

Expressing Complaint by Jordanian EFL Learners: An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the performance of complaint speech act by Jordanian English foreign language (EFL) learners compared with that of American English native speakers, as well as the influence of the first language of Arabic (negative pragmatic transfer) on Jordanian learners' use of complaints. This study used a discourse completion task to collect data from 75 participants divided into three groups: 25 native speakers of American English, 25 Jordanian EFL learners, and 25 Jordanian Arabic native speakers. The findings revealed that the learners' group deviated from both the target and native language groups, and produced more complaint strategies that made their complaints more elaborate and intense. Regarding the use of individual strategies, the learners' deviation from American English norms of speech was the norm, rather than the exception. The findings also showed that a major reason for this deviation was Jordanian learners' tendency to transfer some complaint strategies from their native language, Arabic. The study concludes with a summary and directions for future research.

Keywords: Complaint, speech acts, interlanguage pragmatics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Motivated by the need for communicative abilities when learning a second language, second language learning pedagogy has undergone a major paradigm shift, from holding an absolute focus on form to holding a mutual interest in both form and function. Currently, communicative competence is widely recognized as a major pedagogical goal in second/foreign language teaching and learning. Consequently, researchers have advocated incorporating pragmatic competence as an important component in English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) curricula (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kubota, 1995; Rose & Ng, 2001; Takahashi, 2001). Within interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), speech acts remain one of the major problematic areas for second language learners, largely because they vary in both perception and performance across languages and cultures as a result of deep-seated differences in cultural conventions and assumptions (Ahar & Rasekh, 2011; Al-Momani, 2009; Al-Shboul, Maros, & Yasin, 2012; Felix-Brasdefer, 2007). According to Cohen (1996), the use of speech acts by language learners is:

an area of continual concern for language learners since they are repeatedly faced with the need to utilize speech acts such as complaints, apologies, requests, and refusals, each of which can be realized by means of a host of potential strategies. (p. 383)

Recognizing the importance of pragmatic competence, studies on Jordanian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge have seen a modest increase in the past decade (Al-Issa, 2003; Al-Momani, 2009; Al-Shboul et al., 2012). Nonetheless, to the researcher's knowledge, no study has investigated Jordanian EFL learners' performance of complaint speech act. The two studies on complaints that included Jordanian participants, Al-Khawaldeh (2016) and Al-Hammuri (2011), were cross-cultural in nature. While the latter examined Jordanian native speakers' and American English native speakers' use of complaint strategies, the former examined the speech act of complaints realized by Jordanian Arabic native speakers and British English native speakers. Hence, this study fills an important gap in the ILP literature and has the benefit of being a pioneering work.

2. Purpose of the Study

This research investigates the performance of complaint speech act by Jordanian EFL learners, compared with American English native speakers and Jordanian Arabic native speakers. The study addresses the following questions:

1. Is there a difference in the total number of complaint strategies produced by Jordanian EFL learners, American English native speakers, and Jordanian Arabic native speakers?
2. How does the use of individual strategies in complaint speech act by Jordanian EFL learners compare with that of American English native speakers and Jordanian Arabic native speakers?
3. Is there L1 influence (negative pragmatic transfer) on Jordanian EFL learners' performance of complaints?

3. The Nature of Complaints

According to Searle's (1976) typology, a complaint is an expressive illocutionary act in which "the speaker (the complainer) expresses his/her disapproval and negative feeling towards the state of affairs described in the proposition and for which he/she holds the hearer (the complaine) responsible, either directly or indirectly" (Trosborg, 1995, p. 311). Moreover, Tanck (2002) added that a complaint is a post-event act that occurs when a speaker reacts with displeasure or annoyance to an action that has affected him or her in an unfavorable manner. As a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987), complaints place the complaine's positive face (his or her desire for approval) at risk. Hence, uttering complaints inappropriately may disrupt relationships and harmony between people. Thus, the high social stakes of complaints require considerable face work to ensure the complaint sounds less aggressive, which demands advanced pragmatic knowledge of the target culture on behalf of the learner.

4. Literature Review

Among the research conducted on complaint speech act, Olshtain and Weinbach's (1993) work remains one of the most cited studies in this area. The researchers examined the realization of complaints of native speakers and second language, intermediate, and advanced learners of Hebrew. Data from the two groups were collected using a discourse completion task (DCT). The results indicated that non-native speakers tended to be more verbose and used more words than did the native speakers of Hebrew. Learners were also less direct, used more softeners, and used a wider variety of complaint strategies than did native speakers of Hebrew. Regarding the influence of social variables, learners showed more sensitivity to these variables than did the native speakers. Olshtain and Weinbach explained that the learners chose less severe strategies when complaining than did the native speakers because the individuals entering the new culture wished to sound less offensive and face-threatening.

In another influential study, Murphy and Neu (1996) investigated complaint speech act production of Korean ESL learners, compared with American English native speakers. Both groups were required to respond to one oral DCT situation (a student expressing disapproval to a professor about a low grade). The findings showed that, while American native speakers produced complaints, most Korean learners produced criticisms. Further, American native speakers' responses tended to accept partial responsibility, depersonalize the problem, use mitigators to soften the complaint, and use the inclusive pronoun "we." In contrast, Korean learners personalized the problem, used second person, told the professor what should be done, and refused to accept responsibility for the problem. Most American native speakers perceived Korean learners' responses as aggressive and inappropriate in an American academic context.

Trosborg (1995) examined Danish EFL learners' performance of complaints. The participants were three Danish learners' groups with different proficiency levels. Native Danish speakers and American English native speakers were used as control groups. The study sought to determine whether there was evidence of pragmatic development in expressing complaints among Danish learners with an increased level of proficiency, and whether there was evidence of pragmatic influence from L1 Danish on Danish learners of English complaints. The data were collected through a DCT. With regard to the total number of strategies, the results showed significant differences between the learners groups and both native speakers groups. That is, Danish learners in the three proficiency levels neither followed the target culture norms nor were influenced by their native language. Rather, they followed a pattern of their own in the general use of complaint strategies. In addition, although the learners showed a developmental pattern towards English native speakers' norms of speech in the use of downgrades and upgraders with increased level of proficiency.

All three groups produced significantly fewer downgrades and upgraders than did native speakers of English. Trosborg (1995) concluded that “the communicative act of complaining is an extremely difficult act to master even for advanced learners of English” (p. 370).

To date, the only study that has investigated complaint speech act performance by Arab learners of English was conducted by Umar (2006). The main objective of the study was to explore the differences between Sudanese advanced English learners’ and British English native speakers’ production of the speech act of complaints. Data were collected using a DCT composed of three situations. The results showed that, despite the Sudanese learners’ long years of studying English, they failed to produce appropriate complaint strategies. The learners tended to focus their complaints around two extremes: they were either too indirect (when complaining to a close friend) or extremely confrontational (when complaining to a stranger who pushes into a queue). In both cases, they deviated from complaint strategies performed by native speakers of British English. Overall, according to Umar (2006), Sudanese learners seemed to resort to the conventions of their own culture when performing complaints in English.

In the Iranian context, Abdolrezapour et al. (2012) examined how Iranian EFL learners perceived complaining strategies performed by American native speakers in four situations. The findings revealed that indirect complaints were perceived as more polite by EFL learners. Further, the social variables of power and distance affected the degree of politeness perceived. That is, Iranians, irrespective of their genders, were more concerned about the social power of the interlocutor than the social distance. Finally, gender was not a significant factor affecting the degree of politeness perceived in complaints.

Also examining Iranian EFL learners, Eshraghi and Shahrokhi (2016) compared the complaint strategies employed by female Iranian EFL learners and female English native speakers. Another objective of the study was to examine the influence of contextual variables (social distance and social power) on the choice of complaint strategies by the two groups of participants. The results revealed that Iranian females tended to use indirect strategies, while American females used more direct strategies. Additionally, significant differences between the two groups were found in the production of several complaint strategies. Regarding the influence of social variables, the results indicated that the social status of the interlocutor, yet not the social distance, had a significant influence on the strategy use by the participants of the two groups.

Although not an interlanguage study, Al-Khawaldeh (2016) conducted the most recent study examining Jordanian native speakers’ complaint behavior. Using a DCT, Al-Khawaldeh compared Jordanian native speakers’ and British native speakers’ performance of complaints. The results showed that Jordanian native speakers were more direct than British native speakers. Moreover, of the 11 complaint strategies used, there were significant differences between the two groups in the use of seven complaint formulas. The study also found that British native speakers used more mitigators and downgraders to soften their responses than did Jordanian native speakers.

Overall, studies concerning non-native speakers’ performance of complaints seem to emphasize the intrinsic nature of complaints as a face-threatening act, and highlight the need for more practice on behalf of non-native speakers to avoid any communication failure.

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

For the purpose of this research, three groups of participants were included in this study: (i) 25 Jordanian Arabic native speakers (JA), 13 females and 12 males; (ii) 25 American English native speakers (AE), 14 females and 11 males; and (iii) 25 Jordanian EFL learners (JEFL), 13 females and 12 males. The JEFL and JA participants were recruited from the Hashemite University, Jordan, and the AE participants from the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma. All the participants were undergraduate students between the ages of 19 and 27. The native speaking participants (AE and JA) were students in a variety of disciplines that included education, communication, political science, mathematics, physics and history. To avoid having different proficiency levels among the JEFL participants, only third- and fourth-year English language majors took part in this study.

5.2 Instrument and Procedure

Data from the three groups of participants were collected using a DCT. The choice of a DCT, the most frequently used data collection method in ILP research (Kasper & Dahl, 1991), was conditioned by its suitability to answer the study’s research questions.

A DCT is a practical method that meets the demand for cross-cultural comparability and allows researchers to control social and contextual variables (such as distance, power, gender, education and age) (Al-Issa, 2003; Al-Momani, 2009; Trenchs, 1995).

In designing the current DCT, a review was conducted of previous cross-cultural and ILP studies on the speech act of complaint (Al-Khawaldeh, 2016; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995). Based on the review, six situations were developed, which varied according social status (power) and familiarity (social distance) (see Table 1). The DCT was piloted with three American native speakers and four Jordanian Arabic native speakers. Minor modifications were made to some of the situations to ensure their appropriateness for both cultures. Two versions of the DCT were created, in English and Arabic.

Table 1. DCT Situations Based on Social Variables

Situation	Social power (status)	Familiarity (social distance)
1. Borrowing a camera	Equal (S = H)	Familiar
2. Bad grade	Lower (S < H)	Unfamiliar
3. Loud music	Equal (S = H)	Unfamiliar
4. Damaged book	Higher (S > H)	Familiar
5. Recommendation letter	Lower (S < H)	Familiar
6. Late student	Higher (S > H)	Unfamiliar

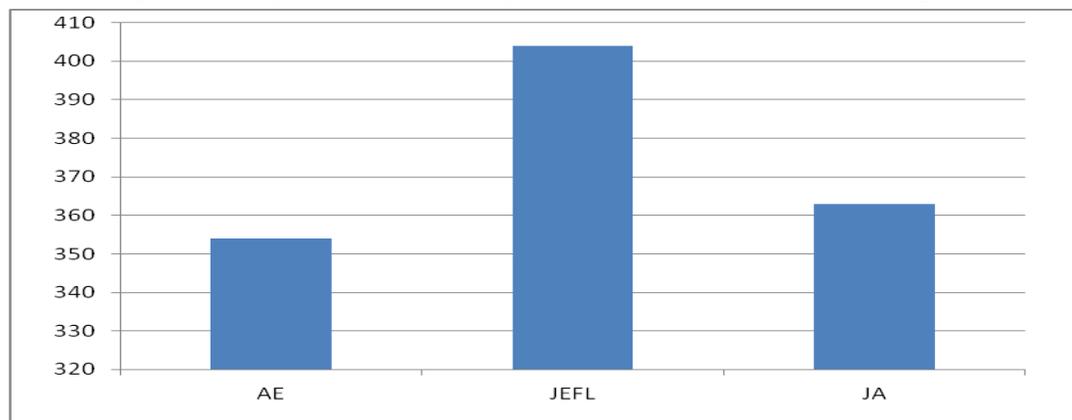
The researcher collected data from the JA and JEFL groups at the Hashemite University, Jordan, while a current instructor (a friend of the researcher) at the University of Oklahoma collected data from the AE group. The JA group used the Arabic version of the DCT, while the AE and JEFL groups responded to the English version. All participants were instructed to read the situations carefully and imagine themselves in the same situations. They were then asked to respond to each situation naturally, as if they were in a real everyday interaction.

5.3 Data Analysis

A new coding scheme was devised in light of previous well-known studies (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995). The new coding scheme was modified to encompass the complaint strategies used by the specific population of this study (see Appendix A). The scheme consisted of 14 complaint strategies: initiator, problem statement, providing justification, removal of negativity, demanding justification, apology, gratitude, preaching, sentencing, future implication, religious expressions, annoyance and disapproval, threat and warning, and request for repair. The coded data were then entered into the SPSS program. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Tukey honest significant differences (HSD) post-hoc analyses were performed to determine whether there were significant differences between the AE and JEFL groups in their use of complaining strategies, and whether negative pragmatic transfer had occurred. Based on Kasper (1991), the following criteria were used to establish the occurrence or absence of negative pragmatic transfer. Negative pragmatic transfer was operational if there was a significant statistical difference in the frequency of a certain pragmatic feature between the JA and AE groups and between the JEFL and AE groups, and no statistically significant difference between the JA and JEFL groups.

6. Results

This section presents the results of the research questions raised by this study. As shown in Figure 1, the data analysis of the three groups' performance of complaint speech act indicated that the JEFL group ($n=404$) used more complaint strategies than did both the AE group ($n=354$) and the JA group ($n=363$).

Figure 1. Frequency of all strategies by AE, JEFL, and JA participants

On average, the JEFL group used ($M= 2.69$) strategies, the AE group used ($M= 2.36$) strategies, and JA group used ($M=2.42$) strategies. The results of the ANOVA for the three groups' overall use of complaint strategies revealed significant mean differences ($F[2, 447] = 5.201, p = .006$) - see Table 2. Tukey HSD post-hoc pair comparisons indicated that the JEFL participants used significantly more complaint strategies than did both the AE and JA groups, and therefore deviated from both the target and native language groups.

Table 2. ANOVA Results for Complaint Strategies per Participant in Each Situation

Group	M	SD	DF (error)	F	Sig
AE	2.36	(1.082)	2 (447)	5.201	.006*
JEFL	2.69	(.955)			
JA	2.42	(.805)			

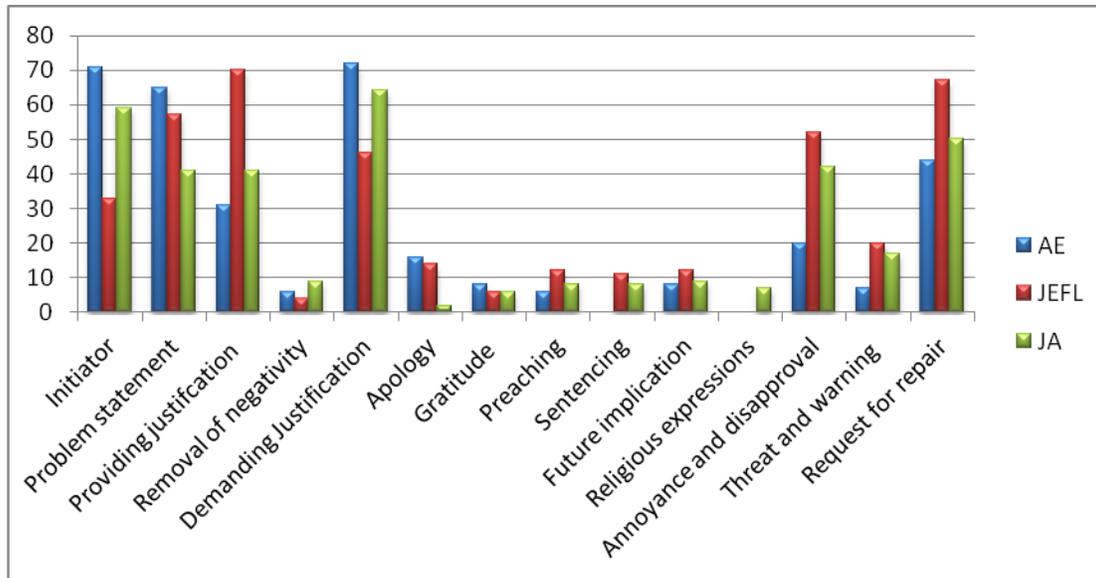
Note: * $p < 0.05$.

Overall, the JEFL group's complaints looked more elaborate than both native speakers' groups. For example:

1. Hello professor, How are you doing! I am one of your students in class and I wanted you to know that I worked hard on this paper. I was wonder if you could reconsider my grade because I believe I deserve more. (JEFL, situation #2)
2. Excuse me professor, I was wondering if I could talk to you about my mid-term paper. (AE, situation #2)
3. مرحبا دكتور, انا بذلت أقصى جهدي علي هذا البحث وبتمني انك تعيد النظر بعلامتي. Hello professor, I did my best on this and I was hoping you could reconsider my grade. (JA, situation #2)

Regarding the use of individual strategies, Figure 2 shows that the three groups centered their complaints on six strategies that constituted approximately 80% of all used complaints: request for repair, initiator, demanding justification, problem statement, providing justification, and annoyance and disapproval. Despite this general resemblance, the three groups disagreed on the order preference and frequency of use of these strategies. The AE group used demanding justification as the most frequent complaint strategy, followed by initiator. Problem statement was ranked third, while request for repair, providing justification, annoyance and disapproval, and apology strategies were ranked fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh as the preferred strategies, respectively.

Figure 2. Frequency of individual strategies by AE, JEFL, and JA groups



Different from the AE group, providing justification strategy was the most frequently used complaint formula by the JEFL group. Further, the JEFL group used request for repair, problem statement, annoyance and disapproval, demanding justification, initiator, and threat and warning strategies as their second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh most preferred strategies, respectively. Similar to the AE group, demanding justification was the most frequently used complaint formula by the JA group. The initiator, request for repair, annoyance and disapproval, providing justification, problem statement, and threat and warning strategies were used by the JA group as their second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh most preferred strategies, respectively (see Figure 2).

As shown in Table 3, the results of the ANOVA revealed significant mean differences in 10 out of 14 complaint strategies: initiator ($F [2, 72] = 8.587, p = .000$); problem statement ($F [2, 72] = 4.537, p = .014$); providing justification ($F [2, 72] = 15.089, p = .000$); demanding justification ($F [2, 72] = 4.903, p = .010$); apology ($F [2, 72] = 6.949, p = .002$); sentencing ($F [2, 72] = 8.028, p = .001$); religious expressions ($F [2, 72] = 9.333, p = .000$); annoyance and disapproval ($F [2, 72] = 10.533, p = .000$); threat and warning ($F [2, 72] = 4.685, p = .012$); and request for repair ($F [2, 72] = 7.883, p = .001$). No significant differences were found in the three groups' use of removal of negativity, gratitude, preaching, and future implication.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Complaint Strategies by the Three Groups

Complaint strategies	AE		JEFL		JA		DF (error)	F	Sig
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Initiator	2.84	(1.143)	1.32	(1.520)	2.36	(1.287)	2 (72)	8.587	.000*
Problem statement	2.60	(1.323)	2.28	(1.061)	1.64	(1.036)	2 (72)	4.537	.014*
Providing justification	1.24	(1.052)	2.80	(1.258)	1.64	(.757)	2 (72)	15.089	.000*
Removal of negativity	.24	(.436)	.16	(.374)	.36	(.490)	2 (72)	1.333	.270
Demanding justification	2.88	(1.236)	1.84	(1.068)	2.56	(1.294)	2 (72)	4.903	.010*
Apology	.64	(.638)	.56	(.712)	.08	(.277)	2 (72)	6.949	.002*
Gratitude	.32	(.476)	.24	(.436)	.24	(.436)	2 (72)	.264	.769
Preaching	.24	(.436)	.48	(.510)	.32	(.476)	2 (72)	1.655	.198
Sentencing	.00	(.00)	.44	(.507)	.32	(.476)	2 (72)	8.028	.001*T
Future implication	.32	(.476)	.48	(.510)	.36	(.490)	2 (72)	.716	.492
Religious expressions	.00	(.000)	.00	(.000)	.28	(.458)	2 (72)	9.333	.000*
Annoyance and disapproval	.80	(.764)	2.08	(1.222)	1.68	(.988)	2 (72)	10.533	.000*T
Threat and warning	.28	(.458)	.80	(.764)	.68	(.627)	2 (72)	4.685	.012*T
Request for repair	1.76	(.831)	2.68	(.900)	2.00	(.816)	2 (72)	7.883	.001*

Note: T indicates the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer; * $p < 0.05$.

Tukey HSD post-hoc pair comparisons of the 10 strategies that showed significant differences revealed that the JEFL participants' use of complaining strategies did not follow a specific pattern. The JEFL group approximated the AE participants' norms of speech in their use of apology (e.g., "Sorry to bother you"; "sorry to come without an appointment") and religious expressions (e.g., "May God reward you"; "May God forgive you"). That is, while there were no significant mean differences between the JEFL and AE participants' use of apology ($M = .56$ and $M = .08$, respectively) and religious expressions ($M = .00$ and $M = .00$, respectively), both groups used these strategies significantly less than did the JA group ($M = .64$ and $M = .28$, respectively). A less progressive trend can be seen in the JEFL participants' use of problem statement (e.g., "I just came by to see if I could talk about my paper"; $M = 2.28$). Their use of this strategy occupied a position midway between that of the AE and JA participants ($M = 2.60$ and $M = 1.64$, respectively) a pattern that indicates both target and native language influence.

Conversely, the JEFL participants' use of providing justification (e.g., "I put a lot of time and effort in this"), initiator (e.g., "professor"; "Dear friend"), demanding justification (e.g., "what happened to the book?"), and request for repair (e.g., "could you please stop the loud music") strategies presented a different pattern to the two native speakers' groups. While the JEFL participants used providing justification and request for repair strategies ($M = 2.80$ and $M = 2.68$, respectively) significantly more than did the AE ($M = 1.24$ and $M = 1.76$, respectively) and JA ($M = 1.64$ and $M = 2.00$, respectively) participants, the JEFL participants tended to use demanding justification and initiator strategies ($M = 1.84$ and $M = 1.32$, respectively) significantly less than did the AE ($M = 2.88$ and $M = 2.84$, respectively) and JA ($M = 1.64$ and $M = 2.36$, respectively) participants.

Negative pragmatic transfer also played a major role in the JEFL participants' use of complaining strategies particularly their use of annoyance and disappointment (e.g., "Your behavior is annoying"; "I am disappointed about my grade"), threat and warning (e.g., "If you come late again, you will not be allowed to attend class"), and sentencing (e.g., "Go out this is not a cafeteria"; "Go and drop the course"). As shown in Table 3, both the JEFL and JA participants used annoyance and disappointment ($M = 2.08$ and $M = 1.68$, respectively), threat and warning ($M = .80$ and $M = .68$, respectively), and sentencing ($M = .44$ and $M = .32$, respectively) significantly more than did the AE group ($M = .80$, $M = .28$, and $M = .00$, respectively). There were no significant differences between the JEFL and JA participants' use of these strategies, which confirms the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer.

7. Discussion

This section discusses the results of this study according to the research questions raised by this investigation. The first research question addressed the total number of complaint strategies used by Jordanian EFL learners compared with American English native speakers and Jordanian Arabic native speakers. The findings indicated that the Jordanian EFL learners produced significantly more complaint strategies than did both the AE and JA groups, and therefore deviated from both the target and native language groups. This finding aligns with the research on second language learners' speech act performance (e.g., Edmondson & House, 1991; Hassall, 2001; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Yu, 2011), which has systematically reported that language learners at the intermediate and advanced levels tend to overuse the strategies of a given speech act, compared with native speakers. This verbosity, also known as the "waffle phenomenon" (Edmondson & House, 1991), seems to be a characteristic of all second language learners, irrespective of their L1. This behavior may also reflect learners' desire to make their pragmatic meaning as transparent as possible. However, from an interlanguage perspective, this verbose behavior in the complaints of Jordanian EFL learners carries the potential for pragmatic failure by creating "a lack of appropriateness which might cause the hearer to react with impatience" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986, p. 175).

The second and third research questions addressed the use of individual complaint strategies by Jordanian learners compared with American English native speakers, and the potential influence of the Jordanian EFL learners' first language of Arabic (negative pragmatic transfer) on their performance of complaints. The results indicated that the three groups agreed on the most frequent strategies: request for repair, initiator, demanding justification, problem statement, providing justification, and annoyance and disapproval. Nonetheless, they disagreed on the order preference and frequency of use of these strategies. Overall, four patterns in the JEFL participants' use of complaint strategies are worth noting. They approximated the AE target language group's norms of speech in only two strategies: apology and religious expressions.

The JEFL participants' use of problem statement strategy occupied a mid-position between the AE and JA groups, which indicates a developmental pattern toward AE norms of speech, while still under the strong influence of Jordanian Arabic (L1) norms. The JEFL participants followed a specific interlanguage pattern of their own, and used providing justification, initiator, demanding justification, and request for repair strategies differently from the two native language (JA and AE) groups. Negative pragmatic transfer was evident in Jordanian learners' use of complaints strategies. The criteria for negative pragmatic transfer were met in Jordanian learners' use of annoyance and disappointment, threat and warning, and sentencing strategies.

The fact that the three groups used the same range of strategies indicates that, while the strategies for perforating complaints seem to be shared between different languages and cultures, the actual use of these strategies in a given situation is culture specific and governed by different cultural norms. The JEFL participants' deviation from both American English and Jordanian Arabic norms aligns with Trosborg (1995), who found that Danish learners of English followed neither their native language nor the target language in their use of complaint strategies. One possible reason for this behavior may arise from learners having limited opportunities for input in the target language in the EFL context. Another possible reason is the nature of the language instruction, as the majority of EFL textbooks do not emphasize pragmatic instruction in their curricula. Regarding negative pragmatic transfer, it seems to constitute an integral part of Jordanian learners' interlanguage. Further, this transfer was a major factor in Jordanian learners' deviation from the target language norms of speech. These results align with two well-established assumptions in ILP research: (i) language learners' comprehension and production of linguistic action are influenced by their L1 pragmatic knowledge, and (ii) language learners' pragmatic failures are often caused by their reversion to L1 pragmatic conventions (Al-Issa, 2003; Al-Momani, 2009; Takahashi, 1996).

8. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This study was designed to investigate the realization of complaint speech act by Jordanian EFL learners compared with American English native speakers, and the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer in learners' performance of complaints. The results indicated that although the Jordanian learners had access to the same complaint strategies as the American English native speakers, they differed in the order preference and frequency of using these strategies. Deviation from American English norms of speech was the norm, rather than the exception. A significant reason for this deviation is Jordanian learners' tendency to transfer some complaint strategies (such as threats, sentencing, and annoyance) from their native language of Arabic. From an interlanguage perspective, in which learners need to interact with native speakers of the target language, the complaint behavior of Jordanian learners might not be socially appropriate in an American English context.

The existing research on Jordanian EFL learners' pragmatic abilities is far from being satisfactory, and much can be done to bridge this research gap. Future research can expand the scope of this study in different ways and address various aspects of making complaints. That is, future studies may investigate the influence of gender, proficiency level, and education on the use of complaint speech act. They also may incorporate different data collection methods, such as role plays and natural data, to determine whether they yield the same results. Another important venue for further research is teaching different complaining strategies to English learners. In particular, researchers can seek to identify which strategies can cause problems for learners in their use and interpretation of complaints.

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Appendix A. Classification of Complaint Strategies

1. Initiator

This strategy includes greetings, address terms, attention getters and other opening formulas (e.g., Hey, Hi, Well, Dr., Professor, Sir, John, Mary)

2. Problem Statement

Drawing the addressee's attention to the cause of the complaint (e.g., I just came by to see if I could talk about my paper)

3. Providing Justification

The speaker provides reasons for issuing the complaint (e.g., I put a lot of time and effort in this...)

4. Annoyance and Disapproval

Expressing the speaker's negative evaluation of the addressee's or his/her act (e.g., Your behavior is annoying; I am disappointed about my grade)

5. Request for Repair

The speaker asks the hearer to make up for the offense or to stop the offense (e.g., Could I have some privacy?; Will you please stop opening my letters?)

6. Threat and Warning

The speaker asserts immediate or potential sanctions against the hearer (e.g., If you open my letters again, I'll move out)

7. Demanding Justification

The speaker asks the addressee to provide reasons for committing the offensive act (e.g., what happened to the camera ??)

8. Apology

The speaker expresses regret for hurting the addressee's feelings or for restricting the addressee's freedom of action (e.g., Sorry to bother you; sorry to come without an appointment)

9. Gratitude

The speaker expresses gratitude; normally used as a closing (e.g., I really appreciate your help; Thank you for considering this)

10. Sentencing

The speaker goes beyond threatening by issuing a sentence and committing the addressee to fulfill it (e.g., Go out this is not a cafeteria; Go and drop the course)

11. Future Implication

Decision to do or not do something in the future (e.g., I will never lend you anything again)

12. Preaching

An utterance that reflects what the speaker thinks as a proper behavior in the situation (e.g., you should take care of other people's items)

13. Removal of Negativity

Expressions that lessen the severity of the offense (e.g., No need to worry about it; That is ok; I will fix it)

14. Religious Expressions

(e.g., May God reward you; May God forgive you)