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Disagreement Strategies Used by Korean EFL Learners: A Discursive Approach*

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This study investigates distinctions between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English in their politeness strategies for expressing disagreement. This study addresses three research questions: (1) What are the overall differences between NSs and NNSs in expressing disagreement?; (2) Are there significant differences between NSs and NNSs in the impact of relative power when expressing disagreement?; (3) Are there significant differences between NSs and NNSs in their perception of the degree of seriousness of the disagreement that in turn influence their politeness strategies? A total of 25 individuals, composed of 10 NSs and 15 NNSs of English participated as respondents to the discourse completion task (DCT) in this study. The severity of disagreement in this study is constructed in terms of participant understanding or perception. The results of this study revealed that Korean learners of English and native speakers of English were substantially different in using politeness strategies when expressing disagreements in English.

[disagreement/mitigating devices/discursive approach]

I. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates differences between native speakers (NS) of English and Korean students as nonnative speakers (NNS) of English in their politeness strategies

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when expressing disagreement. In this paper, disagreement is defined as an opinion that is contrary to or different from that expressed by another speaker (Sifianou, 2012). Leech (1983) in his principles of politeness construes disagreement as a dispreferred speech act: "minimize disagreement and maximize agreement between self and other" (p. 132). Brown and Levinson (1987) also argue that disagreements are face-threatening acts because the speaker conveys that "the hearer is wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some issue" (p. 66). It is therefore assumed that disagreement has been usually regarded as a dispreferred speech act.

However, such an assumption cannot be always warranted because cultures may vary in their pragmatic norms about expressing disagreements and confrontational arguments. In fact, there are cultures that prefer disagreement over agreement. Cultural features that encourage confrontational arguments and disagreements have been identified in Jewish (Blum-Kulka, Blondheim & Hacohen, 2002; Schiffrin, 1984), German (Blum-Kulka et al. 2002), and Greek culture (Kakava, 2002). In relation to Jewish culture, Schiffrin (1984) has shown that disagreement is not always a dispreferred act but rather a vehicle of expressing sociability by providing the freedom to debate various issues. Disagreement in Jewish culture is seen as a willingness to interact and engage with others and as a vehicle to cultivate creative imagination and intellectual curiosities.

Even within the same culture, there are contexts that prefer disagreement over agreement. In the consensus-oriented intimate context, agreement is preferred, whereas, in the argument-oriented classroom context, disagreement is more likely to be preferred as participants in this context tend to exhibit reluctance in displaying agreement compared to displaying disagreement (Blum-Kulka et al., 2002; Kakava, 2002; Netz, 2014). Expressing disagreement varies considerably from culture to culture and from context to context. Disagreement cannot be regarded simply as dispreferred, impolite, or face-threatening acts (Georgakopoulou, 2001; Sifianou, 2012).

Nietzsche (2000) adopts the position that concepts of good and evil are culturally constructed rather than inherently true. In a similar vein, Foucault (1973), in his *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, frames the concept of insanity or madness as a social and discursive construction rather than one of precise psychiatric truth. For him, madness is not an immutable scientific and theoretical concept but rather a commonsense concept constructed by discursive practices.

This position also applies to the act of disagreement as well. The preference for, or the politeness of, disagreement is neither fixed nor objective, but rather discursively constructed according to cultural and contextual situations. This position is referred to as the discursive approach to politeness (Eelen, 2001; Haugh, 2007; Locher, 2006; Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2005) or "postmodern view" of politeness (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 238). As Sifianou (2012, p. 1554) argues, when disagreement is expressed, cultural

variation exists depending on various contextual parameters. In this study the following three research questions are addressed:

(1) What overall differences between NSs and NNSs are manifest when expressing disagreement?
(2) Are there significant differences between NSs and NNSs in the impact of relative power on their expressing disagreements?
(3) Are there significant differences between NSs and NNSs in their perception of the degree of seriousness of the disagreement that in turn influence their politeness strategies?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into the pragmatic competence of NNSs of English has shown that grammatical development does not guarantee a similar level of pragmatic development. Even advanced language learners often show a marked imbalance between their grammatical and pragmatic knowledge (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998, p. 234). Since disagreement is an inherently face-threatening and complex speech act, teaching pragmatic competence in expressing disagreement should be one goal of classroom instruction. For Korean learners of English to develop pragmatic competence in expressing disagreement, at least two factors should be taught: One is to convey clearly the intention of disagreement, and the other is to use indirect disagreement to mitigate threatening another's sensitivity (loss of face).

Lakoff (1973) summarized such a pragmatic competence in terms of two rules: "be clear" and "be polite" (Watts, Ide, Ehlich, 2005, p. 5). In a similar vein, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 132) consider pragmatic competence as a compromise between the two opposing tensions: "the desire to be direct and the desire to be indirect." The product of a compromise between the two desires is referred to as conventional indirectness. Blum-Kulka (1987, p. 131) also defines politeness as the balance achieved between two needs: "the need for pragmatic clarity and the need to mitigate face-threatening" (p.131). The balance between these two needs is achieved in terms of conventional indirectness. This compromise is the necessary outcome, given that direct strategies to express disagreement can be perceived as impolite because they lack face-saving concern, while nonconventional indirect strategies (hints) can be also be perceived as impolite because they lack pragmatic clarity. Accordingly, conventional indirectness is often employed as the optimal strategy to express disagreement that clearly delivers the speaker's intention and at the same time using indirect expression to mitigate face-threat to the hearer.

Kreutel (2007, pp. 3-5) also argues that not only are there direct strategies and indirect strategies in expressing disagreement, but also various mitigation strategies in between the two strategies.

Native speakers of English often employ positive politeness strategies as a means of mitigating the force of disagreement. In contrast, Korean students' expressions of disagreement tend to include the bare exclamation “no” as well as the blunt statement of the opposite without mitigation devices (Bell, 1998, p. 31). To overcome such problems, Korean students should develop pragmatic competence when conversing with native speakers of English. In “Politeness in the Speech of Korean ESL Learners,” Bell (1998) conducted research on politeness strategies used by Korean students in face-threatening contexts such as request, suggestion and disagreement and made two observations. First, compared to their acts of requesting and suggesting, Korean student expressions of disagreement were inordinately forceful, unmitigated, and even aggravating by American convention (p. 38). Secondly, politeness strategies used by Korean students were particularly sensitive to social status. When expressing disagreement to someone of a higher status such as a professor or older acquaintance, Korean students often used politeness strategies. A student relatively restraining disagreement with a professor can also be considered to be a politeness strategy as exceedingly strong and direct expression is used when addressing someone of a lower status (p. 37).

LoCastro (1987), in *Yes, I Agree with You, But...: Agreement and Disagreement in Japanese and American English*, has confirmed that Americans express their preference without hesitation when speaking about food, for instance. As opposed to this, Japanese speakers, to avoid direct expressions of disagreement, use mitigation devices such as token agreement or hedges so as to not come across as impertinent. In “Cultural Expectations in Expressing Disagreement: Differences between Japan and the United States”, Kobayashi and Viswat (2010) argues that Japanese tend to use euphemisms so as to not offend their counterparts, whereas Americans do not appreciate such consideration. From an American point of view, Japanese speakers do not speak directly even when they do not agree (p. 7).

Kakava (1993), based on observation of discussion in class, concluded that Greek students are the most confrontational, American students put an effort to control confrontation, and Japanese students are non-confrontational. She observed that discussions in class could all be qualitatively different considering the difference of the social pragmatic conventions prevailing in Greece, United States and Japan. Comparing their differences with Japanese students, however, as Greek students criticized with a “strong yet mitigated” form and American students used an active and “mitigated” form of criticism (Kakava, 1993, p. 415) American discussion culture could still be regarded as confrontational.

In “Sociolinguistic Variation in Face-Threatening Speech Acts: Chastisement and Disagreement”, Beebe and Takahashi (1989) found differences between Americans and Japanese speakers: First, when expressing disagreement to a proposal by a person of a lower social status, Japanese (85%) compared to American (50%) criticized more straightforwardly. Japanese may often use outspoken criticism such as “I don’t agree with you”, but Americans rarely used such expression (p. 204). Compared to Japanese speakers, Americans used more positive remarks and expression of gratitude frequently even when disagreeing with a proposal from a person of a lower social status. Second, when expressing disagreement to a proposal from a person of a higher social status, there was a higher frequency of straightforward criticism among Japanese speakers (67%) compared to Americans (33%) as Japanese responses tended to be harsh and direct. To one superior-status person’s question, “Isn’t this a great plan?”, Japanese respondents employed direct criticism: “No, it isn't, I'm afraid” or “No, I don't think it's a great plan” (p.207).

Since such research findings contradict Kobayashi and Viswat's (2010) view that Japanese speakers tend to refrain from using direct criticism in order to avoid making the opponent feel uncomfortable, further systematic study identifying which one is a more practical interpretation is warranted. Such relatively short and blunt disagreement is not a feature unique to Japanese learners but rather represents a common problem confounding most EFL/ESL learners. Beebe and Takahashi (1989, p. 207) advise against the conclusion that this is merely a transfer from Japanese discourse norms.

The foregoing literature review has shown that expressing disagreement varies considerably from culture to culture and from context to context. To participate in effective intercultural communication, expressing disagreement from the other person's cultural perspective and in terms of the relevant context should be attempted. As a result, cultural and contextual impacts on expressing disagreement requires investigation.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

To assess the appropriateness of disagreement strategies used by Korean EFL speakers, the speech act of disagreement of NSs was compared with that of Korean EFL speakers, in other words NNSs. A total of 25 individuals, composed of 10 native speakers of English and 15 nonnative speakers of English, participated as respondents to the DCT in this study. The first group was composed of ten NSs (Nationality: 6 Americans, 2 Canadians, and 2 British; Gender: 4 males, 6 females) teaching English to

Korean students at a university in Seoul. The second group was composed of 30 Korean students taking an elective English course in a university in Seoul. All 30 Korean students enrolled in this course participated in the DCT, but the responses of only 6 male students and 9 female students were randomly chosen in order to match the gender ratio of the first group. The Korean students were evaluated as having high-intermediate to advanced English proficiency.

2. Instruments

The data was elicited by means of a discourse completion test (DCT) developed by Beebe and Takahashi (1989), with some modifications to ensure that the situations were familiar to college students. Beebe and Takahashi's (1989) study concerned disagreement between a corporate executive and his or her assistant. The present study modified the corporate executive-assistant relation to a teacher-student relation, not only because educational discourse emphasizing rationality are substantially different from economic discourse emphasizing efficiency but also because students inexperienced in acting as a corporate executive might find it difficult to relate to the situation.

Of Brown and Levinson's three sociocultural variables of power, distance, and severity as the rank of imposition, social distance in this case was not a reliable in characterizing the relationship between a professor and student because the interlocutors are neither complete strangers nor close intimates. The DCT was then constructed based on the two remaining variables: social power of the interlocutor and severity of the particular disagreement as a face-threatening act. The social power (P) variable was treated in this study as a binary value: lower status and higher status. The severity (S) variable can also be considered as a binary value: whether the severity of disagreement as a face-threatening act is low or high. The combination of these two sociocultural variables (2×2 dimensions) generated four possible situations. Accordingly, four situations generating disagreement (Appendix) were devised for the participants to provide their response to indicate how they would disagree with someone of both a higher and lower social status.

The social power of the interlocutors, being embedded in their relative social status, is relatively objective. In other words, Situations 1 (S1) and 2 (S2) are disagreement situations involving a person of lower status talking to someone of a higher status; Situation 3 (S3) and Situation 4 (S4) are disagreement situations involving a person of a higher status talking to someone of a lower status.

S1 [S<H]: student disagreeing with a professor
S2 [S<H]: lower-status person disagreeing with a higher-status person

S3 [S>H]: professor disagreeing with a student
S4 [S>H]: higher-status person disagreeing with a lower-status person

Compared to the social power variable, the severity of disagreement is less objective. This research based on a discursive approach relies upon participant perceptions of severity. However, while such a discursive approach emphasizing participant understandings or perceptions of severity is indeed welcome, it does raise the issue of the status of the researcher in relation to the participants (Haugh, 2007). This study therefore employs a Likert scale as an eclectic method in which participants evaluate the severity of disagreement on a 5-point scale (Appendix).

3. Coding Procedures

Research on disagreement has proposed many different taxonomies. Brown and Levinson (1987) identified four strategies of expressing disagreement, ordered in terms of the extent to which they threaten the other's face. The most threatening strategy is to disagree baldly on record and the least threatening strategy is disagreeing off record with, for example, a hint. Falling in between these two extremes are various mitigation strategies. The politeness strategies for expressing disagreement can be ordered from most to least threatening as follows:

(1) Bald-on-record strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 95)
  (1-1) Blunt disagreement (e.g., “I disagree”, “I don't agree”, “No!”)
  (1-2) Disagreement with explanation
    (As Korean students seem to differ in their English speaking and writing ability, it may be more reasonable in this research to divide the bald on-record strategy into two sub-strategies: blunt disagreement and disagreement with explanation.)
(2) Positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101-129)
  (2-1) Token agreement (e.g., “yes, but...”)
  (2-2) Positive remarks (e.g., “it's certainly an excellent idea, but...”)
  (2-3) Humor or joke
    (Joking is a basic politeness technique, for putting H at ease.)
  (2-4) Offer or promise
    (e.g., “I can bring the relevant materials to you, if you want”)
(3) Negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 129-210)
  (3-1) Conventional indirectness
    (e.g., “May I ask why you think the answer is not mine?”)

(3-2) Question
(e.g., “I don't know why you think my answer is not original.”)
(3-3) Hedges
(e.g., “well”, “just”, “I think”, various modalities)
(3-4) Apologize
(e.g., NNSs tend to overuse “I'm sorry,” which NSs seldom use.)
(4) Off-record strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 213-227)
(4-1) Hints (e.g., “What a boring movie!” → “Let's leave.”)
(4-2) Rhetorical questions (not an actual question: e.g., “What can I say?”)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major purpose of this research is investigating and providing answers to the following three research questions: First, what are overall differences between NSs and NNSs in expressing disagreement? Second, are there significant differences between NSs and NNSs in the impact of relative power when expressing disagreement? Finally, are there significant differences between NSs and NNSs in their perception of the degree of seriousness of the disagreement that in turn influence their politeness strategies?

1. Overall Differences between NSs and NNSs

In this section, the overall differences between NSs and NNSs in expressing disagreement are examined. Table 1 classifies the frequencies of strategies used by NSs and NNSs in terms of (1) Bald on-record (BOR) strategies, (2) Positive politeness strategies (PPS), (3) Negative politeness strategies (NPS), and (4) Off-record (OFF) strategies. Table 1 can be regarded as a two-way contingency table, in which the four major strategies (BOR, PPS, NPS, and OFF) comprise the rows of the table, and the two groups of participants form the columns. As the chi-square value obtained (X^2=13.79) from Table 1 is greater than the critical value X^2=7.8147 (with df=3, at the 5 per cent significant level), there is a significant difference between NSs and NNSs when expressing disagreement.

First, the data in the case of blunt disagreements used by NNSs (only 5%) in Table 1 deviate from previous findings emphasizing that disagreement strategies used by most (66.67%) Korean students were primarily “blunt and contradictory statements,” (Bell, 1998, p. 31) and that “ESL learners' responses sound very blunt and more direct” (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989, p. 207). This difference might be attributed to the fact that the previous studies were based on spoken data, whereas this study was based on data from

written DCT. In other words, Korean EFL learners seem to differ in their English speaking and writing ability.

TABLE 1
Strategies Used For Expressing Disagreement

Strategies	NSs (n=10)		NNSs (n=15)	
	f	%	f	%
(1) BOR				
(1-1) Blunt disagreement	0	0	4	5
(1-2) Disagreement with explanation	14	19.4	33	41.3
sub-total	(14)	(19.4)	(37)	(46.3)
(2) PPS				
(2-1) Token agreement	7	9.7	5	6.3
(2-2) Positive remarks	10	13.9	8	10.0
(2-3) Humor or joke	0	0	0	0
(2-4) Offer or promise	9	12.5	4	5.0
sub-total	(26)	(36.1)	(17)	(21.3)
(3) NPS				
(3-1) Conventional indirectness	0	0	0	0
(3-2) Question	8	11.1	8	10
(3-3) Hedges & modality	13	18.1	10	12.5
(3-4) Apologize	0	0	5	6.3
sub-total	(21)	(29.2)	(23)	(28.8)
(4) OFF				
(4-1) Hints	4	5.6	2	2.5
(4-2) Rhetorical questions	7	9.7	1	1.3
sub-total	(11)	(15.3)	(3)	(3.8)
Total	72		80	

※ BOR (Bald-on-record strategies), PPS (Positive politeness strategies)
NPS (Negative politeness strategies), OFF (Off-record strategies)

Secondly, as the qualitative differences between NSs and NNSs in their strategies of disagreement cannot be sufficiently elucidated exclusively through statistical analysis, it is necessary to go beyond statistical explanations to arrive at an explication of the substantial differences in the content of disagreement expressions employed by NSs and NNSs. For example, as a response to the first situation (S1), both NS and NNS used the same strategy of positive remarks (2-2), but their forms of expressing disagreement were substantially different, as illustrated in the following two excerpts:

NS: I fully understand your concerns and acknowledge the serious attention that should be given to matters of plagiarism. I would not expect any professor to allow such matters to pass by unnoticed. It has never been, nor will it ever be, my intention to purposefully plagiarize any work.
NNS: I understand what you thought, professor. However, this answer is really my own answer, and I can do anything to prove it.

Another example, as a response to the first situation (S1), both NS and NNS used the same strategy of disagreement with explanation (1-2), but their responses were substantially different in their respective paralinguistic features as we can see in the following two excerpts:

NS: But in truth, it is my answer. I didn't look it up on the Internet. Perhaps, it is just a coincidence that I had the same answer. Andre Gide said this: “Everything that needs to be said has already been said.” So isn't it possible that I just happened to repeat what had been said already?
NNS: I swear it is my own work and not based on any precedent ideas. I'm sure it is just a coincidence.

A third difference was that NSs often used rhetorical questions (4-2), whereas NNSs seldom resorted to them. A rhetorical question is a device used to persuade or subtly influence the hearer. For example, A rhetorical question, such as “Who knows?”, performs the function of emphasizing that nobody knows. Therefore, it is a question that is presented, not to solicit an answer, but rather to achieve rhetorical effect. For example, as a response to the fourth situation (S4), NSs often use rhetorical questions as a means of emphasizing the matter of preference for a particular drama is a matter of taste, not a matter of absolute truth. Korean students seemed to be less proficient in these expressions than NSs.

NS: Ha! We weren't watching the same drama then. It is amazing, isn't it? How things such as art, music, or acting can be viewed so differently by people? It really does live in the realm of interpretation.
NNS: I don't think so, I think it was very interesting. Why do you think so?
You don't like the actors?

Finally, NNSs often used “I'm sorry” as a form of apology (3-4) to mitigate the illocutionary force of disagreement, whereas NSs seldom used apologetic strategies as a mitigating device. Korean tended to use “I'm sorry” as a general means of avoiding

confrontation and maintaining a harmonious relationship, whereas American speakers seldom used apologetic strategies in this context because they generally perceive disagreement or differences of opinion as not necessarily representing a failure that requires an apology on the part of the speaker (Kreutel, 2007).

2. The Impact of Power on Expressing Disagreement

In this section, differences between NSs and NNSs with respect to the impact of relative power on expression of disagreements are examined. Table 2A in Table 2 represents the distribution of disagreement strategies when a lower-status person disagrees with a higher-status person's opinion as in the case of (S1+S2). Table 2B represents the distribution of disagreement strategies when a higher-status person disagrees with a lower-status person's opinion as in the case of (S3+S4).

As Table 2A shows, in the situations where one disagrees with a higher-status person, there was a significant difference (X^2=14.00) in the impact of power on expressing disagreement between NSs and NNSs. On the other hand, in Table 2B, in the situations where one disagrees with a lower-status person, there was no significant difference in the impact of power on expressing disagreement between the two groups. This is because the chi-square value obtained (X^2=2.93) is less than the critical value X^2=7.8147 (with df=3, at $p<.05$).

As Table 2A shows, BOR (bald-on-record) strategy was used more frequently by NNSs (50.0%) than NSs (20%), whereas mitigating strategies such as PPS, NPS, and OFF were used more frequently by NSs than NNSs when they disagree to a higher-status person. The results of this research seem to be contradictory to the previous studies at least in three ways.

First, in an educational context, Rees-Miller(2000, p. 1095) argues, the professor has an institutionalized authority to disagree with students based on the professor's responsibility for assigning grades and the professor's academic professionalism. In contrast, students do not have an institutionalized right to disagree since they don't possess the same knowledge as a professor. Conventionally, such an argument can be accepted. However, in reality, when Korean college students these days think the professor's grading is not fair and reasonable, they would take challenge and disagreement for granted. Such a trend seems to be contrary to the traditional Confucian cultural convention emphasizing unconditional submission to the authority of teachers. It can be argued that the factors such as the situational context and the topic of disagreement exert powerful influence on how the politeness strategies of disagreement are selected.

TABLE 2
Disagreement Strategies According to Social Status

Strategies	(Table 2A) L to H				(Table 2B) H to L			
	NS		NNS		NS		NNS	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
(1) BOR								
(1-1)	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	3	8.3
(1-2)	7	20	21	47.7	8	21.1	12	33.3
sub-total	(7)	(20)	(22)	(50.0)	(8)	(21.1)	(15)	(36.1)
(2) PPS								
(2-1)	3	8.6	3	6.8	4	10.5	2	5.6
(2-2)	2	5.7	1	2.3	6	15.8	7	19.4
(2-3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(2-4)	6	17.1	4	9.1	3	7.9	0	0
sub-total	(11)	(31.4)	(8)	(18.2)	(13)	(34.2)	(9)	(25.0)
(3) NPS								
(3-1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(3-2)	6	17.1	2	4.6	4	10.5	6	16.7
(3-3)	6	17.1	5	11.4	7	18.4	5	13.9
(3-4)	0	0	5	11.4	0	0	0	0
sub-total	(12)	(34.3)	(12)	(27.3)	(11)	(30.0)	(11)	(30.6)
(4) OFF								
(4-1)	2	5.7	0	0	2	5.3	2	5.6
(4-2)	3	8.6	0	0	4	10.5	1	2.8
sub-total	(5)	(14.3)	(0)	(0)	(6)	(15.8)	(3)	(8.3)
Total	35		44		38		36	

※ (Table 2A) L to H: Lower to Higher Status (S1+S2)
(Table 2B) H to L: Higher to Lower Status (S3+S4)

Second, Bell's (1998, p. 31) study revealed that the majority (66.6%) of disagreement performed by Korean learners of English were BOR strategy without redress, i.e., "No," "I don't think so." Contrary to Bell's finding, the result of this study revealed, as we can see in Table 2A, that the blunt disagreement (1-1) strategy was used only by 2.3% of Korean students, whereas disagreement with explanation (1-2) strategy was used by as much as 47.7% of them. The reason why such an unexpected result occurred should be rationally interpreted by further studies designed systematically.

Third, the result that NNSs used mitigating strategies such as PPS, NPS, and OFF less frequently than NSs did seems to be contradictory to Bell's (1998) finding that the disagreement of Korean learners of English expressed to a higher-status person tended to

be polite and indirect. The reason why the result of this study investigating the impact of power on disagreement strategies is inconsistent with that of the previous studies should be clarified by further empirical studies.

In this regard, Beebe and Takahashi's (1989, p. 207) results and their comments on the results seem to be informative. In their study, 67% of Japanese ESL speakers used harsher and more direct strategies of disagreement even to the higher-status person, whereas only 33% of the American did. They argue that this data did not seem to confirm the stereotype that Japanese disagreement to the higher-status person should be very polite and hesitant. According to them, one of the reasons why such a surprising result occurs would be that NNSs may have wrongly concluded that softeners and politeness indicators are often not needed in English (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989, p. 215). If their inference of the reason are valid, it would be certainly of great importance to pedagogical implication.

3. Impact of Severity on Expressing Disagreement

In this section the differences between NSs and NNSs in the impact of severity of disagreement on their selecting strategies of disagreements are examined. The severity in this study was determined based on the participants' perception, and was treated as a binary value where the severity of disagreement is either high (S1+S4) or low (S2+S3). Table 3A in Table 3 represents the distribution of disagreement strategies in the case of (S1+S4), where the severity of disagreement is relatively high. Table 3B represents the distribution of disagreement strategies in the case of (S2+S3), where the severity of disagreement is relatively low.

In Table 3A, in the situations where the severity of disagreement is relatively high, there was no significant difference between NSs and NNSs in the impact of severity on expressing disagreement, because the chi-square value obtained (X^2=1.78) is much less than the critical value X^2=7.8147 (with df=3, at $p<.05$). On the other hand, in Table 3B, in the situations where the severity of disagreement is relatively low, there is a significant difference (X^2=20.13) between NSs and NNSs in the impact of severity on expressing disagreement.

TABLE 3
Severity and Disagreement Strategies

Strategies	(Table 3A) S1+S4				(Table 3B) S2+S3			
	NS		NNS		NS		NNS	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
(1) BOR								
(1-1)	0	0	2	4.8	0	0	2	5.4
(1-2)	11	30.6	16	38.1	3	8.3	17	46.0
sub-total	(11)	(30.6)	(18)	(42.9)	(3)	(8.3)	(19)	(51.4)
(2) PPS								
(2-1)	0	0	3	7.1	7	19.4	2	5.4
(2-2)	2	5.6	2	4.8	6	16.7	6	16.2
(2-3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(2-4)	6	16.7	4	9.5	3	8.3	0	0
sub-total	(8)	(22.2)	(9)	(21.4)	(16)	(44.4)	(8)	(21.6)
(3) NPS								
(3-1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(3-2)	6	16.7	4	9.5	4	11.1	4	10.8
(3-3)	6	16.7	3	7.1	7	19.4	6	16.2
(3-4)	0	0	5	11.9	0	0	0	0
sub-total	(12)	(33.3)	(12)	(28.6)	(11)	(30.6)	(10)	(27.0)
(4) OFF								
(4-1)	2	5.6	2	4.8	2	5.6	0	0
(4-2)	3	8.3	1	2.4	4	11.1	0	0
sub-total	(5)	(13.9)	(3)	(7.1)	(6)	(16.7)	(0)	(0)
Total	36		42		36		37	

※ (Table 3A) S1+S4: High Severity

(Table 3B) S2+S3: Low Severity

When we compare differences of using major strategies between NSs and NNSs, the differences in Table 3A, in general, are larger than corresponding differences in Table 3B. For example, the differences of using BOR strategy between two groups in Table 3A and 3B are 12.3 and 43.1 respectively; the differences of using PPS strategy in Table 3A and 3B are 0.8 and 22.8 respectively; the differences of using NPS strategy are very small, and the differences of using OFF strategy in Table 3A and 3B are 6.8 and 16.7 respectively.

These differences of using major strategies between NSs and NNSs seem to reveal that in the situations where the severity of disagreement is relatively high, participants of both groups might have been careful and prudent in expressing disagreement. In contrast, in the situations where the severity of disagreement is relatively low as in the case of

(S2+S3), participants of both groups might have been less prudent in expressing disagreement.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The first research question prompted investigation into the overall differences between NSs and NNSs in expressing disagreement. As seen in Table 1, the results of the present study suggest that there are remarkable distinctions between NSs and NNSs in expressing disagreement. Non-native speakers tended to use mitigation devices such as token agreement (2-1), positive remarks (2-2), offer or promise (2-4), hedges and modality (3-3), hints (4-1), and rhetorical questions (4-2) less frequently than native speakers did. Moreover, in terms of major strategies, native speakers selected mitigating strategies such as PPS, NPS, and OFF more frequently than non-native speakers did.

The second research question prompted investigation into differences between NSs and NNSs in the impact of relative power on expressions of disagreement. Relative power was divided into two categories: In the case depicted in Table 2A, a lower-status person disagrees with a higher-status person's opinion, whereas the reverse case is depicted in Table 2B, i.e., a higher-status person disagrees with a lower-status person's opinion. As the chi-square test indicates, the former case was found to be significant, whereas the latter was insignificant. In other words, the difference in terms of frequency of strategies such as BOR, PPS, NPS, and OFF used by NSs and NNSs is noticeably large in Table 2A, while in Table 2B the difference noticeably less. For example, in Table 2A, 20% of native speakers used the BOR strategy less frequently than non-native speakers (50%) did. In Table 2B, this difference is not as pronounced. Even in using the BOR strategy, most NSs avoided blunt disagreement (1-1), choosing instead the strategy of disagreement with explanations (1-2) because in the educational context, students could not disagree with the professor's evaluation explicitly, i.e., “I don't agree with you”, without explaining why they believed that to be the case.

The third question prompted investigation into differences between NSs and NNSs in the impact of severity of disagreement on their selection of disagreement strategies. Situations (S1+S4) represented more severe situations, whereas situations (S2+S3) were less severe. Relative power was divided into two categories: a lower-status person disagreeing with a higher-status person's opinion (Table 2A) as contrasted with a higher-status person disagreeing with a lower-status person's opinion (Table 2B). As the chi-square test indicates, the former case was found to be insignificant, whereas the latter was statistically significant. In other words, the difference in terms of frequency of strategies such as BOR, PPS, and OFF used by NSs and NNSs is noticeably large in

Table 3B, while in Table 3A the difference is remarkably less so. For example, in Table 3B, native speakers tended to use the strategy of PPS more frequently than did non-native speakers (44.4% as compared to 21.6%, respectively). In Table 3A, this difference narrows. This result suggests that NSs tended to use more polite strategies than NNSs did in the case of less severe situations.

Despite the significance of the results presented herein, this study has several limitations. First, there is a limitation related to the small number of participants involved. Since only 10 NSs and 15 NNSs participated in this study, the extent to which this study is generalizable should be considered with caution. Second, the data used in this study were collected only from written DCT without using actual discourse as an extended sequence of talk-exchange.

Despite the above limitations, however, this study provides at least two important pedagogical implications. First, since even advanced language learners often show a marked imbalance between their grammatical and pragmatic fluency, as Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) maintained, and as disagreement is an inherently face threatening and complex speech act, teaching pragmatic competence in expressing disagreement should be one of the major goals of classroom instruction. To assist students develop pragmatic competence, teachers need to emphasize that the pragmatic competence of expressing disagreement consists of two dimensions: one is to convey clearly the intention of disagreement; and the other is to use mitigating devices to attenuate the threat to another's face. In short, individuals in the educational context tend to be judged on their ability to make a persuasive argument.

Second, to help students develop pragmatic competence, teachers need to make students aware of specific semantic formulas that are necessary to express appropriate disagreement. The most frequently observed semantic formulas for expressing disagreement in American English are positive remarks or expressions of gratitude, partial or token agreement, hedging expressions and various kinds of modality, hints, and rhetorical questions. After helping students become familiar with the frequently used semantic formulas, it is necessary to give students opportunities to practice using them so that they are prepared for actual interactions with native speakers.

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APPENDIX

Discourse Completion Test

Dear Participants!

Thank you for participating in this survey research. I am conducting a study on the speech act of disagreement as used by native and nonnative speakers of English. You are kindly invited to response to the following six situations. Please read the situations and write down what you would say on the lines provided. Please circle the number that corresponds to how seriously the disagreement would invoke embarrassment in the interlocutor (i.e., loss of face). All information you provide will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

General Information:

(1) Gender: Male ( ) or Female ( )

(2) Age: below 20 ( ), 20-25 ( ), 26-30 ( ), over 30 ( )

(3) Your first language ( )

Situation 1 [S1: S<H] <disagreement with a professor>
Your professor questions whether the answer to an assignment question is yours. He says to you, “I’m sorry, but I don’t think the answer is yours. I found the same answer on the internet.” However, it is yours. In response, you would disagree by saying:

“_____
_____”

Please circle the number that corresponds to how seriously this disagreement would threaten loss of face on the part of the professor.
Not even slightly ..... very seriously
1 2 3 4 5

Situation 2 [S2: S<H] <disagreement with a senior person>
You are working on a team project with five of your group members including two senior persons. As the group leader divides the work into five parts, and gives less work to the female members, one of the senior members suddenly blurts out, “It's really unfair. Female students should be treated the same as male students. Why do female members get less work than male members?” However, in your opinion, women are, physically speaking, not as strong as men to do the same amount of work. You disagree by saying:

“_____
_____”

Please circle the number that corresponds to how seriously this disagreement would threaten loss of face on the part of the senior person.
Not even slightly ..... very seriously
1 2 3 4 5

Situation 3 [S3: S>H] <disagreement with your student>
Suppose you are a university professor. In a seminar class on the effect of social network service (SNS), one of your students says, “the so-called SNS has increased active participation in social interactions and communication. It has more positive effects.” Other students seem to agree to this opinion. However, you believe there are more negative effects. People are more indifferent to social activities and have less communication. In response, you disagree by saying:

“_____
_____”

Please circle the number that corresponds to how seriously this disagreement would

threaten loss of face on the part of the student.
Not even slightly ..... very seriously
1 2 3 4 5

Situation 4 [S4: S>H] <disagreement with a junior person>
You are talking about a drama with a younger person, Jenny, over dinner. You think the drama was interesting and the actors were also great. However, Jenny says "that drama was just a tedious melodrama, and I think the actors didn't act well at all." In response, you would disagree by saying:

"_____
_____"

Please circle the number that corresponds to how seriously this disagreement would threaten loss of face on the part of the junior person.
Not even slightly ..... very seriously
1 2 3 4 5

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: College

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