

Interlanguage Complaints: Face Attacking Acts by Indonesian Learners of English

Agus Wijayanto

Program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta
Surakarta, Indonesia

agus.wijayanto@ums.ac.id

Abstrak — *This paper investigates the use of complaints by Indonesian learners of English. It in particular describes a number of complaint strategies which could jeopardize positive and negative face of interlocutors. The data of the complaints were elicited through oral discourse completion tasks from 50 Indonesian learners of English. The findings show that a number of complaint strategies intrinsically attacked the positive and negative face of complainees such as expressing annoyance, blaming, criticizing, rebuking or reproving, admonishing, threatening, and showing dislike or inconvenience.*

Keywords — *Impoliteness, Complaint, Face attacking act, Interlanguage pragmatics*

I. INTRODUCTION

Speech acts are intrinsically face threatening (FTA) that intimidate collocutors' negative and/or positive face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Therefore, when collocutors plan to do FTA, they have to calculate the weightiness of their speech acts on the basis of three variables: the perceived social distance between the hearers and the speakers, the relative social power, and the degree of imposition. Brown and Levinson propose super strategies to minimize threatening others' face, that is, (1) Bald on record: the application of FTA in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way as the need for maintaining others' face is irrelevant due to urgent situations (such as fire) (2) Positive Politeness: the use of strategies to redress the addressee's positive face (the need to be appreciated, respected, and accepted by peers), (3) Negative politeness: the use of strategies to redress the addressee's negative face, (the need for privacy). (4) Off-record: the FTA is performed in such a way that there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent, and (5) Withholding FTA. Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies have been used as a framework to investigate politeness in wide range of speech acts in the area of cross-cultural pragmatics.

Complaint is a face-threatening act which intrinsically threatens addressee's positive face as the speaker expresses negative evaluation of a situation which is the result of the addressee's past actions. The speaker could also threaten addressee's negative face, as the complainer maybe explicitly demands addressee's to repair the offended situation (Kraft and Geluykens, 2002). As complaints commonly contains threats, they could

induce communication breakdown and impair the relationship between interlocutors (Moon, 2001; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993). Because of the reason, complainers should use politeness strategies if they intend to save the addressees' face or to mitigate the severity of their complaints. Nevertheless, complaints are intrinsically rude (Trosborg, 1997), therefore it is rather challenging for speakers to remain polite when performing them.

As reported by studies that complaints tend to be confrontational (Umar, 2006), harsh (Wijayanto, Laila, Prasetyarini, and Susiati, 2012), and direct and rude (Pratiwi, 2013; Wijayanto, Prasetyarini, Hikmat, 2017). Nevertheless, they only report the use of complaint strategies by foreign language learners. This current research intends to explore complaint strategies that could be considered face attacking. Through this paper we would argue that a complaint is not only face-threatening act, but also a face attacking act.

A. Speech Act of Complaint

Complaint has been suggested as the expression of displeasure of a speaker to a hearer. It has been defined as an expression of disapproval or annoyance as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which affect the speaker unfavourably. Complaint is addressed to the hearer, whom the speaker holds responsible for the offensive action" (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993). It is "an expression of negative feelings (displeasure, sadness, anger, etc.) related to what speakers presents as a "complainable matter" (Traverso, 2008) and it is "an expression of displeasure or annoyance of a speaker to a hearer in which the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her or his unfavourably. This complaint is addressed to the hearer (H) whom the S holds, at least partially, responsible for the offensive action" (Kraft and Geluykens, 2002). Complaint is also a "plaintive speech directed to the person the complainer deems responsible for the offence or to one who is able to do something about it" (North, 2000). It is "an expression of dissatisfaction addressed by an individual A to an individual B concerning behaviour on the part of B that A feels is unsatisfactory. The complaint is addressed to the person identified as the cause of the problem responsible for the behaviour that is deemed unsatisfactory" (Laforest, 2002) and it includes "activities in which speakers point out some transgression or misconduct on the part of the

subject who caused a trouble and performed some complainable action; such trouble or complainable activity usually include a grievance on the part of the complainer” (Edwards, 2005).

Based on its definitions, complaint is a face threatening act (FTA) that could threaten complainees or hearer's face. In conducting a complaint, a speaker could endanger the hearer's positive face, as he or she expresses a negative evaluation of a situation which is the result of the hearer's past actions and he or she could also threaten the hearer's negative face, as the complaint may contain an implicit demand to rectify the aforementioned situation (Kraft and Gelyukens, 2002). As it contains threat, complaint could lead to a breakdown in communication and impair the relationship with the other participants (Moon, 2001). Thus, the degree of directness of complaint should be taken into account.

Previous research revealed that English language learners used different complaint strategies as compared with native speakers of English. Trosborg (1995) compared the realization of requesting, complaining, and apologizing by Danish learners of English and native speakers of English. As to complaint strategies, the researcher reported that unlike the native speakers of English the learners used fewer complaint modifications and they tended to phrase their complaints unconvincingly and less forcefully. Murphy and Neu (1996) compared the realization of complaint by American native speakers of English and Korean learners of English. They reported that the native speakers of English hardly used criticism whilst the Korean learners of English tended to produce an aggressive and disrespectful criticism. A study by Tanck (2002) reported that nonnative speakers of English produced longer complaints than did native speakers of English, and they often used inappropriate complaints to collocutors of higher status. It was reported by Umar (2006) that Sudanese learners of English sounded more confrontational than did native speakers of British English when they made complaints since the learners involved much lower levels of courtesy in their complaints.

B. *Impoliteness: Face attacking act*

In its classical concept, impoliteness is seen as a deliberate act intended to undermine or attack the face of the addressee, and therefore it is not an accidental act (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996). Culpeper (1996:350) further asserts that impoliteness is the opposite of politeness that is the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect of social harmony: social disruption. Thus impoliteness is an act intended to damage social relations. Culpeper identified several factors promoting the use of impoliteness. The first is the social relationship between the speaker and listener. Impoliteness will likely occur if the speaker and hearer have a very close or intimate social relationship. The more intimate the greater the chances of having irreverence. Another factor is an imbalance in social power among interlocutors. Those with more powerful social status will likely not be polite. The third is the desire of the

interlocutors not to keep or maintain other's face deliberately, which may be as the results of a conflict of interest.

The other concept views that impoliteness is relative and it normally occurs due to the violations of socio-cultural contexts. According to Terkourafi (2008) this type of incivility occurs when an utterance is not used in its appropriate social contexts. Although impoliteness is felt by the hearers, it is not deliberately used by speakers to attack the hearer's face. In this concept impoliteness equals to rudeness which includes an assessment by a speaker relating to the hearer's behavior which does not fit or comply with its social function (Locher dan Watts, 2008), and it is often referred as violation to existing norms (Schnurr et al., 2008). Culpeper (2010) further defines it as a negative attitude toward a particular behavior that occurs in a particular context. This type of impoliteness arises as one's attitude is not in line with social expectations, desires and/or beliefs of an organization or of a particular group. Based on this definition, impoliteness is inherently contained in neither a particular utterance nor linguistic markers, but rather on the particular social contexts. Similar concept is raised by Locher:

“What is perceived to be (im)polite will thus ultimately rely on interactants' assessments of social norms of appropriateness that have been previously acquired in the speech events in question” (2006:250).

Culpeper (2010) formulated impoliteness acts in the context of interpersonal communication as follows: (1) Bragging and showing off one's power or force including degrading, belittling, mocking others. (2) Insulting, including the use and implications of contempt. (3) Criticizing (including reproach and blame, showing the weaknesses of others). (4) Violating personal space (infringement of personal space) in a literal and metaphorical sense, such as eavesdropping on other people, reading records/documents to be someone other than his business and others. (5) Isolating or ignoring others. (6) Conducting violation of reciprocity, for example did not thank when someone was helped, did not answer greetings.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A. *Research participants*

The research participants were undergraduate students of the English department of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Indonesia. They consisted of 50 students comprising 25 males and 25 females who were in the second-year course of the degree of English education. The age of the students ranged between 18-20 years old, with the average age being 19.5 years.

B. *Research instrument*

This study applied an oral DCT (referred to henceforth as ODCT) to elicit the research data. The ODCT designed for the present study consisted of scenario description which provided the research participants with a specific social situation, setting, speaker's roles, and

relative status levels of collocutors. Based on the scenario description, research participants were required to respond each ODCT orally. Thus the ODCT would retain spontaneous responses. After completing the ODCT, they were interviewed to particularly find out the strategy they used and the reasons of using them. The following is the summary of the ODCT scenarios.

Scenario 1: your close friend broke your new camera.

Scenario 2: your brother borrowed your motorcycle and he returned it late.

Scenario 3: your father forgot to give you money for your tuition fee.

Scenario 4: your neighbour next door turned on rock music too loud.

Scenario 5: your inferior has not finished the report as you ordered.

Scenario 6: your lecturer gave you a low mark.

Scenario 7: a student cut your queue in a photocopy service centre.

Scenario 8: a busker next to you is playing a guitar too loud.

Scenario 9: an administrative staff ignores your presence.

C. Data analysis

The impoliteness model of analysis which was employed by this research was based on Culpeper's (1996 and 2010) which was built on Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies as follows:

Bald on record impoliteness

The FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in which face is not irrelevant or minimized. It should be noted that it is not the same as Brown and Levinson's Bald on record which is a politeness strategy in specific circumstances. For example, face is not relevant in an emergency, when the threat to the hearer's face is very small, or when the speaker is much more powerful than the hearer.

Positive impoliteness

This includes the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.

- (1) Ignore, snub the other – fail to acknowledge the other's presence.
- (2) Exclude the other from an activity.
- (3) Disassociate from others – for example denying association or common ground with the other; avoiding sitting together.
- (4) Be disinterested, unconcerned, and unsympathetic.
- (5) Use inappropriate identity markers – for example using title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nick name when a distance relationship pertains.
- (6) Use obscure or secretive language – for example, mystifying the other with jargon, or using a code known to others in the group, but not the target.
- (7) Make others feel uncomfortable.

- (8) Use taboo words, swear or abusive profane language.
- (9) Call the other names-use derogatory nominations.

Negative impoliteness

Unlike negative politeness, they are designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.

- (1) Frighten – instilling a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.
- (2) Condescend, scorn or ridicule – emphasize your relative power.
- (3) Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously.
- (4) Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).
- (5) Invade the other's space – literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship).
- (6) Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect – personalize use the pronouns "I" and "you".
- (7) Put the other indebtedness on record.

Mock impoliteness - the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remains surface realizations.

Withhold politeness - the absence of politeness where it would be expected. For example, failing to thank somebody for a help may be taken as deliberate impoliteness.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Bald on records impoliteness*

When performing Bald on record impoliteness, the speakers used utterance with no ways of mitigating it. The data show that Bald on record impoliteness was involved in the following complaint strategies: expressing annoyance, blaming, criticizing, rebuking or reproofing, dislike, and admonishing.

Annoyance found in the data was mostly in form of rhetorical questions that was the ones which did not require answers. If the hearer should answer the questions, they will usually express an apology, a counter act, and a defense. The following are some examples.

- (1) *Are you crazy? what are you doing with my camera! (a response to DCT 1).*
- (2) *Hey, why you get in front of the line? (a response to DCT 7)*

Second strategy is blaming in which a complainer presupposes that the accused is guilty of an offence. The data show when the research participants blamed a hearer, they would commonly use a strategy which involved asking for a responsibility from the hearer.

- (3) *I am sorry bro, this is my camera is broken because you, so I really a complain with you and I please I am very pleased about this, because this is a new camera and I-I buy this camera last month so I want you to reparation this camera quickly, thank you my bro. (a response to DCT 1)*
- (4) *Oh no my camera! I-I want-I want you to: to change a new camera. (a response to DCT 1).*

Next, they employed criticism. When using this strategy a complainer expresses gentle to sharp and stern disapprovals relating to a certain state of affairs the speaker considers bad for him or her.

- (5) *Ok Sir, you really need to be professional next time. (a response to DCT 9)*
- (6) *I am sorry sir do you work in here only for watching television? (a response to DCT 9)*

When using the strategy of rebuking, complainers gave sharp comment to hearers but did not impinge a lot of cost. They were commonly in the forms of rhetorical questions. Some questions were used along by supportive moves, such as attention getter, and deference.

- (7) *Why do you ... not yet finish your report? (a response to DCT DCT 5)*
- (8) *Why you-why you are not responsible for your report?! (a response to DCT DCT 5)*

Through the strategy of admonishing, a speaker gives advice or warning in order to rectify or avoid something which will bring harm either to the speaker or the hearer.

- (9) *Don't be like this anymore, please be on time. (a response to DCT 2)*
- (10) *Hey boys:, be patient! (a response to DCT 7)*

Accusations are used by a complainer to establish the agent of a complainable. The complainer can ask the hearer questions about the situation or assert that he or she was in some way connected with the offence and thereby try to establish the hearer as a potential agent of the complainable (indirect accusation). Alternatively, the complainer can directly accuse the complaine of having committed the offence (direct accusation).

- (11) *Oh I am sorry my camera was broken why? (a response to DCT1)*
- (12) *You-you-you broke my camera! (a response to DCT1).*

Next, when showing dislike, complainers showed an offence to complainees in which they expressed dislike or inconvenience. This strategy was often accompanied with supportive moves such as attention getter (preparator), and other speech acts, commonly request and explanation.

- (13) *Hey, your music is very disturbing me! Turn off your music because I must concentrate with-with my study, ok? (a response to DCT 4)*
- (14) *I don't like your way, you should know if it is not good way. You must respect other (a response to DCT 8)*

B. Positive Impoliteness

Impoliteness was generated by the use of identity markers which were irrelevant or inappropriate to the social context regarding the roles of speaker-hearer. For example:

- (15) *Hey-hey boys, I am sorry. Why my lens broke after you borrow? (a response to DCT1)*
- (16) *Hey man! What your problem? (a response to DCT5)*

Some participants used the strategy of 'Calling the other name'. When employing this strategy, the speaker used other name which was intentionally offensive. For example, when responding the scenario of DCT 4 in which one's next door neighbour turned on rock music too loud (complaining to a familiar-equal status), the research participants addressed others using other names, for example:

- (17) *Hey you crazy, you turn on music rock very loudly.*
- (18) *You stupid, you broke my camera? (a response to DCT 1).*

They also employed swear words or abusive language. When using swear words the participant expressed their threats, and there was no indication of mitigating possible consequences.

- (19) *Damn! Because I this day must to send to Jakarta! Fuck! You work out! Work out now! (a response to DCT 5)*
- (20) *What the hell! Your-your-your voice is not good. (a response to DCT 8)*

C. Negative Impoliteness

Through the strategy threatening, a speaker asserted a belief and expressed an intention to inflict pain, injury, evil, or punishment, negative consequence and so on, for example:

- (21) *if you do it again you cannot use it again! (a response to DCT 2).*

Emphasizing speaker's relative power was employed by participants. This sub strategy of negative impoliteness was found in the situation in which the speaker had higher position than the listeners, particularly in situation 5 and 8. The most noticeable act commonly used by the research participants was unmitigated order and command.

- (22) *Hey, why you don't finish the report. Today, I will send the report to Jakarta. You must finish the report today! You understand! (a response to DCT 5)*

Impoliteness also occurs when a speaker shows attitude of regarding someone or something as inferior or worthless or contempt. Through this act the speaker will look down at the hearer. The following are the examples:

- (23) *What do you do this to my camera? My camera is very expensive. I think you-you can't change it! (a response to DCT 1)*
- (24) *Don't touch me! You not good! Your song not good! You must study music well! (a response to DCT 8)*

Complaints can be done politely (Wijayanto et al., 2013), nevertheless the research participants in the present study tended to apply impoliteness. There are some aspects which could account for this. Since the strategies were elicited mainly through ODC, the participants only interacted with unreal interlocutors therefore they might lack accountability for what they said (Wijayanto et al., 2013). Misconception about the stereotype of the target language speakers might also contribute to the use of direct language in Bald on record impoliteness. The English learners like Indonesians in general misapprehend the stereotype of Westerners (American, British and Europeans) as direct (Hassal, 2004). Nevertheless, as complaint is a speech act which intrinsically involves negative feeling as describes above, the use of harsh language by the English learners could be warranted (Wijayanto et al., 2013).

The application of impoliteness by the English language learners might be influenced by some other aspects although they still require further inquiry. First the language learners possibly lacked knowledge of L2 pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics to express polite complaints. Second, as English is not spoken for daily basis in home country settings (Indonesia), they could lack model of how to use polite complaints. Third, the nature of complaint might have induced them to use impolite strategies. Finally, they seemed to transfer L1 strategies to L2, while both have different conventional strategies.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed complaint strategies used by Indonesian learners of English. The findings have showed that through some strategies complaint could turn into a face attacking act by which speakers intentionally to jeopardize their interpersonal relationship. Many excerpts support Culpeper (1996) who states that impoliteness occurs when there is a gap of power between speakers and hearers, in particular when the speakers are unfamiliar with the hearers. Culpeper (1996) argues that intimacy will induce impoliteness. Nevertheless, this social aspect, in this present research, does not engender much impoliteness when the interlocutors have equal and higher status, but it does when the addressees are those with lower status. Paralinguistic aspect such as intonation and stress should be investigated further as they may inflict impoliteness. This area should become a new area for investigating impoliteness. Other aspect that should be

scrutinized is that whether or not the English learners are intentional when they produce impoliteness.

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You say: ...

Appendix: DCT Scenarios

1. Your close friend borrows your new digital camera to take seascapes views. When he returns your camera you find that the lens of your camera is broken. You complain your friend about it.

You say: ...

2. Your brother borrows your motorcycle to visit his friend. You say that you are going to ride your motorcycle to go to your campus at 2 o'clock. Your brother promises you to return it as soon as possible. Now you are about leaving for your campus but your brother has not come up yet. Finally your brother comes home very late. He says that he has forgotten that you are going to go to campus. You make a complaint to your brother.

You say: ...

3. You are a student of a university. You asked for your tuition fee to your father three days ago. Your father promises that you will receive the money today. Now you are going to go to your campus to pay for your tuition fee as today is the deadline to pay it. Unfortunately when you ask the money to your father he says that he has forgotten to take the money from the bank. He is going to give you the money this afternoon or tomorrow morning. You complain your father about it.

You say: ...

4. You are living at a dormitory. It is 22.30 now and you are still studying for the exam tomorrow morning. You are hearing the neighbour next door is playing rock music. The music is getting louder and louder and disturbs your concentration. You go to your neighbour next door to complain about it.

You say: ...

5. You are working at an electronic company. You are a sales supervisor. You asked one of your staffs to make a sales report last week. As it was promised that the report will be ready this morning. Now you need the report and you will send it to Jakarta. You ask the staff for it, but he says that it has not been completed. You make a complaint to him.

6. You are reading the result of the final exam on the announcement board at your department. You find out that the score of your Structure II subject which you predict you will get A is D. You are not happy with the score. You meet the lecturer and make a complaint.

You say: ...

7. You are at a copy service centre for copying a book chapter. Now you and other students are queuing for about 15 minutes. A student whom you do not know cuts the queue and asks the staff to copy his documents. It seems that he knows the staff well. You make a complaint to the student.

You say: ...

8. You are living in Yogyakarta city. To go to your university you always take a bus. Now you are at a bus leaving for your university. On the way a busker is getting on your bus. He is playing his music just close to you and singing a song very loudly. The song is not melodious and it tends to annoy your ears. He also brushes your shoulder with his guitar several times. You are not very happy so you make a complaint to him.

You say: ...

9. You are going to the administrative office to ask some information about your examination scores which you have not obtained. You are queuing at the office for about 30 minutes. Now it is your turn. You try to explain that you have not received your exam scores but the office staff is talking with others about the film they watched on TV, you are being ignored. You are not happy with it so you make a complaint to the staff.

You say: ...