

## Academic Relational Positioning in EFL Higher Education: Lexico-Pragmatic Development Across Digitally Mediated Interaction

Andi Nurhikmah <sup>1</sup>  

Anugerah Febrian Syam <sup>2</sup>  

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Indonesia, <sup>2</sup> Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

American Psychological Association 7th Edition Style Citation

Correspondence Author : Andi Nurhikmah [andyhykmah@gmail.com](mailto:andyhykmah@gmail.com)

### Article History

Received 21 February 2026

Revised 24 March 2026

Accepted 25 March 2026

### Keywords

Academic Relational Positioning; Lexico-Pragmatic Development; Digitally Mediated Interaction; Micro-Longitudinal Analysis; EFL Higher Education

### Subjects

English Language Education; English as a Foreign Language

### Article Structure

[Introduction](#)

[Method](#)

[Findings and Discussion](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[References](#)

### Abstract

In the increasingly digitalized era of higher education, digital academic communication spaces have become a primary arena for the formation of academic identity and legitimacy. Although studies on EFL communicative competence and digital pragmatics continue to grow, few studies have explored micro-longitudinally how lexico-pragmatic development contributes to the formation of academic relational positioning in digitally mediated academic interactions. This study aims to investigate the trajectory of this development in the context of EFL higher education. The study employed an ethnographically informed longitudinal qualitative inquiry design involving 12 students and 2 lecturers over one semester. Data in the form of authentic archives of digital interactions (WhatsApp groups and LMS) were collected through systematic archiving and analyzed using a theoretically informed qualitative analysis grounded in positioning theory and relational work. The results show a shift from formulaic minimalism to collocational alignment, an expansion of the lexico-pragmatic repertoire, and a more contextual and strategic relational orchestration stage. These findings confirm that the development of academic competence is not solely linguistic, but also relational and institutional. This study concludes that digitally mediated interaction is a crucial space for the process of academic discourse socialization in digitalized higher education.



@ 2026 The Author(s). Published by Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## A. Introduction

In the past two decades, digitally mediated academic interaction has become a key space for forming academic relationships in higher education. Platforms such as WhatsApp groups, learning management systems, and institutional messaging environments are no longer simply technical communication media (Smyslova, 2026), but rather arenas where students construct, (Jiang & Hyland, 2026) negotiate (Kayas et al., 2024), and position themselves socially and academically (Perrotta & Pangrazio, 2023). In this context, language is not only a means of conveying information but also a mechanism for relational positioning that represents identity, stance, and orientation toward institutional norms.

In EFL higher education studies, attention to communicative competence has evolved from a focus on grammatical accuracy to a more complex understanding of pragmatic appropriateness (Altakhaineh et al., 2024), relational work (Kentmen et al., 2023), and institutional discourse (Nhat Tuan et al., 2025). Contemporary research shows that academic competence lies not only in the ability to construct structurally correct sentences but also in the ability to mobilise lexico-pragmatic resources contextually in institutionalised interactions (Peng & Zhou, 2025). In the digital space, this dimension becomes even more significant because the absence of non-verbal cues encourages reliance on lexical precision, collocation, formulaic expressions, and idiomaticity (Liu & Cheng, 2025).

Although the literature on digital pragmatics and formulaic language development is growing, studies specifically exploring the microdevelopment of lexico-pragmatic competence within the context of academic relational positioning remain relatively limited (East & Wang, 2025). Most studies on EFL communicative competence still focus on linguistic performance in formal pedagogical settings or task-based assessments (Kim et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the developmental dimensions that naturally occur in everyday digital interactions (Mora & Mora-Plaza, 2023) and actually shape students' academic socialization have not been widely explored longitudinally and in context (Wei & Zhao, 2024).

Building on these gaps, this study is grounded in positioning theory and the framework of relational work as central lenses for understanding language use in academic interaction. Positioning theory conceptualizes discourse as a site where speakers dynamically construct identities, rights, and obligations through interaction (Edelsbrunner et al., 2023). In academic contexts, this positioning is closely tied to how participants negotiate epistemic authority, legitimacy, and participation within institutional structures (Hanushek et al., 2025). Complementing this, relational work emphasizes that politeness, mitigation, and stance-taking are not fixed linguistic features but socially negotiated practices that index alignment, distance, and hierarchy (Purinton Drake et al., 2023). Within digitally mediated environments, these processes become more explicit as participants rely heavily on lexical and pragmatic cues to signal relational intent in the absence of non-verbal resources.

Previous studies on EFL pragmatic development have highlighted the importance of formulaic sequences (Cancino & Iturrieta, 2022), collocational competence (Gholami, 2024), and pragmatic routines in achieving communicative appropriateness (Al-Harhi et al., 2025). Research in digital discourse has further shown that online academic interaction reshapes how learners perform stance

(Eslami et al., 2023), politeness (Jeong & Chiu, 2025), and identity through written exchanges (Chung & Tang, 2022). However, these strands of research have largely been examined separately: studies of lexico-pragmatic development tend to focus on linguistic accuracy and fluency. In contrast, research on relational positioning emphasizes identity construction without systematically tracing linguistic development over time. As a result, there remains a limited understanding of how evolving lexico-pragmatic resources function as mechanisms for negotiating academic relationships in naturalistic, digitally mediated interaction across time.

Furthermore, research on academic discourse socialization often separates lexical development from relational dynamics (Zhou & Larina, 2024). However, in practice, the choice of collocations, formulaic sequences, expressions of gratitude, mitigation, and idioms in communication with lecturers is not merely a linguistic issue but a relational positioning strategy that reflects an orientation toward academic hierarchy (Nurhikmah et al., 2025), solidarity (Nurhikmah et al., 2023), and institutional legitimacy (Syam & Nurhikmah, 2025). In the EFL context, these dynamics are further complex because students operate within a language system that is not entirely their primary linguistic repertoire.

Departing from this conceptual tension, this study positions itself at the intersection of lexico-pragmatic development, relational positioning theory, and digitally mediated academic interaction. This research does not view competency development as a linear shift from “error” to “truth” but rather as a process of negotiating meaning and identity within ongoing communication practices. Using an ethnographically informed approach, this study explores how EFL students gradually construct and reconstruct academic relational positioning through the transformation of their use of collocations, formulaic expressions, and idiomatic resources in digital university interactions.

Specifically, this study investigates how the development of students’ lexico-pragmatic repertoires is reflected in their communication practices with lecturers and peers in digital academic contexts. Rather than evaluating accuracy alone, this study examines how lexical and pragmatic choices function as tools for establishing legitimacy, demonstrating deference, managing social proximity, and negotiating epistemic authority. Thus, this research contributes to a more integrated understanding of academic competency development as both a linguistic and relational phenomenon.

This study contributes to three main aspects. First, this study theoretically expands the discourse on academic communicative competence by situating it within the frameworks of relational positioning and institutional discourse. Second, methodologically, this study adopts an ethnographic perspective to capture the dynamics of competence development in everyday communication practices, rather than in a controlled experimental setting. Third, empirically, this study provides evidence that digitally mediated interaction serves as a space for developing lexico-pragmatic competence in EFL higher education.

By focusing on the development of academic relational positioning in digital interactions, this study seeks to answer the question: how do EFL students construct and transform their lexico-pragmatic resources in the process of negotiating academic relationships? And how does this development reflect the

broader process of academic discourse socialization in the context of digitalized higher education?

## B. Method

This study employed an ethnographically informed micro-longitudinal qualitative design to examine the development of lexico-pragmatic resources in digitally mediated academic interactions within an EFL higher education context. Grounded in an interpretive ethnographic perspective, the study conceptualizes language as a social practice through which academic relational positioning is continuously constructed and negotiated. The micro-longitudinal approach enabled the tracing of gradual transformations in students' communicative repertoires over time through naturally occurring digital interactions.

The participants consisted of 12 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in a private university, along with two course lecturers who functioned as interactional counterparts within the institutional discourse context. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: active engagement in digitally mediated academic communication (e.g., WhatsApp groups and learning management systems), consistent use of English in written academic interactions, and willingness to participate in longitudinal observation. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent before data collection. To support contextual interpretation, background information on participants' linguistic profiles and learning experiences was also collected.

**Table 1. Participants' demography**

Participant	Role in Interaction	Self-reported English Proficiency	Frequency of Digital Academic Interaction
S1	Student	Intermediate	High (daily)
S2	Student	Upper-Intermediate	High (daily)
S3	Student	Intermediate	Moderate (3-4 times/week)
S4	Student	Upper-Intermediate	High (daily)
S5	Student	Intermediate	Moderate (3-4 times/week)
S6	Student	Advanced	High (daily)
S7	Student	Intermediate	High (daily)
S8	Student	Upper-Intermediate	Moderate (3-4 times/week)
S9	Student	Intermediate	High (daily)
S10	Student	Advanced	High (daily)
S11	Student	Upper-Intermediate	Moderate (3-4 times/week)
S12	Student	Intermediate	High (daily)
L1	Lecturer	Advanced	High (daily)
L2	Lecturer	Advanced	High (daily)

The primary data comprised authentic archives of digitally mediated academic interactions collected over one academic semester (approximately seven months). These included class WhatsApp group discussions, individual student-lecturer exchanges regarding academic activities, and written contributions in the learning management system. Data were collected through non-participant ethnographic observation, with systematic archiving conducted at biweekly intervals to ensure data integrity. All interactions were preserved in their original written form to

maintain naturalistic validity. In addition, reflective field notes were compiled to document contextual academic events, such as assignment deadlines and evaluative discussions, which may have influenced relational positioning dynamics. All data were anonymized using participant codes to ensure confidentiality.

Data analysis was conducted using a theoretically informed qualitative approach integrating positioning theory, relational work, and a lexico-pragmatic development framework. The primary unit of analysis was the lexico-pragmatic segment, defined as stretches of discourse containing collocations, formulaic expressions, gratitude expressions, mitigators, stance markers, or idiomatic sequences that contribute to the construction of academic relational positioning. Analysis proceeded iteratively, allowing the identification of patterns across time and participants. Each segment was examined in relation to both its linguistic form and its relational function within the institutional context, including deferential positioning, epistemic stance-taking, alignment, and mitigation. To enhance analytical rigor, a second researcher independently coded a subset of the data, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to ensure consistency. Triangulation across data sources and the use of reflective field notes further supported the findings' validity.

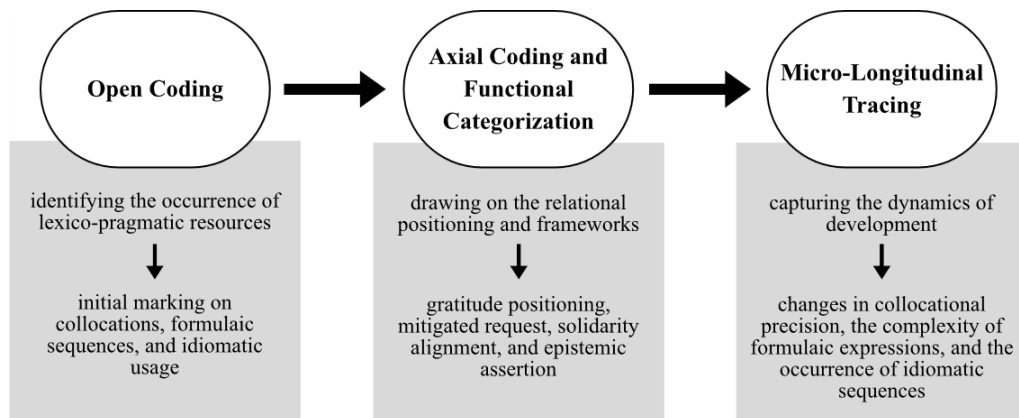


Figure 1. Analysis technique

### C. Findings and Discussion

#### Early-Stage Relational Positioning through Formulaic Minimalism

Preliminary analysis of a corpus of digital interactions indicates that in the early semester, students' academic relational positioning practices are characterized by the use of minimal, repetitive, formulaic expressions that have not yet been fully contextually calibrated to the norms of institutional discourse. The lexico-pragmatic repertoire at this stage tends to be limited to routine expressions with simple syntactic structures and minimal relational elaboration. Rather than functioning as precise stance-taking strategies, the expressions used reflect a generic, differential orientation.

Most early interactions demonstrate the use of gratitude expressions that are fragmentary and not fully integrated into more complex utterance structures. These expressions function as markers of compliance or quick responses to academic authority, but do not yet demonstrate sensitivity to relational nuance or epistemic positioning.

The following example represents this initial pattern:

- S3: Yes sir  
 S3: Big thanks, sir  
 S3: I will submit soon

In the quotes above, formulaic minimalism is evident in the use of short, stand-alone phrases without contextual elaboration. The expression “Big thanks, sir” attempts differentiation, but, collocationally, it doesn’t fully align with the academic norms of gratitude in English academic discourse. This response is responsive but doesn’t explicitly align with the instruction’s content or the lecturer’s epistemic position.

A similar pattern emerged in other interactions in the early weeks of the semester:

- S7: *Thanks mam*  
 S7: *Noted*  
 S7: *Will do*

Expressions like “Noted” and “Will do” function as compliance markers, but their use alone without additional mitigation or framing indicates a limited repertoire. In the context of digitally mediated academic interaction, this choice results in a functional positioning with minimal relational dimension. There are no mitigation, hedging, or elaboration strategies that signal awareness of academic hierarchy or the construction of solidarity.

Furthermore, in some cases, the use of collocations was less precise, even though they were semantically understandable:

- S1: *Thank you for your explanation, I very understand now*  
 S1: *Sorry for late submit*

In this data, forms such as “I very understand” and “late submit” demonstrate limitations in collocational control. However, rather than being interpreted as “errors,” these findings indicate an early phase of the lexico-pragmatic negotiation process, in which students begin to access linguistic resources to establish academic legitimacy, even though they have not yet fully internalized the idioms.

This phase reflects what can be called emergent differential positioning. Students orient themselves toward academic authority through routine expressions, but this positioning does not yet demonstrate the complexity of managing stance, solidarity, or epistemic alignment. Interactions are transactional and focused on completing tasks rather than on building more refined academic relationships.

**Table 2. Lexico-Pragmatic Features in Early-Stage Relational Positioning**

Feature Type	Expressions	Linguistic Characteristics	Relational Function
Gratitude (minimal)	“Thanks”, “Big thanks sir”	Short, standalone, non-elaborated	Compliance marker
Compliance markers	“Noted”, “Will do”	Formulaic, repetitive	Task acknowledgment
Collocational deviations	“I very understand”, “late submit”	Non-standard collocations	Attempted legitimacy
Lack of mitigation	Direct responses	No hedging or framing	Transactional interaction

This phase of formulaic minimalism forms an important baseline for subsequent analysis. This limited but consistent repertoire suggests that, in the initial stages, academic relational positioning is constructed through economical, direct linguistic strategies. However, it is precisely within this limitation that embryonic development is visible: initial attempts to adopt forms associated with academic discourse, although not yet fully calibrated in collocation or pragmatics.

These findings indicate that in the early stages of the semester, students rely on a restricted lexico-pragmatic repertoire to navigate the academic digital space. The resulting positioning is differential but not yet fully strategic, opening up space for more complex transformations in the subsequent phases of their micro-longitudinal developmental trajectory.

This study reveals that academic relational positioning in digitally mediated academic interaction develops through a progressive yet dynamic micro-longitudinal trajectory. The findings demonstrate a shift from formulaic minimalism to collocational alignment, then to repertoire expansion, and finally to a more flexible, context-sensitive stage of relational orchestration. This development reflects not only increased linguistic precision but also a transformation in how EFL students navigate hierarchy (Essabari & Hiba, 2025), solidarity (Smith et al., 2024), and legitimacy within the structure of institutional discourse (Wang & Zhu, 2025). Thus, lexico-pragmatic development emerges as a central mechanism in the naturalistic process of socialization into academic discourse in the digital university space (Zheng et al., 2025).

### **Collocational Alignment and Emerging Pragmatic Calibration**

As the semester progressed, the analysis revealed a more systematic shift in the use of lexico-pragmatic resources. While in the initial phase, students relied on formulaic minimalism, at this stage, more precise collocational alignment and the emergence of pragmatic calibration strategies aligned with institutional discourse norms were evident. This change was evident not only in improved collocation forms but also in a more contextual and targeted integration of relational functions.

In general, students began producing gratitude expressions that were more syntactically complete and more collocationally aligned. Expressions of gratitude no longer stood alone as a sign of compliance, but were accompanied by elaborations that reflected epistemic uptake of the lecturer's explanation.

The following example illustrates the pattern:

S4: *Thank you for your detailed explanation, Sir. It really helps me clarify the concept.*

S4: *I appreciate your feedback on my draft.*

In this data, the phrases “Thank you for your detailed explanation” and “I appreciate your feedback” demonstrate a more idiomatic and integrated mastery of collocations. Furthermore, the follow-up clause (“It really helps me clarify the concept”) indicates sensitivity to stance. The students not only acknowledge the lecturer's authority but also position themselves as reflective learners. This reflects pragmatic calibration toward academic expectations.

A shift also emerged in the use of mitigation and in the formulation of requests. Compared to the initial, more straightforward phase, students are beginning to use mitigated requests that are more aligned with institutional hierarchies.

S8: *I was wondering if it would be possible to get an extension for the assignment, as I am currently revising based on your previous comments.*

S8: *Please let me know if this is acceptable.*

Expressions like “I was wondering if it would be possible” and “Please let me know if this is acceptable” demonstrate mastery of mitigating structures common in academic request discourse. Relationally, this form produces a more sensitive positioning toward authority and indicates an awareness of academic politeness norms. Here, collocational alignment serves as a tool for strategically negotiating legitimacy and deference.

Furthermore, in interactions with colleagues, a different calibration emerges. Instead of being differential, positioning becomes more collaborative and solidarity-oriented.

S2: *I think your argument is quite strong, but maybe we could add more references to support the second point.*

S2: *What do you think if we reorganize the introduction part?*

The use of hedging expressions like “I think” and “maybe we could” demonstrates the ability to manage peer alignment without creating confrontation. This indicates that the development of a lexico-pragmatic repertoire is not only related to collocation precision but also to the differentiation of positioning based on the interaction participants (lecturer vs. peers).

This pattern is also seen in responses to evaluative feedback:

S6: *Thank you for pointing that out. I will revise the section accordingly and make sure the references are updated.*

S6: *I appreciate the constructive comments.*

Here, gratitude, acknowledgment, and a commitment to action (“I will revise...”) are integrated. This form demonstrates institutional alignment, where students not only receive feedback but also explicitly position themselves as responsible agents in the academic process.

This phase can be categorized as emerging pragmatic calibration. Students begin to demonstrate sensitivity to context, participants, and interactional functions. Their collocation repertoire becomes more varied and controlled, while mitigation and elaboration strategies become more consistent. This development is not linear or uniform across participants, but generally demonstrates a transition from generic positioning to more contextual and relational positioning.

**Table 3. Emerging Pragmatic Calibration and Collocational Alignment**

Feature Type	Expressions	Linguistic Characteristics	Relational Function
Elaborated gratitude	“Thank you for your detailed explanation”	Improved collocation + syntax	Acknowledging authority
Mitigated requests	“I was wondering if...”	Use of hedging structures	Politeness & deference
Epistemic uptake	“It helps me understand...”	Integration of stance markers	Cognitive alignment
Peer hedging	“I think...”, “maybe we could...”	Emerging pragmatic control	Solidarity management



Collocational alignment at this stage reflects not only increased linguistic precision but also a transformation in how students navigate academic relationships through language. The emerging pragmatic calibration demonstrates the gradual internalization of academic discourse norms while strengthening the construction of academic relational positioning within the university's digital space.

These findings broaden our understanding of positioning theory by demonstrating that academic positioning is constructed not only through explicit identity narratives but also through micro-contextual choices of lexico-pragmatic resources. In the initial phase, a restricted repertoire yields a generic, deferential positioning. However, over time, students begin to integrate hedging (Betz & Gubina, 2025), stance markers (Fu & Lam, 2026), and idiomatic sequences as strategies to manage epistemic authority and relational distance more precisely (Kurt & Kafes, 2025).

### **Expansion of Lexico-Pragmatic Repertoire and Stance Sensitivity**

In the later stages of the semester, analysis revealed a more complex expansion in students' lexico-pragmatic repertoire, characterized by greater variety in idiomatic sequences, greater flexibility in collocations, and the emergence of stance markers that are more sensitive to epistemic and relational contexts. While collocational alignment was evident in the previous stage, this phase saw a deeper functional alignment: students were not only aligned in form but also demonstrated sophistication in managing epistemic stance, attitudinal positioning, and interactional nuance.

This expansion was evident in the use of idiomatic expressions that were contextualized and appropriately integrated into academic interactions.

S5: *I see your point, Sir. That makes much more sense now.*

S5: *Looking back at my previous draft, I realize I overlooked the theoretical framework.*

The use of phrases like “I see your point” and “Looking back” demonstrates both reflective ability and epistemic position management. Students no longer accept authority; instead, they position themselves as active participants in the construction of meaning. This indicates heightened stance sensitivity, in which language serves to demonstrate intellectual engagement.

Expansion is also seen in the strategic management of disagreements, especially in peer-to-peer discussions.

S9: *I partly agree with your interpretation, but I wonder if the data might suggest a slightly different pattern.*

S9: *Perhaps we could reconsider the second argument in light of the feedback.*

Here, hedged disagreements, such as “I partly agree” and “I wonder if,” demonstrate control over epistemic modulation. Students can articulate differing views without disrupting group solidarity. Relationally, this reflects the ability to balance critical engagement and peer alignment.

In interactions with lecturers, the use of more precise stance intensifiers and epistemic commitment markers also emerged.

S2: *I strongly believe that integrating more recent studies would strengthen the argument.*

S2: *I am confident that the revised version addresses your concerns.*

Expressions like “I strongly believe” and “I am confident” indicate that students are beginning to develop an authoritative voice in digital interactions. The resulting positioning is no longer merely differential but demonstrates measurable epistemic claims. This marks a shift toward more mature academic legitimacy.

In addition, the emergence of idiomatic sequences in discussions of time and task management demonstrates greater pragmatic flexibility.

S11: *We might be running out of time, so maybe we should wrap this up.*

S11: *Let's get the ball rolling on the literature review section.*

Idiomatic expressions such as “running out of time” and “get the ball rolling” are used appropriately in context, demonstrating the integration of idiomaticity into academic coordination practices. This is not simply vocabulary expansion, but rather an indication that students are beginning to internalize broader interactional norms in English discourse.

This phase reflects repertoire expansion accompanied by increased awareness of the relational implications of each lexical choice. Students demonstrate sharper differentiation between formal and semi-formal contexts and between communication with lecturers and with colleagues. Stance sensitivity becomes more explicit through hedging, boosters, evaluative language, and epistemic qualifiers.

**Table 4. Advanced Lexico-Pragmatic Repertoire and Relational Orchestration**

Feature Type	Expressions	Linguistic Characteristics	Relational Function
Stance markers	“I strongly believe”, “I see your point”	Controlled epistemic expressions	Authority negotiation
Hedged disagreement	“I partly agree...”, “I wonder if...”	Balanced mitigation	Managing disagreement
Idiomatic expressions	“running out of time”, “get the ball rolling”	Contextual idiomaticity	Task coordination
Register shifting	Formal vs informal adaptation	Context-sensitive variation	Hierarchy vs solidarity

The expansion of the lexico-pragmatic repertoire at this stage marks a transformation from mere alignment of forms to the ability to manage epistemic and relational positions strategically. Language no longer functions solely as a means of response, but as an instrument for negotiating identity and legitimacy in digitally mediated academic interactions.

Within the framework of relational work, this development can be understood as a gradual calibration process between deference and agency. Students not only adapt linguistic forms but also internalize interactional norms governing academic legitimacy. In other words, lexico-pragmatic alignment serves as a mechanism for negotiating identity within institutional hierarchies. Furthermore, the identified trajectory indicates that digitally mediated interaction is not merely a medium of communication (Almashour et al., 2026) but also a social space in which positioning

practices are tested and reconstructed (Ntumi et al., 2025). The absence of nonverbal cues in digital communication underscores the importance of lexical precision (Prasetyo et al., 2025) and mitigation strategies for relationship-building (Rozenvalde, 2025).

### Negotiating Hierarchy and Solidarity in Digitally Mediated Academic Interaction

Further analysis shows that the development of students' lexico-pragmatic repertoire is not only related to the precision of collocations or the expansion of idiomaticity, but also to the ability to negotiate hierarchical relations and solidarity in digitally mediated academic interaction. In this phase, language functions as a strategic tool for managing social distance, deference, and group affiliation within the institutional discourse structure.

In interactions with lecturers, students consistently employ more structured mitigated deference strategies than in the earlier phase. These strategies demonstrate sensitivity to academic hierarchy while simultaneously maintaining their legitimacy as competent academic participants.

S6: *Good afternoon, Dr. L1. I hope this message finds you well.*

S6: *I would like to seek your clarification regarding the assessment criteria, if possible.*

S6: *Thank you in advance for your guidance.*

In this data, the use of formal address forms ("Dr. L1"), polite prefaces ("I hope this message finds you well"), and mitigated requests ("I would like to seek... if possible") demonstrates a hierarchically conscious positioning construction. Students not only ask for clarification but also frame their requests in a register that aligns with academic professional norms. Here, lexico-pragmatic choices serve to maintain a balance between deference and agency.

In the context of deadline negotiations, a more complex strategy is seen in managing potential face-threatening acts.

S3: *I sincerely apologize for the delay. Due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to finalize the draft on time.*

S3: *If it is still acceptable, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit it tomorrow.*

The use of intensified apology ("I sincerely apologize"), external justification, and conditional request framing demonstrates an understanding of the relational implications of tardiness. Language here serves as a means of hierarchical recalibration, where students attempt to mitigate the negative impact on their position within the academic structure.

Conversely, in interactions with peers, the strategies that emerge are more oriented toward solidarity and collaboration. Students use language that signals equality and team support.

S8: *Don't worry, we can sort this out together.*

S8: *I totally get what you mean. Maybe we can adjust the structure a bit?*

Expressions like "Don't worry" and "I totally get what you mean" demonstrate alignment with solidarity. Here, the positioning constructed is egalitarian, differing from the differential patterns used towards lecturers. This variation demonstrates a mature pragmatic differentiation based on the participants' context.

Interestingly, there are also moments when students simultaneously negotiate hierarchy and solidarity within a collective digital interaction.

- S10: *Thank you for the feedback, Sir. We will revise accordingly.*  
 S10: *Guys, let's make sure we address the theoretical gap clearly in the next draft.*

In this example, the student positions himself differently toward the lecturer, then quickly shifts to a collaborative position with the group. This shift in register demonstrates interactional code-switching skills in the realm of pragmatics, not between languages, but between relational positions within the same digital space.

These findings indicate that students are increasingly able to manage relational complexity within the academic digital ecosystem. Hierarchies are no longer rigidly enforced, but are negotiated through precise linguistic strategies. Solidarity is also manifested not only through informal language but also through stance markers and mitigations that maintain group cohesion.

The development of academic relational positioning in this phase is reflected in students' ability to differentiate among and adapt lexico-pragmatic strategies to different relational configurations. Language serves as a dynamic mechanism for managing authority, affiliation, and legitimacy within the structure of digitally mediated academic interaction, demonstrating a maturing integration between linguistic competence and institutional sensitivity.

These findings align with research on academic discourse socialization, which emphasizes the importance of gradual participation in academic communities of practice (Alexander, 2025). However, unlike studies that focus on formal written production (Burhan-Horasanli, 2024), this research demonstrates that positioning development also occurs in everyday, semi-formal digital communication (Li & Han, 2023). These findings extend the study of formulaic language development by demonstrating that the expansion of idiomaticity and collocation impacts not only fluency but also the ability to manage relational nuance. This study bridges the literature on pragmatic development and institutional discourse, two domains that have often been studied separately (Sung, 2023).

### **Micro-Longitudinal Trajectory of Academic Relational Positioning**

Synthesis across time and participants shows that the development of academic relational positioning in digitally mediated academic interactions does not occur linearly, but rather through progressive yet fluctuating stages of transformation. Micro-longitudinal analysis reveals a relatively consistent general pattern, albeit with variations in intensity between individuals. The developmental trajectory can be understood as a shift from restricted formulaic positioning to strategic relational orchestration.

In the early phase (Weeks 1-4), the majority of participants demonstrated formulaic minimalism, characterized by repetitive expressions of gratitude, simple syntactic structures, and minimal stance marking. The positioning that emerged was differential but not yet fully contextually calibrated. Variation between participants in this phase was relatively low; almost all students relied on a similar, limited repertoire.

Entering the middle phase (Weeks 5-9), clearer differentiation between individuals became apparent. Some students began to demonstrate stable collocational alignment, while others remained in the transitional stage. During this period, the increased use of mitigated requests, elaborate expressions of gratitude, and hedging devices became important indicators of emerging pragmatic

calibration. However, development was not always cumulative; some participants occasionally regressed under academic pressures, such as deadlines or evaluations.

In the late phase (Weeks 10–14), most participants demonstrated significant expansion in their lexico-pragmatic repertoire. The emergence of idiomatic sequences, epistemic stance markers, and a sharp differentiation between positioning toward lecturers and colleagues demonstrates a more mature integration of linguistic competence and relational sensitivity. At this stage, students not only adapt language forms but also actively manage legitimacy and authority within the institutional discourse structure.

Based on this synthesis, the development trajectory can be modelled in the following four phases:

**Table 5. Micro-Longitudinal Trajectory of Academic Relational Positioning**

Phase	Time Frame	Key Linguistic Features	Pragmatic Characteristics	Relational Positioning
Phase 1: Formulaic Minimalism	Weeks 1–4	Limited formulaic expressions	Minimal mitigation	Basic deferential positioning
Phase 2: Collocational Alignment	Weeks 5–9	Improved collocations	Emerging hedging & elaboration	Context-aware positioning
Phase 3: Repertoire Expansion	Weeks 10–12	Idiomaticity & stance markers	Increased epistemic sensitivity	Active positioning
Phase 4: Relational Orchestration	Weeks 13–14	Flexible repertoire	Strategic modulation	Dynamic negotiation of hierarchy & solidarity

This model demonstrates that development does not simply move from less precise to more precise, but from generic positioning to relational orchestration skills, namely the ability to simultaneously integrate collocational precision, pragmatic sensitivity, and relational differentiation. It is important to note that this trajectory is dynamic and not homogeneous. Some participants reached Phase 4 early, while others progressed gradually with fluctuating patterns. Nevertheless, across cases, there is a collective trend toward increasing complexity and flexibility in academic relational positioning.

These findings demonstrate that lexico-pragmatic development in the context of EFL higher education is not simply a process of vocabulary accumulation, but rather a transformation in how students manage academic relationships through language. The identified trajectory confirms that digitally mediated interaction serves as a social space where linguistic competence and institutional sensitivity develop simultaneously and reinforce one another.

Theoretically, this study offers a conceptual model of the micro-longitudinal phases of academic relational positioning to understand the development of academic competence in an EFL context. This model positions relational orchestration as the highest level, where students can adjust lexico-pragmatic modulation based on participants' configurations and interaction context.

Methodologically, the use of an ethnographically informed longitudinal analysis approach underscores the importance of observing authentic communication practices over an extended period. This challenges the dominance of experimental studies that isolate linguistic variables without considering relational dynamics. Conceptually, these findings confirm that academic competence cannot be reduced to grammatical accuracy but must be understood as an integration of linguistic precision and institutional sensitivity in the digital space that is increasingly central to global higher education.

Despite providing in-depth insights, this study has several limitations. First, the research context is limited to a single institution and academic community, so generalizations across contexts should be made with caution. Second, the focus on digital written interactions does not encompass the multimodal dimensions that may influence positioning in online communication. Third, while a micro-longitudinal approach allows for developmental tracking, a single semester may not be sufficient to capture long-term transformations in academic identity formation.

Future research could expand this model by comparing cross-institutional or cross-cultural contexts to test the stability of the identified trajectories. Future studies could also integrate multimodal analysis to examine how visual and paralinguistic elements on digital platforms shape relational positioning. Furthermore, exploring the relationship between lexico-pragmatic development and formal academic performance could provide a more comprehensive perspective on the role of digital communication in the formation of long-term academic legitimacy.

#### D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the development of EFL students' lexico-pragmatic resources in digitally mediated academic interaction unfolds through a dynamic micro-longitudinal trajectory, moving from formulaic minimalism to collocational alignment, repertoire expansion, and ultimately to relational orchestration. In addressing the research objectives, the findings reveal that students progressively refine their lexico-pragmatic repertoires not only in terms of linguistic precision but also in their ability to manage academic relational positioning strategically. Over time, lexical and pragmatic choices function as key resources for negotiating deference, solidarity, and epistemic authority within institutional discourse. This development confirms that academic competence in digital higher education contexts is inherently relational and cannot be reduced to grammatical accuracy alone. Instead, it emerges through the iterative and context-sensitive orchestration of linguistic resources across interactional settings. By highlighting how digitally mediated environments serve as sites of academic discourse socialization, this study underscores the importance of integrating lexico-pragmatic and relational dimensions in understanding how students construct academic legitimacy and identity in contemporary EFL higher education.

#### References

- Al-Harthi, M., Sonbul, S., & Costley, T. (2025). Tracking development in the translation of formulaic sequences: a longitudinal case study. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), 1894. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-06039-5>

- Alexander, I. (2025). Student Perspectives of Academic Discourse Socialization in British Columbia Offshore Schools in China. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 24(3), 660–674. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2168669>
- Almashour, M., Aldamen, H., Jarrah, M., & Al-Deaibes, M. (2026). Translanguaging in Jordanian EFL assessment: Cognitive scaffolding, identity expression, and institutional friction. *System*, 137, 103917. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103917>
- Altakhaineh, A. R., Abu Hasheish, M., & Hamaydeh, D. (2024). Pragmatic Failures in Intercultural Communication: Evidence from Jordan. *PSYCHOLINGUISTICS*, 36(2), 38–62. <https://doi.org/10.31470/2309-1797-2024-36-2-38-62>
- Betz, E., & Gubina, A. (2025). On stance-taking with one-sided vs. two-sided shoulder lifts in German talk-in-interaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1509988>
- Burhan-Horasanlı, E. (2024). Conference presentation preparation sessions as a site for academic discourse socialization in an engineering research team. *English for Specific Purposes*, 76, 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2024.06.002>
- Cancino, M., & Iturrieta, J. (2022). Assessing the impact of the Lexical Approach on EFL perceived oral proficiency: What is the role of formulaic sequences? *Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19, 41–66. <https://doi.org/10.35869/vial.voi19.3759>
- Chung, E., & Tang, E. (2022). Understanding Politeness in an Online Community of Practice for Chinese ESL Teachers: Implications for Sustainable Professional Development in the Digital Era. *Sustainability*, 14(18), 11183. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141811183>
- East, M., & Wang, D. (2025). Advancing the communicative language teaching agenda: what place for translanguaging in task-based language teaching? *The Language Learning Journal*, 53(6), 702–714. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2024.2380278>
- Edelsbrunner, P. A., Malone, S., Hofer, S. I., Küchemann, S., Kuhn, J., Schmid, R., Altmeyer, K., Brünken, R., & Lichtenberger, A. (2023). The relation of representational competence and conceptual knowledge in female and male undergraduates. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 10(1), 44. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-023-00435-6>
- Eslami, Z. R., Larina, T. V., & Pashmforoosh, R. (2023). Identity, politeness and discursive practices in a changing world. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 27(1), 7–38. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-34051>
- Essabari, S., & Hiba, B. (2025). Democratizing the EFL classroom: the impact of a negotiated syllabus on student voice and critical engagement. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 45(2), 149–161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-025-00303-z>
- Fu, Y., & Lam, P. W. Y. (2026). From contrast to communicational practice: The discourse marker “but” in Chinese and British media interviews. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 254, 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2025.12.017>
- Gholami, L. (2024). Oral corrective feedback and learner uptake in L2 classrooms: Non-

- formulaic vs. formulaic errors. *Language Teaching Research*, 28(3), 860–893. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211021560>
- Hanushek, E. A., Kinne, L., Witthöft, F., & Woessmann, L. (2025). Age and cognitive skills: Use it or lose it. *Science Advances*, 11(10). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.ads1560>
- Jeong, A., & Chiu, M. M. (2025). The effects of politeness in shaping discourse in online debates. *Distance Education*, 46(2), 253–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2024.2353257>
- Jiang, F. K., & Hyland, K. (2026). EAP in a changing world: Towards a new research agenda. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 80, 101647. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2026.101647>
- Kayas, O. G., Matikonis, K., Cranmer, E. E., & Campos, J. P. (2024). Socially negotiating privacy boundaries and academic identities. *Studies in Higher Education*, 49(7), 1241–1252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2262507>
- Kentmen, H., Debreli, E., & Yavuz, M. A. (2023). Assessing Tertiary Turkish EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence Regarding Speech Acts and Conversational Implicatures. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3800. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043800>
- Kim, Y., Kang, S., D'Arienzo, M., & Taguchi, N. (2023). Comparing traditional and task-based approaches to teaching pragmatics: Task design processes and learning outcomes. *Language Teaching Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231195876>
- Kurt, B., & Kafes, H. (2025). The role of disciplinary enculturation in stance-taking in L2 academic writing. *Acta Psychologica*, 260, 105720. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105720>
- Li, F., & Han, Y. (2023). Chinese international students' identity (re)construction mediated by teacher feedback: Through the lens of academic discourse socialisation. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 61, 101211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2022.101211>
- Liu, Q., & Cheng, W. (2025). “I’m telling you”: The use of interactional metadiscourse in Chinese live streaming commerce. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 237, 14–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2025.01.001>
- Mora, J. C., & Mora-Plaza, I. (2023). From Research in the Lab to Pedagogical Practices in the EFL Classroom: The Case of Task-Based Pronunciation Teaching. *Education Sciences*, 13(10), 1042. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13101042>
- Nhat Tuan, N., Ngan Ha, T., Thuy Duong, V., & Thi Huyen, V. (2025). Developing Genre and Pragmatic Competence Through Service-Learning: A Discourse-Based Study in a Vietnamese Transnational Hospitality ESP Programme. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 31(4), 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2025-3104-12>
- Ntumi, S., Upoalkpajor, J.-L. N., & Nimo, D. G. (2025). Culturally responsive assessment of help-seeking behavior among university students: a mediation-moderation analysis of cultural norms, mental health stigma, and digital engagement across



- cross-cultural contexts. *BMC Psychology*, 13(1), 922. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03256-0>
- Nurhikmah, A., Syam, A. F., & AP, S. (2023). Lecturer Attitudes on Cross-Cultural Practices in EFL Online Teaching. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, 5(1), 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v5i1.11588>
- Nurhikmah, A., Syam, A. F., & Wahid, A. (2025). HUMOR, POLITENESS, AND INTIMACY IN FAMILY COMMUNICATION: TRACING EFL LEARNERS' SOCIOLINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DAILY WHATSAPP EXCHANGES. *KLASIKAL : JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, LANGUAGE TEACHING AND SCIENCE*, 7(2), 1190–1204. <https://doi.org/10.52208/klasikal.v7i2.1559>
- Peng, H., & Zhou, P. (2025). Digital discourse: we-media's impact on pragmatic competence in college students. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2025.2508321>
- Perrotta, C., & Pangrazio, L. (2023). The critical study of digital platforms and infrastructures: Current issues and new agendas for education technology research. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 31. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.7952>
- Prasetyo, T., Adri, H. T., & Helmanto, F. (2025). The Role of Lecturer–Student Interaction in Developing Critical Thinking Skills: Insights from a Private University in Indonesia. *F1000Research*, 14, 1455. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.173679.1>
- Purinton Drake, A., Masur, P. K., Bazarova, N. N., Zou, W., & Whitlock, J. (2023). The youth social media literacy inventory: Development and validation using item response theory in the US. *Journal of Children and Media*, 17(4), 467–487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2023.2230493>
- Rozenvalde, K. (2025). “My English Skills Are a Huge Benefit to Me”: What Local Students' Narratives Reveal About Language Ideologies at the University of Tartu. *Languages*, 10(10), 248. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages10100248>
- Smith, M. L., Nordfelt, R., Daley, J., & D'Aniello, C. (2024). Not Just Semantics: A Synthesis of Narrative Therapy and Linguistic Relativity as Applied to Spanish-Speaking Bilingual Clients. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 46(1), 100–111. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-023-09670-z>
- Smyslova, S. (2026). Online higher education in exile: futurity amid political crises. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 24(1), 114–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2025.2557460>
- Sung, C. C. M. (2023). Agency and feedback-seeking: academic English socialization of L2 students in Hong Kong. *Language and Education*, 37(3), 364–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2022.2085048>
- Syam, A. F., & Nurhikmah, A. (2025). Mindfulness, Humility, and Reflexivity: Tracing Intercultural Growth in Family-Based EFL Interaction. *IJOLEH : International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 4(2), 203–220. <https://doi.org/10.56314/ijoleh.v4i2.425>

- Wang, Y., & Zhu, Y. (2025). Unlocking futures literacy: essential skills for students for an evolving world. *Cogent Education*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2588021>
- Wei, R., & Zhao, X. (2024). Effects of task-based language teaching on functional adequacy in L2 writing. *Assessing Writing*, 60, 100838. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2024.100838>
- Zheng, Y., Ortega, L., Pekarek Doehler, S., Sasaki, M., Eskildsen, S. W., & Gao, X. (Andy). (2025). Praxeology, humanism, equity, and mixed methods: Four pillars for advancing second language acquisition and teaching. *The Modern Language Journal*, 109(S1), 64–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12977>
- Zhou, Q., & Larina, T. V. (2024). Power and solidarity in pronominal forms of address: A case study of Chinese and Russian teacher-student interactions. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-87-100>