalization among communicators who differ in social or professional standing (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Sproull and Kiesler (1986) observed significant differences between CMC and FtF communication when they noted that CMC resulted in messages that were self-absorbed, undifferentiated by status, and uninhibited. The authors argued that these communicative effects of CMC were the result of a lack of regulation of the communication by social context cues, which are not as prevalent in CMC as in FtF communication. This argument will be discussed in detail later, along with several other theoretical perspectives on the role of CMC as an interpersonal medium and how it differs from FtF communication. The important thing to note here is that the electronic environment of CMC may have an impact on communication, and it is important to determine

how this influences the way people adapt to each other's communication during CMC interaction. Over a decade ago, research investigated issues of gender (i.e., Herring, 1992; Herring, 1996) and politeness (Herring, 1994) in online discursive interactions. Recent studies have continued topic-specific research into this direction, such as a study on gender in electronic discourse (Thomson & Murachver, 2001) and the influence of gender on the development of personal relationships via email (Boneva et al., 2001), and a study on the impacts of emoticons on message interpretation (Walther & D'Addario, 2001).

There is a clear relationship between CMC and interpersonal communication in that the former serves as a channel for the latter. Much of the research on CMC has focused on the communicative effects of this channel: however, these effects also need to be considered within the framework of existing interpersonal communication theories. The purpose of this investigation is to assess whether the principles of CAT apply in a computer-mediated setting. Specifically, this study seeks to identify whether individuals accommodate to verbal politeness markers and structural politeness elements when using email to interact with others.

Theoretical Perspectives on CMC Behavior: A Review of the Literature

This discussion will demonstrate how CMC is used as a distance-based and asynchronous form of interpersonal communication. What is important to note in the following sections is that research has confirmed that a computer-mediated setting impacts interpersonal communication. For example, some argue CMC is less personal than FtF communication (see Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987), while others argue that personal information actually does pass through CMC, only it takes more time for individuals to adjust to the medium to allow this information to pass (see

Walther, 1992). Existing theories of CMC-based interpersonal communication may be useful in explaining the impacts of CMC on communication accommodation.

Cues-Filtered-Out Perspective

A lack of nonverbal cues has been used to explain the findings of impersonal message exchanges in a CMC environment; this approach is commonly referred to as the cues-filtered-out perspective. The theoretical positions of social presence, lack of social context cues, and media richness have been advanced in the literature to explain these effects.

Social Presence Theory

Social presence is achieved when people perceive the salience and involvement of others during interpersonal communication. Based on discussions proposed by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976), Walther (1992) explicated the premise of social presence theory as “The fewer channels or codes available within a medium, the less attention that is paid by the user to the presence of other social participants. As social presence declines, messages are more impersonal” (p. 54). Though measured as perceptions, Short et al. (1976) considered level of social presence to be an inherent quality of media, and they realized the limitations of electronic media in providing multiple codes and channels such as facial expressions, direction of looking, posture, dress, nonverbal, and vocal cues. The notion that a limited number of codes and channels has a significant impact on communication has led to the use of social presence theory as a framework for explaining less personal, more task-oriented communication in CMC (Culnan & Markus, 1987; Hiltz, Johnson, & Turoff, 1986; Rice, 1984; Steinfeld, 1986). The implication

here is that CMC would not be a highly effective interpersonal medium without the multiple codes and channels needed to convey social presence.

Lack of Social Context Cues Hypothesis

Sproull and Kiesler (1986) asserted that in organizational communication, senders and receivers of information are situated in a social context, and this context influences both who communicates with whom and the content that is communicated. Social context consists of geographic, organizational, and situational variables and is perceived by individuals through static and dynamic cues. Static cues emerge from people's appearance and artifacts, while dynamic cues emanate from nonverbal behavior such as nodding and frowning. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) contended that the lack of social context cues in electronic mail have significant impacts on the communication process and the messages transmitted. The effects of a lack of social context cues in CMC include an increase in excited and uninhibited communication, greater self-absorption versus other-orientation, and equalized participation in communication through a reduction in the perceived status differences between actors (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Walther, 1992). As in the case of social presence theory, the lack of social context cues hypothesis could be used to suggest that CMC is not a highly effective interpersonal medium.

Media Richness Theory

Another media theory popularly used to account for the interpersonal effects of CMC is media richness theory. Media "richness" is assessed by the availability of instant feedback, the utilization of multiple cues to convey interpretations and feelings, and the use of natural language rather than numbers to convey subtleties (Trevino et al., 1987). Trevino et al. found

that managers in organizations tend to select FtF communication for content and symbolic reasons, while email is typically used because of situational constraints. This preference to use FtF over CMC in more sensitive situations reflects how CMC is considered to be less rich than FtF communication. Face-to-face interaction “is touted as ‘richest’ given the availability of immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, nonverbal (facial and oral) backchanneling cues, and personalization and language variety” (Walther, 1992, p. 57). By subscribing to this perspective and recognizing CMC as a channel low in richness, one could argue it to be an ineffective interpersonal medium in comparison to FtF communication.

Social Information Processing Theory

Social presence theory, lack of social context cues hypothesis, and media richness theory complement one another in the way they rely on a lack of channels, codes, and cues to explain the interpersonal effects of CMC. It is important to note, however, that studies have yielded inconsistent results, demonstrating that CMC message exchanges are not always less personal than FtF interaction (Rice & Love, 1987; Steinfeld, 1986; Foulger, 1990; Hiemstra, 1982; Johansen, DeGrasse, & Wilson, 1978), creating a need for further investigation and theory building. In identifying the need for investigation and theory building, Walther (1992) offered social information processing theory as a competing explanation of the influence of CMC on interpersonal communication. In addition to explaining the disparities among previous research findings, social information processing theory explains the effects of time on interpersonal relationships among CMC users.

Social information processing theory posits that “communicators using any medium experience the similar needs for uncertainty reduction and affinity, and to meet these needs CMC

users will adapt their linguistic and textual behaviors to the solicitation and presentation of socially revealing, relational behavior. The critical difference between FtF and CMC from this perspective is a question of rate, not capability” (Walther, Anderson, & Park, 1994, p. 465). In other words, actors adapt to the lack of nonverbal behavior inherent to CMC through textual and linguistic cues that, in time, are interpreted as social or personal information. Walther et al. (1994) summarized, “The exchange of social information in CMC may be slower than FtF but it is potentially just as potent over time” (p. 465).

Communication Accommodation Theory: A Review of the Literature

Communication accommodation theory addresses behavioral adjustments individuals make during communication in order to express values, attitudes, and intentions. Specifically, CAT sets out “to clarify the motivations underlying, as well as the constraints operating upon, speech shifts during social interactions and the social consequences of these” (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987, p. 14).

Two key concepts related to CAT are convergence and divergence. Convergence is the process of individuals adapting toward each other’s speech. When Giles (1973) first introduced accommodation theory, he illustrated convergence by reporting that individuals in interview situations adjusted their accents toward that of the interviewer. Divergence, on the other hand, refers to the way individuals adjust their speech away from each other in order to accentuate differences. Bourhis and Giles (1977) reported divergence in their study of the reactions of Welsh people to language questions asked of them by English-sounding speakers. When the English-sounding speakers threatened the ethnic identity of the Welsh by challenging the value

of learning the Welsh language, the Welsh individuals diverged from the English by broadening their Welsh accents.

Adaptative behaviors have been identified in several studies (see Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Features converge that may include utterance length, speech rate, information density, vocal intensity, pausing frequencies and lengths, response latency, self-disclosure, jokes, expressing solidarity/opinions/orientations, gesture, head nodding, facial affect, and posture. While excessive convergence may be perceived as patronizing or inappropriate (Giles & Smith, 1979; Scotton, 1980), speech convergence is generally met with positive evaluation. It follows that convergence may reflect an individual's desire for social approval (Giles et al., 1987). Giles et al. (1987) pointed to research demonstrating that similarity in speech rates, response latencies, language, and accent are perceived more favorably than dissimilarity in the realms of social attractiveness (Street, Brady, & Putnam, 1983), communication effectiveness (Giles & Smith, 1979), perceived warmth (Welkowitz & Kuc, 1973), and cooperativeness (Feldman, 1968).

This study will examine politeness as a form of accommodation in email messages. Politeness in email messages is a relevant area of CMC study since flagrancy, hostility, self-absorption, and inhibition have been observed in CMC settings and attributed to a lack of regulation by social context cues (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). This study posits that social context cues indicating politeness can easily be, and often are, included in CMC messages, and it is conceivable that individuals may accommodate to these cues when interacting with others through email. For the purposes of this study, politeness in email messages will be represented by verbal markers and structural elements. The phrases "please" and "thank you" have been selected as verbal markers for politeness for obvious reasons. Use of a salutation, such as "Dear [recipient name]," and a

closing remark, such as “Regards,” in email messages has been selected to represent structural elements of politeness. The salutation and closing are presumed to be politeness cues because they convey an increased level of respect and formality compared to more abrupt messages that lack these structural elements.

The review of the literature leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: Do individuals accommodate to politeness in email messages by converging to verbal markers (i.e., “please” and “thank you”)?

RQ2: Do individuals accommodate to politeness in email messages by converging to structural elements (i.e., salutation and closing remark)?

RQ3: Do verbal markers and structural elements interact to explain the extent to which individuals accommodate to politeness in email messages?

Methods

Participants

A manipulation check was conducted through a pilot study to test whether the messages used were significantly different from each other. An original scale was used for this test. Participants were asked to rate the level of politeness reflected in verbal markers and structural elements in email messages. For the pilot study, 106 subjects (54% female) were recruited from sections of the basic public speaking course at a large mid-western research university. Students were awarded credit toward their class grade for their participation in this study. On average, subjects were 21 years old, and used the Internet about two-and-a-half hours per week.

For the main study, 121 students ($N = 150$, $n = 121$, response rate of 81%, 60% female) were recruited from the same population as above. Subjects of the main study also received

credit toward their class grade for participation in the study. Repeat participation was prevented. The majority of subjects were 19 (48%) or 20 (29%) years old. On average, participants used email two (30%) or three-to-four (30%) hours per week. Subjects have been using email for an average of just over three years. Fifty-two percent of the participants reported using email primarily for social reasons, such as interacting with friends and family. Secondly, participants reported using email for task-related purposes, such as school or work (46%).

Materials

An original self-report questionnaire was used for this study assessing participant age, sex, years of experience using email, amount of weekly email use, and type of email use (school/work and personal/social usage). Years of experience using email, amount of weekly email use, type of email use, age, and sex were measured with ordinal and nominal response options (see survey in Appendix B). The only other materials involved in this study were email messages.

Four different messages were constructed and sent to the participants. All four messages were highly significantly different from each other with respect to results from the pilot study. Nonetheless, the sentence “Thank you for expressing interest in being a participant in a research study I am conducting” from message one was changed to “You expressed interest in being a participant in a research study I am conducting. Thank you for that.” Using “thank you” as the first words of the message seemed too leading to us.

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of four groups to receive one of the four messages. One message contained verbal politeness markers (i.e., “please” and “thank you”), one contained structural politeness elements (i.e., salutation and closing remark), one contained both

verbal and structural politeness indicators, and one contained neither verbal nor structural politeness indicators (see email messages in Appendix A).

Procedures

Data were collected for this investigation by examining email messages and survey responses from the participants. Students were notified by their instructor that a visiting professor at the university was looking for participants to fill out a survey for a study being conducted. The students were told the professor would contact them via email with more information if they provided their email address to their basic course instructor. Students were also informed that participation in the study would fulfill one of the three research credits required as a course assignment. All students had access to a free email account provided by the university.

Once the student email addresses were collected, each participant received an email message from the visiting professor. Unbeknownst to the students, the true purpose of this message was to evoke email responses that would later be examined to assess whether the students accommodated to the professor's email. It was necessary to have the students respond with a message at least a paragraph in length in order to provide ample opportunity for convergence to take place. Therefore, the professor's email asked subjects to explain their reasons for participating in the study, as if the professor was not familiar with the research credits assigned in the basic public speaking course.

While the general content of the professor's message was the same for each recipient, the professor's messages were manipulated in a 2X2 factorial design. The two independent variables

for this design consisted of verbal politeness markers and structural politeness elements. See table 1 for an overview of the messages.

Table 1

2x2 Design of Politeness Messages Used

Verbal Indicators	Structural Indicators	
	Yes	No
Yes	Message 3	Message 1
No	Message 2	Message 4

Email responses from the participants were measured for politeness using a simple form of content analysis. The measurement process consisted of both researchers together agreeing on a coding scheme by identifying words or terms that would be considered a politeness indicator. Then, ten percent of the returned email messages were chosen at random and coded by each of the two researchers. When 100% coding agreement was reached, the remaining emails were divided up and the researchers identified and counted the verbal politeness markers and structural politeness elements in the responses. Participant response messages containing either “please” or “thank you,” or similar expressions of appreciation, such as “I would appreciate” or “I’m grateful” were considered to contain verbal politeness markers. Participant response messages containing either a salutation or a closing were considered to contain a structural politeness element. Messages containing both a salutation and a closing were considered more polite in terms of structure than messages containing only one of the two elements. Overall, responses to message 3 contained the most politeness indicators ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.12$), followed

by responses to message 2 ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.45$), and message 1 ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.08$).

Responses to message 4 contained the fewest politeness indicators ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 1.13$).

The professor, Dr. Chris Aitken, was actually a fictitious character in this study. The researchers established a separate email account through the university and contacted the participants themselves under the pseudo-identity of Dr. Chris Aitken. As in the case of a similar study investigating student convergence to a professor's answering machine message (Buzzanell, Burrell, Stafford, & Berkowitz, 1996), the status difference between the students and the professor was thought to motivate students "to attempt behaviors (i.e., moderate convergence) that facilitate goals and influence positive reactions" (p. 313). An actual professor was not used for this investigation in order to prevent existing relationships from influencing the level of politeness in the participant responses. Also, the name "Chris" was chosen because it is gender-neutral.

Results

This study examined politeness as a form of communication accommodation in electronic mail. The purpose was to investigate whether social context cues indicating politeness are accommodated and/or mirrored by participants. Each research question is examined separately.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, "Do individuals accommodate to politeness in email messages by converging to verbal markers (i.e., "please" and "thank you")? To answer research question 1, independent samples t-tests were conducted between two versions of messages sent to participants (verbal polite, none) and the politeness level of subjects' responses in the main

body of their messages measured by the number of politeness indicators they used in the main body of their responses. T-tests indicated that there was a significant difference in politeness among the responses to the two versions of messages sent, $t(55) = 2.04, p = .046$. Subjects who received the message with verbal politeness indicators were significantly more polite in the body of their response ($M = .90, SD = .87$) than were subjects who received a message containing no politeness indicators ($M = .50, SD = .64$). Thus, participants accommodated verbal politeness in electronic mail.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, “Do individuals accommodate to politeness in email messages by converging to structural elements (i.e., salutation and closing remark)?” To answer research question 2, independent samples t-tests were conducted between two of the versions of messages sent to participants (structural polite, none) and the politeness level of subjects’ responses in the greeting or sign-off of their messages. T-tests indicated that there was a highly significant difference in politeness among the responses to the two versions of messages sent with regard to the greeting, $t(37) = 6.43, p = .000$. Subjects who received the message with structural politeness indicators were significantly more polite in the greeting of their response ($M = 1.06, SD = .81$) than were subjects who received a message containing no politeness indicators ($M = .07, SD = .26$). Thus, participants accommodated structural politeness in the form of greetings in electronic mail.

With regard to politeness in the sign-off or closing remark and the two versions of messages sent, t-tests only approached significance, $t(56) = 1.89, p = .064$. Subjects who received the message with structural politeness indicators were not significantly more polite in

the closing remark of their response ($M = 1.42, SD = .76$) than were subjects who received a message containing no politeness indicators ($M = 1.04, SD = .79$). Thus, it could not be shown that participants accommodated structural politeness in the form of closing remarks in electronic mail, but did in the form of greetings.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, “Do verbal markers and structural elements interact to explain the extent to which individuals accommodate to politeness in email messages?” To answer research question 3, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey post hoc tests was conducted. The ANOVA investigated the differences between all four versions of email messages sent (verbal polite, structural polite, both, none), and the total level of politeness of subjects’ responses, calculated by adding politeness levels of greeting, body and closing remarks. Comparison of means indicated that subjects who received a message with both verbal and structural politeness indicators were most polite in their responses ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.12$), followed by those subjects who received a message containing only structural politeness indicators ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.45$), followed by those subjects who received a message containing only verbal politeness indicators ($M = 2.32, SD = 1.08$). Subjects who received a message containing no politeness indicators were least polite in their responses ($M = 1.61, SD = 1.13$). The results of the one-way ANOVA showed highly significant differences between the groups, $F(3,117) = 9.70, p = .000, \eta = .20$.

Table 2

2x2 Design of Politeness Messages Used With Mean Politeness Levels of Responses

Verbal Indicators	Structural Indicators	
	Yes	No
Yes	Message 3 $M = 3.13, SD = 1.12$	Message 1 $M = 2.32, SD = 1.08$
No	Message 2 $M = 2.97, SD = 1.45$	Message 4 $M = 1.61, SD = 1.13$

As the standard deviations of the means ranged from 1.08 to 1.45 and the variances ranged from 1.17 to 2.19, they were not drastically different. Levene's test of homogeneity was non significant, $p = .42$. Thus, equal variance could be assumed and Tukey tests were used as follow up procedures.

Post hoc Tukey tests showed that those who had received a message containing both verbal and structural politeness indicators were significantly more polite than those who had received a message containing only verbal politeness indicators, $p = .047$, and significantly more polite than those who had received a message containing no politeness indicators, $p = .000$. All other follow up comparisons were not significant. Thus, overall structural politeness indicators, especially the greeting as shown through results to research question 2, are accommodated. Verbal politeness indicators are only accommodated significantly when combined with structural elements.

Additional Statistics

Additional statistics were conducted to investigate the influence of demographics (age and gender), amount of experience using email, frequency of email use, and purpose of email use on one's propensity to accommodate to politeness indicators. Correlation analysis, in conjunction with the Bonferroni method to minimize chances of making a Type 1 error, were conducted and showed no significant results. Thus, results show that demographics, amount of experience using email, frequency of email use, and purpose of email use have no significant influence on politeness accommodation in email.

Finally, as some of Walther's previous research showed that time might play an important role in asynchronous CMC, we investigated whether level of politeness of a received message influences the speed with which a response is sent. Correlation analysis between all four versions of messages sent, and the time lag in minutes until a response was received, showed no significant results, $r(119) = .01, p = .94$. Thus, politeness level of a message sent does not influence the speed with which a response is sent.

Discussion

As the field of computer-mediated communication is continually evolving, communication theory has made advancements in explaining technology mediated communication, including interpersonal mediated communication. Recently, several studies have focused on issues of gender (Boneva et al., 2001; Thomson & Murachver, 2001), and emoticons (Walther & D'Addario, 2001) in email interactions. This study continues this line of research by examining politeness in electronic mail. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether people accommodate to both verbal and structural politeness indicators in email interactions. The

results of this research indicate that certain politeness indicators are accommodated. This research, thus, provides a new perspective on previous research which has argued that the absence of face-to-face interaction in computer-mediated communication fosters the use of flagrant and hostile language, also known as “flaming.” In the future, it may be possible to reduce flaming and instead to stimulate politeness by including basic politeness indicators in one’s online messages.

In this study, subjects ($n = 121$) received one of four message versions. Each version had the same content, but varied in politeness. Messages contained either verbal politeness indicators (i.e., please, thank you), or structural politeness indicators (i.e., greeting, closing remark), or both, or none. All messages were sent by Dr. Chris Aitken, a fictitious person, to equalize status differences and control for pre-existing personal relationships.

Results showed that participants accommodated verbal politeness indicators in the body of a message, and the structural politeness indicator of a greeting/salutation. When such indicators were included in messages, subjects responded with significantly more polite messages (greeting and body) than when indicators were absent. The structural politeness indicator of a closing remark/sign-off approached significance. More research is needed, possibly with a larger sample, to investigate this issue further.

In addition, results showed that messages containing both verbal and structural politeness indicators stimulated the most polite responses. Verbal politeness indicators alone did not result in overall more polite responses, but structural politeness indicators did. Thus, simply by including a greeting such as “Dear...” a message is perceived as more polite and this politeness is mirrored and accommodated by a similar level of politeness in the responding email message.

Demographics such as age and gender, amount of experience using email, frequency of email use, and purpose of email use do not influence politeness accommodation in electronic mail. Finally, politeness does not make a difference in the speed with which a message is answered, indicating that though time plays a factor in overall impression development and use of social cues in CMC interactions (Walther, 1992; Walther, Anderson & Park, 1994), it does not seem to operate within the time frame of a single interaction.

Overall, this research adds to the literature of social cues in CMC, social information processing, and accommodation theory in the mediated context by showing that politeness can be expressed easily in email, where it then acts as a social cue to enrich mediated electronic communication. Email recipients are capable of detecting politeness indicators, and, consciously or not, accommodate this politeness by including similar politeness indicators in their email responses. More research investigating other social context cues including level of formality, friendliness, and personalness and their communicative accommodation in personal messages is currently in process.

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Appendix A

Message 1: Verbal Polite

Only verbal politeness markers included

You expressed interest in being a participant in a research study I am conducting. Thank you for that. Participation would involve filling out a short survey asking about your uses of electronic mail and basic demographic information. If you are still interested, please send a response to me via email and I will forward the survey to you. As a visiting professor, I am not familiar with the research requirements of the COMS 130 course, so please also provide a brief explanation of why you wish to be a participant in this study. If you are no longer interested, please disregard this message. Thanks again for your interest.

Chris W. Aitken, Ph.D.

Message 2: Structural Polite

Only structural politeness elements included

Dear *[insert participant first name]*

Recently you expressed interest in being a participant in a research study I am conducting. Participation would involve filling out a short survey asking about your uses of electronic mail and basic demographic information. If you are still interested, send a response to me via email and I will forward the survey to you. As a visiting professor, I am not familiar with the research requirements of the COMS 130 course, so also provide a brief explanation of why you wish to be a participant in this study. If you are no longer interested, disregard this message.

Regards,
Chris W. Aitken, Ph.D.

Message 3: Both

Both verbal markers and structural elements included

Dear *[insert participant first name]*

Thank you for expressing interested in being a participant in a research study I am conducting. Participation would involve filling out a short survey asking about your uses of communication technology and basic demographic information. If you are still interested, please send a response to me via email and I will forward the survey to you. As a visiting professor, I am not familiar with the research requirements of the COMS 130 course, so please also provide a brief explanation of why you wish to be a participant in this study. If you are no longer interested, please disregard this message.

Thanks again.

Regards,
Chris W. Aitken, Ph.D.

Message 4: None

Neither verbal markers nor structural elements included

Recently you expressed interest in being a participant in a research study I am conducting. Participation would involve filling out a short survey asking about your uses of communication technology and basic demographic information. If you are still interested, send a response to me via email and I will forward the survey to you. As a visiting professor, I am not familiar with the research requirements of the COMS 130 course, so also provide a brief explanation of why you wish to be a participant in this study. If you are no longer interested, disregard this message.

Appendix B

Self Report Scale of Email Usage and Demographics, Administered via Email

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Please reply to this message. Make sure the text of this message will show in your reply. Then, place an “x” (without the “”) in front of the answer you would like to select.

Chris Aitken

This survey consists of items designed to provide information about your use of electronic mail and demographics. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond to each item according to the scale provided.

1. How many years have you been using email to interact with others?

(1) Less than 1

(2) 1-2

(3) 3-4

(4) 5-6

(5) 7-8

(6) 9-10

(7) More than 10

2. How many hours per week would you estimate you currently spend using email to interact with others?

(1) 0

(2) 1

(3) 2

(4) 3-4

(5) 5-6

(6) 7-8

(7) 9-10

(8) 11-12

___(9) 13-14

___(10) 15+

3. I use/would use email primarily for ...

___(1) interacting socially with acquaintances, friends, or family

___(2) school, work, or other task-related purposes

___(3) gathering information on current events/special interests

___(4) gathering information about an upcoming purchase

___(5) all of the above

___(6) none of the above

4. I use/would use email secondarily for ...

___(1) interacting socially with acquaintances, friends, or family

___(2) school, work, or other task-related purposes

___(3) gathering information on current events/special interests

___(4) gathering information about an upcoming purchase

___(5) all of the above

___(6) none of the above

5. What age group are you a member of?

___(1) 17-18

___(2) 19

___(3) 20

___(4) 21

___(5) 22-23

___(6) 24-26

___(7) 27-29

___(8) 30-35

___(9) 36-45

___(10) 46+

6. What is your sex?

___(1) female

___(2) male

This concludes the survey. Please send your responses to Dr. Chris Aitken via email at cmcresgp@.edu. Thank you for your participation.