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A Contrastive Pragmatic Study of Speech Act of Complaint in Terms of Main Components in English and Persian

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to compare the speech act of main components of complaint strategies in English and Persian in varying situations in two contextual variables, namely, social power (P) and social distance (D). The performance of Iranian EFL learners was also investigated to see how they performed complaints in the target language. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT), composed of six open-ended items, was administered to 24 Iranian students majoring in English Language and Literature at Shiraz University, who were selected based on their score on TOEFL proficiency test (2004) and 16 Australian English native speakers. Data collected through the DCT, were coded and analysed based on taxonomy of complaints developed by Rinnert and Nogami (2006). The focus of the study was on the main component taxonomy. Chi-square tests were conducted to compare the performance of the groups. The results of chi-square for teacher situation showed that the Australian English native speakers (AE) significantly used an initiator more frequently than the Persian EFL learners (PE) and the Persian native speakers (PP). In the case of the academic advisor situation, the AE speakers significantly employed complaints more frequently than the PP. On the part of student situation, the AE speakers started the conversation with a complaint more frequently than the PP speakers. The participants in the PE group significantly used a request more frequently than the AE, but the AE and PP speakers used this semantic formula exactly equally. In the case of other situations, the results of chi-square revealed no significant differences in the frequencies of using complaint patterns between the groups. The performance of Iranian EFL learners showed that they sometimes significantly diverged from their

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English counterparts. It was concluded that other factors, along with negative transfer, were responsible for such a divergence.

Keywords: Speech act theory, complaint, social distance, social power, politeness

INTRODUCTION

To use a language is different from knowing it. The term "communicative competence", with its focus on using the language rather than knowing (Hymes, 1972) is in contrast to Chomsky's linguistic competence. Hymes observed that a person who had only linguistic competence would produce a lot of sentences unconnected to the situation in which they occur. In other words, s/he would be unable to communicate. Based on his observation, he came to the conclusion that speakers of a language need to have more than grammatical competence to communicate effectively. He also added that speakers of a language need to know how a language is used by the members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes. In other words, they need to use their language in both linguistically and socially appropriate ways. Unlike linguistic appropriateness, social appropriateness depends on the social and cultural context in which the language is used. A sentence can be linguistically appropriate, but it may or may not be socially appropriate. In communicative acts or speech acts, both linguistic and social structures are working together in communication.

Speech acts are "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (Searle, 1969, p. 16). He claimed that speaking a language is performing speech acts. In other words, when we say something, we are simultaneously performing communicative acts. Second language learners should be able to produce different speech acts both linguistically and socio-culturally appropriate. Appropriateness of language use can be realised by acknowledging the social identity of the listener in terms of the relative social status and degree of familiarity between participants (Moon, 2001). In other words, speakers should know who they are talking to, what the relationship with the listener is, what makes them talk, what they are talking about and which way of speech fulfills the goal of communication. Since languages are different, these socio-cultural rules may be realised differently in different languages. Thus, second language learners should know how these socio-cultural rules function in the target language so as to avoid communication breakdown.

As a cross-cultural study, the present study investigates similarities and differences between English and Persian native speakers' production of complaint. It also investigates complaints in the interlanguage of Iranian EFL learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech acts are of the key areas of pragmatics. The speech act theory came into existence as a result of Austin's (1962) theories of illocutionary acts, and later on, it was developed by Searle (1976). Austin (1962) makes a distinction between constative and performative utterances.

According to Austin, constatives are those utterances which are evaluated along a dimension of truth, while performatives can be evaluated along a dimension of felicity rather than truth. He mentioned several characteristics for performatives, as follows:

1. They do not describe or report or constate anything at all
2. They are not true or false
3. Uttering a performative is part of doing an action.

He argued that every speech act has three kinds of meaning as follows:

1. Locutionary (propositional) meaning: this is the literal meaning conveyed by particular words and structures which the utterance contains. For example, if someone says "I'm thirsty", the propositional meaning is what the utterance says about the speaker's physical state.
2. Illocutionary meaning: this is the social function of the utterance, or the effect the speaker wants the utterance to have on the listener. The sentence "I'm thirsty" uttered by someone who is thirsty is not only a mere description of his physical state, but also an indirect request to the addressee or someone nearby to bring him something to drink.
3. Perlocutionary meaning: it deals with the effect produced by the utterance. For example, bringing the speaker something to drink is the perlocutionary effect of the utterance "I'm thirsty" (Austin, 1962, pp. 14-15).

Based on the notion of illocutionary force, Austin then developed a classification of speech acts or performative verbs (1962, pp. 150-163):

(1) Verdictives, which express verdicts or evaluations given by judges. This category includes verbs such as to condemn, to absolve, to judge, to estimate, to appraise.

(2) Exercitives, which express the exercising of powers and rights. It includes verbs like to vote, to appoint, to excommunicate, to order, to warn.

(3) Commissives, which express commitments or undertakings. Verbs belonging to this category include to promise, to guarantee, to contract, to commit.

(4) Behavitives, which have to do with social behavior or reaction to it. This category includes verbs such as to thank, to refuse, to apologize, to complain.

(5) Expositives, which are used to explain or clarify reasons, arguments and communications. Verbs belonging to this category include to reply, to argue, to concede, to assume.

Searle (1969), inspired by Austin's work, mentioned three types of acts:

1. Utterance acts consist of the verbal employment of units of expression such as words and sentences.
2. Propositional acts are those matters having to do with referring and predicting.

3. Illocutionary acts have to do with the intents of speakers such as stating, questioning, promising or commanding.

Refining the notion of speech act, Searle (1976) extended them into five categories:

1. Declarative: a speech act which changes the state of affairs in the world. For example, "I pronounce you man and wife".
2. Representative: the speaker describes states or events in the world. For example, "this car is brown".
3. Directive: the speaker gets the listener to do something such as a suggestion, or a command. For example, the utterance "Please sit down".
4. Commissive: the speaker commits the listener to do something in the future, such as a promise. For example: "I'll be back soon".
5. Expressive: the speaker expresses his feelings and attitudes about something, such as an apology, or a complaint.

The speech act of complaint belongs to the expressive category of Searle's (1976) classification of speech act. Olshtain and Weinbach (1993, p. 108) stated that "in the speech act of complaining, the speaker expresses displeasure or annoyance as a reaction to a past or going action, the consequences of which are perceived by speaker as affecting her unfavourably".

For a complaint speech act to occur, several conditions should be met. Olshtain and Weinbach (1993, p. 108) enumerated several preconditions for the occurrence of this speech act:

1. Hearer performs a socially unacceptable act that is contrary to a social code of behavioural norms shared by speaker and hearer.
2. Speaker perceives the socially unacceptable act as having unfavourable consequences of herself, and/or for the public.
3. The verbal expression of speaker relates post facto directly or indirectly to the socially unacceptable act, thus having the illocutionary force of censure.
4. Speaker perceives the socially unacceptable act as: (a) freeing speaker from the implicit understanding of a social commiserating relationship with hearer; therefore chooses to express her frustration or annoyance…; and (b) giving speaker the legitimate right to ask for repair in order to undo the socially unacceptable act, either for her benefit or for the public benefit. It is the latter perception that leads to instrumental complaint aimed at "changing thing" that do not meet with our standards or expectations.

A complaint speech act serves many functions; some of which are as follows:

1. To express disapproval, annoyance, threats, or reprimand as a reaction to a perceived offense (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993).

2. To hold the hearer responsible for the offense made and possibly request him/her to undo the offense (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993).
3. To allow ourselves to let off steam. For example: "oh rotten luck!" and "what a shame!" are utterances expressed by a speaker in order to calm him/herself down. (Boxer, 1993).
4. To confront a problem with the intention of improving the situation (Brown & Levinson, 1978).
5. To share a specific negative evaluation and establish a common bond between the speaker and addressee. For example: A. "I really think his grading is unfair. I worked so hard for this exam." B. "Same here. He wouldn't be satisfied even if we copied the whole book." (Boxer, 1993).

Previous Studies on Complaint

Although the speech act of complaint has not been widely studied, as it is the case with other speech acts like thanking, promise, apology and request, there are a number of studies conducted in this area, which would help provide a framework for this investigation.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) studied the complaint strategies produced by native and non-native speakers of Hebrew and identified five complaint strategies: (1) below the level of reproach, "No harm done, let's meet some other time"; (2) disapproval, "It's a shame that we have to work faster now"; (3) direct complaint, "You are always late and now we have less time to do this job"; (4) accusation and warning, "Next time don't expect me to sit here waiting for you"; and (5) threat, "If we don't finish the job today, I'll have to discuss it with the boss" (p. 202). The results of the study indicated that both native and non-native speakers of Hebrew produced the five strategies, but disapproval, complaint and accusation were used by them more frequently.

A study performed by Rinnert and Nogami (2006) aimed to determine what English complaint strategies are preferred by Japanese university EFL (JEFL) learners. The first stage compared Japanese complaint formulations with previously collected English responses by JEFL learners and native English speakers in two complaint situations. The second stage elicited judgments of appropriateness and effectiveness of various complaint formulations in the same two situations. The findings of this study indicated the aspects of complaints may cause difficulties for JEFL learners. The findings suggest that a complex combination of linguistic, pragmatic and socio-pragmatic factors affect learners' knowledge of appropriate and effective ways to complain. Thus, in order to teach appropriate ways to perform intricate face-threatening acts such as complaints, English teachers need to raise their own awareness of the complexity of the factors involved.

In a study conducted by Al-Tayib Umar (2006), an open-ended questionnaire designed to elicit complaint strategies was distributed among 46 Sudanese students pursing graduate programs in English at

four Sudanese universities, as the English non-native group and 14 British native speakers of English, as the English native group. After collecting the questionnaires, he analysed the responses in terms of six components: (1) Excusing Self for Imposition, "Sorry to bother you boss"; (2) Establishing Context or Support, "This letter is really very important, they said"; (3) A Request "Could you please help me clean the room before you leave"; (4) Conveyance of Sense of Dissatisfaction, Disappoint or (5) Annoyance, "I am very disappointed and a bit angry"; (6) Warning or Threat, "I would think twice before I let you or anyone else use this place again". It was revealed that complaints produced by Sudanese learners of English were significantly different from those produced by English native speakers and lacked sufficient pragma-linguistic knowledge to employ the speech act of complaint appropriately in the target language.

Another study of complaint strategies was conducted by Farnia, Buchheit, and ShahidaBanu (2010). In order to collect data, they administered a questionnaire, involving two situations (Professor Situation and Roommate Situation) to 14 American native speakers of English and 28 Malaysian native speakers of Malay. Then, the data were analysed based on the level of directness and their components. The results showed that the Americans were much more direct in making complaints than the Malaysians in the roommate situation. Moreover, the Americans used significantly greater mitigation than the native speakers of Malay did in the formal situation (Professor Situation). In terms of the complaint components, the Malay native speakers used more initiators and complaints in opening complaints than the native speakers of English, while the Americans significantly used more complaints as the main component of complaints in a situation where social status of the addressee (complainee) was higher than that of the speakers, i.e. the professor situation.

In order to investigate the ways power relations influence politeness strategies in disagreement and determine whether and to what extent the realisation of the speech act of disagreeing by Iranian EFL learners across different proficiency levels differ in relation to people with different power status, a more recent study conducted by Behnam and Niroomand's (2011) using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The findings of this study provide some evidences for the relation between the learners' level of language proficiency and type and frequency of disagreement and choice of politeness strategies associated with people with different power status. It was revealed that learners are more sensitive to the use of more politeness strategies in disagreeing to high status people than low status people. Power relationship, social distance and degree of imposition constrain communicative action universally, but the values of these factors vary from context to context. Therefore, in order to have successful communication, it is important that each community provides

enough knowledge for their people about these factors and politeness strategies. In conclusion, it was argued that the results can be closely related to learning contexts and textbook contents.

Statement of the Problem

The speech act of complaint involves a face-threatening act (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; Sauer, 2000). Second language learners may not be aware of the conventions governing the expression of complaints in the target language, so they employ this speech act inappropriately in their speeches.

Another problem that foreign or second language learners of English may face is that they may think that complaint strategies are universal to all languages; therefore, transfer them from their first language (L1) to English. The result of such generalisation is usually a negative transfer, which may cause communication breakdown.

Significance of the Study

Despite the importance of the speech act of complaint, this part of language has not received as much attention as other speech acts like apology, thanking and request in Iran. Nevertheless, there have been a number of studies such as Salmani-Nodoushan (2008) who investigated the effect of speakers' age, sex and social class on conversational strategies produced in their responses to complaining behaviours; Abdolrezapour and Eslami-Rasekh (2012) who studied the effects of interlocutor's gender on politeness strategies; and Azarmi and and Behnam (2012) who investigated face-keeping strategies used by intermediate and upper intermediate Iranian EFL learners in reaction to different complaint situations. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first attempt investigating the influence of the interlocutor's social status and social distance on complaint strategies employed by English and Persian native speakers.

Findings of this study will be helpful for Iranian EFL learners to develop their sensitivity and awareness of English so as to produce polite and meaningful complaints in English. The study will also have several pedagogical implications for teachers of English to pay more attention to the sociolinguistic aspect of English to help learners communicate effectively and successfully in the target language. The current study is a pragmatic contrastive one which intends to investigate how the speech act of complaint is realised in English and Persian and to study the complaint strategies in the interlanguage of Iranian EFL learners to see whether there are any significant differences between the complaint strategies employed by English and Persian speakers. Thus, this study tries to provide answers to the following questions.

Q_1. Is there any significant difference between the complaint strategies used in English and Persian in different situations varying in interlocutors' social status and social distance?

Q_2. If so, how do Iranian EFL learners express their complaint in English?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In order to conduct the study, the researcher selected two groups of undergraduate students as participants of the study. A purposive sampling method was adopted to select participants of the study. The participants of the first group comprised 24 Iranian native speakers of Persian majoring in English Literature at Shiraz University and the participants of the second group were 16 Australian college-aged native speakers of English selected from Australia. As for the participants of the second group, the researcher selected from among Australians because they are native speakers of English and it is somehow easier to access them. The participants in the two groups were both male and female and their age ranged from 18-26 years.

INSTRUMENTS

For the purpose of this study, two instruments were used: a TOEFL Proficiency Test (2004) and a questionnaire.

TOEFL language proficiency test (2004)

In order to examine the EFL learners' language proficiency level, the researchers used a TOEFL proficiency test (2004), which was an actual retired test. The test was composed of 90 multiple-choice items covering grammar and reading comprehension. The grammar section contained 40 items including fill-in the blanks, multiple-choice items and ungrammatical item recognition. The reading comprehension section contained 50 items. In the reading comprehension section, each passage was followed by several multiple-choice items. Sixty minuteswere allocated to the completion of the test. The students' performance was assessed based on their scores on the test. The total scores for the test ranged from zero to ninety.

Questionnaire

In order to collect data on the complaints of the participants, the researchers used a questionnairecomposed of two parts: a demographic survey and a Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

Demographic Survey

In the demographic survey, the participants were asked to provide the researcher with information including gender, native language, nationality and age.

Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

Kasper and Dahl (1991) defined DCT as a written questionnaire containing short descriptions of a particular situation intended to reveal the pattern of a speech act being studied and mentioned it as

one of the major data collection methods in pragmatic studies. It is a controlled procedure to obtain data from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

To conduct this study, the researchers used a DCT in which two situations were adopted from Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) and were modified to incorporate into them the two variables - social power and social distance. It was prepared in English. The DCT was then translated into Persian to collect data on Iranian EFL learners' responses in reaction to different complaint situations. In order to ensure the content validity of the DCT, firstly, it was checked by the researcher's two TEFL instructors to see whether the DCT items were properly designed and then the researcher piloted it on a ten participants similar to the participants of the study and those items which did not elicit the desired responses were either changed or modified. A Cronbach's alpha was applied to determine the overall internal consistency of the DCT and it turned out to be 0.89, which is an acceptable and high index of reliability. It was composed of six items representing six complaint scenarios varying in the contextual factors of the speaker's social power and his/her degree of social distance with the hearer. The relationships between the speaker and hearer in terms of social distance and social power in six scenarios are given below in Table 1, followed by a summary of each scenario:

Table 1
Description of DCT items

Scenarios	P	D	Social status
1. student vs. teacher	-	-	S<H
2. student vs. academic advisor	-	+	S< H
3. student vs. student (his/her roommate)	=	-	S=H
4. student vs. student	=	+	S=H
5.student vs. waiter	+	+	S>H
6.student vs. university bus driver	+	-	S>H

Note: D=social distance, P= social power, S=speaker, and H=hearer.

Summary of each situation of the DCT is as follows:

Situation 1: A student goes to his/her teacher with whom s/he has a close relationship to complain about his/her low grade.

Situation 2: A student complains to his/her academic advisor about giving him/her the wrong advice in the last semester.

Situation 3: A student complains to his/her roommate about the noise after 11:30 p.m.

Situation 4: A student complains to another student whom s/he does not know about cutting in line in the university self-service.

Situation 5: A student complains to a waiter whom s/he meets for the first time in a restaurant about spilling the drink over his/her new shirt.

Situation 6: A student complains to the university bus driver whom s/he is familiar with about driving fast.

Procedure

The TOEFL test (2004) was administered to 60 EFL learners from Shiraz University and they were given an hour to complete the test. After collecting the test papers, the researcher calculated the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of their scores. The mean score was 80.83 and the SD was 4.45. Those students whose score fell 0.5 SD (2.23) above the M were selected as the participants of the first group. The Persian EFL learners were administered the English version of the questionnaire first, and one week later they were administered the Persian version of the questionnaire. They were given the questionnaire in English first so that the transfer from Farsi to English would not be encouraged by the procedure. The questionnaire was emailed to a university professor in Australia. He administered it to the English native speakers. They provided the necessary data via e-mail.

Data Analysis

The taxonomy of complaints developed by Rinnert and Nogami (2006) was used for the analysis of the data. This taxonomy consists of three categories, namely, main components, level of directness and amount of mitigation. Since the focus of the current study is on the main component category of complaint, it is described below in detail:

Main component

A complaint consists of three main components including initiators, complaints and requests, which are presented as follows:

- Initiators
  Initiators include greetings (e.g., "hi" and "good morning") address terms (e.g., "hey guy", and "sir"), and other opening formulas.
- Complaints
  Complaints refer to utterances expressing negative evaluation, including justification (e.g., "I studied hard in your class so how come I was given such a low grade?"
- Requests
  Requests refer to direct or indirect attempts to get the hearer to redress the situation (e.g., "I highly appreciate if you consider my case."

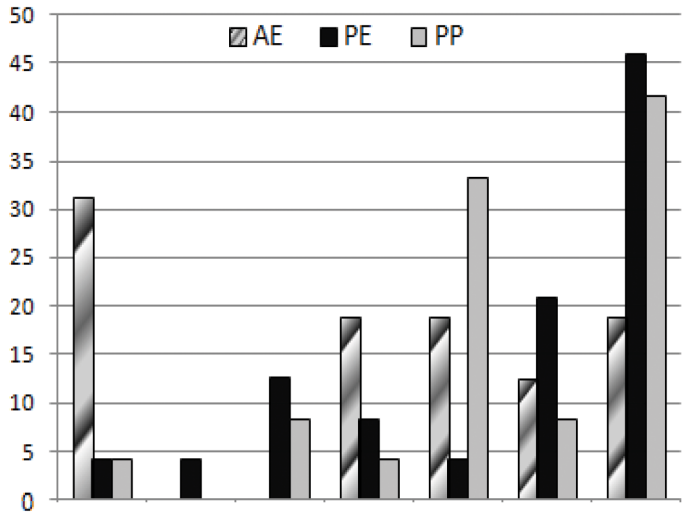
After the coding was completed, descriptive and analytical procedures were conducted. Frequency of responses containing a given complaint pattern

in each DCT situation was calculated by finding out how many times each complaint pattern was used by each group in each situation. In order to address the first research question, perceiving to what extent complaint strategies used by Australian and Iranian speakers are similar or different. The data elicited from Persian native speakers of Persian (PP) and Australian English native speakers (AE) were entered into the SPSS version 20 and chi-square tests were conducted for comparing the complaint responses between the AE and PP groups in terms of main components across all situations. The alpha level was set at .05 or less. Chi-square tests were also conducted between the AE and Persian EFL learners (PE) to address the second research question.

RESULTS

Teacher situation

Scenario 1 represents a situation in which the speaker, who is a student complains to his/her teacher, who is socially higher than him/her and has a close relationship with him/her about marking his/her exam paper unfairly (-P,-D). The relative frequencies of each complaint pattern used by the participants of the three groups in interaction with this scenario are presented in Figure 1.



	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
AE	31.2	0	0	18.8	18.8	12.5	18.8
PE	4.2	4.2	12.5	8.3	4.2	20.8	45.8
PP	4.2	0	8.3	4.2	33.3	8.3	41.7

Figure 1. Complaint response patterns (teacher situation)

In interaction with this scenario, the Australian English native speakers (AE) started their conversation most frequently with initiators (31.2%), while their Persian counterparts used initiators followed by complaints and requests (41.7%) more frequently than other complaint patterns. The AE group used initiators followed by complaints, initiators accompanied by requests and initiators followed by complaints and requests exactly equally (18.8%). Requests preceded by complaints were employed by the AE speakers in 12.5% of the situations. Persian native speakers (PP) used initiators followed by requests in 33.3% of the situations, complaints followed by requests in 8.3 % of the situations, and requests in 8.3% of the situations. Initiators and complaints preceded by initiators were equally used by the PP group in 4.2% of the situations. A notable pattern observed in the interlanguage of Persian EFL learners (PEFL) was the use of all three response segments (e.g., "*excuse me, may I take your time to talk about my final grade*. I think you have scored it wrongly. Would you please recheck it?").

Results of the chi-square showed that the Australian English native speakers significantly used an initiator more frequently than the Persian EFL learners ($\chi 2$= 5.52, df =1, P<.05) and the Persian native speakers ($\chi 2$=5.52, df= 1, P<.05). This situation indicates that the Persian EFL learners adhere to their L1 norms in using initiators.

Table 2
Results of chi-square tests between AE and PE speakers

Complaint patterns / Situations	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
S1(teacher situation)	5.52	0.00	0.06	2.26	1.02	0.18	2.29
S2(academic advisor situation)	0.08	5.00	0.68	0.68	2.16	0.96	0.42
S3(roommate situation	0.46	0.00	0.13	0.06	1.40	0.02	3.44
S4(student situation)	0.00	5.52	0.18	0.55	2.33	0.18	0.02
S5(waiter situation)	1.53	0.71	2.33	0.41	0.96	0.00	0.08
S6(university bus driver situation)	0.00	0.46	0.55	2.09	2.16	021	0.00

Table 3
Results of chi-square tests between AE and PP speakers

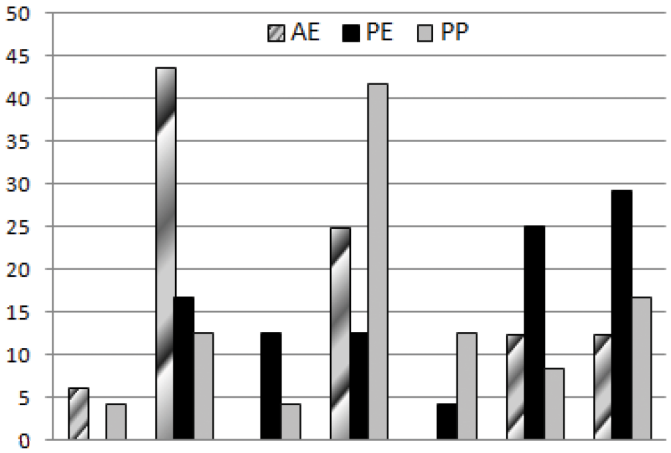
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S5(waiter situation)	1.53	0.71	2.33	0.41	0.96	0.00	0.08
S6(university bus driver situation)	0.00	0.46	0.55	2.09	2.16	021	0.00

Academic Advisor Situation

This scenario represents a situation in which the speaker, who is a student, is complaining to his advisor, whom s/he met for the first time about giving him/her wrong advice on taking a course in fall semester. In this situation, the speaker is socially lower than the hearer and there is a social distance between them (-P, +D).

As shown in Figure 2, to express dissatisfaction towards their academic advisor, the AE group mostly resorted to complaints (43.8%). Twenty five percent of the participants in the AE group used initiators accompanied by complaints (e. g., "*I've come to you to talk about the course you advised me to take*, but it wasn't necessary") to complain to the advisor. The English speakers employed complaints followed by requests by 25%, and initiators followed by complaints and requests in 25% of the situations.

The PP speakers tended to use an initiator followed by a complaint (41.7) more frequently than other complaint strategies. However, that was not the case in English; the AE speakers used a complaint (43.8%) more frequently than other complaint patterns.



	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
AE	6.2	43.5	0	25	0	12.5	12.5
PE	0	16.7	12.5	12.5	4.2	25	29.2
PP	4.2	12.5	4.2	41.7	12.5	8.3	16.7

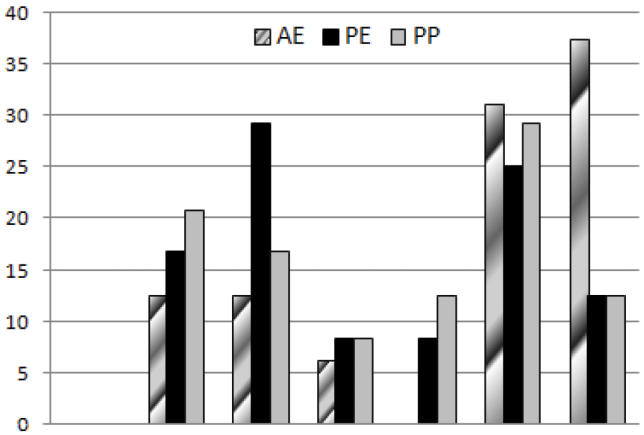
Figure 2. Complaint response patterns (academic advisor situation)

The most notable complaint pattern used by the PE respondents was initiators followed by complaints and requests (i.e., *excuse me sir/madam*I think there is something wrong with my mark. I think I have done better than what this mark shows. Would you please recheck my answer sheet?").

The findings of the statistical tests demonstrated that in dealing with the academic advisor situation, the AE speakers employed C significantly more frequently than the PP speakers ($\chi 2=5$, df=1, P<.05). The statistical findings also showed that the PE respondents performed complaints similar to the way their English counterparts did as no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups regarding the use of complaint patterns.

Roommate Situation

In this scenario, the speaker and hearer, who are roommates, are socially equal and there is no social distance between them (=P, -D).



	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
AE	0	12.5	12.5	6.2	0	31.2	37.5
PE	0	16.7	29.2	8.3	8.3	25	12.5
PP	0	20.8	16.7	8.3	12.5	29.2	12.5

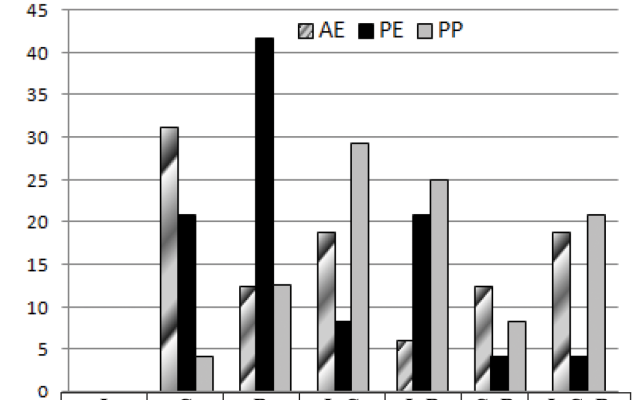
Figure 3. Complaint response patterns (roommate situation)

As shown in Figure 3 above, in this situation, the AE speakers tended to use all three response segments (e.g., *Hey James*. It's very late in the night. Please be quiet) in 37.5% of the situations, and complaints followed by a request (e.g., I am really tired and you sound that you wouldn't be noisy, so can you please be quiet.) in 31.2 % of the situations. A complaint followed by a request was the most frequently used strategy by the Persian native speakers. They mostly tended to start the conversation with complaints followed by a request (29.2%). The PP respondents, compared to their English counterparts used more complaints, and requests. In

their interlanguage, the Persian native speakers showed a tendency to express his or her dissatisfaction to the hearer, who is his/her roommate using a request without an initiator (e.g., "either turn it off or put on the headphones or move out!") in 29.2 % of the situations. The Persian native speakers used I+C+R in both their L1 and L2 equally (12.5 %), but the English native speakers used it almost three times more than both the PP and PE speakers (37.5%). However, the results of the chi-square tests for this scenario, like the advisor situation showed that the differences between the AE and PE groups regarding the percentages of complaint patterns usage were not statistically significant.

Student Situation

Item 4 in the DCT was designed to elicit complaints of the participants in a situation in which the speaker, who is a student, stops another student, who is trying to jump the queue in the university self-service to talk to him/her (=P, +D).



	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
AE	0	31.2	12.5	18.8	6.2	12.5	18.8
PE	0	20.8	41.7	8.3	20.8	4.2	4.2
PP	0	4.2	12.5	29.2	25	8.3	20.8

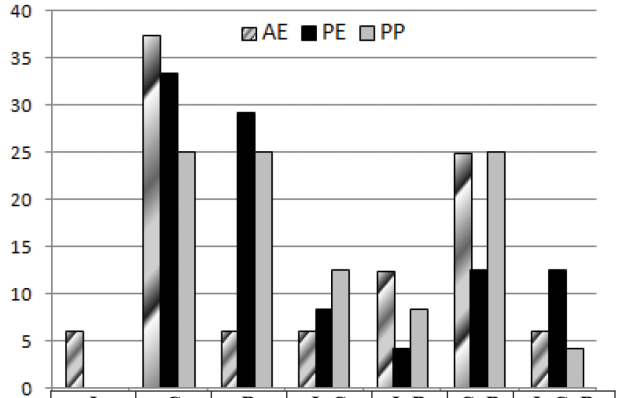
Figure 4. Complaint response patterns (student situation)

As shown in Figure 4, a salient pattern among the AE group (31.2%) was using a complaint without a request and an initiator (e.g., what are you doing? The rest of us have been waiting a long time). They showed a similar tendency to use both a request and a request preceded by a complaint equally (12.5%). Unlike the AE participants, the PP participants used initiators followed by a complaint (29.2%) more frequently than other complaint patterns in interaction with scenario 4. A notable pattern among the PEFL learners' responses produced in interaction with this scenario was a request with no other complaint segments.

Regarding the patterns of complaint used by the participants in this situation, no statistically significant differences were found between the AE and PP groups in all semantic formulas except for C complaint pattern ($\chi 2=5.52$, df=1, $p<.05$), i.e., the AE speakers started the conversation with a complaint more frequently than the PP speakers. The participants in the PE group used a request significantly more frequently than the AE speakers ($\chi 2=3.88$, df = 1, $p<.05$), but the AE and PP speakers used this semantic formula exactly equally (12.5%).

Waiter Situation

This scenario represents a situation in which the speaker is socially higher than the hearer and they do not know each other (+P, +D). Complaints elicited from the participants in the three groups were analysed in terms of their segments, the results of which are shown in Figure 5 below.



	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
AE	6.2	37.5	6.2	6.2	12.5	25	6.2
PE	0	33.3	29.2	8.3	4.2	12.5	12.5
PP	0	25	25	12.5	8.3	25	4.2

Figure 5. Complaint response patterns (waiter situation)

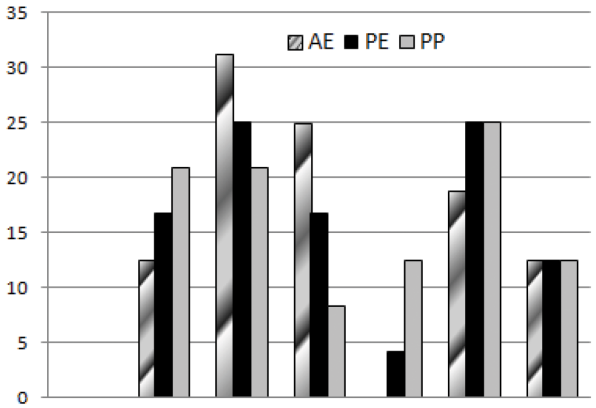
The AE speakers showed a tendency to use a complaint (37.5%) more frequently than other semantic formulas. The relative frequencies for other complaint patterns used by the AE group showed that they started with only initiators, only requests, initiators accompanied by a complaint, and initiators followed by a complaint and a request in 6.2% of the situations for each complaint strategy. Unlike the AE group, the other two groups did not use only initiators in interaction with this scenario. The PP speakers used the three response segments only in 4.2% of the situations, while they used complaints, requests and complaints, accompanied by requests, each one by 25%. The frequency of using complaints accompanied by requests (25%)

for both the AE and PP groups are the same. A salient semantic formula among the PE group was a complaint with no initiator and request (e.g., "what's wrong with you man!").

Despite differences in the frequencies of complaint patterns used by the AE and PP speakers, the results of chi-square for this situation showed that the differences were not statistically significant. The differences between the AE and PE groups were not also statistically significant.

University Bus Driver Situation

The last item in the DCT represents a situation in which the speaker is socially higher than the hearer and the speaker is familiar with the hearer (+P,-D). As shown in Figure 6 below, using requests was the most frequently used strategy by the AE group (31.2%), while using complaints followed by requests was the most frequently used strategies by the PP group (25%). The Australian English native speakers used initiators followed by complaints in 25% of the situations, complaints accompanied by requests in 18.8% of the situation, and initiators followed by complaints and requests in 12.5% of the situations. They began the conversation with only initiators in 12.5% of the situations. Respondents in the PP group produced complaints in 20.8% of the situations, requests in 20.8% of the situations, initiators accompanied by complaints and requests in 12.5% of the situations, initiators followed by requests in 12.5% of the situations, and complaints preceded by initiators in 8.3% of the situations.



	I	C	R	I+C	I+R	C+R	I+C+R
AE	0	12.5	31.2	25	0	18.8	12.5
PE	0	16.7	25	16.7	4.2	25	12.5
PP	0	20.8	20.8	8.3	12.5	25	12.5

Figure 6. Complaint response patterns (university bus driver situation)

The results of chi-square for this situation showed that there were no significant differences in the frequencies of using complaint patterns between the AE and PE groups, and also between the AE and PE groups.

DISCUSSION

As for the first research question, the findings demonstrated that some cross-cultural differences were identified between English and Persian regarding the way speakers of the two languages performed their complaint in lower, equal and higher settings. Therefore, the answer to the first research question is obviously positive.

Both the teacher and academic advisor situations represent lower social settings, with the difference that in the first one the speaker is interacting with someone whom s/he is intimate with (-D) and in the second one the speaker and hearer do not have a close relationship with each other (+D). For the complaint patterns, it was shown that English native speakers showed more tendency to start their complaining expressions with "I" semantic formula in the teacher situation because this semantic formula is the least face-threatening complaint strategy as it may contain greetings, apologising expressions, or address terms. However, the findings of the study are in contrast to the study conducted by Rinnert and Nogami (2006), which demonstrated that English native speakers in the teacher situation employed I+C+R complaint pattern more frequently than other complaint patterns. This divergence may refer to age factor as participants in Rinnert and Nogami (2006) were older than the participants of the current study. Unlike the teacher situation, they mostly used C semantic formula in the academic advisor situation. This refers to the fact that Australians showed a tendency to state their annoyance in most situations, even when speaking to an individual in socially higher position. However, it does not imply that they do not show deference to someone superior. They used other downgrading devices to mitigate the threat. Unlike English native speakers, Persian native speakers did not use C semantic formula in the academic advisor situation at all. They mostly employed I+C+R, and I+C semantic formulas in the teacher and academic advisor situations, respectively. One explanation for this situation can be that in Iranian society when complaints are preceded and followed by initiators and requests respectively, they are perceived by hearer(s) as their threatening force mitigated, while that is not the case with Australian society. Instead, Australian English native speakers preferred using more number of softeners to mitigate the threat to the hearer's positive face. As an indicator of politeness towards their teacher and academic advisor, Persian speakers used address terms such as *ʔɔːstaːd* (teacher, instructor, professor), *aːqaːjemɔːšaːver* (advisor) and English native speakers used titles such as *sir*, *Mr.*, and *professor*. According to Wolfson (1989, p. 79), address terms are a "very salient indicator of status relationship". In lower

settings, interlocutors used address terms more frequently. The result is in line with the findings of Behnam and Niroomand's (2011) study, which found that lower status interlocutors used more address terms than higher status interlocutors. In this study, address terms were more frequent in the first and second situations because in these two situations, the interlocutors were expected to complain to higher status individuals.

In lower settings, where the hearer has dominance over the speaker, the speaker tended to express their complaint as indirectly as possible. In the teacher situation, both Persian and English speakers violated the maxim of manner as majority of them expressed their complaints indirectly. Maxim of manner wants every interlocutor to speak directly, not ambiguously and abundantly. English native speakers interacted with the teacher situation without mentioning the offense and taking the hearer responsible for it. They expressed complaints indirectly mostly through using initiators (e.g., *excuse me Mr.? May I speak with you about my exam?*), initiators followed by requests (e.g., *Hi Mr. /Ms.??? I just wanted to ask you about my exam paper.* Could you please explain your marking approach to clarify some aspects for me?), while that was not the case for the PP group. Persian native speakers did so within initiators and a request for action (e.g., *sæla:m ʔɔ:sta:dxæstenæba:šid*mitu:n æmbærgæmrɔ: bebinæm?), initiators (e.g., *sæla:m ʔɔ:sta:dbebæxšidmɔ:za:hemetu:nm išæm.mixa:stæmdærmɔ:redenɔ:mreemteha :næmba:tu:nsɔ:hbætkɔ:næm*) and requests (e.g., lɔ:tfænbærgæjeemtehɑ:niæmrɔ: dɔ:bɑ:rebæræsikɔ:nid). As compared to the teacher situation, both Persian and English speakers tended to make complaints directly more frequently in the academic advisor situation. This difference can be justified on the ground that in dealing with unfamiliar individuals, they feel more comfortable to challenge the hearer less indirectly.

Both the roommate and student situations in the DCT represent equal social settings, with the difference that in the former, the speaker is dealing with an intimate (-D) and in the latter, the speaker is dealing with a stranger (+D).

As for the complaint patterns used in the roommate situation, the results showed that all complaint patterns except for I complaint pattern were used by both English and Persian native speakers. It seems that some sort of formality is associated with this complaint pattern as it was used in lower settings only, where the hearer has dominance over the speaker. English native speakers (37.5%) expressed facts of annoyance by saying "It's very late in the night. You're so much noisy," but employed an initiator (e.g., Hey James) and a request for action (e.g., Please be quiet) prior to and after the complaint respectively to avoid producing an act which was too face-threatening to his/her roommate. However, Persian native speakers (29.2%) preferred to express their annoyance followed by a request (e.g., æslænræɑ:jætnemikɔ:ni. æ x i r æ n x e I l i s æ r ɔ : s e d ɑ : m i k ɔ : n i .

xɑːmuːšeškɔːnnimešæbe.) without an initiator. It shows that in Iranian society, there is a tendency to express complaints to familiar equal status individuals more explicitly. In the student situation, Persian native speakers (29.2%) tendency to express their annoyance towards someone socially equal and unfamiliar to them with complaints preceded by initiators (e.g., *bebæxšidxaːnɔːm*nɔːbæt-ešɔːmɑː nist) may be justified on the ground that they are more concerned about the hearer's face as they used apologizing expressions as part of initiators. Unlike Iranians, English native speakers (31.2%) felt it more comfortable to express their complaint without other segments to someone unfamiliar to them.

Both the waiter and university bus driver situations represent lower social settings in which the speaker is interacting with a stranger (+D) and someone very familiar to him/her (-D), respectively.

Because a power inconsistency exists between interlocutors and the addressees complained by speakers are in a lower power and position than the speaker, as compared to their performance in higher social setting, they employed initiators less frequently and complaints more frequently. This situation can be justified on the ground that they have power over the hearer and do not feel it necessary to use initiators to redress the threat to the hearer's face.

Based on what has been discussed, the main components of complaint strategies used by English native speakers were different from those used in Persian to some extent.

In the case of the second research question which was posed in relation to the first one, it was indicated that although Iranian EFL learners performed complaints appropriately enough in the target language, some evidence of negative transfer from their L1 were found. Regarding the main components of complaint, they showed a tendency similar to their L1, i.e., they employed I complaint strategy very less frequently than English native speakers. One explanation for this situation can be that due to their lack of practical knowledge in English, they adhere to their L1 socio-cultural norms in expressing their dissatisfaction to individuals of higher social position. However, in the student situation, the significant difference found between EFL learners and English native speakers in using R semantic formula cannot be attributed to the influence of their L1 due to the fact that the participants in both the AE and PP groups employed this complaint strategy exactly by the same percentage (12.5%). One explanation can be that learners follow their own IL rules, rather than relying on transfer all the time or they may have little experience in performing complaints in English.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to fully investigate the speech act of complaints in Persian and English, studies should be conducted using other ethnographic methods such as role-plays, besides the DCT to offer more in-depth data regarding Iranian and Australian socio-

cultural values. Other studies are needed to include a large number of participants so that the results will be more reliable and generalisable. Gender difference of the participants may be a factor affecting their politeness strategies in interacting with people of different social statuses. Thus, further investigation of complaints should select participants from different genders with similar distribution.

CONCLUSION

This study explored differences and similarities between complaint strategies used by English and Persian native speakers in terms of main components. It also investigated complaints in the interlanguage of Iranian EFL students. With regard to the use of complaint patterns, it was found that the complaint patterns used by the two native groups were quite similar, but some significant differences were found between the frequency use of each complaint pattern by the two groups. In the teacher situation, English native speakers used I complaint pattern significantly more frequently than their Persian counterparts. Iranian EFL learners, due to inadequate knowledge of that pattern negatively transferred from their L1 to English. As the study was focusing on the communicative competence of speakers, its findings will be helpful for EFL learners to learn socio-cultural rules governing the L2 in order to communicate competently in the L2 community. They will get familiar with the way native speakers make complaints in different situations, and they increase the quality of their interactions by learning how to use complaint speech act appropriately. They will also be aware of what factors affect the realization of the speech act of complaint in order to perform complaints appropriately so as to avoid communication breakdown.

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