The Effect of Social Status on Complaint Strategies by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the type of complaint strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in complaint interactions in different social status (higher, lower, equal). Thirty Iranian EFL learners and 30 English native speakers participated in the study. Discourse completion task (DCT) as an open-ended questionnaire was administered to them to elicit the required data. Then, the gathered data were analyzed according to modified taxonomy of complaint proposed by Murphy and Neu (1996) involving complaint, justification, criticism, explanation of purpose and candidates’ solution: Demand / Request. In addition, three other strategies were added to this taxonomy i.e. sarcasm, threat and apology. The results indicated that social status of interlocutor had a great influence on strategy choice by participants of two groups. There is a hope that this study can contribute to our understanding of complaint strategies and help language teachers make aware of the existing discrepancies between English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners in realization of complaint strategies.

Keywords: Speech act, complaint strategies, DCT, social status, English native speakers, Iranian EFL learners
1. Introduction

One of the important issues that language users should bear in mind in communication with speakers of another language is their attention to pragmatic norms and behaviours that are different between them. These differences in cross-cultural communication lead to misinterpretation, miscommunication and breakdown in communication. Due to lack of knowledge of pragmatic conventions of another language and culture, people may unintentionally offend the interlocutors. In order to have a successful communication with the speakers of another language, knowing the pragmatic aspects and cultural norms of the target language is necessary. One of the crucial aspects of pragmatics is speech acts as the language functions such as refusing, requesting, apologizing and complaining. Communicative acts involves not only performing speech acts but also the ability to use appropriate language functions in different contextual situations such as the social relationships, social power between the interlocutor and degree of imposition. This study aims to answer whether social status of interlocutor has any effect on complaint strategy choice.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Pragmatics and speech act

The concept of pragmatics has been defined in different ways in the literature. Levinson (1983) defined pragmatics as “the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language” (p. 9). As a part of linguistics, syntax deals with the sentences, semantics deals with propositions; whereas pragmatics focuses on the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are employed (Stalnaker, 1998). Pragmatics research, in applied linguistics, mostly focuses on the relationship between language use and the social and interpersonal context of interaction (Roever, 2011). Crystal (1985) defines pragmatics as

the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication (p. 240).
Koike (1989) defined pragmatics “as the speaker’s knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts” (p. 279).

Recently, educators and linguists have underscored the importance of pragmatic knowledge of language for successful communication of L2 learners. Hymes (1972) points out that L2 learners should produce not only grammatically correct but also appropriate language to achieve communicative goals. This concept of "appropriateness" is later explained by Novick (2000) who states that L2 learners need not only linguistic knowledge such as morphology, syntax, phonology and vocabulary, but they also must acquire socio-cultural rules of target language use.

One of the most important aspects of pragmatics is speech act. The speech act theory was first introduced by philosophers Austin. He (1962) believes that the speakers do not merely use language to say something, but by saying an utterance s/he wants to do some things. He considered three components of speech act:

1. the locutionary act (the actual words or strings of words that the speaker utters)

2. the illocutionary act (the speakers’ intention for saying the utterance)

3. the perlocutionary act (the effect of the utterance on the hearer).

For example, when a speaker says “I am sorry”, he is not only uttering an English phrase but is also performing an action, that of apologizing. By performing a speech act, the speaker produces certain actions such as requesting, apologizing and complaining, refusing, thanking, and etc In other words, we use language to perform language functions. These language functions are called speech acts. Therefore, speech acts play important role in our life and speakers of the target language have to know how to realize and perform speech acts to communicate appropriately in the specific context. The paramount important factor affecting language learners’ ability to communicate appropriately and accurately in the L2 context is their pragmatic ability. Therefore, to be pragmatically competent in L2, language learners should know sociocultural norms of the target language. Lacking such knowledge is supposed to be the main barrier to successful communication between native speakers and language
learners that lead to miscommunication or breakdown in communication and sometimes damage the interpersonal relationship between people.

2.2. Complaint speech act

The focus of this study is complaint which is also a face-threatening act in which the speakers shows his or her dissatisfaction, annoyance and displeasure about something happened by the hearer; therefore, it might lead to lose face. For this reason, performing the complaint, even among speakers of the same language, is a tough work and it should be performed with great cautious because it has a negative effect on the hearer as he or she is blamed for the hearer’s displeasure. According to Trosborg (1995), a complaint is, “an illocutionary act in which the speaker (the complainer) expresses his or her disapproval or other negative feelings towards the state of affairs described in the proposition (the complainable) and for which he or she holds the hearer (the complainee) responsible, either directly or indirectly” (pp. 311-312). The speech act of complaint might involve different kinds of acts, such as, threatening, criticizing, sarcasm and accusing and these acts are likely to impair the social relationship between the interlocutors.

Brown and Levinson (1987) states that all types of speech acts are face threatening in nature either to the speaker or to the hearer. They defined ‘face’ as ‘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 & Levinson 1987, p. 61). They referred to positive face as one’s wish to be liked and appreciated and negative face as one’s desire not to be impeded, imposed by others. Direct complaints, for example, threaten the hearer’s positive face, as the speaker holds the interlocutor responsible for the violation of social norms.

2.3. Selected studies on complaint speech act

In a study by Boxer (1993), the researcher found that Americans have tendency to use indirect complains whereas Japanese learners of English are reluctant to use this strategy since it is considered as a face-threatening act in their first language.

Moon (2001) investigates the speech act of complaint as produced by native and nonnative speakers of English. Nonnative subjects had different first languages including: Chinese, Farsi, Greek, Japanese, Nepali, Portuguese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Tagalog, Tigrigna and
Vietnamese. The data were collected from native and nonnative subjects through a DCT comprising four complaint situations. Then, the data were analyzed based on the notion of "severity of the complaint". The results of this study show that nonnative speakers do not always make complaints in an appropriate way as native speakers do. They have a tendency to make explicit and direct complaints while native speakers prefer ways of implicit complaints.

Tanck (2002) in a study compared the pragmatic knowledge of native and nonnative English speakers when performing the speech act of complaints and refusals. In order to collect data of both native and nonnative speakers, a DCT was given to them in which they had to write their responses to six prompts within familiar, equal and superior\inferior relationships. English native speakers’ responses are considered as a set of baseline data. Then, the nonnative speakers’ responses are compared to those of the native speakers in the presence and quality of the speech act components. The results of this study show that although speech act set components for complaints and refusals produced by native and nonnative speakers are almost the same but the quality of the speech act components differs from native and nonnative speakers. It also indicates that although nonnative speakers’ responses are linguistically correct, yet they lack the pragmatic appropriateness that lead these face-threatening acts of complaint and refusal to be well received by the hearer.

Eslami-Rasekh (2004) compared the use of face-keeping strategies in reaction to complaints by Persian and American native speakers. She found that Persian speakers are more sensitive to contextual factors and use different face-keeping strategies according to the situation whereas American native speakers mostly use one apology strategy and intensify it based on contextual factors.

Abdolrezapour, Dabaghi and Kassaian (2012) examined how Iranian EFL learners perceive complaining utterances produced by Americans in 4 asymmetrical situations. To do this, role-play interactions taken from 10 American speakers and a perceptive questionnaire developed based on the interactions were used to collect the required data from Iranian learners (both male and female). Results of the questionnaire revealed that Iranian learners perceive more indirect complaints as more polite. Moreover, the degree of politeness perceived is affected by social power and distance of interlocutors. The result also indicated that Iranians were more concerned about the social power of the hearer than the social distance between the interlocutors.
3. Method

3.1. Participants

A total of 60 subjects, 30 Iranian EFL learners and 30 English native speakers, comprised the sample of the study. Iranian learners were university students with different educational levels (21 MA students and 9 PhD students) in different majors. Out of which, 11 were females and 19 were males. English native speakers were all selected from American speech community. Of the 30 Americans, 16 were females and 14 were males. Regarding their education, 11 of the Americans were holding MA degree and 19 were holding PhD degree.

3.2. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire in the form of discourse completion test (DCT). The advantages of the DCT are gathering a large amount of data in a short period of time and gaining information on the social and psychological factors affecting performing the speech (Beebe & Cummings, 1985). The participants were administered three situations (complaining a person of higher, lower and equal social status) which were adopted from Kim (2008) and Tanck (2002) and asked to write down what they would say in each situation. The situations are as follows:

Situation 1: You are applying for a position with a highly reputed company. The interview committee has requested that you have your professor send letters of recommendation and your professor has agreed to send this letter directly to the company. When you call the interview committee to check the status of your application, you are told that your recommendation letter has not arrived. You go to the professor’s office to find out what has happened. What do you say to him/her?

You:

Situation 2: You are a university professor. One of your students comes late every session. Last session you told him that he could not come late to your class any more. Today, he is 20 minutes late. What do you tell him?

You:
Situation 3:

You go to bed around 12 o'clock at night and you want to get up at around 5 o'clock tomorrow morning. You cannot sleep because your roommate makes a lot of noise. You’ve put up with the noise for several days, but tonight you feel you should say something. What do you say to her/him?

You:

3.3. Coding schemes of complaint:

The data were analyzed according to modified taxonomy of complaints developed by Murphy and Neu (1996). These strategies are as follows: 1) complaint, 2) justification, 3) criticism, 4) explanation of purpose and 5) candidates’ solution: a) Demand b) request. In addition, three other strategies i.e. 6) sarcasm, 7) threat and 8) apology were also added to this taxonomy.

Complaint:

As Murphy and Neu (1996) pointed out by using complaint, the speaker depersonalize the problem and not to put blame directly on the hearer. (e.g. It is incredibly disruptive to the rest of class)

Criticism:

As Murphy and Neu (1996) state the speaker personalizes the problem and places the blame on the hearer. Criticism is a sentences or phrase that a speaker uses to directly tell a person s/he is wrong. The speaker’s words are scornful and direct. (e.g. You should have told me, if you were not supposed to send my recommendation letter.)

Justification:

Speaker uses justification to give a good reason for an action that leaves the speaker in a positive position (e.g. I really need to get up early in the morning.)

Candidate solution (demand/ request):
The speaker offers a solution to solve the problem (Murphy & Neu, 1996). In this situation, s/he asks on the grounds of authority usually demand (e.g. *Come on time next session.* (or lack of authority usually request (e.g. *Would you please send my recommendation letter again?*).

**Explanation of purpose:**

Speaker explains the purpose of initiating the conversation (Murphy & Neu, 1996) as in:

*I just wanted to make sure whether you sent the recommendation letter to the company.*

**Sarcasm:**

Biting comments, false humor or over/under statement designed to hurt the hearer into positive action. Sarcasm is the lowest form of humor and sometimes it is realized according to tone of voice (e.g. *How kind of you to attend the class. I think your watch has stopped.*)

**Threat:**

To express the negative consequence due to unfavorable manner occurred by the hearer resulting offence or dissatisfaction on the hearer; therefore, s/he threatens the hearer. (e.g. *If you are late again, this is going to have an effect on your grade.*)

**Apology:**

It is usually used when complaining to a person of higher social status and is considered as a politeness marker. It reduces the negative effect of complaint on the hearer. (e.g. *I'm really sorry to bother you, professor.*)

Therefore, to perform complaint speech act, the speaker might use the combination of different strategies. For example if a person wants to complain his/her friend for making noise at midnight, s/he might employ different strategies to perform such an act.

*I have an early wake up tomorrow. You are making too much noise. Be quiet.*

This sentence is coded as:

*I have an early wake up tomorrow (justification)*
You are making too much noise (*complaint*)

Be quiet. (*candidate’s solution: demand*)

4. Data analysis and results

The obtained data were analyzed according to modified classification of complaint strategies proposed by Murphy and Neu (1996). The following table shows the overall frequency of complaint strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in all three situations.

Table 1. Frequency of complaint strategies by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IEFLL (f)</th>
<th>IEFLL (percent)</th>
<th>ENS (f)</th>
<th>ENS (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of purpose</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29.20%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.25%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate’s solution: Request</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.90%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate’s solution: Demand</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.65%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most prominent point drawn from the table above is that Justification was the most frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers and this strategy used by Iranian EFL learners more extensively than English native speakers. The findings showed that that candidate’s solution: demand was the second frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL learners. On the other hand, candidate’s solution: request was the second frequently used strategy by English native speakers. Moreover, the third frequently used strategy by Iranian learners was candidate’s solution: request and by English native speakers was candidate’s solution: demand. It can be seen from the table that criticism was the fourth frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL learners and this strategy was employed by Iranian EFL learners more frequently than English native speakers. As seen from the above table, English native speakers performed complaint more frequently than EFL learners. In other words, Iranian EFL learners tended to employ more criticism (as the explicit way of expressing displeasure) and less complaint (implicit way of expressing displeasure) compared to English native speakers. The findings also showed that explanation of purpose was the third frequently used strategy by English native speakers and it was employed more frequently by this group compared to Iranian EFL learners. The results show that apology was used by English native speakers more than Iranian EFL learners and this strategy was the least used strategy by Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, threat strategy was used nearly by the same frequency by English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, sarcasm was observed in the responses of Iranian EFL learners more than English native speakers and this strategy was the least frequently observed in the responses of English native speakers.

To see the effect of social power on Iranian EFL learners’ and English native speakers, participants’ responses in three different situations (higher, equal, lower social status) analyzed separately and frequency use of each strategy in each social status were identified. Table 2 shows the detailed information on complaint strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in complaining the interlocutor of higher social status (complaining the professor for not sending the recommendation letter).
4.1. Complaining higher social status

The following table shows the frequency of strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in complaining the lower social status (complaining the student for coming late).

Table 2. Frequency of strategies in complaining the interlocutor of higher status by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IEFLL</th>
<th>ENS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(f)</td>
<td>(percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of purpose</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate’s solution: Request</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IEFLL= Iranian EFL learners, ENS= English native speakers, f= Frequency of strategy

As seen from the above table, the most frequently used strategies employed by Iranian learner in complaining the professor was justification with the frequency of 27.30% and by English native speakers was explanation of purpose with the frequency of 28.60%. The second and third frequently use strategy by Iranian learners was explanation of purpose (25.75%) and candidate’s solution: request (24.25%) respectively. Whereas, the second and third preferred strategy by English native speakers were complaint (23.40%) and apology (20.70%) respectively. It is pretty obvious that Iranian EFL learners employed relatively less apology strategy (9.10%) than English native speakers (20.70%). Moreover, there was no occurrence of
criticism strategy by English native speakers. Examples of participants’ responses in complaining the professor (higher status) are as follows:

Iranian learners:

I’m sorry professor. You didn’t send my ecommendation letter. Would you please send it again? (apology + criticism + candidate’s solution: request)

Hi professor. The letter has not received yet. Please send it again. (complaint + candidate’s solution: request)

Hi sir. You have promised me to send the recommendation letter to the company. Why didn’t you send it? (justification + criticism)

English native speakers:

Sir, I’m so sorry to bother you but the interview committee has not received your letter yet. I really need this job. Could you tell me when and how you sent it please? (apology + complaint + justification + candidate’s solution: request)

I just wanted to make sure you sent the letter because the letter has not received yet. Can you do me a favor and resend it? (explanation of purpose + complaint)

Excuse me sir. I hate to bother you but I was wondering if you had a chance to send that letter of recommendation? (apology + explanation of purpose)

As seen in the first situation (Complaining the professor), justification was the most preferred strategy for Iranian learners, whereas explanation of purpose was the most preferred one by English native speakers. It is pretty obvious that Iranian learners expressed their complaint using the short sentences compared to English native speakers.

4.2. Complaining lower social status

The following table shows the frequency of strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in complaining the lower social status (complaining the student for coming late).
Table 3. Frequency of strategies in complaining the interlocutor of lower status by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IEFLL (f)</th>
<th>IEFLL (percent)</th>
<th>ENS (f)</th>
<th>ENS (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22.10%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19.10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate’s solution: demand</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35.30%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IEFLL= Iranian EFL learners, ENS= English native speakers, f= Frequency of strategy

As seen from the table 3, candidate’s solution: demand as a complaint strategy had the highest frequency among Iranian EFL learners (35.30%) and English native speakers (31.25%). Quite similar to English native speakers, Iranian EFL learners employed justification as the second frequently used strategy. The third frequently used strategy by Iranian learners was criticism with the frequency of 19.10. This strategy was employed by English native speakers with the low frequency of 3.15%. Instead, threat was employed by English native speakers as the third frequently used one with the frequency of 14.05%. Some elicitations of the responses in this situation are as follows:

**Iranian EFL learner:**
I told you that you should come on time. You are always late. Go out. *(justification + criticism + candidate’s solution: demand)*

I don’t like any students miss my classes but I have to tell you go out and don’t participate in my classes this term. If you get A in final exam, your score is zero according to my opinion. *(justification + candidate’s solution: demand + threat)*

Hi early bird. That seems you don’t pay attention to me when I tell you not to enter the class after me. If you come late one more, you have to take this course again. *(sarcasm + justification + threat)*

**English native speakers:**

I remarked your tardiness last session and gave you due warning. Leave and return tomorrow in time. *(justification + candidate’s solution: demand)*

I have repeatedly told you not to be late to this class. It is incredibly disruptive to the rest of class. Go out. *(justification + complaint + candidate’s solution: demand)*

Please go out. If you cannot make it to be on time, do not distract others who care enough to be here on time. They deserve better than you. *(candidate’s solution: demand + justification + sarcasm)*

4.3. Complaining equal social status

The following table shows the detailed information of strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in complaining the equal social status (complaining the student for coming late).

Table 3. Frequency of strategies in complaining the interlocutor of equal status by Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IEFLL (f)</th>
<th>ENS (f)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(percent)</td>
<td>(percent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen from the above table, justification was the most frequently used strategy by Iranian learners; whereas candidate’s solution: request was the most preferred one by English native speakers. The second frequently used strategy was candidate’s solution: request and candidate’s solution: demand by Iranian EFL learners; whereas the second frequent one by English native speakers was justification. The examination of findings showed that apology was not seen in the responses of Iranian EFL learners; while, this strategy was employed in responses of English native speakers with the low frequency of 5.05%. Some example of Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers in situation which needs complaining the friend is written below:

**Iranian learners:**

I have to get up early morning. If you want to make noise you have to change your room. *(justification + threat)*

You make too much noise. I have to sleep as I should wake up early tomorrow. Be quiet. *(criticism + justification + candidate’s solution: demand)*
Come on. Is it time for your work or my sleep? I need sleeping. Would you please stop making noise and be quiet? *(sarcasm + justification + candidate’s solution: request)*

**English native speakers:**

Would you please keep it down? I have an early day tomorrow and would really like some sleep. (candidate’s solution: request + justification)

Hey mate. I need to be up early tomorrow but it is always noisy. Would you please be quiet tonight? *(justification + complaint + candidate’s solution: request)*

I am really sorry. I have to get up early tomorrow. Could you please be a little bit quieter? *(apology + justification + candidate’s solution: request)*

In complaining a friend, Iranian learners employed more *candidate’s solution: demand* and less *candidate’s solution: request* compared to English native speakers. It seems that English speakers are more conscious about language they use when complaining their friend to avoid hurt or offense on the hearer and they used more polite words (request rather than demand).

**5. Conclusions**

This study aimed to shed light on the contrastive use of complaint strategies between Iranian EFL learners and American respondents. The findings of this study also showed that social status of interlocutor have an influence on the strategy choice of the speaker. For example, English and Iranian EFL learners used *threat* and *sarcasm* strategies when the interlocutor had equal or lower social status. Moreover, *candidate’s solution: demand* was not used by both English and Iranian EFL learners when the interlocutor had higher social status. Almost all participants used either *justification* or *explanation of purposes* when complaining a person of higher social status to make the grounds for complaint, by this way, they tend to reduce the negative effect of complaining on the complainer. These strategies might be considered as a tool to show their respectfulness to the professor.

The findings showed that *candidate’s solution: request* was not employed by these two groups when the interlocutor had lower social status. The results of the study supports Eslamirasekh, Jafariseresht and Mehregan’s (2012) findings which concluded the interlocutor of higher power or status receives a greater respect, whereas, the interlocutor of lower power or status may
receive direct complaints which are consciously made to be face-threatening to the hearer. Moreover, the results indicated that Iranian EFL learners tended to express their dissatisfaction and displeasure more explicitly (put the blame directly on the hearer); whereas English native speakers have more tendency in expressing their dissatisfaction implicitly (not blaming the hearer directly). In other words, criticism, as the explicit way of expressing dissatisfaction, was used by Iranian EFL learners more than English native speakers; whereas, English native speakers employed complaint, which is regarded as the implicit way of expressing dissatisfaction, more frequently than Iranian EFL learners did. The preference of Iranian learners in choosing criticism over complaint might be due to their lack of their L2 pragmatic knowledge or transfer from their mother tongue. The overuse of criticism rather than complaint by Iranian EFL learners might be considered unacceptable, impolite and rude manner by Americans. Generally, as it was explained Iranian EFL learners complain in a direct manner whereas, English native speakers complain indirectly, so there might be a chance of miscommunication between Iranian learners and English native speakers in complaint situations. To sum up, the results of the study indicated that Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers employ different complaint strategies and the use of these strategies by the two groups varies on the basis of the social power of the interlocutor.

The results of this study can be of use for EFL teachers to build up the pragmatic knowledge of language learners and make them aware of the pragmatic behavior of English native speakers in complaining situations. Furthermore, suggestions are made to investigate the differences between behaviors of participants of different social relationship, educational level and gender. Besides, other research is needed to elicit the respondents’ behavior in complaint situations by other types of instruments such as role play and observation of spontaneous data.
References


