



An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study of Saudis' Complaints

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Received 16 June 2017; accepted 8 August 2017

Published online 26 August 2017

Abstract

This study investigated the strategies monolingual Saudi Arabian adults (MSAAs), Saudi EFL adult learners (SEFLALs), and native speakers of English (ENSs) used when complaining. Another related aim was investigating whether SEFLALs displayed pragmatic transfer when using complaint strategies. A total of 183 written responses were collected from MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs via a three-item discourse completion task (DCT) were analyzed. Findings revealed the strategies used by the study participants when performing the speech act of complaints. First, hints, request and annoyance were the most frequently used strategies by MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs. Second, there were no statistically significant differences among MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs in using the strategy of direct accusation which consistent with the concept of positive pragmatic transfer. Third, hints, behavioral blame, request and indirect accusation were cases of weak negative pragmatic transfer as employed the SEFLALs in the current study. Fourth, modified blame was consistent with concept of strong negative pragmatic transfer. Finally, the last two strategies; annoyance and threat were consistent with no transfer, that is, SEFLAL employed these two strategies as ENSs.

Key words: Complaints; Pragmatic transfer; Speech acts

Al Rashidi, N. M. (2017). An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study of Saudis' Complaints. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 15(2), 11-19. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9835> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9835>

INTRODUCTION

In L2 pragmatics, politeness strategies have received paramount importance. In their theory of politeness, Brown and Levinson, (1987) state that many speech acts such as disagreeing, criticizing, and complaint are intrinsically face threatening because they do not consider the face wants of the interlocutors. They state that face-threatening acts (FTAs) have two main variables: (a) Whose face is being threatened (the speaker's or the addressee's), and (b) Which type of face is being threatened (positive- or negative- face). Since some speech acts are face threatening, politeness strategies are employed to soft the threat to the face of interlocutors (Locher, 2004).

Hymes (1972) introduced the Communicative Competence notion to contrast Chomsky's competence (1965). Since its emergence, communicative competence shifted the attention from focusing on form to concentrate on both form and function. Within the communicative competence framework, language is considered as a communicative activity rather than isolated grammatical rules. Moreover, pragmatic interlanguage (IL) is defined as "the study of nonnative speaker's use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge" (Kasper & Rose, 1999, p.81). Within this pragmatic IL framework, this study investigates the speech act of complaint among Saudis.

Language is a socio-cultural phenomenon that people use to communicate with each other (Jarbou, 2002). This phenomenon is used differently by people with regard to certain social setting and different contexts. Moreover, complaint as a face-threatening act requires being uttered without being rude or impolite. This proposes it is important to communicate successfully and acquire the communicative competence.

Tanck (2002) states that complaint as a speech act occurs when a speaker responds with annoyance or displeasure to an action that has affected him/her negatively. Thus, complaint is a face-threatening act to

the hearer, and the speaker should deliver with caution so that the hearer's feelings might not be hurt (Moon, 2001). In addition, when making complaints, indirect strategies are usually employed so as not to offend the hearer and to avoid being impolite, rude or disrespectful (Wannurk, 2005). In the current study, the researcher investigated the IL pragmatics of the speech act of complaint among Saudis.

A. Problem of the Study

As people communicate with each other, argument and conflict inevitably occur. This leads to interpersonal conflict that is pervasive and inescapable among individuals. Grimshaw (1990, p.1) states that, "conflict is pervasive and ubiquitous among all living organisms (sentient and non-sentient). Conflict is threatening to ourselves and all others around us." Since conflict is pervasive and represents threats to oneself as well as other, several researchers have stressed the importance of examining complaint as a FTA in varied contexts.

Surveying related research indicates that complaint is a speech act that has not received due attention in literature. Because of the lack of sufficient socio-pragmatic knowledge of EFL, complaining is more problematic for the non-native speakers of a foreign language (FL). Yamagashira (2001) argues that nonnative speakers will use their first language strategies if they lack communicative competence in the second language (L2) and, therefore, misunderstandings occur. This may be attributed to its nature as a FTA through which people show their discontent and lack of satisfaction. In such situations, application of politeness strategies is vital for maintaining face. Therefore, complaint among Saudis is an area of research that needs to be explored.

B. Questions of the Study

The researcher posed the following two questions:

- (a) What strategies do MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs use when complaining?
- (b) Do SEFLALs display pragmatic transfer when using complaint strategies?

C. Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is revealed by the scarce number of studies conducted on complaints in the Arab context. These few studies on complaint, to the researcher's best knowledge, were conducted in the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates UAE and Iraq (Umar, 2006; Deveci, 2015; Mayouf, 2013) respectively. Thus and despite the increasing interest in studies of IL pragmatics, Arab studies are scarce in this area of research. This implies the need for conducting the current IL pragmatic study on Saudis' complaints.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the pragmatics literature, a number of studies have investigated the speech act of complaining. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework

and a discussion on the ways in which previous studies on complaints are related to the present study. First, the section examines pragmatic competence, IL pragmatics, and speech acts theory as frameworks. Then, the chapter discusses the speech act of complaint, reviewing its classifications and its code schemes. Finally, the chapter concludes with several empirical studies on IL pragmatics studies of complaints.

1.1 Pragmatic Competence

Hymes (1972) coins the term pragmatic competence. He refers to communicative competence that combines both linguistic knowledge and socio-cultural rules in reaction to Chomsky's competence (1965). Chomsky defines the ultimate goal of linguistic theory as follows:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. (p.3)

Chomsky (1965) proposes that linguistics should study the subconscious of the grammar knowledge. Also, Chomsky proposes that performance, or language use, is full of flaws and is imperfect. Therefore, linguists should depend on it only to study systematically the underlying grammatical rules. For Chomsky's theory, it is more important to investigate linguistic competence than linguistic performance.

Though Hymes (1972) acknowledges that performance might be imperfect, he argues that Chomsky's theory is problematic since it defines linguistic competence in isolation from sociocultural influence. As an alternative, Hymes proposes that a part of a speakers' knowledge of the language is the knowledge of what is contextually appropriate, which he refers to as communicative competence. In addition to the knowledge of how to produce grammatically correct sentences, this definition adds the ability of a speaker to know "when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner" (p.277).

1.2 Sociopragmatic and Pragmalinguistic Failure

Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic competence as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand the language in context" (p.92). Moreover, she divides pragmatic competence into two components: sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic. She identifies pragmatic failure as learner's inability to understand what is meant by what is said.

Pragmalinguistic failure occurs when a speaker transfers linguistic strategy of his/her first language L1 to his/her second language (L2) while performing a speech act. On the other hand, sociopragmatic failure occurs in cultural and social differences. For instance, an Arab

ESL student offering food to an American friend will not accept the American answer “No, thank you” as a refusal act. He will consider it “beating around the bush,” since in Arabic culture it is impolite to accept food on the first request (Jarbou, 2002).

Pragmatic failures can cause unfriendly situations and confusion between native and non-native speakers because a learners’ pragmatic incompetence may be misguidedly interpreted as impoliteness, unfriendliness, boorishness, or ill-will (Thomas, 1983). For example, Olshtain and Cohen (1990) observed that the absence of intensifiers such as *very* or *really* in apologies by Israeli ESL students led their American interlocutors to perceive their apologies as dishonest.

1.3 Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)

ILP focuses on how a learner comprehends and produces speech acts in the second language and how their pragmatic competence develops over the time. Moreover, the learner may add elements from his L1, which is called *transfer*. ILP has two components: a) *IL*, and b) *pragmatics*. Selinker (1972) introduced the term IL as a separate linguistic system. This system is neither the system of L2 nor L1. Scholars often define IL as a learner’s knowledge about structure (Kasper, 1998). IL pragmatics, on the other hand, focuses on how a learner comprehends and produces speech acts in the second language and how their pragmatic competence develops over the time. Moreover, the learner may add elements from his L1, which is called *transfer*.

Linguists identify two types of transfer: a) positive; and b) negative. Positive transfer occurs when L1 strategies match with L2 strategies when performing speech acts because of the similarities between the two cultures. However, negative transfer happens when a pragmatic failure occurs due to cultural differences (Thomas, 1983).

Shardakova (2009) stressed that most of the existing IL studies had used cross-sectional design, which is based on different samples of learners at different proficiency levels. However, the development of IL pragmatics using the same samples of learners is rarely studied (p.38).

1.4 Speech Acts Theory

The theory of speech acts was coined by Austin (1962) and then developed by Searl (1969, 1975, 1979). Austin, in his book, *How to Do Things with Words*, makes a distinction between *constative* utterances and *performative* ones. According to Austin, an utterance such as *the sky is blue* is a constative utterance which reports true or false facts on external states of affairs while an utterance such as *I hereby pronounce you husband and wife* is a performative one and completes a verbal action rather than being a true or false statement. Furthermore, Austin points out that language consists of acts, or speech acts; such as *locutionary* which is the actual saying, such as *the room is hot*; and *illocutionary*

which is the performance of the communicative act or what the speaker does through speaking, such as a *request to open the window*; and *perlocutionary* which is the listener’s reaction. The focus on most pragmatics studies is on *illocutionary acts*. However, performatives can be successfully realized in certain circumstances, that is, *felicity condition*. For instance, the utterance *you are hired* is only felicitous when the speaker has the authority to hire people.

Also, Austin identified five classes of illocutionary acts in the last chapter of his book. The class of *Verdictives*, which are giving a verdict or estimate, include values and facts. The class of *Exercitives*, which are exerting power or influence, include ordering and warning and presuppose authority of the speaker. The class of *Commissives* commits the speaker to do something, such as promising. The class of *Expositives* clarifies reasoning, arguments and communication such as asking and answering. The class of *Behabitives* includes acts that have to do with social behavior and attitudes. However, Austin’s classes were dismissed by linguists, and are not used as frequently as the categories of his student, Searl.

Searl (1979) develops speech acts by categorizing them into five categories: *Assertives*, *Directives*, *Commissives*, *Expressives*, *declarations*, *assertives* are utterances that express what the speaker believes it is true, such as *suggestion*, *statement*, and *complaint*; for example, *I state that it is not raining*. *Directives* are utterances that direct the hearer to do something, such as *order*, *advising*, and *request*; for example, *I order you to leave*. *Commissives*, which are utterances the speaker assigns to do in the future, such as *promise*, *pledge*, and *offer*; for example, *I promise you to pay attention to you*. *Expressives*, which are utterances that express speaker’s feeling and attitude, such as an *apology*, *complaint*, and *congratulation*; for example, *I thank you for giving me the money*. And finally, *declarations*, which are acts which change the state of the world, such as *pointing*, *naming* and *confirming*; for example, *I hereby pronounce you husband and wife* (pp.12-27).

Searl (1975) distinguishes between *direct* and *indirect* speech acts. Grundy (2000) explains this difference by stating that English has a set of sentence forms: a) *declarative*, that is, subject and verb order; b) *imperative*, which has no overt subject; and c) *interrogative*, which in its basic form consists of a verb and subject order. On the other hand, it has a matching set of utterance function: a) *assertion*, b) *request* or *order*, and c) *question*.

When the form matches the function, it is called direct speech act; for example, *I’ll never sell her*, which is declarative used as an assertion. *Don’t ever sell her* is an imperative used to give an order. *Will you ever sell her?* Is an interrogative used as a question? On the other hand, *I wonder when the train leaves* is declarative used as a question. *Have a good journey* is an imperative used as

an assertion. And, *Can you pass the salt, please?* Is an interrogative use as a question?

1.5 Speech Act of Complaint

Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) state that:

In the speech act of complaining, the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance—censure—as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavorably. This complaint is usually addressed to the hearer (H) whom the S holds, at least partially, responsible for the offensive action. For the purpose of this study, censure will be assumed to have been expressed whenever S chooses to verbalize her disapproval of the violation. (p.108)

Complaint is a speech act that basically threatens the positive face of the hearer. Literature on IL pragmatics has directed much attention to complaint as a speech act and its strategies that are used to meet the society acceptable norms. Reasons for this special importance lie in the face-threatening nature of the complaint speech act which has been seen to be subject to cross-gender (Boxer, 1996) and cross-cultural difference in terms of use and interpretation (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993).

1.5.1 Classification of Complaints

Austin (1962) classifies complaints in performatives, which can be explicit, such as *I censure*; half descriptives such as *I blame*, or descriptives such as *I am disgusted*. They all belong to *behabitives*, a subclass of performatives, which express a speaker's attitude and feelings. Searle (1979) divides complaints into two classes: a) *assertive*, which are complaints in which speakers make assertions about the state of affairs; and b) *expressive*, which are complaints that express a speaker's psychological state. Leech (1983) labels complaints as a *conflictive act* because of their illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal (p.105). Furthermore, he stated that complaints are *impolite acts* by the nature of the conflict. Brown and Levinson (1987) identify complaints as essentially Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) because their realization can harm the speaker's and the hearer's positive and negative face.

1.5.2 Direct and Indirect Complaint

Boxer (1993a, 1993b) identified two categories of complaint: a) *direct*; and b) *indirect*. Direct complaint (as defined in Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Strasburg, 1995; Bukowski, 1988) occurs when the speaker addresses a complaint to the hearer and makes him responsible for the dissatisfaction. On the other hand, indirect complaint occurs when the speaker does not hold the hearer responsible for the offense but conveys dissatisfaction about himself or something that is absent.

A direct complaint can be a FTA since the speaker holds the hearer responsible for his dissatisfaction. For example, a teacher blames his student who didn't do his homework: *I don't care if you were absent the last lecture, you should bring your homework*. Also, a direct complaint can be threatening to the speaker's face, since, he imposes

his feeling to the interlocutor. Therefore, the interlocutor will not perceive the speaker's statement positively.

Since these two categories of complaints are usually treated separately, the current study only investigated direct complaints.

1.5.3 Encoding of Complaints

Several scholars have identified different types of strategies of complaints. Schaefer (1982), identifies the following nine semantic components at the discourse level: a) *opener*; b) *orientation*; c) *act statement*; d) *justification of the speaker*; e) *justification of the addressee*; f) *remedy*; g) *threat*; h) *closing*; and i) *valuation*.

Also, Murthy and Neu (1996) identify four strategies of a direct complaint as performed by American speakers of English and Korean L2 learners of English: a) *explanation of purpose*; b) *complaint*; c) *justification of the complaint*; and d) *candidate solution request or demand*.

In her detailed study, Trosborg (1995) recognizes four components of complaints with eight subcategories. The main components are a) *no explicit reproach*; b) *expression of annoyance or disapproval*; c) *accusation*; and d) *blame*.

1.6 Empirical Studies on Direct Complaints

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993) provided one of the most systematic analyses of cross-cultural and IL features of direct complaints. Their research revealed that American speakers, British speakers, and Hebrew speakers employ similar strategies when complaining in situations that are socially unacceptable act (SUA). They stated that the situation itself, not language nor culture-norm, determines the strategy selection across cultures. Also, they noted that social status plays a significant role in strategy selection with regard to Hebrew speakers.

Also, Trosberg (1995) conducted a study on direct complaints and examined the realization of requests, complaints and apologies from cross-cultural and IL perspectives. She studied complaints spoken by Danish learners of English along with complaints uttered by Danish LI and English LI speakers using interactive role-plays. The results revealed that learners used fewer strategies than English native speakers and Danish native speakers. Moreover, she found that English native speakers employ indirect strategies when speaking with a person of higher status to be polite, which goes in line with what Olshtain and Weinbach found on complaints of Hebrew speakers. In contrast, Danish native speakers did not frequently use indirect strategies when addressing a person of high status. However, they used more supportive moves than English speakers.

In an IL pragmatics study, Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) examined pragmatological and sociopragmatic features of direct complaints as performed by intermediate and advanced L2 learners of Hebrew. The results revealed that learners produced longer utterances than

native speakers to negotiate the problem expressed in a complaint. Moreover, learners also employed less direct strategies than native speakers, but they tended to use more intensifiers in their complaints.

Also, Piotrowska (1987) centered her study on the sociolinguistic competence of Cantonese learners of EFL. The results showed that learners' and native speakers' complaints differed from the linguistic and strategic levels when social distance and situational context were considered, which was attributed to differences in sociocultural norms in both language groups.

Arent (1996) reached similar conclusions in his study on the sociopragmatic competence of Chinese speakers of English. It was found that Chinese speakers of English complained to the authorities after they violated a parking ban and even tried to bargain the fine, which is considered inappropriate in American culture. Both Piotrowska (1987) and Arent (1996) asserted that learners of English need to obtain sociocultural norms in the target language to accomplish their communicative goals with native speakers in a complaint situation.

In a study on pragmatic transfer in direct complaints of Vietnamese learners of English, Tran (2002) found that non-native speakers used longer complaints with a greater number of moves and hedges to soften the complaint. Also, the results showed that social status affected learners' strategy selection. He concluded that learners transfer sociocultural norms from their first language when they complain in the target language.

Moreover, some studies showed that learners might have problems choosing an appropriate linguistic politeness strategy in terms of directness. While exploring communicative competence of German learners of English, Kasper (1981) found that the non-native speakers' complaint strategies were more direct than those of native speakers when they interacted with each other in roleplay dialogs. Also, learners had difficulty choosing appropriate modality markers and modal verbs in English. With contrast to native speakers, they preferred intensified indirect complaints, which was attributed to their linguistic behavior in their L1. According to native speakers of English, learners' complaints were perceived as negative behavior, which consequently led to pragmatic failure.

Murthy and Neu (1996) studied how American native speakers and Korean learners of English expressed disappointment about their grade to an American professor. The results showed that American speakers performed a complaint by partially taking responsibility for the wrongdoing, while Korean learners expressed criticism by blaming the professor for the problem. The learners employed the second person with the modal *should*, personalized the problem, and refused responsibility for the situation. Murthy and Neu concluded that appropriate linguistic choices in complaints might facilitate negotiations while inappropriate sociolinguistic behavior can negatively affect negotiations and lead to a conflict.

Within the limited research on direct complaints in Arabic, Umar (2006) compared the pragmatic competence of advanced Sudanese learners of English to native speakers' pragmatic competence when performing the speech act of complaint. The results revealed that the utterances produced by the Sudanese learners of English vary significantly from those made by the native speakers. Despite the long years they spend in studying English, the Sudanese students did not establish appropriate linguistic or socio-pragmatic skills that qualified them to produce appropriate complaints in English.

Also, in the Iraqi context, Hussien and Al Mofti (2014) investigated the pragmatic competence of Iraqi and Chinese English language students to make complaints in English in different situations. With the use of Discourse Completion Task (DCT), the students' responses were compared to responses obtained from native English speakers on the same test. Results revealed that Iraqi EFL learners of English are far behind in terms of linguistic and pragmatic competence in performing speech acts of complaint. Their Chinese counterparts were more indirect than both the Iraq EFL and native English speakers in performing the speech act of complaining.

Deveci (2015) investigated freshman English students' awareness of the complaint speech act set in the Petroleum Institute (PI) in Abu Dhabi, the UAE. Data was collected from 89 students using a role-play situation. In addition, a judgment scale was completed by two instructors to assess the efficiency of the students' performance. The findings revealed that the students had difficulty presenting their case, therefore, producing the speech act of criticism along with the complaint.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

There were 61 participants in the current study. They were divided into three groups: 34 SEFLALs, 10 ENSs, and 17 MSAAs.

2.1.1 SEFLALs

In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, this group was selected based on the following criteria; they learned the English language for ten years or more. A demographical questionnaire was provided along with a DCT to find about the participants' backgrounds and their English language proficiency. A number of 17 participants stated that they used the English language outside the class very often. However, only 14 participants stated they considered themselves as fluent in English. Also, all of the participants were are males except one. Their ages ranged from 27 to 48.

2.1.2 ENSs

The participants in this group were all Americans working in Saudi Arabia in the private sector. Also, all of them

were male except one female participant. Their ages ranged from 25 to 55.

2.1.3 MSAAs

The participants in this group are monolingual Saudi adults. There included 4 females, and the rest were males. Their ages ranged from 25 to 36. This group was selected to serve the purpose of this study, i.e., to be monolingual. Therefore, this group had no current relation with the English language as they stopped learning it with finishing the secondary-school level.

Since the groups of ENSs and MSAAs served only as a baseline in the study, the researcher found that it was not needed to administer a demographical questionnaire to the first group. After the researcher had obtained the research instrument, he designed it in Google Forms and administered to the study participants through e-mails and WhatsApp groups. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and confirmed that SEFLALs and MSAAs' criteria should be fulfilled strictly.

2.2 Instrument

The researcher adopted Umar's (2006) DCT questionnaire. Therefore, it was already validated, and it was reliable as well. The questionnaire divided into two sections; demographical information and DCT. The researcher translated the questionnaire into Arabic for MSAAs. Except for the deletion of demographical information for MSAAs and ENSs, nothing was changed to the original questionnaire. The DCT in Arabic and English comprised three everyday situations used to collect complaints from the study participants. A short description of situations was provided, which prompts participants to write what they would actually say in such situations.

The situations in the questionnaire were as follows:

- (a) Knowing that your room will be vacant over the weekend as you are visiting your family who

lives in another city, your friend requests to stay in your room over the weekend to prepare for his/her final exams. You permit him/her to stay. However, when you come back you find that your friend has behaved carelessly and messed up the room.

- (b) You need to buy a ticket to travel to a nearby city to visit your family over the weekend. You go to the ticket office at the bus station and you have to wait in a long line to get a ticket. The tickets are almost sold out. You have been waiting there for more than an hour. While you are standing in line, someone about your age, tries to cut in line in front of you.
- (c) You are applying for a position with a highly reputed company. The interview committee wants to have a recommendation letter from your employer. Your boss agrees to send this letter directly to the company. A month later you discover that the committee has not received this letter. You go to your boss's office to find out what has happened.

The situations are characterized in the following table.

Table 1
Characterization of the Situations in the DCT

Situation	Role of speaker and hearer
The careless friend	C: Undefined; E: Friend
The bus station	C: Undefined; E: Stranger
The recommendation letter	C: Employee; E: the manager

Note. C= Complainer; E= Complainee

2.3 Data Analysis

Trosberg's (1995) was adapted for the DCT data. The following table illustrated the eleven strategies of complaints. An one-way ANOVA was used to do statistical testing to find whether SEFLALs display pragmatic transfer.

Table 2
The Code Scheme of Complaint Strategies

Category	Strategy	Example
1. No explicit reproach	2. Hint	"Don't see much of you these days."
2. Expression of disapproval	3. Annoyance	"You know I don't drink tea with sugar, do you?"
	4. Ill consequences	"Because of that, I'll have to pay a fine."
3. Accusation	5. Indirect	"We have exam professor next week; haven't you correct our assignments."
	6. Direct	"You used to do your homework, what happened to you?"
4. Blame	7. Modified blame	"I hate to live in a mess; anyway you ought to clean up after you."
	8. Explicit blame (behavior)	"You have to clean up after yourself."
	9. Explicit blame (Person)	"Man, I will never trust you."
5. Directive acts	10. Request for repair	"Would you mind doing your share of the duties as soon as possible?"
	11. Threat	"I shall be leaving soon (if you do not do your share of the cleaning"

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are detailed according to the statistical data obtained from analyzing the participants' responses. Based on the study results, discussion is made relating the study

results to previous research.

3.1 Results of the First Research Question

What strategies do MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs use when complaining?

To answer the first research question, researcher calculated the frequency of strategies employed by MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs based on their responses on the DCT. Their responses are displayed in the following table.

Table 3
Frequency of the Strategies Employed by MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs Based on Their Responses on the DCT

Strategy	MSAAs		SEFLALs		ENSs		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Hints	11	23.40	31	30.39	8	28.57	51
Requests	14	29.78	31	30.39	9	32.14	54
Annoyance	5	10.63	15	14.70	4	14.28	23
Threats/ warnings	4	8.51	8	7.84	2	7.14	14
Direct accusations	3	6.38	7	6.8	2	6.89	13
Modified blame	2	4.25	5	4.90	2	7.14	8
Indirect accusations	3	6.38	6	5.88	1	3.57	10
Blame (behavior)	1	2.12	3	2.94	1	3.44	4
Blame (personal)	2	4.25	2	1.96	0	0	5
Ill Consequences	0	0	1	0.98	0	0	0
Total (all strategies)	47	100	102	100	29	100	183

All the three types of participants (MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs) produced similar results in their preference for using complaint strategies. Overall, hints, requests, and annoyance had the highest frequency. They formed 49.74% of the complaining behavior for MSAAs, SEFLALs, and ENSs. The fourth position was taken by threats/warning as a favored complaining strategy. Other complaining strategies in the list had a low degree of frequency. These results receive support from Trosborg (1995) who states that the strategies of ill consequences, indirect accusation, direct accusation, modified blame,

blame (behavior), and blame (person) are less frequently used. This is because they are more direct and less polite than requests, hints, and annoyance.

3.2 Results of the Second Research Question

Do SEFLALs display pragmatic transfer when using complaint strategies?

To reach answers to this research question, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for statistical testing. Table 4 is based on the five categories of pragmatic transfer, i.e., strong, weak, none, positive, and not applicable.

Table 4
SEFLALs' Pragmatic Transfer When Using Complaint Strategies

Strategy	F value	P≤0.05	Pragmatic transfer
Annoyance	2,54	Yes	None
Blame (personal)	1.95	No	Not applicable
Blame (behavior)	0.3	Yes	Weak
Hints	12.27	Yes	Weak
Requests	10.51	Yes	Weak
Threats/warnings	8	Yes	None
Direct accusations	7.482	No	Positive
Modified blame	0.904	Yes	Strong
Ill consequences	Not applicable (used only once by SEFLAL)		

3.2.1 Strong Negative Pragmatic Transfer

The results were considered consistent with the strong negative pragmatic transfer notion if SEFLAL had significantly greater or lower frequencies of a strategy than the ENSs. Also, the SEFLALs were considered statistically indistinguishable from the MSAAs. The findings for modified blame were consistent with the concept of strong negative pragmatic transfer. The SEFLALs and MSAAs used modified blame more than the ENSs if the social distance is greater between the interlocutors, that is, they tend to be politer with strangers. One explanation is might has to do with socio-cultural factors. In Arabic culture, the stranger is always welcomed

and approached with cautious as it stated in Arabic proverbs and poems

3.2.2 Weak Negative Pragmatic Transfer

The findings were considered consistent when the difference between the SEFLALs and ENSs or the three groups is statistically distinguishable and the SEFLALs fall between the ENSs and MSAAs with regard to the frequency score, that is, “a distinctive intermediate position in which opposing forces of transfer from L1 and convergence to TL were both manifested” (Shea, 2003, p.43). The results of hints, behavioral blame, request and indirect accusation were found consistent with the weak negative pragmatic transfer.

Behavioral blame responds came in the form of rhetorical question such as “*can't you see what you doing is rude?!*” in the SEFLALs responses, and in the form of declarative statement such as “*this is not a good way to earn my trust*” or “*yax-i thariiqh-tik ghalath*” (your behavior is wrong) in the NESs and MSAAs respectively.

The results of the current study revealed that the hint strategy is the most used strategy. An explanation of that because of the nature of the speech act of complaints as FTA. Therefore, speakers tend to use the hint strategy to save their interlocutors “face”. Surprisingly, all the three groups used the hint strategy in the third situation (the recommendation letter) more than the other two. This means that speakers tend to be polite in front of their superiors. According to the data findings, more social status is different among interactionists, the more the speakers tend to save their interlocutors “face.”

Also, request strategy is the second frequent used strategy among the three groups. Most responses in all the three groups came in a form of question “*would you clean the mess?*”, “*Sir, could you send it now?*” or “*would mind going back in the line?*”. This goes in line with searl (1975) distinguishing a direct speech act and indirect one as latter considered to be politer than the former. Because the FTA nature of the speech act of complaints, speakers tend to use the indirect to request a repair. Also, the SEFLALs and the MSAAs used this strategy more frequent in the situation two (the bus station). This means that both the two groups tend not offend their interlocutors if they are socially distant.

Indirect accusation illocutionary force of the SEFLALs and the MSAAs was accompanied with urgency (Tanck, 2004), for example, “*have you send it to the company or not yet?*”. This combination can be frustrating to a boss in real-life situation. However, ENS tended to mild the complaints to avoid the sense of urgency, for instance, “*How are sir? I wonder if got the time to send the recommendation latter*” (Trosberg, 1995).

3.2.3 No Transfer

In order to a strategy to be considered as no transfer, the SEFLALs should be presented with frequencies that are: a) indistinguishable from the ENSs frequencies and, b) statistically distinguishable from the MSAAs frequencies. Threats and annoyance are consistent with the case of no transfer.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) threats are when the complainer attacks the complaineer's face. This is the fourth most-used strategy in current study. This strategy is highly used by the SEFLALs and the NESs when the social distant is close (situation No.1). For example, one SEFLAL wrote on situation one (the careless friend) “*do it again and I will never let you in*”. It is not only a threat, but also accompanied with a challenge to mess up the room again.

3.2.4 Positive Transfer

According to Kasper (1992), the lack of statistical differences in frequencies of feature of language in the L1, L2 or interlanguage attributed to positive transfer. Direct accusation is the only strategy that is consisted with definition of positive transfer. Frequency of the MSAAs, the SEFLALs and ENSs was 6.38%, 6.8% and 6.89% respectively. The variance showed no significant differences among the three groups with regard to direct accusation.

3.2.5 Not Applicable

The findings were considered consisted with the definition of not applicable if the three groups were significantly different from each other, but the SEFLAL is either lower or above the other two groups in terms of strategic frequencies. No occurrences consisted with the definition of not applicable were found among the data. On the other hand, personal blame and ill consequences were excluded from the study because of the lack of the data provided by the participants with regard to these two strategies.

CONCLUSION

The speech act of complaint is a FTA that needs to be mastered to achieve successful communication with native language speakers. Through examining previous studies, it is apparent that direct complaints are not discussed in the Saudi context in cross-cultural or IL studies. So, this study may provide insights into the speech act of direct complaint as performed by American native speakers of English, monolingual Saudi native speakers, and Saudi learners of English by exploring both social distance and social status.

The results of the current study revealed the importance of communicative competence. Also, these results found support from literature with regard socio-cultural factors which go in line with Arent (1996) and Piotrowska (1987) studies. Moreover, the current study results go in line with Umar's (2006) that stated even with the long term learners spent in studying English, they failed to achieve communicative competence.

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