

Complaint and Politeness Strategies used by Iranian Speakers of English

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ABSTRACT

Complaint is a face threatening act and it happens when a speaker reacts with anger to things which go wrong or to a speech or an action which affected him/her unfavorably. Therefore, complaints can engender social relationship breakdown. However, a complainer can use politeness when he/she aims to maintain a good relationship with complainee or to mitigate the severity of his/her complaint and face threat. This study aims to investigate the complaint speech act with regard to the strategies and structure used as well as the politeness strategies employed by Iranian learners in communication with other nationalities in the academic context of a university. Searle's (1969) speech act theory and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory comprised the theoretical framework of the study. The data were elicited through open-ended discourse completion task questionnaire from 50 Iranian learners. The data were analyzed using pragmatics as the approach within discourse analysis. The findings show that Iranians are able to draw on a variety of strategies and structures and adapt them in a flexible manner when faced with various complaint-provoking situations. Culturally, the findings show that Iranians are indirect and exercise negative politeness as they try to minimize the face threatening act of complaining. However, when the situation demands for it, they can be direct in their manner of speech.

Key words: Speech Act, Complaint Strategies, Complaint Structure, Politeness Strategies, Pragmatic Competence, Iranian Learners

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a tool for exchanging ideas and experiences that we have had and facilitates interaction and communication among and between members of groups. In the 21st century, however, English among all the languages worldwide has become one of the most dominant language that people use to communicate internationally (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). Although it seems interesting that people are able to communicate with each other all around the world in a common language like English, peoples' perception of the world around them and interpretations of the situations they encounter are linked to their social and cultural backgrounds and therefore the ability to communicate may be very different and these dissimilarities can lead to difficulties in communications (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Sifianou, 1992; Yule, 1996).

Successful communication is affected both by language appropriateness and language accuracy in different social contexts (Li et al., 2015). Bardovi-Harlig (1996) suggests that lack of pragmatic and linguistic knowledge can lead speakers of different cultures with different patterns of understanding to encounter failure in successful verbal communication. Similarly, Tanck (2002) proposes that even though some speakers are fluent in a second or foreign lan-

guage they may lack pragmatic competence and therefore they are unable to produce culturally and socially appropriate language.

Many researchers (Austin, 1962; Leech, 1983; Grice, 1989; Yule, 1996; Liu, 2005) have also discussed pragmatics and its relation to politeness. Yule (1996), for example, maintains that pragmatics can be considered as the study of language usage in contexts and that is referred to in the literature by different notions such as "contextual meaning" (how contexts affect what is said and where, when and how utterances are produced), "speaker meaning" (how speakers convey their intentions and how they are comprehended by hearers), "the expression of relative distance" (how closeness, social and physical, influences speakers' judgment of utterances), and "inferences" (how more is conveyed than what is said). In short, the norms of politeness of a language are a part of pragmatic competence of a person.

Thus, it is necessary for learners of language to know the pragmatic aspects of the target language with the aim of being able to communicate successfully (Bachman, 1990). As a result of lack of pragmatic competence, speakers may not be well aware of performance of speech acts in a foreign language (Bodman & Einsentein, 1988) and therefore this can cause foreign language learners to use the speaking values of their first language when using the foreign language

(Tanck, 2002). Sifianou (1992) suggests that the problems which learners encounter in attaining communicative competence in a foreign or second language may originate from dissimilarities among their cultures and languages in different aspects of speech act realization. As such, when two or more cultures get together, pragmatic knowledge of speech acts such as complaining is needed for successful communication.

Complaints are one of the speech acts of everyday living. We all experience complaints either when we are angry with someone or about any issues which upset us, or when someone is angry with us. We all face many actions, behaviors and matters which do not make us happy and therefore lead to complaints. In other words, a complaint can be an expression of being angry, unhappy or dissatisfied about something and requires particular speech act strategies for expression. Consequently, when making complaint the speaker reacts with anger to things which go wrong (Geluykens and Kraft, 2007) or to a speech or an action which affected him or her unfavorably (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987).

Trosborg (1995) believes that the speech act of complaint belongs to the expressive category and contains moral judgments that express the complainer's disapproval and approval of the behavior concerned and almost always has to do with the act of moral criticism of the blame involved in the act of complaining. In other words, Trosborg (1995) defines complaints as illocutionary acts wherein the complainer expresses his or her negative feelings and disapproval towards the state of affairs in the complainable and for that he or she holds the complainees responsible, indirectly or directly. As a result, complaint by its nature can cause offence and highly threatens the relationship.

Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) categorized complaints as one of the face threatening acts which include the enormous potential for shutting down the relationship. While complaints can engender social relationship breakdown (Moon, 2002), a complainer can use politeness when he or she aims to have a good relationship with complainees to mitigate the severity of his or her complaint and face threat (Wijayanto et al., 2013).

Politeness is something we all face every day and its aim is to make people comfortable and relaxed in interaction; however, different culturally and socially defined norms may cause misunderstanding among people with different first languages. In order to define politeness, people also may use very general statements based on their backgrounds. While most people are quite sure that they know what politeness means and who is considered as a polite person, they face many problems when trying to define and describe the notion and it can be seen in many different types of definitions and contradictions (Watts, 2003; Wang, 2008). Some may characterize polite behavior as suitable behavior or politically correct while some may consider it as behavior of the educated people.

For second or foreign language learners, showing politeness in a speech act that is inherently face-threatening can be very difficult as what is regarded as polite in their first language can be impolite in the foreign or target language context (Wijayanto et al., 2013). According to Jackson (2014),

an international student may speak up in discussions and this may be expected and normal in his or her home environment, but his or her discourse might be perceived as aggressive and rude in another context. Moreover, if he or she has been socialized to believe that it is impolite to make direct eye contact during his or her speech, he or she is likely to avoid it. However, if his or her interlocutor has been socialized to believe direct eye contact shows respect and trustworthiness, the interaction may lead to misunderstanding (Jackson, 2014). It has been the center of interest and concentration of many studies to study how politeness is expressed in speech acts among different cultures when communicating in their L1, L2 or a foreign language.

Suffice to say, there are many Iranians who attend different universities abroad for higher education. During their studies, they are in contact with other nationalities in the classrooms and campus, in living accommodations, colleges, sharing homes or rooms and may face many problems that can result in misunderstandings in their communication. Therefore, the study of whether Iranians can perform the complaint aspects in English when communicating with other cultures in such difficult situations and how they manage the complaint can be very helpful. Although there are many studies that have been done in different contexts and fields to investigate speech acts and politeness of different cultures in cross-cultural communication (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; Trosborg, 1995; Murphy and Neu, 1996; Moon, 2001; Tanck, 2002; Chen et al., 2011), there are very few studies in the Iranian context and none have focused on Iranians complaining in English when faced with difficult situations that involve contact with other nationalities or other speakers of English. This study adds to this literature in its investigation of the complaint speech act and politeness strategies of Iranian learners when communicating in English in the academic context of a university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Act Theory

The notion of speech acts can be considered as one of the key parts of pragmatics that was first postulated by Austin (1962) who noted, the expressing of the sentence can be doing of an action. As such, utterances can convey intent of speakers and effect on the interlocutors. According to Austin (1962), each speech act forms an occurrence or event that creates a new reality or state that differs from what existed previous to the speech act. Austin (1962) therefore used the term performative to highlight that speech acts can produce changed realities and do not simply represent or report on something which was already there. Searle (1969), who was Austin's student, later assured that speech acts are carried out in real situations of language use and considered them as the minimal and fundamental unit of human communication and linguistic in meaning. Searle (1969) suggested that all verbal speaking is made up of speech acts that are actions in language and considered all verbal speaking as performative.

There are many studies which investigate the performance of speech acts among speakers of dissimilar languages and

they show that while the typology of speech acts seems to be universal, the verbalization and conceptualization of speech acts can be very different across cultures (Blum-Kulka and House, 1989).

According to Gumperz (1978), cultures are very different in interactional styles and this lead to very dissimilar performances of speech acts in languages. Moreover, many studies on speech acts have revealed that using the same speech act might be understood very differently across dissimilar cultures (*ibid.*). Wolfson (1986) notes that speech acts differ among cultures in both the way they are realized and in their distribution, functions and, frequency of occurrence.

Consequently, a speech act in the study of linguistics is considered as an utterance which has performative function in communications and languages. Searle (1969) classifies complaint as an expressive speech act in which complainers express their feelings and attitudes and potentially dispute, challenge, or directly deny the social competence of the hearers. Thus, through complaint speech act speakers make the statements which are very face threatening and can break-down the relationships; however, using politeness strategies can repair these statements and remedy the problem.

Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1978) proposed a theory of politeness which suggested a model for showing politeness in conversation. Their theory includes three main notions: 1) notion of face, 2) notion of face threatening act, and 3) notion of politeness strategies. Notion of face contains the public self-image which all adults try and want to protect, while the notion of face threatening act (FTA) refers to an act which intrinsically damages the speaker or the addressee's face by saying or doing in opposition to what the other wants or desires. Notion of politeness strategies also refer to formulate messages to save the face of hearer in order to prevent face-threatening acts when they are desired.

Based on Brown and Levinson's face theory, all adults in society have face or public self-image which contains two parts, positive and negative face, and whenever people interact with each other their statements include one of them. They consider positive face as a consistent self-image which contains the person's want and desire to be accepted and appreciated, whereas negative face is regarded as a claim to personal protect and includes the person's want and desire not to be impeded. They postulate five politeness strategies (discussed further in Frameworks of Analysis).

Related Studies

In pragmatics literature, the complaint speech act has attracted some attention among researchers. Due to its face-threatening feature, it has also been the subject of many cross-cultural studies (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004). These studies investigated speakers with different L1 and found that dissimilar strategies were used to exercise complaints when the L1 differed.

One study which is widely quoted in the study of complaint is Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) work that com-

prises native and non-native speakers of Hebrew. They categorized five strategies according to severity of the complaint for a particular scenario (one colleague was waiting for another colleague, who arrived late to a planned appointment). The five strategies were: 1) below the level of reproach, 2) disapproval, 3) complaint, 4) warning and accusation, and, 5) threat. The findings of this study revealed that both groups of nonnative and native speakers of Hebrew made use of each strategy mentioned above. However, participants showed greater preference to use the middle three categories, i.e., disapproval, complaint and warning or accusation, rather than being too soft or too confrontational. Therefore, the first and last strategies, below the level of reproach and threat, were found to be less often used.

In another study, Trosborg (1995) examined complaints by native speakers of English and Danish learners of English. Trosborg (1995) devised a more comprehensive framework than Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) for categorizing complaint which consists of four strategies and eight sub-strategies. The research showed that Danish learners used dissimilar complaint strategies compared with L1 speakers of English. They, unlike the native speakers, used fewer complaint modifications and expressed their complaints less forcefully.

In a recent study, Farnia et al. (2009) compared the pragmatic behavior of Malay ESL learners with American learners. The data were collected through verbal reports and DCT and analyzed through Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) taxonomy of complaint. American and Malay respondents were very different in expressing complaints. Americans were much more direct than Malays and used complaints as the main component when the social status of the hearer was higher than the speaker. However, Malays tended to show a different behavior toward addressees in different social status. Malay learners had tendency to be indirect in a high-social status situation like complaining to a lecturer than in an equal-status situation like complaining to a friend. According to the study, it was found that Malays consider the significance of social status in interaction in their communication.

In the case of the Iranian context, Abdolrezaipoor et al. (2012) investigated how Iranian EFL learners perceived the complaint speech act produced by American students in four situations. The data were collected through open role plays and a politeness perception questionnaire. Role-play interactions were taken from 10 American students and perception questionnaires were constructed based on complaint strategies used by Americans. In order to collect the data sixty-five Iranian EFL learners were selected and were asked to rate each case from very rude to very polite. The results illustrated that the more indirect complaints were perceived and understood as more polite utterances by the Iranian learners.

Wijianto et al. (2013) investigated politeness strategies engaged in complaints relating to different social distances and social status levels. The study comprised 50 Indonesian learners of English containing 25 males and 25 females. The data were elicited through oral discourse completion tasks (ODCT) and differentiated through Trosborg's (1995) modified taxonomy. The study accounted the use of politeness

strategies using Brown and Levinson's theory. The findings of the study showed that different social distances and status levels did not result in different types of politeness strategy, but different frequencies of politeness strategies.

Recently, De Leon and Parina (2016) investigated 120 Filipino students' likelihood to complain and to identify various semantic formulae used in the complaints in English and Filipino with regard to gender, status, and self-assessed language proficiency. The data were elicited through a questionnaire and written discourse completion test (WDCT). The results showed that there is no relationship between likelihood to complain and gender, likelihood to complain and self-assessed language proficiency, and likelihood to complain and the level of status. However, the study revealed that Filipinos complained in a different manner depending on the language that they used. While Filipino males were assertive when complaining in English language, they were more assertive when complaining in Filipino language, and both genders used different semantic formulae when complaining in English and Filipino. Moreover, Filipinos speakers of English as a second language preferred to complain in Filipino rather than in English in order to help maintain the face of the complainers.

Although there are several studies that have been done in different contexts to investigate the speech act of complaint of different cultures, there are very few studies done in the Iranian context and none have focused on Iranians complaining in English when faced with difficult situations that involve contact with other nationalities or speakers of English. Consequently, for better understanding of communication by various cultural groups, more investigation about how complaints are performed by different cultures can be very helpful. It should be noted at this point that the words "speakers" and "learners" are used interchangeably in this study. This is because the subjects of this study are Iranian speakers of English all of whom are postgraduate learners from various faculties of a university.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of this study are as follows.

- 1) To investigate complaint strategies used by Iranian learners when communicating with other nationalities.
- 2) To investigate how Iranian learners structure their complaints when communicating with other nationalities.
- 3) To find out the politeness strategies employed by Iranian learners when performing complaints with other nationalities.

METHOD

This study is qualitative and employs pragmatics as the approach to data analysis. In order to analyze the complaint speech act and the politeness strategies used three frameworks are employed. Trosborg (1995) and Rinnert and Nogami (2006) are used to analyze complaint strategies and complaint structures respectively while Brown and Levinson (1987) is used to analyze politeness strategies.

Participants

The sample of this study was made up of 50 Iranian postgraduate learners, 25 male and 25 female, in the academic context of a university. The age range of participants in this study was from 25 to 35 years old and the length of time that they have stayed in Malaysia at the time of this study was a minimum of 1 year and above. It should be noted that all of the participants were considered as proficient users of English based on the fact that the students had presented IELTS certificate or had passed the Tertiary English Programme (TEP) offered by the university they were enrolled at.

Instruments

Data were collected through a background questionnaire and open-ended discourse completion task (DCT) in the type of critical incidents (CIs) (See Appendices). The background questionnaire contains questions relating to personal information such as age, gender and course of study as well as length of English study, self-assessment of English fluency, total time spent in Malaysia or other countries, and their difficulty when doing complaint in English. However, the DCT questionnaire involved 10 difficult situations in which each situation requires respondents to produce a complaint. Moreover, a focused group interview was conducted earlier with a group of postgraduate students from the university in order to help the researcher to create the CIs. This is so that all complaint situations are chosen in naturalistic contexts to involve everyday communicative encounters that students may be involved in.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to gather data, fifty (25 male, 25 female) Iranian postgraduate students at a Malaysian public university were asked to answer the questionnaire. The data was gathered in two sessions during the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015. In the first session 26 students and in the second session 24 students were gathered to one of the classrooms in the university. After a brief introduction of the study and some instructions to the respondents, the investigator distributed the copies of the questionnaire. The participants were requested to put themselves in the situations and imagine what they would say in face-to-face interaction in each situation. Besides, an example of a situation involving a request speech act (i.e. a different speech act from complaint) was given to the participants as a guide in order to give them an idea on how to respond to a DCT situation. According to Kasper and Dahl (1991), the time needed to complete the DCT ought not to exceed 30 minutes because it may make the respondents fatigued and they may not be fully able to do their task. Therefore, students were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The data corpus of this study resulted in 500 responses of which 360 were utilized for analysis. The responses which were illegible and not fully responded to were left out of the analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

The procedure for data analysis proper is as follows:

- Step 1: Collecting handwritten responses to CIs
- Step 2: Selecting legible and fully responded responses
- Step 3: Typing handwritten responses in order to facilitate analysis
- Step 4: Analyzing the data based on frameworks established for the study
- Step 5: Counting the frequencies of each complaint strategy
- Step 6: Counting the frequencies of each politeness strategy
- Step 7: Comparing the researcher and co-rater's results and reconciling differences
- Step 8: Calculating the average agreement between researcher and co-rater's results
- Step 9: Reporting the results

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, a co-rater, who had knowledge and experience in applied linguistics and pragmatics, was used for the study. She analyzed 220 responses (equivalent to 61% of the data) and counted the frequency of each strategy which had been used by respondents. There was a 92% percent consensus on complaint structures, a 93% percent consensus on complaint strategies, and 95% consensus on politeness strategies between the researcher and the co-rater.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis involved the use of three frameworks: Trosborg's (1995) and Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) complaint taxonomies and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness taxonomy. Needless to say, complaints contain utterances that function as head acts which are the main strategies that express complaints, and supporting moves which contain additional information that initiate and follow the head acts. Trosborg's (ibid.) taxonomy was used to establish the head acts and specific strategies within the complaint while Rinnert and Nogami's (ibid.) taxonomy

served to establish the overall structure of the complaint. Brown and Levinson's (ibid) taxonomy of politeness strategies was used to ascertain how politeness was exercised in the complaints.

Therefore, the responses to the ten situations were analysed based on first, Trosborg's (1995) complaint strategies, second, Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) taxonomy for complaint structure, and third, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies, all of which functioned as frameworks of analysis for the study.

Frameworks of Analysis

Trosborg's (1995) Complaint Taxonomy

Trosborg (1995: 338) complaint taxonomy is comprehensive in which it consists of four strategies and eight sub-strategies. See Table 1.

Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) Complaint Taxonomy

Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) complaint taxonomy was used to examine how complaints are structured. The taxonomy contains: 1) main components, 2) level of directness, and 3) amount of mitigation. Complaint structures were analyzed using these features.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Taxonomy

Brown and Levinson (1987: 95-227) divided politeness strategies into five main types: 1) bald on-record, 2) negative politeness, 3) positive politeness, 4) Off-record, and 5) not doing FTA. Politeness strategies were analyzed using these strategies.

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest 10 strategies for achieving negative politeness, 15 strategies for positive politeness and 15 strategies for off-record. See Table 3.

Table 1. Complaint strategies

I No explicit reproach 1 Hints	Complainer does not mention the complaint in the complainable and does not directly state something is offensive	E.g. "My car was in perfect order when I last drove it. There was nothing wrong with my car yesterday."
II Disapproval 2 Annoyance 3 Ill consequences	Complainer expresses dislike, disapproval, and annoyance in connection with a certain state of affairs that he or she considers bad for him or her	E.g. "There's a horrible dent in my car. Oh dear, I've just bought it." E.g. "How terrible! Now I won't be able to get to work tomorrow. Oh, damn it, I'll lose my insurance bonus now."
III Accusation 4 Indirect 5 Direct	Complainer establishes the complainees as the agent of the complainable and directly or indirectly accuses the complainees for committing the problem	E.g. "You borrowed my car last night, didn't you?" E.g. "Did you happen to bump into my car?"
IV Blame 6 Modified blame 7 Explicit blame (behavior) 8 Explicit blame (person)	Complainer assumes that the complainees is guilty of the offence and states modified blame of complainees's action or directly blames the complainees or his or her action	E.g. "Honestly, couldn't you have been more careful? You should take more care with other people's car." E.g. "It's really too bad, you know, going round wrecking other people's car. How on earth did you manage to be so stupid?" E.g. "Oh no, not again! You are really thoughtless. Bloody fool! You've done it again!"

Quantitative Analysis

After the data was analyzed, the researcher and co-rater counted the number of uses for each strategy and converted them into percentages. It should be noted that all reported numbers were rounded to two decimal places. Then, the results were tabulated into figures and charts in order to display the results clearly. The data is presented to display findings to all three research questions simultaneously.

FINDINGS

Figure 2 shows Complaint Strategies Used by respondents.

Figure 2 presents the eight complaint strategies applied by Iranian learners when they complain in English. From the chart, indirect accusation is the most frequent strategy used by respondents (22.69%), followed by annoyance strategy as the second rank of frequency (18.22%). Among all complaint strategies, hints and explicit blame (person) strategies were the least frequently used strategies. It should be noted that in 11.11% responses, respondents ignored the problem and did not make a complaint. The results show that complaints

Table 2. Complaint structure

1. Main component	
a. Initiator	beginning formula
b. Complaint	expression of negative evaluation
c. Request	direct or indirect attempts to get H to redress the situation
2. Level of directness	
a. Indirect	no explicit mention of offense and implied offense only
b. Somewhat direct	mention of offense, but no mention of the hearer's responsibility
c. Very direct	explicit mention of offense and hearer's responsibility for it
3. Amount of mitigation	softening expressions such as "sort of, a little, you know, could, would, I wonder, I think" and etc.

Rinnert and Nogami (2006: 33)

Table 3. Realization of politeness strategies

Positive politeness theories	Negative politeness theories	Off-record theories
1. Notice/attend to H	1. Be conventionally indirect	1. Give hints/clues
2. Exaggerate	2. Question, hedge	2. Give association clues
3. Intensify interest to H	3. Be pessimistic	3. Presuppose
4. Use in-group identity marker	4. Minimize imposition	4. Understate
5. Seek agreement	5. Give deference	5. Overstate
6. Avoid disagreement	6. Apologize	6. Use tautologies
7. Presuppose/assert common ground	7. Impersonalize	7. Use contradiction
8. Joke	8. State the imposition as a general rule	8. Be ironic
9. Show concern for H's wants	9. Nominalize	9. Use metaphors
10. Offer, promise	10. Go on record as incurring a debt	10. Use rhetorical questions
11. Be optimistic		11. Be ambiguous
12. Include both S and H in the activity		12. Be vague
13. Give reasons		13. Over-generalize
14. Assume/assert reciprocity		14. Displace hearer
15. Give gift to H (e.g. goods, sympathy, understanding)		15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis

were structured through several patterns. The patterns and frequencies are as in Table 4.

The table shows eight structures which were used by respondents in order to deal with the situations. The findings show that using the 'Complaint followed by Request' (C+R) was the most frequently used structure by Iranian learners when making complaint. From the table, 'Request followed by Complaint' (R+C) and only expressing 'Complaint' (C) were the subsequent ranks of frequencies respectively. Other structures were 'Initiator followed by Complaint followed by Request' (I+C+R), 'Initiator followed by Request followed by Complaint' (I+R+C), 'Initiator followed by Complaint' (I+C), 'Initiator followed by Request' (I+R), and only expressing 'Request' (R).

Figure 3 shows the politeness strategies used by respondents. Figure 3 shows the politeness strategies applied by Iranian learners when they complained in English. From the chart, negative politeness strategy was the most frequently used strategy by respondents (42.77%). Positive politeness strategy is shown as the second rank of frequency (37.5%). The figure also shows that off-record and 'not doing FTA' as the least used strategies. The details and example of each type of complaint and politeness strategy is discussed below.

Indirect Accusation

The results of the present study indicate that the indirect accusation strategy is the most frequent strategy used by respondents (22.69%). The speakers used this strategy when they asked the hearers questions about the situation or asserted that hearers are in some way connected with the problem and offence. For example:

Hey dude you're listening to very loud music, aren't you? I think if you turn down the music or close your windows, the noise cannot go through the thin walls and I'd appreciate it if you do that. [Sit. 10][Resp. 36]

1) Complaint strategy: [Indirect Accusation]

- "You're listening to very loud music, aren't you? I think if you turn down the music or close your windows, the noise cannot go through the thin walls".

Table 4. Complaint patterns

1. Complaint+Request (C+R)	26%
2. Request+Complaint (R+C)	16%
3. Complaint (C)	13%
4. Initiator+Request+Complaint (I+R + C)	11%
5. Initiator+Complaint+Request (I+C + R)	10%
6. Initiator+Complaint (I+C)	9%
7. Request (R)	8%
8. Initiator+Request (I+R)	7%

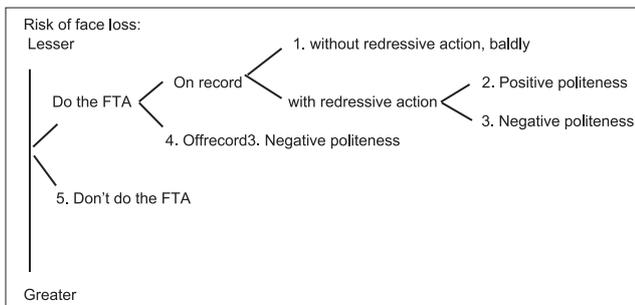


Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Choice of Polite-ness Strategy

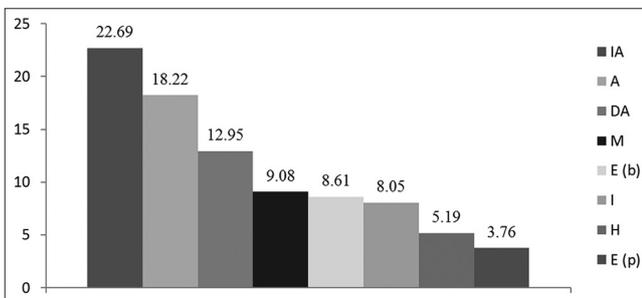


Figure 2. Frequency of Use of Complaint Strategies. Where: IA= Indirect Accusation, A= Annoyances, DA= Direct Accusation, M= Modified blame, E (b)= Explicit blame (behavior), I= Ill consequences, H= Hints, E (p)= Explicit blame (person)

- Compliant structure: (I+C+R)
 - Initiator: "Hey dude"
 - Accusation/indirect: "You're listening to very loud music, aren't you?"
 - Mitigator: "I think"
 - Indirect request: "if you turn down the music or close your windows, the noise cannot go through the thin walls and I'd appreciate it if you do that."
- Politeness strategy: [Off-record/Rhetorical question], [Negative politeness/Hedge]
 - "You're listening to very loud music, aren't you?"
 - "I think if you turn down your music or close the windows, the noise cannot go through the walls and I really appreciate it if you do that"

To cope with this situation, the speaker used indirect accusation as a strategy. The complaint comprised an initiator prior to indirect accusation followed by a mitigator and indirect request to repair the problem. The speaker also used a rhetorical question in the off-record strategy and left the an-

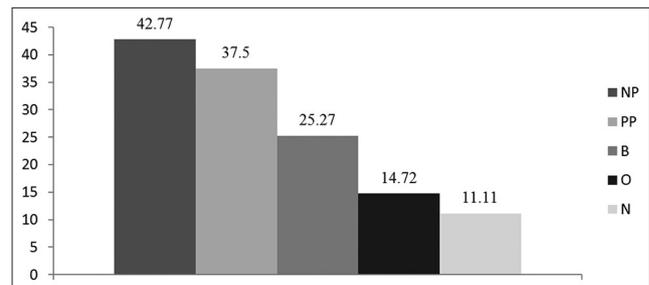


Figure 3. Frequency of Use of Politeness Strategies. Where: NP= Negative Politeness, PP= Positive Politeness, B= Bald on record, O= Off-record, N= Not doing FTA

swer hanging in the air, followed by hedges and minimized imposition which are the negative politeness strategy.

Annoyance

Annoyance was the second most frequent complaint strategy (18.22%). The speakers used this strategy when they wanted to show that the hearer did something wrong and expressed it through annoyance, dislike and disapproval. By using this strategy, speakers imply that the hearer is responsible, but do not mention the hearer as the guilty person. For instance:

It's really annoying to hear lots of noise at night especially when I'm so tired and need to sleep, can you please speak quieter when you are talking on the phone? [Sit. 1] [Resp. 17]

- Complaint strategy: [Disapproval/Annoyance]
 - "It's really annoying to hear lots of noise at night especially when I'm so tired and need to sleep"
- Compliant structure: (C+R)
 - Annoyance/Somewhat direct: "It's really annoying to hear lots of noise at night especially when I'm so tired and need to sleep"
 - Indirect request: "Can you please speak quieter when you are talking on the phone?"
 - Mitigator: "Can you"
 - Politeness marker: "Please"
- Politeness strategy: two strategies are used: first [Bald on record], and second [Negative politeness/Be conventional indirect] respectively.
 - "It's really annoying to hear lots of noise at night especially when I'm so tired and need to sleep"
 - "Can you please speak quieter when you are talking on the phone?"

Dealing with this situation, the complainer expresses annoyance. A somewhat direct annoyance was used followed by a mitigator and politeness marker prior to requesting repair. The speaker used a direct statement and the bald on record strategy and tried to be conventionally indirect by using mitigator "can you" before requesting a repair.

Direct Accusation

As the results show, direct accusation is the third most frequent strategy (12.95%). The same as indirect accusation, when the respondents used direct accusation, they attempted to establish the agent of the complainable; the difference

is that the respondents directly accuse the hearer as having committed the problem and offence. For instance:

My friend your part of work is not good enough and I really worry about it. Please improve your part for the better, thank you. [Sit. 3][Resp. 8]

- 1) Complaint strategy: [Direct accusation]
 - “Your part of work is not good enough and I really worry about it”
- 2) Complaint structure: (I+C+R)
 - Initiator: “My friend”
 - Direct accusation/Very direct: “Your part of work is not good enough and I really worry about it”
 - Politeness marker: “Please”
 - Direct request: “improve your part for the better”
 - Politeness marker: “Thank you”
- 3) Politeness strategy: [Bald on record]
 - “My friend your part of work is not good enough and I really worry about it. Please improve your part for the better, thank you.”

The speaker used direct accusation in order to deal with the situation. An initiator was used before a somewhat direct accusation followed by a direct request to repair. Politeness markers precede and follow it. Bald on record is used as the politeness strategy in this response.

Modified Blame

The results of this study illustrate that 9.08% of the respondents used the modified blame strategy in order to cope with the situation. When the speakers choose modified blame as a strategy, they state a modified disapproval of an action that the hearer is responsible for, or they state a preference for alternative approaches not taken by the hearer. It is assumed that the hearer is responsible and guilty of the offence, although this is not stated explicitly. For example:

Couldn't you really ask permission on using my belongings? I don't like to share some of my personal properties at all. So please don't take them without my consent anymore. [Sit. 6][Resp. 15]

- 1) Complaint strategy: [Modified blame]
 - “Couldn't you really ask permission on using my belongings? I don't like to share some of my personal properties at all”
- 2) Compliant structure: (C+R)
 - Modified blame/Very direct: “Couldn't you really ask permission on using my belongings? I don't like to share some of my personal properties at all”
 - Politeness marker: “Please”
 - Direct request: “don't take them without my consent anymore”
- 3) Politeness strategy: two strategies are used in this response: first [Off-record/Rhetorical question], and second [Bald on record] respectively.
 - “Couldn't you really ask permission on using my belongings?”
 - “I don't actually like to share some of my personal properties at all. So please don't take them without my consent anymore”

Modified blame strategy is used in this response. Modified blame is followed by politeness marker “please” prior to

a very direct request to repair. The speaker also used two politeness strategies in this response. He/she used a rhetorical question in the off-record strategy as the priority when the speaker asked a question and left the answer hanging in the air; the bald on record strategy subsequently follows.

Explicit Blame (Behavior)

Explicit blame (behavior) strategy is used with lower frequency than modified blame strategy (8.61%). When the respondents used explicit blame (behavior) strategy, they explicitly stated the action that the hearer had to take responsibility for. The unique feature of an explicit blame (behavior) was the explanation that the action was bad. For instance:

Your action was not good at all, it's very impolite to move others' bag and belongings to another table when you want to seat there. So, before reporting your action to the librarian, fetch me my bag to my table and seat in another chair please. [Sit. 9][Resp. 47]

- 1) Complaint strategy: [Explicit blame (behavior)]
 - “Your action was not good at all, it was very impolite to move others' bag and belongings to another table when you want to seat there”
- 2) Compliant structure: (C+R)
 - Explicit blame behavior/Very direct/Justification: “Your action was not good at all, it was very impolite to move others' bag and belongings to another table when you want to seat there”
 - Direct request/Threat: “So, before reporting your action to the librarian, fetch me my bag to my table and seat in another chair”
 - Politeness marker: “Please”
- 3) Politeness strategy: [Bald on record]
 - “Your action was not good at all, it was very impolite to move others' bag and belongings to another table when you want to seat there. So, before reporting your action to the librarian, fetch me my bag to my table and seat in another chair please.”

Explicit blame behavior is followed by a threat and a direct request to repair with a final politeness remark. Bald on record is used as the politeness strategy in this response.

Ill Consequence

8.05% of the respondents used ill consequences strategy in their responses. The same as the annoyance strategy, when the respondents used the ill consequences strategy, they expressed their annoyance by referring to the situation and avoided mentioning the hearer as a guilty person, although they held the hearer responsible for the offence. The difference was the respondents expressed the ill consequences resulting from the problem that the hearer was responsible for. For example:

There isn't any possibility of getting good mark for the presentation, we will certainly lose mark for it, so take the matter up with the professor and give us a second chance to present our work, thanks. [Sit. 8][Resp. 12]

- 1) Complaint strategy: [Disapproval/Ill consequence]
 - “We will certainly lose mark for the presentation”

- 2) Compliant structure: (C+R)
- Ill consequence/Indirect: “There isn’t any possibility of getting good mark for the presentation, we will certainly lose mark for it”
 - Direct request: “Take the matter up with the professor and give us a second chance to present our work”
 - Politeness marker: “thanks”
- 3) Politeness strategy: [Negative politeness/Be pessimistic]
- “There isn’t any possibility of getting good mark for the presentation, we will certainly lose mark for it, so take the matter up with the professor and give us a second chance to present our work”

Ill consequence is followed by a direct request to repair and a politeness remark. Be pessimistic within negative politeness was the politeness strategy used when the speaker referred to a bad consequence.

Hints

The results revealed that hint was not a commonly used strategy and only 5.19% of the respondents used this strategy in order to deal with the situations. Hints is considered as a soft complaint and most indirect strategy since the speakers do not explicitly say something is bad or offensive. For instance:

I always get a good mark for doing my assignments, I really can't endure get a bad mark for them. [Sit. 3][Resp. 20]

- 1) Complaint strategy: [No explicit reproach/Hint]
- “I always get a good mark for doing my assignments, I really can’t endure get a bad mark for them.”
- 2) Complaint structure: (C)
- Hint/Indirect: “I always get a good mark for doing my assignments, I really can’t endure get a bad mark for them.”
- 3) Politeness strategy: [Off-record/Give hints and clue]
- “I always get a good mark for doing my assignments, I really can’t endure get a bad mark for them.”

By using a hint, the speaker does not directly state the problem and indirectly refers to it. Hint within the No explicit reproach strategy was used. Giving hints within the off-record strategy was also used as a politeness strategy.

Explicit Blame (Person)

The results of this study show that the explicit blame (person) strategy is the least frequent strategy used by participants (3.76%). Explicit blame (person) is the most direct strategy and when this strategy is used, the speakers clearly blamed the hearers and they were not very careful about the hearer’s feeling. For example:

You're not studious and serious in your work at all. You're really irresponsible student and so I'll never make this blunder and agree to be in one group presentation with you again. [Sit. 8][Resp. 3]

- 1) Complaint strategy: [Explicit blame (person)]
- “You’re not studious and serious in your work at all. You’re really irresponsible student and so I’ll never make this blunder and agree to be in one group presentation with you again.”

- 2) Compliant structure: (C)
- Explicit blame to hearer/Threat: “You’re not studious and serious in your work at all. You’re really irresponsible student and so I’ll never make this blunder and agree to be in one group presentation with you again.”
- 3) Politeness strategy: [Bald on record]
- “You’re not studious and serious in your work at all. You’re really irresponsible student and so I’ll never make this blunder and agree to be in one group presentation with you again”

Explicit blame to the hearer is followed by a threat. Bald on record is also used as a politeness strategy in this response.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study shows the complaint strategies used by Iranian learners, how their complaints are structured, and how politeness is displayed in their complaints when communicating in English in complaint-provoking situations of a university. According to the results, Iranian learners use a variety of complaint strategies: indirect accusation, annoyance, direct accusation, modified blame, explicit blame (behavior), ill consequences, hints, and explicit blame (person). Indirect accusation is the most frequent complaint strategy. According to Trosborg (1995), indirect accusation involves asking questions about the situation and asserting the hearer is connected to the problem while simultaneously disclaiming all responsibility of the speaker’s involvement in the situation. Trosborg notes that this strategy is less face threatening and more polite to the hearer than direct accusation. Iranians may have used indirect accusation the most as it allows them to deal with the problem situation without having to break their relationship with the hearer. Annoyance is the second most frequently used complaint strategy. When using this strategy, the respondents stated the problem by referring to the situation rather than the hearer. They also avoided mentioning the hearer as a guilty person and therefore their complaints were less face threatening. Among all complaint strategies, hints and explicit blame (person) strategies were the least frequently used strategies. In both these strategies, the hearer is clearly blamed; in hints it is done indirectly while through explicit blame the act is direct.

Respondents’ complaints were structured using different patterns. The responses were mainly structured as Complaint followed by Request (C+R) in order to deal with the situation. The complaint comprised any of the eight strategies discussed above. However, as noted above, the most frequent complaint strategies were indirect accusations and showing annoyance. These complaint strategies were mostly followed by indirect requests; however sometimes direct requests were involved. Other structures were Initiator + Complaint + Request (I+C+R), Initiator + Request + Complaint (I+R+C), Initiator + Complaint (I+C), Initiator + Request (I+R), Request + Complaint (R+C), expressing Complaint (C), and expressing Request (R).

Initiators, greetings and address terms were incorporated within the structural patterns. Some examples of the initiators were ‘hi, sir, madam, my friend, dear’ which were used by respondents as opening formulas. In relation to

level of directness, the indirect strategy was of the highest occurrence. When using this strategy, the respondents did not mention the offense and they only implied it. Besides indirect strategy, somewhat direct strategy was at the second rank of frequency. By using somewhat direct strategy, the respondents mentioned the offence without expressing the hearer's responsibility. In addition, the respondents used very direct strategy when they explicitly mentioned the offense and hearer's responsibility for it. This strategy, however, was the least frequently used strategy with regard to level of directness.

The respondents also commonly used mitigating devices and softeners in their complaint in order to consider politeness and maintain a good relationship with the hearer. Some examples of the softeners used by the respondents were modal verbs such as 'could', 'would' or other softening remarks such as 'I think', 'you know' and politeness markers like 'I wonder', 'thank you'.

Regarding politeness strategies, the results show that negative politeness was used with the highest frequency. By using this strategy, the respondents were concerned about the hearer's freedom of action and tried to minimize the threat to the hearer. For example, they mostly tried to be conventionally indirect by asking the question 'could you...?'. Besides negative politeness strategy, positive politeness strategy was the second rank of frequency. The respondents used positive politeness when they wanted the hearer's face to be satisfied. Bald on record strategy was applied as the third frequently used strategy. In this strategy, the respondents used direct and blunt statements without considering the hearer's face and therefore their acts were face threatening acts with maximum efficiency towards hearers. Off-record was not commonly used by the respondents. When using this strategy, Iranian learners did not say their intentions explicitly and they mostly used hints in their responses. Some participants chose 'not doing face threatening acts' as a strategy when they ignored the problem and said nothing in reaction to the situation.

In sum, the results of this study show that Iranian learners were responsive when communicating in English in complaint-provoking situations. They had in their interlanguage a variety of complaint and politeness strategies as well as patterns of use that they were able to draw on, adapt in a flexible manner, and perform when faced with a variety of communicative situations. The nature of strategies and structural patterns employed were context-sensitive as their use was shaped by the dynamics of the context of the social situations concerned. The findings show that the learners had the pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence to manage the speech act of complaint in various situations. Culturally, the findings show that Iranians are indirect and exercise negative politeness as they try to minimize the face threatening act of complaining. However, when the situation demands for it, they can be direct in their manner of speech as evidenced by the use of direct accusation, explicit blame strategies, and direct requests embedded within the complaints.

Suffice to say, the contribution of the study to the field is with regard to how a group of Iranian learners complain when speaking in English to peers of other nationalities in terms of

strategies and structures used. Another contribution of the study is with regard to methodology; Trosborg (1995) and Rinnert and Nogami (2006) were combined to analyze the complaint speech act regarding strategy and structure. In the literature, there is no known study that investigates both complaint strategies and complaint structure of the complaint speech act.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Background Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Your involvement is voluntary and confidential and your cooperation is highly appreciated.

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender: Male Female
4. Education: Master PhD
5. Faculty:
6. Field of study:
7. How many years have you been studying English?
8. How long have you been in Malaysia or other English-speaking countries?
1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years and above
9. What is your level of proficiency in English?
10. Intermediate Intermediate-advanced Advanced
11. What is the most difficult thing for you when you want to complain in English?

Appendix B: Discourse Completion Task

Instructions: Please read all the situations which described below carefully then answer the questions. You may possibly have been in same situations, and maybe not. If yes, write down how did you behave and what did you say, if not try to imagine what you will do and what you will say and briefly explain why you did or said that. Please use your usual speech and respond each scenario impulsively as you do in face-to-face daily interaction. The example below can give you an idea to how to respond. (This situation intends to yield the act of requesting)

Example: You got flu and were not be able to present at your class. Therefore, you would like to ask your classmate, who is from different culture of yours, to borrow his or her notes to make a copy and prepare for the exam. What do you say?

You say: Hi, 'cos I was sick I missed the class yesterday. Could you lend me your notes only for few hours? I'll copy them and return them as soon as possible.

1) You have a roommate who is from different culture of yours. Although you get along very well together, there is also one problem. Your roommate always spends hours on the phone chatting to his or her family at midnight on weekend and talks very loudly. So you cannot sleep well and you also have an early morning class on next day. Will you say anything to your roommate? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it and if no, please make clear why not.

You say:

2) In one of your classes the professor asks the students if any of them volunteer to present his or her study. You are not sure about your study and don't feel like speaking, so you don't volunteer. Suddenly, a student sitting next to you and looked on your study before, who is from different culture of yours, tells the professor that you are ready and your study is well. Upon hearing that, your professor asks you to present your study while everybody is listening. What do you think about your classmate behavior? Will you say anything to him or her later? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

3) In one of your classes you are in a pair written work assignment with one of your classmate, who is from different culture of yours. You have done a great job on preparing your part, but your partner is not doing well at all. You are worried about losing points and cannot make the assignment very well alone. Will you say anything to your partner about his or her part? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

4) Your housemate, who is from different culture of yours, usually invites his or her friends once or twice a week. They burst out laugh and speak quite loudly. You also have to study well for your class quiz every week. So you have to focus on your subjects, but due to their noise you cannot concentrate well. Will you say anything to your housemate? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

5) You always try to pay attention in the class to get information and take notes, but there is one problem. One of your classmates, who is from different culture of yours, sitting next to you and he or she talks and asks you question while the professor is lecturing and everybody is listening. Therefore, you cannot concentrate and lose lots of tips and information. What do think about this action? Will you say anything to your classmate? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

6) In one sharing home, you and your housemate who is from different culture of yours living together. Your housemate and you get along pretty well; however, there is one problem. He or she usually takes whatever it yours at home such as your pot, glass, dishes and so on and use them without your permission. What will you do in this situation? Will you say anything to your classmate? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

7) In one of your classes you feel very cold and turn off the AC, but your classmate who sat beside the AC panel and he or she is from different culture of yours, suddenly turn on the AC again and when you only request to turning down the air conditioner, he or she says that the class is too hot and just ignore your request. What do you think about this behavior? Will you say anything to your classmate? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

8) You and one of your classmates, who is from different culture of yours, are in one group presentation for one of the subjects. You both have done a well job on preparing slides and tips, but on the day when it is scheduled to present, he or she does not show up. Your professor says that the presentation cannot be scheduled again and both of you will lose points for this assignment if you do not present on that time. So you end up presenting, while you are not well focused on your partner's part. Would you say anything to your partner later? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

9) You usually go to library for the study. One day after one hour reading you feel tired and decide to have rest for ten minutes, so you go outside to have something. When you go back inside the library, you see one of the students, who is from different culture of yours, has sat on your chair and he or she has put your bag and you books on the other table. Would you say anything to that student? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say:

10) You have finished your exam and feel very tired. So, you come back home to take a rest and prepare yourself for the next exam. But there is one problem. Your neighbor next door, who is also another student and she or he is from different culture of yours, turned on the music too loud. Therefore, you cannot relax and be ready for the study of the next subject. Would you say anything to your neighbor? If yes, please briefly explain what you will say and why you will say it. If no, please make clear why not.

You say: