

# Gender Differences in Complaint Strategies among Iranian Upper Intermediate EFL Students

Leila Nasiri Kakolaki<sup>1</sup> & Mohsen Shahrokhi<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

\* Mohsen Shahrokhi, E-mail: shahrokhi1651@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

*The goal of this research was to know the differences between the strategies used by male and female upper intermediate EFL learners in complaining. Various studies suggest that the way men and women speak is different. Women are considered to be more polite than men. The present study investigated the differences of complaining realizations between Iranian EFL men and women students. A number of 60 (30 males and 30 females) upper intermediate students were selected based on their performance on a general proficiency test administered by the institute's authorities to participate in the study. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The responses were analyzed based on Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) taxonomy. The study revealed that there was a difference between men and women in realizing the complaining speech act. Men used very direct complaint more frequently compared to women who used indirect complaints the most. The present study found gender has an influence on the choice of complaining strategies and politeness.*

## **Keywords**

*complaint, gender, DCT (Discourse Completion Test), speech act, politeness*

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Rationale of the Study*

The communicative aspect of the language can be said to be realized as “pragmatic competence”, which refers to the ability to perform language functions in a context. Pragmatics is simply the study of meaning in interaction. The concept of speech acts, one of the key areas of pragmatics, was first proposed by Austin (1962) who stated that “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action” (p. 5). This implies that utterances convey a speaker's intention that can have an effect on the interlocutors. According to Austin, utterances are locutionary acts, intents are illocutionary acts, and the effects of the utterances are perlocutionary acts.

Searle (1969) argued that the illocutionary aspect of an utterance, or a “speech act” was the basic linguistic unit of communication and meaning. Therefore, based on Austin's definition, Searle refined and further developed the speech act theory. Searle (1976) divides illocutionary acts into five major classes: “representatives” (e.g., claiming, swearing), which represent a state of affairs and denote the

identification of the speaker to commit himself to the truth of the expressed proposition; “Commissives” (e.g., promising), which obligate the speaker to carry out a future action; “Directives” (e.g., ordering, requesting, forbidding), which are intended to get the hearer to take a particular action; “Expressives” (e.g., apologizing, complaining), which project the speaker’s feelings or attitudes; “Declaratives” (e.g., resigning, appointing), which bring about or change the state of affairs they name.

According to Tanck (2002), the speech act of complaint occurs when a speaker reacts with displeasure or annoyance to an action that has affected him/her in an unfavorable manner. It is believed that complaint is a face-threatening act to the hearer; therefore, it should be made cautiously by the speaker in order not to hurt the hearer’s feelings and hence impair the relationships between them (Moon, 2001).

Moon (2001) concludes that nonnative speakers do not always make complaints following the appropriate ways of native speaker’s complaints. They tend to make complaints in a more explicit way, whereas native speakers use more implicit ways of complaints.

When making complaints, people often use indirect strategies in order not to offend the other party and to avoid being impolite, rude or disrespectful (Wannurk, 2005). Because of the lack of sufficient socio-pragmatic knowledge of the second language, complaining becomes even more difficult for the non-native speakers of a second language. Yamagashira (2001) states that if nonnative speakers do not know how to make complaints in a second language, it is assumed that they will use their own language strategies and, consequently, misunderstandings occur.

Direct Complaint (DC) is a face-threatening act through which a speaker makes complaints about someone or something that is present in the speech act scene (Murphy & Neu, 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993). Indirect Complaint (IC) or griping, on the other hand, can be described as a non-face-threatening speech act in which the responsible party or object of the complaint is not present during the interaction within which the speech act is performed (D’Amico-Reisner, 1985). Both direct and indirect complaints have the potential of leading to lengthy interactions between speaker and addressee; however, it is usually in the indirect complaint or griping that one finds conversational material upon which shared beliefs and attitudes may be expressed (Tatsuki, 2000). As such, the indirect complaint becomes a solidarity-building device since it freely invokes the listener to engage in a series of commiserative responses to demonstrate attention and concern, or to maintain intimacy and stable social relationships.

Language and gender theorists including Cameron (1995, 1996) have advocated the need for the definition of a new theoretical perspective, which adequately accounts for the difference between male and female speech patterns. Sex is biologically determined whereas gender is a social construct involving a set of psychological social phenomena and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is the differences of the character, function and responsibility of both men and women. Men and women are different. They are the same species in the different worlds, either the style on interaction, values or rules. It is thought that women are regarded as a subordinate or less powerful

group than men in many communities and not surprisingly this is not often reflected in the different politeness devices used by and addressed to women. Gender represents probably the most important division in society. We use gender to refer to the social and psychological phenomenon associated with being feminine or masculine as these concepts are defined in a given culture.

Both men and women have their own characteristics including their speech. It can be seen that women are more responsive than the men are and men tend to give delayed response to their interlocutor. Studies of language and gender have returned repeatedly to the question of how the language used by men and women reinforce their respective positions in society. Women are maintained in a subordinate position, it has been argued, because they are socialized to adopt powerless patterns of speech; and conversely men maintain their dominance by the use of verbal strategies associated with power. The propensity of men to interrupt women more than women interrupt men may be seen in these terms. According to Pease and Barbara (2001), male awareness is concerned with getting results, achieving goals, status and power, beating the competition and getting efficiently to the bottom line.

The men tend to be interested in something that makes them get status and power. If it doesn't have the beneficial for them, they tend to give delay responses to their interlocutor. Gender difference can be analyzed in terms of topic, amount of talk and purpose of talking and speech acts. The different conversational strategies of men and women are studied by analyzing their use of interruption, agreeable and disagreeable response, hedges and boosters and the use of questions to demonstrate that women tend to be more polite than men.

The speech act analysis of male and female complaint will be one of the interesting research lines. There has been much research about the speech act of complaining but a little attention has been paid to gender difference aspect of it. Therefore, the study investigates the extent to which Iranian Upper Intermediate EFL learners are able to realize complaints to fulfill their communicative needs. Moreover, as Russell (1996) reports the relationship between the interlocutors, including the gender, determines the way a complaint is realized. Accordingly, the other concern of this study is to examine whether the gender of Iranian EFL interlocutors influences their complaint strategies in Men to Men (M-M) interaction, Men to Women (M-W) interaction, Women to Women (W-W), and Women to Men (W-M) interaction.

### *1.2 Research Questions*

This piece of research attempts to examine complaint strategies used by male and female and the degree of politeness in the realization of complaint. Therefore, it aims to seek answers to the following questions:

RQ1: is there any significant difference between male and female Iranian upper Intermediate EFL students in terms of complaint speech act components use?

RQ2: to what extent the gender of Iranian upper Intermediate EFL students affect the degree of politeness perception as regards complaint strategies?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

The sample of Iranian EFL learners consisted of a number of 60 language learners (30 males and 30 females) studying upper intermediate level at Iran Language Institute (ILI) in Esfahan, Iran. The level of language proficiency of *the participants* was determined by the Institute itself through the administration of a placement test. In order to ensure greater internal validity, only 24 to 30 aged informants were included.

### 2.2 Instruments and Data

The data for this study were collected through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire (See Appendix A). Beebe and Cummings (1995) acknowledge that the advantages of the DCT include gathering a large amount of data quickly, classifying stereotypical semantic formulas and strategies, and acquiring insights into the social and psychological elements which may affect speech act performances. DCT data also possess the quality of further manipulation and allows us to make comparisons and generalize findings based on quantitative data. In fact, Kasper and Rose (2002) indicates that DCT is an effective data collection instrument when the objective of the investigation is to inform the speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategic and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented, and about their sociopragmatic knowledge of the context factors under which particular strategies and linguistic choices are appropriate.

Twelve situations were given to participants in written form based on relative social power and social distance. The situations were designed while differing in terms of intimacy among people involved, whether they were acquaintances and strangers and according to social power, whether the speaker had a higher rank or social position, lower rank, or equal rank compared to the addressee. Ogiermann (2009, p. 32) argues "in order to be able to test the influence of social power and social distance on strategy choice, the DCT had to include scenarios based on equal and unequal power (-P & +P) combined with low and high social distance (-D & +D)". In DCT, -P denotes a relationship between people of equal status, the variable +P indicates that one of the interlocutors is socially superior to the other.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts:

- 1) A section for collecting biographic information about the participants.
- 2) Twelve sections each of which involves a situation which requires a complaint.

In this study, informants were asked to fill out the open-ended questionnaire directly in the institute. The informants were supposed to read the situations, consider themselves in the situations and write down their normal reactions. The respondents were asked to write their answers in English as the questionnaire is.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

The realizations of complaining strategies in this study were analyzed by using Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) model. Rinnert and Nogami (2006), propose the investigation of complaint speech acts could be

conducted from three perspectives: main component (initiator, complaint, request), level of directness (indirect, somewhat direct, very direct), and amount of mitigating.

(a) Main component:

- 1) Initiator (greetings, address terms, and other opening formulas). For example: “Excellency, why are you acting in a discriminatory way?”
- 2) Complaints (expressions of negative evaluation, including justification). For example: “You are so inconsiderate”.
- 3) Request (direct/indirect attempts to get the hearer to remedy the situation). For example: “I look daggers at him and tell him to be careful while walking”.

(b) Level of directness:

- 1) Indirect (no explicit mention of offense, implied offense only). For example: “I call him and let him know that he cannot get success if he doesn’t attend the class”.
- 2) Somewhat direct (mention of offense, but no mention of the hearer’s responsibility). For example: “You made me angry”.
- 3) Very direct (explicit mention of offense and hearer’s responsibility for it). For example: “You took my time, you are responsible for my delay to the conference”.

(c) Amount of mitigation (counting the softening expressions, e.g., “a little, sort of, you know, would/could, I think/I wonder”). For example: “I think the mark is a little bit low”.

The researchers started by tabulating the strategies used by the participants in order to identify the complaint strategies they used. The tabulation of the results made it possible for the researchers to determine the strategies used and whether or not Rinnert and Nogami’s (2006) model applies to Iranian respondents. It further helped to clarify whether or not gender has an effect since previous research had reported that females are more polite than males are.

The data were submitted to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis including frequency and chi square test. The frequency analyses were conducted to identify the percentage of complaint strategies used by male and female speakers. Then the data were classified into three main categories of very direct, somewhat direct, and indirect, and again frequencies of use of these three main categories of complaint strategies were calculated. Chi square test was performed in order to establish whether the differences in the frequency of strategies made by subjects were statistically significant. In order to find out if there were any relationship between the complaint strategies and the gender of the respondents Cramer’s (V) statistical procedure was conducted.

### **3. Findings**

#### *3.1 Investigating the First Hypothesis*

The first hypothesis of the present study which was formulated based on the first question was that “The complaint strategies used by male and female Iranian upper Intermediate EFL students are the same”. The following steps were taken in order to test the hypothesis and find the answer to the first

research question of the study. First, the answers of the respondents to the DCT were summarized based on Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) classifications of complaint strategies, and tabulated in Table 1 and Table 2. As stated earlier, it was intended to investigate the possible differences between male and female EFL learners in using complaint strategies; to this end, having gathered the DCTs, the data were categorized in terms of the respondent's gender.

**Table 1. Percentages of Complaint Components Based on Rinnert and Nogami's (2006) Classification Used by Male and Female Participants**

Complaint speech act components	Male	Female
	percentage	percentage
Initiator	13.51%	29.48%
Complaints	64.86%	58.97%
Request for remedy	21.62%	12.16%

*Note:* The percentage numbers are rounded to two decimal.

According to the statistics presented in Table 1, complaints made up 64.86% of males data and 58.97% of females. The component of complaint according to Rinnert and Nogami (2006) included items such as expressions of negative evaluation, including justification. When somebody complains about something, it means that some limitations have exceeded. Therefore, the interlocutors tend to justify the occurred exceeding.

The reason why complaint component was used more frequently by EFL learners was due to the fact that this strategy is considered the main device to express complaint. The second component used by male learners was the component of "Request for remedy" with 21.62% for males; however, the percentage of using this component by females was 12.16%. Instances of this class are items such as direct/indirect attempts to get the hearer to remedy the situation. The following discourse can be considered as an example of this component: "I look daggers at him and tell him to be careful while walking".

Men seem to have higher authority; therefore, they may take the control and ask for a remedy, and this leads to higher usage of this strategy by men. The component "Initiator" registered 13.51% by male; this component was used roughly twice by female learners 29.48%. Initiators include items like greetings and address terms. An example of this component can be seen in this sentence: "Excellency, why are you acting in a discriminatory way?"

In general, female learners tend to open conversations first, and carrying out the speech act of complaint is not an exception of this rule. Due to this fact, the female learners chose this component more than male learners.

The descriptive data shown in Table 1 indicates that the frequency and percentage of the realization of

complaint speech act components between male and female learners are not equally distributed. However, still we were not sure whether the difference was statistically significant or not. In order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the issue under question regarding the difference between male and female learners in terms of complaint components, the chi-square test was run. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Chi-Square Tests among Components of Complaint Strategies by Male and Female Learners**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.000 <sup>a</sup>	4	.199
Likelihood Ratio	6.592	4	.159
N of Valid Cases	3		

<sup>a</sup> 9 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

According to the figures given in Table 2 the significance level is 0.199, which is higher than the observed level of significance ( $.05 < .199$ ). This tells us that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female learners in terms of complaint components use.

Based on the results, the answer to the first question was that Iranian male and female EFL learners make use of the same components while conducting the speech act of complaint. Although, there were some differences in the frequency of the components used by the two genders, the difference was not statistically significant.

### *3.2 Investigating the Second Hypothesis*

In the study in hand, the second hypothesis which was based on the second research question stated that “The gender of Iranian upper Intermediate EFL students does not affect the degree of politeness perception as regards complaint strategies”. In order to check the level of male and female’s politeness when realizing a complaint speech act, two factors were taken into account; first the level of directness, and two the amount of mitigation. The former assumes that the more indirect a complaint is realized, the more polite it would be. The latter assumes that mitigation can soften the face threatening nature of a complaint make it more face-saving; consequently, mitigated complaints could be more polite.

The required data were gathered through the DCTs and they are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3. Percentages of Levels of Directness in Complaint Strategies Used by Male and Female Participants**

Complaint directness	Male	Female
	percentage	percentage
Indirect	8.69%	44.44%
Somewhat direct	19.56%	36.58%
Very direct	71.73%	22.22%
total	100%	100%

According to the statistics presented in Table 3, 44.44% of the female participants have chosen to be indirect while complaining, while only 8.69% of male participants contended to be indirect when they want to complaint. On the other hand, 71.73% of the male participants chose to be very direct, while only 22.22% of the female participants believed in being very indirect while complaining. 19.56% of the male participants said that they may complain somewhat directly, while 36.58% of the female participants stated they may complaint somewhat directly. Generally speaking, the more direct a complaint speech act is conducted, the less polite it is.

As shown in Table 3, women tended to be more indirect compared with men. Keith and Suttleworth (1989, p. 222) suggest that “women are more polite, indecisive or hesitant, complaining and nagging”. In order to find out if there were any relationship between the directness of complaint strategies and the gender of the respondents, Cramer’s (V) statistical procedure was conducted the results of which are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. The Results of Correlations between Directness of Complaint Strategies and Genders**

		Male learners	Female learners
Male learners	Cramer’s (V) Correlation index	1	-.935
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.230
Female learners	Cramer’s (V) Correlation index	-.935	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.230	

According to the statistics presented in Table 4, there is a negative correlation between the male and female learners in the level of directness in carrying out complaint strategies ( $V = -.935$ ). However, since women were found to be more indirect, they can be considered more polite in their complaints. These findings were the bases to reject the second hypothesis of the study. Hence, gender proved to be a determining factor in complaint strategies by Iranian EFL learners. However, in order to investigate the issue more elaborately, the way the interlocutors express complaints across genders was scrutinized more deeply. The results are presented in Table 5.



**Table 5. Percentage of Complaint Directness in Cross-Gender Interactions**

<b>Directness of Complain</b>	<b>M-M</b>	<b>M-W</b>	<b>W-W</b>	<b>W-M</b>
Indirect	3.07%	3.60%	8.27%	11.81%
Somewhat direct	6.92%	3.60%	9.02%	3.93%
Very direct	25.38%	27.92%	11.27%	7.08%
total	35.38%	35.13%	28.57%	22.83%

Table 5 illustrates how different genders perform the speech act of complaint in same-gender and opposite-gender interactions. As it can be seen, as far as the level of directness is concerned, women tended to be more indirect against men (11.81%), while men-women complaints were indirect only in 3.60% of the times. On the other hand, women-women complaints were indirect only in 8.28% of the situations. Men-men complaints were indirect only in 3.07% of the situations. Generally, as it was stated earlier, women are more indirect compared with men in conducting the speech act of complaint.

A “somewhat direct” complaint was observed among participants of the study in both same-gender and opposite-gender interactions. In cases when men were asked to complain against men, 6.92% of the respondents chose the level of somewhat direct. On the other hand, only 3.60% of the male participants stated that they are somewhat direct when they want to complain to women. Female learners who intended to complain to members of the same gender in 9.02% of situations were somewhat direct, while in cases when they wanted to complain to the opposite sex, the female learners in 3.93% of cases chose to be somewhat direct.

As the analysis of the next level of directness shows, it was found that men were very direct compared with women. In fact, 25.38% of men were very direct in complaining to other men, and in 27.92% of situations they were very direct against women. On the other hand, female learners were very direct only in 7.08% of complaints made to men, and in 11.27% of the situations the female learners stated that they are very direct in complaining to other women. The overall analysis of the level of directness shows that women are less direct than men.

**Table 6. Percentage of Complaint Mitigation in Cross-Gender Interactions**

<b>Mitigation of Complaint</b>	<b>Cross-gender interactions</b>			
	<b>M-M</b>	<b>M-W</b>	<b>W-W</b>	<b>W-M</b>
	7.69 %	9.00 %	10.52 %	9.44 %

The other component that was believed to have an effect was the use of “Mitigation”. According to the statistics presented in Table 7, the number of situations where male learners attempted to mitigate their complaint was 10 out of all situations, while females in 25 situations tried to mitigate their complaints. Again, the female learners tended to be more polite.

Table 7 presents the frequency of this component as used by male and female learners.

**Table 7. Frequencies of Mitigation Used by Male and Female Participants**

Mitigation of Complaint	Male	Female
	Frequency	Frequency
	10	25

As it is shown in Table 7, the amount of mitigation used by female learners is more than male learners. Generally speaking, the higher amount of mitigation leads to more polite use of complaint strategies.

The abovementioned results demonstrated that there were not significant differences in complaint components between Iranian male and female learners; however, male and female learners differ from each other in terms of their level of directness implying that they are different in level of politeness as to performing complaint speech act.

These research results provided evidence to prove the first research hypothesis, according to which the complaint strategies used by male and female Iranian upper Intermediate EFL students are the same. Finally, based on the findings of the study, it could be realized that Iranian male and female upper intermediate EFL learners demonstrated parallel strategy in application of complaint formula. Moreover, evidence proved that male learners are more direct than female learners meaning that female learners are more polite than male ones in terms of performing a complaint.

#### **4. Discussions and Conclusions**

##### *4.1 Addressing Research Question One*

The first research question was as follows:

What are the complaint speech act components used by male and female Iranian upper Intermediate EFL students?

In this research it is found that the frequency use of complaint components by Iranian male EFL learners is not significantly different from that of female learners. In a quest to find answer for this question, after gathering the required data and analyzing it through Chi-square technique, evidences proved the existence of no significant difference between Iranian EFL males and females in application of complaint components. The components used by the participants included complaints, request for remedy, and initiators. Thus, through analysis of the responses, the researchers concluded that the most commonly components used by Iranian EFL learners were the component complaint. The study reveals the availability of some of the common complaint strategies by Iranian male and female EFL learners. The realization of any speech act requires much consideration since speech acts are Face Threatening Acts in nature, according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. For instance, the hearer's negative face (the desire not to be impeded by others) as well as speaker's positive face (the desire to

be appreciated and liked by others) is jeopardized when a complaint speech act is realized. Consequently, the complaint makers can opt for a variety of strategies for realizing a complaint to mitigate the threat to the addressee's face.

This study concerned with the relationship between gender and the complaint components used by Iranian EFL learners. Although not much research has investigated the type of complaint strategy by Iranian EFL learners, other speech acts have been investigated. For example, Shahrokhiand Mohd (2012) showed that Persian males employ most of strategies of request speech acts which have been claimed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) to be universal. In the same vein, in the present study it was found that both male and female learners make use of the same components in carrying out the speech act of complaint, as proposed by Rinnert and Nogami (2006).

#### *4.2 Addressing Research Question Two*

Gender has long been recognized as a crucial variable in language use. Since the 1970s, much has been written about gender differentiation and its impact on language. First, women are consistently found to use higher frequencies of standard forms (Holmes, 1991). Trudgill (1983, p. 162) described this as the "most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past twenty years". Besides this, women are generally believed to be more cooperative, facilitative, supportive, and less competitive in conversation (Coates, 1995; Holmes, 1991), willing to accommodate to their addressees' style of speech (Mulac et al. 1988), and concerned for the face needs of the person they are addressing. Empirical studies of language use (Lakoff, 1973; Brown & Levinson, 1987) also demonstrate that women express themselves more politely than men. Lakoff (1973) pointed out a series of linguistic features that are used more often by women, and which in her opinion express uncertainty and a lack of confidence. She claimed that women use more "super polite forms" such as tag questions, hesitation markers, euphemisms, and rising intonation on declaratives. In addition, she also found that women tend to use more emphatic stress and intensifying adverbials.

The second question of the present study intended to investigate whether gender had any effect on the issue under investigation. The study aimed to shed light on the politeness of complaining used by Iranian male and female EFL learners and it further investigated the effect of participants' gender on their perception of politeness in performing complaint strategies. Results pointed to the direct link between indirectness and politeness in complaints strategies by Iranian EFL learners. The results revealed that gender was a determining factor in the rating of politeness. It was found that female learners tend to be more indirect than male learners in conducting complaint. First of all, this study's data suggests that male speakers are more aggressive in that they are more direct in complaint strategies compared to their female counterparts. The data also suggests that females are generally more polite in conversation since they tend to be more indirect in the complaint.

The vast literature on gender differences in linguistic performance shows tendencies for aggressiveness in male and politeness in female language use and claims that these differences are universal. For example, Coates (1995) described that women are generally believed to be more cooperative,

facilitative, supportive and less competitive in conversation.

In another study the speech act of complaint was investigated by Lin's (2007). Using data from DCT and Scaled-Rating Questionnaires (SRQ) Lin (2007) collected from 60 Taiwanese university students; she found that in general, females produce longer utterances than males when making complaints. In addition, she found that females are more easily disturbed, and are thus more inclined to complain upon encountering a complaint-provoking situation. As for complaint strategies, male speakers resort to threatening (blaming/cursing/threatening) strategies noticeably more often, while female speakers used more explicit complaint and opt out strategies. Lin also considered the effect of different contextual factors.

The results of this study also lend support to Jui-chun's (2013) study. He found that female Hakka speakers are more polite than males, since they tended to use longer sentences to weaken or soften the force of a complaint and frequently chose an Ask for Repair strategy, as thrift is a virtue highly regarded by the Hakka. In addition, some other researchers have compared the differences of men and women in using different speech acts. Their results are in the same vein with the present study. They have suggested that women utilize more back-channeling devices of positive minimal response (e.g., mm, hmm, uh-huh, yeah) than men (Fishman, 1983).

In another study on complaint speech act, Boxer (1996) found that men and women behave very differently with respect to both complaining and responding to complaints. Her results showed that (a) more women participated in troubles-talk than men, and (b) women were recipients of more indirect complaints because they were seen as more supportive in general than men. The gender differences emerged when dealing with responses to indirect complaints showed that men tend to offer advice while women tend to commiserate. In general she showed that women participated more in indirect complaining than men. Iranian EFL speaker's performances when complaining basically provide evidence for such universal gender differences.

## **5. Implications**

It must be noted here that in order for the findings of this study to be pedagogically valid and applicable, first of all, they must be subjected to replication and empirical validation. It is then and only then that the results and findings can be generalized to other populations. Therefore, it is fair to say that Iranian male English students make use of the speech act of complaint directly which leads to impoliteness of this speech act; this can be associated with the face-threatening nature of this speech act, and this fact emphasizes the necessity of development of pragmatic competence among foreign language learners. Furthermore, based on the findings avoidance of direct strategies and substitution of more polite ones are the signs of pragmatic competence of the learners of English. In this regard, results of this study propose some implications: first, finding of this study can help teachers and test designers to write appropriate diagnostic tests in order to assess the general knowledge and understanding of language learners about speech acts and to evaluate the ability and performance of

learners in production of speech acts in the specific context in which the speech act of complaint should be conducted. Second, the results of this research help material developers and publishers to know which speech acts are basic and should be noticed in pedagogic planning for effective education and how to choose materials for the purpose of teaching speech acts. Third, the findings of this research can be used in teacher training programs to uncover these issues as to what extent realization and interpretation of strategies for speech act should be taught explicitly in a language teaching program. This study also reveals some interesting patterns and tendencies which could serve as the basis for future studies of other speech acts as well as the baseline for cross-cultural comparisons.

## References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Boxer, D. (1996). Complaints as positive strategies: What the Learner Needs to Know. *TESOL Quarterly*, 277-299.
- Coates, J. (1995). The Negotiation of Coherence in Face-to-Face Interaction: Some Examples from the Extreme Bounds. In M. A. Gernsbacher, & T. Givón (Eds.), *Coherence in Spontaneous Text* (pp. 41-58). New York: John Benjamins.
- D'Amico-Reisner, L. (1985). *An ethnolinguistic study of disapproval exchanges* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Pennsylvania.
- Fishman, P. (1983). Interaction: The Work Women Do. In T. Barrie, K. Cheris, & H. Nancy (Eds.), *Language, Gender and Society* (pp. 89-102). Boston, Mass.: Heinle&Heinle.
- Holmes, J. (1991). Language and Gender. *Language and Teaching*, 24(4), 207-220.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). The logic of politeness: Or, minding your p's and q's. In C. Corum et al. (Eds.), *Papers from the ninth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (pp. 292-305). Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and Woman's Place. *Language in Society*, 2(1), 45-80.
- Lin, Y. H. (2007). Making Complaints in Mandarin Chinese: Gender Differences and the Sociolinguistic Universal. In M. Y. Tseng (Ed.), *Exploring Language at the Interface* (pp. 41-76). Taipei: Crane Publishing.
- Moon, K. (2001). *Speech act study: Differences between native and non-native speaker complaint strategies*. Retrieved from [http://www.american.edu/tesol/Kyunghye\\_Moon.pdf](http://www.american.edu/tesol/Kyunghye_Moon.pdf)
- Mulac, A., Wiemann, J. M., Widenmann, S. J., & Gibson, T. W. (1988). Male/Female Language Differences and Effects in Same-Sex and Mixed-Sex Dyads: The Gender-Linked Language Effect. *Communication Monographs*, 55(4), 315-335.
- Ogiermann, E. (2009). *Onapologizing in negative and positive politeness cultures*. Amsterdam: John

- Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Olshtain, E., & Weinbach, L. (1993). Interlanguage features of the speech act of complaining. In G. Kasper, & S. D. Pinto (Eds.), *Intercultural Communication: A Three-step Method for Dealing with Differences*. Garant.
- Pease, A., & Barbara, P. (2001). *Why men don't listen and women can't read maps*. Britain: Pease International Pty Ltd.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shahrokhi, M., & Mohd, J. J. (2012). Perception of dominance, distance and imposition in persian male's request speech act strategies. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 678-685.
- Tanck, S. (2002). *Speech act sets of refusal and complaint: A comparison of native and non-native English speakers' production*. Paper presented for TESL 523 Second Language Acquisition class at AmericanUniversity, Washington: DC.
- Trudgill, P. (1983). *On Dialect*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tatsuki, D. H. (2000). If my complaints could passions move: An interlanguage study of aggression. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32, 1003-1017.
- Yamagashira, H. (2001). Pragmatic transfer in Japanese ESL refusals. *Pragmatic Transfer*, 31, 259-275.

## Appendix A

### The Discourse Completion Test

Dear student, Thank you in advance for your participation in this research and for completing this questionnaire. By completing this questionnaire, you agree that I can use your responses for research purposes. All your identifying information will be confidential when the results of this study are presented, written up and/or published. This questionnaire includes 2 parts. In part 1, please write down your age and indicate your gender and also write your native language and university major. In part 2, please complete the scenarios.

#### Part 1

- 1) Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Native Language: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) University major: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part 2

There are 12 situations described below. Please read the following descriptions of situations and then write what you would say in each situation.

1) Suppose you are an MA student and have been helping your neighbor, a high school student, with his/her studies for a month now. He/she didn't attend to your next meeting. How will you complain (S > H, -SD)?

---

2) How will you complain if your neighbor has opposite gender?

---

3) Suppose you are a professor, rushing to get to class on time, a student run round the corner and bump into you and you don't know him/her at all, almost knocking you down. How will you complain (S > H, +SD)?

---

4) How will you complain if the student has opposite gender?

---

5) You arranged to meet a friend in order to get some books from him/her to study for an exam. You waited for an hour, but she/he didn't show up. How will you complain the next day when you see him/her (S = H, -SD)?

---

6) How will you complain if your friend has opposite gender?

---

7) You are a new student at the university. You ask a student (a passer-by) for the location of the dormitory, but he/she answered in unrelated and ridiculous manner. How will you complain (S = H, +SD)?

---

8) How will you complain if the student has opposite gender?

---

9) You lend a book to your supervisor to study and return it to you, although you informed him/her about its rarity and your need but he/she lost the book. How will you complain (S < H, -SD)?

---

10) How will you complain if the supervisor has opposite gender?

---

11) You are paid less of a bonus at New Year time than a colleague on the same pay scale and think it is unfair. How will you complain to your boss (S < H, +SD)?

---

12) How will you complain if the boss has opposite gender?

---