

# "I need to talk to you" – A contrastive pragmatic study of speech act of complaint in American English and Malaysian

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## Abstract

*The present study is a cross-cultural contrastive pragmatic study of the speech act of complaint between American native speakers of English and Malaysian native speakers of Malay. The subjects were selected from Malay university students majoring at University Sains Malaysia and American native speakers of English majoring at a college in Pennsylvania in the United States. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion task followed by a semi-structured interview. Data were analyzed using Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) taxonomy of complaint examining the main components of complaints, level of directness, and amount of mitigation used in American and Malaysian respondents. The findings show that American and Malay respondents show significantly different behaviors to express complaints in the research situations.*

**Key words:** speech act, speech act of complaint

## Introduction

The present paper is a contrastive pragmatic study of the speech act of complaints between American native speakers of English and Malaysian native speakers of Malay who are studying English language. It will examine how differently the two cultures realize complaints in their respective societies.

### Literature review

#### Speech act of complaint

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

1. Locutionary or propositional meaning is what the speaker says. In other words, it is the literal meaning of the words e.g. "It's cold in here".
2. Illocutionary meaning is the social function of the words, or the intended meaning. When the speaker says "It's cold in here", it could be an indirect request to the hearer to close the window, or an indirect refusal to someone to open the window, or it might be a complaint to someone after he has opened the window.
3. Perlocutionary meaning is the effect of one's words on the listener. For example, "It's cold in here", might make the listener to close the window.

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

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

2. Directives: the speaker has the listener to do something, e.g. requesting, ordering, suggesting, e.g. "Close the window please."
3. Commisives: the speaker commits himself to do something in the future, e.g. promise, threaten, like "I promise you to visit you at Christmas."
4. Expressive: It is used to express a speaker's feeling and attitude such in complimenting, thanking, apologizing.
5. Declarative: this speech act changes the state of affairs, e.g., "I now name this ship *Blue Ocean*".

Within the above category, the speech act of complaint belongs to the category of expressives. According to Trosborg (1995), a complaint is,

an illocutionary act in which the speaker (the complainer) expresses his/her disapproval, negative feelings etc. towards the state of affairs described in the proposition (the complainable) and for which he/she holds the hearer ( the complaine) responsible, either directly or indirectly (p311-312)

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, a complaint is a face-threatening act since "it threatens the complaine's negative face wants, and at the same time it endangers the complainer's positive face wants if the complaine does not accept the complaint" (Tamanaha, 2003, p.18).

For a complaining act to occur it must meet some necessary conditions. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) identified these conditions as follows:

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

## A selected review of studies of the speech act of complaints

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

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

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

In a cross-cultural study of complaints strategies between Japanese and Americans using an open-ended questionnaire in the form of discourse completion tasks and a few role plays, Spees (1994) found out that Japanese are more direct than Americans in situations where the interlocutors have equal status with each other. However, regarding social distance, the Japanese responded differently

toward out-group interlocutors (i.e., strangers) than toward in-group interlocutors (i.e. family, friends, etc.), and they were generally more indirect to out-group members (in Tamanaha, 2003).

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

In a study of realization of speech act of complaint by Malaysian ESL learners using DCT and verbal reports, Farnia, Buchheit, and Shahida Banu (2009) found out that Malaysians show different behavior as the social status of the addressee differs. Their findings show that Malaysian ESL learners are more indirect in high-social status situations, i.e. complaining to a professor, than in equal-status situations, i.e. complaining to a roommate. Results of verbal reports indicated that Malaysian value the importance of social status in the interaction in their mother tongue which was also manifested in their responses in English.

## Objectives

The present study is significant in that it compares the pragmatic behavior of two different cultures, Malaysian and American. Most comparative contrastive speech acts studies have been conducted with Chinese and Japanese respondents and no research to date has addressed the American and Malaysian population. Research in contrastive pragmatics helps avoiding communication breakdown or failure, being misunderstood or impolite when interaction occurs between people of two different cultures.

## Methodology

The present study is a contrastive pragmatic study of the preferred choice of the strategies of speech act of complaint by American native speakers of English and Malaysian native speakers of Malay. The data for this study were collected through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion task. A semi-structured interview was completed immediately following the data collection.

The open-ended questionnaire included two parts: a demographic survey and a discourse completion task questionnaire. The demographic survey included questions regarding age, gender, level of study and possible exposure to another language/culture by dwelling abroad for more than two years. The questionnaire was adopted from Rinnert and Nogami (2006). The respondents were given the two hypothetical situations and were asked to write what they would say in a real conversation.

### 1. Situation 1 (Professor Situation)

You received your final grades. You were shocked that Professor Ann gave you a C. Her class was one of your favorites and you had studied very hard. You had received an A on your report, so you don't understand why your final grade was so low. You knock on the door of her office.

Professor: Come in.

### 2. Situation 2 (Roommate Situation)

You are sharing an apartment with your friend. Recently, s/he comes home very late almost every night and makes a lot of noise. You and your friend agreed to be quiet after 11.30 pm. when you first decided to live together. You've put up with the noise for several days, but tonight you feel you should say something.

Roommate :.....( watching TV).....

A semi-structured, face-to-face interview was conducted immediately after collecting the questionnaire. The subjects of the study were fourteen American university students studying at Community College of Philadelphia, a public college in a metropolitan city in the United States and twenty-eight Malaysian University students studying at the University Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. The American subjects were seven males and seven females whose ages ranged from 18 to 45. Two of the respondents had lived abroad for more than two years. The Malaysian subjects were two males and twenty-

six females whose ages ranged from 18 to 25. The age of Malaysian subjects ranged from 18 to 25; none had experience living out of Malaysia.

## Classification of complaints

A taxonomy of complaints developed by Rinnert and Nogami (2006) was adopted to analyze the data. This taxonomy consists of three main components of complaints, namely the main component, the level of directness and the number of softeners used in the interaction.

These components are presented, as follows, in detail:

1. Main component
  - Initiator (e.g. greetings, address terms, and other opening formulas)
  - Complaints (expressions of negative evaluation, including justification)
  - Request (direct or indirect attempts to get the hearer to redress the situation)
2. Level of directness
  - Indirect (no explicit mention of offense, implied offense only)
  - Somewhat direct (mention of offense, but no mention of the hearer's responsibility)
  - Very direct (explicit mention of offense and hearer's responsibility for it)
3. Amount of mitigation (counting the softening expressions, e.g. "a little, sort of, you know, would/ could, I think/ I wonder")

After data collection was completed, the DCT questionnaires were coded based on Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) taxonomy of complaints. The data was then entered into SPSS for further descriptive and statistical analysis. A semi-structured, face-to-face interview was conducted after each data collection. The respondents were asked questions regarding their perception and any effect of social status in choosing strategies; they were also asked if their answers would have been different had it been conducted in actual face-to-face conversation, rather than in writing.

## Data analysis

The results of the data analysis are presented below. The analyzed data are present for each situation in the questionnaire separately. The situations in the questionnaire were different in terms of social status of the addressee.

### Main components

#### Situation 1 (Professor Situation)

Figure 1 shows the findings of the main components by American native speakers of English and Malaysian native speakers of Malay in the interaction with the professor situation. The results show *initiators* to be the most frequently used strategy of the main component category for native speakers of Malay, whereas *complaints* were the most frequently used strategy for native speakers of English. The third most common strategy to be used was *requests*.

Some examples of the initiators used by the respondents were:

- Native speakers of English:

"Good morning"

"Hi"

"Excuse me, professor"

"Do you have a minute?"

"Professor, I have a question for you?"

"I was wondering if I can talk about my final grade".

- Native speakers of Malay:

"Assalamualaikum Profesor, saya ada hal yang nak dibincangkan dengan Profesor."

(Assalamualaikum Professor, I have something to discuss with you)

"Prof, maaf mengganggu. Saya nak tanya tentang markah penuh saya."

(Sorry for bothering you Prof. I want to ask you about my final result)

"Selamat pagi Prof Ann, saya harap saya tidak mengganggu."

(Good morning Prof Ann, I hope I'm not bothering you)

**Complaints** were the second most frequently used strategy for native speakers of English.

Some sample responses of **complaints** were:

- Native speakers of English:

"I was wondering why my grade is so low? "

"I don't feel like I deserve C in a class I've given 110 percent in!"

"I received an A on my report so I don't understand why I received a C as a final grade".

"I studied hard in your class so how come I was given such a low grade".

- Native speakers of Malay:

e.g., "Kenapa saya dapat C sedangkan saya begitu komited dengan tugas dan kelas Prof Ann?"

(Why did I get a C, even though I was very committed in doing my assignments and coming to your class)

"Kenapa markah laporan saya tinggi tapi exam, markah teruk?"

(Why did I get a high mark for my report but my exam result is really low?)

"Kenapa saya boleh dapat C. Saya tak percaya. Saya yakin saya boleh dapat markah lebih daripada itu."

( Why did you give me a C. I can't believe this. I'm sure I can get a better mark then this)

As the third frequently used strategies in the main component for native speakers of English and second frequently used strategy for native speakers of Malay, some examples of **request** were:

- Native speakers of English:

"Can u explain me why I got this grade?"

"I highly appreciate if you consider my case."

- Native speakers of Malay:

"Saya nak tahu bagaimana saya boleh dapat markah C? Saya harap Prof, dapat periksa kembali kertas saya."

( I want to know how I got a C? I hope that you would re-check my paper)

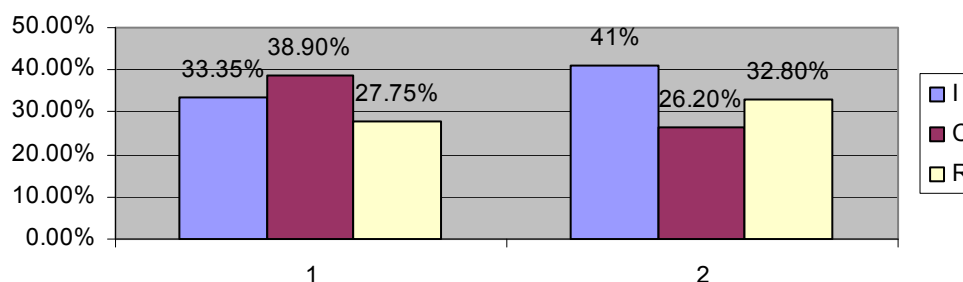
"Boleh tak Profesor terangkan apa salah saya dalam kertas ini."

(Can you explain what's wrong with my paper)

"Boleh Dr tolong jelaskan?"

(Can you please explain this?)

**Figure 1: Complaint responses in Professor Situation**

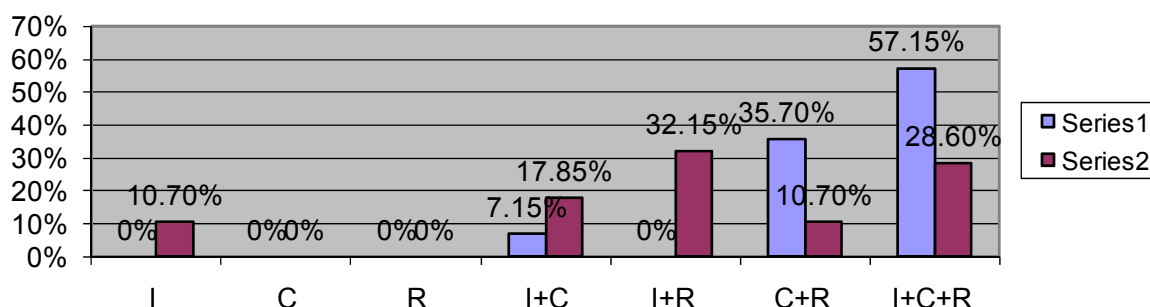


1. Native speakers of English, 2. Native speakers of Malay

Note: I. Initiators, C. Complaints, R. Request

In terms of using main components, they are identified in seven categories. Figure two shows patterns of components in the Professor situation for the two groups of participants. As Figure 2 shows, using initiators followed by complaints and requests was the most frequently used strategy by native speakers of English (57.15%) while using initiators followed by a request was the most frequently used pattern by native speakers of Malay (35.70%). As Figure 2 shows, in 10.70% of the situations, Malay respondents started with only initiators, while in 17.85% of the situations, the initiators were followed by a complaint and in 32.70% of the situations, Malay respondents began the conversation with complaints preceded by a request. Native speakers of English used initiators only in 10.70% of the situations, an initiator accompanied by a complaint in 7.15% of the situations and a complaint preceded by a request in 35.70% of the situations.

**Figure 2: Pattern of complaints for professor situation**



Note: Series1: Native speakers of English, Series 2: Native speakers of Malay

Note: 1. Initiators, 2. Complaints, 3. Request

To ascertain any statistical significant difference in the use of strategies between the two groups of respondents, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The findings of t-test show that there was a statistically significant difference in the use of main components of complaints between the native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay. However there are no statistically significant differences regarding the pattern of complaints between the two groups of respondents.

## Situation 2 (Roommate Situation)

Figure 3 shows the complaint responses in the second informal (Roommate) situation. Unlike Situation 1, *complaints* were the most frequently used strategy for both native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay. Some sample responses were:

- Native speakers of English:



"I thought you said you would be quiet after 11.30?"

"What's up with the noise?"

"You've been coming home late all the time and making noise while I'm trying to sleep, that really inconsiderate."

- Native speakers of Malay:

"Awak balik lewat malam dan membuat bising. Saya tak suka macam tu."

(You come back late and make a lot of noise. I don't like it)

"Ani, dulu awak dah janji dengan saya yang awak tak akan bising lepas pukul 11.30", tapi kenapa awak bising, (dan) balik lewat?"

(Ani, you promised that you would not make noise after 11.30, but why do you always make noise, (and) come back late?)

"Hampir setiap malam awak balik lewat malam, kemudian buat bising tengah-tengah malam, awak tak sedar ke yang awak dah ganggu orang lain nak tidur?"

(Almost everyday you come home back late at night, then you start making a lot of noises, don't you see that you are actually disturbing others who are sleeping?)

As Figure 3 shows, *initiators* were the second most frequently used strategy of native speakers of Malay and third frequently used strategy by native speakers of English. Samples of the responses are as follows:

- Native speakers of English:

"I want to talk about something really important".

"Yo, bro!"

"Look, I need to talk to you."

"Hey, I think we need to talk; "

- Native speakers of Malay:

. "Ani, saya nak cakap dengan awak sekejap".

(Ani, I want to talk with you for a while)

"Kak Farah, saya ada hal nak cakap sikit boleh?"

(Kak [it literally means an older sister] Farah, is it ok if I want to talk with you about something?)

"Lily saya ingin cakap dengan awak. Saya ada hal penting" ni.

(Lily, I want to talk with you. I have something important to tell you)

*Request* is the third frequently used strategy by native speakers of Malay and the second frequently used strategy by native speakers of English in the informal situation. Samples of responses are as follows:

"We agreed to keep the noise level down but you have not been following through with it and we need to figure out something if we are going to keep living together";

"I can tell you that I can't take this if it goes for another moment;

"I would appreciate it if you could quiet it down a bit."

- Native speakers of Malay:

"Kita pernah membuat persetujuan bersama dan saya harap kamu menghormatinya."

(We have made an agreement before and I hope you will respect it)

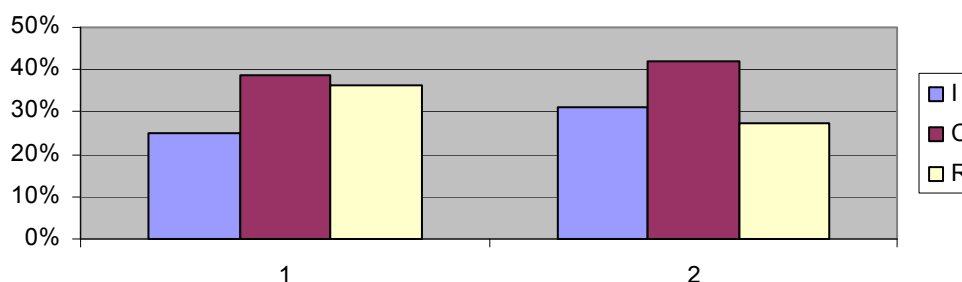
"So, aku harap hang consider la sama privacy aku, ok?"

(So, I hope you will be more considerate regarding my privacy too, ok?)

"Saya berharap awak tak mengulangi perbuatan tersebut."

(I hope you would not do this again)

**Figure 3: Complaint responses in the roommate situation**

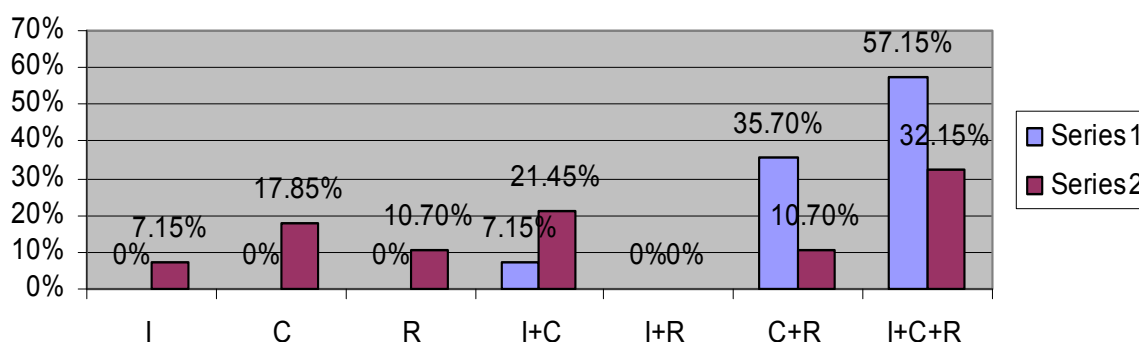


Note: 1. native speakers of English, 2. native speakers of Malay

Note: I. Initiators, C. Complaints, R. Request

Figure 4 shows the findings for the pattern of complaints by the respondents. The findings show that initiators followed by a complaint and then a request were the most frequently used strategy among both American and Malaysian respondents in the informal model. Using the pattern of C+R was the second most frequently used strategy for native speakers of English while I+C pattern was the second most frequently used strategy by native speakers of Malay.

**Figure 4: Pattern of complaints for roommate situation**



Note: 1. Initiators, 2. Complaints, 3. Request

The results of independent sample t-test show that native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay used significantly different numbers of complaints and requests in their responses; that is, Malay used significantly more complaints than Americans and the Americans used significantly more requests than Malay in the informal Roommate situation; however, there is no statistically significant difference in the use of initiators between the two groups. However, there are no statistically significant differences regarding the pattern of complaints between the two groups of respondents.

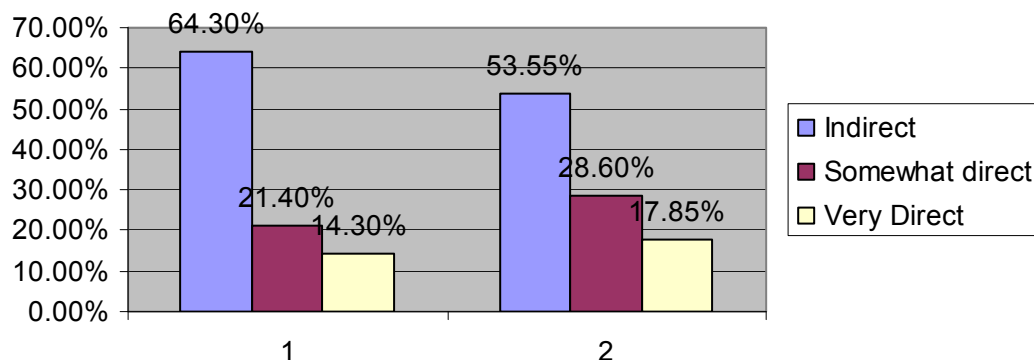
Level of directness

Professor situation

Figure 5 shows the findings of the level of directness by both groups of respondents in the formal Professor situation. As can be seen, American native speakers were more direct than Malay native speakers in the situation where the addressee was their professor.



**Figure 5: Level of indirectness for Professor Situation**



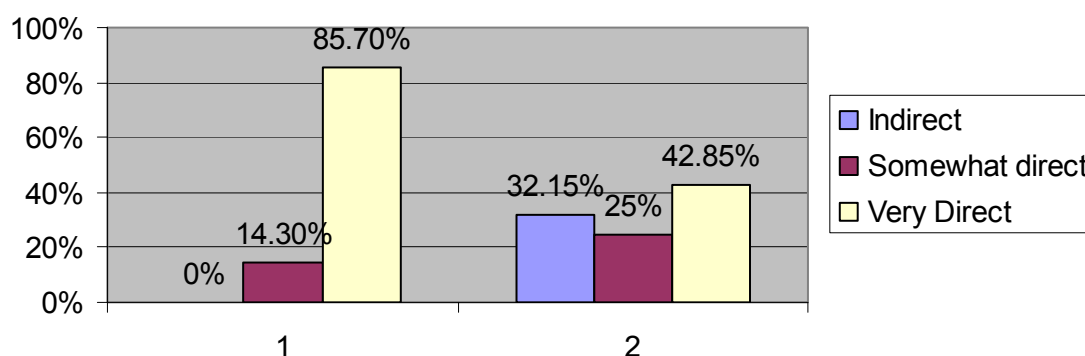
Note: 1. Native speakers of English, 2. Native speakers of Malay

Results of independent sample t-test show that there is only statistical significant difference in the use of *somewhat direct strategy* between the two groups of respondents; that is, native speakers of Malay used significantly more *somewhat direct strategy* than native speakers of English.

### Roommate Situation

Figure 6 shows the findings for level of indirectness in the Roommate situation for native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay. As Figure 6 indicates, native speakers of English were much more direct than native speakers of Malay in the situation where the object of address was their roommate. The findings show that native speakers of Malay used *indirect strategy* in 32.15% of the situation where their American counterparts did not resort to this strategy in the informal Roommate situation.

**Figure 6: Level of indirectness for roommate situation**



Note: 1. Native speakers of English, 2. Native speakers of Malay

The findings of independent sample t-test show that there is a statistically significant difference in the use of *very direct strategy* between native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay; however, there is no statistically significant difference in the use of the *somewhat direct strategy* between the two groups of respondents in this informal situation.

### Use of Mitigation

#### Professor situation

Figure 7 shows the *use of softeners* in the Professor situation. Some example of softeners terms by the respondents in the first situation are as follows:

- Native speakers of English:

as you know....

Really

Would you please

I just wanted...

I'm just worried....

I thought...

I would like to.....

• Native speakers of Malay:

Saya harap... (I hope..)

Saya memohon ( I request [hope] that...)

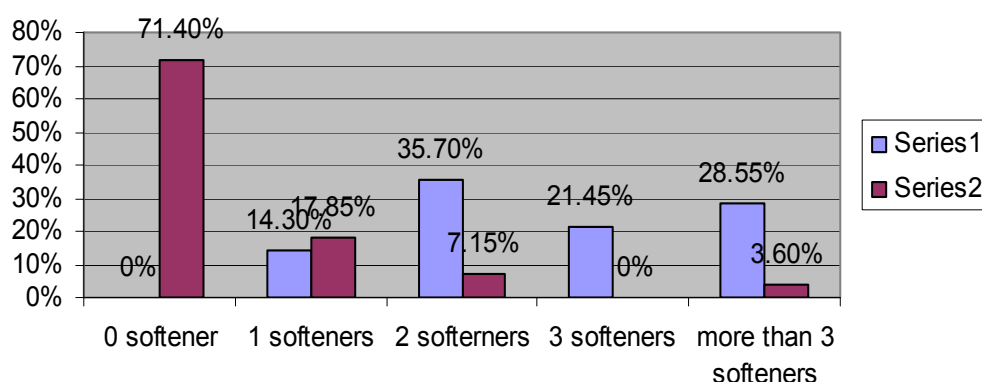
Saya cuma (I just want ...)

Saya rasa.. (I feel that...)

Boleh tak saya ambil masa Prof sikit...(If you don't mind.. )

The findings show that in 71.40% of the formal situations, native speakers of Malay tended not to use any softeners in their responses and in 35.70% and 7.15% of the situation they used one and two softeners in this formal situation, respectively. In 3.60% of the situations, native speakers of Malay used more than three softeners in their responses. On the other hand, native speakers of English used one softeners in 14.35% of the formal situation, two softeners in 35.70% of the situations, three softeners in 21.45% of the situations and in more than 28% of the situations, they used more than three softeners.

**Figure 7: Amount of mitigation in the Professor situations**



Note: 1. Native speakers of English, 2. Native speakers of Malay

Results of independent sample t-test show that there are statistical significant differences in the use of softeners, except for the use of only one softener (14.30% vs. 17.85%) between native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay. That is, American used significantly greater mitigation than native speakers of Malay in the formal situation.

### Roommate Situation

Figure 8 shows the number of softeners used by native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay in Roommate situation. Samples of responses used in this situation by the respondents are as follows:

• Native speakers of English:

I think....

We agreed...

I would appreciate...

Can you please...

• Native speakers of Malay:

e.g. Saya harap... (I hope...)

Saya berasa... (I feel..)

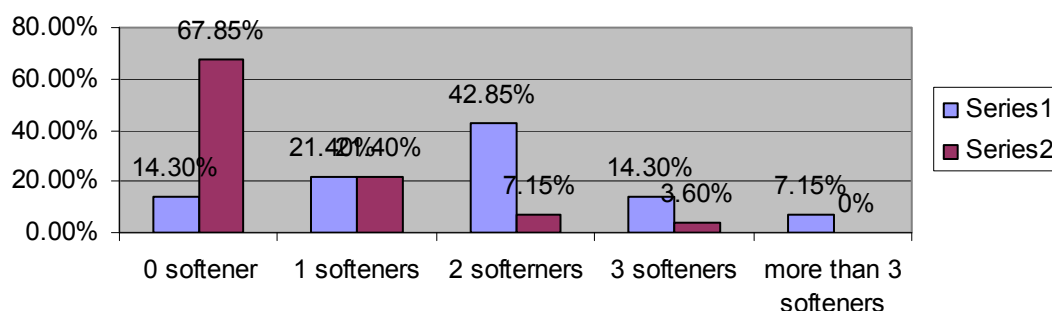
Emm.... (emm..)

Err... (err..)

Saya minta maaf jika saya... (I'm sorry if I ...)

As Figure 8 shows, in 67.85% of this informal situation, native speakers of Malay did not use any softeners, while native speakers of English did not any softeners in 14.30% of the situations. Both native speakers of English and Malay used one softener in 21.40% of the situation. In 42.85% of the situation, native speakers of English used two softeners, whereas their Malay counterpart used two softeners in only 7.15% of the situation. In 14.30% and 3.60% of the situations, native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay used three softeners, respectively. These findings show while native speakers of Malay didn't use more than 3 softeners in their responses their American counterpart used more than three softeners in 7.15% of the informal situation.

**Figure 8: Use of softeners in the Roommate situations**



Note: 1. Native speakers of English, 2. Native speakers of Malay

Results of independent sample t-test show that there is a statistical significant difference in the use of two softener strategy between native speakers of English and native speakers of Malay. That is, American used significantly more two softeners in their responses than their Malay counterparts in the informal situation.

## Verbal report

The results of semi-structured interview which was conducted along with the questionnaire show that most of the Malaysian and American respondents perceived the situations in the questionnaire as "formal vs. informal". Malaysian and American respondents both agreed that social status is important to them and that it plays a vital role in helping them to choose appropriate responses when they are talking to someone.

Both Malay and American students agreed that social status influenced their choice of words, including the necessity to being polite and more humble when talking to someone who is superior to them, specifically educational and/or social status. This could be seen in the responses that were collected in the first situation. However, both groups felt that it was absolutely not necessary to be either polite or humble when talking to someone at the same social level with them because they felt there was no difference that separated them from their friends, roommates and/or classmates (Situation two). However, a limited number of students (Malay) said that they would talk the same way to everyone despite

any differences that existed between them. Those few Malaysian students believed that social status should not affect their word choice because there should be a sense of equality in interacting with everyone, regardless of status in the social hierarchy.

## Discussion

The findings show that Malay native speakers significantly used more initiators and complaints in opening complaints than native speakers of English, while Americans significantly used more complaints as the main component of complaints in a situation where social status is higher than the speakers, i.e. the professor situation. Regarding the pattern of complaints, American used the pattern of C+R and I+C+R more than Malay where Malay used more I+C and I+R; however, the number is not statistically significant. On the other hand, in the second situation, Malays used significantly more complaints than Americans while Americans used significantly more requests than Malay in the Roommate situation. Regarding the level of directness, the findings show that Malaysians significantly used the more somewhat direct strategy in their complaint strategy in Professor Situation, while Americans were found significantly to be very much more direct than Malays in the Roommate situation. Moreover, American used significantly greater mitigation than native speakers of Malay in the formal situation.

The findings of the present study are to some extent controversial. In a situation where hierarchy and social status are expected to be important, as in Malaysia an eastern non-egalitarian society where keeping face is more acceptable, Malaysian used *more complaints* than their American counterparts in the professor situation. The findings of this study contrasts with the findings of a previous study by Malaysian ESL learners' preferred choice of complaint strategies where respondents tried to keep face and be indirect when talking to someone from higher social status, i.e. professor, in order to maintain the relationship (Farnia, Buchheit, and Shahida banu, 2009). In the interaction with the roommate, Malaysian ESL learners also were found to use softeners as well as being direct in order not to lose face and damage the relationship. A comparison of the findings of this study with the previous study on Malaysian ESL learners shows that Malaysian ESL learners respond similarly to Americans when replying in the English language. In the present study, Americans are found to be more direct in the second situation where the respondents addressed their roommate. Despite being direct in the second situation, Americans used significantly more softeners and mitigation in their responses in both Professor and Roommate Situations

## Conclusion

The present study investigated the realization of the speech act of complaints among American native speakers of English and Malaysian native speakers of Malay. Data were collected through DCT questionnaire and semi-structured interview from twenty-eight Malaysian native speakers of Malay and fourteen American native speakers of English. All respondents were university students in their respective countries, Malaysia and the United States.

There are a number of limitations to the study. First, the findings cannot be generalized to the wider population due to the relatively restricted number of respondents. Besides, though DCTs are the most common method of data collection in pragmatic studies, more data with other methods of data collection are needed to authenticate these findings. However, despite these limitations, the study presents a number of insights. The responses were analyzed in terms of the main components of complaints, the level of directness and the degree of mitigation. The findings indicate that American and Malaysian showed different pragmatic behaviors in different situations.

It is anticipated that the findings of the present study will add to the body of literature in contrastive pragmatic study in demonstrating the differing behaviors of two contrasting cultures in terms of expressing complaints in formal and informal situations, and the possible implications of English study on speech acts

## Acknowledgment

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## Appendix

### Discourse Completion Tasks

#### A. English Version:

1. You received your final grades. You were shocked that Professor Ann gave you a C. Her class was one of your favorites and you studied very hard. You got an A on your report, so you don't understand why your final grade was so low. You knock on the door of her office.

S. Come in.

You: “ .....

2. You are sharing an apartment with your friend. Recently, (s)he comes home very late almost every night and makes a lot of noise. You and your friend agreed to be quiet after 11.30 pm. when you first decided to live together. You’ve put up with the noise for several days, but tonight you feel you should say something.

Roommate :.....( watching TV).....

You: “ .....

#### B. Malay Version:

Anda telah mendapat keputusan penuh peperiksaan anda. Anda berasa terkejut kerana Profesor Ann telah memberi anda C. Kelas Profesor Ann merupakan salah satu kelas kegemaran anda dan anda telah belajar dengan bersungguh-sungguh. Anda telah mendapat A untuk tugas laporan anda. Jadi anda tidak faham kenapa markah penuh anda begitu rendah. Anda mengetuk pintu pejabat Profesor Ann.

Profesor Ann: Masuk.

Anda: “ .....

Anda tinggal bersama seorang rakan anda dalam sebuah apartment. Baru-baru ini, dia sering pulang lewat malam hampir setiap hari dan membuat bising. Semasa, anda dan rakan anda mengambil keputusan untuk tinggal bersama, kamu berdua telah bersetuju untuk tidak membuat bising selepas pukul 11.30 malam. Anda telah cuba sabar dengan bunyi bising itu untuk beberapa hari tetapi malam ini anda rasa anda patut berkata sesuatu kepadanya.

Rakan serumah anda: .....(sedang menonton TV).....

Anda: “ .....