Hey I Want To Complain: Cross-Cultural Comparison of Complaints in Persian and American English

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ABSTRACT
What should we do when the customer service is poor or when we buy a faulty product but the store does not let us return it? We should resolve such problems through complaining effectively. Having a good command of grammatical rules and vocabulary of the language is necessary but it is not enough; the ability to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate is a real asset in settling such problems. This study attempted to compare the pragmatic competence of Iranian EFL learners with that of native speakers of English language when they find it necessary to perform the speech act of complaint. Ten Iranian EFL students of Azad University in Lahijan served as the subjects of this study. The data were collected through comparing the complaint letters written by American native speakers with those by Iranian EFL learners. The responses were analyzed in terms of the main components of complaints. The findings indicated that American native speakers and Iranian EFL learners showed different pragmatic behaviors.

Introduction

We cannot enjoy a decent communication unless we develop the required competence. During the last few decades, the importance of communicative competence has been widely acknowledged in the field of second/foreign language teaching and learning. Hymes (1972), for instance, maintains that second language learners must learn to speak not only grammatically, but also "appropriately" to achieve communicative goals. This concept of "appropriateness" is further explained by Novick (2000) who postulates that second or foreign language learners must acquire not only linguistic rules such as morphology, syntax, phonology and vocabulary, but they must acquire socio-cultural rules of language use also. Acquisition of socio-cultural rules, which is widely known as pragmatic competence, is crucial to second and foreign language learners.

The acquisition of socio-pragmatic competence is seen as a vital component of successful language learning (Cohen, 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). One area of interest is the learners' acquisition of speech acts—the ability to use linguistic forms for pragmatic or functional purposes in socio-culturally appropriate contexts. Among the types of speech acts, two kinds of complaining acts have been addressed: indirect complaint and direct complaint. The former is defined as the expression of displeasure about oneself or something or someone that is not present whereas the latter is referred to the expression of annoyance as a reaction to an unfavorable action (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). The function of indirect complaint is a positive strategy for establishing commonality and rapport in social conversation (Boxer, 1993). In contrast, direct complaints are aimed at requiring the hearer to offer repair or remedy for the infringement of behaviors. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), complaining is a face threatening act (FTA) that involves imposition from the speaker to the hearer. Its realization hinges heavily on socio-cultural considerations and situational variables, and thus varies from culture to culture (Bell, 1998; Cohen, 1996; Koike, 1989). To avoid pragmatic failure and communication breakdown, interlocutors have to know which semantic formulas to use in order to attend to each other's face, and perceive the potential for repair in interaction.

Those who seem fluent in a foreign language due to their command of the grammatical rules of that language and its vocabulary may still lack pragmatic competence, and as a result they may not be able to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate. Appropriateness of language use can be realized by acknowledging the social identity of the listener in terms of the relative social status and the level of acquaintance between participants (Moon, 2001).

Furthermore, appropriateness of specific speech acts is governed by the social norms involved in language use (Manes, 1983). Unfortunately, nonnative speakers may not be fully aware of all the socio- linguistic rules governing the appropriateness of speech acts in the target language (Einsentein & Bodman, 1998). This state may lead some nonnative speakers to use their first language rules of speaking when using a second language (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss–Welts, 1990; Bergam and Kasper, 1993; Olshtain and Weinback 1993; Weizman, 1993; Al-Amar, 2000; Tanck 2002; Umar, 2004.)

Since languages are different and their use is governed by community-specific rules, transfer of language (L1) rules when using a second language could lead to generate pragmatically inappropriate linguistic forms. Al-Amar (2000) warns that non-native speakers who do not use pragmatically appropriate language "run the risk of appearing "uncooperative" at least or more seriously "rude" or "insulting" (p.4). Scollon and Scollon (1993) also assure that violation of pragmatic rules is bound to lead to communication breakdowns.

To avoid such miscommunications and their negative impact on human relations, applied linguists and more particularly those who are concerned with second language teaching are expected to address the question of pragmatics and speech act appropriateness more seriously. Kasper, (1997) affirms that competences, whether linguistic or pragmatic, should be developed and learned systematically.

It is now generally believed that pragmatic competence could be better acquired through systematic provision of

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learning opportunities that enhance its attainment (Novick, 2000). Yet, it is widely held that material for teaching pragmatics should be based on careful analysis of socio-linguistic deviations that characterize the performance of non-native speakers when using a target language (Tanck, 2002).

This study investigated whether the structure of direct complaints in Persian is similar to the structure of direct complaints in American English.

Review of Literature

What we do with words, or how human beings create a "speech act", was the concept coined by John L. Austin (1962) in his book entitled, "How to do things with words". Austin realized three different levels of meaning when using language:

1. Locutionary or propositional meaning is what the speaker says. In other words, it is the literal meaning of the words e.g. "It's cold in here".

2. Illocutionary meaning is the social function of the words, or the intended meaning. When the speaker says "It's cold in here", it could be an indirect request to the hearer to close the window, or an indirect refusal to someone to open the window, or it might be a complaint to someone after he has opened the window.

3. Perlocutionary meaning is the effect of one's words on the listener. For example, "It's cold in here", might make the listener to close the window.

John Searle (1970), who was a student of John Austin, realized that the speaker in a real situation may not always be able to produce the desired effect on the hearer. For instance, when the speaker says "It's cold in here", he has in his mind an indirect request to the hearer to close the window. But the hearer may take it as a statement and do nothing. Searle (1976) extended Austin's illocutionary act into five categories:

1. **Representative**: the illocutionary act where the speaker describes states or events, such as reports, assertions or claims, e.g. "It is very cold in this room".

2. **Directives**: the speaker has the listener to do something, e.g. requesting, ordering, suggesting, e.g. "Close the window please."

3. **Commisives**: the speaker commits himself to do something in the future, e.g. promise, threaten, like "I promise you to visit you at Christmas."

4. **Expressive**: It is used to express a speaker's feeling and attitude such in complimenting, thanking, apologizing.

5. **Declarative**: this speech act changes the state of affairs, e.g., "I now name this ship Blue Ocean".

Within the above category, the speech act of complaint belongs to the category of expressives. According to Trosborg (1995), a complaint is, an illocutionary act in which the speaker (the complainer) expresses his/her disapproval, negative feelings etc. toward the state of affairs described in the proposition (the complainable) and for which he/she holds the hearer (the complainee) responsible, either directly or indirectly (p p311, 312).

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, a complaint is a face-threatening act since "it threatens the complainee's negative face wants, and at the same time it endangers the complainer's positive face wants if the complainee does not accept the complaint" (Tamanaha, 2003, p.18). For a complaining act to occur it must meet some necessary conditions. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) identified these conditions as follows:

The speaker expects a favorable event to occur (an appointment, the return of a debt, the fulfillment of a promise, etc.), or an unfavorable event to be prevented from occurring, (damage, an insult, etc.), the action results, therefore, in the violation of speaker's expectations by either having enabled or failed to prevent the offensive event (cited in Al-Tayib Umar, 2006, p.14)

Complaining as a speech act has been analyzed by Austin (1962), Edmondson (1981), Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993), Searle (1976), and Trosborg (1995). Austin placed complaints in the class of performatives and the subclass of behabitives, which are concerned with our attitudes and expressions of attitudes towards one's social behavior. Searle, in contrast, included complaints ('deplore') into the class of expressives because they express the psychological state of a person. For example, when we complain we express our dissatisfaction about the matter of the complaint. The matter of complaints ('causal agent') varies: we complain about situations, about our dissatisfactions in different areas of our everyday life, about other people's behavior (Newell and Stutman 1989/1990), and even about ourselves, for example, 'Oh! I'm so stupid' (Boxer 1993a: 31). Therefore, there are different types of complaints.

A direct complaint is a direct confrontation (Newell and Stutman 1989/1990) performed by a speaker who expresses displeasure or annoyance towards a hearer for a socially unacceptable behavior, and holds the hearer responsible for this behavior (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993). Similar to a direct complaint, an indirect complaint also expresses displeasure and annoyance but, unlike a direct complaint, does not hold the hearer responsible for the substance of the complaint (Boxer 1993a). This kind of complaint leads the hearer to potential commiseration and sympathy with the complainer (Boxer 1993a; Newell and Stutman 1989/1990).

An indirect complaint may also be referred to as 'griping' or 'grumbling' (Boxer 1993a), 'troubles-talk' (Tannen 1990; Michaud and Warner 1997), 'troubles-telling' (Brenneis 1988; Tannen 1990), and 'troubles-talk narrative' (Ouellette 2001). Although these terms are often used interchangeably, an indirect complaint is often a smaller unit of 'the troubles-telling (talk) speech event in that it is often the initiating speech acts of such an event' (Boxer 1993a: 2). Consequently, troubles-talk narrative is characterized as a speech event which builds solidarity between interlocutors through the indirect speech act of complaining and through face-saving strategies such as speaker 'hedges' and listener 'commiserative responses' as backchannels.

(Ouellette 2001: 3)

Boxer refers to troubles-telling events as indirect complaint exchanges or sequences that 'can work toward establishing solidarity' (1993a: 3). Thus, when interlocutors are engaged in indirect complaining, they are working toward creating relationships of companionship.

Brown and Levinson (1987) treat complaints as face threatening either to the speaker or to the hearer. All members of a society have 'face', or 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects: (a) negative face … [and] (b) positive face' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). According to Brown and Levinson, 'face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction' (1987: 61). While negative face is defined as one's desire to be unimpeded by others, positive face is characterized as the wish of every member 'that his wants be desirable to at least some others' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Brown and Levinson propose that different types of speech acts can affect either the speaker's or the hearer's negative or positive face that is they are face-threatening.

Direct complaints, for example, threaten the hearer's positive face, as the speaker holds the interlocutor responsible for the violation of social norms. Indirect complaints do not threaten in the same way, since the hearer is not accountable for the speaker's dissatisfaction, offence or frustration, but they do put the speaker's positive face at risk. Ouellette found that in order to save their positive face when troubles telling, speakers often used a mitigating strategy, such as hedging, as 'an attempt on the part of the narrator to maintain his or her face while complaining so as not to seem too mean or critical in the eyes of audience members' (2001: 111).

Concomitantly, indirect complaints can be considered as face threatening to the hearer's negative face, as it can be assigned to those acts that 'predicate some future act A of H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to do (or refrain from doing) the act A' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 66). For example, by sharing a negative evaluation of something or somebody with a hearer (Boxer 1993a), the speaker wants the hearer to display solidarity and understanding of the problem that is introduced. To satisfy the hearer's desire 'not to be impinged on' (Brown and Levinson 1987), the speaker can use negative-politeness strategies demonstrating that the speaker cares for the hearer's wants.

Olshtain and Cohen (1983) assert that speech acts are not produced alone; they are incorporated into speech act sets, or formulas, which include several moves. Direct complaints in American English were investigated by Murphy and Neu (1996) who distinguished four components of this speech act set: 1. Explanation of purpose (speaker explains the purpose for initiating the conversation); 2. Complaint (speaker expresses dissatisfaction about the hearer's behavior); 3. Justification (complainer states the reasons for complaining); and 4. A candidate solution: request (complainer offers a resolution to resolve the problem). Hence, the speech act set of direct complaints has a beginning, body and an end.

Indirect complaints also have boundaries and consist of distinctive parts. In his study of hedges and indirect complaints in the troubles-talk narrative of American English native speakers, and Korean and French speakers of English, Ouellette (2001) determined that troubles-talk narrative incorporates elements identical to those identified by Labov (1972), specifically, abstract, orientation, complications, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Each of these elements has a communicative function: abstract summarizes the story; orientation sets the stage and identifies the participants; complication charts the details of what happened; evaluation reflects the speaker's attitude towards the story; resolution outlines how the problem that evoked the speaker's complaints could be solved or treated in future; and coda signals the end of the indirect complaint sequence (Labov 1972). Since troubles talk often consists of many turns, orientation, complications and evaluation can be performed several times in a different order while a complainer develops the story (see Ouellette 2001).

Pragmatics is the study of how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a speech situation. People in different countries may view pragmatics principles quite differently from each other, which pave the way for studies in cross-cultural and contrastive pragmatics (Shaozhong). Besides, studies on speech acts have shown that the same speech act might be realized quite differently across different cultures (Han, 1992). According to Wolfson (1981), "speech acts differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are realized but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve". (p.123)

Studies on the speech act of complaint have shown that people use different strategies to express their dislike and complaints. For example, when complaining to a professor about an unfair grade, Americans expressed a direct complaint ('I think …in my opinion, maybe the grade was a little low'), while Koreans learners of English preferred a criticism over an explicit complaint ('…. You don't recognize my point') (Murphy & Neu, 1996). Another study has indicated that Germans showed a preference for requests for repair, justifications, and criticism more than Americans who tend to avoid these strategies (DeCapua, 1998).

Several studies have investigated cross-cultural differences in complaint to determine how respondents who differ in culture and language choose the preferred strategies. For example, in a study of native speakers and advanced learners of Hebrew, Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) identified five strategies as the speech act set including (1) below the level of reproach, e.g. "No harm done, let's meet some other time", (2) disapproval, e.g. "It's a shame that we have to work faster now after you delayed the work", (3) complaint, e.g. "You are always late and now we have less time to do the job", (4) accusation and warning, e.g. "The next time, don't expect me to sit here waiting for you" and (5) threat, e.g. "If you don't finish the job today, I'll have to discuss it with the boss" (p. 202). In their study, native speakers of Hebrew realized social status to be significantly important.

In a cross-cultural study of complaints strategies between Japanese and Americans using an open-ended questionnaire in the form of discourse completion tasks and a few role plays, Spees (1994) found out that Japanese are more direct than Americans in situations where the interlocutors have equal status with each other. However, regarding social distance, the Japanese responded differently toward out-group interlocutors (i.e., strangers) than toward in-group interlocutors (i.e. family, friends, etc.), and they were generally more indirect to out-group members (in Tamanaha, 2003).

In another study of American and Korean speakers of English, Murphy and Neu (1996) identified four semantic formulas from the respondents to be (1) an explanation of purpose, (2) a complaint, (3) a justification, and (4) a request. The researchers were able to demonstrate a high correlation between native and non-native speakers when producing explanation of purpose, justification, and request; however, native and non-native speakers differed in the production of complaint.

Rinnert and Nogami (2006) developed a taxonomy of complaints that consists of three main components of complaints, namely the main component, the level of directness and the number of softeners used in the interaction. These components are presented, as follows, in detail: 1. Main component Initiator (e.g. greetings, address terms, and other opening formulas) Complaints (expressions of negative evaluation, including justification) Request (direct or indirect attempts to get the hearer to redress the situation) 2. Level of directness Indirect (no explicit mention of offense, implied offense only), Somewhat direct (mention of offense, but no mention of the hearer's responsibility), Very direct (explicit mention of offense and hearer's responsibility for it) and 3. Amount of mitigation (counting the softening expressions, e.g. "a little, sort of, you know, would/ could, I think/ I wonder").

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justification (complainer states the reasons for complaining); and 4 a candidate solution: request (complainer offers a resolution to resolve the problem).

The differences in the realization of direct complaints in letters written by Iranian learners of English and American native speakers seem to be relatively unexplored, and it was the purpose of this study to compare the speech act of direct complaints in Persian and American English in order to make Iranian learners of English aware of the possible cultural differences and to help them to avoid inter-cultural miscommunication.

Methodology

Ten Iranian EFL students of Azad University in Lahijan served as the participants of this study. They were asked to write a business letter of complaint on the subject below.

The product that you ordered has arrived, but it is not functioning well. Write a letter of complaint.

Direct complaints in American English were investigated by Murphy and Neu (1996) who distinguished four components of this speech act set:

1. explanation of purpose (speaker explains the purpose for initiating the conversation);

2. complaint (speaker expresses dissatisfaction about the hearer's behavior);

3. justification (complainer states the reasons for complaining); and

4. a candidate solution: request (complainer offers a resolution to resolve the problem).

The data of this study were collected through analyzing the complaint letters written by Iranian EFL students; in other words, the complaint letters written by American native speakers were compared with those by Iranian EFL learners for the presence of such components as 1. explanation of purpose (speaker explains the purpose for initiating the conversation), 2. justification (complainer states the reasons for complaining), 3. a candidate solution or request (complainer offers a resolution to resolve the problem), 4. Mitigation or softening expression , e.g. "a little, sort of, you know, would/ could, I think/ I wonder", 5. giving time, and 6. warning.

The tables in the following section show how components were differently used by Americans and Iranians for making complaints.

Data Analysis

Table 1 shows how Americans and Iranians were different in using the components of purpose, justification, request, mitigation, giving time, and warning while making complaints.

Table 1. The components used by Americans and Iranians for making complaints

	1. Purpose AM	IR	2. Justification AM	IR	3. Request AM	IR	4. Mitigation AM	IR	5. Giving time AM	IR	6. warning AM	IR
1.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	–	✓	–	–	–
2.	✓	–	–	–	✓	✓	–	–	✓	–	–	✓
3.	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	–	–	✓
4.	✓	–	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	–	–	✓
5.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	–	✓	–	–	✓
6.	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓
7.	–	–	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	–	✓	✓
8.	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	–	–	✓
9.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	–	✓	✓	–	–
10.	✓	–	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	9	5	8	5	10	7	8	2	9	3	2	8

The symbol ☐ means that the component was used, and the sign – means that the component was not used; AM and IR stand for American and Iranian, respectively. Ninety percent of the Americans explained the purpose for making the complaint at

the beginning of the letter; however, 50% of the Iranian EFL learners used this component of explanation. 80% of the Americans stated the reasons for complaining, but 50% of Iranian EFL learners justified their complaining. All American complainers offered a resolution to resolve the problem, and 70% of the Iranian EFL learners offered a request. 80% of the Americans used mitigation (softening expression , e.g. "a little, sort of, you know, would/ could, I think/ I wonder") while complaining, but this component was used by 20% of Iranian complainers. The component of giving time was used by 90% of native speakers. But only 30 percent of the Iranians used this component. Only 20% of the Americans made use of the last component of warning, which is the optional component in making complaint. On the other hand, 80% of Iranian learners of English used this component of warning. Finally, 88% of Americans and 44% of Iranians used the first five components while complaining.

Moreover, in order to determine whether the proportions of the two categories (nationality and using components) differ from the expected proportions, the chi square analysis was employed. Table 2 below shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the first component of purpose.

Table 2. relationship between nationality variable and using component of purpose

	Using purpose	Not using purpose	Total
American	9	1	10
Iranian	5	5	10
Total	14	6	20

The computed x^2 value was 2.1, and the critical x^2 value was 3.8. Table 3 below shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the second component of Justification.

Table 3. Relationship between nationality variable and using component of Justification

	Justifying	Not justifying	Total
American	8	2	10
Iranian	5	5	10
Total	13	7	20

The computed x^2 value was .87, and the critical x^2 value was 3.8. Table 4 below shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the third component of request.

Table 4. relationship between nationality variable and using component of request

	Requesting	Not justifying	Total
American	10	0	10
Iranian	7	3	10
Total	17	3	20

The computed x^2 value was .39, and the critical x^2 value was 3.8. Table 5 below shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the fourth component of mitigation.

Table 5. Relationship between nationality variable and using component of mitigation

Mitigating	Not mitigating	Total	
American	8	2	10
Iranian	2	8	10
Total	10	10	20

The computed x2 value was 5, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. Table 6 below shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the fifth component of giving time.

Table 6. Relationship between nationality variable and using component of giving time

	Giving time	Not Giving time	Total
American	9	1	10
Iranian	3	7	10
Total	12	8	20

The computed x2 value was 5.2, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. Table 7 below shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the sixth component of warning.

Table 7. Relationship between nationality variable and using component of warning

	Warning	Not warning	Total
American	2	8	10
Iranian	8	2	10
Total	10	10	20

The computed x2 value was 5, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. These pieces of information helped the researcher to estimate the likelihood that some factor other than chance (sampling error) accounts for the apparent relationship. The findings indicate that American native speakers and the Iranian EFL learners used the components differently to realize the speech act of complaint.

Discussion

This study attempted to determine whether or not the variable of nationality is related to the number of such components of a complaint letter as purpose, justification, request, mitigation, giving time, and warning.

Ninety percent of the Americans explained the purpose for making the complaint at the beginning of the letter; however, only 50% of the Iranian EFL learners used this component of explanation. The very first line of letters written by the Americans clearly addresses why they are writing the letter and what their exact complaint is. They give as many pertinent facts as possible, including the date, time and location where they made the purchase or received the service, along with any relevant serial or model numbers: *I bought the above iron from The Electrical Store in Newford on 10 October 2005*; however, the Iranians were not so informative in this respect.

Table 2 shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the first component of purpose. The computed x2 value was 2.1, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. The computed x2 value does not exceed the critical x2 value. In other words, the variables of nationality and using the component of purpose do not exhibit the quality of dependence. It means that the variable of nationality does not seem to influence the use of the component of purpose.

Ninety percent of the Americans stated the reasons for complaining, and 50% of Iranian EFL learners justified their complaining.

Table 3 shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the second component of Justification. The computed x2 value was .87, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. Moreover, all American complainers offered a resolution to resolve the problem, and 70 % of the Iranian EFL learners offered a request. The native speakers stated specifically what outcome or remedy (a replacement, a refund, a repair, or some other form of compensation) would satisfy them: *To resolve this problem, I would appreciate it if the vacuum could be repaired or replaced.* The native speakers tried to be as constructive as possible in their comments, suggesting a way that they can continue their relationship with the company.

Table 4 reveals the relationship between the nationality variable and using the third component of request. The computed x2 value was .39, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. The computed x2 values, according to tables 3 and 4, were far below the critical x2 values necessary for the null hypothesis at the .05 level. The researcher concluded that there is no significant relationship between enjoying a certain nationality (American and Iranian) and using the components of justification and request.

Although Iranians used this component of request more frequently than the other effective components, they simultaneously informed the reader that they plan on taking their business elsewhere, which will make the reader have little incentive to try and resolve the problem. The Iranian learners of English used imperatives intensively, which makes their complaints sound more inappropriate: *Repair the iron.,* and *Pay my money back.* This intensive use of imperatives clearly shows that they pragmatically transfer this component. The Americans, on the other hand, in order to soften the blow of their complaint, mentioned some of the positive aspects of the company or organization, such as the overall quality of the products or services, the low prices, the excellent customer service, and so forth. They wrote so positively that the company or entity would be more willing to work with them: *This is the first time something like this has happened with one of your products.* In other words, the table shows that 80% of the Americans used the fourth component of mitigation while complaining, but this component was used by only 20% of Iranian complainers, which makes the addressee less willing to be cooperative.

Table 5 shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the fourth component of mitigation. The computed x2 value was 5, and the critical x2 value was 3.8. There seems to be a significant relationship (at the .05 level of significance) between being an American and the number of times the component of mitigation is used in the complaint letter. The component of giving time was used by 90% of native speakers. But only 30 percent of the Iranians used this component. The native speakers gave the reader a time limit to resolve the matter. They provided an exact time period within which they would like the issue to be resolved, which will give them peace of mind and will help bring the issue to a speedy conclusion. The time period they provided was reasonable: *a week or two* which is usually sufficient, though this will vary depending on what their requests are: *I would like to have this product immediately replaced with a working unit of the same*

brand or model within 3 days. Such a component is almost absent in letters written by the Iranian writers.

Table 6 indicates the relationship between the nationality variable and using the fifth component of giving time. The computed $x2$ value was 5.2, and the critical $x2$ value was 3.8. The computed $x2$ value exceeded the critical $x2$ value, which means those enjoying the American nationality are significantly more likely to use the component of giving time.

American's optimism prevented them from being perceived as hopeless complainers. However, Iranians' solution to the problem lacked optimism. In complaining about the faulty product, the Iranians, unlike the American native speakers, made the situation rather more unpleasant by not mitigating their complaints. 80 percent of them used the component of warning, which would annoy the reader and not encourage the complainee to solve the problem; however, this component was used by only 20 percent of the Americans, whose tone of complaint was not aggressive or insulting. Such questions and sentences as *'Why can't you get this right?', 'Otherwise, we may have to look elsewhere for our supplies.', 'I'm afraid that if these conditions are not met, we may be forced to take legal action.'*, by the Iranians, sounds accusatory or demanding. The Americans do not threaten legal action in their first communication. It may be the solution they ultimately require, they send their complaint letter first and await a response; legal action would be their last resort. It is illegal to write a letter that contains language threatening physical violence, destruction of property, or assault to health or safety. A threat can be interpreted as harassment and grounds for action in a court of law, and can be subject to penalties ranging from fines to prison time. An American does himself a favor and put threats out of mind. While writing their letter, the Americans remain diplomatic and courteous at all times. No matter how justified their complaint may be, they do not allow their letters to become angry, sarcastic, or threatening, but the Iranians forget to keep in mind that the person that reads their letters will often not be the person responsible for the problem, so they used the component of warning more frequently: *'The next time, don't expect me to buy your product.'*

Table 7 shows the relationship between the nationality variable and using the sixth component of warning. The computed $x2$ value was 5, and the critical $x2$ value was 3.8. Once more the computed $x2$ value exceeded the critical $x2$ value, which means those enjoying the Iranian nationality are significantly more likely to use the component of warning.

The Iranians will have much better success if they treat the recipient as somebody who wants to help them, rather than assuming they are filled with malicious intent. If the Iranians want to get result, they should remain calm and write letters whose tone is matter-of-fact. An angry or threatening tone is ineffective. They should remember that the person they are addressing may not be the owner of the company that made the defective product. The complainee will be much more responsive and willing to please a gracious, polite customer, who uses a respectful and professional tone, rather than a customer who uses an angry, accusatory, inflammatory or a threatening tone.

The Americans finally thanked the company, and gave their contact information so the company could communicate with them: *'You can contact me at the address above or email me at happycustomer@home.com.'* The more ways that the reader can contact the complainer, the better his chances are of being contacted, so this is another point that the Iranian EFL learners need to take into consideration.

In order to enjoy a sound and safe communication, the Iranian EFL learners should know how the speech act components for complaint produced by native speakers differ from those produced by non-native speakers in terms of frequency. In other words, their responses were linguistically correct, but their frequency of producing components could be considered less appropriate than that produced by native speakers. The findings indicated that American native speakers and Iranian EFL learners showed different pragmatic behaviors.

The results of this investigation will help both identify the pragmatic deviations that may have bad effect on the complaints made by the Iranian students and provide examples that the English language teachers and syllabus designers can use to explain situations in which students may pragmatically fail and also to develop material to cope with these problems. Teachers may, therefore, help their students enjoy an optimal pragmatic success through imparting information or knowledge of the difference in using the components of complaints in different cultures. Testers may also find these findings helpful in testing students' knowledge of the difference in using the components of complaints in different cultures.

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the wider population due to the relatively restricted number of respondents. Besides, though analyzing letters of complaint in terms of the components mentioned above can be a good method of data collection in pragmatic studies, more data with other methods of data collection are needed to authenticate these findings. Future studies can replicate this study by taking these factors into consideration.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the present study may add to the body of literature in contrastive pragmatic study in demonstrating the different behaviors of two contrasting cultures in terms of expressing complaints.

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