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Linguistic Directness and Complaints in Korean EFL Context

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Complaints have been studied from the major disciplinary perspective which assumes the correlation between linguistic directness and face-threat. Following the interactional approach, however, this study aimed to disentangle linguistic directness from the perceived face-threat. The study investigated the speech act of complaint by comparing the performance of native English speakers and Korean L2 learners in terms of the degree of linguistic directness and explicitness. 32 subjects participated in the study and they were divided into three groups: a group of native English speakers and two groups of Korean l2 learners of different proficiency levels. The questionnaire with a discourse completion task were employed to collect data. The questionnaire gave six complaint situations in which subjects were asked to write their responses. The responses were coded using the taxonomy of linguistic directness proposed by (Decock & Depraetere, 2018). The results showed that there are some discrepancies between native speakers and Korean L2 learners in their performance of complaining and L2 proficiency influenced the overall production of complaints. The findings offer accurate insights into the degrees and types of linguistic directness in complaint speech act across contexts.

[speech act/complaints/linguistic directness/explicitness]

I. INTRODUCTION

Speech acts are the fundamental units of linguistic communication (Searle, 1979). The ability to formulate appropriate speech acts is a major component socio-pragmatic competence because speech acts are the situation in which linguistic forms and social norms are implicated (Manes, 1983). While speech acts themselves are universal, the socio-pragmatic rules determining the appropriate production of speech acts extensively

differ among languages (Allami, 2012; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Golato, 2002; Matsumura, 2001).

Among the speech acts, making complaints is rather complicated because complaints basically involve face-threatening act (Murpy & Neu, 1996). Making complaints appropriately entail the proper selection of linguistic forms and social norms to convey disappointment and at the same time to avoid possible disruption in personal relationship between interlocutors (Murpy & Neu, 1996). For L2 learners, therefore, making appropriate complaints in L2 context may be much more difficult.

Complaints have been studied mainly from pragmatic and intercultural perspectives. Focusing on which discourse strategies are used in realizing complaints, research in the complaint speech act describes how complaints are performed in a specific language or to compare how complaints differ between native speakers and learners of the language. Most of the studies (Boxer, 1993; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Du, 1995; Meinl, 2010; Trosborg, 1995) analyzed complaint speech act using a taxonomy develop by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) which categorized complaints into specific strategies. In general, complaint realization strategies have been categorized by means of the degree of directness or explicitness and the studies assumed that a higher degree of directness of complaint strategies equates to a higher degree of perceived face-threat and indirectness and politeness are correlated (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). Recently, however, a body of work has tried to clarify the notion of directness from the perspective the interactional approach and systematically described the linguistic realizations of complaints to the level of directness (Drew & Walker, 2009; Vasquez, 2011).

Moreover, some researchers have observed that any single speech act including complaints may not be realized in isolation, but rather form a larger speech act set such as advice, suggestions, and warnings (Cohen & Oshtain, 1993, Murphy & Neu, 1996). A speech act set is a combination of speech acts that make up a complete speech act. They noticed that complaints also often occur as a speech act set.

Based on the taxonomy of linguistic directness and the degree of explicitness (Decock & Depraetere, 2018), therefore, the study compared native English speakers and Korean L2 learners' performance of the complaint speech act and whether their L2 proficiency has an effect on the production of complaints. This study also examined to what extent complaints occur as a speech act set in combination of other speech act.

II. COMPLAINT SPEECH ACT

While speech acts are the fundamental units of linguistic forms and pragmatic functions, as opposed to other speech acts, it is not easy to map specific linguistic forms into

functions for complaint. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) explain that complaints occur when a speaker reacts with displeasure to an action that has affected the speaker unfavorably. Complaints indicate that something had happened to the speaker, so fully intentional Wierzbicka (1991). Therefore, the recipient of the complaint is responsible (Edmondson & House, 1981). More broadly, any type of comment with even the slightest negative valence can be treated as complaint (Heinemann & Traverso, 2009) and the speakers may tend not to give an impression that they are making complaints while they are exactly doing that (Edward, 2005). Complaints requires strategies because it has strong potential for disturbing the state of personal relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A complaint may commonly be produced in sequence of piece of praise and something else beginning with 'but' (Sacks, 1992). In this way, complaints often occur as a speech act set (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). That is, like other speech acts, complaints may also be realized by combining two or more discourse strategies, some of which represent other types of speech acts (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Murphy & Neu, 1996). For example, a complaint can be realized by a single utterance or it can combine with other strategies to occur as a speech act set such as a set of complaint and suggestion together.

A dichotomy used to subdivide the complaint strategies is whether the complaint is direct or indirect. Complaints can be made directly or indirectly (Boxer, 1993). A direct complaint involves an explicit or implicit accusation (Clyne, 1994). On the other hand, an indirect complaint is just expression of disappointment not necessarily intended to change the unsatisfactory state and has a function to unload negative effect (Boxer, 1993). With respect to the study of directness in complaint speech act, most work uses 'directness' and 'indirectness' to show how the complaint is linguistically formulated and its politeness effects. Literature on politeness commonly assumed that people tend to use indirect speech and regarded indirect speech acts to be more polite than direct ones, which can be perceived as impolite because they may indicate a lack of concern with face.

Complaint strategies have often been categorized by means of the binary distinction between direct and indirect and a directness scale developed by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995). House and Kasper (1981) classified directness level into eight with level 1 being the most indirect and level 8 the most direct. For House and Kasper, when complaints are more indirect, they are more implicit and have less degree of face-threatening. Trosborg's taxonomy (1995) of complaint strategies is similar to House and Kasper's. She identified eight strategies, with strategy 1 being the most indirect and strategy 8 the most direct one. Though Trosborg (1995)'s taxonomy is more detailed than that of House and Kasper (1981), the overall directness scales in in both House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995) are based on the degree of explicitness and the degree of face-threat. The directness scales for complaints in both House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995) capture the degree of explicitness in terms of an inference process with the

assumption that the more indirect (implicit) complaint strategies involve a more inference process. By equating the degree of directness and the degree of face-threat, complaints have been studied based on the assumptions that the degree of face-threat is inherent in specific linguistic strategies, face-threat is a matter of speaker intention not hearer's, and indirectness and politeness are correlated (Meinl, 2010).

Though the directness scales developed by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995) have been widely adopted in studies on complaint speech act which focus on directness, as Decock and Depraetere (2018) maintained, the speaker-centered approach to speech acts and politeness has also been challenged by scholars (Arundale, 2006; Grainger & Mills, 2016; Haugh, 2007; Locher & Watts, 2005) who advocate a discursive and interactional approach to politeness. They criticize the assumption that face-threat and politeness are mainly related to speaker intention and that politeness and impoliteness are inherent in specific linguistic forms of utterances (Eelen, 2001). Interactional approach to politeness argues that the analysis of interaction includes both speaker intention and hearer evaluation and that meanings are achieved through the collaborative negotiation between the participants in an interaction. Politeness is totally a matter of hearer evaluation and judgement (Fraser & Nolen, 1981). They also problematize the correlation between indirectness and politeness assumed by the directness scales. Studies (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Haugh, 2015; Wierzbicka, 1985) have shown that indirectness is not necessarily a polite strategy and a higher degree of directness does not always indicate a higher degree of impoliteness. Politeness norms differ across cultures because they depend on social and cultural values. Therefore, the evaluation of speech act realizations based on directness and politeness also varies across-culture (Wierzbicka, 1985). Politeness is just one of the interpersonal effects which indirectness or directness can have (Haugh, 2015).

Listeners do not always automatically interpret the literal meanings of linguistic forms of utterance. They use socio-pragmatic knowledge to understand the speakers' implicatures and indirect speech act is not always equal to inferential one which conveys implicatures (Gibbs, 2002; Wilson & Sperber, 2004). Moreover, in certain context of speech acts, conventional indirectness is perceived as more polite than nonconventional indirectness (Blum-Kulka, 1987), though Brown and Levinson (1987) consider conventional indirectness as a negative politeness strategy.

To reassess directness and indirectness, Grainger and Mill (2016) made a distinction between first-order indirectness and second-order indirectness in the perspective of interactional approach. It is first-order indirectness that reflects the interactants' perspectives on indirectness. Second–order indirectness implies the theoretical assessment of indirectness. According to their distinction, the only indirectness is off-record speech because it brings about implicature. Conventional indirectness in taxonomies by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995) is regarded as on-record utterance and excluded from

the theoretical perspective on indirectness. Unlike House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995), the theoretical assessment of directness and indirectness in Grainger and Mill (2016) is based only on explicitness or implicitness not on the scale of face-threat.

Following their theoretical conceptualization of directness, Decock and Depraetere (2018) elaborated the explicitness in more detail and distinguished more than one level of explicitness among the on-record complaint strategies. Decock and Depraetere (2018) argued that directness and indirectness in previous studies on complaints are ambiguous terms, in the sense that they cover explicitness and implicitness which imply illocutionary force and at the same time degree of face-threat which is perlocutionary effect. They maintained that it is necessary to separate the understandings of indirectness from the concept of politeness and further proposed to qualify the term as 'linguistic directness' when the term 'directness' is used to refer to the theoretical assessment of what is implicated not the linguistic forms of the utterance. The degree of linguistic directness is related to explicitness and implicitness. Decock and Depraetere (2018) suggested that when dealing with how the hearers evaluate the realizations of speech act in terms of politeness and face-threat, it is simply 'perceived politeness' and 'perceived face-threat'. When it comes to the analysis of complaints, disentangling the understandings of directness makes it possible to take into account the fact that some realizations of complaints categorized as linguistically indirect might actually be judged by the hearers as impolite or face-threatening. The degree of face threat in complaining utterance can be traced through interactional analysis because it is judged by the hearers not the speakers. It cannot be determined by just examining linguistic directness. Following such insights from the interactional approach which only focuses on the analysis of linguistic directness without making claims about face-threat or politeness, this paper adopted the taxonomy proposed by Decock and Depraetere (2018).

Some research on complaints have maintained that complaints like any other speech act may not be realized by a single strategy but by combining two or more different types of speech acts, and a speech act set is a combination of speech acts that make up a complete speech act (Cohen & Oshtain, 1993; Murphy & Neu, 1996). They observed that one utterance alone does not perform a speech act but several utterances are needed for the accomplishment of the intended illocutionary act as in the case of complaints, invitations and apologies (Murphy & Neu, 1996). Some research on complaints both DCT-based and on-line interaction (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; Vasquez, 2011) suggested that complaints frequently occur with other speech acts such as suggestions, advices, warnings, and threats. Thus, the present study also takes up the question of the extent to which other speech acts tend to occur with complaints.

Most of previous studies on complaints in both L1 context and intercultural context (Boxer, 1993; Clyne, 1994; Hermanno, 2009; Laforest, 2002; Li, Zheng, & Yang 2006;

Min, 2020; Tanck, 2002; Yuan, 2007; Zhang, 2001) adopted taxonomies of complaint strategies based on the binary distinction of direct and indirect, and different directness levels. Among those, two directness scales developed by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995) have proven highly influential in work on complaints. On the assumption that complaining intrinsically involves face-threatening act, the studies used the terms 'directness' and 'indirectness' to indicate differences in linguistic features of complaints and politeness. While there is growing body of research on complaint speech acts across cultures, the study on complaints from the interactional approach remains scant except Decock and Depraetere (2018) and Vasquez (2011). Decock and Depraetere (2018) reassessed the notion of directness as a tool for the analysis of complaint strategies and offer accurate insights into degrees and types of linguistic directness based on extensive data analysis of CMC business complaints. They divided complaint strategies into six categories in terms of linguistic directness which means explicitness and the criteria for linguistic directness is concrete and operational for data analysis. No claims with regard to face-threat and politeness were made in their analysis. In order to determine the extent to which CMC complaints display some of the defining characteristics of complaints as identified by previous research, Vasquez (2011) found that complaints tend to occur as a speech act set and co-occur with other speech acts such as warnings or advice. She also showed that while majority of the complaints can be considered indirect complaints, there were some examples that blur the direct and indirect dichotomy.

Focusing on some of the features of complaints, as identified in the aforementioned studies (linguistic directness, implicitness, complaints as a speech act set), the present study was guided by the following research questions.

1. To what extent the use of complaint strategies is different between Korean L2 learners and native English speakers in terms of linguistic directness?
2. What is the relationship, if any, between Korean L2 learners' proficiency and their production of complaints?
3. What is the extent to which complaints occur as a speech act set in combination with other speech acts?

III. METHODS

1. Participants

Total of 32 subjects participated in this study. They consisted of 22 Koran L2 learners of English from two universities in Korea and 10 native English speakers. Korean participants

were composed of both undergraduate and graduate students from various majors including English and they were between twenty and twenty eight in their age. They have been learning English between eight to fourteen years. Their experiences of studying abroad in English speaking nations ranged from four to twenty three months. Six students have not been to any English speaking nations. They were divided into two proficiency levels. Based on the Oxford Placement Test, 11 students with high level and 11 with low level of English proficiency were chosen for the study. Native speakers consisted of eight Americans and two Canadians who were aged between 27 and 34 and teaching as full-time instructors in universities in Korea. They self-identified as Standard English speakers. There was no age-limit set for the participants since age was not considered to the concern of the study.

2. Instruments and Data

The data for this study consisted of responses elicited by the written questionnaire in a form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The issue of how data are gathered is one of the main concerns in intercultural approaches. Though more ethnomethodologically informed approaches have focused on naturally occurring talk in interaction, pragmatic approaches still tend to rely on data elicited via DCT because of the effectiveness of DCT form. The DCT yields a large number of responses and is easy to assess and even create an initial classification of semantic formula and strategies that will occur in natural conversation. It can control various variables such as status and gender and establish cross-culturally significant differences. Thus, DCT questionnaire was used for the study and modified for naturalness and cultural familiarity by two Korean colleagues and one native speaker. Six prompts were adapted and modified from Olshtain and Weinbach (1993).

TABLE 1

Description of Each Situation

Situations	Social power	Social distance
1. Sister opened the personal letter	-P	-D
2. Stranger cutting the line	-P	+D
3. Boss's bad review	+P	-D
4. Professor's unreasonable grading	+P	-D
5. Food not fresh in Restaurant	+P	+D
6. Neighbor playing loud music	-P	+D

The complaining situations were set up according to variables involving power relation and social distance. Power relation involves the discrepancy in social status between the interactors. Social distance means the degree of intimacy between the participants. The

participants were given enough time and instructed to produce responses in each situation freely so that they can give proper responses that they find most likely to produce in each situation of complaints. The data were coded based on work by Decock and Depraetere (2018). The six prompts were in the Appendix. Each of the complaining situations can be defined as in Table 1 above.

3. Data Analysis

The data collected through DCT questionnaire was categorized and analyzed based on the complaint taxonomy proposed by Decock and Depraetere (2018). Adopting the definition of complaints from Trosborg (1995) and Meinl (2010), Decock and Depraetere (2018) described the contextual situation of complaints as follows: the complainer disapproves of a past or ongoing action or occurrence which does not conform to his or her expectations and interests; the consequences of this action or occurrence are at cost to the complainer, who holds the complainee responsible for the perceived offence and who wants the complainee to remedy the perceived offence in some way. Although there are cross-cultural variations in the type of complaint reasons, the features of linguistic realizations of complaints, and perceptions of the complaint realization, Decock and Depraetere (2018) considered the definition to be cross-culturally valid. The four constitutive components of the complaint situation are described as follows:

(A) a past or ongoing action or occurrence
(B) the disapproval or negative evaluation of the complainable
(C) the assumed agentive involvement of the complainee
(D) the wish for the offence to be remedied

The taxonomy distinguishes six categories between implicit and explicit complaint strategies (category 1 vs. categories 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) and the distinction between categories 2 to 6 being based on whether there is an explicit reference to the speech act or an explicit reference to at least one of the constitutive components of the complaint situation. Decock and Depraetere's(2018) six categories based on the linguistic directness are as follows.

Category 1: Hint or implicit complaint
When there is no specific reference to the speech act, but all our constitutive components of the complaint situation are implicated, the complaint is realized off-record as a hint. In this case, only the complaint situation gives clue to a complaint being performed.

Category 2: Explicit reference to the complaint speech act
If a complaint is realized through a reference to the speech act by using a word that designates the complaint, the complaint is realized on-record. This explicit reference is generally supplemented with one or more of the constitutive components of the complaint. The more constitutive components the speaker adds, the more linguistically direct the complaint is rated

Category 3: One constituent component
This strategy includes complaint realizations in which only one constituent component of the complaint situation is expressed on-record.

Category 4: Two constitutive components
This category comprises complaint realizations in which two of four constitutive components of the complaint situation are communicated on-record.

Category 5: Three constitutive components
It is possible to communicate three constitutive elements of the complaint situation on-record.

Category 6: All four constitutive components
This strategy comprises complaint realizations in which all four constitutive components of a complaint situation are expressed on-record.

The six categories are defined in terms of linguistic directness, that is the degree of explicitness. In natural spoken data, complaints are frequently realized interactionally over the course of several turns. In the case of this DCT questionnaire data, however, the initial complaints, which are the first turn in the complaint interactions, were categorized according to their degree of linguistic directness.

In order to account for the stylistic differences in the linguistic realization of the constitutive elements in complaint situation, this study also paid attention to the different speech acts which are used to realize the component parts of the complaints. Because complaints often co-occur with speech acts such as warnings, threats, or advice depending on the context (Vasquez, 2011), this procedure of analysis also deserves attention once the complaints have been classified in one of the different categories of linguistic directness.

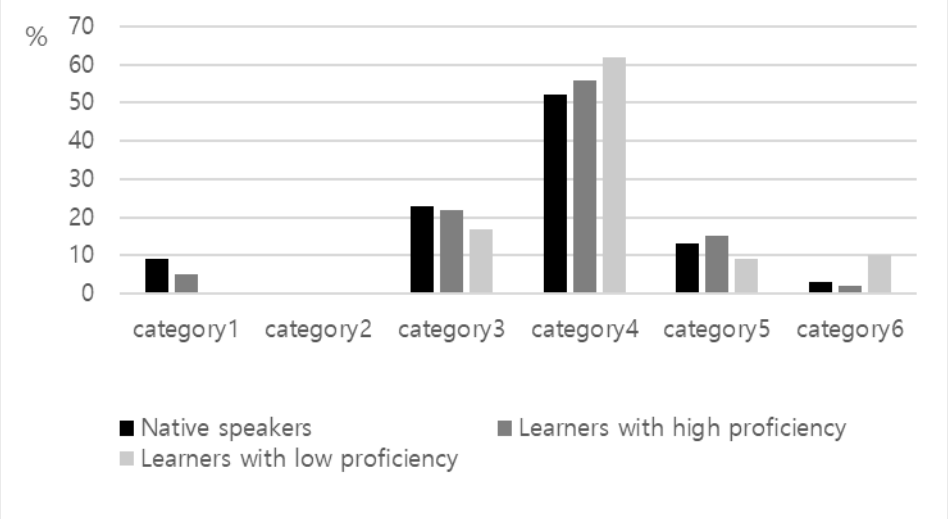
IV. RESULTS

1. Linguistic Directness

The graphic representation of the categories of complaint strategy in Figure 1 below demonstrates the distribution of the categories in all situations for both native speakers and Korean L2 learners.

FIGURE 1

Distribution of the Categories Used in Complaints



Overall, the results show that the native speakers and the groups of Korean L2 learners were different in the realizations of complaints. The complaints by native speakers were realized off-record (category 1), as a hint, so in a fully implicit way much more frequently than those of Korean L2 learners, as in '*I don't think I will leave my letters on the table again*', '*I have to go to bed'*, '*I have an exam tomorrow', 'I'll take summer course', 'I lost my appetite already'*. A list of similarities was identified in explicit complaint strategies by native speakers and Korean L2 learners. Among all the explicit strategies, category 4 was the most preferable strategy by both native speakers and Korean L2 learners. The two groups most often made complaints by communicating two out of four constitutive components of the complaint situation on-record. The two components communicated explicitly can be the complainable (A) and disapproval of the complainable (B) as in '*Look! I'm sick and tired of this, look at this'*, '*I feel terribly embarrassed about your review',* the complainable (A) and the agentive involvement of the complainee (C), '*Oh,*

you opened my letter', 'Why did you open my letter?' 'Why did you do that?' 'Excuse me, my steak tasted spoiled' or the complainee (A) and the wish for the offence to be remedied (D), '*Excuse me, the end of line is back there', 'The line starts back there!*' by native speakers and '*Please behind with us', 'Can you go behind the end of the line?', 'Please don't cult in line'* by L2 learners.

This was followed by category 3 which comprises complaint realizations in which only one constitutive element of the complaint situation is communicated on-record. Only the complainable (A) can be communicated explicitly, as in '*My letter is open'*, '*Did you open my letter?*' *Somebody opened my letter!*' '*What happened to my note?*' '*What's going on here?*' *'I'm so sad to have this grade*', '*This is unfair*'.

Moreover, both native speaker group and Korean learner group never produced complaints by explicitly referring to the speech act of complaint and even though this explicit complaint strategy, which belongs to category 2, can often be complemented with other complaint strategies by referring to one or more of the constitutive elements of the complaint. This type of complaint realization through the explicit words of complaint such as '*claim*', '*disapprove*', or '*complain*' seems to be typical of more formal and business context rather than in informal everyday interactions.

The variables of power and distance showed an effect on the two groups' use of complaint strategies. Both native speakers and Korean L2 learners had a tendency to be more indirect when talking to people at a higher social status such as a boss and a professor. In addition, some modifiers such as *unfortunately, despite, though* were used when talking to an unfamiliar interlocutor.

However, the groups of Korean L2 learners tended to deviate from native speakers in their use of complaint strategies. Some utterances by Korean L2 learners of low proficiency were found to be criticizing rather than complaining such as '*I think we have to talk about to clarify some points'*, '*What's wrong with me?', 'The review is not fair at all*'. The linguistic structures of these sentences do not reflect formality towards the person in a higher position. In addition, even the same complaint strategy is realized by both groups, the learner groups tended to complain more confrontational ways than the group of native speakers as in '*I'd like to know why I deserve the bad review'*, '*What' wrong with me?*', '*I want you to write another one for me, if it is okay with you*'. While native speaker group never produced negative assessment of the complainee as a person, some L2 learners of low proficiency gave negative assessment as in '*You are not fair'*, '*I think you are wrong'*, '*You are irresponsible*'.

Among all the categories of explicit complaint, the Korean group of high proficiency was closer to the native speaker group in that they made complaints off-record, in fully implicit way (5%) which is the fourth preferable strategy by native speaker group. None of the group of low proficiency produced complaints off-record.

Out of all categories used, the learner group of high proficiency produced 15% category 5 in which a complainer chooses to communicate three constitutive components of the complaint situation on-record. This number slightly exceeded the group of native speakers by 2% and low proficiency group by 6%. The three elements communicated explicitly can be the complainable (A), the agentive involvement of the complainee (C), and the wish for the offence to be remedied (D), as in '*If you could still write it for me, that would be great*', *'I was wondering if you could turn down the music a little bit', 'I hope you will return it today'*, even by voicing a threat '*If you open my letter again, I won't trust you anymore!',* or the combination of the complainable (A), the disapproval of the complainable (B) and complainee (C), as in '*I'd like to talk with you about this to clarify it', 'You shouldn't have opened my letter', 'I was wondering if you could turn down the music a little bit'.*

While some L2 learners chose to opt out when they made complaints such as '*I'd like to know my weak points and improve it because I really like this course', 'I'll try to improve my argument, thank you for your feedback*' in situation where the speaker voiced his discontent with the grade in his term paper, native speaker group never produced the strategy of opting out in this situation. In addition, the complaint strategy category 6 in which the complainer communicate all four constitutive elements of complaint situation on-record was not preferable among the native speakers and learner group of high proficiency (3% and 2% each). However, the learner group of low proficiency employed this strategy more (10 %) as in '*It's not okay, don't open my letter again'*, '*Hey, this is not good, please don't cut in line*', '*You've been disturbing me all night. I wonder if you could turn down the music*'.

It is also noticeable that the learner group, particularly the low proficiency group, had some problems in using diverse linguistic forms to realize communicative functions. For instance, the group of low proficiency never produced complaints using past tense modal verb in the conditional sentence as was found in complaints by many native speakers and some learners of high proficiency as in '*I you could still write it for me, that would be great'*, '*If you could turn down the music, that would be wonderful', 'I was wondering if you could give a second thought'*. The sentence structures of '*Do you think you could give me another chance?*' as a consultative device were never produced by the learner group of low proficiency. The group relied much on the use of word '*please*' as an initiator of complaints as in '*Please, go to the back'*, even though it is not proper use for the situation of complaint.

In addition, most of the native speakers made complaints with 'excuse me' as an initiator of the complaints in situation 2 where they made complaints to a stranger for cutting in line as in '*Excuse me, the line starts back there'*, and '*Excuse me, the end of line is back there'*. In contrast, all of the learner group of low proficiency and some of high proficiency used '*please*' and '*I'm sorry'* as initiators for complaining. None of the native speakers produced

the two expression when they made complaints in the same situation. '*I'm sorry'* expresses the relationship between the speaker and the hearer (Borkin & Reinhart, 1978). Therefore, '*I'm sorry'* is used when the speaker is concerned about the damage of the hearer's feelings or the violation of his rights. On the other hand, 'excuse me' basically expresses the relationship between the speaker and the pragmatic rules in the context (Borkin & Reinhart, 1978). Consequently, if the speaker wants to fix the violation of pragmatic rule in the specific situation of the past or the future, '*excuse me'* is more appropriate. The main function of '*please*' is making offers or requests (White, 1993). That is why the use of 'please' as the initiator of complaint sounds quite inappropriate.

2. Complaint as a Speech Act Set

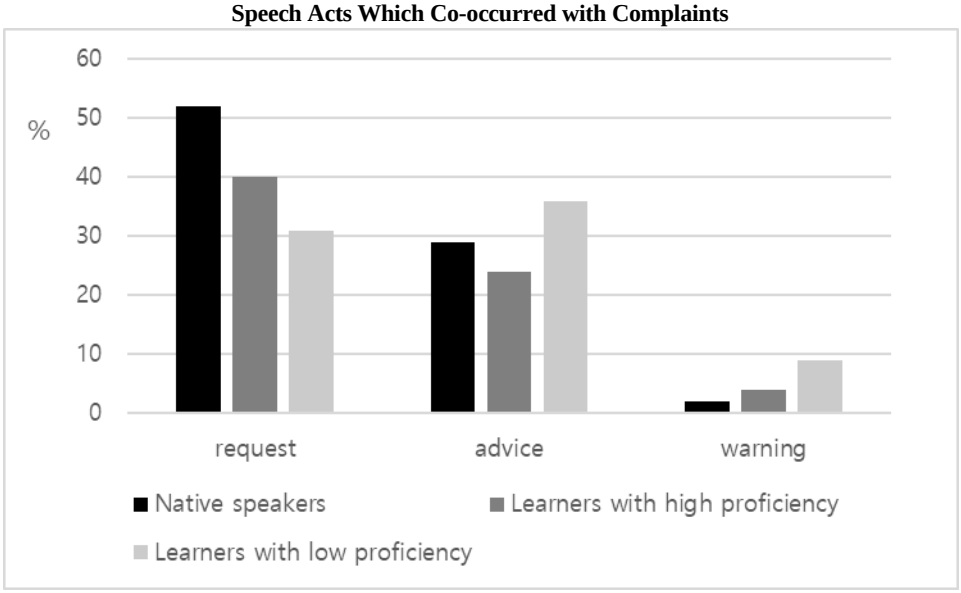
As for the third research question, 'what is the extent to which complaints occur as a speech act set in combination with other speech acts?', the analysis of complaints by both native speaker group and Korean L2 learner group indicated that very often, complaints do not occur in isolation, but rather form part of a larger speech act set, which include advice, request, suggestions, expressive, assertion. The constitutive components of complaint situation were often realized through different speech acts. What follows is not an exhaustive account, but rather a brief exploration of the aforementioned performatives.

The complainable (A) can be realized by simply asserting or describing it as in '*My letter was open'*, '*Somebody opened my letter'*, '*There's something wrong in my grade'* (assertion); by requesting more information regarding the act or situation '*What is the weak point of my work*?', '*Let me know the weak points in my argument'* (request). Disapproval (component B) can be realized by voicing an insult '*I've made every efforts for you for five years, but I didn't get promoted*', '*I gave it my all, but couldn't make it'* (expressive); by negative evaluation *'Should I perhaps look for another job, as I couldn't get promoted thanks to you*!'. Agentive involvement of the complainee (component C) can be expressed by using question forms '*Why did you do that?*', '*Why did you open my letter?*', '*Why did you give me such a bad review?*' (interrogation) or by asserting '*You opened my letter'*, '*You gave me terrible review', 'You cut in the line'* (assertion). The wish for the offence to be remedied (component D) can be articulated through a request '*Could you turn down the music?*', '*How can I possibly improve my writing?*', '*Would you stop doing this?*'; or through a warning as in '*If you open my letters again, I will never trust you anymore'*, '*If this happens again, I won't allow this'*. The data aforementioned confirm that complaints are often realized through a combination of different speech acts (Vasquez, 2011).

The speech acts which co-occurred with complaints across groups are presented in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

Speech Acts Which Co-occurred with Complaints



As presented in Figure 2, the results show that requests are the most frequently occurring speech acts used to realize the components of the complaints or co-occurred with the complaints in both native speaker group and Korean learner group of high proficiency. The group of low proficiency produced more direct advice mostly in the form of imperatives such as '*Go back to the line', 'Please go back to the line', 'Please turn down the music'*. This doubled the total used by the learner group of high proficiency and native speaker group. A few warnings occurred in the utterances from native speakers and the learner group of high proficiency, but these were not as frequently expressed as the aforementioned speech acts. However, the group of low proficiency deviated from the two groups in their more frequent use of warning when they made complaints.

V. DISCUSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the taxonomy of linguistic directness and the degree of explicitness, this study investigated the complaint speech act by comparing the performance of native English speakers and Korean L2 learners to find out to what extent the use of complaint strategies is different between the two groups and whether the learners' L2 proficiency has an effect on the production of complaints. Following some insights (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Murphy & Neu, 1996) that any single speech act may not be realized in isolation, but

rather form a larger speech act set, this study also examined how the different speech acts are used to realize complaints by native speakers and Korean L2 learners.

The previous taxonomies of complaint strategies (House & Kasper, 1981; Trosborg (1995) assumed the correlation between linguistic directness and politeness. It is true that the choice of linguistic form used to realize a constitutive component and the degree of explicitness, and the level of face-threat cannot be totally separated because it is highly possible that certain ways of making complaints are more possibly to be perceived as face-threat. However, since there is no one-to-one relation between linguistic directness and perceived face-threat. Face-threatening and politeness can only be judged and evaluated by the hearers. Therefore, this study made no claims with regard to face-threat and politeness. Following some insights from the interactional approach which only focuses on the analysis of linguistic directness without making claims about face-threat or politeness, this study adopted different categorization proposed by Decock and Depraetere (2018). Focusing on levels of linguistic directness, which denotes the degree of explicitness, the complaints were analyzed based on the six categorization of complaint strategies.

The results of analysis showed that the realization of complaints by Korean L2 learners of high proficiency was closer to that of the group of native speakers in terms of linguistic directness. But the learner group of low proficiency was found to be deviated from the group of native speakers. The study found that while the majority of the complaints can be considered linguistically direct, there were nevertheless some examples that blur the exact boundary in the directness category. This study also found that complaints often occurred as a larger speech act set, and complaints tended to co-occur more frequently with requests rather than other types of speech acts such as warnings or threats in the native speaker group and the learner group of high proficiency. However, the group of low proficiency produced more direct advice mostly in the form of imperatives.

With respect to the study's limitation, it is important to point out that the present study analyzed a small data of complaints in the form of DCT. Therefore, the findings of this study clearly cannot be extended to all complaints, nor should they even be extended to different register and genre. In addition, this study suggests another limitation of working with DCT data where the issues related to 'authenticity' or 'reliability' abound.

Turning back from larger methodical issues to the discourse-pragmatic features that comprised the focus of the present study, previous work on complaints mixed up linguistic directness and perceived face-threat and suggested linguistic directness correlates with politeness; more indirect realization of complaints is perceived as less face-threatening, which results in inaccurate cross-linguistic and cross-cultural claims. Admittedly, the analysis of complaints based on linguistic directness can serve as a useful tool for the categorization and analysis of complaints across cultures in a sense that it respects the generally acknowledged distinction in linguistics between function and form. Form refers

to the linguistic realization of the complaints and function to its effect on the complainee. Thus, this study is more in tune with current theoretical and methodological advances in pragmatic research. This is a necessary step to arrive at a better understanding of strategies used to realize complaint speech act. Inevitably, it needs to be complemented with a detailed stylistic analysis of the each strategy or category of complaint in the future. In addition, the analysis of perceived face-threat from the interactional or perceptional approach will be necessary to delve into how complaints are perceived with regard to politeness and face-threatening.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Language: English
Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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