Hanae EZZAOUYA[1] & Iori OHASHI [1,2]

[1] Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary
ezzaouya.hanae@gmail.com
[2] Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary and Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, Hungary
ohashiiori106084@gmail.com

EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF POLITENESS IN RELATION TO LANGUAGE ATTRITION AND INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS IN AN INTERCULTURAL ACADEMIC CONTEXT

Abstract: The present paper explores the intricacies of the perception of international doctoral students of politeness, linguistic choices, and language attrition, and their subsequent influence on intercultural academic relationships. The findings of this study provide an insight on the interplay between the perception of politeness and linguistic choices, a paramount determinant of successful academic communication. The data from this case study further shows that assimilation to the host country's culture and linguistic nuances along with the length of academic breaks in the home country emerge as critical factors in second and first language attrition. The study underscores the imperative need for developing pragmatic competence and particularly ensuring its reinforcement through prolonged sustained exposure and productive language practice in both the nascent and advanced stages of second language acquisition in academic contexts where English is used as a lingua franca. As the environment of academic communication is becoming increasingly globalized, the results of this study emphasize the significance of effective communication and sustained pragmatic competencies in establishing effective academic networks, collaborations, and relationships in diverse intercultural settings.

Keywords: second language attrition, perception of politeness, linguistic choices, English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA).

1. Introduction

In the vast field of linguistic research, language use and interpersonal relationships in an intercultural academic context stands out as a rich and compelling field for exploration, especially under the pragmatic influence of

the perception of politeness in shaping communication, and as a competence that is deeply rooted in the realm of intercultural communication that requires diligent acquisition and sustained maintenance and retention by individuals who are immersed in multicultural settings. Within this complex area of language and culture, a deeply instrumental phenomenon arises: the impact of a disuse period of productive language in cultural exposure.

The following questions arise and need to be diligently addressed: What happens linguistically when individuals are suddenly detached from the new cultural environments to which they have already started adapting? Is there a potential induction of language attrition in the pragmatic area of politeness as a result of such interruptions of language use? If so, how could such linguistic changes resonate in the flow of intercultural academic relationships where the necessity for effective communication is ever elevated?

Drawing from years of research on pragmatics, this paper aims to unearth answers to the questions above by embarking upon an investigation into how a discontinuity in the exposure to a new cultural environment could lead to degrees of language attrition in terms of politeness and have an impact on interpersonal relationships in an academic context. The following sections feature a literature review, methods, results, and conclusions of the research.

2. Literature review

The following literature review aims to provide an exploration and examination of already established theories, findings, and research related to politeness, second language attrition, and interpersonal relationships in an intercultural academic context in order to set the theoretical background upon which this research and its tools are based, to offer a comprehensive understanding of the present paper, and to identify key areas for future research.

3. Politeness

Starting with the concept of politeness, it can be said that research in this pragmatic field has moved through three waves, beginning with the "first wave" of politeness research which proposes a universal framework of politeness, to the "second wave" which investigates politeness through an analysis of co-constructed interactions between speakers in naturally occurring environments, until the more recent "third wave" which attempts to design politeness models across language and culture (see House & Kádár, 2021; Kádár, 2017 for an extensive review).

The first wave of politeness research was heavily influenced by Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work on politeness theory that introduced the key

concept of "face", defined as one's public self-image based on two aspects: positive face and negative face. According to their work the former constitutes a desire to be appreciated by others and maintain a positive self-image claimed by interactants, while the latter comprises a desire for respect in regards to one's basic right of freedom of action and speech, freedom from imposition, basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distractions.

Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that interactants cooperate to maintain each other's face and presume others do the same, whilst maintaining both their faces, regardless of differences in language and culture that arise from the mutual vulnerability of each other's face. This brought to light the concept of "face threatening acts" (FTAs), a term coined to refer to social acts which intrinsically threaten face reputation or social value in a conversation (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face threatening acts can be divided into two subtypes: threatening positive face acts and threatening negative face acts. Criticism, disagreement, accusations, insults, disapproval, challenges, apologies, acceptance of compliment, self-humiliation, and confessions can all be attributed to threatening positive face. Advice, orders, requests, warnings, suggestions, complaints, reminders, threats, interruptions, expressing thanks, accepting gratitude or apology, showing excuse, accepting offers, committing to doing something unfavourable can all be ascribed to threatening negative face. Criticism, disagreement, and similar acts are actions that may ruin one's public self-image if done incorrectly or deliberately, and advice, order, and similar acts are what may deprive freedom or action and speech. There exist other speech acts that are said to threaten both positive and negative face, namely complaints and interruptions. The features of FTAs provide an insight into speech acts and their impact on both positive and negative faces of a speaker.

As a response to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that received criticism from a cross-cultural point, Haugh and Schnieder (2012) argued that although this theory has had a significant impact on the field, it failed to capture the universality of politeness as the focus was rather on politeness differences between standard American English and standard British English than on other varieties of English and on other languages. They explained that when other varieties of English (e.g., Australian English, Singaporean English, & South African English) and regional differences (e.g., Northern and Southern English dialects in the UK) come into picture with "social strata" or social stratification (social hierarchical categorization), the dynamics become more complex (Haugh & Schnieder, p. 1018). This argument by Haugh and Schnieder illustrates the difficulty of conceptualising (im)politeness across English variations, even more so across language and cultures. Moreover, while Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) had a significant impact on the field of pragmatics, it still failed to explore politeness across cultures. As an example, Ide (1989) showed that politeness in cultures like Japan is not necessarily dependent on an individual's choice but is rather a cultural and social requisite.

All in all, the first wave of politeness research consisted of a universal theory that received criticism due to its lack of comprehensiveness.

The second wave of politeness research took into account the importance of analysing co-constructed speech, which is often idiosyncratic, targeting primarily the hearer's evaluation of politeness rather than solely the speaker's utterances and how they may impact face (House & Kádár, 2021). This evaluation from the hearer's side was what second wave politeness scholars focused on because they viewed conversation to be co-constructed, hence necessitating an investigation of naturally occurring data for examination; an approach that was overlooked in the first wave of politeness research which relied on synthesised utterances (House & Kádár, 2021, pp. 58–61). Although the second wave of politeness research derived authentic data from the real world, it still posed problems such as the absence of an alternative theory which explains (im)politeness of an idiosyncratic nature.

The third wave of politeness envisages modelling politeness across language and cultures from both a micro perspective, whereby politeness is seen as a co-constructed individualistic phenomenon and a macro perspective, whereby practices of the production and evaluation of politeness are captured through models (Kádár, 2017). Kádár emphasized that although the term "third wave" of politeness has not yet been used widely, it still has been tackled by scholars such as Haugh (2007). Cross-cultural politeness studies have been present since the first and second waves of politeness research, however co-constructed and idiosyncratic speech in an English-mediated environment only received special attention in the second wave of politeness research. Likewise, the third wave of politeness research adopts a bottom-up approach and examines large datasets to find similarities of production and evaluation of interpersonal communication in cross-cultural contexts (Kádár, 2017).

Despite the disparities surfacing from the three waves of politeness research, it is worth highlighting that the terms "first wave, second wave, and third wave" do not follow a temporal order, and that the ideas found in second wave of politeness research can also be present in the first and third waves (Kádár, 2017).

Moving to the concept of impoliteness, it can be noticed that research in this field did not receive much attention during the first wave. Here, Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) comes to light (House & Kádár, 2021). Grice (1975) hypothesised that speakers cooperate and make an effort to make the conversation successful in communication, an aspect of (im)politeness that was not taken into account during the first wave of politeness research. As Grice (1975, p. 45) states, communicative exchanges are "cooperative efforts, and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction", which can either be agreed upon from the beginning, developed during conversation, or completely spontaneous.

Research on impoliteness gained popularity after Culpeper's (1996) work, especially during the second and third waves of politeness research. Impoliteness

researchers sought to explore whether speakers need to intentionally act in inappropriate ways to be perceived as impolite.

While impoliteness can be defined as any "communicative acts perceived by members of a social community (and often intended by speakers) to be purposefully offensive" (Tracy and Tracy, 1998, p. 227), it does not solely necessitate the intentionality to offend, especially given the current situation of globalisation where people from around the world come together and communicate through a shared linguistic medium, in this case English as a lingua franca, which could create misunderstandings due to cultural sensitivities and differences. Impoliteness is rather said to emerge in three cases, namely when "(1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Culpeper, 2005, p. 38).

To sum up, what needs to be kept in mind is that politeness may not always be explicitly noticed as it is expected in everyday communication, however it can still be identified when one encounters situations facing over-politeness or impoliteness (House, 2006).

4. Linguistic choices

While exploring intercultural pragmatics, it can be noticed that different pragmatic norms reflect different cultural values, and that different cultural values and relations require different approaches to the same act. In attempting to engage in successful communication, second and foreign language speakers attempt to achieve the communicative competence that is needed for effective interactions. This includes developing four competences: grammatical, strategic, discursive, and sociolinguistic (Canale & Swain, 1980). Linguistic choices during communication will differ in all four competences. For instance, speakers may not succeed in delivering messages deemed to be polite because, beyond the structural use of language, the function of linguistic choices plays a pivotal role in sociolinguistic competence, which is a prerequisite for establishing successful communication. More elaborately, how words are selected and used conveys both literal messages and implicit social and cultural cues that affect how messages are received and interpreted. While one might have a high degree of proficiency in grammatical competence for example, they may not necessarily succeed in delivering messages that will be perceived as polite, as sociolinguistic competence is a prerequisite for establishing appropriateness and politeness in communication. Krulatz (2015) supports this claim by showing such instances where advanced level non-native speakers of Russian were still deemed impolite in their emails by native speakers' judgment in light of Brown and Levinson's (1987) FTAs of request. The study illustrated the importance of having sociolinguistic competence when making requests, as the linguistic choices of non-native speakers (NNSs) of Russian

who lacked sociolinguistic competence was suggested to impact their politeness' perception of native speakers (NSs) of Russian. As a concrete example, NNSs had a tendency to use "professor" or "dorogoj" to start and "spasibo" to end an email, contrasting with the NS preference for "s uvaženiem" and the formal use of "vy", which, according to the research, is an unfavourable practice that does not align with conciseness and conventional politeness formalities in Russian communication (Krulatz, 2015).

Similarly, a study by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) found that Greek Cypriot university students of English received poor evaluation on their personalities by NSs of English in their emails due to a misalignment in the perception of politeness of NNSs university students and that of NSs university lecturers. Although the number of participants were low in her study, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2016) still showed the significant role of politeness in causing pragmatic violation and subsequent overall negative personality evaluation, as illustrated in her work: "ENS [British English Native Speakers] lecturers drew negative evaluations about the sender not as a learner but as a person" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016, p. 15).

Focusing on the sociolinguistic competence, important pragmatic aspects that relate to politeness seem to play a pivotal role in the linguistic choices of speakers. Of these, cooperativeness in communication, context, and shared knowledge are of specific interest to the current paper. Starting with cooperativeness, Grice (1975) introduced the Cooperative Principle (CP), a general principle that covers how speakers cooperate to make communication successful. Grice (1975) introduced four maxims which make this viable, notably, the maxim of Quantity, the maxim of Quality, the maxim of Relation, and the maxim of Manner. Quantity requires contributing to communication by delivering an adequate and appropriate amount of information. Quality implies saying what the speaker believes to be true and avoiding giving false information. Relation means to "be relevant" (Grice, 1975, p. 46), which can be interpreted as speaking or asking questions that are relevant to the topic of the conversation. Manner consists of being perspicuous, meaning to be clear, brief, and orderly without ambiguity and obscurity. Grice's maxims are directly linked to politeness in that they lay the ground for understanding how speakers use language in socially accepted ways. By adhering to the maxims, speakers show consideration for their interlocutors' cognitive resources and time, which is seen as a cornerstone of politeness. For instance, providing concise information (quantity) and ensuring its truthfulness (quality), staying relevant (relation), and being clear (manner) reflect a consideration for the listener's context and background, which allows for a seamless exchange that aligns with the politeness norms that are expected in social interactions.

Moving to context, there are three kinds of contexts that affect the communicative situation: (1) a situational context that consists of the actual physical and social environment where an interactive situation takes place, along with what interactants know about it and their roles there within, (2) a background knowledge context

which comprises what interactants know about each other's cultures, areas of life, norms, discursive expectations, and interpersonal knowledge, and (3) a co-textual context which shows the extent to which interlocutors are aware of what is being discussed (Cutting, 2008).

As for shared knowledge, two areas need to be accounted for; the first being the linguistic or systematic knowledge of a certain language, and the second being the schematic knowledge that shows common knowledge of conventionally accepted reality and experience. (Widdowson, 1990, p. 102). Systematic knowledge in particular is closely related to Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory which presumes that speakers use language to perform acts such as giving orders, making requests, giving advice, etc. rather than to simply refer to the extent of truth or falsity of a statement. The way these speech acts are performed can either be direct or indirect. On the one hand, direct speech acts involve an explicit match between the intention of what is said and the conventional meaning of what is said where the form and function of speech are directly related. On the other hand, indirect speech acts involve a difference between the intention of what is being said and the conventional meaning of what is said, where the form and function are not directly related and an underlying implicit pragmatic meaning is embedded (Cutting, 2008). For instance, a speech act such as "can you reach the heater" could convey a direct question about someone's literal ability to reach a heater, and it could also convey an indirect pragmatic request to have the heater started. This illustration shows how the same message could be framed as a direct request showing the speaker's intentions, or an indirect statement that can be interpreted based on the context.

Linguistic choices play a pivotal role in shaping communication and the way speech acts are conveyed and interpreted. These choices reflect the speakers' intention and are pertinent in regard to the (in)directness of speech acts as elucidated by Austin (1962). For instance, linguistic items can be chosen to reflect a speaker's explicit intention with the conventional meaning so as to reduce ambiguity and enhance mutual intelligibility (such as in the direct command "close the window"), or they can be selected to carry implicit meanings to be derived from the context (such as in the indirect saying "it is getting cold" that implies the need for an act to close the window). Thereafter, when discussing linguistic choices, it is both important to highlight their variance across grammatical, strategic, discursive, and sociolinguistic competences, and to explore how these choices facilitate (in)directness degrees in speech acts, which in turn reflects varying degrees of politeness, formality, and clarity. This affirms the centrality of linguistic choices as a means of executing speech acts in social interactions.

That being said, when studying linguistic choices, it is important to pay attention to the contextual aspects that are taken into account in communication, the levels of politeness and formality, the degree of mutual intelligibility, and the type of vocabulary that is used in interactions.

5. English as a Lingua Franca in academic contexts

Covering the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in an academic context, it is worth highlighting the emergence, prevalence, and implications of this field in relation to politeness and academia. ELF is broadly defined as "communication in English between speakers with different first languages" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). It is an approach that focuses on establishing mutual intelligibility in communication through the modification of language use to best suit the communicative situation (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Speakers of ELF come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and focus rather on fluidity and adaptability to establish effective communication than conformity to native-speaker linguistic norms (Jenkins, 2007). Moreover, not only does ELF play an important role in daily communication, but it also has a key role in academia. In this regard, Jenkins (2000) asserts that English as a Lingua Franca in Academia (ELFA) is a significant dynamic tool that facilitates communication among academics of different backgrounds. Fenton-Smith et al. (2017) further support this by showing that more and more scientific publications are produced in English, leading to a growing number of international collaborations that necessitate a solid ground for communication through a shared medium, in this case ELF. This has important implications for academic practice. Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) showed that English as a lingua franca lays the groundwork for a pragmatic approach to communication, whereby intelligibility and understanding override the importance of attaining native-speaker proficiency, a study further supported by Seidlhofer's (2011) 'let it pass' idea where intelligibility is favoured over fixing minor grammatical errors.

While ELF usage has undeniable advantages, it still comes with challenges such as problems with the quality of language production that result from communicative misunderstandings or linguistic limitations (Flowerdew, 2013). One particularly complex aspect of communication that can lead to such misunderstandings, especially when due to diverging cultural norms and expectations, is the afore-reviewed concept of politeness. Politeness has a focal point in establishing interpersonal relationships and plays a pivotal role in ELF communication, especially in the academic context. Politeness in ELFA aligns closely with intercultural or international politeness strategies such as expressing gratitude, apologizing, and prioritizing directness (Jenkins, 2007) rather than sociolinguistic norms deriving from traditional Anglo-American norms such as indirectness, deference in language use, and hedging (Kecskes, 2014). For instance, Kecskes's (2007) research showed that ELF speakers most often prefer using compositional meaning of expressions rather than using formulaic language to enhance mutual-intelligibility, an approach that is seen to promote transparency and minimize potential misunderstandings arising from culture-specific figurative language. ELF speakers' hesitance to use non-literal expressions such as phrasal verbs and idioms stems from prioritizing intelligibility over fluency, which in turn leads to effective communication during lingua franca exchanges. As noted by Sifianou (2013), these

intercultural strategies feature tendencies to employ directness and explicitness in the speakers' communicative style, with a special focus on clarity rather than indirectness and deference to reduce ambiguity among interlocutors, given the multicultural environment of ELFA interactions. Moreover, communicating politely in an ELFA context integrally necessitates the co-construction and negotiation of meaning through actively shaping and agreeing upon shared linguistic norms, mutually respecting and tolerating differences, and seeking consensus to embody a democratic ethos of interactions, hence not favouring any linguistic group and accommodating to everyone's basic communicative needs (Mauranen, 2012).

In summary, as varied interpretations of what constitutes polite language may come into play, it is paramount to consider that politeness is a complex concept that is deeply entwined with speakers' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the communicative context, and that to alleviate the impact of this complexity on communication, there has to be a keen awareness of the interlocutors' varied norms and an established negotiated construct rather than a fixed set of linguistic rules, all to ensure the clarity, intelligibility, unambiguity, mutual understanding, and consensus needed for effective communication in academic ELF contexts, and to embody a pragmatic approach to language use. It is then of special interest to continue researching this topic in the current paper, hoping to further our understanding of what promotes or hinders successful interpersonal relationships among academics of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in light of a varied perception of politeness.

6. Second language attrition

Second language attrition, an emerging significant field in applied linguistics, can be defined as a decreased use of a second or foreign language that leads to partial or total loss of language skills (Seliger, 1989). Reviewing recent literature, theory development, empirical studies and debates in the field, it is notable that early research of second language attrition focused primarily on the descriptive aspect of the field. For instance, Seliger (1996) posited the regression hypothesis, proposing that the sequence of language acquisition inversely reflects the order of language loss in attrition. Likewise, Paradis (2004) brought about a new perspective with the Activation Threshold Hypothesis, suggesting that second language attrition is characterised by an increased difficulty of language access, rather than a complete loss of language competence; a view further supported by Bahrick's (1984) empirical study which proved that the process of relearning a formerly acquired second language is meaningfully more rapid and easier than its initial acquisition. In a similar vein, Porte (2003) described second language attrition as a parallel phenomenon to first language attrition, however with different mechanisms.

Other aspects of second language attrition have had a share of increased interest; particularly, cross-linguistic influence. Hohenstein et al. (2006) showed

that the way both first and second languages impact one another within the same individual has a significant effect on the processes of language acquisition, which also has an implication on language attrition. Subsequently, numerous studies have explored other factors that facilitate second language attrition, particularly cognitive, affective, and social factors. For example, Schmid (2011) concluded that cognitive determinants such as proficiency level and age are important factors of attrition, showing that language users with higher proficiency are less likely to experience attrition. In a related fashion, Hakuta et al. (2003) established that early acquisition leads to slower attrition, a study that aligns well with Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis which states that acquisition in early life reinforces the acquired linguistic skills. Similarly, de Bot and Weltens (1991) posited that languages acquired at later points are more prone to attrition. As for affective factors, de Bot and Stoessel (2000) stressed that determinants such as motivation and attitude towards the target language affect the likelihood of potential attrition, where higher motivation and a positive attitude decrease the chances of attrition, proposing that language retention is not solely a cognitive phenomenon, rather a process that is profoundly entwined with the individual's emotional stance towards a language.

Approaching second language attrition from a sociolinguistic perspective, it is worth noting that sociolinguistic factors such as language use, context, and identity, are especially worth considering. For example, Tsimpli et al. (2004) found a significant correlation between the frequency of language use and language retention, implying that consistent language practice is more likely to prevent, or at least slow down, attrition.

Seeing second language attrition from an educational lens, Weltens and Cohen (1989) discerned that higher education students who terminated their studies of a foreign language showed a major drop in language proficiency albeit after a short period of time. Similarly, Murtagh (2003) established a longitudinal study that showed how attrition of English as a second language increased with time when Irish participants lacked adequate exposure to the target language.

While all the above-mentioned works provide significant insights into the field of second language attrition, there remain linguistic aspects that have not been given due attention; notably, those of a pragmatic nature. As Schmid & de Leeuw (2019) state, "to date there is little to no research that we are aware of investigating language attrition with respect to pragmatic conventions of politeness and formality" (p. 187). Of these few studies, Schauer (2007) explored German learners' interlanguage pragmatic development of English at a foreign university over one year, focusing primarily on productive pragmatic development and awareness. In particular, Schauer's research pinpointed the overlooked pragmatic aspect of using external modifiers in requests and found differences in their frequency of use in native speakers compared to language learners. Notably, factors such as learner differences, exposure to the L2 environment, and motivation to create personal connections with native speakers were observed to influence the

learners' pragmatic development, which suggests that temporal and individual elements directly impact the acquisition of a second language (Schauer, 2007). Moreover, it was revealed that learners benefiting from exchange programs in the target language environment were more likely to develop their pragmatic skills than those who did not. Instances of these results were drawn from authentic experiences of learners who engaged in simple activities such as obtaining a medical prescription or opening a bank account, which were found to enrich the participants' cultural and linguistic understanding (Schauer, 2007). That being said, overlooking pragmatic aspects in EFL contexts can create a disadvantage between learners who received pragmatic instruction or spent time in the L2 environment and those who did not. Whilst Schauer's study did not explicitly touch upon aspects of language attrition, the results have strong implications on language acquisition/ learning, which in turn can affect attrition.

Another study that linked pragmatic aspects to language attrition showed that analysing the discourse of self-repair in free speech provides a perspective on studying language attrition where potential links between self-repair strategies and their role in mitigating vocabulary attrition or retention can be drawn (Ezzaouya, 2022). While this study did not directly cover the role of politeness in self-repair, it showed that proficient speakers employed self-repair strategies such as lexical and quasi-lexical pause fillers, false starts, and repetitions to make up for disfluencies in communication, whereas those experiencing attrition used these strategies as a means of gaining time to retrieve lexical items. This underscores the influence of self-repair on linguistic choice and vocabulary competence rather than politeness in particular.

To form a more comprehensive model of attrition, further research is needed, especially in light of the nuanced studies of pragmatic contexts. Thus, this paper attempts to fill this research gap, open a new dimension in exploring second language attrition, and further our understanding of this linguistic phenomenon through an investigation of the potential intersection between attrition and politeness in an intercultural academic context.

In conclusion, the above literature review serves as the foundation of the research design undertaken in this study. It is essential to note that the literature shapes the design and trajectory of the interview schedule and survey instruments. By integrating the seminal works highlighted in the literature review into the methodology, the paper aims to bridge extant knowledge with the distinct foci of the present investigation.

7. Methods

The following section highlights the methodology employed in this research. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and

quantitative data collection tools. The research design, data collection procedures, participants, and measures implemented to ensure reliability and validity are elucidated below.

8. Research design

This study examined twelve international students at a doctoral school of linguistics in a Hungarian higher education institution where English is the main medium of instruction and communication to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the complex dynamics of second language attrition and politeness within each participant, and to account for their unique experiences and perspectives. The choice of participants strategically allowed for a manageable data collection as it provided a spectrum of insights into second language attrition and politeness strategies. The number of participants, though low, is sufficient to capture varied linguistic and personal historic backgrounds without compromising the depth of the study. This approach incorporates both longer-term expatriates having assimilated to the host country's culture, and shorter-term participants discovering new social and linguistic norms. By examining each individual's unique journey, this specific size sets a balance between the inclusion of diverse perspectives and the feasibility of conducting the in-depth qualitative side of the research.

Moreover, the study hypothesised that (1) these international doctoral students would base their linguistic choices on their perception of politeness, that (2) participants who are perceived to be polite have higher chances of establishing secure relationships with fellow doctoral students and professors, and that (3) participants who return to the host country after a vacation in their home country are likely to experience second language attrition, especially in terms of politeness. To test the hypotheses, three research question (RQ)s were posed:

RQ1: How does the perception of politeness affect the participants' linguistic choices in their intercultural academic context?

RQ2. How could linguistic changes resonate in the flow of intercultural academic relationships where the necessity for effective communication is constantly elevated?

RQ3. What happens linguistically when individuals are suddenly detached from the new cultural environments they have already started adapting to, and is there a potential induction of language attrition in the pragmatic arena of politeness as a result of such interruptions of language use?

9. Data collection

To answer the research questions above, the study relied on two sources of data collection: a survey and an interview schedule.

10. Survey

The survey was used to investigate how international doctoral students chose lexical items when communicating with other international doctoral students in an intercultural academic setting (RQ1) and how the perception of politeness inhibits the dynamics of academic relationships (RQ2). The survey questions consisted of four sections, each tackling a different category of inquiry. The first section collected the participants' background information. The second section explored participants' perception of politeness. The third section investigated the participants' linguistic choices in light of their opinion on what constitutes politeness (e.g., the behaviours they employ to act politely, using direct/indirect speech acts, and their linguistic knowledge) and the actions they take when communicating in an intercultural academic context. Finally, the fourth section briefly explored the participants' views of the importance of politeness in establishing relationships. In short, the survey incorporated questions related to politeness based on the pragmatic concepts reviewed in the literature, namely; the Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962); face and FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987); situational background and co-textual context (Cutting, 2008; Widdowson, 1990); CP and the four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice, 1975). While some of these might be perceived as outdated, they still provide foundational theoretical frameworks that have influenced subsequent research in pragmatics. For example, early works on pragmatics helped understand how contexts influence linguistic meaning, which has been essential in developing models for pragmatic competence and performance. Such frameworks have enabled researchers to analyse various ways in which interactants use and understand speech acts, conversational strategies, and implicatures across languages and cultures, serving thereby as historical pillars and methodological benchmarks against which new empirical and theoretical findings are measured, offering basic terminologies indispensable for grasping pragmatic instances in real-world communication. Their significance, thereafter, lies in the foundational understanding they offer, setting the stage for contemporary interpretations and applications within the area of pragmatic studies.

11. Interview schedule

An interview schedule was deemed appropriate for this study compared to an interview guide as it allowed the researchers to simultaneously conduct the same interview and generate comparable and compatible data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The strict format of scheduling allowed each interviewer to minimize any variation in the questions asked. This rigidity, however, did not imply that deviation from the schedule was not permissible since participants came from varied backgrounds, had unique experiences and generated different responses.

The interview schedule was designed with predetermined questions which laid the foundation for discussions, ensuring that each session adhered to the same standard with minimal variation in the questioning. Follow-up questions were asked depending on the initial responses of the participants. A set of potential follow up questions within our schedule were incorporated to address the emergent themes in real-time. They were carefully crafted to align with the study's objectives and were employed based on the depth of the initial question set responses. In the double analysis approach, both researchers independently reviewed various subsets of interviews to identify variations in data interpretation. Detailed discussions post-interview were held to reconcile any discrepancies, and to ensure consistency and reliability while allowing for documented flexibility in response to participants' answers.

The interview questions were devised based on four categories of inquiry: the perception of politeness, politeness attrition, coping strategies, and academic relationships. Each interview question was formulated to fit within the categorization of Patton's (1990) typology of open-ended interview questions (e.g., experience/behaviour questions, opinion/value questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, background/demographic questions, and sensory questions) as cited in Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 85). However, sensory questions were not used as they were not of specific interest to the present study. The questions were sequenced from general to specific, starting with opinions, experience, and knowledge, and ending with relationships with professors and other international doctoral students resident in the same host country.

The first phase of the interview started with participants' perception of politeness and their initial experience of arriving at the host country, Hungary (Budapest, to be more precise). Questions on politeness in their home country in comparison to their host country were posed, then an experience in the shift of the perception of politeness to explore the impact of second language attrition was investigated. Moreover, coping strategies which participants used to cope with any changes in their politeness level were examined. Finally, questions regarding academic relationships with professors of the host country and other international doctoral students were asked.

Our assumptions were that international students had returned home during breaks; however, this was not the case for all students, especially with the recent global pandemic (COVID-19). Not all participants went back to their home country during vacation and academic breaks which caused issues when asking questions about their experience of potential language attrition and shift in the perception of politeness. These issues were rectified by changing the settings from "home country" to "other countries they have visited" for those who had not travelled back to their home country. An additional question was added investigating participants' family and friends' observations on their politeness to substitute questions on differences in the perception of politeness found between them and their family (home country

norm). Because the study focused on language attrition as a phenomenon which asked for their experience outside of the host country, some interviews with those who have never travelled were significantly shorter than others.

12. Participants

The study's participants were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria were based on the research aim and the participants' characteristics and relevance of their profiles to the phenomena under study. It is worth mentioning that the co-authors of the present paper also participated in the study as they also belong to the target group. Twelve international students who have been studying at a doctoral school of linguistics in Budapest, Hungary from one to four years were recruited as participants for this study. Of these participants, 7 individuals identified as females and 5 as males. Their age ranged between 25 and 50 years old, and their profiles comprised native speakers of Mandarin, French, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, Indonesian, German, Wolaitato, Kazakh, Javanese, Vietnamese, the Minnan dialect, and Kiswahili. While 8 participants identified English as their second language, 4 individuals identified Mandarin, French, Indonesian, Amharic as their respective second languages and English as another language they can speak. As far as their level of proficiency is concerned, 3 participants assessed their level as C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 3 as C1, and 2 as B2.

All 12 participants were invited to complete the survey as a first phase of data collection, then they were asked to take part in both online and offline interviews, which both of the authors conducted. For online interviews, Zoom (Version 5.13.11) was used to host and record the meeting, and for offline interviews, the Voice Memo app (default app) of iPhone 12 pro was used to solely record the audio which was then transferred to the researcher's computer and immediately deleted from the smartphone storage for security and ethical compliance. The participants consented to the use of their anonymized answers for research purposes both prior to filling in the survey and at the beginning of the interview. All interview recordings were then transcribed using Microsoft Word (Version 16.72), and all participants' names and their affiliations were anonymized.

13. Validity and reliability

The present study followed the guidelines of qualitative research interview (Guba, 1991; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) for research design and analyses with trustworthiness. Using a qualitative interview was selected as one of the primary methods for this study as it enabled the eliciting of in-depth and rich narratives

that are essential for understanding the complexities of the research subject, and as it allowed for a more nuanced exploration of participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

The study recruited only international doctoral students studying in Budapest, Hungary as a participant group and focused on participants' perception on politeness and its impact in intercultural academic settings, ensuring construct validity. Interview questions were formulated following guidelines by Maykut & Morehouse (1994), while usage of interview schedules and design of interview questions conformed with Patton's (1990) interview question typology. Both of Maykut & Morehouse (1994) and Patton's (1990) guidelines emphasize that interview schedules should be designed to ensure depth in the data collection, while allowing for flexibility in exploring topics arising during the interview. This aligns well with the exploratory nature of our study, which aims to delve into the participants' experiences, with a particular focus on their behaviours, opinions, feelings, knowledge, and backgrounds. The survey was built around pragmatic and politeness content as discussed in the literature. In addition to the design of the survey and interview questions, the present study further ensured stepwise replication and triangulation (Guba, 1991) and the authors comprehensively double analysed the interviews for coding, thematic consistency, discrepancies, and the emergence of unforeseen insights. To ensure trustworthiness and reliability, individually collected interview data were transcribed and later reviewed and coded by the respective researchers, focusing mainly on emergent themes and patterns of participant responses, along with divergence in perspectives as recommended by Guba (1991), whose guidelines emphasize credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research to validate the findings and interpretations. The internal validity of the data was secured by having the two researchers code the interviews independently and later compare the codes and rules for inclusion together as a team. Finally, the usage of the survey and the interview questions allowed for the establishment of triangulation.

14. Results

14.1. Survey results

The survey investigated international doctoral students' perception of politeness and linguistic choices as well as their impact on intercultural academic relationships. A total number of 12 participants responded to the survey. As previously mentioned, the survey comprised three sections exploring (1) participants' background information, (2) their perception of politeness, (3) their linguistic choices, and (4) their academic relationships. Here the results of sections (2), (3), and (4)are presented.

14.2. Perception of politeness

Survey questions in this section investigated particpants' understanding and their perception of what constitutes politeness. Given examples from situational, background, and co-textual contexts as can be seen in Appendix (C) (Cutting, 2008; Widdowson, 1990), more than half of the participants explicitly responded that factors such as being aware of the physical and social environments where the conversation takes place, background knowledge such as the interlocutor's cultural and personal background, and giving attention to the speaker through non-verbal cues like nodding and maintaining eye contact to indicate active listening and engagement constitute politeness. The remainder only selected knowing the cultural and personal background and acting accordingly to the norm and expectation of a particular discourse community as being polite. Interestingly, of the latter group of respondents, none of them considered paying attention to what the interlocutor has said through non-verbal cues like nodding and maintaining eye contact as a requisite for being polite. Participants' understanding of speech acts (direct and indirect speech acts) and their usage had mixed results. Participants were given actual examples of each speech act when deciding their choice of preference, and their survey responses showed that they preferred using direct speech acts (33%) compared to indirect speech acts (25%). The rest (42%) opted for using either option, depending on individual situations. The survey questions also incorporated positive and negative FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to account for participants' perception of polite behaviour. The majority of participants agreed upon expressing thanks as polite behaviour, followed by accepting gratitude and apologies from others. Regarding linguistic options participants considered as polite, many selected using honorifics or titles to address the interlocutor and showing respect through gratitude from the offered options. Knowledge of language and common knowledge of shared experience, however, were not aascribed the same value as using honorifics and appreciating others. Only five out of twelve participants considered all the above options as showing linguistic politeness.

14.3. Linguistic choices

As far as linguistic choices are concerned, half of the participants responded that they would choose words they think are appropriate for the situation as a general criterion (50%), out of which (33.3%) are words that doctoral students perceived as generally polite, (33%) are words that are easy for others to understand, (25%) are honorifics or titles, and (16.7%) are words that participants are familiar with. The other half of the participants (50%) chose all the above options. Similarly, students reported commonly modifying the level of formality of words in accordance with their interlocutor, particularly through the usage of academic and technical

words, and sometimes vocabulary deemed to impress others. Although the subject matter/topic was reported to influence linguistic choices, the intended audience or interlocutor were more commonly considered, and the level of respect intended to be conveyed followed through. One of the interesting findings from the survey responses was that participants who reported being proficient in English also reported having received occasional feedback regarding their politeness levels; in particular, (58.3%) were subject to a remark from their professors or fellow doctoral students for being impolite.

14.4. Relationships

As for the third section investigating relationships in the survey, all participants suggested that showing politeness to build academic relationships with fellow doctoral students and professors is extremely important. Accordingly, all participants but one believed that fellow doctoral students and professors whom they perceived as more polite are approachable and easier to talk to, and that these polite individuals have better academic relationships with their fellow doctoral students and professors. Moreover, 10 participants reported never having had any negative experiences with other fellow doctoral students where they felt they were impolite to them, unlike the remaining two participants who claimed that it was sometimes the case. This falls in line with the frequency of having had negative experiences with professors being impolite to participants, in which case 10 individuals reported it to be a rare occurrence, and two to be a frequent encounter. Conversely, all participants claimed that they often, if not always, had positive experiences with professors where they felt they were polite to them, all maintaining the belief that cultural differences affect the way behaviour is perceived to be polite in academic settings among fellow doctoral students and professors. Lastly, 8 participants thought that it is very important for universities to teach international doctoral students about politeness in an intercultural setting and its role in building academic relationships with their fellow doctoral students and professors, and 3 found it either somewhat or moderately important. Teachings on politeness would incorporate pragmatic approaches aligned with third-wave politeness research, emphasizing contextually nuanced and culturally sensitive interactions. This framework guided the formulation of our questions and was central to our discussions on the conception of politeness with participants, acknowledging their varied cultural backgrounds and personal definitions as revealed through interviews and surveys.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in light of the sections above along with their potential experience of attrition, an interview schedule was devised to capture more detailed information and example situations that embody the participants' experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

14.5. Interview results

Delving into the qualitative data collected through the in-depth interview, this part aims at unravelling themes and experiences from the participants' narrative to provide an understanding of the studied phenomena. The interviews aimed to mainly explore the participants' experience of potential attrition in their acquired politeness norms upon returning to Hungary, the host country, after spending a break, either the summer vacation or mid-term autumn and spring holidays, in their home countries. The aim was to shed light on any alterations that may have occurred in their perception of politeness and the contextual factors that may have contributed to these changes.

The schedule was semi-structured and consistent across interviews, allowing participants the freedom to elaborate on their unique experiences. Each interview started with broad open-ended question about participants' understanding of the concept of politeness as whole, followed by questions about their initial experiences in the host country in terms of politeness and language use, through a comparison between politeness in the home country vs host country, leading to questions about changes noticed in their use of politeness along with coping strategies used to readapt to the host' country's norms, and ended in questions about their interpersonal relationship within the academic context. The transcripts were analysed thematically, starting with coding, then identifying and refining themes related to three categories: the perception of politeness, academic relationships, and politeness attrition.

A total of nine interviews were conducted as not all participants who took part in the survey proceeded with the interview. As an initial stage, each researcher coded and categorised the interviews they conducted individually, then they reviewed one another's work, later they compared their findings and identified the themes found in the interviews all together. The coding was grounded in the theoretical framework established by our literature review, which also informed our category formulation, ensuring that they reflect the key concepts relevant to our research questions and objectives.

Starting with the first category of the perception of politeness, four recurring themes were identified during the interview analysis. The first theme consisted of "Politeness Awareness" where participants highlighted the importance of having knowledge about what constitutes politeness both in their native country and host country and compared the perceptions of their own politeness norms to those of the host country. The second theme comprised "Adaptation to Politeness" which reflected the challenges that participants faced while attempting to adjust to the host country's politeness norms upon their first arrival to the host country, upon their return to their home country, and after an extended break in their home country. The latter adaptation included readjusting or readapting to the host country's norms after any significant absence, acknowledging that the adaptation

process is dynamic and context dependent. This led to differences in "Politeness Use", a theme that showed how each participant uniquely used their language based on their own politeness knowledge, politeness beliefs, and external factors. Here, it was unanimously reported that aiming at using the host country's native language is most important as it is deemed to be polite behaviour, regardless of the level of proficiency, especially when using softer and lower tones. 'Tones' in this context refer to the use of voice modulation; specifically, the respondents indicated that softer volume and gentler speech inflections are perceived as more polite. Conversely, the last theme "Politeness beliefs" showed what participants believed to constitute polite behaviour, and they unanimously reported that having a high proficiency in English also meant having the optimal ability and skills to be most polite.

Moving to the second category of relationships, several themes were identified: "Politeness as a Prerequisite of relational benefits", "Self-confidence and Self-belief in one's politeness", "Politeness Confusion", and "Coping Strategies and Relationships". In relation to the first theme, it was unanimously believed that politeness is essential for successful communication and negotiation with one another, especially in an intercultural academic setting, as illustrated in one of their responses (see "Tom PP" below). Participants also reported that being polite led to better reactions or responses from interlocutors and was more beneficial to them when cultivating relationships.

Tom (PP): I think politeness is an important thing in, for the language speakers, whatever language they speak because the polite, politeness might, might, whether you will speak politely or not politely, internal politeness. It might not really change the meaning itself, but it might change the way the the way people will react or respond. Maybe the meaning might not might change entirely, but the way people will react might be totally different.

In relation to the second theme, it was observed that participants commonly perceived themselves to be polite, regardless of their lack of explicit knowledge of the host culture's politeness norms. As can be seen in the excerpt below, Sam seems confident with his politeness levels and acknowledges that although differences exist in cultural and politeness norms, it is the interlocutor's responsibility to understand the speaker's politeness.

Sam (SS): I think I have always been polite in, in my own, in my own view. I have always been, been polite (...). it is, it depends on, on the culture. Maybe there could be differences in, in cultural inclinations towards politeness. But I think, uh, I have always been polite (…), *I don't really think it counts on me because I have always believed or, or viewed myself as, as polite* because that's how I, I, I, I view life. You should be polite at all, at all circumstances.

The third theme showed that participants commonly reported having politeness confusion both in respect to their own behavior and in interpreting others', as they lacked explicit knowledge of the politeness norms of the host country, and that they mostly observed those norms in casual authentic interactions between native speakers. Some reported that using the non-verbal cues of interlocutors such as smiling and nodding was the main indicator of approval for their behaviour. The following example shows an instance of politeness confusion where the participant seems to be choosing to maintain her own norms as a form of being polite, potentially to avoid the discomfort of misaligning with uncertain local expectations; while also using the strategy in generating the answer itself.

> Sarah (PA) & (PC): I think I, I don't know about, frankly speaking, *I don't know about their norms of politeness here*. But I think the, I, I would follow like the way that I follow right now, like I would use the same, the norms [my norms]. And since they are appropriate to their community and they don't feel any kind of disagreement with them

This leads to the fourth theme, which revealed that some participants reached out to friends and colleagues for a confirmation of their politeness along with extensive apologies as a coping mechanism to politeness confusion. However, all participants reported needing more structured coping strategies to overcome the challenging politeness confusion, which would lead to the creation of better relationships. The authors proposed a couple of strategies and discussed them with the participants one by one, leading to a consensus on the most helpful approaches. This method allowed for an in-depth understanding of each strategy's benefits, as perceived by participants, and how these contributed to the findings presented. Of these strategies, having courses on intercultural communication and language usage, taking part in training in cultural awareness, and having student support group discussions would be most helpful. Additionally, on the one hand participants felt that learning the host language is considered polite and many even attempted to take language courses during their study in the doctoral program to facilitate establishing effective relationships both in professional and non-professional settings. On the other hand, participants rarely reported the need to learn politeness norms of English as a Lingua Franca to establish successful academic relationships, even if it was the main communication means in their academic settings.

Finishing with the category of politeness attrition, three themes were identified: "difficulties in academic communication", "politeness shift", and "host country (dis) connection". Concerning the first theme, all participants reported having difficulty in polite communication in academic settings. More particularly, the difficulty was related to instantly finding polite words, dropping the use of honorifics to make professional relations closer, dropping the excessive repetition of "thank you", and overusing hedging, conditionals, and modals. Regarding politeness shift, it was a

general tendency for participants who spent shorter breaks in their HC to report difficulties adapting to their native country (NC) during the break, going as far as receiving remarks on having become less or more polite, and three participants who spent longer breaks in their NC reported difficulties readapting to their host country (HC) politeness norms. In both cases, participants deliberately increased their politeness levels upon their return to the HC both in academic and non-academic settings. There was however one instance of a participant who did not report any shift in their politeness in either country. Lastly, concerning connection to the host country, participants who spent 3 to 4 years in the HC reported almost fully assimilating to the HC's politeness, and those who spent more time or breaks in their NC reported less assimilation to the HC's politeness.

15. Interpretation of the results

The results presented above helped come down to answers sought in the research questions. To answer RQ (1) how the perception of politeness affects linguistic choices in an intercultural academic context, the survey results showed that participants select linguistic items deemed appropriate based on a number of factors, including an item's level of politeness, level of formality, the context of the situation, and the interlocutors addressed. Most participants reported using their native language politeness norms when making linguistic choices, and that so far for some, it has rarely caused them to receive any feedback about being impolite in the host country, a statement that remains ungeneralizable and highly subjective to each participant's unique experience. These results proved the initial hypothesis that the international doctoral students would base their linguistic choices on their perception of politeness to be true. In other words, the perception of politeness amongst international doctoral students as shown in the survey is based on an interplay of contextual understanding, cultural background knowledge, and the application of speech acts. The findings suggest that politeness is not a static concept but is dynamic and contingent upon various factors that are situationally defined. It appears that the participants' understanding of politeness is anchored in the implicit norms they have absorbed over time and their educational and cultural experiences. This includes an intuitive understanding of what constitutes polite behavior within their own cultural contexts, which is later applied in the host country. Relying on native politeness norms potentially reflects a comfort with known conventions and the assumptions that these norms have a broader applicability than they might in reality. For instance, the use of non-verbal cures by some respondents as a politeness norm indicates an emphasis on the role of such cues across cultures. Moreover, preferring direct speech acts by a third of the participants could reflect a cultural orientation towards explicit communication, while the mixed responses to the use of either act suggests a nuanced approach to

linguistic choices, potentially influenced by the desire to avoid misunderstandings in communication. As for the general consensus over expressing thanks, accepting gratitude, apologizing, and using honorifics and titles, it could be inferred that certain polite behaviour is fundamental across cultures. Still, the lesser importance placed on language proficiency and shared experiences could indicate that while these elements are recognized, they are not deemed as critical to the expression of politeness as are more overt acts of respect and acknowledgment in the academic context. These layers of understanding and behaviours provide a rich starting point for further investigation into how international students navigate the complexities of intercultural academic communication and the implications for their social integration and academic success.

To address RQ (2) how could linguistic changes resonate in the flow of intercultural academic relationships where the necessity for effective communication is constantly elevated? the results showed that although all participants claimed that adhering to the host country's politeness norms is essential for successful communication and establishing effective intercultural academic relationships, they did not try to explicitly learn about the host country's politeness norms, nor did they consider adhering to the politeness norms of ELFA. Interestingly, this did not seem to cause nine participants of different nationalities, age, and gender any obstacles in establishing successful academic relationships, at least in their view. A potential hint as to why these participants did not face the obstacles could be the role of other communicative factors such as the universality of academic norms transcending local politeness norms, the adaptive strategies individuals naturally develop in multicultural environments, the high level of English proficiency among academics, the prevalence of English as the medium of instruction and communication in many higher education institutions, or universally recognized forms of polite behaviours. It would be worth exploring whether the academic setting itself - often characterized by its own subset of rules and norms - provides a common ground that supersedes local cultural expectations. In such an environment, the commonality of academic goals and the focus on scholarly pursuits may promote a more inclusive and forgiving atmosphere for politeness discrepancies. For other participants, however, their lack of knowledge did create a difficulty in establishing academic relationships, both with fellow students and professors. Based on the interview schedule analysis, results also proved the hypothesis that participants who are perceived to be polite have higher chances of establishing secure relationships with fellow doctoral students and professors to be true. It becomes pertinent here to consider the impact of power dynamics on the interpretation and practice of politeness within academic relationships. Although the focus of the study was not on how professors perceived their student politeness and its impact on their relationships, it did take into account how the students perceived and assessed their interactions with their professors taking politeness as a factor influencing their relationships. The initial findings suggest

the general importance of politeness across interactions with both fellow students and professors, however the differences between these two groups need to be accounted for as professors may carry different expectations related to politeness in comparison with interactions amongst peers. While this distinction is not a primary focus in the current research, it is still a critical aspect for understating the interplay between linguistic behaviours and relationship building. To address this issue, a future analysis ought to examine how power dynamics influence the perception and enactment of politeness in academic settings, particularly by delving into the specific incidents where politeness is noted as a factor facilitating or hindering academic rapport.

As far as RQ (3) tackling what happens linguistically when individuals are suddenly detached from the new cultural environments they have already started adapting to, and if there is a potential induction of language attrition in the pragmatic arena of politeness as a result of such interruptions of language use, the interviews showed that some participants did not experience any instances of second language politeness attrition after returning to the host country following shorter breaks, and that others suspect having experienced politeness attrition following longer breaks. In the former case, it appeared that there were more indications of first language politeness attrition. This proved the hypothesis that participants who return to the host country after a vacation in their home country are likely to experience second language attrition, especially in terms of politeness to be partially true, as the duration of the break seemed to be a pivotal factor influencing the occurrence of attrition.

16. Conclusion

The present study investigated international doctoral students' perception of politeness and its attrition, their linguistic choices, and their impact on intercultural academic relationships. Results from both the survey and the interview indicated that the perception of politeness plays a significant role in linguistic choices, which in turn affects the communication needed for establishing successful academic relationships. Results also showed that assimilation to the host country and the duration of academic breaks in the home country influenced the activation of either first or second language attrition in the pragmatic area of politeness. Moreover, problems in the perception of politeness are likely due to having overlooked the importance of developing pragmatic competence in the early stages of second language acquisition. In the current context, where English is used as a lingua Franca in an academic context, it seems that having this pragmatic competence is ever more mandatory as some participants saw it to be a necessity to create an academic network and establish good relationships. To make the study more effective, future studies are encouraged to quantitatively explore the studied

phenomena and seek generalizations through the inclusion of more participants of diverse backgrounds in academic settings. Accordingly, the study could lead to better insights by exploring the phenomena from the perspective of participants from the host country, in particular professors and academics.

References

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words. Harvard University William James lectures 1955.* Oxford University Press.

Bahrick, H. P. (1984). Semantic memory content in permastore. *American Psychologist*, *39*(2), 92–104.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Cogo, A., & Dewey, M. (2012). *Analysing English as a lingua franca: A corpus-driven investigation*. Continuum.

Culpeper, J. (2005). Impoliteness and Entertainment in the Television Quiz Show: *The Weakest Link*. *Journal of Politeness Research*, *1*(1), 35–72. https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.1.35

Cutting, J. (2008). *Pragmatics and discourse: A resource book for students* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

de Bot, K., & Stoessel, S. (2000). In search of yesterday's words: Reactivating a long-forgotten language. *Applied Linguistics*, *21*(3), 333–353.

de Bot, K., & Weltens, B. (1991). Recapitulation, regression, and language loss. In H. W. Seliger & R. M. Vago (Eds.), *First Language Attrition* (pp. 31–53). Cambridge University Press.

de Bot, K., Martens, V., & Stoessel, S. (2004). Finding residual lexical knowledge: The "savings" paradigm revisited. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *8*(4), 373–383.

Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2016). Variation in evaluations of the (im)politeness of emails from L2 learners and perceptions of the personality of their senders. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *106*, 1–19.

Ezzaouya, H. (2022). Self-repair and vocabulary attrition in English as a second language: a multiple case study of Moroccan non-native speakers of English. *Working Papers in Language Pedagogy, 17*(1), 23–44.

Fenton-Smith, B., Humphreys, P., & Walkinshaw, I. (2017). *English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in Asia-Pacific*. Springer.

Flowerdew, J. (2013). English for research publication purposes. In B. Paltridge & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (pp. 301–322). Wiley.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry. *Educational Communication and Technology*, *29*(2), 75–91.

Hakuta, K., Bialystok, E., & Wiley, E. (2003). Critical evidence: A test of the critical period hypothesis for second language acquisition. *Psychological Science*, *14*(1), 31–38.

Hansen, L., Umeda, Y., & McKinney, M. (2002). Savings in the relearning of second language vocabulary: The effects of time and proficiency. *Language Learning*, *52*(4), 653–678.

Haugh, M. (2007). The discursive challenge to politeness research: An interactional alternative. *Journal of politeness research*, *3*(2), 295–317.

Haugh, M., & Schneider, K. P. (2012). Im/politeness across Englishes, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *44*(9), 1017–1021. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.05.010

Hohenstein, J., Eisenberg, A., & Naigles, L. (2006). Is he floating across or crossing afloat? Cross-influence of L1 and L2 in Spanish–English bilingual adults. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *9*(3), 249–261. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728906002616

House, J. (2006) Communicative styles in English and German. *European Journal of English Studies*, *10*(3), 249–267.

House J., & Kádár, D. Z. (2021). *Cross-cultural pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.

Ide, S. (1989). Formal forms and discernment: Two neglected aspects of universals of linguistic politeness. *Multilingua*, *8*, 223–248.

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford University Press.

Kádár, D. Z. (2017). Politeness in Pragmatics. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.218

Kankaanranta, A., & Planken, B. (2010). BELF competence as business knowledge of internationally operating business professionals. *Journal of Business Communication*, *47*(4), 380–407.

Kecskes, I. (2014). *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

Kecskes, I. (2017). Context-dependency and impoliteness in intercultural communication. *Journal of Politeness Research*, *13*(1), 7–31. https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2015-0019

Krulatz, A. (2015). Judgments of politeness in Russian: How non-native requests are perceived by Native speakers. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 24*(1).103–122.

Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological Foundations of Language*. Wiley.

Mauranen, A. (2012). *Exploring ELF: Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*. Cambridge University Press.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203485781

Murtagh, L. (2003). Retention and attrition among second language speakers in Irish-medium primary schooling. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *6*(3), 201–217.

Paradis, M. (2004). *A Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Patton, M. Q., (1990). *Qualitative Evaluations and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Porte, G. (2003). English from a distance: Code-mixing and blending in the L1 output of long-term resident overseas EFL teachers. In G. Porte & S. Carter (Eds.), *Input and Evidence: The Raw Material of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 247–278). John Benjamins.

Schauer, G. A. (2007). Finding the right words in the study abroad context: The development of German learners' use of external modifiers in English. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 4*(2), 193–220.

Schmid, M. S. (2011). *Language attrition*. Cambridge University Press.

Schmid, M. S., & de Leeuw, E. (2019). Introduction to Linguistic Factors in Language Attrition. In M. S. Schmid & B. Köpke (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of language attrition* (pp. 181–190). Oxford University Press.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford University Press.

Seliger, H.W. (1989). Deterioration and creativity in second language attrition. In K. Hyltenstam & L. K. Obler (Eds.), *Bilingualism Across the Lifespan: Aspects of Acquisition, Maturity, and Loss* (pp. 173–188). Cambridge University Press.

Seliger, H .W. (1996). Primary language attrition in the context of bilingualism. In W.C. Ritchie & T.K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 605–625). CA Academic Press.

Sifianou, M. (2013). The impact of globalisation on politeness and impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *55*, 86–102.

Tracy, K., & Tracy, S. J. (1998). Rudeness at 911: Reconceptualizing Face and Face Attack, *Human Communication Research*, *25*(2), 225–251.

Tardy, C. (2004). The role of English in scientific communication: lingua franca or Tyrannosaurus

rex? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *3*(3), 247–269.

Tsimpli, I. M., Sorace, A., Heycock, C., & Filiaci, F. (2004). First language attrition and syntactic subjects: A study of Greek and Italian near-native speakers of English. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *8*(3), 257–277.

Weltens, B., & Cohen, A. D. (1989). Language attrition research: An annotated bibliography. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *11*(3), 363–375.

Widdowson, H. G. (1990). *Aspects of language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (2023). *ZOOM cloud meetings* (Version 5.13.11). ht*t*ps://zoom.us/

Appendices
Appendix A
Coding Category

Category name and Code	Rules of inclusion
Self-confidence and Self-belief (SS)	Individuals believe themselves to be polite with or without cultural knowledge of host country
Politeness as a Prerequisite leading to relational benefit (PP)	Individuals believe being polite is a prerequisite for establishing successful relationships, making it beneficial
Politeness Confusion (PC)	Not having full awareness of politeness norms of host country / intercultural academic settings
Coping Strategies and Relationships (CSR)	Using strategies to cope with politeness confusion to establish academic relationships
Politeness Awareness (PA)	Having knowledge of what constitutes politeness in NC and HC is important.
Adaptation to Politeness norms (AP)	Adapting to the politeness norms of the HC is perceived to be a need
Politeness Belief (PB)	Beliefs about what constitutes polite behaviours
Politeness Use (PU)	Using polite language is based on politeness awareness, politeness belief, and external factors
Difficulties in Academic communication (DA)	Individuals have experienced difficulties with polite communication in academic settings (all participants)
Politeness Shift (PS)	Signs of politeness shift, receiving a remark of either becoming more / less polite in their NC / HC.
HC (dis)connection (HCC)	Connection with the HC impacts readjustment to HC norms

Note. NC = native culture; HC = host culture.

Appendix B
Interview Questions with Interview Schedule Guideline

Interview Questions (max 90 min):

Interview questions are designed to ask about these four aspects: *(1) perception of politeness, (2) politeness attrition, (3) coping strategies, and (4) academic relationships.* Follow instructions on the interview question sheet.

- Take necessary notes on findings and ask follow-up questions.
- If the interview takes more time than anticipated, ask again if the participant is fine with continuing.

Follow up questions are in italics.

Opening lines:

Good morning/afternoon.

Thank you very much for your willingness to take part in this interview. I will be your interviewer for this study. My name is …………….... I am studying for a Ph.D. at the Doctoral School of Linguistics in Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, Hungary.

I am currently conducting research on politeness.

Your answers and data remain anonymous and are only used for the purpose of this research. Do you accept to take part in this interview?

Note: If participants have NOT gone back, ask if they have been to any other countries and change the settings.

Section 1: Perception of politeness

Initial Experience in Host Country (first arrival to Hungary)

1. How would you define politeness?
   Could you mention a specific behaviours or phrase you consider universally polite?
2. What do you think of politeness?
   Do you believe that what is deemed polite in one culture can be seen as impolite in another?
3. In your view, have you seen yourself as becoming more polite or impolite when you moved to Hungary? If so, can you give an example?
   Can you describe any adjustments you've had to make to your behaviours that have made you feel more or less comfortable?
4. Have you found any difficulties in communicating politely using English when you arrived in Hungary for the first time?
   What specific aspects of using English for communication have posed the most significant challenges in being polite?
5. Have you experienced any cultural shock when interacting with Hungarian people in terms of politeness and language use?
   Can you share an incident where cultural differences in politeness or language use led to a misunderstanding?

Comparison between Home Country and Host Country

1. In your opinion, what does it mean to be polite in your culture?
   Are there any customs or social norms in your culture that might be misunderstood as impolite by others?

2. In your opinion, is it necessary to adjust your politeness levels in different countries? If yes, can you please describe it?
   How do you decide when and how to adjust your politeness in a new cultural setting?
3. In your view, what do you think about the value of politeness in communication in your home country compared to in Hungary?
   How do you think the perceived value of politeness in Hungary has influenced your communication style?
4. Do you prefer using English with your fellow international doctoral students who share your L1, or do you shift to your shared L1?
   - In case you use your L1, do you change your levels of politeness and formality?
5. Have you seen differences in the way people respond to politeness in your home country compared to in Hungary?
5. How important do you think it is to adapt to the politeness norms of Hungary? Why?
6. Have you ever chosen a word in English that you thought was polite, but that was perceived as impolite by your interlocutor? If so, please provide an example.

Return to the home country
1. Did you return to your hometown during breaks (either academic (spring and autumn) or summer breaks)?
   o If so, how many times did you go back home?
   o What was the duration of your stay?
2. What languages did you use while interacting with people in your hometown? E

Return to host country
1. Have you experienced any culture shock when you came back to Hungary after the break in your home country? Can you give me examples of situations?
2. Have you experienced any difficulties while readjusting to Hungary's culture and language after the break in your home country? Can you give me examples of situations?

Section 2: Politeness Attrition
1. Have you generally seen or felt any changes in the levels of your politeness after returning to Hungary from the break in your home country?
2. Have you seen or felt any changes in communicating politely in English with your fellow doctoral students and professors after returning to Hungary from the break in your home country?
3. Have you seen or felt any changes in the levels of your politeness when communicating with Hungarian people in general after returning to Hungary from the break in your home country?
4. What do you consider to be a polite language in English?
5. Have you experienced any difficulties in finding the right words to use in different situations? (for example, in academic contexts vs with friends)
6. Have you found yourself using words or sentences that are widespread in your culture but less common in Hungarian culture? Can you give me an example of this situation?
7. Have you received any comments or remarks on your politeness levels or language use after you returned to Hungary from the break in your home country?

Section 3: Coping Strategies
1. What strategies did you use to cope with any changes in your politeness levels after returning to your host country?

2. What do you think of politeness in body language?
3. Have you reached out to any Hungarian people (professors, peers, friends, etc.) for support or help to improve your communication after you returned to Hungary from the break in your home country?
4. I will propose some resources and I want you to think of how they can be helpful in maintaining politeness levels while living abroad:
   - o Courses on intercultural communication and language usage
   - o Personal coaching on language and intercultural communication
   - o Trainings in cultural awareness
   - o Student support group discussions
   - o Do you recommend any other resources?

Section 4: Relationships
1. How would you describe your relationship with the Hungarian professors?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your Hungarian fellow doctoral students?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your non-Hungarian fellow doctoral students?
4. How would you describe your relationship with other international students in general?
5. Have you felt a difference in politeness levels while interacting with Hungarian fellow doctoral students in comparison to international ones? If so, how? Can you give me an example of the situation?
6. Have you ever misinterpreted someone's politeness or impoliteness in an academic context? If so, please provide an example.
7. Do you think that politeness differences cause problems in your interactions in your multicultural academic setting?
8. In your view, what is the relationship between politeness and interactions in a multicultural academic setting?
9. Do you find it difficult to establish relationships with Hungarian people? Why?
10. What do you feel when you use English with Hungarian people?
11. Would you consider it more polite to use Hungarian than English while interacting with Hungarian people?

Closing line:
Thank you very much for your time today. Do you have any comments or questions regarding the interview?

Appendix C

Survey

Types of questions: Yes/No questions, Multiple choice, Written answers

Demographic information

Age; Gender; First language; Second language (+ other languages); Level of English proficiency; Number of years studying in intercultural academic context.

Perception of politeness

Which of the following options do you think constitutes politeness?
- Being aware of physical context, social context, mental worlds, and roles of people in interaction
- Being aware of cultural knowledge and interpersonal knowledge various areas of life, each other, norms and expectations of particular discourse community
- Being aware of what people have been saying

Which of these linguistic options constitutes politeness?
- Having knowledge of language
- Having common knowledge of shared experience
- Using honorifics or titles (mr. mrs. sir. dr. etc.)
- Saying please and thank you

Which of the following options do you consider as more polite?
- Using indirect speech acts (ex: saying "it's cold outside" instead of saying "could you please close the window")
- Using direct speech acts (ex: saying "could you please close the window" directly)
- Both

Please select what you consider as polite behaviour(s) from the following items
- Showing disapproval, criticism, disagreements, challenges
- Expressing thanks
- Accepting gratitude or apology
- Accepting excuses
- Accepting offers
- Accepting apologies
- Accepting compliments
- Showing humbleness
- Making confessions
- Giving orders
- Making requests
- Making suggestions
- Giving advice
- Giving reminders
- Giving warnings
- Doing something unfavourable for the benefit of others
- Making complaints
- Interrupting the person
- all of the above
- none of the above

Which of the following items is/ are valuable in communication?
>-Saying what you believe to be true and have evidence for it.
>-Not saying too much or too less than the information is required
>-Being relevant (ex: to only talk about things related to the main topic)
>-Being perspicuous (clearly, briefly, orderly, without ambiguity and obscurity)
>-Having awareness of intercultural differences
>-all of the above
>-none of the above

Linguistic choices

How do you select words when communicating in English?
>-I use words I know well
>-I use words I think are appropriate for the situation
>-I use words I think are polite
>-I use words that are easy for others to understand
>-I use honorifics or titles (Mr., Mrs., sir., Dr., etc.)
>-All of the above
>-None of the above

Do you modify your choice of words in academic contexts?
>-None of the above
>-Yes, I use more technical words
>-Yes, I use more academic words
>-Yes, I use words that I think will impress the interlocutor
>-No, I use the same general words as in other non-academic contexts

Which of the following items determine your level of formality when choosing words in academic contexts?
>-The subject matter/ topic
>-The intended audience/ interlocutor
>-The level of respect I want to convey

How often have you been corrected by a professor or fellow doctoral student for using inappropriate language or being impolite in an academic context?
>-(Never; rarely; sometimes; often; always)

Overall assessment

How confident are you in your ability to communicate politely in academic contexts with your international fellow doctoral students and professors?
>-(Very confident; Somewhat confident; Not very confident; Not at all confident)

In your opinion, how much of an impact does politeness have on effective communication in academic contexts?
>-(Significant impact; Moderate impact; Minor impact; No impact at all)

Relationships

In your view, how important is showing politeness to build academic relationships with fellow doctoral students and professors?
>-(Extremely important; Very important; Moderately important; Somewhat important; Not important)

Do you think that fellow doctoral students and professors whom you perceive as more polite are approachable and easier to talk to?
>-Yes/no

In your opinion, do you think that students who are perceived as more polite have better academic relationships with their fellow doctoral students and professors?

     -Yes/no

How often have you had negative experiences with other fellow doctoral students where you felt they were impolite to you?

     -(Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Often; Always)

How often have you had positive experiences with other fellow doctoral students where you felt they were polite to you?

-(Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Often; Always)

How often have you had negative experiences with professors where you felt they were impolite to you?

-(Always; Often; Sometimes; Rarely; Never)

How often have you had positive experiences with professors where you felt they were polite to you?

-(Always; Often; Sometimes; Rarely; Never)

Do you think that cultural differences affect the way behaviour is perceived to be polite in academic settings among fellow doctoral students and professors?

-Yes/no

How important do you think it is for universities to teach international doctoral students about politeness in an intercultural setting and its role in building academic relationships with their fellow doctoral students and professors?

-(Not important; Somewhat important; Moderately important; Very important; Extremely important)