




*A Prgmatic study of the Speech Act of complaint produced by Al-Iraqiya
University students Speaking English as a foreign Language*

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دراسة تداولية لأفعال الكلام المتعلقة بالشكوى التي يستخدمها طلبة الجامعة
العراقية الناطقون باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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Abstract

This research investigates the pragmatic aspects of complaints produced by Al-Iraqiya University students who speak English as a foreign language. Complaints are fundamental speech acts in communication, reflecting individuals' dissatisfaction with a particular situation or behavior. However, the cultural and linguistic differences between native and non-native English speakers can significantly influence the form and function of complaints. Through a pragmatic lens, this study aims to explore how Iraqi university students navigate the speech act of complaint in English, examining both linguistic and socio-cultural factors at play.

Drawing upon theories of pragmatics and intercultural communication, the study employs a mixed-methods approach. Data collection involves both qualitative and quantitative methods, including discourse completion tasks, interviews, and surveys. The analysis focuses on identifying the linguistic strategies employed by participants in expressing complaints, as well as the underlying cultural norms and expectations shaping their communicative behavior. Moreover, the study examines the impact of proficiency level, and social context on complaint strategies.

The findings of this research contribute to our understanding of cross-cultural communication and language use among non-native English speakers, particularly in the context of complaint speech acts. Insights gained from this study can inform language teaching practices, curriculum development, and intercultural communication training, ultimately fostering more effective communication between Iraqi students and English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Al-Iraqiya University, students usually complained directly. Al-Iraqiya University students don't often use strategies to soften complaints, in addition the don't often use indirect strategy suggesting that they might not be concerned with avoiding potential conflicts when expressing their concerns. This may be due to cultural influences or a preference for clear and straightforward communication.

Key words: Speech acts ,Pragmatics, Complaints ,English as a foreign language (EFL),Al-Iraqiya University

المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث الجوانب البراغماتية للشكاوى التي يقدمها طلاب جامعة العراقية الناطقون باللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية. تعتبر الشكاوى أفعال كلامية أساسية في التواصل وتعكس عدم رضا الأفراد عن موقف أو سلوك معين. ومع ذلك ، يمكن للاختلافات الثقافية واللغوية بين المتحدثين الأصليين وغير الأصليين باللغة الإنجليزية أن تؤثر بشكل كبير على شكل ووظيفة الشكاوى. يهدف هذا البحث ، من خلال منظور براغماتي ، إلى استكشاف كيفية استخدام طلاب الجامعات العراقية فعل الشكاوى باللغة الإنجليزية ، مع البحث في العوامل اللغوية والاجتماعية الثقافية المؤثرة.

بناءً على نظريات التداولية والتواصل بين الثقافات ، تستخدم الدراسة نمطا منهجيا مختلطاً. تشمل عملية جمع البيانات كل من الأساليب النوعية والكمية ، بما في ذلك مهام إكمال الخطاب والمقابلات والاستطلاعات. يركز التحليل على تحديد الاستراتيجيات اللغوية التي يستخدمها المشاركون في التعبير عن الشكاوى ، وكذلك على القواعد الثقافية والتوقعات الأساسية التي تشكل سلوكهم التواصل. علاوة على ذلك ، تبحث الدراسة في تأثير مستوى الكفاءة والسياق الاجتماعي على استراتيجيات الشكاوى.

تساهم نتائج هذا البحث في فهمنا للتواصل بين الثقافات واستخدام اللغة بين الناطقين غير الأصليين باللغة الإنجليزية ، لا سيما في سياق أفعال كلام الشكاوى. يمكن أن تفيد الأفكار المستفادة من هذه الدراسة في ممارسات تدريس اللغة وتطوير المناهج الدراسية وتدريب الاتصال بين الثقافات ، مما يعزز في النهاية التواصل الأكثر فاعلية بين الطلاب العراقيين والناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية من خلفيات ثقافية متنوعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أفعال الكلام، التداولية، الشكاوى، الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية (EFL)، الجامعة العراقية.

1-Introduction

This study examines how students at Al-Iraqiya University who are learning English as a foreign language express complaints. Complaining is a vital skill in communication, and this research investigates how non-native speakers approach it. By analyzing the methods used by these students, the study aims to understand how they express complaints, what factors shape their choices, and how these findings can inform English language teaching and learning. The research contributes to the understanding of complaining and provides practical insights for both educators and students in non-native English environments.

Studying complaints is important because they're a common way people express dissatisfaction in daily life. Complaints help maintain relationships, solve problems, and get solutions. Non-native English speakers may struggle to make complaints due to different cultural and language backgrounds. This can lead to communication issues. Al-Iraqiya University is a prestigious institution in Iraq. Students there need to be able to effectively make complaints in English for academic success and future careers.

This research aims to examine how Iraqi university students studying English as a second language express complaints. It investigates the reasons behind their choice of complaint strategies and aims to pinpoint areas where English language instruction and learning could be enhanced.

This study's findings can help create better teaching tools and methods for foreigners learning English, especially when it comes to the speech act of complaint. It can also improve how we understand what affects non-native speakers' use of complaint strategies. This can help with cross-cultural communication and make people more culturally aware. That is why this study is

important: it could lead to better communication in English as a foreign language and more successful cross-cultural interactions.

2-The Research question:

1- How do English learners at Al-Iraqiya University express complaints, and how do their culture and language backgrounds influence their communication style?

3-The purpose of the Study:

This research aims to study: how foreign English learners at Al-Iraqiya University complain. The study aims to expand our understanding of complaint speech in foreign English contexts. It also intends to provide practical advice for improving cross-cultural communication and teaching English.

4-Significance of the study:

This research is important because: It adds to our knowledge of linguistic actions, such as complaints, in foreign language learning (English in this case). It helps us understand the techniques that students at Al-Iraqiya University use to express complaints in English. It reveals the cultural and linguistic influences shaping these techniques. This information can improve cross-cultural interactions and cultural sensitivity in diverse communication settings.

Secondly, this study is important for English teachers and students in non-native English-speaking environments. The study's findings can help create effective teaching materials and methods that focus on the act of complaining in English as a foreign language. Using the information from the study, English teachers can create lesson plans that enhance students' ability to make complaints appropriately and accurately in English. Finally, this

study is significant for Al-Iraqiya University and other Iraqi higher education institutions. Effective English communication skills are essential for students' academic success and future careers.

5- Literature Review

5-1 Definition of speech act of complaint

Complaining is a way to show that you're unhappy or frustrated about something that has happened. People complain for different reasons, like to fix a problem, express their feelings, or stay connected with others. In the study of how people talk, complaints are called expressive acts because they can affect the relationship between the person complaining and the person they're complaining to. How people complain can be different depending on their culture and language. For example, in English, people might complain by directly stating the issue, using polite language, or showing sympathy for the other person.

1-Complaints are verbal expressions of unhappiness, criticism, or issues regarding actions, situations, or people. Complaining is a socially acceptable way to express negative feelings and is used as a strategy to repair or maintain social relationships (Liu & Sheng, 2015, p. 35).

2-A complaint allows someone to express their disapproval of a person, action, or event. This can be done to alert others about issues, release emotions like frustration or anger, ask for help, or achieve other goals. How a complaint is delivered (directly or indirectly) depends on the context, social norms, and culture (Trosborg, 1995, p. 58).

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5-2 Theoretical frameworks on speech act of complaint

Speech act theory explains how language is used to carry out actions, not just convey information. It goes beyond simply describing or stating something. As per J.L. Austin, there are two types of speech acts: 1. Constative: These speech acts describe or report something, like "It's raining." 2. Performative: These speech acts perform an action through the words themselves, like "I promise" or "I apologize."

Austin and Searle studied the nature of speech acts, which are words used to do something (not just convey information). Austin proposed four key elements: Locutionary act: The actual words spoken. Illocutionary act: The intention behind the words (e.g., stating, ordering, promising). Perlocutionary act: The impact the words have on the listener. Felicity conditions: The social factors that determine whether a speech act is appropriate. Searle later expanded on Austin's "illocutionary act" and classified them into five categories: Assertives: Stating something as true. Directives: Ordering someone to do something. Commissive: Making a promise or commitment. Expressives: Expressing an emotion or attitude. Declarations: Causing a change in the world (e.g., declaring a state of emergency).

Speech act theory has been applied to various aspects of language use, including complaints. Complaints can be viewed as a type of expressive speech act through which the speaker communicates their dissatisfaction or displeasure. By expressing their feelings, the speaker not only conveys information but also performs an action. Complaints serve different purposes, such as seeking resolution, expressing emotions, or maintaining social relationships (Austin, J. L. (1962).

Speech act theory, developed by philosophers like Austin and Searle, helps us understand how we use language. It goes beyond just sharing information. Words can also be used to do things, like make promises or ask questions.

Complaints can be viewed as a form of speech act that serves various purposes, such as expressing dissatisfaction, seeking resolution, maintaining social relationships, or asserting rights. As Austin and Searle suggest, complaining is a performative speech act that extends beyond the literal meaning of the words spoken. It can signal the speaker's discontent with a situation or their expectation of action being taken to address their concern.

Researchers have used speech act theory to study complaints and identify the language and social factors that make them more or less effective in different situations. For example, in healthcare, the outcome of a complaint can be influenced by how serious the issue is, how skilled and empathetic the healthcare provider is perceived to be, and the cultural expectations around complaining in that healthcare system (Lerner et al., 2014). How customers express their complaints, including their choice of words and tone, can greatly affect how well the customer service interaction turns out (Garcia, 2013).

In summary, speech act theory provides a valuable framework for comprehending complaints as a type of speech act and their functions. By examining the linguistic and social factors that shape the efficacy of complaining in diverse contexts, researchers can offer insights into how communication and language use can be enhanced to facilitate conflict resolution and effective problem-solving.

5-3 The Speech Act of complaint:

Complaining is a way people communicate their unhappiness or irritation about something. It can happen in any situation, whether it's social, work-related, or school-related. Complaints are usually directed at people, businesses, or organizations.

In college, students frequently grumble about their university experiences. They might complain about rules, resources, teachers, how the school is run, or anything else that bothers them. Students might voice their complaints officially, like by submitting formal complaints to the school's administration, or informally, like by talking about their problems with friends or professors.

Complaints are challenging because they can make the person or group being complained about feel threatened or embarrassed. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory explains that complaints are "face-threatening acts" because they damage the social standing or "face" of the target. To avoid upsetting the target, complainants should carefully craft and deliver their complaints in a polite and respectful way that minimizes any potential harm to their social identity.

Studies have delved into the nature of complaining in university settings. Rauhala and Tainio (2013) discovered that students primarily complained about their professors' teaching methods, personalities, or communication abilities. Sarfo and Asenso (2018) investigated how Ghanaian university students communicated complaints to their instructors, identifying direct criticism and displacing blame as prevalent strategies.

In addition, research has examined the connection between complaints and academic performance. Watkins and Conner (2017) discovered that university students who expressed frequent

complaints also indicated lower levels of involvement and contentment with their university experience.

To sum up, complaining is common in academic environments and can have major effects on both the person making the complaint and the person receiving it. To lessen the potential for harm, complainants should strive to communicate their concerns respectfully and diplomatically. Future studies might investigate effective complaint delivery tactics in academic settings and look into the effects of complaints on academic results.

1. Direct Complaints:

- Example: "This hotel room is not clean. There are stains on the sheets and towels." (Austin, 1962)

2. Indirect Complaints:

- Example: "I wish the music in this café was a bit quieter. It's hard to have a conversation." (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

3. Mitigated Complaints:

- Example: "I'm sorry to bother you, but I think there might be a mistake in my bill. The amount seems higher than what I expected." (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)

4. Non-verbal Complaints:

- Example: Frowning, shaking one's head, or raising eyebrows to express dissatisfaction without verbalizing it explicitly.

These examples show different ways of expressing complaints in various situations. They vary in how direct and polite they are, as different cultures and social norms influence how we voice our grievances.

4-6 Cultural and Linguistic Factors Influencing the Speech Act of Complaint

The way people complain isn't just about language. It's also shaped by the culture and society where they live. Research shows that different cultures and languages have their own ways of expressing dissatisfaction, influenced by factors like social status and norms (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Additionally, people who are studying English as a foreign language (EFL) typically have their own cultural and language experiences that influence how they understand and express grievances.

The way people complain is influenced by the customs and beliefs of their culture. Different cultures have different rules and feelings about how to show that you're not happy, which can change how people complain and how directly they say it (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). In some cultures, directly expressing complaints is seen as disrespectful and confrontational. Instead, people may use indirect or softened language to communicate their issues (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). They view this approach as an acceptable way to raise concerns without causing offense.

The language we speak can shape how we make complaints. Different languages have different words, sentence structures, and politeness markers used for complaints (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). These variations can make it challenging for learners of English as a foreign language to express complaints effectively because they may not be familiar with the necessary linguistic resources.

When English learners complain, understanding the connection between cultural and language factors is crucial. Learners often borrow complaint strategies from their native culture and

language, which can lead to challenges in expressing complaints effectively in English (a phenomenon known as interlanguage pragmatics) (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Students might also struggle to notice and grasp the hidden signals and cultural rules used in complaints in the new language. This can cause misunderstandings or expressions of dissatisfaction that are not appropriate.

Thus expressing dissatisfaction is influenced by cultural norms and language. Cultural differences determine how complaints are made and understood. Language itself, including its use in specific contexts, affects the way complaints are communicated. Understanding these factors is crucial for effective intercultural communication and second-language proficiency.

6- Methodology

1-Participant: The study engaged 100 undergraduate students the third stage from Translation department at Al-Iraqiya University using random selection. This approach aimed to create a diverse and representative sample of participants.

2-Data Collection: Participants took a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) with real-life complaint scenarios. They were asked to imagine themselves in these situations and write a complaint response. These completed DCTs were then collected and analyzed.

3-Data Analysis: The student responses to the complaints were converted into text and sorted into groups based on the various strategies used in their responses. A coding system, developed from existing frameworks (such as Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), was utilized to recognize and categorize the specific strategies employed by the students.

7-Results:

Table (1) presents the frequency and percentage of various complaint strategies used by students at Al-Iraqiya University.

Table (2)presents some examples used by the students.

Table 1.

No	Complaints Strategies	Frequency of Strategy	Percentage
1	Direct Complaint	60	60%
2	Indirect Complaint	10	30%
3	Mitigated Complaint	25	25%
4	Non-verbal complaints	5	10%

1-Strategy of Direct Complaint:

- Frequency: 60

-Percentage: 60%

Al-Iraqiya University, students usually complained directly. This shows that they tend to be assertive and confident in expressing their concerns. Instead of using indirect language or trying to soften their complaints, they stated their issues straightforwardly. Among 10% participants used an indirect approach to complain. They expressed their concerns subtly, using hints or polite language to avoid being confrontational. These students appeared to be more cautious and respectful in how they voiced their dissatisfaction.

2. Indirect Complaint Strategy:

- Frequency: 10

- Percentage: 10%

The mitigated complaint strategy was employed by 25% of the participants.

3. Mitigated Complaint Strategy:

- Frequency: 25
- Percentage: 25%

Approximately (25%) participants utilized an approach that minimized the severity of their complaint and mitigated complaint strategy. Students used a conciliatory approach to make their complaints less harsh. They used phrases like "I'm sorry, but..." or "I don't mean to complain, but..." to soften the blow. They did this probably to keep relationships peaceful.

4. Non-verbal Complaint Strategy:

- Frequency: 5

Percentage: 5% Iraqiya University students don't often use strategies to soften complaints, suggesting that they might not be concerned with avoiding potential conflicts when expressing their concerns. This may be due to cultural influences or a preference for clear and straightforward communication.

Iraqiya University students don't often use strategies to soften complaints, suggesting that they might not be concerned with avoiding potential conflicts when expressing their concerns. This may be due to cultural influences or a preference for clear and straightforward communication.

The non-verbal complaint strategy was utilized by 5% of the participants.

Students expressed their dissatisfaction subtly, using non-verbal cues like facial expressions, body language, or gestures. Instead of directly voicing their concerns, they communicated their displeasure through these non-verbal means.

Table 2.

No	Complaints Strategies		Examples
1	Direct Complaint	1- 2- 3-	<p>I would like to complain on my new electronic device, it was damaged when I receive it. I want my money back please.</p> <p>No sir, the meal was cold, please get me another one.</p> <p>My car broke down in the middle of the way.</p>
2	Indirect Complaint	1-	I lost my work because I was waiting the bus for a long time
3	Mitigated Complaint	1- 2-	<p>I have no idea what is wrong with this car, it just suddenly broke down in the middle of the way, and I need some help before the sun goes down please.</p> <p>I actually have some problems sir about the quality of teaching. I know that you are doing your best to find qualified teachers for your respectable institution.</p>
4	Non-verbal complaints	1- 2-	<p>Nodding</p> <p>frowning</p>

8-Discussion:

This study explores how students at Al-Iraqiya University communicate complaints in English. The results show that students often use direct strategies, such as openly expressing their concerns. This approach suggests that the students tend to be assertive and may prefer a direct communication style. Cultural factors or a preference for clarity could be contributing to this behavior.

Some students realize the value of politeness when expressing concerns. Instead of being direct, they use more tactful methods to convey their complaints. This gentler approach helps them avoid arguments and keep relationships healthy.

Al-Iraqiya University students don't often use strategies to soften complaints, suggesting that they might not be concerned with avoiding potential conflicts when expressing their concerns. This may be due to cultural influences or a preference for clear and straightforward communication.

Non-verbal ways of expressing complaints show how important non-verbal cues are in communicating complaints. Some students might have used facial expressions, body language, or gestures to show they were unhappy, possibly because they didn't speak the language well or liked to communicate indirectly.

There are more ways for people to complain than we thought. This shows that each person has their own way of doing it. Researchers should look into these unique approaches more closely to better understand how people complain in English as a foreign language.

9-Conclusion:

The study on complaint strategies used by students at Al-Iraqiya University provides insights into their understanding of language in practical situations. It shows that students use both direct and indirect strategies to complain, indicating a need for more teaching on using indirect strategies and effectively conveying messages non-verbally. These findings can help improve teaching methods to enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in situations where they need to make complaints.

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Appendix

- Instructions: Please imagine yourself in the following situations and provide an appropriate complaint response. Respond as you would in a real-life situation. Feel free to use any language or expressions you find suitable.
- Situation 1:
 - You purchased a new electronic device online, but it arrived damaged. You want to complain to the customer service representative. Respond to the customer service representative's question:
 - Customer Service Representative: "How can I assist you today?"
- Situation 2:
 - You have been waiting for a bus for a long time, and it still hasn't arrived. The bus company's information desk is nearby. You decide to complain to the staff. Respond to the staff member's question:
 - Staff: "How can I help you?"
- Situation 3:
 - You ordered a meal at a restaurant, but when it arrived, it was cold. You want to complain to the waiter. Respond to the waiter's question:

- Waiter: "Is everything okay with your meal?"
- Situation 4:
- You rented a car for a road trip, but it broke down in the middle of the journey. You call the car rental company's customer service hotline to complain. Respond to the customer service representative's question:
- Customer Service Representative: "What seems to be the problem with the car?"

- Situation 5:
- You attended a language course, and you are dissatisfied with the quality of teaching. You want to express your concerns to the course coordinator. Respond to the course coordinator's question: