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A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF FACE-THREAT  
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**A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF FACE-THREAT AND  
FACE-MANAGEMENT IN POTENTIAL COMPLAINT SITUATIONS**

**By**

**Laura C. Hartley**

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## ABSTRACT

### A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF FACE-THREAT AND FACE-MANAGEMENT IN POTENTIAL COMPLAINT SITUATIONS

By

Laura C. Hartley

Within the pragmatics literature, a number of studies have investigated the speech act of complaining. In most cases, the researchers have failed to define a "complaint" before proceeding with analysis. The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical definition of a "complaint" and to examine in-depth the linguistic details of the speech act of complaining, with a particular view to illuminating the linguistic devices employed in managing the "face" of the participants involved in Potential Complaint Situations. In addition to dealing with micro-level questions regarding how complaints are realized in various circumstances, this study also sheds light on macro-level issues related to how individuals create and maintain appropriate kinds of face-management in conversational interaction.

Data in the study were collected through interviews, discourse completion tests and ratings tasks and were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative means. The situations examined in the study varied in terms of three sociolinguistic variables: gender, power and social distance. The respondent

group consisted of European-American students at a Midwestern university, aged 18-25.

Results of the study indicate that while complaints can be and sometimes are made directly, it is more often the case that some kind of face-management is employed. Options for managing face include the choice of opting out of performing the face-threatening act, as well as performing the complaint indirectly or utilizing mitigation. How and when complaints are made is affected by the gender, power and social distance dynamics, as well as particular characteristics of the situation.

This study also illuminates the importance of examining speech acts within the social and cultural contexts in which they occur. It points to the importance of the hearer as a co-constructor of meaning within the conversation and the effects of the surrounding discourse on the identity and function of the speech act under investigation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Grateful acknowledgment is made to Cambridge University Press for the right to reprint Figure 1 (reproduced in this volume as Figure 1, pg. 5) from *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Ben Hartley, for putting up with all of my complaints throughout this process and my son, Luke, whose birth came just one week after I finished writing this dissertation. The two of you inspire me to be all that God has gifted me to be.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Theoretical Foundations: Speech Act and Politeness Theories

In 1962, a series of lectures by the philosopher J.L. Austin was published under the title *How to Do Things with Words*. A major premise in this work was that utterances are not only used to describe or report on situations. Rather it is the case, in Austin's words,

that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it (p. 6, italics his).

Austin calls these kinds of utterances "performatives," since in saying them, a person is actually performing some act.

After developing the notion of performatives and the conditions under which they can be successfully performed (which he calls "felicity conditions"), Austin moves into a broader discussion of the ways in which to *say* something is to actually *do* something. He distinguishes three kinds of acts that are all accomplished by the speaking of any single utterance. First, there is the *locutionary act*, which is "roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to 'meaning' in the traditional sense" (p. 108). Secondly, an utterance accomplishes an *illocutionary act*, which is the force that the utterance has, or the way in which the utterance is being used. For example, any number of utterances can be used to perform the

illocutionary act of asking a question, giving information, ordering, warning, etc.

Finally, an utterance also performs a *perlocutionary act*, namely "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something" (p. 108), e.g. convincing, inciting to action, conveying urgency, etc.

John Searle, a student of Austin, elaborated on the notion of using language to accomplish certain actions in his 1969 work entitled *Speech Acts*. In the beginning of the book he explains that to speak a language involves performing speech acts and goes on to describe the main thesis of his argument as follows:

...all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts. The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act (p. 16).

In the third chapter of *Speech Acts*, Searle undertakes an analysis of the level of "illocutionary acts" suggested by Austin. Using the illocution of "promising" as a case in point, he lays out the conditions that must hold for an illocutionary act to be successfully accomplished. Searle points out that these conditions are similar to Austin's notion of felicity conditions in the use of performatives.

The work of Austin and Searle has become the basis for a whole body of research into speech acts. Some scholars have focused attention on further developing and clarifying a theoretical understanding of speech acts (see, for example, Sadock, 1974; Bach and Harnish, 1979; Tsohatzidis, 1994). Other researchers have focused on applications of speech act theory, examining how

speakers in various languages perform a variety of speech acts. Some of the speech acts that have been studied include requests (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Gordon & Ervin-Tripp, 1984; Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Weizman, 1993), apologies (e.g. Borkin & Reinhart, 1978; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Bergman & Kasper, 1993), compliments (Wolfson, 1981, 1989), expressions of gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986, 1993), and refusals (Liao, 1994).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the foundational work of Austin and Searle, many of these studies have relied in some part on Brown and Levinson's (hereafter B&L) (1978, 1987) politeness theory. Building on the work of Goffman (1967), B&L develop the notion that all human beings are constantly at work in the process of maintaining different aspects of their own and others' "face," i.e. the public self-image that each individual projects to the world. They claim that "face" is "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61).

B&L divide face into two components: negative face, which is the basic claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition, and positive face, the desire to be appreciated and approved of. The terms "positive" and "negative" should be understood here as technical labels, without the normal connotations of "good" and "bad." Every individual has and must attend to both kinds of face.

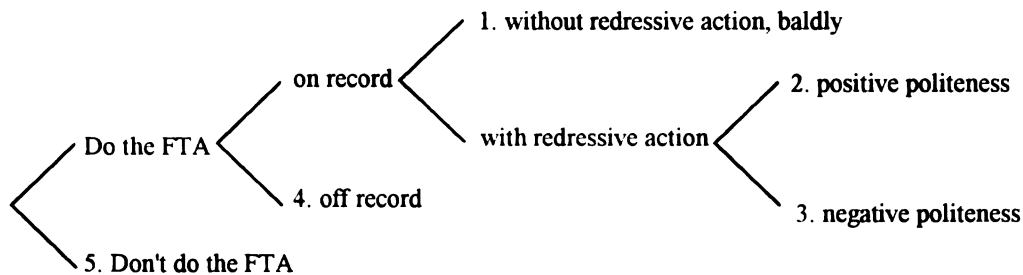
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<sup>1</sup> Some of these examples are not "classical" speech acts, in Austin and Searle's definitions, but would certainly fall into this general area of study as it has been understood and expanded by researchers since that time.

Having thus defined face, they argue that there are certain kinds of communication acts that intrinsically threaten some aspect of face of either the speaker, hearer or both. They call these acts face-threatening acts, or FTAs. B&L distinguish FTAs based on both the kind of face threatened (i.e. positive or negative) and whether the FTA constitutes a threat to the speaker's face or the hearer's face. They note that these two distinctions give rise to a four-way grid for classifying FTAs based on the kind of face that is primarily threatened. In an endnote, they offer examples of speech acts that illustrate threats to the four kinds of face: promises (threat to speaker negative face), warnings (threat to hearer negative face), apologies (threat to speaker positive face) and criticisms (threat to hearer positive face). While this grid provides a neat classification schema, B&L point out that, for most FTAs, the situation is considerably more complicated than this grid suggests, since many FTAs can be classified as fitting into more than one category. Even with the seemingly straightforward examples provided above, it is evident that this is the case. For example, while a criticism primarily threatens the hearer's positive face, it is no doubt the case that the speaker's positive face is also on the line, since the speaker runs the risk of being seen as overly-critical or unjustified in his or her comments.

Because performing FTAs in the most direct way (i.e. by strictly

adhering to Grice's (1975) conversational maxims<sup>2</sup>) could easily cause offense, B&L claim that speakers use a number of strategies to soften or mitigate FTAs. They lay these strategies out in a kind of decision-making schema, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Possible strategies for doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.)

According to this schema, the most direct way of performing an FTA is to do it baldly, without redress<sup>3</sup> while the most indirect way to perform the act is to go off record, i.e. to do it in some way that keeps the attributable intentions of the speaker ambiguous. In between is the possibility of performing the act on record, i.e. unambiguously, but with some kind of redressive action directed to either the positive or negative face of the hearer. By laying out this schema for doing FTAs, B&L appear to equate levels of politeness with levels of directness, although they

<sup>2</sup> Grice posited that all participants in conversation adhere to a "Cooperative Principle", which states that individuals will attempt to cooperate in conversation. He further elaborates this by claiming that, in particular, interactants will follow four "maxims": Quantity (say neither more nor less than required); Quality (make your contribution genuine and not spurious); Relation (make your contribution appropriate to the transaction); Manner (make your contribution clear).  
<sup>3</sup> "Redress" and "redressive action" as used here are synonymous to what is also referred to in this volume as "mitigation."

never make this connection explicit.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the rest of B&L's volume is devoted to spelling out specific strategies within the four overall macro-strategies described above. They claim that these various strategies are universal, i.e. they can be utilized by any speaker, regardless of the language being spoken. They illustrate each of the strategies using data primarily from three languages: English, Tamil and Tzeltal. While these three languages are certainly associated with diverse cultures, a claim of universality based on such minimal empirical evidence is shaky at best. In the two decades since the original theory was put forth, B&L's politeness theory has become the framework through which a good deal of empirical work in a number of different languages has been done.<sup>5</sup> Taken together, these studies provide a rich resource for the evaluation of B&L's claims regarding universality in politeness.

## **1.2 Previous Research on Complaints**

One interesting speech act to investigate in terms of the kinds and extent of politeness and face-management utilized is that of complaining. Like the speech

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<sup>4</sup> While B&L deal extensively with positive and negative face and the various kinds of mitigation that can be used in the process of face management, they never actual define what the term "politeness" in their "politeness theory" refers to. Fraser (1990) identifies Brown and Levinson's approach as one of four different models of politeness found within the linguistic literature. Their model is what Fraser calls the "face-saving view." The other models are the "social-norm view," the "conversational-maxim view," and the "conversational-contract view." Meier (1995) defines politeness functionally as "behaving in a socially appropriate manner" (p. 351) and then points out that both context and participant expectations will play a role in determining what constitutes appropriate behavior.

<sup>5</sup> While not the primary purpose of this paper, it is the author's hope that the results of this study will contribute to the increasing body of empirical work that investigates speech acts and face-management strategies.

act of criticism, complaining is a speech act which primarily threatens the positive face of the hearer, although the speaker's positive face is also on the line. Studies in the literatures of disciplines such as Linguistics, Communication, Social Psychology and even Business Marketing have attempted to describe and analyze various aspects of the complaint event.

Candlin, Coleman and Burton (1983), for example, center their attention on one particular situation in which complaints often occur, namely dentist-patient communication. Their focus is on the different discoursal sets that dentists and patients bring to the communication situation and how that affects the conversational flow. They claim that patient complaints occur within a three-stage event: (1) the dentist provides a cue that a report should be made; (2) the patient presents the complaint, often indirectly; (3) the dentist responds to the complaint by either ignoring it altogether, disagreeing with it, or agreeing but minimizing it. Although the researchers provide several examples from naturally occurring data, they never spell out precisely how they are defining "complaint."

Beebe and Takahashi (1989) examine Japanese and American styles of chastisement<sup>6</sup> through the use of both ethnographic data collection and discourse completion tests. On the discourse completion test, subjects were presented with two situations in which they were asked to place themselves and then respond with what they would say in the situation. Both situations involved a photo-copying

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<sup>6</sup> The authors of this study do not define what they mean by the term "chastisement." The situations that were utilized and responses they received, however, appear quite similar to the kinds of scenarios present in other research that has claimed to be studying complaints.



task within a business situation. In one scenario, they were asked to imagine themselves in the higher status position (i.e. corporation president) and then respond to a mistake made by their assistant. In the second situation, they were to play the part of a middle-manager dealing with a miscommunication with their boss.

The researchers analyzed the responses for each situation as falling into one of four categories, based on what they call “semantic formulas.” For situation 1, these were statement of error, correction, request for repair, and criticism. They found that Americans were more likely to state the error and ask for repair, while the Japanese most often criticized. Situation 2 produced semantic formulas of self-defense, apology, offer of repair and criticism. In this case, both groups resorted to statements of self-defense, although the Americans did so at a higher rate. Americans also apologized more than Japanese did. From the figures that Beebe and Takahashi present, it is evident that many of their responses were categorized into more than one semantic formula.<sup>7</sup> They make no mention of this in the text of their article, however, and therefore do not discuss whether certain formulas often occurred together in specific ways.

Focusing on a different aspect of the complaint situation, Boniskowska (1988) examines the choice of opting out of performing a complaint. Building on an analysis of complaints in an unpublished master's dissertation, this article

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<sup>7</sup> This evidence comes from the fact that the percentages do not total 100%. For example, in Situation 1, semantic formulas used by Japanese respondents are given as: statement of error (39%), correction (31%), request for repair (46%), and criticism (54%).

investigates the reasons given by British English-speaking students when they chose not to complain in a situation. The researcher found three main reasons why students opted out: (1) the act (A) was not seen as offensive because the speaker (S) believed the hearer (H) was justified in causing it; (2) S did not hold H responsible for A; and (3) S did not blame H openly for A, feeling that she or he had no right to do so.

Clyne's (1994) discussion of complaints is situated within a very broad investigation of intercultural communication within the work environment. His treatment of complaints is thus much briefer than other researchers who have focused more specifically on this single speech act type. He divides complaints into two categories: exercitive complaints, where someone is exercising power, and whinges, long and repeated expressions of discontent. Of the studies discussed so far, Clyne comes the closest to defining "complaint" by offering definitions for these two subcategories of complaint. The results of his analysis suggest that, while people from all groups in his study whinge, European males are the most likely to complain, and Southeast Asian women are the least likely to either complain or whinge.

Newell and Stutman (1989) consider the speech act of complaint within the broader context of conversational negotiation of confrontation, especially with reference to initiation and response. Thus they focus their analysis on the entire conversational episode in which a complaint appears. They point out that there is an inherent difficulty in studying complaints, since a great deal of different kinds

of activity can all be placed within the category of "complaint."

After listing a number of studies which deal with complaints (none of which provide a definition), they note that "the definition of complaining has proven problematic for conversational analysts" (p. 146). In their final analysis, they conclude that " 'to complain' in fact denotes a variety of different speech acts" (p. 148) which then may be used to initiate different types of communication episodes. Thus "complaint" is in reality, for these researchers, merely a cover term for the various kinds of acts (again, not defined any more specifically than this) that bring about social confrontation.<sup>8</sup> Since social confrontation is the focus of their interest, the remainder of their article deals with the responses to complaints and how confrontation is negotiated within a conversation.

While Edmondson (1981) is primarily interested in investigating the speech act of apology, he discusses complaints in terms of their role in on-going discourse in providing an opportunity for an apology to be offered. He notes that the conditions for complaining and apologizing to occur are similar, namely:

APOLOGIZE:	S did P, P bad for H
COMPLAIN:	H did P, P bad for S <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Newell and Stutman do point out that "[a]lthough confrontations always begin with complaints, complaints about behaviors do not always function to initiate confrontations" (1989/90, p. 148). With this acknowledgement, however, they essentially void whatever definition of complaint they have thus posited (i.e. as an act that initiates social confrontation). Ultimately, these researchers also proceed with an analysis of complaints without having any definition of complaint to work from.

<sup>9</sup> S here stands for "speaker" and H for "hearer." P refers to the event that occurred.

and notes that "in the case of APOLOGY and COMPLAIN, the same event P might be involved, such that what from one conversationalist's viewpoint constitutes a ground for a COMPLAIN constitutes a ground for an APOLOGY for his interlocutor" (p. 278).

As with other studies, Edmondson fails to define the speech act of "COMPLAIN", although he does make several important observations about the occurrence of complaints. He points out, for example, that unlike apologies, there does not appear to be an overt performative for complaining. Instead, he suggests that indirectness is both appropriate and conventional in the performance of a complaint, which he ties to the fact that complaints constitute non-H supportive behavior modes.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Edmondson notes the fact that in discourse terms, a complaint has no conventional "right-pair-part" that will satisfy that complaint. He claims that this follows from the fact that the perlocutionary intent of a complaint is negotiable, a point elaborated on by the Newell and Stutman article discussed above.<sup>11</sup>

In their discussion of politeness markers in English and German, House and Kasper (1981) also deal with the speech act of complaint. Their primary goal in this article is to compare English and German speakers in terms of directness. They present a schema of eight directness levels of complaints, although the

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<sup>10</sup> Edmondson is drawing here on terminology from Leech's (1977) "Tact principle" rather than Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, but the concepts of "non-H supportive behavior" and "H face-threat" are clearly compatible.

<sup>11</sup> This point will be more elaborately illustrated in Chapter 3, when the difference between intention and interpretation of complaints is discussed.

justification for their ordering of these levels is not presented in this article.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, while they lay out the circumstances under which a complaint can occur, they also do not specifically define complaint. In fact, they claim that their use of the term “complain” in this study is broad enough to include other expressive verbs such as “criticize”, “accuse” or “reproach.”

Finally, Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) report on two different studies involving complaints. To their credit, the first sentences of their article lay out the definition of complaint from which their analysis will proceed. They say:

In the speech act of complaining, the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance—censure—as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavorably. This complaint is usually addressed to the hearer (H) whom the S holds, at least partially, responsible for the offensive action. For the purpose of this study, censure will be assumed to have been expressed whenever S chooses to verbalize her disapproval of the violation (p. 108).

The researchers then proceed to discuss two studies of complaints made by speakers in their native languages. In the first study, Hebrew-speaking university students were presented with 20 situations and asked to respond in a discourse completion format. From the responses, a five-point scale of complaint realization was developed in terms of the degree of face-threat that the speaker undertook.

These five categories, from least to greatest amount of face-threat, were: (1)

Below the level of reproach, realizations that enable S to avoid direct mention of

---

<sup>12</sup> For example, they claim that the statement “There’s a stain on my blouse” is more indirect than saying “Did you wear my blouse by any chance?” In the first case, the hearer’s agentive involvement in the act is avoided. But in the second case, explicit mention of the act itself is left out. Why the authors consider the second statement to be more direct than the first is not clear.

the act (A) or focus on S; (2) Expressions of annoyance or disapproval, do not explicitly mention A or H, but do express general annoyance at the violation; (3) Explicit complaint, S makes use of an openly face-threatening act towards H, but no sanctions against H; (4) Accusation and warning, S uses an open-face threat and implies potential sanctions; (5) Immediate threat, S openly attacks H. In this study, Olshtain and Weinbach found that the respondents tended to cluster around the three central strategies, and that the relative status of the S and H influenced the choice of complaint strategy. It is difficult to assess the validity of the coding categories in this study, however, since the authors provide only one or two examples in each case.

The second study focused more on the actual linguistic realizations of complaints, but merely presented four categories into which responses were placed: indirect, unmitigated, mitigated, and opting out. This study examined British-English, American-English and (Israeli) Hebrew speaking groups. They found that all three groups chose to express complaint more than they chose to opt out. They also discovered that overall, the three groups behaved very similarly in their choice of strategies. Assessment of their work is again difficult given the fact that they offer no examples of what they consider to be an indirect, a mitigated, or an unmitigated complaint.

### **1.3 Goals of this Study**

The above discussion about past research on complaints has been purposefully detailed. In each case, the studies have focused on particular parts of the complaint event but have often failed to define a "complaint" itself or provide the necessary support for the framework used within their analysis. It is important for a strong theoretical foundation to undergird any empirical analysis; indeed without such a frame, it is difficult to interpret data in any meaningful way.

Accordingly, the goals of this study are:

- (1) to construct a working definition of the speech act of complaining. This definition must minimally include:
  - (a) a description of the kinds of situations in which complaints can occur; and
  - (b) a statement regarding what constitutes a complaint itself;
- (2) to investigate the roles that speaker intention and hearer interpretation play in the evaluation of whether or not a complaint has been made;
- (3) to understand the ways in which indirectness and mitigation are accomplished within complaint realizations and how they contribute to the overall face-management accomplished;
- (4) to analyze the effect of the sociological variables of gender, power and social distance on complaint realization;
- (5) to situate the above analysis within a broader construct of face-management, in order to see how complaints interact with other speech

acts in potential face-threatening situations.

The organization of chapters in this volume are laid out along the lines of the research questions presented above. The next chapter first provides a working definition of the speech act of complaining as well as a description of the pre-conditions necessary for an utterance to be considered a complaint. It then describes the methodology utilized for the data collection of the present study, including hypotheses of the study. Chapter 3 focuses on the results first from the portion of the data collected through interviews, which reveals a good deal regarding the folklinguistic notions of complaints. Some of the quantitative data collected as a follow-up to the interviews are also discussed here, and these data shed some light on what goes into the evaluation of whether or not a complaint has been made.

The data collected through discourse completion tests are examined in Chapter 4. This chapter includes a more careful discussion of the strategies employed for directness, indirectness and mitigation in both complaint realizations and requests for repair, the two kinds of face-threatening acts that appeared most frequently in the data. Chapter 5 discusses the kinds and extent of variation found in the data as a result of the independent sociological variables examined. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses implications of the current study within the theoretical frame of politeness theory and suggests a possible course for further study.



## Chapter 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Defining Complaints

As noted in the first chapter, any investigation of a speech act must begin with a working definition of the act under investigation. A problem with many studies in the speech act literature is that they proceed by asking their readers to merely rely on some intuitive understanding of the speech act in question. While native-speaker intuition certainly plays an important role in the analysis of when a complaint has and hasn't been made, it is still necessary to spell out as explicitly as possible what constitutes a complaint. A good starting point is the examination of the conditions under which a complaint can be made.

In the broadest sense, a speaker (S) can make a complaint about any situation that he or she finds unsatisfactory. It is not the case, as Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) suggest, that some particular action has to have been committed by some hearer (H). In fact, one can complain about circumstances brought about by oneself (e.g. "I can't believe how horribly I did on that test") or even about situations with no apparent agentive cause (e.g. "I'm so tired of this rain.") A person can also complain about another individual to a third party<sup>1</sup> (e.g. "I'm so mad that Sue did that.") Furthermore, it is not obligatory that S perceive some act

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<sup>1</sup> This kind of complaint is what Boxer (1993) calls an "indirect complaint." This terminology should not be confused with my later discussion of directness v. indirectness in complaint realizations.

as having unfavorable consequences for him or herself, as Olshtain and Weinbach also claim. One can certainly complain about an act committed against someone else (e.g. "I can't believe that she didn't help you.") Thus it appears that the only prerequisite for complaining is that the speaker finds a particular situation to be unfavorable in some way. In this study, I will refer to situations where this is the case as "Potential Complaint Situations."

That being said, however, it is understandable that the past research which has examined complaints has primarily focused on circumstances in which the speaker is complaining about some particular act committed against him or herself for which he or she holds the hearer to be responsible in some way. These are the situations in which face is threatened most directly and which confrontation and face-management must be balanced most carefully. Thus they provide the most interesting scenarios for an analysis of politeness phenomena. As in past studies, the focus of the current study will be on situations in which the hearer has committed some particular act that the speaker believes to have adverse consequences for him or herself.

If the preconditions of a complaint are only that the speaker finds some situation unsatisfactory, the definition of a complaint is simply the expression of a negative evaluation of the situation by S. In order for the complaint to be considered a direct complaint, however, this negative evaluation must be straightforwardly recoverable from some aspect of the utterance itself. This will usually be a negatively-loaded word or phrase, but could also be a particular

intonation. Paralinguistic devices are an important area of study in the realm of complaints, but due to scope limitations, they will not be examined in the current study. Because complaints are so highly face-threatening, a wide variety of options exist for making a complaint indirectly. This point will be further elaborated in Chapter 4.

## **2.2 Data Collection**

A major tenet in sociolinguistic research is that if we want to investigate how people actually use language, we need to examine contexts in which language occurs naturally. This desire for "naturalness," however, is sometimes sacrificed in the course of research for a number of reasons. First, there are ethical issues related to observing and especially recording people's speech surreptitiously, which may be one of the few ways of obtaining truly naturally occurring data. Once people are made aware that their speech is under investigation, they often become more self-conscious of how they are speaking (a phenomenon described by Labov (1972) as the "observer's paradox"). Second, if language is analyzed in naturally occurring situations, it may be difficult to account for all of the factors that are potentially influencing how the language is being used. There is little experimental control in these cases. Finally, when investigating a specific linguistic item, using naturally occurring data may result in a tremendous amount of analysis that yields only a few tokens of the item being studied. In terms of the study of speech acts, it may be fairly easy to observe instances of, for example,

greetings by simply hanging around areas where people are likely to meet and greet one another. In the case of complaints, however, it is much more challenging to find ways of observing natural instances of complaint realizations.

Because of these challenges inherent in the study of speech acts, many researchers have relied on the use of discourse completion tests, in which respondents are presented with situations and asked to write what they would say in that situation. For reasons of both experimental control and comparability to other research in this area, the present study also utilized a discourse completion test as the primary means of collecting utterances in Potential Complaint Situations.

The data for this study were collected in two phases. In the first phase, qualitative interviews were conducted by university-aged students with their peers. The primary reason for having students, rather than the researcher, interview respondents was to minimize the effects of the observer's paradox as much as possible by reducing the power differential within the interview situation and increasing the participants' familiarity. In this way, the researcher was able to obtain more casual and less guarded responses.<sup>2</sup> The interviewers were given a script to follow in which they first asked their respondents to define a complaint and to provide other words that could be used to describe a complaint. Follow-up questions were used to further define and clarify the categories which respondents

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<sup>2</sup> The interviews were often filled with laughter and were sprinkled with both slang terms and in many cases a good number of obscenities, all indications of their casual tone.

offered. The interviewers then presented respondents with a number of actual complaints drawn from a pilot study (Hartley 1996) and asked them to provide words or adjectives that describe the complaint or the person using the complaint.<sup>3</sup> A total of 73 interviews were conducted, with 38 female respondents and 35 male respondents. The dyads were primarily same-sex, although a number of cross-sex pairs also participated.

In phase 2 of the data collection, 120 university students (60 males and 60 females) completed a questionnaire that contained two parts.<sup>4</sup> The first part was a discourse completion test, in which respondents were presented with four situations and asked to write what they would say in those situations. The four situations chosen varied from each other in terms of two important factors which Brown and Levinson (1987) claim play a significant role in influencing levels of politeness--namely, social distance and power.

Social distance (D) in this study is represented by the degree of familiarity between participants in the situation. A (-D) situation is one in which there is a high degree of familiarity, as opposed to (+D), where the participants do not know each other well, if at all. Power has to do with the degree to which one participant in a situation is able to impose his or her plans or self-evaluation at the expense of the other. A (-P) situation is one in which the participants are more-or-less social equals, while a (+P) situation in this study will be one in which the offender has a

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<sup>3</sup> The actual script that interviewers were asked to follow is presented in Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of the questionnaire as it was presented to respondents can be found in Appendix B.

higher rank ascribed to him or her than the person who is offended and thus complaining.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, this study includes an added sociolinguistic variable, namely gender. For each situation, half of the male respondents and half of the female respondents were asked to imagine a female committing the offense, while the other half of the respondent group was presented with a male offender. The results were a four-way gender classification for each scenario in terms of the gender identities of the complainer/speaker and the offender/hearer: female-female, female-male, male-female and male-male.

The respondents were given the following directions for completing the discourse portion of the questionnaire:

**Directions:** You will be presented with four situations. For each situation, do the following:

1. Read the details of the scenario and then write out a script of what you would say in that situation on the blank lines given below the scenario. Please try to be as realistic as possible; that is, write only what you believe you would actually say, and not what you would merely think or wish to say.
2. If you wouldn't say anything in the situation, write "Nothing" on the first line and then on the remaining lines give a brief explanation as to why you would say nothing.
3. After you have completed this task, rate each situation by circling a number on each of the scales which follow it.

The actual scenarios that were presented to the respondents are listed below, along with an indication of the social distance and power differentials that

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<sup>5</sup> A third possibility for power exists, where the person doing the complaining has more power than the one being complained to. This situation, however, calls for the least amount of face-management of the three power possibilities and has thus been excluded from this study in order to make the scope of the investigation more manageable.

they represent (although these markings were not present on the questionnaires).

Only one gender was presented to each respondent, as explained above.

1. A good friend of yours from high school is visiting you for the weekend. In preparation for his/her visit, you clean the kitchen thoroughly. Shortly after your friend's arrival, you tell him/her to make himself/herself comfortable while you run out to the store. When you arrive home, you notice that your friend has made a huge mess in the kitchen. You say to your friend: (-D, -P)
2. You've been waiting in line for two hours to buy tickets to a concert that is almost sold out. As you're standing there, a man/woman about your age tries to cut in line in front of you. You say: (+D, -P)
3. You have worked for your current boss for some time now and you get along well. When your annual performance review comes around, you find out that he/she has given you a bad review. You do not think the review is a fair picture of your work. When you see your boss, you say: (-D, +P)
4. Last year when you were planning out your courses, you went to talk for the first and only time to the professor who has been assigned to you as your academic adviser, in order to ask his/her advice on what courses you should take for your major. After taking several of the courses he/she said you had to take, you find out that one of the courses will not count towards your major after all, and that you will need to take a different course instead during summer school in order to graduate on time. You go to your adviser's office during his/her office hours and say: (+D, +P)

After the description of each situation, respondents were given five blank lines to write out their responses. It should be noted that the four scenarios were presented to respondents in different orders, so as to reduce any ordering effects overall.

As mentioned above, the four scenarios in this study were constructed to represent the four possible combinations of [+/- power] and [+/- social distance], with the additional factor of gender (of both speaker and hearer). To achieve slightly better control in this study, a single situation could have been chosen and

the participants in the scenario varied to produce the four-way power/distance distinction. There are several reasons why this research utilized four different scenarios, rather than this single scenario with varied participants approach.

First, one of the aims in constructing the scenarios was to create situations in which the respondents could reasonably and realistically find themselves. To imagine a single scenario in which a friend, a stranger, an employer and an advisor (or some other manifestations of the possible power/distance relationships) would all commit the same offense proved to be quite a challenge. While a scenario such as cutting in line might have been a candidate, it does not seem likely that someone one knows (i.e. a [- distance] relationship) would simply cut in line without saying anything. In addition, as these respondents were all university students, it is difficult to imagine that many of them would be waiting in line for a concert that both their peers and, for example, academic advisors might equally want to attend. Perhaps a different kind of event, such as a football game, would be more realistic. In any case, trying to create a single scenario that would find four different participants equally likely to commit the same offense could easily have taken away from the plausibility of the scenarios.

Secondly, the practical concern of availability of respondents motivated the choice to use four different, rather than one single, situation. Were respondents presented with the same scenario four different times, there may have been some redundancy effects in their responses. In other words, by the time they reached the fourth presentation of the same scenario, their responses may have been greatly



influenced by the previous responses they had written. Great care would have had to be taken to randomize the scenarios so that equal numbers of respondents were presented with the four participants in all 16 possible orderings. Another possibility would have been to present each respondent with only one of the possible four participant scenarios. This, however, would have required four times the number of respondents. As questionnaires for this study were handed out in a large undergraduate class in which respondents were not required to participate in the study, either of these possibilities would have posed serious difficulties for the timely collection of data.

Finally, using only one scenario instead of four would have allowed for better control, but this control would have come at the expense of some comparative ability. Even using four different scenarios, this research study is necessarily quite narrowly focused in terms of the demographics of the respondent group. To further narrow the scope of investigation to a single scenario would make any statements of generalizability that much more tentative. By employing four different situations, comparisons can be made among the responses given for different kinds of scenarios, and these differences themselves become an interesting source of variability.

In past studies of complaints, up to 20 different scenarios have been utilized within the data for a single study. These studies have usually lumped all responses together into a single data set for analysis, without taking into account any variability which may be a result of the differences in how the offenses in question

are perceived. The current study thus goes one step further in its analysis by attempting to understand how the characteristics of the situation itself can contribute to the realization of complaints.

Since four different situations were used in this study, an important question is in what ways (beyond the power/distance relationships of the participants) the situations are significantly different from one another. More specifically, what are the characteristics of a situation that might affect the way in which a complaint is registered? Although a large number could be imagined (and perhaps even controlled for), three factors were examined in the current study.

First, the perceived severity of an offense is likely to influence complaint realizations. If an offense is seen as not severe at all, chances are greater that respondents may choose not to complain at all, or may use a less face-threatening complaint than if the offense is perceived to be quite severe. Second, how responsible the speaker holds the hearer for the offense in question may also influence how a complaint is made. This is particularly true in situations in which a person is complaining to some representative of the offending party rather than the person who directly committed the offense, although no scenarios of that sort were utilized in the current study. Still, it is an interesting question as to how responsible the offenders in each of the four scenarios are held to be.

Finally, whether or not the speaker thinks that the hearer is likely to repair the situation may also affect the complaint realization. This characteristic speaks to the motivation for the complaint. It is an interesting question as to whether

complaints differ if the individual making the complaint feels like his or her complaint is likely to change the situation in question. It is important to note again that these three characteristics do not represent an exhaustive list of the possible influences on complaint realizations. They do, however, provide a good starting point for an investigation of how a situation itself might produce some variation in complaints, apart even from the participant relations involved in the situation.

In order to examine these three characteristics, respondents were presented with three questions after they had written their responses for each scenario and asked to rate them as follows:

*How severe is this offense?*

not severe at all      1      2      3      4      5      very severe

*How responsible is [the person] for this situation?*

not very responsible 1      2      3      4      5      very responsible

*How likely is it that [the person] will do something to correct the situation?*

not likely at all      1      2      3      4      5      very likely

The four situations above were chosen because they were situations in which the respondents could realistically find themselves. Thus, while the data are not naturally occurring, the respondents were not being asked to role play a type of situation with which they might be completely unfamiliar, a criticism which has often been made regarding discourse completion data collection techniques.

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were presented with

three complaints from each of the same four situations (for a total of 12 complaints) which were drawn from the pilot study. For each complaint the respondent was asked the following questions:

1. Would you consider this statement to be a complaint?
2. If the respondent circled “yes,” they were then asked which category of complaint the response best fits into.<sup>6</sup>
3. Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?
4. Do you think the other person in the situation will interpret this statement as a complaint?

The respondents were then asked to rate the complaint on nineteen five-point semantic-differential scales.<sup>7</sup> The word pairs used for these scales were drawn from the terms offered in the second half of the interview data. For example, since in the qualitative interviews a number of people had labeled some of the responses as “rude,” all of the responses presented in the second half of the questionnaire were rated on a “rude - polite” scale. Once again, the situations and complaints were presented in different orders to different groups of respondents in order to eliminate possible ordering effects.

In order to control the number of independent variables within this study, the respondent group chosen was fairly socially homogenous. The respondents were all between 18 and 25 years old, from the Great Lakes or Midwest region of the U.S., students at Michigan State University, and native speakers of English. In

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<sup>6</sup> The categories offered were five of the most frequently stated terms given by respondents in the initial portion of the interview data when they were asked about other terms that could be used to describe a complaint. The respondents were also given the category of “Other.” followed by a blank line on which they could write an alternative term.

<sup>7</sup> The actual scales utilized are presented in Section 3.2.

addition, it was primarily respondents of European-American descent within this demographic group that were studied, although a number of respondents of other racial groups were included in the interview portion of the data collection.

For the questionnaire portion of the data collection where greater control over the respondent group was possible, care was also taken to balance the respondent group in terms of urban-rural origin. Half of the respondents within each gender group grew up in towns with populations of 10,000 or less, while the other half came from areas with populations of greater than 10,000 residents. While some research has shown urban v. rural location to be an important sociolinguistic variable, the pilot study conducted for this research showed no significant effects from residence. Thus this variable was not included in the present study as an independent variable to be investigated.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

As data in this study were both qualitative and quantitative, a variety of tools were incorporated in the data analysis. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Analysis of folklinguistic definitions of complaints, as well as collection of terms to be used in the semantic-differential portion of the questionnaire, was done using HyperResearch, a qualitative analysis software program. HyperResearch allows the researcher to develop a coding system and then code a large number of transcripts using this system. Reports can then be generated to locate occurrences of specific codes with the corpus. Use of this

software allowed a more sophisticated and systematic analysis of themes within the qualitative data.

Data from the discourse completion portion of the questionnaire were coded first according to whether or not the response could be considered a direct complaint, an indirect complaint or a choice to opt out of complaining.<sup>8</sup> Those responses that contained a direct complaint were then coded for use of mitigators. For indirect complaints, an analysis of the kinds of speech acts used (e.g. request, compliment, offer, etc.) was done.

Chi-square tests of independence were run on this portion of the data to determine the effects on choice of response contributed by the four independent variables in the study: speaker sex, hearer sex, power and social distance. In addition, a correlation between ratings of severity of offense, responsibility of the offender and likelihood of correction and directness levels were explored, also through chi-square analysis.

For part two of the questionnaire data, responses to the questions asked about each complaint realization were tabulated and compared. Factor analysis was run on the semantic-differential ratings to identify the major factors involved in the interpretation of complaints. Mean scores of each situation for each of the resulting factor groups were then calculated.

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<sup>8</sup> Opting out included both instances in which the respondent indicated that he or she would say nothing and cases in which the respondent wrote something that could clearly not be considered a complaint, e.g. "Hi, how are you doing today?"

## 2.4 Expected Conclusions

A number of hypotheses were examined, based on a pilot study of complaint realizations (Hartley 1996) as well as other studies of politeness phenomena, particularly Brown and Levinson (1987), found in the sociolinguistics and pragmatics literature. These hypotheses, together with their theoretical bases, are presented below.

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Respondents will draw on a variety of politeness strategies in performing complaints, including the choice of opting out of performing the FTA, the use of mitigators (both syntactic and lexical), and the use of indirectness, to accomplish face management. This hypothesis is based both on the pilot study (Hartley 1996) and Brown and Levinson (1987).

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** Situations where the participants are in an on-going relationship (i.e., -D relationships) will result in more face management than those where the encounter is brief and passing. This will manifest itself in the use of more politeness strategies, such as mitigators and use of indirectness. Similarly, those situations which incorporate a power differential (+P) will also require greater attention to face management and the corresponding use of politeness strategies. Considering these factors in combination, the greatest amount of politeness should be used for the scenario which includes the boss (-D, +P), while the stranger cutting in line scenario (+D, -P) should produce the greatest amount of directness and the least amount of mitigation. This hypothesis is based primarily on the work of Brown and Levinson (1987).

**HYPOTHESIS 3:** Gender may influence the results, both in terms of how complaints are made *by* men v. women and in terms of how complaints are made *to* men v. women. Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that many of the findings in the sociolinguistic literature which support the idea that men and women use different “genderlects” may be the result of other factors, such as power differentials and social networks. Nevertheless, there is enough empirical evidence within the sociolinguistic literature to suggest that gender is an important social variable to consider in studies of language use.

In addition to these specific hypotheses, which were examined primarily through quantitative results in this study, qualitative methods were used to explore the folklinguistic notions of what constitutes a “complaint” and how various elements within a situation (participants, setting, etc.) interact to produce circumstances where different kinds of complaints are seen to be appropriate.



## Chapter 3

### THE FOLKLINGUISTICS OF COMPLAINING

#### 3.1 Folklinguistic Categories of Complaining

In the last chapter, a working definition of a complaint as any negative statement made about a situation that one finds unsatisfactory was given.

Folklinguistic studies of a variety of language phenomena, however, reveal that linguists' beliefs about language do not always coincide with popular ideas and attitudes. Because of this, a good place to begin an analysis of what constitutes a complaint is to compare the technical definition that forms the basis of this study with how respondents themselves define a complaint.

**Table 1.** Aspects of complaining in folklinguistic definitions

Feature	# of occurrences
Being unhappy, upset, angry	19
Having a problem with something	9
Voicing opinion, concern, feelings	15
Expressing disagreement	13
Saying you don't like something	13
Being or saying something negative	9
Expressing dissatisfaction	6
Trying to resolve or fix something	6
Yelling at someone	2

In the interviews, the first question that respondents were presented with was "Give me your definition of a complaint." Using the HyperResearch software

program, an analysis of responses given to this question revealed ten aspects of complaining, which can be further reduced to two obligatory and two optional components.<sup>1</sup> These aspects, along with the number of times they occurred in the interviews, are presented in Table 1.

The most frequently mentioned aspect of complaining was someone being unhappy, upset or angry with a situation or person. For example, one respondent said, "Generally it's just when someone's upset about something" and another offered, "A complaint would be if someone's very unhappy." An additional nine respondents said that a complaint occurs when someone has a problem with something. Examples of statement along this line include: "It's basically just when someone has a problem with something" and "A complaint is something that a customer or any kind of consumer has a problem with, the product they're buying or the services they're receiving." These two aspect correspond to the precondition of a complaint given in the technical definition (i.e. that a speaker finds a situation to be unsatisfactory in some way).

The next five categories listed in Table 1 are all variants of the technical definition of a complaint as the negative evaluation of a particular situation. Fifteen people expressed this in terms of voicing some concern or telling your feelings to another person, as in the following statement: "A complaint is um

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<sup>1</sup> The aspects presented here are drawn from the actual wordings of the responses given. For this reason, several categories are fairly overlapping in their meanings and could be collapsed together. Also, it should be noted that a single response could be categorized into more than one aspect.

when you voice your opinion with something that you don't agree with." Another respondent explained it as: "When someone is not happy about something and they tell their feelings to another person."

In thirteen cases each, respondents claimed that complaining involved expressing disagreement or saying that you don't like something. Examples of disagreement include: "A complaint is someone who doesn't agree with what's happening in his or her life" and "Someone complains when they're not in agreement with what's going on." In the "don't like" category, respondents offered definitions such as "A complaint is when somebody tells another person about something they don't like" and "Someone who's bitching about something that they don't like."

The next most frequent category was being or saying something negative. This wording was used nine times. Examples include: "when people are being verbally negative" and "expressing detrimental views or opinions about a situation or person." Expressing dissatisfaction with a situation was the final way in which the technical definition of a complaint appeared in the folklinguistic data. For example, "A complaint is when a person is unsatisfied with a certain someone or a certain thing."

In addition to the preconditions for a complaint and the actual definition of a complaint, six responses also incorporated the intended outcome of complaining. This was expressed in terms of trying to resolve or fix something. For example,

one respondent said: "A complaint would be something that I have a problem with that I need to talk to someone about and get fixed."

Finally, two respondents thought that yelling at someone should also be included in the definition of complaining, although the data in the following chapter shows that this is clearly not obligatory. Their responses are as follows: "when someone does something to make you angry and you might yell or scream at them because they did that to make you angry" and "when somebody's done something wrong you have the right to yell at them or tell them that they did something wrong."

This examination of the folk definitions of complaining provides support for the technical definition of a complaint that forms the basis of this study. It seems that there is general agreement that for something to be a complaint, the individual making the utterance must be unhappy or dissatisfied with a particular situation (which is precisely the precondition for a complaint in the technical definition). They then choose to voice their feelings or opinions about the matter, i.e. they produce a negative evaluation of the situation. Sometimes this is done with an eye towards fixing the situation, although this does not appear to be an obligatory aspect of complaining. In other words, sometimes complaints are made for the sole purpose of venting frustration or anger, and this may or may not be accomplished through yelling at someone.

With a basic folk definition of a complaint established, it is also interesting to examine the various labels for complaining that exist in the folk wisdom. This

**Table 2. Folk labels for complaints**

<b>Term/Phrase</b>	<b>Total # suggesting term (n=73)</b>	<b># of females suggesting term (n=38)</b>	<b># of males suggesting term (n=35)</b>
Bitching	48	26	22
Whining	22	9	13
Nagging	9	5	4
Griping	6	5	1
Arguing	4	2	2
Saying something/being negative	4	2	2
Moaning	4	0	4
Chewing out	3	2	1
Disagreeing	3	2	1
Voicing opinion/concern	3	2	1
Annoying	3	1	2
Saying you don't like something	2	2	0
Talking about/discussing the situation	2	2	0
Being unhappy	2	2	0
Criticizing	2	1	1
Sharing upsetness/being upset	2	0	2
Crying	2	0	2
Throwing a fit	1	1	0
Letting off steam	1	1	0
Request for some diversity in what they're doing	1	1	0
Ventilating	1	0	1
Trippin'	1	0	1
Hassling	1	0	1
Being disruptive	1	0	1
Pissin'	1	0	1
Bothering	1	0	1

was done by asking the respondents the question: "What else can you call it when a person complains?" In response to this question, 26 different terms or phrases were offered. These are presented in Table 2.

By far the most common category of complaining for these university students is "bitching", with 48 respondents offering this term. This is followed by "whining", given by 22 people. "Nagging" and "griping" come next, with nine and six respondents respectively suggesting these terms. There were a few gender effects in this portion of the data, although given the relatively small numbers here it is unlikely that these differences are significant. "Whining" is a term that more males than females use, with 13 males (or 37%) offering the term while only nine females (24%) did. "Moaning" is exclusively a male term, with all four instances of this item being given by men. In contrast, females tend to use the term "griping," with five women but only one man offering this word.

Having established the labels which students use to describe complaints, the question arises whether these labels represent sub-categories of complaining, and, if so, how they are defined and differ from each other. In elaborating on the various labels, aspects such as attitude,<sup>2</sup> degree, duration, effect, reason, specificity, emotion involved and language used all helped to differentiate among

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the term "attitude" here as it is commonly understood in phrases such as "he has an attitude problem," rather than the technical linguistic uses associated with either "propositional attitudes" in Semantics or "language attitudes" in Social Psychology of Language research.

**Table 3.** Definitions for selected subcategories of complaints

<b>“Bitching”</b>	
<i>Attitude:</i>	“bitching is getting an attitude”
<i>Degree:</i>	“bitching is venting your anger in a severe manner”
<i>Effect:</i>	“when you're bitching at someone you're just kind of babbling telling them you really don't appreciate what they're doing and they're not I don't really care if they learn anything from it”
<i>Emotion:</i>	“bitching is I think um when you're really really really upset about something that's really really making you mad”
<i>Language:</i>	“I would say that bitching out is far more - like there would be some swear words in that situation”
<i>Reason:</i>	“you're just getting things off your chest”
<i>Specificity:</i>	“bitching has a tendency to be more personal, more directed towards a person instead of - such as their bad habits etcetera”
<b>“Whining”</b>	
<i>Duration:</i>	“whining is uh continually going on about something”
<i>Effect:</i>	“whining's more like babyish, and annoying and makes me just like think of obnoxious people”
<i>Reason:</i>	“whining's kind of like uh when you're unhappy for silly reasons and you just whining for little reasons”
<i>Language:</i>	“whining you've got these [whining sound] (laugh) just high pitch almost like a cry”
<b>“Nagging”</b>	
<i>Degree:</i>	“I would compare nagging to so- somelike like, if you're complaining about how your mom won't let you go outside and play and you're like "come on mom let me play" and bitching is more on the serious note where like - something like "screw you mom you never let me go out with my friends" something more serious than nagging”
<i>Duration:</i>	“nagging would be just like keep on saying it”
<i>Effect:</i>	“I think nagging is more or less just like wanting your way and just you know nagging until you get your way”
<b>“Gripping”</b>	
<i>Degree:</i>	“I also think maybe bitching might be a little harsher than gripping”
<i>Reason:</i>	“gripping to someone is more along the lines of if you have a problem with what they're doing, like you have something to gripe about it's not it's not something that you don't have control over”
<i>Language:</i>	“gripping I guess is kind of like you're just - I don't know in your regular voice”

**Table 4. Situations and responses judged in phase two**

<b>Situation 1:</b> A person returns from running errands to find their visiting friend has messed up the newly-cleaned kitchen. They say:	
<i>Response 1.1:</i>	“I spent all day cleaning the kitchen. I would appreciate it if you would pick up your mess.”
<i>Response 1.2:</i>	“Boy, someone was in the cooking mood.”
<i>Response 1.3:</i>	“What the hell did you do to the kitchen?”
<b>Situation 2:</b> A stranger cuts in line ahead of someone who has been waiting two hours to buy concert tickets. The person says:	
<i>Response 2.1:</i>	“Excuse me, but the end of the line is back there. We’ve been waiting all day.”
<i>Response 2.2:</i>	“I think people cutting in line is really rude.”
<i>Response 2.3:</i>	“Who do you think you are?”
<b>Situation 3:</b> A person has just received a bad performance review from their boss with whom they have worked awhile and get along well. They go to see the boss and say:	
<i>Response 3.1:</i>	“Why did you give me a review like that. I really don’t think that was fair. Why didn’t you talk to me - instead of giving me a bad review. I though you would be cooler than that.”
<i>Response 3.2:</i>	“I would like to know why you gave me a bad review. I feel that I have done more than enough to make this company happy.”
<i>Response 3.3:</i>	“I don’t understand why I received a bad review I wish that I had been told that you thought my performance was bad.”
<b>Situation 4:</b> A student finds out the advice their adviser gave them regarding classes was wrong and they will now have to go to summer school. They go to see their professor and say:	
<i>Response 4.1:</i>	“Is there any way I can get out of this requirement since you gave me some incorrect information?”
<i>Response 4.2:</i>	“What am I supposed to do now that I’ve wasted my time on unnecessary courses?”
<i>Response 4.3:</i>	“How could you give me the wrong advice? Aren’t you supposed to know this stuff?”



the terms. Table 3 includes selected quotes that exemplify some these aspects for each of the top four categories.

In general, bitching seems to be thought of as the harshest term and is accompanied by an attitude. It's also associated with anger or intense emotion. Whining and nagging are both complaints that are stretched out over long periods of time. The difference is that nagging appears to accomplish something whereas whining might just be done to hear oneself complain. Gripping appears to be used when there are specific issues at hand, but these issues are not of major importance.

To get a better understanding of the nuances among the various subcategories of complaints suggested by the respondents, additional data were collected in the second phase of the research. As described in Chapter 2, this phase of data collection included the presentation of 12 utterances (three in each of four situations) to respondents who were then asked to make certain judgments about them. The statements that were presented to the respondents are given in Table 4.

The first question that respondents were asked about each utterance was whether or not they considered it to be a complaint. Table 5 presents the results of this question.

**Table 5.** Results from: "Would you consider this statement to be a complaint?"

Response	Number of respondents answer "Yes" (n=120)	Percent answering "Yes"
1.1	68	56.67%
1.2	23	19.17%
1.3	105	87.50%
2.1	59	49.17%
2.2	98	81.67%
2.3	86	71.67%
3.1	107	89.17%
3.2	74	61.67%
3.3	50	41.67%
4.1	44	36.67%
4.2	118	98.33%
4.3	95	79.17%

In each of the situations, there was one response that the majority of respondents did not consider a complaint. These are responses 1.2: "Boy, somebody was in the cooking mood"; 2.1: "Excuse me, but the end of the line is back there. We've been waiting all day"; 3.3: "I don't understand why you gave me a bad review. I wish that I had been told that my performance was bad."; and 4.1: "Is there any way I can get out of this requirement since you gave me some incorrect information?" In each of these situations, the responses in question are clearly the most indirect examples of complaining.<sup>3</sup> It may be the case that if these responses had been presented in isolation, they would have been judged to be complaints by a larger percentage of respondents. In comparison with much more direct complaints, however, respondents may have chosen to classify them

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<sup>3</sup> A more detailed discussion of indirectness in complaint realizations is taken up in Chapter 4.

as non-complaints, particularly since the choice of categorizing them as "indirect" complaints was not offered to the respondents.

For those respondents who did consider each statement to be a complaint, the next task they were asked to do was to categorize the complaint by selecting one of five labels, which were chosen because they appeared frequently in the interview data. These categories were: "Whining", "Bitching", "Nagging", "Gripping" and "Chewing out." In addition, respondents were given the option of selecting "Other" and filling in a term of their choosing. The results from this question are presented in Figure 2.

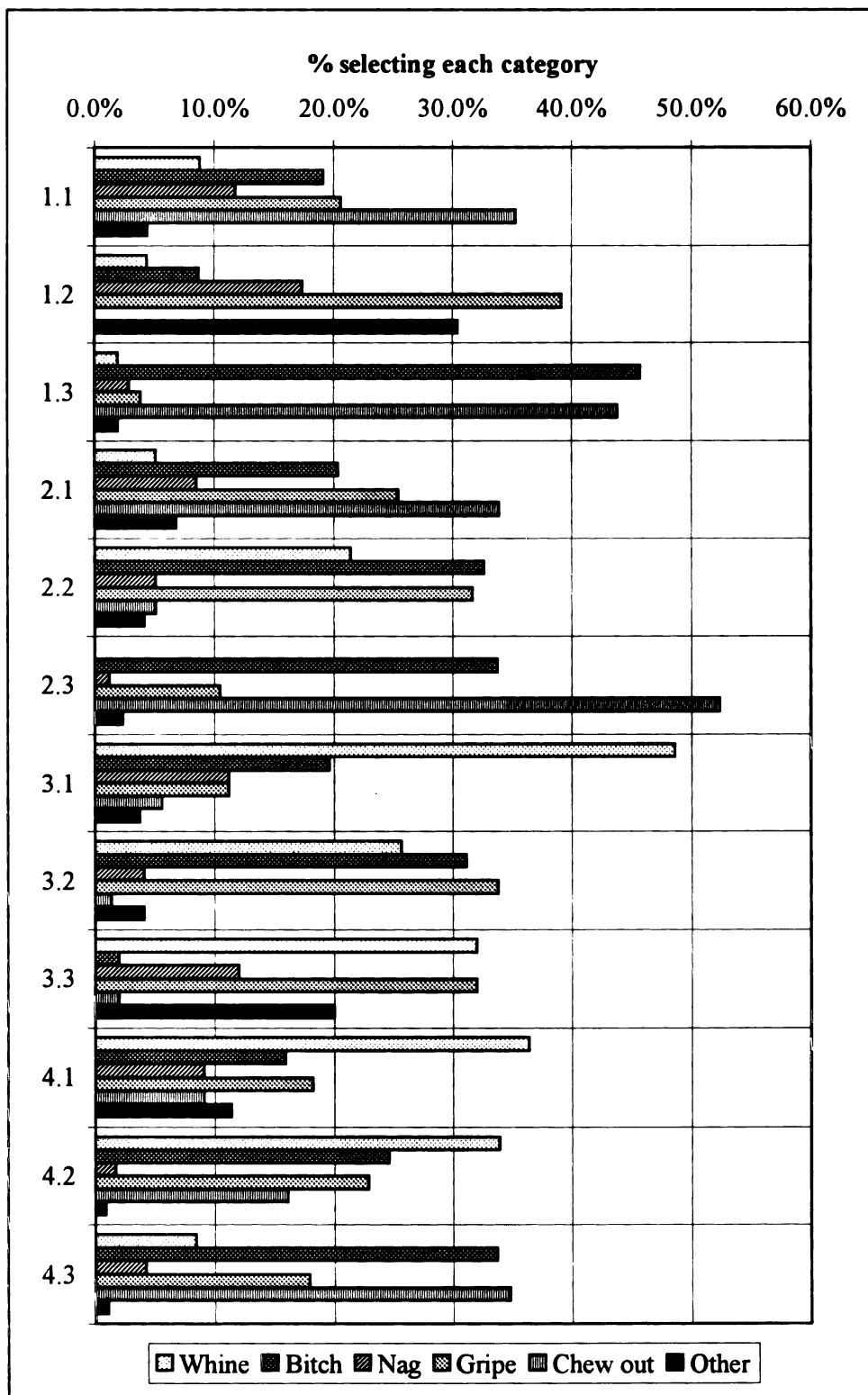
For all of the responses, the categorizations were divided between two or more categories. This is likely because the categories themselves are overlapping in many ways. In addition, part of the definition of each of these kinds of complaining has to do with the context. So, for example, what might be considered a "bitch" if said to a friend might sound more like a "whine" if said to a boss. In any case the best examples of each of the categories seem to be as follows:

"Whine" – 3.1 "Why did you give me a review like that. I really don't think that was fair. Why didn't you talk to me - instead of giving me a bad review. I thought you would be cooler than that." (said to boss)

"Bitch" – 1.3 "What the hell did you do to the kitchen?" (said to friend) – this is almost equally considered to be "chewing out"

"Gripe" – 1.2 "Boy, someone was in the cooking mood." (said to friend)

"Chew out" – 2.3 "Who do you think you are?" (said to stranger)



**Figure 2. Complaint categorization for each statement**

There doesn't seem to be a very good example of nagging in this data, according to the respondents, although response 1.2 ("Boy someone was in the cooking mood") received the highest percentage for this category.

There are several interesting points to note in regards to the category of "other." First, the four responses which received the lowest percentages of people calling them a complaint (see Table 5: 1.2 -- 19.17%; 2.1 -- 49.17%; 3.3 -- 41.67%; 4.1 -- 36.67%) also received the highest percentages of "other categorization" among those who did classify them as complaints (see Figure 2: 1.2 -- 30.43%; 2.1 -- 6.78%; 3.3 -- 20.00%; 4.1 -- 11.36%). In other words, of the almost 20% of respondents who considered response 1.2 to be a complaint for example, almost 1/3 of those individuals were not happy with the categories presented to them for complaint classification and instead opted to create their own category for this response.

In fact, the "other" classification of response 1.2 sheds some light on why such a low percentage of respondents chose to call this a complaint in the first place. Five of the seven individuals who placed this response in the "other" category called it "sarcastic." It thus seems that the indirectness utilized in this complaint comes across as sarcasm rather than a more benign and less face-threatening hint, even when intonation that might help convey a sarcastic meaning is lacking in the stimulus data. It may be the case that many of the more than 80% of respondents who said that this response was not a complaint nonetheless considered it a sarcastic comment. In fact four individuals who circled "No" to the

question "Do you consider this statement to be a complaint" wrote on their questionnaires that they would classify the statement as sarcasm. It thus seems then that respondents want to keep separate the illocutionary act of "complaining" and rhetorical device of "sarcasm."<sup>4</sup> Why this is would need to be explored more thoroughly in future research.

Responses 2.1, 3.3 and 4.1, in contrast to 1.2, seem to derive their low percentages of classification as complaints from their subtlety or tact. Terms such as "questioning," "legitimate," "subtle" and "stating the facts" are applied to these responses, both by those who classified these statements as "other" complaints and those who said they were not complaints at all.

### **3.2 Intention and Interpretation in Complaining**

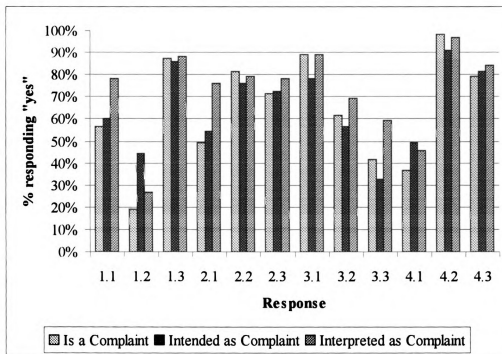
In the performance of a face-threatening act, an individual generally has a number of options in terms of directness, as illustrated in Brown & Levinson's (1987) decision making tree of possible strategies for performing FTAs (see Figure 1). Using more indirect strategies, such as going off-record, has the advantage of allowing the speaker to avoid responsibility for damaging the other participant's face, while still saying something that will hopefully get his or her point across. The primary disadvantage, however, in going off-record is that the point may in fact be missed or ignored altogether by the hearer. Because of this, it

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<sup>4</sup> Although note the discussion in Chapter 4 regarding the use of sarcasm as an indicator of direct complaints.

is possible for any given FTA for there to be a mismatch between the speaker's intention (i.e. to perform the FTA) and the hearer's interpretation (i.e. whether or not he or she understood the statement to be the intended FTA).

In order to explore the relationship between speaker intention and hearer interpretation in complaint realizations, the respondents were also asked to judge whether they thought that each of the 12 statements discussed in the last section were intended to be complaints and would be interpreted as complaints. The results of these questions, combined with the previous question of whether or not the respondent thought each statement was a complaint, are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Is v. Intended to be. v. Interpreted as complaint

Paired-sample t-tests reveal that there is a statistically significant (at the .01 level or greater) difference between the ratings of intention and interpretation for seven of the twelve responses. Table 6 shows the t values obtained.

**Table 6.** T-values for intention v. interpretation ratings

<b>Response</b>	<b>t<sub>obt</sub></b>	<b>d.f.</b>	<b>p</b>
1.1	4.674	119	.000
1.2	-3.345	119	.001
1.3	0.377	119	.707
2.1	3.431	119	.001
2.2	1.420	119	.158
2.3	2.620	119	.010
3.1	3.513	119	.001
3.2	5.596	119	.000
3.3	3.431	119	.001
4.1	0.217	119	.828
4.2	1.000	119	.319
4.3	0.831	119	.408

Of the seven significantly different responses, it is only response 1.2 (“Boy, someone was in the cooking mood”) that respondents thought was more likely to be intended as a complaint than interpreted as one. This is interesting in light of the previous point regarding the distinction between sarcasm and complaining. For the remaining six responses, respondents thought that the statement is more likely to be interpreted as a complaint than intended as one.

This result points to the importance of the hearer in the negotiation of face-management. It appears that the nature of Potential Complaint Situations is such that almost any statement made could be interpreted as a complaint, even if it was not the speaker's intention that it be one. Perhaps this is due to the hearer's own



recognition that in these situations he or she has violated some social norm or otherwise threatened the speaker's face (whether intentionally or unintentionally) and as a result is expecting some kind of negative response from the speaker. Thus any response can be taken to be a negative evaluation, i.e. a complaint.

### **3.3 Factors in the Interpretation of Complaints**

If hearer interpretation plays such an important role in the overall face-management of Potential Complaint Situations, then it is necessary to understand what factors go into the process of interpreting statements to be complaints. The results of the semantic-differential rating task shed some light on this issue.

As mentioned in chapter 2, from the initial interview data in which respondents offered adjectives to describe certain complaints, 19 word pairs were chosen to be included in the second round of data collection. The terms were selected based on the frequency with which they were mentioned in the interviews in combination with the breadth of meaning that they provided for a description of complaints. These word pairs were:

Rude - Polite	Effective - Ineffective
Mean - Nice	Negative - Positive
Legitimate - Not Legitimate	Not Sarcastic - Sarcastic
Diplomatic - Not Diplomatic	Defensive - Not Defensive
Indirect - Direct	Arrogant - Not Arrogant
Unreasonable - Reasonable	Not Assertive - Assertive
Aggressive - Non-aggressive	Patient - Impatient
Appropriate - Inappropriate	Mature - Immature
Angry - Not Angry	Passive - Active
Confrontational - Non-confrontational	

Respondents were asked to rate on a five point scale each of the responses discussed above in terms of these word pairs. Word pairs were presented in the order shown above, so that not all positive terms would be on one side or the other. Polarities were then reversed on a number of the word pairs for analysis, so that the ratings went from negative (=1) to positive (=5).

Factor analysis on the data set revealed that the 19 word pairs could be reduced to three major factor groups, accounting for almost 60% of the total variance. Table 7 presents the factors in each of the three groups, along with their weightings. .30 was selected as the cut-off point for inclusion in a factor group; terms that received a weighting slightly less than this value can be considered marginal terms in the factor group (and are thus indicated with parentheses in Table 7).

**Table 7. Factor Groups (with weightings)**

#1	“Diplomacy”	#2	“Boldness”	#3	“Manner”
0.86	Reasonable	-0.81	Assertive [=Not Assertive]	0.83	Nice
0.83	Appropriate	-0.79	Active [=Passive]	0.80	Polite
0.81	Legitimate	-0.73	Direct [=Not Direct]	0.76	Not Angry
0.56	Diplomatic	0.59	Non-confrontational	0.72	Patient
0.55	Mature	0.58	Non-aggressive	0.72	Positive
0.41	Effective	0.30	Not Angry	0.57	Mature
0.41	Polite	(0.25	Not Defensive)	0.55	Non-aggressive
0.37	Positive	(-0.25	Effective [=Ineffective])	0.54	Not Arrogant
0.35	Nice			0.46	Non-confrontational
(0.29	Not Arrogant)			0.42	Diplomatic
				0.39	Not Defensive
				0.30	Appropriate
				(0.28	Not Sarcastic)

The first factor group is labeled “Diplomacy”, because these are factors which relate to the legitimacy of the complaint, the way the complaint is handled, and the outcome of the complaint. The second factor group has been labeled “Boldness,” because it appears to deal with how willing the person is to stand up for him or herself. This factor group is framed in the negative; i.e. the respondents seem more concerned about a complaint being too “wimpy” than overly bold or aggressive. The final factor group has to do with the “Manner” in which a complaint is expressed. According to the respondents, there should be an appropriate amount of politeness and calm on the part of the complainer, with a certain level of maturity and lack of sarcasm.

Table 8 shows the mean scores of each of the factor groups for each of the responses that were rated. Response 3.3 “I don’t understand why I received a bad review. I wish that I had been told that you thought my performance was bad” is rated the best for all three factor groups. Apparently, if one is going to complain to an employer, this response can be used as a model for how best to do it, according to these respondents.

**Table 8.** Means scores for each response by factor group

<i>Response</i>	<i>FG1</i>	<i>FG2</i>	<i>FG3</i>
1.1	3.73	3.38	3.23
1.2	3.46	3.07	3.39
1.3	2.37	2.90	1.89
2.1	4.03	3.42	3.38
2.2	3.12	2.74	2.87
2.3	2.45	2.83	1.83

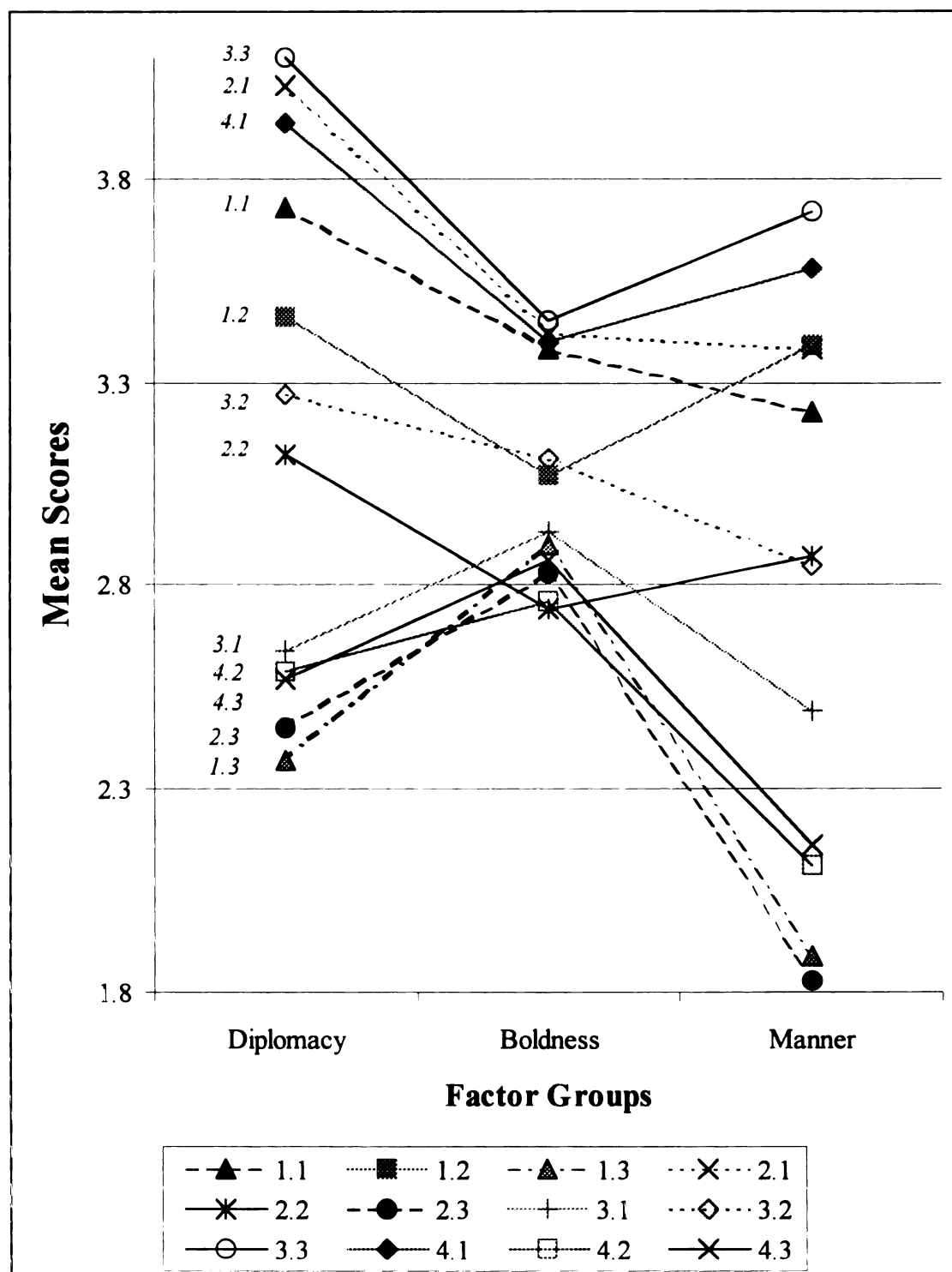
<i>Response</i>	<i>FG1</i>	<i>FG2</i>	<i>FG3</i>
3.1	2.64	2.93	2.49
3.2	3.27	3.11	2.85
3.3	4.10	3.45	3.72
4.1	3.94	3.40	3.58
4.2	2.59	2.76	2.11
4.3	2.57	2.86	2.16

On the other end of the spectrum, three different responses received the worst rating in each factor group. In terms of diplomacy, “What the hell did you do to the kitchen?” is not very effective, perhaps due to the presence of an obscenity (mild though it may be for some of these respondents' vocabularies).

The indirect “I think people cutting in line is really rude” appears to be the big winner in terms of wimpiness. And “Who do you think you are?” is rated the least polite in terms of the manner in which the complaint is expressed. This is likely due to the fact that the complaint deviates from the actual issue at hand and personally attacks the offender.

Figure 4 presents these scores in a chart; the responses pattern in several groups. At the bottom, there are five responses that are seen as relatively bold, but not very diplomatic and delivered in a fairly poor manner. These are responses 1.3 “What the hell did you do to the kitchen”; 2.3 “Who do you think you are?”; 3.1 “Why did you give me a review like that. I really don’t think that was fair...”; 4.2 “What am I supposed to do now that I’ve wasted my time on unnecessary courses”; and 4.3 “How could you give me the wrong advice? Aren’t you supposed to know this stuff?”

At the top, there are four responses that are seen as being very diplomatic, with their boldness and manner ratings similar to each other, although less than the diplomacy ratings. The responses that pattern this way are 1.1 “I spent all day cleaning the kitchen. I would appreciate it if you would pick up your mess”; 2.1 “Excuse me but the end of the line is back there. We’ve been waiting all day”;



**Figure 4.** Mean scores for each response by factor group

3.3 “I don’t understand why I received a bad review. I wish that I had been told that you thought my performance was bad”; and 4.1 “Is there any way I can get out of this requirement since you gave me some incorrect information.”

This leaves the three responses that fall in the middle of the graph. 1.2 “Boy someone was in the cooking mood” and 2.2 “I think people cutting in line is really rude” are judged to be fairly equal in their respective diplomacy and manner ratings, but they are substantially lower in their boldness ratings. This makes sense since these are the two responses that utilize the greatest amount of indirectness. They avoid direct reference to the offender as the agent of the offensive act and do not ask for a specific remedy to the situation.

The last response is 3.2 “I would like to know why you gave me a bad review. I feel that I have done more than enough to make this company happy.” This response is seen as middle of the road in terms of diplomacy and boldness, but it slips some in its ratings of manner. In the interview data, when respondents were asked to describe this complaint and the person who made it, many people made references to the person being a bit arrogant or too confident in his or her own abilities. For example, one respondent said “this complaint he’s kind of like bragging about his accomplishments like he thinks he’s so good for the company and and I think he’s kind of big-headed,” and another said “I think that person kind of thinks too highly of themselves um and I don’t think that would be a good way to approach a boss someone that’s ahead of you and can like fire you.”

To summarize, the results of this investigation of folklinguistic ideas of U.S. university students about complaints reveal the following:

(1) American university students use quite a few categories to describe different kinds of complaints, and these different categories are evoked according to factors such as who the participants in the complaint situation are, what the setting is, what is being complained about and such particular characteristics as degree of intensity and emotion involved in the complaint realization. The most common kind of complaint for these respondents is “bitching,” with “whining” being the next most frequent.

(2) There is no definitive idea about what is and what isn’t a complaint. There appears to be a wide range of directness and indirectness that can be employed in complaint situations. Presenting respondents with a particular response and asking them to choose “yes” or “no” as to whether the response is a complaint thus leads to breakdowns such as 40% of respondents saying it is a complaint while 60% say it isn’t (or 70-30, 55-45 etc.) A future study might be able to investigate the question of directness more specifically by asking respondents to rate a response on a scale as to whether it definitely is or is not a complaint.

(3) There is often some discrepancy between the intention and interpretation of complaints. The respondents recognized the possibility of a statement that was not intended to be a complaint being interpreted as one, and vice versa. Again, this relates to the range of directness available in the

construction of complaints and the subsequent “wobble room” or benefit of the doubt that hearers can choose to give or not to give. Interestingly, it appears that responses that are not intended to be complaints may be interpreted as them more often than the other way around. This has implications for the degree to which the hearer is part of the negotiation of meaning within the situation.

(4) For university students, there are three major factors to consider when judging the politeness and effectiveness of a complaint. These factors are diplomacy, boldness (or lack of “wimpiness”) and manner.

This discussion of folklinguistic categories and ratings of complaints provides a starting point from which to proceed to a larger investigation of the linguistic details of actual complaint realizations, and that is the task that is taken up in the following chapter.



## **Chapter 4**

### **DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS IN COMPLAINT REALIZATIONS**

#### **4.1 Face-Management Choices in Potential Complaint Situations**

In Chapter 2, the working definition of a complaint being utilized in this study was presented. It was noted that the only precondition for a complaint is that the speaker finds the situation in question unfavorable in some way. When this occurs, the situation can be considered a "Potential Complaint Situation" or PCS. Within a PCS, a speaker has a choice as to how direct or indirect he or she will be in making a complaint.

In the current study, the data from the discourse completion portion of the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of how direct a complaint a speaker chose to make. Each response was coded as containing: (1) no complaint; (2) an indirect complaint; (3) a direct, but mitigated complaint; or (4) a direct complaint. In the few cases where a response contained two distinct complaints that could be coded at separate directness levels, the more direct code was assigned. Table 9 gives the total numbers and percentages of respondents who made a complaint at each directness level for each situation.

While the degree of face-threat involved in performing a given speech act is not the same thing as the level of directness, it is generally the case that the more

direct a speech act, the more face-threat it will produce.<sup>1</sup> Thus a direct complaint such as "You're a real slob" is taken to be more face-threatening than the mitigated complaint "You're kind of a slob, aren't you?"

**Table 9.** Overall directness levels for complaint realizations

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Directness Level</b>	<b># of respondents choosing this level (out of 120)</b>	<b>% of respondent choosing this level</b>
1 (friend/ messy kitchen)	No complaint	37	30.83%
	Indirect	49	40.83%
	Mitigated	4	3.33%
	Direct	30	25.00%
2 (stranger/ cutting in line)	No complaint	36	30.00%
	Indirect	53	44.17%
	Mitigated	2	1.67%
	Direct	29	24.17%
3 (boss/ bad review)	No complaint	33	27.50%
	Indirect	60	50.00%
	Mitigated	16	13.33%
	Direct	11	9.17%
4 (adviser/ bad advice)	No complaint	19	15.83%
	Indirect	61	50.83%
	Mitigated	11	9.17%
	Direct	29	24.17%

In the sections that follow, each directness level will be analyzed separately in terms of the kinds of complaints that appear in that category. In addition, explanation as to how and why the respondents utilized that directness level for each situation will be offered.

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<sup>1</sup> The converse, however, may not be true. See, for example, Blum-Kulka (1987) for empirical evidence that the most indirect requests are not always judged to be the most polite.

## 4.2 The Choice of Opting Out

As Brown and Levinson (1987) note, the first choice an individual must make in the performance of any face-threatening act is whether or not to do the FTA at all. B&L note that the payoff for choosing to not do the FTA is that the speaker avoids offending the hearer in any way. They also point out, however, that the speaker also fails to achieve his or her desired communication goals by taking this route. They conclude that since "there are naturally no interesting linguistic reflexes of this last-ditch strategy, we will ignore it our discussion henceforth" (p. 72).

While it may be the case that choosing to say nothing or to say something other than a statement that can be interpreted as a face-threatening act may be uninteresting from a *linguistic* point of view, it is not the case that these situations are also uninteresting from a *sociolinguistic* point of view. That is to say, examining the frequency with which certain individuals or groups choose to opt out of performing a face-threatening act such as a complaint, as well as the reasons that people choose to opt out of doing the FTA, may shed some interesting light on the social evaluation of a given situation as well as the norms of behavior of various sociological groups.

As previously described in chapter 2, respondents in the current study were presented with four situations and asked what they would say in each situation. In the instructions they were given for this task, the following statement was included: "If you wouldn't say anything in the situation, write 'Nothing' on the

first line and then on the remaining lines give a brief explanation as to why you would say nothing." Table 10 gives the frequencies and percentages of those who chose to opt out of complaining in each situation.

As the table indicates, the choice of opting out of performing a complaint is utilized quite frequently in the first three situations, with about half as many individuals making this choice in the fourth situation.

**Table 10.** Frequency of opting out of performing any FTA

<b>Situation</b>	<b># of respondents choosing to opt out (out of 120)</b>	<b>% of respondents choosing to opt out</b>
1 (friend/kitchen) [-P, -D]	37	30.83%
2 (stranger/line) [-P, +D]	36	30.00%
3 (boss/review) [+P, -D]	33	27.50%
4 (adviser/advice) [+P, +D]	19	15.83%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>125 (out of 480)</b>	<b>26.04%</b>

Although not every respondent who chose to opt out of performing a complaint provided a reason for their choice, some interesting trends can be discovered from those who did. In the first situation, in which a visiting friend messes up the kitchen, the primary reason given for avoiding a face-threatening act was that it would risk some disruption in the established relationship. Consider the following quotes that exemplify this point:

**"I wouldn't want to hurt my friend's feelings."**

**"I wouldn't say anything because they were a good friend and more than likely I had not seen them in a long time."**

**"Sometimes you just have to grin and bear it -- especially with a friend you don't see often."**

**A reason given almost as often in this scenario was that the speaker either expected the friend to clean up or at least believed that they would help if asked.**

**For example:**

**"I think that when I came home my friend would apologize and say she would clean up the mess in a minute. I'd then start to help her clean up the kitchen."**

**"I'm sure she would offer to help as I was cleaning."**

**Other respondents expressed the fact that they wouldn't want to make the situation uncomfortable. For example, one respondent included the comment: "I don't want to ruin the weekend over a messy kitchen." Others indicated that this situation was "no big deal." A few even claimed some measure of responsibility for the offense, with comments like "I told her to make herself at home, so I don't expect anything from her in the way of cleaning. She is a guest."**

**In the second situation, in which a stranger is cutting in line, only two respondents actually provided reasons for their choice to opt out of complaining, and both agreed that they would not complain because someone else probably would. One respondent phrased the reason as follows: "By that time I would be too frustrated to say something and someone else would probably say something anyway."**

Table 10 indicates that in the third situation, in which the boss gives a bad employee review, 33 respondents chose not to perform the face-threatening act of complaining. Interestingly, only four of these individuals indicated this by claiming they would say nothing, and only one of those individuals gave a reason for their choice. This person indicated that "[t]his response depends of the type of job. If it is my permanent career, I would probably say something, but none of my other jobs have been that important yet."

The remaining 29 respondents who were coded as opting out of the third situation wrote something, but their statements were not particularly threatening to the hearer's face. Most often they were a simple statement or question asking for permission to speak with the boss about the review, such as "I was wondering if we could discuss my annual review." It may be the case that in conversations which followed this introductory remark the individual would have registered a complaint. However, given the nature of the data collection tool used in this study there is no way to know this. Still, it is interesting that given the unequal power relationship in this scenario, many respondents felt the need to begin the encounter by asking permission to speak -- a move that is clearly a face-management tool in and of itself.

The final scenario was one in which an academic adviser has given the student some bad advice that has led to the need for a summer school class. A reason for opting out given by almost half of the respondents who made this

choice was that the speaker him/herself was actually responsible for this situation, rather than the adviser. Consider the following quotes:

"It would be my fault for not having the adviser put in writing, that if I take these classes, then I will graduate. Also, I should have checked out the requirements myself and made my own schedule."

"It is my responsibility to know what classes I have to take. I wouldn't need his help and it wasn't his fault the course wouldn't count. I would just figure out one that would."

Several other respondents seemed to feel that with this situation, the damage had been done and could not be repaired. For example, one respondent indicated "It is too late by then and there's nothing you can do about it...The adviser messed up, but she can't fix it, so it's not worth getting worked up over."

Out of all the reasons provided for all the situations, only one respondent indicated that the situation in question (which happened to be the messy kitchen scenario) was unrealistic. This respondent wrote: "A high school friend of mine would not do such a thing. Also I would not go to the store without them." The fact that out of 480 possible responses only one included such a comment is a good indication that the data collection tool used in this study, while having certain limitations, did not suffer from the problem of placing respondents in unrealistic situations and having them imagine what their response might be. In fact, one respondent, in opting out of saying anything in the adviser situation, commented: "Like everything else, I would probably just deal with it and move on. (It's happened before)."

In examining the reasons that individuals chose to opt out of performing a complaint in this study, it becomes evident that the choice of not performing an FTA in a Potential Complaint Situation is a valid and effective option for the management of the participants' face. In some situations, it appears that the offense itself is not perceived to be severe enough to warrant the risk to both the speaker's and hearer's face that the performance of a complaint would entail.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, while offense is in fact taken, factors such as maintaining a pre-established relationship are seen as being more valuable than any relief of frustration that complaining might provide. Finally, there are situations in which speakers are frustrated or offended but feel that the situation is not likely to be changed. In these cases, respondents sometimes also choose to opt out of performing the FTA.

#### **4.3 Direct Complaints**

At the opposite end from opting out in Brown and Levinson's (1987) decision making tree for performing face-threatening acts is the choice to go on-record, with no redress. This is the choice to perform an FTA in the most straightforward, direct manner. The biggest advantage of doing this, according to B&L, is that the speaker accomplishes his or her communication goals in the most efficient manner (p. 72). In addition, he or she avoids the potential for being

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<sup>2</sup> This possibility will be explored more in the next chapter.



misunderstood. Of course, performing a direct, bald FTA also brings with it the greatest amount of risk to face of both the speaker and the hearer. It is thus only in situations where the speaker feels that the face-threat is most needed or most justified that direct, unmitigated FTAs are likely to be employed.

**Table 11.** Use of direct complaints by situation

<b>Situation</b>	<b># of respondents using a direct complaint (out of 120)</b>	<b>% of respondents using a direct complaint</b>
1 (friend/kitchen) [-P, -D]	30	25.00%
2 (stranger/line) [-P, +D]	29	24.17%
3 (boss/review) [+P, -D]	11	9.17%
4 (adviser/advice) [+P, +D]	29	24.17%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97 (out of 480)</b>	<b>20.21%</b>

As Table 11 shows, respondents in this study chose to use direct complaints almost equally within situations 1, 2 and 4 -- about a quarter of the time. For the third situation with the boss, however, respondents complained directly in less than 10% of the cases. A chi-square test of independence confirms that there is a significant difference between the number of respondents who utilized direct complaints in the third situation, as compared to the other three scenarios ( $\chi^2 = 12.339$ , d.f. = 3,  $p < .01$ ). These figures are easily interpretable in light of the

previous discussion of the risks inherent in direct FTAs, combined with an understanding of the social dynamics involved in each situation.

In the scenario with the boss, there is both an unequal power relationship (in which the speaker finds him or herself in a position of less power than the hearer) and an on-going relationship that must be maintained. It is in this situation then that face-management must be most skillfully employed. Uttering a direct complaint thus appears to be too risky a strategy in the estimation of most respondents.

If this is a valid explanation for the use of direct complaints, one would expect the greatest number of direct complaints to show up in the situation that finds participants in an equal power, but non-on-going relationship. This would be the second situation, with the stranger cutting in line. Table 11, however, reveals that this is not in fact the case. In raw figures, situation two has the same number of direct complaints as situations four and one less than situation two. Chi-square tests reveal no significant differences between these three scenarios in terms of their use of direct complaints ( $\chi^2 = .214$ , d.f. = 2,  $p > .80$ ). It appears that where power between participants is equal or social distance is large, then the likelihood of a direct complaint increases. The combination of equal power and large social distance, however, is not enough to free speakers from politeness constraints and face-management concerns.

Having discussed the use of direct complaints within each of the situations, it is important to understand what goes into the native speaker's intuitive

perception that a complaint has been registered. In chapter 3 we explored the question of what factors assist in the assessment of a complaint; however, to this point we have not moved beyond the simple definition of "the expression of a negative evaluation of a given situation" to explore what precisely constitutes a direct complaint. An analysis of the responses given in the discourse completion portion of the data collection in this study contributes to a better understanding of this issue.

The primary question related to what constitutes a complaint is in what ways the "negative evaluation" of a situation manifests itself. In the data for this study, six different reflexes of this negative evaluation emerged from an analysis of the data. Table 12 presents these reflexes, along with the number of occurrences within each situation.<sup>3</sup>

The most frequently utilized strategy for registering a complaint overall was for the respondent to make a statement regarding his or her disapproval of or disagreement with the hearer's action. An example of a complaint incorporating this strategy in each situation follows:

1: "I can't believe you made a mess in my kitchen, after I cleaned it for you."

2: "Hey buddy! I've been standing here for two hours...no way can you just waltz into line like that!"

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<sup>3</sup> As in other cases, more than one reflex often occurred within a given response. Thus, while a total of 97 direct complaints were produced (out of 480 total responses), the figures in Table 10 add up to more than the total number of direct complaints that occurred.

3: "Listen, about my review, what is wrong with my work. I think you're way off."

4: "That was very irresponsible telling me to take that course. You get paid to do this and aren't doing it right. I think I'm going to talk to your supervisor."

**Table 12.** Components of complaints in each situation

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Disapproval of action</b>	<b>Obscenity/ Name- calling</b>	<b>Excla- mation</b>	<b>Conse- quences</b>	<b>Sarcasm</b>	<b>Negative Feelings</b>
1	9	18	1	0	4	2
2	11	7	12	0	0	1
3	8	0	1	0	2	0
4	11	7	2	11	3	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>

The next most frequently used strategy to perform a complaint was to incorporate an obscenity or to directly attack the offender through name-calling. This strategy did not occur in the third situation, but was used more than any other strategy in the first situation. Phrases such as "What the hell did you do in here?" were the most common, but other obscenities also occurred. Examples include "Thanks a fuckin' bunch" and "Holy shit!" Name-calling included terms like "pig" and "jerk," as well as slightly more offensive designations such as "bitch" and "dumbass."

Each of the situations also contained at least one example of a negatively-loaded exclamation, such as "I don't think so!," "No way!," "Oh no!" or "Are you

kidding?!" These exclamations, either by themselves, or in combination with other strategies also convey the negative evaluation necessary for a complaint.

One strategy that was used exclusively in the fourth situation in this data was pointing out the negative consequences of the hearer's action. A good example of this strategy is found in the following complaint: "I just wasted my time and money on a useless class. I believe this is your fault because it was your job to direct me." Another example of this strategy is the utterance: "I can't believe that I have to stay at school because of your negligence!<sup>4</sup> If all this information is printed why didn't you give me a copy to double check." Although this strategy did not occur for the other situations in this data, it is easy to think of complaints that could be made in this way. For example, in the messy kitchen scenario, one might say: "All the time I spent cleaning this morning was for nothing!" Similar kinds of statements could be imagined for the other situations as well.

A fifth strategy for making a complaint is to utilize sarcasm. This is a more difficult strategy to analyze, given the fact that the data in this study are primarily written, since sarcasm often is conveyed through paralinguistic devices. Even given that fact, however, there are a number of instances of complaining in this

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<sup>4</sup> Since the data in this portion of the study were written, spelling errors (such as the spelling here of "negligence") occurred at times. Rather than correct the errors, the quotations are presented here as they were actually written.

study that are clearly accomplished through the use of sarcasm. Several examples from three of the four situations follow:

1: "Good Lord, did you grow up in a barn?"

1: "Don't you clean up after yourself? I'm not the maid around here."

3: "Do you think you could have been a little harder?"

4: "Why don't you just stick a knife in me. I don't want to stay another semester."

Finally, sometimes direct complaints are made through the speaker's expression of some negative feelings he or she holds as a result of the action of the hearer. Examples of this strategy once again occurred in three of the four situations. For example:

1: "What's going on. I left this perfectly clean and you go and do this. This is totally disrespectful."

2: "Excuse me mame but I have been waiting here in line for two hours now and I don't appreciate you trying to cut in front of me."

4: "I am very upset with the job you have done as my adviser. I really do not think I should have to take another class since it was your mistake."

4: "I am sick of you people telling students to take classes that are wrong."

A direct complaint can thus be said to have been made when any one of the components described above occurs and conveys a negative evaluation of the situation on the part of the speaker. Of course, the more that the components are

combined, the stronger the complaint may seem, although there is probably no absolutely objective way to measure the "strength" of a complaint.

#### **4.4 Mitigated Complaints**

Mitigation is the process of employing certain linguistic devices or strategies in an attempt to soften the negative impact of a face-threatening speech act. Fraser (1980) points out that mitigation and politeness are not the same phenomenon, although they often occur together. One can be relatively polite while employing minimal mitigation, such as in a request like "Please sit down." On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine a mitigated speech act that does not also imply some attempt at politeness. Thus, Fraser concludes, mitigation entails politeness, but not vice versa (p. 344).

While Fraser lists what he calls a "partial" and "preliminary" set of mitigating devices, a more thorough list of the kinds of devices that can be employed to mitigate the force of an FTA was utilized in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project. The results of much of the work in this project, which focused primarily on the speech acts of requesting and apologizing, appear in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), and the appendix of this volume includes the coding schema employed in the project. Within the overall coding was the identification of what the researchers call "downgraders," which are lexical/phrasal or syntactic devices used to mitigate the face-threat of the request.

While the CCSARP project and coding schema was devised primarily to study requests and apologies, in an earlier article House and Kasper (1981) suggest that a very similar list of "downgraders" can be applied equally to complaints as to requests in order to achieve a desired level of politeness. The current study thus began the analysis of mitigation in complaint realization using the categories of downgrading utilized in the CCSARP project. In the current complaint data, a number of those downgrading categories did not occur, while several other categories of mitigation emerged. A discussion of these categories follows shortly.

Although mitigation is an important option for accomplishing face-management for many speech acts, it was actually not utilized with great frequency when respondents made complaints in the current study. Table 13 presents the numbers and percentages of mitigated complaints that occur in the data.

Mitigation occurred most often in the third situation, which suggests an interesting correlation, since this is precisely the situation where the fewest number of direct complaints occurred (see Table 11). It was employed slightly less in situation four and very infrequently in situations one and two.

Chi-square tests of independence reveal that, overall, situation is a significant factor in the use of mitigation. More specifically, there is significantly less use of mitigation in situations one and two as compared with three and four ( $\chi^2 = 12.666$ , d.f. = 3,  $p < .01$ ). There is no significant difference between



**Table 13.** Use of mitigated complaints by situation

<b>Situation</b>	<b># of respondents using a mitigated complaint (out of 120)</b>	<b>% of respondents using a mitigated complaint</b>
1 (friend/kitchen) [-P, -D]	4	3.33%
2 (stranger/line) [-P, +D]	2	1.67%
3 (boss/review) [+P, -D]	16	13.33%
4 (adviser/advice) [+P, +D]	11	9.17%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33 (out of 480)</b>	<b>6.88%</b>

situations one and two or situations three and four. From these results, it appears that mitigation seems to be largely a result of the power component, i.e. it is more likely to be utilized in complaints when there is a power difference than when participants are equal in terms of power.

Table 14 shows the kinds of mitigating devices found in the data.<sup>5</sup> The only mitigating device that occurred at least once in every situation was the interrogative. This is a syntactic device that frames the complaint in the form of a question, thus presenting the hearer with the illusion that he or she is being given a choice to modify or at least explain his or her action. Examples of this device from each situation are as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> Several of complaints utilized more than one mitigating device. Thus the total numbers here do not match the total number of mitigated responses in Table 12.

1: "Would you mind having a little common courtesy and stacking the dishes in the sink?"

2: "Why don't you have some consideration for those people who have been here for hours and step to the back of the line?"

3: "Why did you give me a bad review? If you had a problem with the way I worked why didn't you say something?"

4: "Why did you mis-advise me? Do you know what type of situation you put me in?"

**Table 14.** Mitigating devices used in complaint realizations

<b>Mitigating Devices</b>	<b>Situation</b>				<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
Subjectivizer	0	0	10	2	<b>12</b>
Interrogative	1	1	2	7	<b>11</b>
Hedge	0	0	1	3	<b>4</b>
Lexical choice	2	0	1	0	<b>3</b>
Conditional	0	0	2	0	<b>2</b>
Tense	0	0	0	2	<b>2</b>
Cajoler	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Hesitator	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Agent avoider	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Relationship marker	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>

The most frequently employed mitigating device was the subjectivizer, although this was only used in situations three and four. Subjectivizers occur when the speaker expresses the fact that the statement is only his or her subjective

opinion, thus lowering his or her commitment to the propositional content that follows. Phrases such as "I think" and "I guess" are often utilized in this manner to downgrade the overall force of the speech act. Examples of subjectivizers in the data include: "*I believe* that I deserve a better rating than what I received and I was wondering why" and "*I can't help but think* you're somewhat responsible for wasting my time and money" (italics mine).

This last example also contains an example of a hedge (i.e. "somewhat"), a lexical or phrasal addition that allows the speaker to avoid some degree of preciseness and thus mitigates the overall force of the FTA.<sup>6</sup> Another example of a hedged complaint, which comes out of the third situation in the data, is "You know, I am not *real* happy about the report you gave me. I was *somewhat* confused as to the reasons I was evaluated this way" (italics mine).

Lexical choice is a kind of mitigating device wherein the complaint could have clearly included a stronger or more face-threatening word, but the speaker chose instead to use a less face-threatening lexical item. This is the case, for example, when more mild words are substituted for obscenities. In the first situation, for example, we find two cases of "What the heck..." instead of the more direct and face-threatening "What the hell..."

Conditionals can also be utilized as mitigating devices, as in the case of the following complaint which comes out of the third situation: "Can I talk to you

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<sup>6</sup> According to Fraser (1980), hedging is not the same thing as mitigation; however, some hedges can be used to mitigate.

about the review you gave me? I would really wish if you would've said something to me about all of this." In this instance, the speaker performs a kind of odd mitigating hypercorrection by utilizing modals combined and a conditional "if," the combination of which actually makes the sentence ungrammatical, but clearly conveys the speaker's tentativeness in putting forth the complaint.

"Tense" permits a point-of-view operation in which a past tense is utilized where one would expect the present tense. The effect of this switch is to metaphorically remove the speaker from the complaint that is about to be put forth. In the complaint "I just wanted to make you aware of the inconvenience you've caused me involving both time and money," the use of past tense "wanted" instead of present tense "want" accomplishes this effect.

The remaining categories occur only once each in this data, although a brief explanation of them is still useful, since they clearly can be and are used to mitigate complaints. A cajoler is an element that seeks to draw the hearer into a kind of agreement with the speaker. The phrase "you know" functions this way in the complaint "You know, I am not real happy about the report you gave me." A hesitator is a pragmatic marker that indicates some hesitation on the part of the speaker to put forth the complaint in the first place. In this data, an example is: "*Um*, I don't think so. You can move."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The relative infrequency of these two categories is likely a result of the fact that the data collected were written rather than spoken, since pragmatic markers such as these generally occur rather frequently in spoken data.

An agent avoider is a syntactic device by which the speaker removes him or herself as the agent of the complaint or avoids naming the hearer as the perpetrator of the offensive act. In this study, an example of this mitigator occurs in the complaint: "This review seems to be an unfair representation of my performance." Finally, a relationship marker is an appeal to a previous or current relationship between the participants. This acts as a complaint mitigator by conveying the idea that the speaker doesn't view the offense as severely as he or she might were the relationship not to exist. The complaint: "*Just like old times*, you are still messy!" (italics mine) incorporates this mitigation device.

As shown through the discussion above, there is a wide range of options available for the mitigation of complaints, although these tend not to be utilized in this data as much as with other speech acts such as requesting. This may partially be the result of collecting the data through written means, but it may also be the case that complaints threaten face to such a greater extent than many other FTAs that to truly reduce the impact of the utterance, something more than a mitigating device is required. It is with this suggestion in mind that the discussion now turns to the utilization of indirectness in making complaints.

## 4.5 Indirect Complaints

The most frequently utilized directness level in the data for all situations was that of indirectness. As Table 15 shows, indirect complaints occurred in nearly half of all responses given. A chi-square test of independence indicates no significant difference between the four situations in the use of indirectness ( $\chi^2 = 3.308$ , d.f. = 3,  $p > .30$ ).

**Table 15.** Use of indirect complaints by situation

Situation	# of respondents using an indirect complaint (out of 120)	% of respondents using an indirect complaint
1 (friend/kitchen) [-P, -D]	49	40.83%
2 (stranger/line) [-P, +D]	53	44.17%
3 (boss/review) [+P, -D]	60	50.00%
4 (adviser/advice) [+P, +D]	61	50.83%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>223 (out of 480)</b>	<b>46.46%</b>

The fact that indirect complaints show up so frequently in this data is undoubtedly tied to the degree of face-threat involved in complaints. To perform a complaint threatens first the hearer's positive face, since one is pointing to him or her as the perpetrator of some offensive act. It also, however, is a threat to the speaker's positive face, since in performing the complaint, he or she opens him or

herself up to being seen in a negative light, as one who complains too easily, without justification, etc.

Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that the major benefit of going "off-record" (i.e. using an indirect FTA) is that the ambiguity involved provides a kind of escape-hatch against such criticism, by allowing the speaker to avoid committing him or herself to a single intent. In terms of complaints, using indirectness is clearly a face-management strategy, since it (hopefully) communicates that the speaker is unhappy with the situation without coming out and directly stating the cause of his or her dissatisfaction.

One of the most interesting things about indirect complaints is that there seem to be few or no conventional methods for complaining. In fact, the claim can be made that, given the right circumstances (and perhaps the right inflection), almost any utterance can be used and/or interpreted as a complaint. In the current study, an analysis of the semantic content of the indirect complaints revealed eleven different categories of indirectness. That there are many others is quite likely. Table 16 presents the categories and frequencies of indirect complaints in this study.

The most frequently employed strategy overall was for the speaker to simply make a statement pointing out that the offensive act had been committed. Very often, the reference to the offensive act itself was somewhat indirect, leading to a kind of embedded indirectness. Thus, for example, in the messy kitchen scenario, several respondents made statements such as "It looks like you made

yourself right at home." This is clearly a reference to the mess the hearer has made, albeit an implied, rather than direct one. Similarly, in the situation in which the stranger cut in line, many people made references to the back of the line (e.g. "There is a line and it doesn't start there" and "The end of the line is back there"), implying that the hearer had entered the line at an inappropriate spot.

**Table 16.** Categories of indirect complaints

<b>Category</b>	<b>Situation</b>				<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
Statement of the Act	11	17	19	28	<b>75</b>
Justification	7	30	13	17	<b>67</b>
Hearer's Explanation	1	10	27	20	<b>58</b>
Request for information	21	0	22	11	<b>54</b>
Lexical/phrasal choice	12	4	1	0	<b>17</b>
Scolding	0	0	0	9	<b>9</b>
Warning	2	1	0	0	<b>3</b>
Protest	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
Compliment	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Wish	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Offer	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>288</b>

In the third scenario with the boss, many respondents included statements that pointed to the fact that they had seen the review and would like to talk about it. In some cases, the fact that the review was unfavorable was stated, e.g. "I



noticed you gave me a bad review, could you please tell me what it is that does not meet up to your expectations." In other cases, the unsatisfactory nature of the review was more subtly mentioned, such as "I got my review back and I didn't realize that my work was not up to par." Notice that, in this case, part of the indirectness comes from the avoidance of pinpointing the boss as the evaluator in the bad review, although obviously both the boss and employee know that this is the case. The strategy of stating the act is used most frequently in the final situation, in which the academic adviser gives the student some bad advice on which courses to take. A representative example in this case is the statement "You advised me to take several classes that I come to find out are not applicable to my major."

The next most frequently employed indirectness strategy is for the speaker to make a statement that is a justification for why he or she is complaining. The purpose here is clearly two-fold. As mentioned previously, complaining is a speech act that threatens not only the hearer's face, but also the speaker's face. By laying out a justification for the complaint, the speaker not only registers the complaint, but also points out that he or she is a reasonable person for making the complaint. Often, these statements of justification are combined with other statements, particularly requests for the hearer to repair the consequences of the act. Examples from each of the situations in which this is the case are given below:

1: "I would appreciate it if you would clean up after yourself. I just cleaned the kitchen a few hours ago."

2: "Excuse me, I was here first so wait in line."

3: "Could you tell me why I received such a bad review...I thought my performance was just fine."

4: "Is there anyway that I can get around taking this course since you gave me bad advise [sic] about a different class."

It is sometimes the case that justifications for the complaint actually stand alone and serve as the complaint itself. This is an interesting situation, since it appears that a justification statement acts as a kind of mitigating device, which serves to soften the force of a complaint that isn't ever stated. For example, in the first situation, one respondent made the statement "Geez I just cleaned this place up." It is possible to go through an inferencing process from the actual statement made to an understanding that a complaint about the mess has been registered.

A strategy that is similar to justification is hearer's explanation. The difference is that while justification works to directly protect the speaker's face, hearer's explanation is a strategy that on the surface at least looks like it is being used to manage the hearer's face. In this strategy, the speaker asks the hearer why he or she would commit the offensive act, thus giving the hearer the chance to explain his or her actions. Examples from the data are:

1: "What did you do that for?"

2: "Why did you cut in front of me?"

3: "Can you explain these low scores to me please."

4: "Why did you suggest that course when I didn't need it?"

In reality, using a question about the hearer's intentions is probably not a sincere opportunity that the speaker is presenting the hearer to explain what happened, but rather a way of pointing out that the speaker recognizes that the hearer has committed an offensive act. Thus it is a very interesting strategy since it seems to threaten the hearer's face (by being an indirect complaint) at the same time it gives the appearance of maintaining it.

Since the strategy of hearer's explanation is most often phrased in the form of a question, it could also be seen as a subset of the next category. In this more general case, the complaint is disguised as a request for information. As with the previous examples, however, it is not likely that the speaker is really interested in an answer to the question but rather is using this as a way of presenting a complaint. Examples from the various situations include:

1: "You were really hungry, weren't you."

3: "What was I doing wrong to deserve a review like that?"

4: "Do you realize the classes you had me take last semester were not even required?"

The six strategies listed at the bottom of Table 16 illustrate the fact that almost any speech act can be used to register a complaint. Even a speech act as unlikely to be a complaint as a compliment can in fact be used in this way, as in the case of the respondent who made the following statement about the messy kitchen: "Did you make something good to eat? You utilized the kitchen well!"

The remaining category listed in Table 16 is somewhat unlike the others. While the other strategies employ speech acts in ways that allow them to act as something other than the most straightforward illocutionary act that they would normally be interpreted as, the lexical choice strategy is one in which another speech act is utilized, but the particular choice of a certain word or phrase is enough to imply that the speaker is unhappy with the current state of affairs.

For example, the statement "Help me clean up the kitchen" would probably not be interpreted as a complaint. The addition of a single phrase, however, is enough to push it over the line and make it an indirect complaint. This is the case with the respondent who said "Help me clean up *the mess you made* in the kitchen" (italics mine). In other cases, the subtle change of a word is enough to imply the complaint. This happens in the second scenario when one respondent wrote the utterance "Excuse you" instead of the simple attention-getting phrase "Excuse me." In the boss scenario, the one instance of this strategy being used is when one respondent says "Hi, I would like to talk to you about my sub par review." Here the addition of the adjectival phrase "sub par" is enough to suggest the employee's dissatisfaction with the boss' rating.

It is important to reiterate the fact that the strategies discussed here are by no means the only ones available for making an indirect complaint. In fact, one of the reasons that there was so much variation in the comparison of intention versus interpretation in complaints in chapter 3 was precisely because there is a kind of negotiation of meaning that is available when complaints are made in this indirect

fashion. The advantages of being so indirect are clearly related to the face-management of the parties involved in the situation, but the ambiguity can also lead to complaints being missed altogether or being registered where not intended.

#### **4.6 Complaints and Requests for Repair**

Before closing this chapter, it is important to bring up one more aspect regarding the threat to face that complaints carry. The problem with many past studies of complaints is that they present the data in such a way as to suggest that complaints are always made in isolation from other speech acts. What the data in the current study show, however, is that complaints are often combined with other speech acts, which work together to produce an overall face-threat to the various participants involved in the interaction.

Given the fact that the scenarios in this study were purposefully constructed to be situations which could be potentially repaired, the most common type of FTA besides a complaint that appeared in the data was a request for repair of the situation.

Requests are one of the more thoroughly studied speech acts in the linguistics literature. While a complaint primarily threatens the positive face of the hearer, a request primarily poses a threat to the hearer's negative face. This is because a request asks the hearer to surrender a bit of his or her autonomy by submitting to some imposition. Of course, like a complaint, a request likely also

involves some threat to the speaker's positive face, since he or she does not want to be seen as unreasonable or overly-demanding in making the request.

In the CCSARP project mentioned earlier, an elaborate coding system for the analysis of requests was developed. One aspect of the coding had to do with what the researchers labeled "strategy type." This is a nine-category classification system based on the syntactic and semantic features of the request in question. These nine categories are further collapsed into three levels of directness, which the authors term (1) direct strategies, (2) conventionally indirect strategies, and (3) nonconventionally indirect strategies.

In the current study, requests for repair were identified in the responses and coded on the same three point scale used for complaints, namely (1) direct requests, (2) direct, but mitigated requests, and (3) indirect requests. The category of indirect requests in this case corresponded to Blum-Kulka and House's (1989) designation of "nonconventionally indirect" strategies, which included both strong and mild hints. The main difference between the coding in the current study and that of the CCSARP project is in what kinds of utterances are considered "direct" requests.

Blum-Kulka and House claim that in addition to "mood derivable" utterances (which utilize the grammatical mood, or command form, of the verb to signal a request, e.g. 'Clean up that mess'), four other categories should be considered direct requests. These categories, with examples, are performatives ('I'm asking you to clean that mess'), hedged performatives ('I would like to ask

you to give your presentation a week earlier than scheduled'), obligation statements ('You'll have to move your car'), and want statements ('I really wish you'd stop bothering me'). These five categories are combined into the level of "direct" requests and differentiated from "conventionally indirect" requests, which include suggestory formulae ('How about cleaning up') and query preparation ('Could you clean up the kitchen, please?').

While I would agree that mood derivable utterances are the most direct strategy for making a request, I cannot see a principled justification for separating strategies 2-5 from 6-7, calling the first group "direct" and the second "conventionally indirect," and the researchers do not offer such a justification. Rather, it seems to me that strategies 2-7 all represent mitigated forms of the bald (i.e. "mood derivable") request strategy and should be classified in Brown & Levinson's terms as on-record, with redress. In the current study, then, only those requests for repair that utilize the typical command structure were classified as "direct." Utterances that fall into the other categories mentioned above were coded as being "direct, but mitigated." Of course the final option, as with complaints, was to opt out of making a request for repair in a response. Table 17 presents the results for requests for repair by situation and directness level found in the data for the current study.

**Table 17. Overall directness levels for requests for repair**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Directness Level</b>	<b># of respondents choosing this level (out of 120)</b>	<b>% of respondent choosing this level</b>
<b>1</b> (friend/ messy kitchen)	No request	74	61.67%
	Indirect	3	2.50%
	Mitigated	25	20.83%
	Direct	18	15.00%
<b>2</b> (stranger/ cutting in line)	No request	20	16.67%
	Indirect	53	44.17%
	Mitigated	20	16.67%
	Direct	27	22.50%
<b>3</b> (boss/ bad review)	No request	118	98.33%
	Indirect	2	1.67%
	Mitigated	0	0.00%
	Direct	0	0.00%
<b>4</b> (adviser/ bad advice)	No request	78	65.00%
	Indirect	13	10.83%
	Mitigated	23	19.17%
	Direct	6	5.00%

Several points are readily apparent from the figures given above. First, in general, respondents chose to opt out of making a request for repair at higher rates than they opted out of complaining (see Table 9 for a comparison). This is especially the case in the third scenario, where only two brave souls made indirect suggestions that the boss reconsider his or her marks on the employee performance evaluation. The second situation produced the greatest number of requests for repair, but even here there were twice as many indirect as direct requests.

What explanations can be offered to account for the relative infrequency of requests for repair in situations constructed so as to be potentially repairable? One possibility is that the respondents did not, in actuality, see the situations in question as being easy to repair. This is not a good explanation, however, when



one considers the overall ratings given to each situation in terms of how likely it is that the situation will be corrected. Recall from chapter 2 that after respondents wrote responses to each scenario, they were asked to rate the situation on a five-point scale for three factors. One of these factors was "likelihood of repair."

Table 18 gives the mean scores and standard deviations for this category.

As Table 18 shows, on a scale of 1 (= not very likely) to 5 (= very likely), all four situations received a mean score of higher than 2.5, which means that overall, respondents considered all of the scenarios to be more repairable than not.<sup>8</sup> Even situation 3, in which only two individuals chose to make a request for repair, was rated as being relatively correctable.

**Table 18.** Mean scores for "likelihood of repair" ratings

Situation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1 (friend/kitchen) [-P, -D]	3.767	1.158
2 (stranger/line) [-P, +D]	3.483	1.092
3 (boss/review) [+P, -D]	3.292	0.893
4 (adviser/advice) [+P, +D]	2.592	1.344

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that while the standard deviations for these ratings are somewhat large given the scale in question, histograms show fairly normal distributions of ratings.

An alternative explanation for the greater use of complaints as opposed to requests for repair is related to the kind of face threatened by each speech act. As previously discussed, complaints primarily threaten the hearer's positive face, while requests threaten hearer's negative face. In her work on cross-cultural conflict styles and negotiation, Ting-Toomey (1988) puts forth the proposition that one of the major differences between members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures is the relative importance of negative versus positive face needs.

She claims that in individualistic cultures, such as the U.S., the need for autonomy and privacy outweighs the need for interdependence and inclusion, while the opposite is true for members of collectivistic cultures. In terms of conflict situations, this would mean that members of individualistic cultures generally perceive a greater degree of face-threat from FTAs that threaten negative face (such as requests) than those that threaten positive face (such as complaints). If Ting-Toomey's theory is correct, it may be the case that the respondents in this study are refraining from making requests for repair more than refraining from making complaints because requests for repair are considered to be more serious in terms of face-threat to these U.S. students.

A third and final explanation that may account for the data here relies not on the kind but rather the amount of face-threat involved overall. Table 19 provides a comprehensive picture of how the two FTAs in question are used in combination.

**Table 19.** Complaints and requests for repair by situation and directness levels

Situation	Complaint Level	Repair Level			
		No repair	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
1 (friend/ messy kitchen)	No complaint	30	2	5	0
	Indirect	26	1	10	12
	Mitigated	2	0	2	0
	Direct	16	0	8	6
2 (stranger/ cutting in line)	No complaint	3	23	2	8
	Indirect	13	21	11	8
	Mitigated	0	0	2	0
	Direct	4	9	5	11
3 (boss/ bad review)	No complaint	31	2	0	0
	Indirect	60	0	0	0
	Mitigated	16	0	0	0
	Direct	11	0	0	0
4 (adviser/ bad advice)	No complaint	17	1	1	0
	Indirect	32	9	17	3
	Mitigated	11	0	0	0
	Direct	18	3	5	3

The first item to note in this table is the relatively infrequent use of direct complaints in combination with direct requests for repair (see shaded cells). This combination clearly involves the greatest amount of face-threat to the hearer. If we look at the scenarios in terms of the power and social distance components, we find that the situation requiring the most skillful management of face-concerns, i.e. with the boss (an unequal power but on-going relationship), has no instances of this combination of FTAs. The adviser scenario ([+power, +distance]) has the next fewest incidents, followed by the friend scenario ([-power, -distance]). Both of these situations involve some careful manipulation of face-needs, but not to the same extent as the boss scenario. The situation which requires the least amount of attention to face concerns, namely the stranger cutting in line (a [-power,

+distance] scenario), also has the highest incidence of the most face-threatening combination of speech acts.

At the opposite end of the face-threat continuum is the choice to opt out of performing any FTA at all. Here we find that social distance is the important factor in determining whether or not some threat to face will be risked. For the two [-distance] situations which represent on-going relationships that must be maintained, we find a fairly high occurrence (around 25%) of respondents opting out. These respondents likely feel that the offenses in question are not so great as to risk threatening the face of the hearer and thus damaging the relationship. For the remaining two scenarios, respondents are much more likely to risk some face-threat, although here power seems also to come into play. For the [+distance] scenario that includes an unequal power component (i.e. with the adviser), respondents are almost six times as likely to opt out of performing any FTA than with the similar distance, but equal power situation.

In between these two extremes, we find various combinations of indirect, mitigated, and direct complaints and requests for repair. Since these two FTAs involve qualitatively different kinds of face-threat, it is not possible to objectively quantify the precise amount of face-threat that any given combination produces. It is apparent, however, that for each situation these two kinds of FTAs, with their varying levels of directness, are used together in managing overall face concerns.

In the first situation, there are, for example, an almost equal number of respondents who chose to produce a direct complaint with no request for repair as

those who chose a direct request for repair with no complaint. A similar statement can be made about the second and fourth scenarios, although in this case the combinations in question are direct complaints and indirect requests for repair, and vice versa (thus producing a slightly higher face-threat than the combination in the first scenario).

In terms of other combinations, we find a high frequency of indirect complaints with no requests for repair (a combination that is clearly only one step removed from choosing to opt out) for the first, third and fourth situations (with 26, 60, and 32 respondents respectively using this combination). In the second situation, on the other hand, more respondents (23) chose the opposite combination. In addition, a fairly high number (21) risked slightly more face-threat by placing an indirect complaint together with an indirect request.

Although more could undoubtedly be said about the particular FTA combinations for each scenario in this study, the overall point is that it is not enough to study speech acts in isolation if we want to understand how they are used in the overall politeness and face-management of actual discourse situations. Rather it is vital to understand that each speech act used contributes some portion of the overall threat (or maintenance for that matter) in the negotiation of participants' face.

This discussion has focused on two main types of face-threatening acts found in PCSs, namely complaints and requests for repair. To be completely accurate in claims regarding the overall face-threat would require investigation

into additional kinds of speech acts involved in the responses in this study. A scan of the data was enough to convince the researcher that no other category of speech acts was substantial enough to warrant separate analysis in this case. Nonetheless, future studies of Potential Complaint Situations (or any discourse situation for that matter) should bear this point in mind when examining how speech acts are manipulated to maintain appropriate levels of politeness and face-management.

## **Chapter 5**

### **SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION IN COMPLAINING**

#### **5.1 Situations and Complaint Realizations**

In the preceding chapter, we saw how levels of directness for complaints and requests for repair are used to produce different amounts of face-threat in various situations. In this chapter, the discussion turns to an analysis of the primary sociolinguistic variables found in this study -- namely situation, speaker sex, hearer sex, power and social distance -- and how these variables affect the realization of complaints in Potential Complaint Situations.

In the discussion in chapter 4, directness levels were analyzed for each of the four situations, although no justification was given for separating the data in this way. It is thus helpful to begin this discussion with a more careful look at how the four scenarios that appear in this study differed from one another. As mentioned in Chapter 2, respondents were asked to rate each situation in terms of three characteristics: severity of the offense, responsibility of the offender and likelihood of correction. The mean scores and standard deviations for each of these characteristics were calculated, and the results are presented in Table 20.

**Table 20.** Mean scores for three characteristics in each situation

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Severity of Offense</b>	<b>Responsibility of Offender</b>	<b>Likelihood of Repair</b>
1	2.308 S.D.=1.019	3.992 S.D.=1.213	3.767 S.D.=1.158
2	3.875 S.D.=0.984	4.292 S.D.=1.337	3.483 S.D.=1.092
3	3.292 S.D.=1.170	3.667 S.D.=0.973	3.292 S.D.=0.893
4	4.075 S.D.=1.189	4.008 S.D.=1.357	2.592 S.D.=1.344

If we compare the situations to one another in terms of the combination of these three factors, we find some interesting differences among the scenarios. The first situation, with the friend and the messy kitchen, is seen as being least severe and most likely to be repaired, while falling in the middle in terms of responsibility of the offender. The exact opposite can be said for the fourth situation, in which the advisor gives bad advice. To these respondents, this offense is both most severe and least likely to be corrected. In situation 2, the stranger cutting in line is held most responsible for his or her actions, and the offense is seen as fairly severe but also fairly correctable. Finally, the employer giving the bad review is seen as least responsible for the offense in question, and this offense is seen as less severe but also less likely to be repaired than all but one other.

One-way ANOVA tests reveal that situation is a significant variable for all three of these characteristics (Severity:  $F=62.954$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p=.000$ ; Responsibility:



$F= 5.184$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p=.002$ ; Likelihood:  $F=23.428$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Post-hoc Tukey tests identify more precisely where the significance lies, as shown in Table 21.

In terms of severity, situations 2 and 4 are not rated significantly differently from one another, but these two combined are significantly different from both 1 and 3. Situation 1 is seen as least severe, followed by situation 3 and then situations 2 and 4.

The case is slightly more complex for the responsibility ratings. Situations 1, 2 and 4 are not significantly different, and neither are situations 1, 3 and 4. The difference between the ratings of situations 2 and 3, however, is large enough to create overall significance. In terms of the mean scores, the boss is held least responsible for his or her actions, followed by the friend. Next comes the advisor, and finally the stranger.

In terms of likelihood of repair, situations 1 and 2 are not significantly differently rated, and neither are situations 2 and 3. Situations 1 and 3, however, are significantly different from one another, and situation 4 is significantly different than all three other scenarios. Mean scores reveal that situation 4 is seen as least likely to be corrected, while situation 1 is most likely to be repaired. In between these two fall situations 3 and 2 respectively.

**Table 21.** Results of post-hoc Tukey tests for the three characteristics

Dependent Variable	(I) Situation	(J) Situation	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Severity of Offense	1.00	2.00	-1.5667(*)	.141	.000
		3.00	-.9833(*)	.141	.000
		4.00	-1.7667(*)	.141	.000
	2.00	1.00	1.5667(*)	.141	.000
		3.00	.5833(*)	.141	.000
		4.00	-.2000	.141	.489
	3.00	1.00	.9833(*)	.141	.000
		2.00	-.5833(*)	.141	.000
		4.00	-.7833(*)	.141	.000
	4.00	1.00	1.7667(*)	.141	.000
		2.00	.2000	.141	.489
		3.00	.7833(*)	.141	.000
Responsibility of Offender	1.00	2.00	-.3000	.159	.232
		3.00	.3250	.159	.171
		4.00	-1.6667E-02	.159	1.000
	2.00	1.00	.3000	.159	.232
		3.00	.6250(*)	.159	.000
		4.00	.2833	.159	.280
	3.00	1.00	-.3250	.159	.171
		2.00	-.6250(*)	.159	.000
		4.00	-.3417	.159	.137
	4.00	1.00	1.667E-02	.159	1.000
		2.00	-.2833	.159	.280
		3.00	.3417	.159	.137
Likelihood of Repair	1.00	2.00	.2833	.146	.213
		3.00	.4750(*)	.146	.006
		4.00	1.1750(*)	.146	.000
	2.00	1.00	-.2833	.146	.213
		3.00	.1917	.146	.556
		4.00	.8917(*)	.146	.000
	3.00	1.00	-.4750(*)	.146	.006
		2.00	-.1917	.146	.556
		4.00	.7000(*)	.146	.000
	4.00	1.00	-1.1750(*)	.146	.000
		2.00	-.8917(*)	.146	.000
		3.00	-.7000(*)	.146	.000

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

It is, of course, important to note that the ratings of severity, responsibility and likelihood of repair cannot be completely disentangled from the identities of the participants involved. What makes the offense in the first scenario least severe, for example, may be at least in part the fact that it is committed by a friend. If the scenario was set up so that a roommate's friend messed up the kitchen, it is possible that the offense would have been rated more harshly. It is interesting to note, as well, that the boss is seen as least responsible for the offense while the stranger is held most responsible. In reality, it is much more likely that cutting in line would be an unintentional act, particularly compared to the bad review given. Clearly some consideration of the power and social distance differentials must have played a role in these ratings.

Even so, how each situation was rated in terms of the three characteristics discussed here provides some explanatory power when we examine levels of directness utilized (see Tables 9, 17, and 19). Returning briefly to some of the points mentioned in the last chapter, recall that respondents chose to opt out of complaining the least in the fourth scenario. It is probably not a coincidence that this is the situation that was considered to contain the most severe offense. Situations 1 and 2 also contained the highest numbers of direct and mitigated requests for repairs, and these are the two scenarios rated most likely to be repaired.

The fact that the boss is held least responsible for the offense in question may also partially explain the extremely high number of responses that contain an

indirect complaint with no request for repair. If the boss is not considered overly accountable for his or her actions, then there is no firm ground on which to put forth a face-threatening speech act that will seem justified. These explanations should not be divorced from other factors such as power and social distance which undoubtedly contribute to the overall results; however, used in combination with these other factors, a better understanding of how and why directness levels are utilized in the performance of FTAs can be achieved.

## **5.2 Severity, Responsibility and Likelihood of Repair as Independent Variables**

Up to this point, we have been examining the ratings of severity of offense, responsibility of offender and likelihood of repair as dependent variables, with the independent variable being situation. However, it is also possible to examine the levels of directness utilized by respondents by using these three categories as independent variables. It is an interesting question, for example, as to whether those respondents who perceive a situation to be quite severe are more likely to use a higher level of directness in complaint realization than those who see the situation as not being very severe. It is possible to examine the directness levels utilized for both complaints and requests for repair in this way. Although respondents rated each scenario for these three factors on a scale of 1 to 5, for the purposes of this analysis, respondents have been collapsed into three groups: low

(ratings of 1 or 2), medium (rating of 3) and high (rating of 4 or 5) for each characteristic.

It is possible to examine the effects of the factors of severity, responsibility and likelihood of repair both overall and within particular situations. Overall, both severity and responsibility proved to be significant factors in the choice of opting out versus performing a complaint, as Tables 22 and 23 illustrate. Respondents who judge the situation to be low or medium in terms of severity of offense and responsibility of offender chose to opt out of performing the complaint at a higher rate than those who judged the situations to be high in terms of these factors.

**Table 22.** Overall effects of severity of offense on complaint realizations

Respondents who:	Severity of Offense Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	42 (32.8%)	36 (31.8%)	47 (19.7%)
Complained	86 (67.2%)	77 (68.1%)	192 (80.3%)

$$\chi^2 = 10.077, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .01$$

**Table 23.** Overall effects of responsibility of offender on complaint realizations

Respondents who:	Responsibility of Offender Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	24 (36.9%)	25 (31.2%)	76 (22.7%)
Complained	41 (63.1%)	55 (68.8%)	259 (77.3%)

$$\chi^2 = 7.081, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .05$$

In terms of the speech act of requesting repair, all three factors had a significant overall effect in the choice of opting out versus performing the FTA.

These results are given in Tables 24-26 below. The results for severity of offense and likelihood of repair are straightforward in their interpretation. Low ratings in these two categories tend to produce a higher percentage of respondents choosing to opt out, while high ratings cause respondents to perform the request for repair at a higher rate.

**Table 24.** Overall effects of severity of offense on requests for repair

Respondents who:	Severity of Offense Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	94 ( 73.4%)	68 (60.2%)	128 (53.6%)
Requested Repair	34 (26.6%)	45 (39.8%)	111 (46.4%)

$$\chi^2 = 13.780, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .001$$

**Table 25.** Overall effects of responsibility of offender on requests for repair

Respondents who:	Responsibility of Offender Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	36 (55.4%)	71 (88.8%)	183 (54.6%)
Requested Repair	29 (44.6%)	9 (11.2%)	152 (45.4%)

$$\chi^2 = 32.238, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .001$$

**Table 26.** Overall effects of likelihood of repair on requests for repair

Respondents who:	Likelihood of Repair Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	92 (77.3%)	82 (63.1%)	116 (50.2%)
Requested Repair	27 (22.7%)	48 (36.9%)	115 (49.8%)

$$\chi^2 = 24.637, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .001$$

The figures in Table 25 are harder to interpret. It appears that respondents who rate the responsibility of the offender as either high or low chose to perform

the FTA at an almost equal rate. The statistical significance comes from the fact that the group of medium raters chose to opt out of requesting repair at a much higher rate. Perhaps this is a sign that this factor was not seen to be as relevant to requests for repair as the other two factors, leading a large number of respondents to fall back on the neutral rating of "3."

For respondents who did choose to perform either FTA, we find an overall significant effect on complaint realizations only for the factor of responsibility of offender, as shown in Table 27. As in Table 25, the results are somewhat surprising. Respondents who rated the responsibility of the offender as either high or low used a fairly similar distribution of indirect versus mitigated versus direct complaints. It is once again the medium raters who show a slightly different pattern. They utilized a slightly higher rate of indirectness and mitigation, with a substantially smaller percentage of direct complaints. It may be their uncertainty in determining the responsibility of the offender that causes them to err on the side of caution in this case.

**Table 27.** Overall effects of responsibility on directness levels in complaints

<b>Directness Level:</b>	<b>Responsibility of Offender Rating</b>		
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
Indirect	26 (63.4%)	40 (72.7%)	157 (60.6%)
Mitigated	3 (7.3%)	10 (18.2%)	22 (8.5%)
Direct	12 (29.3%)	5 (9.1%)	80 (30.9%)

$$\chi^2 = 13.636, \text{ d.f.} = 4, p < .01$$

In terms of requests for repair, only likelihood of repair had an overall significant effect on directness levels. These results are given in Table 28. In this case, those who rate the situations as highly likely to be repaired are almost equally distributed in their choice of directness levels. Perhaps since the situation is likely to be repaired, a request for repair in any form will do the trick. Which directness level is actually chosen is then determined by other factors. For those who are less confident about the reparability of the situation, however, greater face-management must be employed so as not to push the hearer away from a willingness to correct the situation due to the directness/rudeness of the speaker.

**Table 28.** Overall effects of likelihood of repair on directness levels in requests

Directness Level:	Likelihood of Repair Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Indirect	12 (44.4%)	21 (43.8%)	38 (33.0%)
Mitigated	6 (22.2%)	22 (45.8%)	40 (34.8%)
Direct	9 (33.3%)	5 (10.4%)	37 (32.2%)

$$\chi^2 = 10.701, \text{d.f.} = 4, p < .05$$

In addition to the overall effects discussed above, it is also possible to get a better idea of how individual situations interact with the three variables of severity, responsibility and likelihood of repair, if at all. When we examine individual scenarios, chi-square tests reveal no significant effects for any of the three variables in terms of level of directness for either complaints or request for repair. There were a few significant effects, however, in the choice of opting out



versus performing the FTAs for each of the characteristics in at least one of the situations.

In terms of severity of offense, there was a significant effect on complaint realizations for the fourth situation only. Table 29 presents these results.

**Table 29.** Severity of offense for complaints in situation 4

Respondents who:	Severity of Offense Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	10 (52.6%)	1 (12.5%)	8 (8.6%)
Complained	9 (47.4%)	7 (87.5%)	85 (91.4%)

$$\chi^2 = 23.022, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .001$$

The figures here reveal that respondents who rated the offense in the fourth situation as being moderately to highly severe were much more likely to produce a complaint. Of the 19 respondents who saw this offense as being fairly low in terms of severity, however, just over half chose to opt out of complaining about the situation.

A similar effect was found for the fourth situation only in terms of responsibility of the offender, as shown in Table 30.

**Table 30.** Responsibility of offender for complaints in situation 4

Respondents who:	Responsibility of Offender Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	8 (38.1%)	5 (38.5%)	6 (7.0%)
Complained	13 (61.9%)	8 (61.5%)	80 (93.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 17.867, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .001$$

In this case, those who found the advisor highly responsible for the mistake complained at a rate of 93%. In comparison, only about 62% of those who thought the advisor to be low or medium in terms of his or her responsibility complained about the situation.

**Table 31.** Likelihood of repair for complaints in situation 1

Respondents who:	Likelihood of Repair Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	10 (58.8%)	8 (36.4%)	19 (23.4%)
Complained	7 (41.8%)	14 (63.6%)	62 (76.5%)

$$\chi^2 = 8.627, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .05$$

In terms of likelihood of repair, a significant effect for complaining versus opting out was found only in the first situation. These figures are presented in Table 31. In this case, the more likely the respondents feel the situation is to be repaired, the more likely they are to complain about it. Those who see a low likelihood of repair complain at a rate of only 41.8%. The respondents who rated the likelihood of repair as medium complain at a rate of 63.3%. Finally, 76.5% of those who perceive a high likelihood of repair chose to make a complaint.

Turning to the FTA of requesting repair, we find a few more significant effects based on these three factors. Severity of offense comes into play only in the first situation, as shown in Table 32.

**Table 32.** Severity of offense for requests for repair in situation 1

Respondents who:	Severity of Offense Rating		
	Low	Medium	High
Opted Out	52 (74.3%)	18 (47.4%)	4 (33.3%)
Requested repair	18 (25.7%)	20 (52.6%)	8 (66.7%)

$$\chi^2 = 12.077, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .005$$

In this situation, the expected pattern is once again found. Respondents are most likely to opt out if they find the offense to be low in terms of severity. Only a third of those who find the situation highly severely offensive chose to opt out. In between these two extremes lie those who rated the situation as moderately severe. This group is almost equally split between those who request a repair and those who opt out of performing the FTA.

There were no significant effects on any of the situations for requests for repair in terms of the ratings of responsibility of the offender. As might be expected, however, three of the four situations showed significant effects by likelihood of repair ratings on the rates at which repairs were requested. These figures are presented in Table 33.

For the first situation, only the respondents who perceived the situation as being highly likely to be repaired bothered to request a repair at any substantial rate (53.1%). In situation 2, the break seems to come between those who perceive the situation as very low in terms of being repaired (52.2% requested repair) as opposed to those who rate it medium (88.2%) or high (92.1%).

**Table 33.** Likelihood of repair for requests for repair in situations 1, 2 and 4

Situation	Respondents who:	Likelihood of Repair Rating		
		Low	Medium	High
1	Opted Out	17 (100%)	19 (86.4%)	38 (46.9%)
	Requested repair	0 (0%)	3 (13.6%)	43 (53.1%)
$\chi^2 = 23.702$ , d.f. = 2, $p < .001$				
2	Opted Out	11 (47.8%)	4 (11.8%)	5 (7.9%)
	Requested repair	12 (52.2%)	30 (88.2%)	58 (92.1%)
$\chi^2 = 20.124$ , d.f. = 2, $p < .001$				
4	Opted Out	45 (75.0%)	12 (46.2%)	21 (61.8%)
	Requested repair	15 (25.0%)	14 (53.8%)	13 (38.2%)
$\chi^2 = 6.853$ , d.f. = 2, $p < .05$				

In situation 4, we find a slightly different pattern. Here it is those who see the situation as moderately likely to be repaired that are most likely to request a repair (53.8%). Those who rate it highly likely to be repaired request a repair at a rate of only 38.2%. And those who see it as unlikely to be repaired drop to a request rate of only 25%. The reversal of expected rates of requesting repair between the medium and high raters is difficult to explain. It is likely that other factors that are not immediately apparent are influencing the results in this case.

### 5.3 The Effects of Sex, Power and Social Distance on Complaint Realizations

The remaining sociolinguistic variables examined in this research were sex (of both the speaker and hearer), power and social distance. Like the characteristics of the situation discussed in the previous section, these variables

influenced the choice of whether or not to complain, as well as the directness level when complaints were made, in various ways. The raw numbers for the breakdown of complaint realizations in terms of the combination of all four of these variables are given in Table 34. Since it is difficult to say anything substantial about the figures as presented in the detailed breakdown, the analysis will proceed to a discussion of each of these more specific variables by collapsing the numbers given in Table 34 in various ways.

**Table 34.** Complaint realizations by sex, power and social distance

Power	Distance	Speaker Sex	Hearer Sex	Complaint Directness Level			
				Opt Out	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
-	-	F	F	9	13	2	6
			M	12	14	1	3
		M	F	12	8	0	10
			M	4	14	1	11
	+	F	F	9	15	1	5
			M	8	16	2	4
		M	F	11	9	1	9
			M	8	13	0	9
+	-	F	F	6	22	0	2
			M	12	11	7	0
		M	F	5	9	9	7
			M	10	18	0	2
	+	F	F	7	16	2	5
			M	5	14	4	7
		M	F	4	13	3	10
			M	3	18	2	7

The first question we can examine is to what extent the identities and relationships of the participants influence the choice to make a complaint in the first place. Chi-square tests of independence reveal that of the four variables

discussed here, only power is significant overall in the choice of opting out. Table 35 summarizes the data for this variable.

Without considering the individual situations, participants chose to opt out of performing a complaint at a rate of 26% overall. Quite unexpectedly, those situations which include a power differential between participants are actually less likely to lead participants to opt out of complaining than those where participants are equal in power.

**Table 35.** The effects of power on the choice of opting out of complaining

Power Level	Choice	
	Opt Out	Make Complaint
-	73 (30.4%)	167 (69.6%)
+	52 (21.7%)	188 (78.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>125 (26.0%)</b>	<b>355 (74.0%)</b>

$$\chi^2 = 4.770, \text{ d.f.} = 1, p < .05$$

It is difficult to interpret these results in isolation. This outcome may be the by-product of the particular situations utilized in this study rather than a general result about the effects of power on complaint realizations. Table 10 in chapter 4 shows the rates at which respondents opted out of each particular situation. While there are similar numbers of respondents opting out of situations 1, 2 and 3, a much smaller number opted out of complaining in situation 4 (which is, in fact, a [+power] situation). As discussed previously in this chapter, situation 4 is considered to contain the most severe offense and is least likely to be repaired in

the respondents' estimation. These facts may account for the lower percentage of opting out, and this in turn may be an explanation for this power result.

Actually, explanations for the effects of power on complaint realizations should also be sought in terms of possible interactions with the other variables. Looking at the two-way interactions between speaker sex, hearer sex, power and distance reveals that there is, in fact, a significant interaction between power and hearer sex.<sup>1</sup> Table 36 presents the results of this interaction.

**Table 36.** The interaction of power and hearer sex in complaint realizations

Power/Hearer Sex Combination	Choice	
	Opt Out	Make Complaint
-power, female	41 (34.2%)	79 (65.8%)
-power, male	32 (26.7%)	88 (73.3%)
+power, female	22 (18.3%)	98 (81.7%)
+power, male	30 (25.0%)	90 (75.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>125 (26.0%)</b>	<b>355 (74.0%)</b>

$$\chi^2 = 7.907, \text{ d.f.} = 3, p < .05$$

The figures in this table reveal that while respondents tend to complain to a male offender at about the same rates (around 74%), regardless of the power relationship between the two, there is a striking difference between complaint rates to females in positions of power versus non-power. To peers, i.e. power equals,

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<sup>1</sup> There are no other significant two-way interactions except for power by distance, which is the same thing as situation.

both male and female respondents<sup>2</sup> opt out of complaining at a higher rate if the hearer is female rather than male. For authority figures, exactly the opposite is true. This is a very interesting result and may reflect societal attitudes about the "proper" roles and treatment of women versus men that persist, even among younger respondents, after 20+ years of mainstream feminist thought promoting the idea of women as status equals to men in positions of authority.

It is also helpful in this discussion to consider the directness levels utilized when complaints were made. Once again, a chi-square test shows power to be a significant factor.

**Table 37.** The effects of power on directness levels of complaints

<b>Power Level</b>	<b>Directness Level</b>		
	<b>Indirect</b>	<b>Mitigated</b>	<b>Direct</b>
-	102 (61.0%)	8 (4.8%)	57 (34.1%)
+	121 (64.4%)	27 (14.4%)	40 (21.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>223 (62.8%)</b>	<b>35 (9.9%)</b>	<b>97 (27.3%)</b>

$$\chi^2 = 13.718, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .001$$

The figures in Table 37 are quite straightforward in their interpretation. The two situations in this study in which respondents are in equal power relationships with the offenders produce a much higher percentage of direct complaints and a slightly lower rate of indirect complaints than the situations

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that there was no significant 3-way interaction between speaker sex, hearer sex and power (or social distance for that matter).



where power is unequal. Mitigation tends to be used much more in [+power] situations as well.

In addition to power, the variable of speaker sex was also significant overall in terms of the directness levels utilized in making complaints (although not in the choice to opt out). Table 38 shows the comparison. The results here support other claims in the sociolinguistic literature that women tend to be more indirect in their use of language than men (e.g. Goodwin 1980). In this case, we find that two-thirds of the direct complaints in the study come from men, who utilize the option of directness (rather than mitigation or indirectness) at almost twice the rate of women.

**Table 38.** The effects of speaker sex on directness levels of complaints

Speaker Sex	Directness Level		
	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
Female	121 (70.3%)	19 (11.0%)	32 (18.6%)
Male	102 (55.7%)	16 (8.7%)	65 (35.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>223 (62.8%)</b>	<b>35 (9.9%)</b>	<b>97 (27.3%)</b>

$$\chi^2 = 12.774, \text{ d.f.} = 2, p < .005$$

Once again, the situation is slightly more complex than either Tables 37 or 38 suggest. If we look at interactions between variables, we find a number of significant results. In fact, chi-square tests reveal two-way interactions between most of the independent variables. These will be presented and discussed individually as appropriate.

To begin with, we find that speaker sex shows a significant interaction with hearer sex, as seen in Table 39. One important source of significance in this table is the behavior of male respondents towards female offenders. It is in this gender combination that the smallest rate of indirectness and largest percentage of direct complaints are made. Female respondents are not very likely to be direct to either females or males (although slightly more so to females); however, they utilize mitigated complaints at a rate that is substantially higher when they are complaining to men as opposed to other women. Mitigation in general, therefore, seems to be largely the result of cross-sex versus same sex-interactions.

**Table 39.** The interaction of speaker and hearer sex in complaint directness

Speaker/Hearer Sex Combination	Directness Level		
	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
female to female	66 (29.6%)	5 (14.3%)	18 (18.6%)
female to male	55 (24.7%)	14 (40.0%)	14 (14.4%)
male to female	39 (17.5%)	13 (37.1%)	36 (37.1%)
male to male	63 (28.2%)	3 (8.6%)	29 (29.9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>97</b>

$$\chi^2 = 30.462, \text{ d.f.} = 6, p < .001$$

Speaker sex also interacts significantly with both power and social distance. The figures for these interactions are presented in Tables 40 and 41.

In the first case, three different patterns occur when we examine each of the directness levels. For indirectness, we find similar percentages of usage for females in both power configurations and males in [+power] relationships, but

males in [-power] situations use much less indirectness and the highest rate of direct complaints. They also rely on mitigation very little. Mitigation in fact goes hand-in-hand with power differentials, regardless of speaker sex. In terms of directness, both females and males utilize it more in [-power] situations than in [+power] ones, although overall males use it more than females.

**Table 40.** The interaction of speaker sex and power in complaint directness

Speaker Sex/Power Combination	Directness Level		
	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
female, -power	58 (26.0%)	6 (17.1%)	18 (18.6%)
female, +power	63 (28.2%)	13 (37.1%)	14 (14.4%)
male, -power	44 (19.7%)	2 (5.7%)	39 (40.2%)
male, +power	58 (26.0%)	14 (40.0%)	26 (26.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>97</b>

$$\chi^2 = 28.843, \text{ d.f.} = 6, p < .001$$

**Table 41.** The interaction of speaker sex and distance in complaint directness

Speaker Sex/Distance Combination	Directness Level		
	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
female, -distance	60 (26.9%)	10 (28.6%)	11 (11.3%)
female, +distance	61 (27.4%)	9 (25.7%)	21 (21.6%)
male, -distance	49 (22.0%)	10 (28.6%)	30 (30.9%)
male, +distance	53 (23.8%)	6 (17.1%)	35 (36.1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>97</b>

$$\chi^2 = 16.102, \text{ d.f.} = 6, p < .05$$

In terms of the interaction between speaker sex and social distance, there are several interesting observations that can be made. Both females and males tend to utilize indirectness at similar rates, regardless of how well they know the other individual (although once again, females use it more than males). When it comes to directness, however, social distance does figure in, as both females and males are more direct in [+distance] relationships. This makes sense since there is no substantial on-going relationship that could be harmed by being too face-threatening. In on-going relationships, both males and females utilize mitigated complaints at a higher rate.

The remaining two-way significant interaction in this data comes between hearer sex and power. This result is presented in Table 42.

**Table 42.** The interaction of hearer sex and power in complaint directness

Hearer Sex/Power Combination	Directness Level		
	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
female, -power	45 (20.2%)	4 (11.4%)	30 (30.9%)
female, +power	60 (26.9%)	14 (40.0%)	24 (24.7%)
male, -power	57 (25.6%)	4 (11.4%)	27 (27.8%)
male, +power	61 (27.3%)	13 (37.1%)	16 (16.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>97</b>

$$\chi^2 = 16.040, \text{ d.f.} = 6, p < .05$$

The results in this table are again fairly straightforward. Indirectness tends to be utilized more in [+power] situations regardless of whether the respondents are complaining to a male or female, although it should be noted that the females

in [-power] relationship receive the lowest rate of indirectness as well as the highest rate of directness in complaint realizations. Conversely, males in positions of power receive the most deference, reflected in the greatest percentage of indirectness and smallest rate of direct complaints. The use of mitigation is once more the consequence of power, even more so than is indirectness.

While it is possible to examine three-way interactions as well, the interpretation of significance becomes much more difficult, and in fact we do not learn much more about the data than we already have by examining the effects of individuals variables and two-way interactions.

In addition, it is possible to examine the other FTA in this study, i.e. requests for repair, using the same sociolinguistic variables as in the preceding analysis of complaint realizations; however, doing so does not add significantly to an understanding of the effects on the performance of face-management which these variable contribute. The effects, in fact, are similar, with each of the four variables of speaker sex, hearer sex, power and social distance contributing in some way to the overall results, either as an independent effect or by interaction with some other variable. Furthermore, since only two respondents chose to make a request for repair in the third situation (with the boss), the results of statistical analysis would be skewed. Because of these reasons, the results and discussion of the effects of the four sociolinguistic variables on requests for repair have been excluded.

To summarize this section, we can say that, of the variables examined here, the variable of power seems to exert the greatest influence over complaint realizations. It has a significant individual effect on both the choice of whether or not to make a complaint in the first place, as well as on what level of directness is utilized when complaints are made. In addition, it interacts with the other three variables to affect complaint realizations in various ways. Speaker sex appears to be the next most important variable, as it also individually exerts significant influence over directness levels in complaint realizations. It also interacts with each of the other three variables in terms of directness levels. Hearer sex and social distance are less important, although they do have some significant influence in combination with the other variables.

## **Chapter 6**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1 Summary of Results**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the main points from this investigation of responses to Potential Complaint Situations and to situate the current results within a broader framework of face-threat and face-management. The current study has examined both what people say within PCSs, as well as how they define, interpret and perceive complaints.

The study began with a pragmatic definition of a complaint as the expression of a negative evaluation of some situation that the speaker finds unsatisfactory. This definition was anchored in folklinguistic data, and the discussion noted that it is not necessary for the offensive act to have been committed by the hearer (i.e. the one to whom the complaint is being made). It is cases such as these, however, where most research (including the current study) has focused attention, since it is these situations that require the greatest amount of attention to facework issues.

Having defined complaints, an argument was made that in order for a complaint to be considered a "direct" speech act, the negative evaluation inherent in it must be straightforwardly recoverable from some aspect of the utterance itself. The fourth chapter explored various ways that this direct negative evaluation can be expressed. In particular, six strategies utilized in the data of the

current study were noted. These strategies were: (1) expressing disapproval of the action, (2) using obscenities and/or name-calling, (3) incorporating negative exclamations, (4) pointing out the negative consequences of the hearer's action, (5) utilizing sarcasm, and (6) stating negative feelings. While this list is most likely non-comprehensive, it does provide a good starting point for the further analysis of the content of direct complaints, heretofore not examined in the speech act literature.

This study also showed that, while direct complaints can and certainly are utilized in a variety of situations, the most common way of putting forth a complaint is to do so indirectly, by going "off-record" in Brown and Levinson's terms. This is no doubt due to the high degree of face-threat inherent in making complaints, and it sets complaints apart from other speech acts, such as requesting, apologizing, complimenting, etc., that utilize conventional syntactic formulas much more regularly.<sup>1</sup>

The major problem associated with the frequent use of indirectness in complaint realizations is that it becomes much more difficult to say conclusively when a complaint has or hasn't been put forth. By using an indirect complaint, the speaker thus requires the hearer to be more actively involved in the overall negotiation of meaning within the conversational exchange. The hearer's

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<sup>1</sup> But see Kleiner (1996) for the claim that directness in direction-giving is the least preferred strategy among middle- (but not working-) class respondents. Status was not a variable in the current study.



interpretation of the utterance, in addition to the speaker's intention, becomes important in determining when a complaint has been made, and this can sometimes lead to a mismatch between the speaker's and hearer's understanding of exactly what has transpired within the exchange.

Because of the importance of hearer interpretation in complaining, we explored folklinguistic categories of complaints and found that there were a number of characteristics that helped respondents define a complaint. The aspects mentioned included the attitude with which the utterance was put forward, the degree and duration of the statement, the reason it was uttered and the subsequent effect it had, the amount of specificity it involved, the emotion conveyed, and language utilized in making the utterance. In terms evaluating utterances as complaints, we saw three main factors that are employed: diplomacy, boldness and manner.

Regarding the issue of what people actually say in PCSs, we found that aspects of both the context and participant identities have a significant influence on whether or not and how complaints are made in response to offensive acts. This study examined four situations in particular and looked at how a variety of sociolinguistic factors influenced the choice of complaint realizations. Table 43 presents the overall results of this portion of the data and discusses them in terms of the hypotheses presented in chapter 2.

**Table 43.** Overall results for complaint realizations in each situation

Situation	Severity Ranking	Responsibility Ranking	Likelihood of Repair Ranking	Power	Social Distance	Sex	Complaint Realization			
							Opt out	Indirect	Mitigated	Direct
1 (friend/ messy kitchen)	4 (least)	3	1	—	—	F to F	9 (7.5%)	13 (10.8%)	2 (1.7%)	6 (5.0%)
						F to M	12 (10.0%)	14 (11.7%)	1 (0.8%)	3 (2.5%)
						M to F	12 (10.0%)	8 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (8.3%)
						M to M	4 (3.3%)	14 (11.7%)	1 (1.7%)	11 (9.2%)
						Total	37 (30.8%)	49 (40.8%)	4 (3.3%)	30 (25.0%)
2 (stranger/ cutting in line)	2	1	2	—	+	F to F	9 (7.5%)	15 (12.5%)	1 (0.8%)	5 (4.2%)
						F to M	8 (6.7%)	16 (13.3%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.3%)
						M to F	11 (9.2%)	9 (7.5%)	1 (0.8%)	9 (7.5%)
						M to M	8 (6.7%)	13 (10.8%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (7.5%)
						Total	36 (30.0%)	53 (44.2%)	4 (3.3%)	27 (22.5%)
3 (boss/ bad review)	3	4	3	+	—	F to F	6 (5.0%)	22 (18.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.7%)
						F to M	12 (10.0%)	11 (9.2%)	7 (5.8%)	0 (0.0%)
						M to F	5 (4.2%)	9 (7.5%)	9 (7.5%)	7 (5.8%)
						M to M	10 (8.3%)	18 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.7%)
						Total	33 (27.5%)	60 (50.0%)	16 (13.3%)	11 (9.2%)
4 (adviser/ bad advice)	1 (most)	2	4	+	+	F to F	7 (5.8%)	16 (13.3%)	2 (1.7%)	5 (4.2%)
						F to M	5 (4.2%)	14 (11.7%)	4 (3.3%)	7 (5.8%)
						M to F	4 (3.3%)	13 (10.8%)	3 (2.5%)	10 (8.3%)
						M to M	3 (2.5%)	18 (15.0%)	2 (1.7%)	7 (5.8%)
						Total	19 (15.8%)	61 (50.8%)	11 (9.2%)	29 (24.2%)

The first hypothesis stated that respondents would draw on a variety of politeness strategies in performing the complaints, and these strategies include the choice of opting out in addition to the use of mitigation and indirectness. Table 43 shows that this hypothesis is clearly confirmed. Direct complaints were utilized overall at a rate of only about 20%, and they were not used more than 25% of the time for any given scenario. The remaining 75-80% of responses were either indirect, mitigated or a choice to not complain at all. Indirect complaints were the most frequently utilized, both overall and in each individual situation. Opting out was the second most common response, while mitigation was utilized relatively infrequently in these data.

The second hypothesis stated that situations in which the participants are in on-going ([-distance]) relationships, as well as those that contain a power differential, will require the greatest amount of face-management. Conversely, situations with [+distance] and [-power] relationships will demand less facework. This combination should lead to the greatest amount of attention paid to face in a [-D, +P] situation, and the least amount of facework in a [+D, -P] scenario.

The situation in this study that represented the [-D, +P] configuration was the boss/bad review scenario. An examination of Table 43 shows that this is indeed the situation in which the respondents are most attentive to face concerns. While they chose to opt out of complaining at the same rate in this situation as in situations 1 and 2 (and more so than in situation 4), respondents utilized both a greater amount of indirectness and mitigation as well as a significantly lower rate

of directness than in the other scenarios. Furthermore, only two respondents chose to add the additional face-threat of a request for repair in this situation, as Table 16 illustrates. It is important to note that respondents did not find the offense in this situation to be particularly severe and they held the boss least responsible for the offensive act, compared to other situations. These facts certainly contribute to the overall use of face-management in this situation.

The opposite situation in terms of power and distance in this study was the stranger cutting in line scenario. It was predicted that respondents would be least concerned with face matters in this scenario, in which the participants are social equals in a non-on-going relationship. This should lead to the greatest amount of directness in complaining. The actual results do not entirely confirm this portion of the second hypothesis. Rather, it seems that the distribution of complaint realization choices is almost identical to the first situation, which is a [-D, -P] relationship. In some ways, the fourth situation ([+D, +P]) appears to involve less face-management than the second. Respondents opted out of complaining to the adviser at about half the rate that a complaint was made to the stranger in line, choosing instead to produce almost three times the number of mitigated complaints.

An explanation for this result lies at least partially in the characteristics of the situations themselves. The offense committed by the adviser was seen to be the most severe of all the situations, while the friend messing up the kitchen was not rated particularly severely at all. Furthermore, the friend situation was

considered to be most likely to be repaired, while the adviser scenario was rated least likely on this same scale. These facts, combined with the power and social distance characteristics of the relationships represented by each situation, worked together to produce results which make the realization of complaints in the second situation much more like those of the first and fourth situations.

In addition, these results suggest that social norms require a certain degree of politeness in interactions as a kind of baseline for socially acceptable behavior. Factors such as a power differential or lack of social distance may contribute added degrees of politeness to the exchange, but only in extreme cases will aspects of the situation override the minimal level of politeness and actually cause speakers to make use of rudeness conventions. What specifically these aspects may be is an interesting area for further exploration.

Finally, it is important to note that in at least one way, the second half of the second hypothesis is indeed confirmed. The results from use of requests for repair (as seen in Table 17) clearly indicate a willingness to utilize a greater amount of this kind of face-threat in the second situation than the other three. Respondents chose to opt out of performing this particular FTA at a rate of only 16.7%, compared to 61.7%, 98.3% and 65% respectively in situations 1, 3 and 4. Furthermore the use of direct requests for repair was also significantly higher than in the other situations. This result illustrates the importance of examining the entire utterance when doing speech act research, rather than simply pulling out for

analysis those portions of responses which fit into the category of the speech act under investigation.

The third hypothesis presented in chapter 3 indicated that gender may influence the results of the study, both in terms of how complaints are made *by* men v. women and *to* men v. women. As the discussion in chapter 5 showed, this was in fact the case. More specifically, female speakers tend to opt out of complaining at higher rates overall than males and utilize a higher percentage of indirectness as well. Males, on the other hand, use more direct complaints comparatively. Hearer sex does not seem to be as significant an influence on complaint realization, although it does contribute some minor effects. It interacts with power in terms of the choice of opting out, with the greatest number of respondents opting out of complaining to a female in an equal power relationship, while the fewest respondents do so when the hearer is a female in a position of power. Furthermore, hearer sex interacts with both speaker sex and power in the actual directness levels utilized when complaints are made. Thus the third hypothesis is confirmed, although gender is not the most influential variable in the overall results.

## **6.2 Critiquing Brown and Levinson**

While Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has provided a good framework through which to investigate the speech act of complaining, this study has illuminated a number of areas of weakness in the theory as well. One of the

major critiques of B&L's theory, in fact, has been that it is highly theoretical, although it purports to be empirically-based by citing examples from three diverse languages. Many of the empirical studies that have utilized the theory have attempted to fit their results into the existing theory rather than point out areas in need of revision or expansion. The purpose of this section is to critique B&L's theory in light of the results from this investigation of complaints.

The first point worth noting is one mentioned in the first chapter of this volume. B&L claim that their theory is about "politeness," but they never define what they mean by this term. It is apparent from their discussion that they take "politeness" to be the equivalent of "directness," but they give no principled explanation or empirical evidence as to why they believe this is so. Studies such as Blum-Kulka (1987) have shown, in fact, that these concepts are not the same; the most indirect instantiation of a particular speech act is not necessarily viewed as the most polite way of performing it.

Although the current study did not specifically test this issue, results from the rating task discussed in Chapter 3 do shed some light on the matter. Recall that factor analysis of the semantic differential ratings revealed that utterances in Potential Complaint Situations were evaluated in terms of diplomacy, boldness and manner. The feature of directness is part of the "boldness" factor group, while politeness is an important element in the "manner" group (see Table 7). Table 8 and Figure 4 shows how 12 different utterances were judged. Although a few of the utterances received similar scores for boldness and manner, the majority had a

fairly substantial difference between their ratings in these categories. While "directness" and "politeness" were not being specifically compared, these findings suggest that for complaints, as in Blum-Kulka's findings for requests, these terms should not be used interchangeably.

Another problem with B&L's theory is the fact that it is too speaker-centered. Although in their theory the hearer's face is part of what is potentially threatened and must be maintained in a conversational episode, it seems to be entirely up to the speaker to assess the amount of face-threat involved with a particular act and to adjust his or her behavior accordingly. The results of the current study, however, suggest that with complaints, the hearer is an important and active participant in the identification of an utterance as a complaint. More specifically, Figure 3 illustrates the mismatch between respondents' assessment as to whether an utterance was intended as a complaint and whether it would be interpreted as one. In most cases, a higher percentage of respondents believed that the utterance would be interpreted as a complaint than believed that it was intended as one. Although this result does not specifically spell out the relative importance of the speaker v. the hearer in the overall negotiation of meaning in complaint exchanges, it does point out the need to incorporate the hearer into the analysis to a greater extent than B&L do.

Thirdly, B&L's conception of the weightiness of an FTA is too narrow. They argue that the assessment of the seriousness of an FTA involves only the factors of social distance (D), power relations (P), and the absolute ranking (R) of



impositions related to the expenditure of goods and services in the particular culture. They even go so far as to provide a formula for computing the weightiness (W) of an FTA as:  $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$ .

While the current study has shown the influence that these factors (particularly the first two) have on the realization of a complaint, it is quite apparent that there are other factors that play into this as well. In particular, the gender of the participants is often a significant factor in how complaints are made, as are characteristics of the situation such as the severity of the offense, the responsibility of the offender and the likelihood of correction. As previously mentioned, it is likely that there are factors beyond these that are influencing how complaints are realized, but the analysis of these factors alone is enough to show that an assessment of the weightiness of a given FTA is more complex than B&L's simple formula suggests.

A further problem with B&L's theory is that it takes an FTA to be the appropriate unit of analysis for an understanding of how face-management is accomplished. In other words, it appears that B&L believe either that speaker utterances never contain more than one FTA or that the amount of face-threat in a communicative exchange is equal to the sum of the amount of face-threat in each act that is part of the utterance. Once again, the current study shows the reality to be far more complex than either of these possibilities.

While the main analysis in this volume centers on complaints, the data in this study also revealed a large number of another kind of FTA, namely requests

for repair. It would have given an inaccurate picture of the amount of face-threat and face-management involved in these utterances had the requests for repair been excluded from the analysis. In particular, Table 19 shows the interaction between complaints and requests for repair that appears in this data. In some cases, while there is no complaint present in an utterance, there is nonetheless a request for repair made at various directness levels (and vice versa). This shows that in addition to the amount of face-threat, respondents are sensitive to the different kinds of face-threat that may be appropriate or inappropriate in a given situation. It also suggests that face-management strategies could come from outside the FTA itself, by way of other communicative acts in the utterance, although a specific analysis of these kinds of strategies was not incorporated in the current study.

A related issue has to do with the identity of acts themselves. Again, since B&L deal with single FTAs as their unit of analysis, there is no discussion in their work of the possibility of a single utterance functioning as more than one illocutionary act. In the discussion of indirectness in complaint realizations, this study demonstrated that an utterance which could be considered a direct instantiation of a particular speech act (such as statement, request, warning, compliment, etc.) could nonetheless also be interpreted as an indirect complaint. The argument here is not that what appears to be one speech act is in reality a different one; rather, it seems to be the case that an utterance that functions as one illocutionary act can at the same time function as another. It remains an issue for further discussion and elaboration as to how precisely the hearer goes through the

implication process to recognize multiple functions of a given utterance, but it is quite clear from the evidence presented in this study that this process is indeed occurring.

The above critiques of B&L's politeness theory illustrate the importance of drawing on empirical research to test the validity and assess the strengths and weaknesses of any theoretical framework. While B&L's work provides a great deal of explanatory power in an analysis of utterances in Potential Complaint Situations, the points elaborated above suggest that the theory would be more useful if its designers would find ways of refining it given the results of various empirical studies, including the current one.

### **6.3 Implications for an Understanding of Face-Threat and Face-Management**

One of the stated goals of the current study was to situate an analysis of complaints within a broader framework of face-management. The results summarized at the beginning of this chapter offer several new insights into the construct of facework as it has been previously understood and utilized within the pragmatics literature.

To begin with, we have seen that not all speech acts are "created equally" when it comes to the amount of face-threat involved and subsequent face-management required. While all speech acts can be performed either directly ("on-record") or indirectly ("off-record"), some have more readily-identifiable

conventional forms than others. This fact is directly connected to the amount of face-threat involved with merely performing the speech act at all. In the case of complaints, we found that the use of indirectness is much more frequent than with many other speech acts. This makes the analysis of complaints more challenging, although certainly not less interesting.

While Brown and Levinson suggest an ordering in terms of directness between redress directed at positive versus negative face needs (with positive redress being more direct), this study has suggested that positive and negative face are qualitatively different. Because of this, it is not possible to objectively measure the amount of face-threat or face-management that corresponds to the different kinds of face-concerns. Indeed, it may be the case that social and cultural contexts play a significant role in determining the degree of face-threat involved in the utterance of a given kind of speech act.

This study, in fact, illustrates the importance of analyzing characteristics of a situation to determine how they effect the realization of responses within that situation. In particular, we noted how the evaluation of situations in terms of severity of offense, responsibility of the offender and likelihood of correction affected the realization of complaints and requests for repair within Potential Complaint Situations. It is undoubtedly the case that there are other aspects of conversational context which affect how complaints are made, not to mention how other speech acts are realized and face-management accomplished.

In addition, the current study has underscored the holistic nature of discourse that has often been ignored or overlooked in the analysis of speech acts. While the primary goal of Austin and Searle's pioneering work in this field was to move researchers beyond a word- or sentence-level analysis towards an understanding of language as action, quite often studies in this area have isolated particular speech acts and analyzed their form and content apart from the contexts in which they occur. This kind of analysis is foundational and thus crucial to the understanding of a given speech act, but it is not enough. In addition to the form that it can take, it is important to understand how a particular speech act interacts with other speech acts in the same utterance or conversation to create the overall meaning that is being negotiated.

Furthermore, we find that a speech act's very identity is often malleable in that it can function at a number of directness levels to operate as more than one speech act at the same time. We saw, for example, that a statement such as "I see you made yourself at home" is at one level merely a statement, with the corresponding illocutionary force of stating. And indeed it is possible for a hearer to choose to interpret this utterance as nothing more than a statement. At another level, however, we find that this utterance can also be understood as a complaint. Herein lies the power and flexibility of language to be used not only as a tool for the conveyance of meaning but also as an instrument of social maneuvering.

#### **6.4 Concluding Remarks**

While this study is not the first to attempt an analysis of complaints, it has done so in ways that have addressed a number of shortcomings of previous research in this area. To begin with, the analysis has proceeded from a specific theoretical definition of a complaint, rather than merely relying on native-speaker intuition in determining what should and should not be counted as a complaint. It has furthermore incorporated folklinguistic understandings of this particular speech act as a confirmation of and supplement to technical concepts. In addition, while the study retains some of the limitations inherent in using discourse completion tests as opposed to naturally-occurring data, it has attempted to deal with past criticisms related to asking participants to respond to unrealistic situations.

The major contribution that this research makes to the field of language study is the connections it draws between the more specific concepts of speech act theory and the broader notions of politeness and facework theory. It has illustrated the importance of analyzing both the internal content of the speech act and the external context of the situation to achieve a fuller understanding of how language is indeed action in the world of conversation. It has also illuminated a number of both strengths and weaknesses in Brown and Levinson's conceptualization of face-threat and face-management in communicative exchanges.

This study represents merely the beginning of what could be a broader, more comprehensive investigation into the speech act of complaining. More

specifically, this work has focused on a necessarily homogeneous and well-defined respondent group as well as a few particular kinds of situations. There is great potential for expanding this research to include other demographic and language groups and thus move the research into the realm of cross-cultural pragmatic studies.

## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

**Instructions:** You will make a tape recording (on a normal cassette tape) of a young (18 to 25 year old) Michigan State University student (who is from the Great Lakes or “Midwest”) and is a native speaker of English.

At the beginning of the tape, state your name and student number, but do not mention the respondent's name. You should state on the tape, however, the respondent's age, gender, and ethnicity. (This is also a good opportunity to play the tape back and make sure the tape recorder is working.)

After you have put this information at the beginning of the tape, go on to the interview, which has two parts.

#### **PART 1:**

Ask your respondent the following underlined questions (just as they are written, except as noted):

1) Give me your definition of a complaint.

(Pause for response.)

2) What else can you call it when a person complains?

(Pause for response.)

This next part of the interview is a little trickier. You will ask the following questions about each one of the answers you got to question number 2. For example, if your respondent said he or she could call a complaint “chewing somebody out” and “bitching,” then you would ask the following kinds of questions about both answers:

3) Who can you “chew out”? Who can't you “chew out”?

(Pause for response.)

4) Where, when, and about what sorts of things can you “chew people out”?

(Pause for response.)

You would then ask these same questions about “bitching.” In your interview, you will use the actual words or phrases your respondent gave you as answers to question 2.

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Next, you will try to get your respondent to give definitions of each of the words they gave you as their own responses to question number 2. They can best do this by comparing the words they gave you to one another. For example, if you had the responses we mentioned above, you would ask

5) How, exactly, is “chewing out” different from “bitching”? (Of course, you will use the words your own respondent gave you.)

(Pause for response; then go on to Part II.)

### PART II

In part two we are trying to find out what words (usually adjectives) are used to describe people and situations. If your respondents ask you to clarify after you give them the following data to respond to, just say something like “What words would you use to describe this?” or even “What adjectives would you use to describe this?”

There are two situations. First, ask the respondent to imagine the following:

Situation #1: You've been waiting in line for two hours to buy tickets to a concert that is almost sold out. A person cuts in front of the person in front of you, and the person who got cut in front of says:

Excuse me, but the end of the line is back there. We've been waiting all day.

How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response)

Instead of that., imagine the person said:

I think people cutting in line is really rude.

Again, ask your respondent: How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response)

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Instead of that, imagine the person said:

Why do you think you can cut in front of me?

Again, ask your respondent: How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response)

Instead of that, imagine the person said:

Who do you think you are?

Again, ask your respondent: How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response; go on to the second situation)

Now ask the respondent to imagine the following:

Situation #2: A person has worked for their current boss for some time, and they get along well. When the employee's annual performance review comes around, they find out that their boss has given them a bad review. They do not think the review is a fair picture of their work. They go to see the boss and say:

I don't understand why I received a bad review. I wish that I had been told that you thought my performance was bad.

How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response)

Instead of that., imagine the person said:

I was wondering why you gave me a bad review. Can I do anything to change this?

Again, ask your respondent: How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

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Instead of that, imagine the person said:

I would like to know why you gave me a bad review. I feel that I have done more than enough to make this company happy.

Again, ask your respondent: How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response)

Instead of that., imagine the person said:

Why did you give me a review like that. I really don't think that was fair. Why didn't you talk to me, instead of giving me a bad review. I thought you would be cooler than that.

Again, ask your respondent: How would you describe this complaint? How would you describe the person who made it?

(Pause for response)

**End of interview.**

## APPENDIX B

### Sample Questionnaire

*Please provide the following information for classification purposes only. In no way will this information be used to identify you individually in published results of this study.*

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: M / F

Ethnicity (circle one):

1 European-American

2 African-American

3 Hispanic-American

4 Asian-American

5 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Highest grade level completed: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please answer with city and state (and country if not U.S.) for each of the following questions:*

Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you spend your elementary school years? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you spend your high school years? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did your mother grow up? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did your father grow up? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the majority of your life been in a town/city with a population of (check one):

Less than 10,000 people \_\_\_\_\_

10,000 people or more \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a native speaker of English? Yes No

If "No", what is your first language? Besides English, what other languages do you know and how well (check level)?

Language: \_\_\_\_\_

Language: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ have studied for \_\_\_\_ years

☐ can read newspaper

☐ can speak conversationally

☐ can speak fluently

☐ have studied for \_\_\_\_ years

☐ can read newspaper

☐ can speak conversationally

☐ can speak fluently

*Please read and sign the consent form on the back of this sheet before answering the questions on the following pages.*

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form for Linguistic Study

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have consented to participate in a linguistic study involving situations where complaints are made. I understand that the data obtained from me will be in the form of written responses to given scenarios and ratings regarding certain beliefs. I understand that all demographic information about myself in addition to all data I provide is strictly for the purpose of linguistic research and will be kept confidential. In no way will I be placed at risk in this study. I also understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation at any time during the project, including mid-process. Any questions regarding this project or inquiries regarding the results of the study may be addressed to: Laura C. Hartley, Department of Linguistics, A614 Wells Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI 48824; hartleyl@pilot.msu.edu.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## APPENDIX B

### PART I

**Directions:** You will be presented with four situations. For each situation, do the following:

1. Read the details of the scenario and then write out a script of what you would say in that situation on the blank lines given below the scenario. Please try to be as realistic as possible; that is, write only what you believe you would actually say, and not what you would merely think or wish to say.
2. If you wouldn't say anything in the situation, write "Nothing" on the first line and then on the remaining lines give a brief explanation as to why you would say nothing.
3. After you have completed this task, rate each situation by circling a number on each of the scales which follow it.

1. A good friend of yours from high school is visiting you for the weekend. In preparation for his visit, you clean the kitchen thoroughly. Shortly after your friend's arrival, you tell him to make himself comfortable while you run out to the store. When you arrive home, you notice that your friend has made a huge mess in the kitchen. You say to your friend:

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*How severe is this offense?*

not severe at all      1          2          3          4          5      very severe

*How responsible is your friend for this situation?*

not very responsible    1          2          3          4          5      very responsible

*How likely is it that your friend will do something to correct the situation?*

not likely at all      1          2          3          4          5      very likely

2. You've been waiting in line for two hours to buy tickets to a concert that is almost sold out. As you're standing there, a woman about your age tries to cut in line in front of you. You say:

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*How severe is this offense?*

not severe at all      1          2          3          4          5      very severe

*How responsible is the person who cut in line for this situation?*

not very responsible    1          2          3          4          5      very responsible

*How likely is it that this person will do something to correct the situation?*

not likely at all      1          2          3          4          5      very likely

## APPENDIX B

3. You have worked for your current boss for some time now and you get along well. When your annual performance review comes around, you find out that he has given you a bad review. You do not think the review is a fair picture of your work. When you see your boss, you say:

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*How severe is this offense?*

not severe at all      1          2          3          4          5      very severe

*How responsible is your boss for this situation?*

not very responsible   1          2          3          4          5      very responsible

*How likely is it that your boss will do something to correct the situation?*

not likely at all      1          2          3          4          5      very likely

4. Last year when you were planning out your courses, you went to talk for the first and only time to the professor who has been assigned to you as your academic adviser, in order to ask her advice on what courses you should take for your major. After taking several of the courses she said you had to take, you find out that one of the courses will not count towards your major after all, and that you will need to take a different course instead during summer school in order to graduate on time. You go to your adviser's office during her office hours and say:

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*How severe is this offense?*

not severe at all      1          2          3          4          5      very severe

*How responsible is your professor for this situation?*

not very responsible   1          2          3          4          5      very responsible

*How likely is it that your professor will do something to correct the situation?*

not likely at all      1          2          3          4          5      very likely



## APPENDIX B

### PART II

**Directions:** Imagine that instead of being in the situations in part I, you were instead simply observing people in those situations. You will be presented with a number of possible statements that might be made by people in those situations. For each statement:

1. Answer the questions which follow by circling "Yes" or "No".
2. Rate the statement using the word pairs which follow it by placing an "X" in one of the blanks between the two word opposites. For example, if you thought the statement was quite rude, you would place an "X" in the blank closest to the word "rude" like this:

Rude     X     \_\_\_\_\_   \_\_\_\_\_   \_\_\_\_\_   \_\_\_\_\_   Polite

If you thought it was somewhat rude, you would place the "X" in the next blank over, and so on.

Rude   \_\_\_\_\_     X     \_\_\_\_\_   \_\_\_\_\_   \_\_\_\_\_   Polite

**Situation A:** A stranger cuts in line ahead of someone who has been waiting two hours to buy concert tickets. The person says:

**Response 1:** "Excuse me, but the end of the line is back there. We've been waiting all day."

Would you consider this statement to be a complaint?      Yes      No

*If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?*

Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Gripping                      Nagging                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?      Yes      No

Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?      Yes      No

**Rate this statement on the following scales:**

Rude	_____	Polite	Effective	_____	Ineffective
Mean	_____	Nice	Negative	_____	Positive
Legitimate	_____	Not Legitimate	Not Sarcastic	_____	Sarcastic
Diplomatic	_____	Not Diplomatic	Defensive	_____	Not Defensive
Indirect	_____	Direct	Arrogant	_____	Not Arrogant
Unreasonable	_____	Reasonable	Not Assertive	_____	Assertive
Aggressive	_____	Non-aggressive	Patient	_____	Impatient
Appropriate	_____	Inappropriate	Mature	_____	Immature
Angry	_____	Not angry	Passive	_____	Active
Confrontational	_____	Nonconfrontational			

## APPENDIX B

### Response 2: "I think people cutting in line is really rude."

Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No

*If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?*

Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No

Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No

Rate this statement on the following scales:

Rude	_____	Polite	_____	Effective	_____	Ineffective	_____
Mean	_____	Nice	_____	Negative	_____	Positive	_____
Legitimate	_____	Not Legitimate	_____	Not Sarcastic	_____	Sarcastic	_____
Diplomatic	_____	Not Diplomatic	_____	Defensive	_____	Not Defensive	_____
Indirect	_____	Direct	_____	Arrogant	_____	Not Arrogant	_____
Unreasonable	_____	Reasonable	_____	Not Assertive	_____	Assertive	_____
Aggressive	_____	Non-aggressive	_____	Patient	_____	Impatient	_____
Appropriate	_____	Inappropriate	_____	Mature	_____	Immature	_____
Angry	_____	Not angry	_____	Passive	_____	Active	_____
Confrontational	_____	Nonconfrontational	_____				

### Response 3: "Who do you think you are?"

Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No

*If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?*

Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No

Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No

Rate this statement on the following scales:

Rude	_____	Polite	_____	Effective	_____	Ineffective	_____
Mean	_____	Nice	_____	Negative	_____	Positive	_____
Legitimate	_____	Not Legitimate	_____	Not Sarcastic	_____	Sarcastic	_____
Diplomatic	_____	Not Diplomatic	_____	Defensive	_____	Not Defensive	_____
Indirect	_____	Direct	_____	Arrogant	_____	Not Arrogant	_____
Unreasonable	_____	Reasonable	_____	Not Assertive	_____	Assertive	_____
Aggressive	_____	Non-aggressive	_____	Patient	_____	Impatient	_____
Appropriate	_____	Inappropriate	_____	Mature	_____	Immature	_____
Angry	_____	Not angry	_____	Passive	_____	Active	_____
Confrontational	_____	Nonconfrontational	_____				

## APPENDIX B

**Situation B:** A person has just received a bad performance review from their boss with whom they have worked awhile and get along well. They go to see the boss and say:

**Response 1:** "Why did you give me a review like that. I really don't think that was fair. Why didn't you talk to me - instead of giving me a bad review. I thought you would be cooler than that."

Would you consider this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No

If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?

Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Gripping                      Nagging                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No

Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No

Rate this statement on the following scales:

Rude	___	___	___	___	Polite		Effective	___	___	___	___	Ineffective
Mean	___	___	___	___	Nice		Negative	___	___	___	___	Positive
Legitimate	___	___	___	___	Not Legitimate		Not Sarcastic	___	___	___	___	Sarcastic
Diplomatic	___	___	___	___	Not Diplomatic		Defensive	___	___	___	___	Not Defensive
Indirect	___	___	___	___	Direct		Arrogant	___	___	___	___	Not Arrogant
Unreasonable	___	___	___	___	Reasonable		Not Assertive	___	___	___	___	Assertive
Aggressive	___	___	___	___	Non-aggressive		Patient	___	___	___	___	Impatient
Appropriate	___	___	___	___	Inappropriate		Mature	___	___	___	___	Immature
Angry	___	___	___	___	Not angry		Passive	___	___	___	___	Active
Confrontational	___	___	___	___	Nonconfrontational							

## APPENDIX B

<p><b>Response 2: "I would like to know why you gave me a bad review. I feel that I have done more than enough to make this company happy."</b></p> <p>Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No</p> <p><i>If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?</i></p> <p>Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other _____</p> <p>Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No</p> <p>Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No</p>																																																														
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## APPENDIX B

**Situation C:** A person returns from running errands to find their visiting friend has messed up the newly-cleaned kitchen. They say:

**Response 1:** "I spent all day cleaning the kitchen. I would appreciate it if you would pick up your mess."

Would you consider this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No

If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?

Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Gripping                      Nagging                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No

Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No

Rate this statement on the following scales:

Rude	_____	Polite	Effective	_____	Ineffective
Mean	_____	Nice	Negative	_____	Positive
Legitimate	_____	Not Legitimate	Not Sarcastic	_____	Sarcastic
Diplomatic	_____	Not Diplomatic	Defensive	_____	Not Defensive
Indirect	_____	Direct	Arrogant	_____	Not Arrogant
Unreasonable	_____	Reasonable	Not Assertive	_____	Assertive
Aggressive	_____	Non-aggressive	Patient	_____	Impatient
Appropriate	_____	Inappropriate	Mature	_____	Immature
Angry	_____	Not angry	Passive	_____	Active
Confrontational	_____	Nonconfrontational			

## APPENDIX B

<b>Response 2: "Boy, someone was in the cooking mood."</b>		
Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No		
<i>If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?</i>		
Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other _____		
Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No		
Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No		
<b>Rate this statement on the following scales:</b>		
Rude                      _____                      Polite	Effective                      _____                      Ineffective	
Mean                      _____                      Nice	Negative                      _____                      Positive	
Legitimate                      _____                      Not Legitimate	Not Sarcastic                      _____                      Sarcastic	
Diplomatic                      _____                      Not Diplomatic	Defensive                      _____                      Not Defensive	
Indirect                      _____                      Direct	Arrogant                      _____                      Not Arrogant	
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Appropriate                      _____                      Inappropriate	Mature                      _____                      Immature	
Angry                      _____                      Not angry	Passive                      _____                      Active	
Confrontational                      _____                      Nonconfrontational		

<b>Response 3: "What the hell did you do to the kitchen?"</b>		
Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No		
<i>If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?</i>		
Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other _____		
Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No		
Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No		
<b>Rate this statement on the following scales:</b>		
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Legitimate                      _____                      Not Legitimate	Not Sarcastic                      _____                      Sarcastic	
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Angry                      _____                      Not angry	Passive                      _____                      Active	
Confrontational                      _____                      Nonconfrontational		

## APPENDIX B

**Situation D:** A student finds out the advice their adviser gave them regarding classes was wrong and they will now have to go to summer school. They go to see their professor and say:

**Response 1:** "Is there any way I can get out of this requirement since you gave me some incorrect information?"

Would you consider this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No

If "Yes", what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?

Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Gripping                      Nagging                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No

Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No

Rate this statement on the following scales:

Rude	___	___	___	___	___	Polite						Effective	___	___	___	___	___	Ineffective					
Mean	___	___	___	___	___	Nice						Negative	___	___	___	___	___	Positive					
Legitimate	___	___	___	___	___	Not Legitimate						Not Sarcastic	___	___	___	___	___	Sarcastic					
Diplomatic	___	___	___	___	___	Not Diplomatic						Defensive	___	___	___	___	___	Not Defensive					
Indirect	___	___	___	___	___	Direct						Arrogant	___	___	___	___	___	Not Arrogant					
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Aggressive	___	___	___	___	___	Non-aggressive						Patient	___	___	___	___	___	Impatient					
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Angry	___	___	___	___	___	Not angry						Passive	___	___	___	___	___	Active					
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## APPENDIX B

<p><b>Response 2: “What am I supposed to do now that I’ve wasted my time on unnecessary courses?”</b></p> <p>Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No</p> <p><i>If “Yes”, what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?</i></p> <p>Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other _____</p> <p>Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No</p> <p>Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No</p>																																																																															
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<p><b>Response 3: “How could you give me the wrong advice? Aren’t you supposed to know this stuff?”</b></p> <p>Would you considered this statement to be a complaint?    Yes    No</p> <p><i>If “Yes”, what category of complaint do you think this response best fits in (circle one)?</i></p> <p>Whining                      Bitching                      Chewing Out                      Griping                      Nagging                      Other _____</p> <p>Do you think the person who made this statement intended for it to be a complaint?    Yes    No</p> <p>Do you think the stranger will interpret this statement as a complaint?    Yes    No</p>																																																																															
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