A Study of Lexicogrammatical and Discourse Strategies of "Complaining" in American English

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Abstract

This study endeavors to sketch out the lexical and grammatical strategies of the speech act *complaining* through a corpus research of the data provided by American University undergraduate students. The data collected through "open" type DCTs (discourse completion test) were digitalized and analyzed at the lexical, grammatical and discourse levels. While this speech act is an FTA (face-threatening act) in nature, it has been confirmed that there are elements related to politeness and solidarity enhancement in the performance of this speech act. It is therefore supposed to be valuable for EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) learners to study how to receive and perform this speech act properly if they are to belong to the community where their target language, English, is used as the first or main language.

1. Introduction

This is one of the series of corpus study of English speech acts based on the data collected in the author's SAC (Speech Acts Corpora) project, started in 2006[1]. The target speech act in this study is *complaining*, which intrinsi-

cally conveys negative meanings to the hearer (henceforth *H*). This speech act belongs to Searle's ASSERTIVE as clearly stated in his illocutionary type classification (1979). Leech (1983) classified this speech act into COLLABORA-TIVE but it is assumed that *complaining* also has the features of his CONFLICTIVE as explained later.

The data was collected with "open" DCTs conducted with 167 university undergraduate students in Missouri, U.S.A. in 2006 and 2007. The uniqueness of this DCT lies in its "openness": it asks informants to put down their utterances (speech act performance) as well as the situations in which the illocutions were produced. This framework has allowed the researcher to investigate (1) the situations in which the target speech acts are performed, and (2) various utterances and discourse strategies which lay people consider as the core and the peripheral parts of the target speech acts. These are thought to be advantages in the exploration of speech acts in foreign language as they can clarify how speech acts are performed in which situation in the target foreign language. Then the written data was digitalized and analyzed with a corpus tool (*Wordsmith*) for lexical and grammatical studies and computer spreadsheet software for the survey of various discourse strategies.

The author has so far published some of the results obtained through the same procedure in this research project: *Suggesting* (Suzuki, 2009a), *Inviting* (Suzuki, 2009b), *Comforting* (Suzuki, 2010), *Thanking, Apologizing, Requesting, and Inviting* (Suzuki, 2012). One same feature that all these three speech acts share in common is that they are normally performed with politeness strategies of some kind to mitigate the impact of an FTA (face-threatening act) and to strengthen an FEA (face-enhancing act). This work is going to reveal what kind of lexicogrammatical and discourse strategies are employed to perform an FTA by its nature.

2. Literature review

The target speech act in this study, *complaining*, has been studied ethno-

graphically in the works of such researchers as D'Amico-Reisner (1983), Boxer (1993), Olshtein and Weinback (1993), Boxer & Pickering (1995), and Laforest (2002).

We first examine the ways in which this speech act has been treated in the early frameworks of illocutionary acts and politeness. *Complaining* is included in Searle's ASSERTIVE category. He defines and explains the ASSERTIVE type speech acts as follows:

> The point of purpose of the members of the assertive class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition. All of the members of the assertive class are assessable on the dimension of assessment which includes *true* and *false*. ... Once we recognize the existence of *assertives* as a quite separate class, based on the notion of illocutionary point, then the existence of a large number of performative verbs that denote illocutions that seem to be assessable in the True-False dimension and yet are not just "statements" will be easily explicable in terms of the fact that they mark features of illocutionary force which are in addition to illocutionary point. Thus, for example, consider "boast" and "complain". They both denote assertives with the added feature that they have something to do with the interest of the speaker.
>
> (Adapted from Searle, 1979: 12-13)

One thing we should note in Searle's explication is that the illocutionary acts in this category are considered in terms of the proposition and the added illocutionary force.

While indeed *complaining* is performed to express "the interest of the speaker", the next thing the researcher would like to see is in what ways its illocutionary force is related to politeness (or social equilibrium). For this purpose Leech's framework, Principles of Pragmatics (POP), is to be examined next.

Leech (1983) states that Searle's ASSERTIVE corresponds to his COLLABORATIVE as it "commits S (= a speaker) to the truth of expressed

proposition: *eg* stating, suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming, reporting" (*ibid*.: 105). At the same time he says, "But there are some exceptions: for example, boasting is generally considered to be impolite" (*ibid*.: 106). The latter statement causes confusion as to which illocutionary act type can accommodate *complaining* in Leech's taxonomy as it is more similar to *boasting* and *claiming* rather than *suggesting* and *reporting* regarding (im)politeness. It is presumed to be a speech act in his CONFLICTIVE category (*The illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal; eg threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding*) (*ibid*.: 104) as *accusing* and *reprimanding* are analogous to *complaining* and the following description of this type matches its features concerning politeness:

> ... politeness is out of the question, because conflictive illocutions are, by their very nature, designed to cause offence. To threaten or curse someone in a polite manner is virtually a contradiction in terms: the only way to make sense of the idea is to suppose that the speaker does so ironically. Presumably in the course of socialization children learn to replace conflictive communication by other types (especially by the competitive type) ...
>
> (Leech, *ibid*.: 105)

Regarding politeness, as Laforest (*ibid*.: 1597) points out, *complaining* is included as a "face-threatening act" (FTA) in Brown & Levinson's framework, as the one that threatens "the positive-face want, by indicating (potentially) that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, wants, etc." (1987: 66). More specifically, it shows "that S has a negative evaluation of some aspect of *H*'s positive face" (*ibid*.).

However, if we would like to consider more correctly and in more depth how *complaining* is performed in our daily life, we need to remember that it is targeted at different objectives: sometimes it is addressed directly towards *H* (FTA above) and sometimes towards others, including the speaker him/herself. The latter case is in many cases not an FTA for *H* as it does not cause him/her any offense. Boxer (1993) and Boxer & Pickering (1995) are

the works that focused on IC (indirect complaint) in conversations which are targeted not at *H*. Boxer (1993) explains what IC is as follows:

> The present research is a study of a type of negative evaluation that will be referred to here as the indirect complaint (IC) as it is used in a speech community of middle class speakers of American English. ... The term 'indirect complaint' is taken from the work of D'Amico-Reisner on disapproval exchanges. Indirect disapproval is juxtaposed by D'Amico-Reisner with instances of direct complaint or disapproval (D). ICs differ from instances of D in that the addressee is not held responsible for a perceived offense.
>
> (Boxer, 1993: 106)

Boxer & Pickering (1995) indicated that ICs and proper responses to them could create solidarity and therefore the pair (ICs and responses) should be included in ESL/EFL class as in the following:

> ICs differ from Ds in that Ds are not commonly thought of as having the potential of leading to increased positive social interaction. Whereas compliments, invitations, and apologies are treated as solidarity-establishing acts in English classes that specifically focus on the acquisition of communicative competence, complaints are typically treated as Ds, or confrontational acts. The principal pedagogical implication is that the IC, as a specific and frequently-used speech act in many communities, should be recognized by learners for its potentially positive underlying social strategy, and responded to accordingly if solidarity is desired.
>
> (Boxer & Pickering, 1995: 46)

These statements are important for this research as there are many IC type responses in the data, while some are directed towards *H* (D). It is also worth noting that *complaining*, especially ICs, could become an important teaching material in ESL/EFL class as can be seen from the above. ICs and their responses can enhance "solidarity" in American English and learning about them can benefit learners, especially if they desire to live in a commu-

nity or stay there for a certain period of time. This can be a justification of treating the speech act of *complaining* in the current linguistic study and its pedagogical implications.

3. The data collection and analysis procedure

The data analyzed in this study was collected in Missouri, the U.S., in 2006 and 2007 with over 160 university undergraduate students in one of the author's research projects (2006-2008). This project was designed to investigate the lexicogrammatical and discourse strategies, along with relevant politeness strategies, employed to perform eleven types of target English speech acts. The data collection was carried out with the native speakers of American English for the purpose of sketching out the linguistic strategies in American English for both linguistic studies and their pedagogical applications.

In the data collection an "open" type DCT (discourse completion test) was used to elicit not only the core part of the speech act performance but also related speech act strategies along with the situation in which they are presented. It requested the informants to write the following as main subjects: (1) the situation in which the informant actually performed the target speech act, (2) the utterance s/he actually produced. This DCT was designed that way as the purpose of the research was to explore the linguistic strategies for speech act performance without any presupposition or assumption. The Type-A DCT requested monologue type utterances, while the Type-B asked the informants to put down the conversations in which they performed the target illocutionary acts. The A type was designed to focus on the speech act performance itself whereas the B type allowed the researcher to also collect responses to the target speech acts performed. As the data collected with the B type DCT includes replies, data trimming was carried out for this study: (1) replies were cut off so that this study can concentrate on the speech act performance itself, (2) the part which functions only as a reply to the conversation partner was eliminated.

The data collected in the above way was then analyzed to investigate the lexicogrammatical and the discourse strategies. For the investigation of lexical and grammatical features of *complaining*, *Wordsmith* (5.0.0.334), concordance software, was employed. It created a wordlist which presents the lexical items according to their frequency, and a concordance list which provides information about collocations and grammatical structures of the target lexical items. Then the discourse strategies were scrutinized with the use of computer spreadsheet.

4. The results of the data analysis

This section presents and discusses the various features of *complaining* performed by the informants described earlier. They include (1) the types of situations, (2) Lexicogrammatical strategies, (3) discourse strategies, and (4) semantic formulas.

4.1 Types of situations

First, we will examine what types of situations appeared frequently as the ones where *complaining* was performed.

Table 4.1.1 *Types of Situations in order of their frequencies*

1	O	SCHOOLWORK	18	12.8%
2	F	FRIEND	17	12.1%
3	T	WEATHER/TEMPERATURE	16	11.3%
4	D	FAMILY	14	9.9%
5	U	WORK	11	7.8%
6	L	RESTAURANT	9	6.4%
7	A	ACTIVITY IN GENERAL	8	5.7%
7	G	HEALTH	8	5.7%
9	E	FOOD	7	5.0%
10	B	CLUB ACTIVITY	6	4.3%
10	R	TEACHER/CLASS	6	4.3%

12	C	EXPENSE	4	2.8%
13	H	HUNGER	3	2.1%
13	K	PURCHASES/GOODS	3	2.1%
13	N	SCHOOL LIFE	3	2.1%
16	J	PERSONAL BELONGINGS	2	1.4%
16	S	TRAFFIC	2	1.4%
18	I	NEIGHBORHOOD	1	0.7%
18	M	SCHOOL FACILITIES	1	0.7%
18	P	STRANGER	1	0.7%
18	Q	SWEETHEART	1	0.7%

Table 4.1.1 shows all types of situations and their frequencies As can be seen the most frequent type is SCHOOLWORK. The reason why it appeared so many times can be understood by the fact that the informants in this study were university undergraduates. As can be seen from Table 4.1.2, the complaints are made against "tests", "homework", "grades", etc., which are deeply related to their school life. This evidences that these are the main sources of these students' complaint.

Table 4.1.2 *Specifications of SCHOOLWORK (Selected)*

1	Frustrated from school, I come home and complain to my parents.
2	Test day.
3	Class schedule
4	Talking to friend about a class.
5	Complaining about the amount of homework.
6	Tired of school work.
7	This homework is difficult.
8	Charlie receives a bad grade and has to tell his mom.
9	Matt is mad about math test.
10	Complaining that I didn't get the grade I wanted.

SCHOOLWORK is followed by (A) FRIEND, (B) WEATHER/TEMPER-

ATURE, (C) FAMILY, (D) WORK, (E) RESTAURANT and others, which are also linked closely to the informants' daily life, as summarized and specified in Table 4.1.3. We can observe and understand that they are the main causes of students' frustration in these situations.

Table 4.1.3 *Specifications of FRIEND, WEATHER/TEMPERATURE, FAMILY, WORK, RESTAURANT (Selected)*

(A) FRIEND	
1	One of my friends does something incredibly stupid.
2	My roommate borrows my clothes without asking.
3	Sally spilled soda on my homework.
4	My friend is eating my food.
5	My friend takes my Playstation 3 without asking first.
6	I'm complaining about loudness of my roommate.
7	My friend invited someone I didn't want to come.
(B) WEATHER/TEMPERATURE	
1	It is 100° outside.
2	The rooms feel hot.
3	I complained to my supervisor that it was too cold in the offices.
4	It's raining outside and my pants are all wet now. I tell my brother.
5	I say that I don't like rainy days to my friend, Sarah.
6	Football practice will be bad today, cause of the heat outside.
(C) FAMILY	
1	My sister slaps me.
2	Tami wants me to clean the basement.
3	My Mom wants me to take my brother and friends to the zoo.
4	Husband lies to kids.
5	I want to go to a party but my parents won't let me go.
(D) WORK	
1	My boss made me stay late at work.
2	I am complaining to my manager about hours at work.
3	Complaining to my mom about co-workers

4	Table at work didn't tip.
(E) RESTAURANT	
1	My food was cold at the restaurant. I complained to the waiter.
2	My food is not cooked correctly. My steak is raw when I asked for well done.
3	I ordered no mustard on my hamburger and they put it on there.

4.2 Lexical and grammatical strategies

In this section we are examining the lexicogrammatical strategies employed by the research contributors when they performed *complaining*. First we examine which lexical items were recurrently used in this speech act with the wordlist (Table 4.2) created by *Wordmith*.

Table 4.2.1 *Wordlist (The words that appeared 10 times or more)*

N	Word	Freq.	N	Word	Freq.
1	I	176	28	FOR	16
2	TO	103	29	MAN	16
3	YOU	61	30	ON	16
4	MY	59	31	BUT	15
5	IS	52	32	HERE	15
6	SO	47	33	IN	15
7	IT	42	34	IT'S	15
8	THE	41	35	WHY	15
9	AND	38	36	JUST	14
10	THIS	37	37	MUCH	14
11	A	36	38	OUT	14
12	DO	36	39	TOO	14
13	HAVE	36	40	MOM	13
14	DON'T	29	41	AM	12
15	ME	26	42	COULD	12
16	REALLY	25	43	HATE	12
17	WANT	24	44	HOMEWORK	12

18	GO	23	45	GET	11
19	WE	23	46	GOING	11
20	I'M	22	47	HOT	11
21	NOT	22	48	LIKE	11
22	CAN'T	20	49	BELIEVE	10
23	THAT	20	50	CLASS	10
24	CAN	18	51	DID	10
25	OF	18	52	TAKE	10
26	ARE	17	53	THEY	10
27	ALL	16	54	TIRED	10

Now we are going to investigate the lexicogrammatical strategies observed in the data in more detail by picking up some distinctive words in this speech act.

[Selected] Lexicogrammatical strategies (collocations / chunks / grammatical arrangements)
A) I

It can be understood why the word *I* came at the top of the list as *S* asserts his/her own emotion (i.e. frustration) in this speech act. Table 4.2.2 exhibits the patterns in which *I* was used together with other lexical items. Since *I* is the subjective case, we focus on the two words after it (on the right-hand side: R1 and R2).

Table 4.2.2 *The patterns of concordance (I)*

N	Centre	R1	R2
1		HAVE	TO
2		DON'T	WANT
3	I	CAN'T	BELIEVE
4		HATE	I
5		AM	HAVE

6		REALLY	DON'T
7		WISH	SO
8		WANT	THIS
9		JUST	
10		ORDERED	

Now we scrutinize how *I* is used with other distinctive lexical items which appear in Table 4.2.2 through analysis of the utterances the informants produces: (1) *have to*, (2) *don't want*, (3) *can't believe*, (4) *wish*, (5) *want*.

(A1) + *have to*

A) Why do <u>I have to</u> do this by myself?
B) Do <u>I have to</u> go?
C) Do <u>I have to</u> do all of these chores?!
D) Why do <u>I have to</u> take out all this trash?
E) <u>I have to</u> be at work in 30 minutes.
F) It's always hot out, so <u>I have to</u> wear shorts and then I go to class and it's cold so I freeze.
G) Seriously if <u>I have to</u> write one more Biology lab written up, I will scream.
H) You weren't being careful with your drink so now <u>I have to</u> start over.

The phrase *have to* expresses obligation imposed by "some other authority than the speaker" (Leech, 2002 [1975]: 171). This means that this expression indicates that *S* is doing something against or regardless of his/her own will. Therefore it is supposed to be expressing *S*'s unwillingness and reluctance to do something in this speech act.

(A2) + *don't want*

A) <u>I don't want</u> to and I won't be in a good mood at all.
B) <u>I don't want</u> to go.
C) <u>I don't want</u> to go to class.
D) <u>I don't want</u> to do it!

E) <u>I don't want</u> you to go to your friend's party tonight.

The phrase *don't want* also indicates *S*'s unwillingness in a direct and strong way.

(A3) + *can't believe*

A) <u>I can't believe</u> they didn't tip!
B) <u>I can't believe</u> how much homework I have!
C) <u>I can't believe</u> my truck broke down again.
D) <u>I can't believe</u> Cassie!
E) <u>I can't believe</u> she would do that!
F) <u>I can't believe</u> you invited her.

The phrase *can't believe* in this illocutionary act is supposed to be showing *S*'s surprise in a negative way (viz. disappointment).

(A4) + *wish*

A) <u>I wish</u> I could leave right now.
B) <u>I wish</u> it were not so hot out here,
C) <u>I wish</u> my mom liked my friends more.
D) <u>I wish</u> people would drive!
E) <u>I wish</u> they would turn their music down,
F) <u>I wish</u> we didn't have to do it.
G) <u>I wish</u> we could just sleep in!

According to *Oxford Dictionary of English*, *wish* means "feel or express a strong desire or hope for something that cannot or probably will not happen". Therefore *S* is expressing his/her frustration in an indirect way by showing his/her "strong desire" about "something that cannot or probably will not happen".

(A5) + *want*

A) My food is wrong and <u>I want</u> a refund.
B) <u>I want</u> to go back to bed.
C) I have other stuff <u>I want</u> to do.
D) But Mom <u>I want</u> to go to the party.
E) <u>I want</u> you to come with us.

The definition of *want* by *Oxford Dictionary of English* is as follows: have a desire to possess or do (something). Thus what is meant by *want* is similar to *wish*, except that *want* is used to make an actual claim about something that *S* would like to possess or do.

B) MY

The word *my* is supposed to be one of the key lexical items that can reveal what *S* is complaining about.

Table 4.2.3 *The lexical items that follow* **MY**

account	body	burger	classes	clothes
English class	eyes	family	(not my) fault	feet
food	foot	friends	(Oh) my God	(Oh) my Gosh
hair	head	homework	hours	house
income	laptop	mind	mom	Oh my
money	nail	needs	nose	pants
Playstation	report card	room	sister	size
steak	stomach	stuff	tank	test
things	throat	time	tire	truck
wrist				

As can be seen in Table 4.2.3, *my* is followed mainly by nouns and noun phrases except for some idiomatic expressions (e.g. *Oh my Gosh*). They are generally the cause of *S*'s frustration and are profoundly related with the situation types discussed earlier (e.g. SCHOOLWORK, FRIEND, FAMILY,

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HEALTH, PERSONAL BELONGINGS).

C) SO

This word is useful in inspecting what adjectives are used in this speech act. Table 4.2.4 shows such adjectives that follow *so*.

Table 4.2.4 *The lexical items that follow* **SO**

angry	annoying	bad	boring and long	cold
complicated	distracting	early	expensive	freaking hot
hard	hot	hungry	I …	long
loud	much	much homework	much to do	much work
now …	sick	tired	uncomfortable	unfair
why …				

We can observe that many of the adjectives following *so* have negative meaning (e.g. *angry*, *annoying*, *bad*, *uncomfortable*, *unfair*) or indicate the cause of *S*'s frustration (e.g. *cold*, *early*, *long*). Another inspection proved that the word *too*, which is oriented towards negative meaning itself, is followed by similar adjectives.

4.3 Discourse strategies

This section examines the discourse strategies. First we look at the strategies employed by informants in Table 4.3, which was created in the researcher's attempt to classify the linguistic strategies for *complaining* by their types. There are mainly two types of strategies: "Head act", which is the core part of this speech act, and "Supportive move", the part providing various types of "supports" in achieving *S*'s complaint (cf. Blum-Kulka, *et al.*, 1989).

Table 4.3 *Discourse strategies – strategy classification*

No	Type	Strategy classification	Freq	%(1)	%(2) [2]
1	L	Head act (showing frustration)	103	24.6%	31.1%
2	S	Supportive move (reason for complaint)	71	16.9%	21.5%
3	D	Head act (basic, explicit)	58	13.8%	17.5%
4	J	Head act (question)	33	7.9%	10.0%
5	K	Head act (request)	19	4.5%	5.7%
6	M	Head act (showing reluctance)	11	2.6%	3.3%
7	G	Head act (explanation of problem)	10	2.4%	3.0%
8	E	Head act (command)	9	2.1%	2.7%
9	O	Head act (suggestion)	5	1.2%	1.5%
10	F	Head act (demand for compensation)	4	1.0%	1.2%
11	H	Head act (polite command)	2	0.5%	0.6%
12	R	Supportive move (other)	2	0.5%	0.6%
13	I	Head act (question for solution)	1	0.2%	0.3%
14	N	Head act (showing s's determination)	1	0.2%	0.3%
15	Q	Supportive move (apology)	1	0.2%	0.3%
16	T	Supportive move (suggestion)	1	0.2%	0.3%
17	A	Adverb	3	0.7%	
18	B	Attention getter	9	2.1%	
19	C	Attention getter + vocative	11	2.6%	
20	P	Interjection	13	3.1%	
21	U	Vocative	52	12.4%	
		Total 1 (all)	419		
		Total 2 (excluding A, B, C, P, U)	331		

Now we are going to examine the main five discourse strategies in detail in the following: (1) [L] *Head act (showing frustration)*, (2) [S] *Supportive move (reason for complaint)*, (3) [D] *Head act (basic, explicit)*, (4) [J] *Head act (ques-*

⑵ Percentage 1 (%(1)): obtained from Total 1) indicates the proportion including all the strategies and Percentage 2 (%(2)): obtained from Total 2) excludes A, B, C, P, U. These are excluded as it has been confirmed that they are peripheral discourse strategies in this speech act.

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tion), (5) [K] *Head act* (*request*).

4.3.1 [L] Head act (showing frustration) [Selected]
a)   *I can't believe how much homework I have!*

b)   *I cannot stand that girl!*

c)   *I hate living here.*

d)   *I really don't like this rainy weather.*

e)   *I'm not happy.*

f)   *I'm sick of all of this school work.*

g)   *I'm so sick of having so much work!*

This is the most general type strategies found in the data. In many cases S expresses his/her frustration in a declarative type sentence starting with *I* as its subject. As can be seen from the above examples, the sentences usually contain a negative word (e.g. *not*) and a word with negative connotation (e.g. *hate*, *sick*).

4.3.2 [S] Supportive move (reason for complaint) [Selected]
a)   *Bridgett and I got into a huge fight today.*

b)   *I bought this shirt here.*

c)   *I got no sleep last night.*

d)   *I had to stand on my feet the entire time.*

e)   *I have so much homework to do,*

f)   *We are watching a movie, and you're being loud.*

g)   *you just assigned us 2 papers to write*

We need to specify the reason why we have to make a complaint whey we do so in a logical and rational way. Hence it is reasonable that this strategy has been found as the second most common one.

4.3.3 [D] Head act (basic, explicit) [Selected]
a)   *it is not acceptable.*

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b)　*That's rude and childish.*

c)　*these shoes are too small.*

d)　*this is a boring practice.*

e)　*This is crazy / ridiculous / stupid.*

f)　*This isn't fair.*

g)　*you are the one that made the mess.*

This strategy, although they are basically showing *S*'s frustration, was classified in the different category as they are thought to have stronger impact than the [L] type above by expressing *S*'s frustration in a more explicit way.

4.3.4　[J] Head act (question) [Selected]

a)　*Do all the teachers think their class is our only class?*

b)　*Do I have to go?*

c)　*How come my sister doesn't have to do anything?*

d)　*How could you do something like that?*

e)　*Is there anything you can do to fix it?*

f)　*Why did you take my Playstation?*

g)　*Why do I have to do this by myself?*

h)　*Why do you always treat me like a child?*

i)　*Why does this have to be so complicated?*

This type is a rather indirect one as the speakers avoid making direct complaints by making them a question. While this strategy is thought to be milder than a more explicit one, it could have a strong impact when used cynically as in (d) above (*How could you do something like that?*).

4.3.5　[K] Head act (request) [Selected]

a)　*Can we please do something that is more fun?*

b)　*can you please bring me something that is hot and good to eat?*

  c)   *Can you turn down your music?*

  d)   *Can you turn off that stupid music?*

  e)   *could you not play with my laptop right now?*

  f)   *Could you please have it warmed up?*

  g)   *Could you take a look at them and do something about it?*

  h)   *May I please exchange the shirt for a new one?*

This strategy can create a politer and nicer impression in making a complaint, as the speaker is using polite formulaic expressions (e.g. *Can you*, *Could you*, *May I*, *please*). One notable thing about the examples above is that these are addressed to *H*. It is assumed that this strategy is one of the main choices when one makes a direct complaint towards the addressee. This strategy could be a candidate for a pedagogical material for teaching how to perform this speech act without causing offence or conflict.

4.4 Semantic formulae

This section inspects the arrangements of the discourse strategies, i.e. semantic formulas, based on their frequencies. The strategy combinations are summarized in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 *Semantic formulae (Combination of discourse strategies)*

N	Combination	Freq.	N	Combination	Freq.
1	L	18	10	LSU	4
2	D	11	11	DJ	3
3	LS	9	12	DS	3
4	DL	8	13	JSU	3
5	LU	7	14	KS	3
6	DU	6	15	MSU	3
7	J	6	16	OSU	3
8	JL	5	17	SU	3
9	JS	4			

The table shows that the two most frequent ones are "L" and "D" types, which have been analyzed and discussed earlier. Therefore we are going to focus here on the combinations of the strategies frequently observed (except for those consisting of a certain strategy with only A, B, C, P, and U): (1) LS, (2) DL, (3) JL, (4) JS.

4.4.1　LS type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
I have had a really hard day at work and my feet hurt. I am telling my brother about it.	My feet really hurt.	head act (showing frustration)	L	LS
	I mean they really, really hurt.	head act (showing frustration)	L	
	Because I worked all day.	supportive move (reason for complaint)	S	
	I had to stand on my feet the entire time.	supportive move (reason for complaint)	S	
Working overtime too much	I have a complaint about my hours.	head act (showing frustration)	L	LS
	I feel I've been working too much & want my hours cut.	head act (showing frustration)	L	
	my family needs me too.	supportive move (reason for complaint)	S	

*T = Type; C = Combination

This is a basic type combination as *S* presents reasons as well as a complaint. This combination could be taught to EFL or ESL learners as the first thing so that they can understand how this speech act is performed by native English speakers.

4.4.2 DL type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
Your mother won't let you go out this weekend.	You never let me do anything.	head act (basic, explicit)	D	DL
	I hate living here.	head act (showing frustration)	L	
I complain about the neighbor's music.	Their music is way too loud!	head act (basic, explicit)	D	DL
	I can't even hear myself think!	head act (showing frustration)	L	

This combination is similar to the LS type above, but is a little different in that the first utterance (*head act (basic, explicit)*) is a rather explicit complaint. So this combination is supposed to have a stronger impact than LS.

4.4.3 JL type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
Complaining about the amount of homework.	I can't believe how much homework I have!	head act (showing frustration)	L	JL
	Do all the teachers think their class is our only class?	head act (question)	J	
When I have to take out the trash.	Why do I have to take out all this trash?	head act (question)	J	JL
	It smells really bad.	head act (showing frustration)	L	

This type is in some way similar to the DL type, as the question is a complaint itself. Still, it is thought to be a little more indirect that DL because of the nature of the interrogative sentence.

4.4.4 JS type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
Little kid broke a vase while playing ball in the house.	I told you not to throw that ball, didn't I?	supportive move (reason for complaint)	S	JS
	So why did you do it?	head act (question)	J	
Roommate complaining about the weather.	It's always hot out, so I have to wear shorts and then I go to class and it's cold so I freeze.	supportive move (reason for complaint)	S	JS
	Why does this have to be so complicated?	head act (question)	J	

This type is similar to the LS type but is different in that the core part (question) is trying to elicit H's reply in a more direct way. The first example is addressed towards H (direct complaint) and therefore thought to have a rather strong impact (viz. FTA), while the second is an IC and could be one way to enhance solidarity with H (Boxer & Pickering, *ibid*.).

5. Discussions concerning politeness and this speech act.

This study is the first attempt for the researcher to investigate an FTA since 2000, when he studied about FTAs in English produced by Japanese EFL learners (Suzuki, 2000). (This research scheme is different from the previous one in that the data collection was done with native American English speakers.) Since then the author has attempted to study about politeness and the speech acts for harmonious and collaborative communication (e.g. *thanking*, *apologizing*, *inviting*). Therefore this research is meaningful in studying about how a conflictive type speech act is actually performed in English.

As can be understood from the previous observations and discussions, *complaining* is an FTA by its nature (Laforest, *ibid*.). Thus the informants' utterances were full of lexical items connoting negative meaning and there were few politeness markers there. However, as presented in 4.3.5, some of the research participants opted to make a request when they seek for solu-

tions to the problems they had with *H*s. This is what can be taught to EFL/ESL learners to maintain harmonious and collaborative relation with others in English.

Furthermore, it was valuable that ICs (Boxer & Pickering, *ibid*.) were found in the data for this study. As they state it is assumed to be valuable to teach EFL/ESL learners how to make use of ICs effectively to enhance solidarity with their friends in English.

6. Conclusion and future directions

So far we have observed how *complaining* was performed by American university undergraduate students. Although it is an FTA by its nature, learning the lexical, grammatical and discourse strategies are supposed to be meaningful and valuable for advanced-level English learners. They need to make proper complaints whenever it is necessary to do so and to be equipped with the knowledge about how they could make their complaints sound nicer. It is also of value for them to know that ICs are utilized for solidarity enhancement. For this reason learning about how to exchange their frustrations with their friends properly could benefit the learners who are staying in English speaking countries.

It was a difficult task to classify all the discourse strategies into suitable categories as there were quite sensitive nuance differences (and similarities) created when they were analyzed at the discourse level. Some similar utterances were classified into different categories when such different nuances or functions were observed. Above all, the researcher believes it was a worthwhile scheme as the differences of the discourse strategies in the data had to be addressed. Therefore it would be desirable that this initial study will be developed with further data scrutiny.

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