

Complaints –
A cross-cultural study of pragmatic strategies

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Abstract

At the center of this study is the investigation of the use of pragmatic strategies in the speech act of complaining as realized by native speakers of Canadian English, native speakers of German, and German ESL learners of advanced proficiency. Complaints are intrinsically face-threatening speech acts. Due to the inherent clash between exercising their functional purpose and maintaining good relations with the interlocutor, complainers use various pragmatic strategies and directness levels to adjust the face-threat to the hearer. It is therefore crucial that non-native speakers be aware of target-like pragmatic behavior. Comparisons of the three groups concerning the selection of these strategies provide insights into cross-cultural differences between Germans and Canadians. They also provide insights into interlanguage features of the group of language learners and their position in relation to both groups of native speakers.

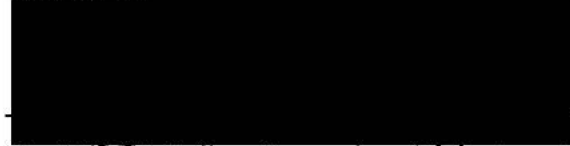
Complaints were collected from a total of 42 respondents, with 14 respondents in each group. All participants responded to a total of 12 identical situations in a closed oral role-play. The responses were tape-recorded and then transcribed for the analysis. Based on this collected data, a functional set of complaint categories was developed for the strategic analysis, consisting of four complaint categories: addressing the problem, requesting repair, justifying, and assigning blame. Each category is subcategorized with various levels of directness.

Analyses were carried out on three main pragmatic aspects: (a) The respondents' feedback about their perception of the situational context and their responses. These

responses concerned the level of frustration resulting from each situation, decisions to opt out of the complaint in real-life, and their ratings of the directness of the complaints. (b) The respondents' use of pragmalinguistic strategies in the complaints, specifically the length of the complaints, the directness employed in the complaint categories, and the number of modality markers used in the complaints. (c) The influence of the two sociopragmatic factors, social distance and social power, on the selection of the pragmalinguistic strategies.

Results indicate pragmalinguistic differences in the perception and realization of complaints between native speakers of German and native speakers of Canadian English. While the group of German ESL learners showed some resemblance to Canadian complaint behavior, their overall use of pragmatic strategies indicates a high degree of transfer from their native language into the second language. The sociopragmatic analysis revealed that learners adjusted their pragmatic strategies based on social constellations – a fact which resembled Canadian complaining behavior. The findings indicate that even at an advanced stage in their linguistic knowledge, language learners tend to cling to the pragmatic strategies used in their native language in this very personal domain of language use.

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*My mom and two sisters
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Language learners face two major challenges in their quest to become competent speakers of a second language. They not only need to acquire the linguistic system of the target language, but they also need to be familiar with the appropriate language use. The acquisition of the linguistic means enables learners to have the necessary linguistic tools to produce utterances in the target language. However, it is the acquisition of pragmatic competence that allows language learners to make informed decisions about what the most appropriate strategies are in specific contexts.

1.1. Background

Communicative competence (e.g. Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990), which is the ability to relate to others successfully in social interaction, has become a central focus in second language acquisition. Language instructors have shifted their emphasis from traditional teaching objectives, which mainly focused on the acquisition of isolated linguistic aspects, to teaching learners to use linguistic forms in context by linking linguistic knowledge to extralinguistic factors (Trosborg, 1995). One important component of learners' general communicative knowledge is the ability to make appropriate functional choices in a variety of situational contexts, referred to as pragmatic competence (e.g. Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Learners' pragmatic competence has come to form an important aspect in the field of Second Language Acquisition and more in-depth research on non-native speakers' (NNSs') use and development of this competence is required.

The acquisition of pragmatic competence might be the most challenging linguistic ability to acquire and to teach in a second language. Many studies of advanced learners have found that it takes many years of residence in the target culture before a level of near-native abilities in pragmatic production is reached (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Olshtain & Weinbach 1993). The challenge lies in the fact that there is considerable cross-cultural variation in the use of pragmatic forms and their relations to such notions as politeness and directness. What is considered appropriate in a culture varies greatly depending on contextual factors and is subject to

individual preferences as well. This makes it crucial for learners to develop an awareness of pragmatic behavior in the target language community in order to minimize negative transfer from their native language and other incorrect assumptions and over-generalizations, all of which can lead to pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

The importance for language learners to adhere to pragmatic norms in the second language and the severe consequences pragmatic failure can cause have been widely discussed (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Leech, 1983; Olshtain, 1983; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993; Thomas, 1983). Pragmatic failure often reflects badly on the person because it is seldom recognized as a language difficulty. This is especially crucial for learners of advanced proficiency. Because these learners tend to have good control over other linguistic abilities such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, native speakers (NSs) tend to misjudge pragmatic difficulties as personality flaws of the learners and not as second language difficulties, caused by cross-cultural differences. By uncovering this variation, 'trouble' areas for learners can be predicted and methodologies developed, to provide language learners with the necessary pragmatic tools for making polite and appropriate contributions in a second language to the extent that they are willing and able to adjust to target-like behavior.

Research on cross-cultural variation in the use of politeness forms an important contribution to interlanguage pragmatics. The relationship between politeness and indirectness varies cross-culturally, a fact which influences speakers' preferences for the pragmatic force they apply to utterances. Previous studies on directness have observed that learners often tend to opt for more direct strategies than NSs (e.g. Fearch & Kasper, 1989; Murphy & Neu, 1995; Trosborg, 1995), but some studies have also found that learners tended to be less direct (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). The use of less direct strategies by the language learners has been generally noted in those studies in which speakers of the target language community preferred more direct strategies than speakers of the first language. This suggests that learners' use and assessment of politeness values may be influenced by (a) transfer from the native language, and (b) other interlanguage features (Kasper, 1996b).

1.2. Purpose of this study

This study investigates cross-cultural differences in complaining, specifically in the production of direct complaints. It is at the interface between interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics. The purpose of this study is to analyze complaint techniques of advanced German ESL learners. By taking into account the cross-cultural variation that is observed among NSs of German and NSs of Canadian English, inferences can be made as to how the cross-cultural differences found in both language communities affect learners' pragmatic behavior.

Previous studies of NSs of German and NSs of varieties of English have found that Germans tend to prefer a higher degree of directness than English speakers (DeCapua, 1989; House, 1979; House, 1987; House and Kasper, 1981). However, little research has been conducted to date with German ESL learners. The use of directness by German ESL learners has been investigated in the production of requests (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House, 1987) and apologies (House, 1988), but only one study is known to the researcher that has investigated the production of complaints (DeCapua, 1989). Cross-cultural studies have focused mainly on British and American speakers of English; no studies are known that compare Canadian and German complaint behavior.

This research study focuses on complaints because this speech act has received little attention in cross-cultural and interlanguage speech act research, as Kasper and Blum-Kulka pointed out in 1993. While research on complaints has increased to some extent in the meantime, no uniform framework for the analysis of complaining strategies exists. The investigation of complaint behavior is complex, and new contributions to the analysis of complaints are needed in order to achieve the design of a solid framework that can be applied to future empirical research on complaints. It is hoped that the framework used in this analysis will prove useful for future research on complaints.

Belonging to the group of face-threatening speech acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987), complaints are intrinsically confrontational. Due to the inherent clash between exercising their functional purpose and maintaining good relations with the interlocutor, complainers use various pragmatic strategies and directness levels to adjust the face-threat to the hearer. This places great demands on NNSs to realize complaints in an acceptable manner by the standards of NSs because complaints are potential sources of

pragmatic failure and can lead to miscommunication and the breakdown of good relations with the interlocutor.

The outcome of this research contributes to second language teaching and research by revealing more profound insights into the influence of cross-cultural differences on pragmatic behavior and the impact these differences have on second language learning. This allows teachers to make informed decisions about the design and implementation of material and the use of efficient methodologies to enhance learners' pragmatic competence in a second language. The collection of data from NSs is also an important resource in the classroom. All too often, teachers present pragmatic information based on their intuition about what are appropriate forms of speech, which has proven at times to be oversimplified and biased (Cohen, 1996a, 1996b).

This small-scale study is intended to give first insights into the issues discussed here. It is hoped that a similar study can be reproduced on a larger scale to confirm the findings made here.

1.3. Organization of the text

This thesis begins with an introduction to the theoretical concepts on which this research study is based in chapter 2. Specifically, these are the areas of interlanguage pragmatics, speech act theory, politeness theory, and the relevancy of these areas to cross-cultural communication. The review of the literature in chapter 3 discusses methodologies and frameworks used in research on pragmatics. This chapter also describes previous studies of complaints, including the complaint frameworks used in their analysis, methodologies and research outcomes. Finally, the research objectives in this study are presented and hypotheses about the outcome are discussed.

The second part of this work presents the experimental study. Chapter 4 describes the methodology. Chapter 5 presents considerations that have been found crucial for the approach taken in the analysis. Based on these considerations, a detailed description of the framework used in this analysis is provided. Chapter 6 presents and discusses the results. It is divided into participants' feedback about the situational factors and their complaint responses, a pragmalinguistic analysis, which investigates the realization of complaint responses, and a sociopragmatic analysis, which

investigates the effect social constellations had on the realization of complaints. Chapter 7 includes a summary of the findings, discussions of implications for the acquisition of pragmatic competence, and limitations of this study. Finally, pragmatic aspects are pointed out that will require further research in the future.

Chapter 2: Theoretical concepts

This chapter provides a discussion of the theoretical background to this research study. The areas of pragmatics, politeness, and speech acts are discussed, as they form important components of this study.

2.1. Pragmatics

The exact definition of what pragmatics means varies widely and tends to be determined by the positioning of pragmatic competence within a language system. Pragmatics is generally viewed as “the societally necessary and consciously interactive dimension of the study of language“ (Mey, 1993, p. 315) concerned with “understanding intentional human action” (Green, 1989, p. 3). Leech (1983) defines pragmatics as “the study of meaning in relation to speech situations” (p. 6).

Levinson (1983) favors definitions that view pragmatics as “meaning minus semantics” (p. 32). Such a definition of pragmatics, he argues, takes into account the additional component of context as a complement to semantics in order to arrive at the level of utterance meaning. Leech (1983) has a similar view of the relationship between semantics and pragmatics. He views the *sense* of an utterance as being semantically determined and the *force* of an utterance as being semantically and pragmatically determined, which is why force includes the notion of sense (p. 17).

The specific relation between pragmatic competence and other areas of linguistics tends to be viewed differently among pragmaticists. For example, Leech (1983) regards pragmatics as interacting with but not as a component of the grammar and states that “grammar interacts with pragmatics via semantics. (p. 12). Levinson, on the other hand, views pragmatics as a component of linguistic theory, which “can take its place beside syntax, semantics and phonology within an overall theory of grammar” (p. 33). In the more recent theories on communicative competence, pragmatic competence tends to be regarded as one major component of communicative competence. For example, Bachman (1990) modified Canale and Swain’s (1980) model of communicative competence. Bachman’s model of language competence is divided into organizational and pragmatic competence. He views pragmatic competence as being composed of

illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence and organizational competence as being composed of grammatical and textual competence.

These definitions of pragmatics reveal that at the core of pragmatics is the study of “extralinguistic factors” (Mey, 1993, p. 27), which go beyond the mere study of words, phrases, and sentences. Besides grammatical knowledge, other contextual factors such as background knowledge, sociocultural assumptions, and the physical setting influence one’s understanding and production of utterances. Thomas (1983) stresses the great subtlety of pragmatic competence when she regards it as the point at which “a speaker’s knowledge of grammar comes into contact with his/her knowledge of the world.” She stresses the highly individual perception of both constructs when she continues to state that “both systems of knowledge are filtered through systems of beliefs -- beliefs about language and beliefs about the world” (p. 99).

2.1.1. Interlanguage pragmatics

The notion of *interlanguage* was first defined by Selinker (1972). It concerns second language learners’ knowledge of the target language. Interlanguage production is influenced by information that learners have acquired about the foreign language, by characteristics of learners’ native language (s), previously learned languages, and by other general factors that influence second language learning. Language learners’ developing language abilities in the second language are systematic, but also unstable and transient. They change based on new information and experiences about the use of pragmatic strategies in the target speech community (Kasper, 1995, 1996a; Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

Interlanguage pragmatics focuses on second language learners’ pragmatic abilities in a second language. Kasper (1996a) defines interlanguage pragmatics in a rather broad sense as “the study of nonnative speakers’ comprehension, production, and acquisition of linguistic action in L2” (p. 85). Ninio and Snow (1996) are more specific, describing interlanguage pragmatics as “the acquisition of knowledge necessary for the appropriate, effective, rule-governed employment of speech in interpersonal situations” (p. 4). Both definitions reveal the importance that is placed

on learners' acquisition of a language in *action* and *interaction*. It is not sufficient for language learners to be familiar with the language system itself; they need to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately with other speakers, based on the specific circumstances in which the interaction takes place. For the purpose of this research study, the scope of interlanguage pragmatics is delimited to include NNSs' production of speech acts only. The acquisition of pragmatic competence is addressed only in regard to pragmatic transfer from the native language, leaving aside such topics as the instruction of pragmatics, the development of pragmatic competence, or issues relating to broader conversational issues such as coherence and discourse management.

Studies in interlanguage pragmatics tend to be concerned with second and foreign language learners' deviations from NS patterns. However, the assumption that it is highly advantageous for NNSs to become native-like has been critically discussed in recent reflections on teaching communicative competence as being too restrictive (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Byrnes, 1991). It has been suggested that deviations from the norms of a speech community do not necessarily lead to pragmatic failure and that in fact total convergence might not be desirable for NNSs. Instead, NNSs might consciously choose to retain some non-native characteristics because they express their individuality and unique cultural background. Another question being discussed is how far pragmatic divergence in fact leads to pragmatic failure. After all, pragmatic differences do not necessarily lead to miscommunication. Even though many speech act studies have found that NNSs tend to use a wider variety of semantic formulas in their production of speech acts, they might be perfectly comprehensible and appropriate.

The stance that is taken here is that culture-specific characteristics of pragmatic aspects and subsequent cross-cultural differences need to be identified in order to make language learners aware of the variety of linguistic forms and the politeness functions prevalent in the target speech community. The goal of this research study is *not* to point out what language learners *do wrong* in order to achieve their complete adaptation. Rather, it is to identify deviations from the target forms in the use of pragmatic strategies of which German learners should be *aware*. This pragmatic knowledge allows language

learners to make informed decisions, and it enables them to express themselves the way they wish. Especially when faced with confrontational speech acts such as complaints, NNSs are likely to be more critical in what they perceive as appropriate and polite.

2.1.2. Sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics

The data analysis of pragmatic competence in this study follows the model of the British pragmaticist Leech (1983), who regards linguistic competence as being composed of grammatical and pragmatic competence and further divides the field of pragmatics into pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (p. 11). According to Leech's model of pragmatic competence, a successful utterance requires the speaker to make informed decisions on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects. Differences in the selection and perception of these factors account for much of the pragmatic diversity found across cultures. An understanding of linguistic realizations in the target language based on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects is therefore crucial for NNSs.

Pragmalinguistics is concerned with "the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions" (Leech, 1983, p. 11). In other words, pragmalinguistic competence refers to speakers' ability to interpret the communicative intent beyond the most literal level of meaning to derive at the purpose or intention of an utterance, also known as the pragmatic force (see section 2.3.1 for a more detailed discussion). Leech's statement refers to the fact that different cultures can interpret the illocutionary force of an utterance differently. The notion of pragmalinguistics has been widened to include a "variety of strategies and forms which are concerned with speakers' intentions and the ways they achieve to imply them in their utterances" (Kasper, 1996a, p. 85). Language learners need to be able to "assess the politeness value of conventions of means and form" (Kasper, 1995, p. 2) in the target language and be able to use and comprehend them accordingly. These conventions encompass a number of strategic decisions, ranging from semantic choices and the selection of pragmatic force to decisions on the syntactic and lexical level, all of which influence the level of politeness through mitigation or aggravation of illocutionary force.

Sociopragmatics concerns the influence of social and cultural factors on language use. It is concerned with the fact that communicative uses "operate variably in different

cultures or language communities, in different social situations, among different social classes, etc.” (Kasper, 1995, p. 10). Sociopragmatic decisions on language use are mainly influenced by these social constellations. They form an important factor for conversational principles and maxims (Leech, 1983, p. 10; see chapter 2.2). For example, the observed variation in language use that a speaker employs when talking to his or her boss and when talking to a friend about the same topic under similar circumstances illustrates the effect social power constellations have on the speaker’s choice of linguistic strategies. Based on the evaluation of sociopragmatic factors, speakers decide whether a speech act is produced and if so which strategies should be selected to fit the situation (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994).

In order to achieve their pragmatic goals with a maximum of effectiveness and politeness, “speakers must match verbal knowledge of the available pragmalinguistic repertoire with an appraisal of the most relevant situational factors” (Blum-Kulka, 1991). Speakers’ sociopragmatic perceptions and pragmalinguistic abilities can be measured based on the use of specific linguistic features (Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1992). In the area of sociopragmatics, they list such competence as “appropriate formality, intensity, directness, register, politeness, taboo and different pragmatic ground rules” (p. 7). Pragmalinguistic abilities encompass the use of “components of directness, amount of information, correctness of linguistic form or formula” (p. 8). If speakers’ choices of pragmatic strategies are based on sociopragmatic variables, they act as independent variables since speakers change their pragmalinguistic production depending on the situational context (p. 6).

It is important to note that the use of directness is found in both pragmatic components. Distinctions between these two pragmatic competencies are not always clear because “pragmalinguistic choices carry sociopragmatic information” (Kasper, 1998, p. 198). This is the case because a certain level of directness can be chosen based on specific situational factors, but it can also be a constant feature, falling under the category of pragmalinguistics. This means that in the analysis of directness in this study, the source for the use of directness or indirectness may lie in the general trait of the group (or individuals of the group) or it may be affected by the situational factors. Care needs to be taken when drawing conclusions about the extent to which both of these areas

influence the choices of directness in a speech act.

2.1.3. Pragmatic failure

In cross-cultural communication, interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds come together. Chick (1996) notes that “the distinct nature of the value systems, pervasive configurations of social relations, and dominant ideologies of cultural groups ... shape communicative conventions, thereby giving them their culturally specific character” (p. 329). When this “cultural filter” (Blum-Kulka, 1991, p. 256) is transferred from one speech community to another, this potentially leads to miscommunication. Thomas views pragmatic failure as having occurred in “any occasion on which H [the hearer] perceives the force of S’s [the speaker’s] utterance as other than S intended s/he should perceive it” (Thomas, 1983, p. 94).

Since insufficient knowledge of pragmatic rules is less obvious to interlocutors, NNSs’ difficulties in conveying the intended illocutionary force or the degree of politeness may be misinterpreted as the speaker’s personality rather than a language difficulty (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). As Kasper (1990) puts it, “not-so-competent participants, such as NNSs, suffer the perennial risks of inadvertently violating politeness norms, thereby forfeiting their claims to being treated as social equals” (p. 193). Studies have revealed that even advanced learners lack complete pragmatic awareness and the ability to produce the full range of pragmatic utterances to express the intended illocutionary notion and/or politeness value (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; House, 1996; Olshtain, 1983; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993). These advanced learners are at an especially high risk of being misjudged as having a flawed personality or being impolite or rude because they appear to have good control over the language through correct grammatical choices and a large vocabulary (Thomas, 1983, pp. 96-97).

2.2. Politeness

Politeness is a major component of pragmatics. Politeness principles allow speakers to achieve smooth communication by showing consideration and respect for the interlocutor. Especially in potentially face-threatening speech acts such as complaints, a speaker is able to achieve his or her communicative goals while avoiding conflicts by

adhering to forms of politeness. The most influential politeness theories, which are applied to politeness studies, are those by Brown & Levinson (1987), Lakoff (1973), and Leech (1983). Their politeness models attempt to explain universal features of politeness while acknowledging culture-specific features in social interaction.

Since all three politeness theories are based on Grice's theory of conversational implicature and his *Cooperative Principle* (CP) that gives rise to this implicature, it is very briefly presented here. According to Grice (1975), interlocutors adhere to the CP, a general principle, which describes effective and purposeful communication. Under the CP, four sub-categories are distinguished, called maxims. These are the maxims of quality, quantity, manner, and relevance. They are the driving force behind the CP and ensure the structured and purposeful exchanges of information between interlocutors. Based on these maxims, speakers have the ability to interpret utterances beyond the most basic, literal level of meaning.

Lakoff (1973) views pragmatic competence as constituting of two major rules: be clear and be polite (p. 296). The notion of clarity is a concentrated version of the Gricean maxims. Lakoff divides politeness further into three sub-rules: don't impose, give options, and make the hearer feel good (p. 298). She notes that since two or more of these rules might be at work at the same time, a speaker needs to make choices as to which principle receives attention over the others. Especially in informal conversations, politeness tends to supersede over clarity because the interlocutors' main interest is the "reaffirming and strengthening of the relationship" rather than the communication of information (p. 289).

Leech (1983) also expands the Gricean theory of communication. He adds a *Politeness Principle* (PP) as a complement to the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP) to close the "missing link between the CP and the problem of how to relate sense to force" (p. 104). The politeness principle itself contains a number of sub-categories with the tact maxim being the most important one.¹ With the help of the politeness principle, he accounts for the many instances in conversations in which especially the maxims of manner (be clear) and quantity (be brief but concise) are violated out of concerns for politeness.

¹ As additional sub-categories, Leech lists generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy.

For Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness has a subordinate rank to Grice's CP. They view politeness as not as "robust" as the maxims under the CP (p.5). Based on the fact that the maxims under the CP are universal background assumptions while politeness is "socially controlled" and not "owed by each to all" (p.5). Instead, inferences on politeness can be made through the analysis of the two major principles, face concerns and adherence to the CP.

2.2.1. Politeness and the notion of *face*

The following account of *face* and face needs is specifically discussed by Brown and Levinson (1987). It is based on Goffman's (1967) assumption that social interaction is motivated by interlocutors' attempts to adhere to their own and others' face needs. According to Brown and Levinson, politeness serves as a means of consideration to these needs. Face, they argue, is "emotionally invested ... [it] can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61). The linguistic means employed in social interaction can be regarded as the means to respect and satisfy one's own and others' face wants.

Brown and Levinson (1987) divide the notion of face into negative face and positive face. Positive face refers to an individual's striving to be approved of by others. When addressing a hearer's positive face wants, a speaker indicates solidarity and addresses the hearer's positive self-image, thereby satisfying the hearer's need for approval and belonging. Negative face, on the other hand, refers to each individual's desire not to be impinged upon. A speaker's usage as negative politeness reveals concern about the hearer's negative face and is expressed by avoiding or minimizing the face threat to the hearer. Negative politeness is revealed through conventionalized indirectness, formality, and self-effacement. These two face needs coexist, yet they conflict in what they are supposed to achieve. People seek independence and freedom from imposition on the one hand and strive for belonging and harmony with their interlocutors on the other.

2.2.2. Politeness and directness

Speakers' illocutions are most effective when uttered in the most direct manner because their interlocutors are more likely to get the message. However, as noted by

Blum-Kulka (1991), “effectiveness can be at odds with politeness” (p. 257). Blunt complaints are likely to be perceived as impolite while hints at the unfavorable situation and indirect requests for repair are more likely to be perceived as polite and appropriate by the hearer. This has caused Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) to assume a positive correlation between the degree of politeness and indirectness. In other words, an increasing degree in indirectness generally means an increase in politeness and vice versa.

Studies on politeness and directness have shown, however, that the relationship is more complex than that. For example, Blum-Kulka (1987) found that very indirect utterances require a great amount of effort to make the correct inferences. NSs of Hebrew tended to perceive indirect utterances as less polite than more direct utterances. This causes Kasper (1996b) to caution that while the use of indirect expressions is a universal strategy, “the relationship of indirectness and politeness is complex and varies cross-culturally” (p. 10).

In their politeness model, Brown and Levinson (1987) link the notion of face threat to politeness, which in turn influences the degree of directness a speaker uses. The more face-threatening the act, the more likely is speakers’ use of indirectness because they strive to minimize the face threat to the hearer. The use of imperatives, for example, is appropriate in certain situations in which invitations are made such as “*Come in, don’t hesitate, I’m not busy*” (p. 99). In most requesting situations, however, it would be inappropriate to pose such direct requests as “*Help me fix my car tonight*” because of the blunt interference in the hearer’s wishes and plans for that night, which shows disrespect to the hearer’s “freedom of action” (p. 70).

2.2.3. Politeness and contextual factors

Politeness investment varies based on contextual factors. According to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework of politeness, there are three main factors that determine the degree of politeness investment by a speaker – social power, social distance, and the ranking of the imposition. Brown and Fraser (1979) divide these factors further into context-external (the social constellations between interlocutors) and context-internal factors (the specific situational factors). According to Brown and Levinson, a speaker

determines the degree of face threat (discussed in detail in section 2.3.2) posed by a speech act and consequently the degree of politeness required for the communication of the act based on these three factors, as summarized by Fraser (1990):

- (i) Social Distance (D) between the speaker and the hearer; in effect, the degree of familiarity and solidarity they share.
- (ii) Relative power (P) of the speaker with respect to the hearer; in effect, the degree to which the speaker can impose will on the hearer.
- (iii) Absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the culture, both in terms of the expenditure of goods and/or services by the hearer, the right of the speaker to perform the act, and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition. (p. 231)

In Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), there is a linear relationship between these three factors and the degree of politeness used. This means that the politeness investment is highest if the social distance between the interlocutors is great, if the hearer is of greater social power than the speaker, and if the imposition on the hearer is significant (e.g. in a conversation by an employee to a boss about a salary raise). The politeness investment is the least if interlocutors are socially close and of equal status and if the act concerns a minimal imposition on the hearer (e.g. a friend asks for a match to light a cigarette).

Wolfson's (1988) study contradicts the claim that most politeness is invested toward people of higher social power and distance. She has identified a non-linear relationship between social distance and politeness, called *Bulge Theory*. According to these findings, the degree of politeness tends to be the greatest in interaction with acquaintances and friends, while it lessens with increasing and decreasing social distance. Speakers tend to be less polite toward strangers and relatives because the speaker's relationship is fixed in both cases. As Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) put it "strangers, we never see again; relatives are here to stay" (p. 118).

The context-internal parameters that influence politeness investment are specific to different speech acts. In the speech act of requesting, for example, Blum-Kulka and House (1989) have found the following factors to be important: (a) the hearer's obligation to carry out the request, (b) the speaker's right to issue the request, (c) the

speaker's difficulty in carrying out the request, and (d) the likelihood of the hearer's compliance (p. 140). In the speech act of apologizing, Olshtain (1989) identified the following two components as influential for the degree of politeness: (a) the perceived severity of the offense and (b) the obligation to apologize (p. 160). Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993) divided direct complaints based on social obligation (nonexistent, explicit, and implicit).

2.2.4. Cross-cultural variation of politeness

Politeness investment has been attested to be influenced by differing cultural values, which in turn cause cross-cultural variation in the perceptions of situational factors and subsequently the strategy selection used to produce communicative acts. Leech (1983) addresses the cross-cultural relativity of politeness principles and the importance to adhere to cultural standards of the target community when he writes: "It is on the basis of such group norms that we judge individual people as being 'polite' or 'impolite' in particular speech situations. ... Relative politeness is therefore variable on many dimensions, according to the standard or set of standards under scrutiny" (p. 84).

Pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic factors in shaping a speaker's language use were already discussed in section 2.1.2. They are now taken up again with the focus on cross-cultural variation in the perception of these two factors and the subsequent variation in the use and perception of politeness across cultures.

2.2.4.1. Cross-cultural relativity of politeness and directness

Speech act studies (e.g. in Polish by Wierzbicka, 1985; in Hebrew by Blum-Kulka, 1987) have found that in certain cultures and languages such as Polish and Hebrew, politeness and indirectness do not always correlate with each other in a linear way, as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983).

Wierzbicka (1991) notes that many speech act studies are ethnocentrically biased and that indirectness as an indicator for politeness is mainly found in Anglo-Saxon cultures and hence a dangerous over-generalization (p. 25). Likewise, Blum-Kulka and House (1989) state that "if other norms such as clarity in expressing intentions and a show of sincerity are preferred over a display of non-imposition, then directness will not

necessarily be associated with impoliteness” (p. 138). Instead, in cultures that prefer higher degrees of directness, its use in speech acts such as requests and offers is often associated with positive intentions (Wierzbicka, 1991). Wierzbicka also cautions that cultural norms do not only differ across languages but even within the same language (e.g. Australian English versus American English versus Canadian English versus British English)² and beyond that across ethnic backgrounds, social classes, genders, etc. Holmes (1995) describes the complexity of cross-cultural variation when she states:

Linguistic politeness, then, is one expression of cultural values, and accurate analysis involves identifying the relative importance of different social dimensions in particular cultures. Moreover, any particular example of linguistic behavior may be perceived quite differently by different cultural groups, and even by individual members of a particular group. (p. 24)

Cross-cultural variation of the values of politeness and directness and subsequent differences in the perception of these factors in communication is an important aspect in cross-cultural studies. Due to the inherent differences of these pragmatic notions, care needs to be taken when interpreting these differences in the light of the politeness that is invested.

2.2.4.2. Cross-cultural relativity of politeness and contextual factors

Contextual factors such as social relations and situational perceptions underlie specific cultural values and are likely to be perceived differently across cultures. Cross-cultural differences in the perception of the situations that elicit specific strategy selections “lie at a deeper level still than the question of what pragmatic means a speaker uses to carry out the act” (Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989, p. 179).

When analyzing such pragmatic features as politeness and directness, it is important to measure cross-cultural variation of the underlying factors that determine the use of specific strategies in order to shed light on preferences for specific strategies or linguistic forms. Kasper and Dahl (1991) note that “the combination of production and metapragmatic assessment data provides an empirical basis for explaining observed patterns of speech act realization and politeness in terms of perceived contextual constraints, and of the pragmatic

² Even within the same language variant, regional variation is often found (e.g. Northern British English versus Southern British English, Western German versus Eastern German).

force and politeness value language users attribute to different linguistic means and strategies” (p. 238). In other words, measurements of speakers’ perceptions of contextual parameters are necessary tools to provide the researcher with information in how far contextual factors influence speakers’ pragmalinguistic responses. The assessment of contextual variables helps explain differences in realization patterns across cultural groups. Kasper and Dahl state that little attention has been paid to these differing “values and weights of contextual factors” (p. 238). Considering the great diversity of contextual factors that affect language use, it is not surprising that many studies of advanced learners have found that pragmatic competence might be the most difficult ability to acquire.

2.3. Speech acts

Research in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics has primarily focused on the analysis of speech act production. Speech acts are used to perform certain functions in language use, e.g. complimenting, apologizing, requesting, complaining, correcting, and refusing. In speech act research, the models mostly referred to are Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts and Searle's (1969) modified version.

2.3.1. Indirect vs. direct speech acts

Austin divides speech acts into three different semantic meanings, which illustrate their communicative function: On the first, most basic level, a speaker produces an utterance that carries locutionary meaning. On the second, more abstract level, the message also carries an intended effect, also referred to as illocutionary force. The hearer decodes the message by combining the knowledge about the context with the literal information conveyed in the message. If the utterance is successful, the hearer realizes the illocutionary force behind the literal meaning and the utterance fulfills its intended purpose. On the third, the perlocutionary level, the action is carried out to achieve the speaker's intended result. The linguistic choices to carry out speech acts vary, depending on contextual features, both social and situational, which in turn influence whether an utterance is considered appropriate or not. Pragmatic knowledge encompasses a speaker's ability to choose appropriate utterances that fit the specific situation.

Speech acts are considered direct if the relationship between the locutionary force and the illocutionary force is transparent. For example, if a speaker says, “*Give me a lift,*” the speaker’s intention to demand a ride from the hearer is unambiguous in this imperative utterance. In contrast, an utterance such as “*Did you by any chance come to the party by car?*” requires inference from the hearer to interpret it as a request to give the speaker a ride. The ambiguity of the second request is ‘hearer-friendlier’ in this situation because the hearer can choose to ignore the request or supply an explanation why he or she can not comply with it without losing face.

2.3.2. Face-threatening speech acts

Speech acts are classified according to their inherent impact on the interlocutors. Inherently face-threatening speech acts “run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65). They include speech acts such as apologies, requests, refusals, disagreements, and complaints. When producing these face-threatening acts, speakers have to cope with the intrinsic conflict of wanting to perform the face-threatening act and risking the face threat of their interlocutors. The speaker has the power to counterbalance the face threat through linguistic means of politeness such as directness and the use of modality markers, which influence the degree of severity and thus the degree of face threat toward the hearer.

As discussed in section 2.2.3, the seriousness of a face-threatening act is generally measured on the three dependent and “culturally-sensitive” (Fraser, 1990, p. 230) variables discussed above, social distance, social power, and the degree of imposition. The seriousness or ‘weightiness’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 76) of the face-threatening act determines the degree of politeness that is invested by the speaker. It is calculated by the additive weighing of these variables.

The hearer’s face wants can be threatened in two different ways: They can form an imposition on the hearer (e.g. orders, requests, and suggestions), which causes a threat to his or her negative face, and/or they can pose a face threat to the hearer, thereby forming a threat to positive face (e.g. criticism, insults, accusations, and disagreements). Brown and Levinson (1987) note that some speech acts, among them

complaints, tend to form threats to both, negative and positive face (p. 66).³

Complaints threaten the hearer's positive face in that they are likely to comprise some criticism; they threaten negative face because they tend to express some request to repair the damage. But they can also potentially threaten the speaker's positive face, for example if the hearer does not comply with the request for repair or claims that the complaint is unreasonable.

2.3.3. Politeness strategies for performing face-threatening acts

Brown and Levinson (1987) have developed a set of strategies for the performance of face-threatening acts. They range from the decision to opt out of the linguistic act altogether to choosing different ways of voicing it (p. 69). The strategies are chosen based on the speaker's payoff considerations between the potential value of producing the face-threatening act on the one hand, and potential damage this act could cause on the other (pp. 71-74). According to Brown and Levinson, the speaker has the following options:

1. Opting out: Initially, the speaker has to make the decision whether to opt out of the speech act, thereby avoiding an open confrontation with the hearer, or whether to produce the speech act in question. Not producing the speech act would lessen the chance of repair and deny the speaker the opportunity to voice his/her frustration. The speaker needs to weigh the potential damage caused by the problem against the potential discord with the hearer.

2. Carrying out the act *on* or *off* the record: If the face-threatening act is produced off-record, the speaker uses a hint or other indirect and ambiguous form of pointing out that something is wrong, without explicitly mentioning the hearer or the offensive act. While the speaker decreases the face-damage to the hearer, the speaker runs the risk that the hearer will not comply, either because the hearer chooses to ignore the speech act or because he or she doesn't pick up on it. If the speaker chooses to carry out the act on record, he or she can choose between producing it with or without redress.

³ Beebe & Takahashi (1989) note that it is at times problematic to determine which speech acts are face-threatening and to whose face (p. 200). Likewise, Scollon and Scollon (1995) remark that this four-way classification into negative and positive face-threat and the threat to the hearer's and the speaker's face form a "double risk" and conclude that there is "no faceless communication" (p. 38).

3. Using positive or negative politeness: If the face-threatening act is produced on record without redress, the complaint is openly directed to the hearer. It involves the explicit mentioning of either the socially unacceptable act or the hearer, or both. By openly addressing the hearer's offensive action, the speaker risks the hearer's face loss and/or an open conflict.

When using redress, the speaker has two options: addressing the hearer's positive or negative face needs. The speaker uses negative politeness (thereby addressing the hearer's negative face needs) by verbally acknowledging the hearer's freedom and assuring the hearer that the speaker refrains from imposing on the hearer. The speaker uses positive politeness (thereby addressing the hearer's positive face needs) by showing concern for the hearer and treating him or her in a friendly way. Even though the speaker still explicitly mentions the socially unacceptable act and/or the hearer's involvement, the speaker's utterances reveal empathy and understanding toward the hearer, thereby easing the face threat and tension resulting from the face-threatening act.

2.3.4. Cross-cultural variation in speech act realization

Even though Brown and Levinson (1987) demonstrate that while there seem to exist certain universal strategies, realization tends to vary across speech communities. Kasper (1996b) states that while the range of strategies used in speech acts seems to be universal, "the selections participants make from such repertoires vary between speech communities, and these variations systematically reflect different cultural orientations" (p. 10). This means that speakers of different cultures might vary in the range of semantic formulas they use to perform a speech act. Negative transfer from the native language to the second language would in such a case be likely to occur, which in turn could be a potential source for pragmatic failure.

It is the perception and production of these cultural-specific politeness strategies that pose problems even for advanced language learners. As Beebe and Takahashi (1989) point out, learners "may accurately or inaccurately perceive linguistic differences between their native language and the target language. Even if they accurately perceive differences, they may have difficulty producing what they perceive. And often, the problem is that they do not perceive the differences

accurately, or they exaggerate them” (p. 200). The authors describe the high demands on language learners in the production of inherently face-threatening acts. They state that ”in performing face-threatening acts ... speakers must integrate personal and societal values with linguistic competence and, most importantly, gain some knowledge of ‘face work’ ... and some experience using it in the L2 interaction” (p. 200).

2.3.5. Direct complaints

This study investigates cross-cultural differences in complaining, specifically in the production of direct complaints. Direct complaints differ from indirect complaints in that they are directly expressed toward the person who has caused the complaint or a person who is immediately involved in the action. Indirect complaints, on the other hand, relate to personal concerns or problems in which the hearer is not directly involved (Boxer, 1993). They are used in a commiserating sense, revealing solidarity or even intimacy because the speakers share their concerns with this third party.

2.3.5.1. Previous definitions of direct complaints

Complaints have been classified as expressives (Searle, 1976) in which the speakers express their “psychological state ... about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (p. 12). Both, the state of affairs (here the problem) and the speaker’s feelings about it can be expressed explicitly or implicitly on a continuum of varying degrees of directness. Through the more or less open confrontation with the hearer, a complainer has one or more of the following goals, which vary depending on whether the situation is reversible or not. The speaker intends to achieve one or more of the following: (a) give vent to his or her annoyance resulting from the action; (b) cause the hearer to apologize or at least to justify the action; (c) achieve some form of redress. The complaint is therefore closely connected to the apology, which is likely to follow if the hearer feels that he or she is responsible for the offense. Table 1 shows the features of these two interrelated speech acts:

Table 2.1.

Complaints and apologies: Features of two interrelated speech acts

	Event	Event Evaluation	Event Actor	Event Recipient
Complaint	Post	Bad	H	S
Apology	Post	Bad	S	H

Note. H=hearer; S=speaker

(Adapted from Bergman & Kasper, 1993, p. 83)

Research on specific speech acts requires careful and precise definitions to ensure the most appropriate delimitation of utterances. Flowerdew (1988) discusses the “scalar nature of speech act categories” and a certain “fuzziness” in what is understood by them (p. 80). Likewise, Leech (1983) views Searle’s (1969) clear-cut divisions of speech acts into “action-categories” based on defined sets of rules of speaking as an “unrealistic and unsubtle view of what communication by means of language is like” (p.23). Leech claims that “any account of illocutionary force which defines it in terms of rules like this will present a limited and regimented view of human communication” because the same utterance can serve various functions based on the context in which they are set (p. 24). At the same time different utterances can serve the same function, so it is important to define complaints based on contextual factors rather than on form and content (Morrow, 1995).

Edmondson (1981) and Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) have proposed contextual definitions of direct complaints. Edmondson defines complaints as follows:

S wishes H to believe that S is not in favor of H’s having performed an act A, as being against the interests of S. Clearly presupposed is that H did A. In that A is against the interests of S, and H is held by S to be responsible for A, a speaker in making a complaint, may be held to be not in favor of H – i.e. H’s social standing with S is in jeopardy. (p. 143)

Olshtain and Weinbach’s definition is similar:

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 S holds, at least partially, responsible for the offensive action. (p. 108)

2.3.5.2. Working definition

For the purpose of this study, the definitions discussed in the previous section require some revisions. It is important to stress that the notion of ‘complaining’ is viewed in a broader sense here because one major focus of this study is the use of directness. The analysis of the various strategies that are used to react toward unfavorable situations is very informative concerning the use of directness across the three groups of respondents. Such an analysis must also allow for indirect strategies, which do not necessarily fall under the restricted complaining categories from above. Consider, for example, the three reactions toward an unfavorable situation in a restaurant, where customers have been waiting for a long time for an order:

- (1) *“We’ve been waiting quite a while for our food since we ordered it. Is it coming soon?”* (CanEng)⁴
- (2) *“Excuse me, Miss. Have you forgotten us?”* (GerEng)
- (3) *“I’m just curious if the wine is on its way.”* (CanEng)

The speaker in the first example first realizes the complaint by stating the problem and then asks for repair. Strictly speaking, responses two and three could not be considered complaints and would fall out of the analysis because they do not explicitly state the problem. Example two asks for a possible reason for the delay and example three poses a ‘normal’ request without negative evaluation of any sort. However, these two strategies used to solve this situation are very informative because they reveal the numerous strategies and levels of directness complainers have available in unfavorable situations. Consequently, the scope of reactions needs to be broadened to include a wider range of strategies that are used in complaint situations.

For the working definition in this study, it is acknowledged that “complaints are often the overriding theme of an exchange that can include a variety of subordinate speech acts” (Morrow, 1995, p. 47). Hatch (1992) notes that complaints are usually negotiated in a larger context and rarely stand alone as isolated speech acts (p. 141). She lists as typical components of complaints (a) an opening, (b) a self-justification for the complaint by the speaker, (c) a possible justification of the hearer’s action, (d) the

⁴ The complaints belong to the data collected for this study. CanEng = response was produced by a Canadian NS; GerGer = response was produced by a German NS; GerEng = response was produced by a German ESL learner.

complaint act, (e) a proposed remedy, and (f) a closing (p. 144). She notes that all of the components are optional, except for the complaint act itself, which she views as obligatory. However, based on the considerations from above that a complaint can take on various forms, it is argued here that the label 'complaint' should refer to the collective term for all utterances that can occur in situations discussed above. If the phrase 'complaint act' is substituted by the label 'statement of the problem,' it can be argued that none of the components that can make up the speech act of complaining are essential, but that any one or more of them can constitute a complaint.

Taking up Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies for face-threatening acts, a potential complainer can choose from the following complaint strategies. The complainer can choose to (a) produce a direct complaint, (b) produce the complaint indirectly, or (c) opt out of producing the complaint. The complainer can adjust the pragmatic force of an utterance by using a variety of upgraders and downgraders at the syntactic, lexical, phrasal, and prosodic level. Downgraders generally mitigate the force of an utterance by indicating the speaker's positive or negative politeness toward the interlocutor. Upgraders, on the other hand, tend to increase the force of an utterance by intensifying its meaning (for examples, please see section 5.2.5).

2.4. Summary

The theoretical constructs discussed in this chapter have revealed speakers' numerous choices for the realization of speech acts. The discussion of the area of pragmatics in section 2.1 has shown that there is more to language proficiency than grammar and vocabulary. The appropriateness of utterances based on the specific contexts also forms an essential part of a language learner's proficiency in a second language. The notions of politeness and cross-cultural differences in the use of politeness are a major component of pragmatics, as discussed in section 2.2. Language learners may run into trouble if their perception of politeness and norms of politeness varies from those in the target language. Section 2.3 applied the notion of politeness and directness/indirectness to the production of speech acts in general and the speech act of complaining specifically. Examples revealed the varying degrees of politeness and directness that speakers may use to communicate their messages.

Chapter 3: Review of empirical research in interlanguage pragmatics

The first part of this chapter provides a comparison of research methods available for the collection of speech acts in interlanguage pragmatics. It is followed by the discussion of the six most relevant cross-cultural and interlanguage studies on complaints and a short summary of additional studies.

3.1. Data elicitation methods

In interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics, a number of different data collection methods have been used. They include closed and open role-play, the collection of authentic speech in the ethnographic approach, and written Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs). Each of these research methods has its advantages and drawbacks and should be chosen depending on the specific research questions and the available resources (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Kasper & Dahl, 1991).

In most studies on speech acts, DCTs are used. Situations are provided on paper and the respondents are asked to respond to them in written form. The description of the situation is sometimes followed by an utterance of the interlocutor, if the speech act under investigation requires it. The participants then respond in written form on a number of blank lines that are provided for the response. The advantage of using the DCT is that they can be easily distributed and administered to a large number of subjects. The researcher saves a considerable amount of time because the data do not need to be transcribed. Another advantage is that contextual factors can be controlled through the information conveyed in the situations. However, there are also a number of disadvantages in using DCTs. Based on the following considerations, written responses are likely to be distorted from how they would be produced orally. (a) Traditionally there are stylistic differences between written and oral speech because writing tends to be more formal and academic. (b) When writing their answers down, respondents are able to stop, reconsider, even erase and change their responses. In oral role-play, there are constraints on this behavior, and the researcher is able to note all instances of correction. (c) In spoken data collection, the response time can be controlled and thus kept more or less similar to natural response time, but the

researcher does not have any influence on how much time each subject takes for each written response, as also noted by Cohen (1995, p. 25). (d) Participants' pressure to perform the speech act with more care is much higher in oral responses with the researcher present than when responses are written out and analyzed with the writer out of sight.

The fact that the influential CCSARP⁵ has used the DCT for their data collection might have caused many subsequent researchers to follow their methodology. However, while the DCT might be the optimal instrument for some speech act studies, research should not be based entirely on one and the same instrument, since the data collection method influences the outcome to some extent. Cohen (1996b) concludes that written tests, such as Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs), "do not elicit natural speech with respect to actual wording, range of formulas and strategies, length of responses, or the number of conversational turns necessary to fulfill this function" (p. 194). Bardovi-Harlig (1999) refers to this phenomenon when she addresses "characteristics of DCT data" (p. 239). She refers to a study by Beebe and Cummings (1995), which compared the collection of refusals by ESL teachers through DCT and in a natural setting over the telephone. The authors found that "written role plays bias the response toward less negotiation, less hedging, less repetition, less elaboration, less variety, and ultimately less talk." (p. 70). The authors suggest the use of DCTs to investigate broader issues, such as classifications of speech act sets and the range of semantic formulas used by cultural groups. However, for more detailed research that is to capture linguistic use of such features as actual word use, directness, prosodic means, non-verbal communication, and the length of exchanges, oral data collection methods are preferable (Cohen, p. 25; Bardovi-Harlig, p. 239; Beebe & Cummings, p. 80).

In the ethnographic approach, data collection occurs in real-life situations, which enables the researcher to collect authentic conversations as they occur in natural settings. This approach can provide researchers with the entire interaction between interlocutors if they are recorded on tape or video. However, it is time-consuming to

⁵ The CCSARP (Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project) investigated cross-cultural variation in the production of apologies and requests in a variety of different languages and different cultures, among them Canadian French, British and Australian English, Argentinian Spanish, Hebrew, and German.

collect and does not allow the researcher to control contextual variables (Cohen, 1995). Moreover, the researcher is often only able to take notes about the conversation, so that longer interactions or specific wordings are often lost.

In closed role-play, the subjects are introduced to a number of situations and asked to respond orally to them. The responses are usually recorded on tape or video and then transcribed. The advantages of closed oral role-play is that the researcher is able to collect oral responses and to control variables in the set-up of the situations, which are identical for all subjects. One major drawback of closed oral role-play lies in the fact that this method does not allow for an exchange with an interlocutor over several turns. Since respondents were aware of the fact that they were given only one turn to respond, they most likely produced a more complete response than they would have made in their first turn in natural conversation. While this might not truly represent the initial approach to the interlocutor in authentic speech, it provides an overall account of how the respondents might have addressed the subject matter in several turns.

Open role-play allows for an exchange between the interlocutors, which enables the researcher to collect the negotiation between interlocutors and more complete discourse features. The turns can be controlled by the researcher to some extent if a trained assistant is used as one of the interacting persons. However, due to the openness of the interaction, rating and coding can be problematic and time-consuming. Responses will not only vary based on the participants' individual choices, but also depend on the interlocutor's moves in each exchange. This makes it more challenging to compare exchanges.

Rintell and Mitchell (1989) investigated differences in the performance of requests and apologies of NSs and NNSs elicited through a DCT and a closed role-play. They found that the NNSs used longer responses in the oral role-play, because of more supportive moves, hesitations, and recyclings (p. 253). Subjects used more direct responses in the written version of the questionnaire and that in face-to-face interaction the subjects were more polite (p. 269), which led them to conclude that difference in directness might have been caused by the output mode. The fact that the study presented here focuses on issues of directness and politeness in the realization of spoken complaints calls for data collection in the same output mode.

3.2. Analysis of speech acts

In speech act research, there are two predominant approaches to the analysis of speech act behavior. Speech acts are either viewed as being composed of a *head act* and adjuncts, or they are viewed as consisting of one or more of several possible components, which make up a *speech act set*. Both approaches are discussed in the following.

3.2.1. The head act

The notion of head act was first developed by Sinclair and Coulhard (1975) and taken up by Edmondson (1981), who used it in his model of spoken discourse. It has since been applied to the analysis of speech acts in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) defined head acts as “the utterances(s) that constitute the nucleus of the speech act (the ‘Head act’), i.e. that part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently from other elements” (p. 200). Other elements that precede or follow the head act are considered to be adjuncts to the head act. The authors gave the following example: “*Danny / could you lend me 100 pounds for a week / I’ve run into problems with the rent for my apartment*” (p. 200). They viewed the request “*could you...*” as the head act because it would be sufficient to make the request. They argue that the utterance, “*I’ve run into problems...*” forms the adjunct to the head act because it strengthens it.

Whether the approach is suitable for the analysis of speech acts depends on the specific acts under investigation. In the analysis of requests and apologies by the CCSARP, for example, the notion of head act was applied to requests, while apologies were viewed to consist of five major strategies, which made up a speech act set.

3.2.2. The speech act set

In speech act research, Olshtain & Cohen’s (1983) notion of a *speech act set* is a widely followed model for the analysis of speech acts. It focuses on the functional and strategic analysis of utterance meaning and is based on Fraser’s (1981) notion of semantic formulas. Fraser describes semantic formulas as utterances, which can be words, phrases, sentences, or longer, which meet particular pragmatic strategies used to produce the speech act in question. A speech act set consists of the various

semantic formulas that can be used to produce a specific speech act. Each semantic formula meets a particular criterion or strategy. Within each of the main semantic formulas, sub-formulas can be found with varying degrees of directness. The range of possible semantic formulas that can be used to produce the speech act in question makes up the speech act set. A speech act therefore consists minimally of one semantic formula, but it is often composed of a combination of various semantic formulas, which can also occur repeatedly within the same act (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Cohen, 1996b).

Consider the following complaint about a messy room: *“This apartment is really messy. Do you think you can help me clean it? I’ve had to do it the last two weekends in a row.”* This complaint consists of three different semantic formulas. The first sentence addresses the problem. The second sentence demands the repair of the situation, and the final utterance provides a justification for the request. It possibly also serves as a justification for why the speaker believes that the messy apartment poses a problem. Another speaker might choose to produce the complaint in a shorter fashion, by merely stating the problem as in *“God, it’s dirty in here,”* hoping that the roommate gets the message and starts cleaning.

The next section provides information about how previous studies on the speech act of complaining have applied the issues discussed above to their methodologies and the design of their frameworks for the analysis.

3.3. Previous complaint studies

In the following, six previous complaint studies by House and Kasper (1981), Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993), DeCapua (1989), Morrow (1995), Murphy and Neu (1995), and Trosborg (1995) are discussed. While the focus of discussion is on the methods of analysis used to investigate complaints and the findings concerning the directness used in the complaints, some additional information about the participants, the methodology, and the findings of these studies are presented to provide the reader with a fuller picture.

Additional complaint studies have been conducted by Moon (1996), Schaefer (1982), and Trenchs (1995). They are addressed only briefly at the end of this section. The value

of these studies for the one presented in this work is not as high because they do not address the issue of directness.

3.3.1. House and Kasper (1981)

The focus of House and Kasper's study was the use of politeness strategies, specifically the use of directness and modality markers, by NSs of German and British English. Data was collected through open role-play. The situations presented to the respondents were not controlled for context-external factors. Responses were divided into complaints and requests, which were analyzed separately from each other. They selected what they thought of as the *head acts* of complaints and requests.

House and Kasper developed directness scales along which they ordered eight different complaint and request propositions (separately from each other), depending on how explicitly or implicitly the speaker addressed certain aspects of the complaint content. They argued that speakers identify one or more of the following content areas when uttering complaints, ordered from the least to the most direct: a) the problem, b) a negative evaluation of the problem, c) the hearer's agentive involvement, and d) a negative evaluation of the agent's behavior or the agent as a person (p. 159). The authors proposed that speakers can address all of these subjects implicitly or explicitly, which amounts to a total of eight complaint strategies with differing directness levels.

For requests, eight levels of directness were divided up as follows: 1) mild hints, 2) strong hints, 3) preparatory questions, 4) preparatory statements, 5) scope-stating, 6) locution-derivable, 7a) hedged and 7b) explicit performative, and 8) mood-derivable. The directness levels refer to the relation between the speaker's locution (what is being said) and the illocutionary point (the speaker's intent). In the mildest form of hints, the locution is distinct from the proposition of the illocutionary intent; in the strongest, most direct form, the request proposition is explicitly mentioned in the locution and the speaker's intent is emphasized through the use of an imperative.

The analysis of the complaint propositions revealed that the group of Germans used higher degrees of directness in both speech acts, complaints and requests. Specifically, the most frequently used levels when requesting were level three for the British group and level six for the German group. The complaint strategy most heavily used among the German

group was level six while among the British speakers the use was evenly distributed across levels three, four, five, and six. In a second step, the researchers analyzed the use and distribution of modifiers that strengthen or weaken the force of an utterance, also called modality markers (see 5.2.5 for detailed discussion). They found similar frequencies in the overall use of modality markers, but noticed considerable variation in the types of markers used in the two groups.

One difficulty of the complaint framework used in this study is the fact that the authors supply at times rather complex explanations for the directness levels, as also noted by DeCapua (1989, p. 36). Consider for example level 6 for the complaint analysis:

(X = speaker, Y = hearer, P = problem)

By explicitly asserting that the action P for which Y is agentively responsible is bad, explicitly stating a preference for an alternative action not chosen by Y, X implies that Y is bad/or X asserts explicitly that Y did P and that P is bad for X, thus also implying that Y is bad. (p. 160)

This highly convoluted and rather abstract description of a directness level is not only difficult to follow, but also difficult to apply to other data.

In this study, the directness levels of speech acts were considered to be binary. In other words, complaints were coded either as explicitly or implicitly, ignoring the fact that within each of the two strategies, there are often further strategies that vary in directness. Morrow (1995) criticized the fact that the implied strategies serve in House and Kasper's study as "default descriptors" (p. 179), which were assigned when elements are missing altogether. Further, the authors argued that one category overrides others in directness. However, they ignored that there is considerable overlap across the categories depending on whether utterances in these categories are implicit and explicit. According to this analysis, the utterance "*Terrible, this stain won't ever come off*" is less direct than the complaint "*Did you wear my blouse by any chance?*" (p. 160). Based on the design of the directness levels, the first utterance is considered less direct because the hearer's involvement is only implied (but a negative evaluation of the problem is clearly stated) while in the second example, the speaker asks about the hearer's connection with the problem. Separating the content areas and assigning directness levels to each of these individually without a cross-comparison would have facilitated clearer distinctions.

3.3.2. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993)

The focus of this examination was the analysis of complaints by NSs and advanced NNSs of Hebrew. The cultural background of the learners was not specified. The authors controlled the situations for differences in social status and social power as well as explicit and implicit social obligation.⁶ Using Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), Olshtain and Weinbach extracted and categorized what they called *head acts* and devised five main categories of complaint strategies ordered by degree of face-threat. This *severity scale*, as they called it, varied from the most indirect strategy ‘below the level of reproach’ to the most direct strategy ‘immediate threat.’

The data analysis revealed that NSs and NNSs showed similarities in the distribution of the strategies employed, although the group of NNSs used slightly more indirect strategies. Similarities could be expected due to the fact that the NNSs were of advanced language proficiency and had lived in Israel for five to six years. In both groups, the majority of respondents used the intermediate strategy ‘explicit complaint,’ followed by the next more direct strategy ‘accusation or warning’ and the next less direct strategy ‘expression of annoyance or disapproval.’ In terms of length of utterances, however, the group of NNSs used significantly longer utterances and higher numbers of moves, especially when the complainees’ offense was based on an implicit obligation. The study also revealed that social distance and social power were significant factors for both groups in terms of length of utterance and severity of the complaints. Significant differences in terms of the social constellations between interlocutors across groups were only found in situations in which the speaker was of higher social power than the hearer. Here, the non-native group used considerably longer utterances. Finally, the study revealed that learners tended to use more softeners and more intensifiers than the native group did.

A weakness of this study lies in the fact that only head acts are analyzed. The discussion of the speech act set in section 3.2.2 has shown that speech acts are often composed of more than a single utterance. It is questionable whether it is always possible

⁶ Olshtain and Weinbach do not specifically explain what they mean by ‘implicit obligation’ and ‘explicit obligation.’ From the examples they present, it seems that explicit obligations concern the violation of clear rules or laws that the complainer can refer to in the complaint. The authors present a situation with explicit obligation in which the complainees does not stop at a stop sign. Implicit obligations, on the other hand, concern the violation of underlying values or expectations. The authors present the example of a student who returns late from a vacation and wants to hand in a paper, but the professor does not accept it.

to clearly determine which utterance forms the head act, especially in longer complaints. Such an analysis also leads to the neglect of other important components beside the head act. Olshtain and Weinbach also did not specifically address the placement of requests. One of the example sentences provided suggests that they included requests in their categories if they were considered the head act of the complaint.

Further, the categories do not always show clear increases in directness, similar to the drawback in House and Kasper's (1981) study. For example, the authors place in category 2, labeled 'expression of annoyance or disapproval,' comments like "*Such lack of consideration*" and "*This is really unacceptable behavior*" (p. 111). In the next more direct category, called 'explicit complaint,' they place such utterances as "*One should not postpone this type of operation*" and "*You should not have postponed such an operation.*" These examples show that the authors seemed to regard utterances that encompass negative evaluations but only implicitly state the problem or the hearer's involvement as being less direct than those utterances that lack evaluations but explicitly address the speaker or the problem. Utterances that addressed a negative evaluation of the hearer's behavior in the statement "*You're inconsiderate!*" received an intermediate level of directness and face threat (level 3) while the threat "*I'm not moving an inch before you change my appointment*" received the highest level of directness (level 5). It is questionable whether complainers would perceive a threat as more face-threatening than the bluntly posed negative evaluation of their personality.

3.3.3. DeCapua (1989)

An investigation into sociocultural transfer of German ESL learners was conducted by DeCapua. This study included two groups of subjects, NSs of American English and a group of Germans who was asked to respond in their native language as well as in English. DeCapua's analysis of the speech act of complaining includes semantic components, levels of directness, and modality markers. Data was collected through discourse completion tests (DCTs) and the situations centered on encounters in the service industry, which meant that the respondents were of higher social status than their interlocutors.

Following Olshtain & Cohen's (1983) notion of speech act sets, DeCapua argued that complaints can be conveyed through the use of various semantic formulas that make up the

speech act set, or, as she calls it, the *response set*. The response set for complaints is composed of (a) opting out, (b) statement of the problem, (c) criticism, (d) justification, (e) request for repair, (f) demand for repair, (g) threat/pressure. DeCapua noted that a clear differentiation between some of these categories was not always possible (p. 139). For example, she reports difficulties with the ordering of responses into the categories 'requests' or 'demands.' Further ambiguous classifications were observed between the categories 'statement of the problem' and 'criticism' (p. 120).

Based on her observation that the degree of directness was maintained throughout the various semantic categories used in a response set, DeCapua argued that the response set functions as a unit and should be considered as such when analyzing the level of directness (p. 146). Due to the fact that the boundaries between categories were found to be "fuzzy and overlapping" (p. 142), DeCapua developed a continuum of directness/indirectness by which she measured the directness and face threat of the speech act sets. She pointed out that there should be no clear distinctions made between directness levels because the perceived face threat resulting from the utterances is highly subjective, depending on specific psychological and personal factors (p. 148).

DeCapua found that the German group, both in English and in German, produced more direct complaints than the American group. In other words, the German group used more demands or threats than requests, and more criticisms instead of complaints. When the German complaints were rated on the scale that measured face threat, they were consequently found to be more face-threatening than the complaints of the American group. The author inferred that the two groups vary in their communicative behavior due to differing societal expectations and cultural attitudes (p. 213).

The analysis of the use of modality markers revealed that when speaking German, the German group used twice as many modality markers as did the group of Americans. When speaking English the Germans still used 25% more modality markers than the Americans. DeCapua found that this is generally true for both kinds of modifiers, upgraders and downgraders. The Germans tended to use modality markers across a wider range of direct and indirect complaints in both languages. It should be noted, though, that the number of occurrences of modifiers was only related to number of responses and not to their length (that is the number of utterances within the complaints). Longer complaint sequences will

most likely contain more modifiers than shorter ones.

One limitation of this study is the fact that DeCapua used the same group of Germans to collect the ESL data and the German data. This meant that this group was ‘functioning’ as Germans and ESL learners, responding to the same questions twice. This might have distorted the data due to the effects of repetition. This means that the participants might have been influenced by their first responses in the second round of answers. DeCapua’s study focused on complaints in a specific setting, that of service situations. This raises the question as to whether the complaint behavior would be different in other types of situations.

3.3.4. Morrow (1995)

Morrow’s study investigated the instruction of pragmatics to intermediate-level ESL students from a variety of native language backgrounds. Specifically, he investigated the effect of pedagogical intervention on learners’ production of complaints and refusals. This study is relevant because of the framework Morrow used for the complaint analysis.

For the analysis and evaluation of the complaint strategies, Morrow divided complaints into three major categories (a) identification of the problem, (b) assignment of blame, and (c) resolution of the problem. Each of these major categories was sub-categorized by levels of directness. The basic concept of the propositional coding followed that of House and Kasper (1981). However, he avoided the binary distinction between implicit and explicit utterances because the use of ‘implicit’ as a default descriptor caused some imprecision (p. 179). Also, some of the categories were restructured and more directness levels added, to allow for a more specific placement of the utterances. Each utterance could be assigned one, none, or multiple codes depending on which one(s) of the three categories were addressed. Morrow also stressed that the discourse context needs to be considered for the categorization of utterances since their functions can vary depending on their positioning within the complaint (p. 183).

Each category was sub-divided into four to six sub-strategies (p. 182). The category ‘identification of the problem’ was divided up by the manner in which the problem and its evaluation was described, ranging from the most indirect utterance, labeled ‘mention problem,’ to the most direct one, called ‘explicit dissatisfaction.’ The category ‘blame the

hearer' was divided up by the manner in which the speaker addresses the fact that the hearer is to blame for the problem. Sub-categories ranged from the most indirect one, 'potential responsibility' to the most direct one 'explicit assertion.' Finally, the category 'resolution of the problem' was divided depending on the force a speaker uses to achieve repair from the hearer. Sub-codes ranged from the most indirect one, 'negotiator,' to the most direct one, 'threat.' In the second part of the study on complaints, Morrow analyzed the use of complaint modifiers.

As a result of this study, Morrow found that language learners were more direct than NSs of American English before and after the instruction of speech acts in the classroom. However, the teaching of pragmatic strategies did have a positive effect on students' production of complaints and refusals. After instruction, the group of learners produced these speech acts in a more clear but at the same time less direct manner and therefore more polite manner, increasing in resemblance to native-like utterances (pp. 271-273). Comparisons between the pre-and post-tests revealed that instruction did not seem to have an impact on the overall frequency of modifiers; only slight changes occurred in the use of specific categories.

A shortcoming of this analysis is the fact that the complaint framework was not comprehensive enough. Morrow himself stated that his coding scheme was not developed enough to account for all possible types of utterances that could occur in complaints. He noted that many explanations used by the speakers to support their complaints had to be neglected in his analysis because the coding scheme was not exhaustive enough.

3.3.5. Murphy and Neu (1995)

Murphy and Neu compared the speech act sets of American NSs and Korean NNSs of English. In the first part of their study, they investigated differences in the use of the speech act sets expressing disapproval. NSs and NNSs respondents were asked to respond to one situation in which the respondents talked to a person of higher social power. The situation involved a student complaining to a professor about a bad grade. Data collection occurred through closed role-play and responses were transcribed.

The researchers observed that the speech act set used by the NSs and NNSs of English was similar in the components 'explanation of purpose,' 'justification,' and

'candidate solution/request,' but that it differed in the element that contained an expression of blame. The distinct use of blame caused them to divide up disapprovals into the speech acts of complaining and criticizing (p. 200). In complaints, they argued, the speaker assumes some responsibility, while in criticisms the hearer is solely blamed for the situation, with the speaker denying any responsibility. The assignment of blame was revealed through certain linguistic features, which distinguished complaints from criticisms. The authors argue that complaints tend to be depersonalized, they often contain questions, mitigators, and the inclusive pronoun 'we.' Criticisms, on the other hand, are revealed through personalization of the problem, use of the second person pronoun 'you' and the modal 'should,' indicating what the hearer should or should not do (p. 205). While all NSs produced the speech act of complaining, NNSs tended to use criticisms instead of complaints.

In the second part of the study, the researchers asked American NSs of English to judge the acceptability of the responses, which were supplied from the tape-recordings as well as transcribed on paper. The majority of NSs perceived the complaints as acceptable, appropriate, and respectful while they tended to rate criticisms as inappropriate, unacceptable, aggressive, and not credible (pp. 206-208).

The authors discussed a possible reason for the fact that none of the American NSs of English used criticisms but the majority of Korean NNSs of English did. They speculated that while the difference between a criticism and a complaint seems to be clearly distinctive to the American NSs of English, this difference might be less clear to Korean NNSs of English (p. 211). Murphy and Neu noted that because of cross-cultural and linguistic differences, NNSs might pick up differences in pragmatic force or meaning where there are none, or they might not notice differences in language use where NSs pick up clear distinctions in meaning. They suggest that there is a need for NNSs to be taught distinctive differences such as these in foreign/second language instruction.

The differentiation between complaints and criticism in this study is far from absolute. The authors list a number of important factors that contribute to a hearer's perception of an utterance as a criticism. However, it remains questionable as to where the line should be drawn between a complaint and a criticism. For example, the authors group the response to a low grade, *"I was kind of upset about my grade ... but there are certain areas that I uh*

wasn't totally in agreement with what you said were my problems here" as a complaint. The response, *"...but I think my point of view is more relevant to the subject and that has to be emphasized..."*, however, is considered a criticism (p. 200).

The decision as to where a complaint stops and a criticism starts depends on the combination of the linguistic features mentioned above. It is also certainly subject to the individual perception. It might be preferable to avoid clear distinctions between complaints and criticisms and to note tendencies instead.

3.3.6. Trosborg (1995)

The focus of this study is the cross-cultural examination of aspects of pragmatic competence by three different groups: Danish learners of English of three different proficiency levels, NSs of Danish, and NSs of English. These groups allowed Trosborg to make cross-cultural comparisons between native Danish and native English speakers and to investigate developmental patterns of the language learners. Under examination were the production of requests, complaints, and apologies with differing social constellations (to measure sociolinguistic competence). Data was collected through open role-play, more specifically, through role enactment (McDonough, 1981, p. 80).

For the analysis of complaints, Trosborg created four categories ordered by degree of directness, most of which contained a number of sub-strategies. A complaint could be composed of one or more of the following strategies:

- Category (1) No explicit reproach
 - Strategy (1) Hints

- Category (2) Disapproval
 - Strategy (2) Annoyance
 - Strategy (3) Ill consequences

- Category (3) Accusation
 - Strategy (4) Indirect accusation
 - Strategy (5) Direct accusation

- Category (4) Blame
 - Strategy (6) Modified Blame
 - Strategy (7) Explicit Blame (behavior)
 - Strategy (8) Explicit blame (person)

(adapted from Trosborg, p. 319)

In a second step, Trosborg analyzed internal modifications (upgraders and downgraders) and external modifications (supportive moves) used in the three groups.

Findings in this study revealed that all three groups of NNSs used fewer indirect strategies and more direct strategies than the English NSs. Moreover, the NNSs used fewer internal and external modality markers, and they lacked the ability to adjust their strategies to the social parameters of social distance and dominance (p. 370). Based on the comparison of the two groups of NSs, Trosborg found only few differences in the pragmatic behavior of the two groups of NSs, which led her to conclude that most of the learners' divergence was not caused by negative transfer from the native language but rather related to problems in the acquisition of a foreign language (p. 371). Trosborg concluded that the speech act of complaining is especially challenging for language learners, even for those that are at an advanced proficiency level.

Trosborg's framework is useful in that it allows divisions of complaints and the placement of individual parts into different complaint categories. A few unanswered questions remain. It is not clear, for example, where Trosborg placed requests. One request appears in the category 'Modified Blame,' but it remains unclear whether all requests are placed in this category or not. Initially, Trosborg stated that her analysis revealed that five factors determine the directness level, each of which can be expressed explicitly or implicitly (similar to House and Kasper's study). However, only four categories are listed in her framework, with varying numbers of sub-strategies.

It is arguable whether the strategies presented in Trosborg's framework really build up in directness, as the following examples reveal: The strategy (3) 'ill consequences' is rated as less direct than strategy (4) 'indirect accusation.' However, the example for strategy (3) "*Oh damn it! I'll lose my insurance bonus now!*" seems more direct than the example from strategy (4) "*Did you happen to bump into my car?*" Comparisons of directness levels of formulas with different semantic content could have been avoided by separating the categories and only rating directness levels within each of these categories. As already noted in House and Kasper's (1981) and Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987, 1993) studies, the comparison of directness across different content areas makes clear distinctions difficult.

3.3.7. Additional studies

Moon (1996), Schaefer (1982), Trenchs (1995) analyzed semantic formulas but disregarded differences in directness in the complaint realizations. Trenchs and Schafer employed the notion of a ‘head act,’ in their analysis, which they labeled ‘act statement.’ Moon devised individual categories for specific combinations of the main acts (complaint + request, request + complaint, request only, complaint only, etc.). It is questionable, however, whether the order of these formulas is so significant that it requires consideration. The three authors focused on the entire complaint conversation, including opening and closing formulas. Additionally, Moon and Trenchs included specific linguistic forms such as irony, sarcasm, and rhetorical questions preaching and cursing in the semantic formulas they devised. These are rhetorical measures that further shape the directness of the main strategies, but they should not be considered as belonging to the main semantic formulas.

3.4. Summary

This discussion has revealed that careful reflections on complaints, and the many ways in which they can be uttered, are necessary to achieve a meaningful analysis. Many of the discussed studies were missing definitions concerning the composition of complaints, a crucial aspect for the subsequent analysis. The studies often lacked explanations of what parts of the complaints they intended to analyze and why they chose that specific examination over other possible analyses. It was therefore a difficult endeavor to speculate about the approaches taken by the researchers, and it required uncountable readings of the articles and close examinations of the examples that were presented to conclude from those on the authors’ standpoints. The following summary is to give a condensed overview of the analyses of the studies above.

As discussed in section 3.2.1, there are two main trends to analyze complaints. Those studies that extract the *main act* or *head act* from the other components and those that acknowledge the importance of additional components and analyze complaints on a larger scale under a *speech act set*. Of the complaining studies presented in section 3.3, House and Kasper (1981), Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993) analyzed head acts. DeCapua (1989), Morrow (1995), Murphy and Neu (1995), as well as Trosborg (1995)

approached the analysis by using the notion of a speech act set or comparable analyses, which took into consideration that a complaint can consist of various main components. The critical discussions of these studies revealed that the selection and analysis of one main component is not always possible because complaints often consist of several utterances that address different content areas and carry out different sub-strategies. An analysis based on a set of strategies seems therefore more suitable for this speech act.

All studies presented above examined the directness used to realize the complaint in one way or another. The categories, on which the division into directness levels was based, varied considerably:

- (1) Levels of directness were distinguished by propositional content and illocutionary intent within the same large complaint category. (House & Kasper, 1981; Trosborg, 1995).
- (2) Levels of directness were distinguished by propositional content and illocutionary intent and placed in separate functional categories (DeCapua, 1989; Morrow, 1995; Murphy & Neu, 1995).
- (3) One utterance could be coded for more than one function and within these functional categories for different directness levels (Morrow, 1995).
- (4) Separate complaint categories were designed based on the directness level and the resulting face-threat to the complainees (DeCapua, 1989; Murphy & Neu, 1995; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, 1993).

The following changes are suggested in order to achieve a refinement of the analysis of complaints: (a) Researchers need to incorporate into their analyses the fact that a complaint can span several utterances, even several turns. (b) It needs to be acknowledged that the main strategy, complaining, can be produced by one or more sub-strategies, each of which can be produced in different degrees of directness.

(c) Frameworks need to account for the fact that one utterance often conveys more than one function. (d) Directness levels should be distinguished based on the same content only, in order to avoid arbitrary coding and inconsistent ratings of directness levels.

These changes were incorporated into the framework of this study, which is presented in the following chapters.

Most of the studies that compared language learners with NSs of the learners' native language *and* NSs of the target language have found that language learners tend to transfer pragmatic strategies from the native language into the second language (DeCapua, 1989; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, 1993). If learners' first language prefers more directness, as in the example of Germans learning English, learners tend to show a negative transfer of these directness strategies into the target language. In target cultures that prefer a high degree of directness, such as Hebrew, learners tended to prefer less direct strategies, most likely due to transfer from their first language. Interestingly, Trosborg (1995) found that both groups of NSs in her study (speakers of Danish and speakers of British English) showed similar strategies in the directness level, but that the group of English learners tended to be more direct than both groups of NSs, which provides evidence for the use of more direct strategies by learners caused by the language barrier.

Morrow (1995) and Murphy and Neu (1995) compared NNSs to NSs of American English. Both studies found that the language learners tended to be more direct than the NSs. However, due to the lack of data from speakers of the learners' native language, no conclusions could be drawn as to the question whether the higher directness stemmed from negative transfer from their native language, language difficulties in the second language, or both.

3.5. The current study

This study sets out to investigate cross-cultural and learner-related differences in the production of complaints of three groups, NSs of German, NSs of Canadian English, and German ESL learners of an advanced proficiency. As pointed out earlier, complaints have received little attention in speech act research compared to research of other speech acts such as apologies and requests. More research is necessary to determine how complaints are realized and how they can be analyzed so that the results accurately reflect speakers' pragmatic choices.

Only one study has investigated German ESL learners' complaint behavior and more research is needed to gather more information concerning cross-cultural differences between these groups and interlanguage features of German ESL learners.

This study not only compares differences between pragmatic strategies used in complaints, but it also attempts to investigate determining factors for the expected divergence. While some measurements of social factors have been conducted in previous studies of other speech acts, very few have explored speakers' approaches to complaints and the underlying reasons they might have for preferring different levels of directness. Yet, speakers' assessments of situational factors are important aspects for the acquisition of pragmatic strategies because they provide information to what extent second language learners are psychologically willing and able to adjust to the norms and expectations of the target culture.

This is the first cross-cultural study that compares the complaint behavior of Germans with Canadians. The discussions of previous work in cross-cultural pragmatics revealed that most studies have focused on British and American English; few studies are known to the researcher that have investigated Canadian speakers of English. However, sharing the same language does not mean that the different cultural groups share the same pragmatic behavior as well. Therefore, this study fills an important gap by investigating Canadians' pragmatic choices in general and the production of complaints, specifically.

3.5.1. Research objectives

For this analysis, a suitable framework for the analysis of complaints had to be found initially. The complaint responses were then compared on the following complaint elements:

- 1) Respondents' ratings of the complaint situations and the approach they took on solving the problem:
 - a) level of frustration
 - b) decision to opt out
 - c) degree of explicitness conveyed in their complaints
- 2) Pragmatic strategies used in the realization of the complaints:
 - a) length of the complaint
 - b) degree of directness used in the complaint categories

- c) number of lexical and phrasal modality markers.
- 3) Variation of the pragmatic strategies used within each group based on sociopragmatic influences of social distance and social power in terms of the following strategies:
- a) length of the complaint
 - b) degree of directness of the complaint categories
 - c) number of lexical and phrasal modality markers

3.5.2. Rationale and hypotheses

It was assumed that differences in the groups' realization of complaints might be caused by differences in the perception of the complaint situations and cross-cultural differences in the perception of directness in general. The three groups were therefore initially compared on their perception of three potentially influencing factors, their level of frustration in each situation they responded to, the perceived degree of explicitness with which the respondents conveyed their complaints, and the question whether they would in fact choose to complain if they were faced with these situations in real life.

Prior to the data collection, some hypotheses were put forward concerning the use of directness. Based on the findings from previous directness studies of Germans and speakers of varieties of English, it was hypothesized that German NSs would be more direct than Canadian NSs. Based on the fact that previous studies found language learners to be more direct in the second language, it was expected that differences in the use of directness would be more extreme between the ESL group and the group of Canadian NSs.

It was hypothesized that the expected variation in the groups' use of directness might be influenced by (a) the fact that a higher level of frustration causes more direct complaints and (b) the fact that both cultural groups might measure directness with different standards. It was assumed that both groups of Germans might choose more direct strategies because they are more agitated by the problems they are faced with and that they actually perceive the same level of directness as lower than the Canadian group because Germans are used to relating to each other in a more abrasive manner.

Canadians were also expected to opt out of the complaint more often than the Germans to avoid a verbal conflict. Both German groups were expected to show similar trends in their decisions of whether they would perform the complaint or opt out.

It was also assumed that the social constellations between interlocutors might have an effect on the use of directness in the complaints. For this reason, different social variables were constructed in the complaint situations presented to the participants. However, it was expected that the three groups would react to these different social constellations in a similar manner.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter provides information about the implementation of the methodology used in this study. It describes the data collection method used, the selection of the groups of respondents, and the design of the role-play situations. It also presents the findings of a pilot study and the changes that were made to the research design, based on these results. Finally, the administration of the role-play is presented.

4.1. Data elicitation method

The data collection in this study occurred through closed role-play. There are two main reasons for this decision. First of all, the research questions center around issues of directness and politeness, which are strongly determined by context-internal and context-external factors. These variables thus needed to be clearly stated and controlled for in the set-up of the situations, which leaves the DCT and closed role-play as possible choices for the data collection. The main reason for choosing closed role-play over the DCT is the different output. Since this study investigates the production of oral complaints, a methodology was chosen that allowed the participants to orally respond to the situations. This follows Bardovi-Harlig's (1999) suggestion to keep the output mode constant by conducting the DCT orally, which is the data collection method used in this study.

4.2. Participants

This study investigates cross-cultural differences in the pragmatic production of complaints between NSs of German, NSs of Canadian English, and advanced German ESL learners. Each of the three groups consisted of 14 respondents, 7 men and 7 women. A number of factors related to the participants' backgrounds were controlled in this study. All participants were university students in their twenties. The NNSs were at an advanced to high-advanced level of proficiency in English with TOEFL scores ranging from 573 to 650 points. All NNSs had lived in Canada for at least three months, and they had not been abroad for more than a total of six months. A longer stay in a foreign-speaking country, especially for the NNSs, might have resulted in

variation caused by a greater adaptation of speech norms to the foreign speech community. The majority of German and Canadian NS were contacted in university classes. The students that were interested in participating in the study provided their name and phone number on a sign-up list. The German English learners were contacted by phone and asked whether they would be interested in participating. The researcher or the assistant explained in broad terms the purpose of the study, the methodology, and the approximate time it would take to participate in this study.

Prior to the data collection meeting, the ESL volunteers were asked about previous stays abroad and their TOEFL scores to ensure that they fit the profile needed to for this study. Some ESL students had to be rejected because they had stayed abroad for longer prior to their stay in Canada. One Canadian NS was not included in the data analysis because she was a first generation Canadian. Her Chinese background might have distorted the data.

4.3. Design of the situations

The participants were asked to respond to 12 situations (see Appendix A). Each situation was carefully designed to control for the social power of the interlocutors, social distance, and the degree of frustration of the speaker because these factors were assumed to have an impact on the strategies speakers would use in their complaints. Three situations were designed for each of the social power and social distance constellations. Table 4.1 shows the social factors specified in each situation. The number following each title of situation refers to the order in which the situations were presented to the participants. For example, situations 7, 3, and 11, are situations in which the speaker is of greater social power than the hearer (the participants role-play customers relating to store clerks and a waitress) *and* both interlocutors are strangers.

Table 4.1

Situations ordered by social relations

Situations	Social power			Social distance	
	S>H	S<H	S=H	+	-
Lost sweater (7)	✓			✓	
Expensive dry cleaner's (3)	✓			✓	
Late order (11)	✓			✓	
Dirty dog (4)			✓	✓	
Line cutting (9)			✓	✓	
Reckless snowboarder (1)			✓	✓	
No letter of recommendation (12)		✓			✓
No vacation time (5)		✓			✓
Difficult statistics class (2)		✓			✓
Noisy neighbors (8)			✓		✓
Stingy friend (10)			✓		✓
Dirty roommate (6)			✓		✓

Note. S>H: Speaker has more social power than the interlocutor.

S<H: Speaker has less social power than the hearer.

S=H: Speaker and hearer are of equal social power.

S +: Speaker interacts with a stranger

S -: Speaker interacts with an acquaintance/friend

The situations were designed to reflect realistic situations with which university students can identify. This role enactment (McDonough, 1981) ensures that the respondents can imagine themselves in the specific contexts. Since the subjects had most likely experienced similar situations, they could draw from past experiences in their responses. By choosing familiar contexts and roles, responses were intended to be as close to naturally occurring conversation as possible (Cohen, 1995). This authenticity was especially necessary to compensate for the unavoidably artificial set-up of the data collection. The situations were described with detailed descriptions of the circumstances in which the complaints occurred, because, as Kasper and Dahl (1991) point out, lacking information leaves it up to the respondents to fill in the gaps by designing “mentally elaborated versions” (p. 219).

The gender of the interlocutor was equally distributed across the twelve situations. In other words, the respondents were presented with six situations in which they talked to women and six in which they talked to men. The situations were presented to all respondents in the same sequence.

4.4. Pilot study

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted with 14 participants. The pilot study revealed participants' difficulty in responding to the situations if they were not described in enough detail. Respondents noted that they would shape their responses based on the specific circumstances in the situation. For example, a situation depicted the potential complainer sitting in a café, where he or she was supposed to meet a friend who was late. The participants were asked for their reaction once the friend arrived. Many of the participants were hesitant and said that a reaction would depend on how late the friend was and whether he had a good reason for being late. Due to these difficulties, this situation was removed.

Another change occurred in the participants' choice to opt out. In the pilot study, participants were not asked to respond to a situation once they had indicated they would opt out of the complaint. The study revealed that once ESL learners found that out, they were very quick to check the opting out box and moved on to the next question. This option turned out to be an easy way out. It was found that shyer participants, especially ESL students, would 'escape' having to come up with a response by using the opting out option. This trend has also been observed by Bardovi-Harlig (1999). In the main study, the option of opting out was kept because it is an important strategy, which needs consideration. However, subjects were told that even if they decided to opt out, they were asked to imagine what they would have said if they had chosen to complain to the interlocutor. This allowed the collection of information on whether respondents would opt out of realizing the face-threatening act. At the same time, missing responses that occurred because the respondents found it easier to opt out than going through the effort (and stress!) to produce a complaint could be avoided.

4.5. Administration of the role-play

The recordings took place in the time from November 1999 until February 2000. The researcher collected the data from the Canadian NSs as well as the ESL learners in Victoria, Canada. An assistant recorded the data for the group of German NSs in Berlin and Hannover, Germany. The assistant received specific written instructions so that all data were collected under similar conditions. The situations were translated into

German; only names and localities were changed to German counterparts.

Each session lasted between 25 and 40 minutes, depending on how quickly the participants responded and the time that was spent on discussions following the data collection. Generally, the ESL learners required more time to respond, but some variation also occurred among the NSs. The group of NNSs received an approximately three-minute warm-up in speaking English. The participants were initially asked to sign a consent form and to fill out a biographical questionnaire (see Appendix B), which included information about the name, age, major, and nationality for all participants. For the group of ESL learners, the questionnaire included additional questions about their language proficiency, previous stays abroad, and the length of their current stay in Canada. The information collected in the questionnaire was important to ensure that the respondents were of the previously defined background.

The respondents were instructed that they were going to listen to twelve situations. They were asked to imagine themselves in these situations and to respond to the other person involved as if he or she was in the room. The participants were *not* told that they would be asked to complain in these situations, but merely that they were asked to respond to the constructed situations. The use of the term *complaining* was avoided because it is generally associated with negative attitudes and might have affected the responses. A tape-recorded example of a situation and response illustrated the process (see Appendix C). A different speech act (refusal) was chosen so that participants would not be affected by the degree of directness used in the example response.

Following the example, participants listened to 12 situations on tape, and they were also encouraged to follow the same descriptions in written form (see Appendix A). They were allowed some extra time to re-read and reflect on their responses before they were asked to verbalize them. This was important so that the respondents were able to imagine themselves in these situations and to set their frame of mind accordingly. The responses to situation 10 (stingy friend) are presented in Appendix D. Naturally, not all of the respondents would have chosen to address the problem in real life. Some might have preferred to *opt out* of a response for various reasons. For this reason, the respondents were asked whether they would address the problem in the situation, or not.

Following each response, the participants were also asked to estimate the significance of the consequences resulting from each situation on a one-to-five scale, ranging from 'not serious' to 'very serious' after they had responded to a situation. They also indicated the degree of the complaine'e's violation in each situation on a scale from 'low' to 'high.' Both aspects were rated on scales ranging from 1 to 5. The point of this was to measure the speaker's overall frustration resulting from the situation. The respondents were also asked to rate the explicitness with which they had addressed the complaint. The recordings often opened up interesting conversations after the data collection was completed. Respondents discussed their pragmatic abilities, previous experiences they had in this area, their experience with cross-cultural differences, etc.

After all the data were collected, the responses were transcribed. The responses were transcribed with great approximation to the tape-recordings, including pausing, hesitation, false starts, laughter, fillers, etc.

4.6. Summary

This chapter described the research design, the selection criteria for three groups of respondents, the design of the situations used to elicit complaints, and the data collection method used in this study. The framework that was used to analyze the collected data and the rationale for the value of this framework, are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

In the first part of this chapter, section 5.1, some general pragmatic considerations are discussed which need to be incorporated in the analysis of the complaint data. Examples of complaint data from this study illustrate the various points. They reveal the need for more elaborate frameworks for the analysis of complaints to avoid oversimplifications and derive meaningful analyses of speaker meaning. Some challenges of analyzing pragmatic meaning are also discussed. This discussion leads into the second part of this chapter, the analysis of complaints, as conducted in this study. In section 5.2, the decision-making process with which potential complainers are faced is illustrated. This is followed by detailed descriptions of the main strategic decisions and the frameworks used to analyze these strategies. Examples illustrate the rationale for the design of the framework and the subsequent analysis.

5.1. Pragmatics and the importance of meaning: Some considerations for the analysis of complaints

The study of utterance meaning is the central topic in the domain of pragmatics. The correct interpretation of utterance meaning is important in interactional communication because conversation is only successful if the hearer recognizes the implications of the utterance. It therefore presents a crucial constituent in the analysis of the pragmatic strategies in this study. The examination of the complaint data revealed three main challenges: the multi-functionality of semantic formulas, the change of meaning depending on co-text and context, and the determination of what is implied by the speaker beyond the mere propositional content. These three factors were taken into consideration in the design of the complaint framework. They are discussed in detail in the following sections.

5.1.1. The multi-functionality of utterances

Section 2.3.5 discussed the fact that complaints tend to be multifarious. They may contain more than one speech act and they can be approached from different angles. This means the same situation can provoke complainers to use different strategies, even

though complainers are striving for the same goal. In the analysis of the complaint data in this study, the focus is on what is said, how it is said, and what the immediate function(s) of these utterances are. Consider the following examples in response to situation 11 (late order):

- (1) *“Excuse me. I was wondering if we could get our drinks now.”* [CanEng]
- (2) *“Halt stop. Wir hatten etwas zu essen bestellt und wir sind hier kurz vorm verhungern und verdursten.”* [GerGer] (transl.: Hey, stop. We’ve ordered some food and we’re almost dying of hunger and thirst here.)

Both complaints are reactions to the same problem (the late order) and both complainers want to achieve the same goal (to make the waitress aware of the problem so that she will serve it soon). However, the strategies they use to obtain the same goal are different. In the first example, the complainer makes a request to solve the problem and chooses not to mention what is wrong. In the second example, the complainer openly states the problem and then justifies it. In the analysis of the complaint strategies, the first complaint is only coded as a request, while the second one is coded as a statement of the problem, which is followed by a justification why the complaint was necessary.

It is important to note at this point that the functions of utterances used in a complaint require careful consideration because any one utterance can directly or indirectly address several complaint aspects, as pointed out by Morrow (1995). Consider the following responses to situation 4 (dirty dog):

- (1) *“Did you realize that your dog just jumped up on me with his dirty paws? Maybe you should keep a better eye on him.”* [CanEng]
- (2) *“Können Sie das nächste Mal nicht ein bißchen besser auf Ihren Hund aufpassen?”* [GerGer] (transl: Can’t you watch your dog a little better next time?)

The complaint in example 1 states the problem and then makes a request for repair in the future. The speaker in the second example addresses repair on the propositional level. However, the use of negation *“nicht”* combined with the use of the comparative form *“besser aufpassen”* indirectly refers to the problem, namely that the complainees did *not* keep an eye on him. It therefore needs to be also coded as an indirect statement of the problem.

5.1.2. Identifying speaker meaning

It is a challenge of the data analysis in this study to find the right balance between acknowledging the fact that many utterances fulfill more than one function at the illocutionary level, while at the same time avoiding ambiguous interpretations of utterance meaning beyond a certain point of abstraction. Taking this into account, only those illocutions that could be easily implied based on the ‘bigger picture’ derived from the context, co-text, choice of words, etc. were included in the analysis. For example, complaints in response to situation 3 (expensive dry cleaner’s) were only coded for assignment of blame if the speaker viewed the complainees as being directly involved in the problem. Compare the following three complaints on the assignment of blame (please refer to section 5.2.4.3.2 for levels of directness):

- (1) *“I don’t understand what the charge here is on my dry cleaning bill.”* [CanEng]
- (2) *“Did you change your prices? Because I’ve been here a couple of times and now I have to pay a lot more. Why?”* [GerEng]
- (3) *“... Ich möchte jetzt mal gerne von Ihnen wissen wieso Sie jetzt auf einmal die – Ihre Preise so dermaßen in die Höhe treiben...”* [GerGer] (transl.: I would like to know from you why all of a sudden you raise the prices so much.)

The first complaint was not coded as containing any assignment of blame because the speaker does not address the hearer’s involvement. The second complaint was coded for the second category ‘indirectly assign blame’ because the speaker states that the hearer has the potential for being responsible. The third complaint received the code ‘directly blame H for the problem’ because it clearly presupposes that the clerk is responsible.

5.1.3. Context and co-text

In order to achieve a close approximation of speaker meaning, utterances need to be considered in their situational and conversational context. In her analysis of complaints, refusals, and apologies, Trosborg (1995) stresses the importance of *co-text* (the conversational sequence in which an utterance is placed) and *context* (the situational context in which the interaction takes place) for the analysis of utterance meaning (pp. 334-336). In her analysis, Trosborg found that the same utterance can take on various meanings and functions depending on its placement within the apology, complaint, or

refusal. The following examples, taking from the data of this study (situation 4, dirty dog and situation 9, line cutting⁷), reveal the importance of considering co-text and context:

(1) *"That's a playful dog you've got there."* [CanEng]

(2) *"The end of the line is back there."* [CanEng]

If taken out of context, both utterances would not necessarily be interpreted as complaints. The description of the dog as *"playful"* could just mean that it is an active, fun dog. However, in the light of the fact that the dog just jumped at the speaker, dirtying his or her jacket, the adjective used to describe the dog is interpreted as an indirect complaint that the dog in fact is a little 'too' playful. Similarly, the utterance in the second example could be interpreted as a mere piece of information if uttered in response to a question such as *"Do you know where the end of the line is?"* Considering the context, the fact that the hearer has already cut into the line of waiting customers and therefore disregarded the line of people, the expression needs to be considered as an indirect complaint which entails the indirect request to go back to the end of the line like everybody else.

The consideration of the co-text is another crucial aspect for the analysis of utterance functions. Utterance meaning changes if the conversational sequence in which it is placed changes. Consider the following two examples from situation 11 (late order on Valentine's Day):

(1) *"Excuse me. Do you remember me? We ordered wine and pasta a long time ago. Would you – could you check that order? I mean I feel like you've forgotten us."* [GerEng]

(2) *"Excuse me, Miss. Have you forgotten us?"* [GerEng]

Both complaints contain suggestions that the waitress might have forgotten the customer. However, their function varies depending on the other components entailed in the complaint. In the first example, the utterance is preceded by a statement of the problem and a request. It functions as a possible explanation or justification of why the complaint had to be made. In the second example, the utterance in question makes up the entire complaint. Since there are no other propositions made concerning the situation, the justification indirectly refers to the fact that the customer has been waiting for the order for a long time and that a likely explanation could be that the waitress has forgotten to

⁷ Canadian speakers will most likely be more familiar with the terms 'line-jumping' or 'queue-jumping.'

serve this table. In other words, this utterance also makes opaque reference to the fact that there is a problem. These examples also show that the coding of what is implied or hinted at requires the attention to speakers' selection of linguistic and pragmatic features such as content, word choice, syntax, co-text, and context.

5.2. Pragmatic strategies

In this chapter, the factors for the selection of pragmatic strategies are discussed, along with the subsequent linguistic options speakers have to express a complaint. Figure 5.1 outlines the decisions speakers make when faced with an unfavorable situation, as they are traced in this study:

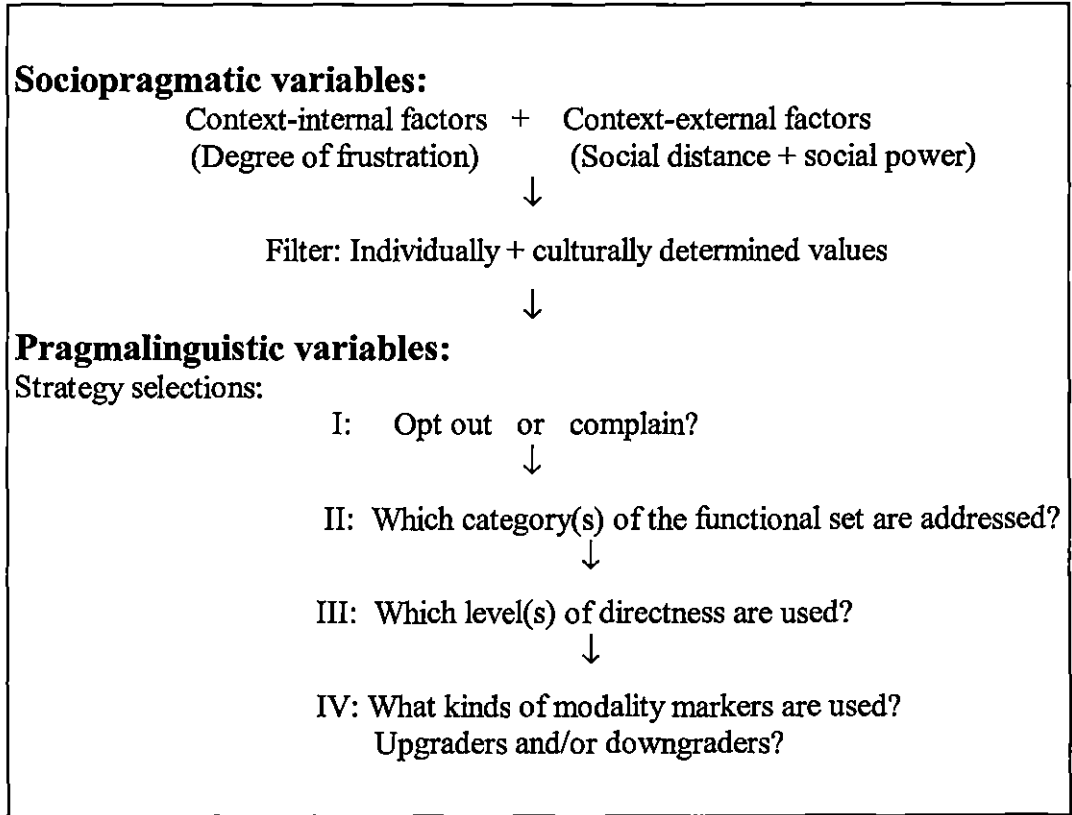


Figure 5.1. The decision-making process in complaining.

The contextual factors of social power, social distance, and degree of frustration are the main determinants for the strategy selection. They pass through individual and cultural filters, which affect the evaluation of the complaint situation and the determination of the appropriate strategies in the specific situation. Based on the evaluation of the situational factors, a speaker decides on the most appropriate strategies. Initially, the decision has to be made whether to produce a complaint or to opt out. If a complaint is to be made, speakers determine which complaint categories they wish to address and the degree of directness with which they want to address them. Finally, the use of modality markers needs to be determined and specific selections made to fine-tune the directness level. The numbering of the strategies does not mean that the decision-making occurs in neatly ordered sequence, one after the other. Rather, they indicate the magnitude of the strategies, ranging from the most basic decision of whether or not to pose a complaint to rather subtle strategies that fine-tune the directness level.

5.2.1. Degree of frustration

A speaker's strategic choices of whether and how to express a complaint are influenced by a number of factors. As discussed in section 2.2.3, Brown and Levinson (1987) list as the three main factors social power, social distance, and the degree of the imposition on the hearer caused by the speech act in question.⁸ In this study, it is assumed that role constellations such as social distance and social power of interlocutors are perceived in similar ways in Canadian and German culture because of the close cultural background of both languages. Similarities in the perception of these role constellations were confirmed in House's (1988) study of speakers of British English and speakers of German. While she did not find any significant differences in the groups' perception of social constellations, she did find variation in the way speakers of both languages rated context-internal factors (p. 307).

It was hypothesized, therefore, that the significance of the complaint situations might be rated differently by the three groups of subjects and to some extent by the

⁸ The authors caution that while these three factors are the most relevant ones, they comprise many other sub-factors such as status, authority, occupation, friendship, situational parameters, etc. (p. 80).

individuals within the groups, which would potentially cause differences in directness. The variables of social distance and social power were described in section 2.2.3. Brown and Levinson's notion of imposition, however, needed some modification to fit the context of complaining. It is discussed in this section.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the higher the degree of imposition, i.e. the demand on the hearer and/or the face threat to the hearer caused by the speech act, the less direct and more polite the speech act tends to be. While the degree of imposition on the hearer is certainly significant for such speech acts as 'simple' requests, which Brown and Levinson most often refer to in their analysis, this factor needs to be viewed from a different angle in the analysis of complaints. For complaints, the focus needs to be shifted from the hearer to the speaker and his or her perception of the past negative incident that requires correction. After all, the complainer is not asking for a favor of any sort but is instead asking the hearer to straighten out the unfavorable situation that has been imposed on him or her by the hearer. In this respect, the complainer has the *right* to impose on the hearer.⁹ The main determinant for the complaint realization is therefore not so much the imposition on the hearer that will occur through the production of the complaint but rather the imposition on the speaker by the hearer that is embedded in the problem that has already occurred. It follows that the politeness level used depends on the level of the speaker's frustration with the situation and the complaineé, rather than the degree of imposition on the complaineé posed on the speaker through the act of complaining.

In this study, the two most consequential context-internal factors that shape the strategic selection of complaints are considered to be (a) the complaineé's degree of wrong-doing and (b) the severity of the consequences for the potential complainer. These two factors are considered as significantly influencing the strategy selection for two reasons. First, the seriousness of the violation in the eyes of the complainer varies considerably, depending on whether the offender has caused the problem deliberately or whether he or she had little or no influence in its prevention.¹⁰ Second, the more severe

⁹ Whether the potential complainer decides to exercise this right is another matter.

¹⁰ The components that make up S's level of frustration correspond to S's rights and H's obligations in requests (e.g., Blum-Kulka & House, 1989). The more consequential the infraction on S by H, the greater is S's right to complain and the greater H's responsibility for the action, the higher H's obligation to

the consequences for the potential complainer, the more likely it is that the complaint is formed in a rather direct manner with relatively little politeness investment. These two aspects were measured and combined to assess the level of the speaker's frustration. It was expected that the higher the degree of frustration on the part of the complainer, the lower the degree of politeness used in the complaint, relative to the two other influencing factors of social power and social distance.

Consider the circumstances in the situation in a restaurant where a customer is waiting too long for the order. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), customers will vary the complaint depending on the degree to which they impose on the waitresses' freedom of action and/or the degree of the face threat posed on the waitress with the criticism entailed in the complaint. It is argued here that while both these factors certainly influence the speaker's action, they are not as consequential for the strategy selection of the speech act of complaining. First of all, customers will regard the degree to which they are imposing on the waitress as less important because after all she failed to provide the expected service. Secondly the imposition in the form of face threat to the waitress is a secondary factor which is to a great extent determined by the strategy selection of the complainer. In their milder form, complaints can be posed in the form of advice or suggestions, with little imposition on the hearer. Complainers shape their complaints depending on the degree to which they feel they have been negatively imposed upon, that is ill-treated, by the waitress (e.g. Whose fault is it? Is the kitchen slow, or has the waitress obviously forgotten the guest and is already serving customers that have arrived later?) and by the perceived consequences the problem has on them (e.g. How important is good service for this romantic Valentine's Day dinner?).

Both influencing factors, the seriousness of the consequences and the degree of the complaine'e's wrong-doing, were rated by the participants. The mean of both ratings reveals the overall degree of frustration, which in turn influences the use of the complaint strategies.

5.2.2. Opting out

Brown and Levinson's (1987) discussion of face-threatening acts has shown that speakers can choose to remain silent and opt out of the complaint. As Bonikowska (1988) argues, "...the opting out choice is as much a pragmatic choice as any strategic choice employed in a speech-act performance" (p. 169). Especially in situations that call for face-threatening speech acts, such as complaints, a speaker might choose not to perform the act to avoid a verbal confrontation with the hearer.

The decision-making of whether to produce a complaint or not depends on the degree of frustration, the social relation to the interlocutor, and other contextual and personal factors. If the potential complainer estimates the unfavorable event as insignificant, it might be not worth producing the complaint. In situation 9, for example, in which a shopper cuts into a line at a grocery store, several participants noted that they would have opted out of the complaint because they would rather wait a few more minutes than point out the customer's faulty behavior. In situation 1, in which a snow-boarder cut the potential complainer off, participants expressed the opinion that the damage is done already and a complaint would not change anything. Others mentioned the fact that the snow-boarder might not have run them over on purpose, in which case they did not want to embarrass him with a complaint. Finally, many Canadian participants argued that they were not confrontational and did not want to get involved in an argument with the other person.

5.2.3. Explicitness of the complaint

Section 2.2.4.1 discussed cross-cultural relativity of such notions as politeness, directness, and the perception of social constellations. The question arises whether the fact that a culture tends to use less directness has an effect on their overall perception of directness. In other words, do people of such a culture perceive indirect utterances as more direct because they do not use such a high degree of directness in general? The fact that it was assumed that Canadians use less directness than the two groups of Germans raises the question of whether they perceive their complaints as in fact being less direct, or whether they have different standards. This question was pursued when the participants were asked to rate the explicitness of each of their complaints after they had

responded to the situation on tape. They were asked to rate how explicit/strong each of their responses were on a scale ranging from 1 (very mild) to 5 (very strong).

5.2.4. Realizing the complaint

Figure 3.1 showed that if speakers produce a complaint, they choose from various complaint strategies and directness levels. They select the content areas they want to address from the set of functional complaint categories, they choose the appropriate level of directness, and they further mitigate these selected strategies through the use of modality markers. These different realization patterns are discussed in the next two sections.

A “bottom-up approach” (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, p. 179) was used to derive a new classification system for the complaint categories. In a bottom-up approach, the researcher identifies categories based on the collected data. This was necessary because none of the previous complaint frameworks were found to be appropriate when applied to this complaint on a trial basis. In particular, the assignment of complaint segments into devised categories of prior studies was found to be ambiguous. Therefore, a functional set of complaint strategies was devised based on the German and Canadian NSs data, under consideration of the pragmatic discussions in the first part of this chapter (5.1).

5.2.4.1. Length of a complaint

The segmentation of data forms an important factor for the coding and the subsequent outcome of the data analysis. In the analysis of the complaint data in this study, it was not found suitable to follow syntactic features because in spoken language the sentence structure is not as carefully chosen as in written language. Instead, complaints were divided into utterances, based on the categories that were established in the functional set of complaining. This also corresponds to the general assumption of speech act theory that communication consists of strings of speech acts. Searle (1969), for example writes that “the unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, 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).

The length of an utterance could therefore range from one word, e.g. “*Idiot*” to longer segments that consist of one or more sentences, as in: “*You know, for the first couple of weeks, could you kind of turn it down until people get an idea of what you’re trying to say and then maybe increase the difficulty of this course?...*” While utterances could be clearly distinguished if they change in content focus, the counting of utterances within the same complaint categories require clarification. Consider the following request for repair in response to situation 2 (difficult statistics class):

“...I was just wondering if you we might be able to slow the lectures down or if you have some study sheets you can hand out or if you have a tutorial session that you could offer on a weekly basis.” (R) [CanEng]

Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1993) suggest divisions into “speech acts with each act differentiated from the next by a shift in theme, purpose, or goal” (p. 173). Following this approach, complaint segments were counted as one utterance if they occurred one after another and no change in the complaint categories addressed or the directness level within this category was apparent. However, quite frequently complaint components were used several times at different positions within a complaint. Consider the following complaint to situation 10 (stingy friend):

“I think the grocery that’s your treat now, (R) because, remember, I paid all the bills in the last week (P). So I think you should buy the groceries now (R + B).” [GerEng]

In this complaint, the speaker makes the request twice, at the beginning of the complaint and again, as a reinforcement, at the end of the complaint. They were counted as two utterances. In some complaints, the directness level within the same category changes. Consider the following example, in which the speaker intensifies the statement of the problem:

“Du hast mich einfach überfahren und mich noch nicht mal beachtet. (P + B) Und ich hab’ mir fast die Knochen gebrochen und ein paar blaue Flecken habe ich auch...(P).” [GerGer] (transl.: You just ran me over and you didn’t even pay attention to me. And I almost broke all my bones and I’ve gotten a few bruises, too.)

The complainer states the problem that the snowboarder ran her over in the first utterance. She then intensifies it by pointing out the ill consequences resulting from her crash. This complaint was considered as consisting of two utterances.

The coding of the complaints depends on the specific research questions. When the length of complaints was measured, one complaint component was counted as one unit of analysis. However, in the coding of the complaint categories and directness levels, an utterance could be coded for two or more different categories. Consider the following response to situation 10 (stingy friend), “*Oh, I forgot my wallet.*” (R + J) [CanEng]. In this example, the speaker hints at the need for the friend to pay this time by pointing out a special circumstance, which causes the speaker to make this request. This single utterance was therefore coded in both complaint categories.

5.2.4.2. The functional set of complaint categories

Following Morrow (1995), DeCapua (1989), and Murphy and Neu (1995), complaints were split different content areas. The following functional set of complaint strategies was created:

1. Reference to the complainable matter
2. Reference to the hearer’s involvement or responsibility
3. Reference to the repair
4. Justification
 - a. Speaker’s perspective: Justification of the speaker’s complaint
 - b. Hearer’s perspective: Justification of the hearer’s actions

The notion of a functional set of complaint categories is adapted from Olshtain and Cohen’s (1983) concept of a *speech act set*. As noted by Olshtain and Cohen in their analysis of apologies, a speech act can encompass one or more semantic formulas, each of them being sufficient to produce the speech act in question. These formulas make up the speech act set. In the case of complaints, it was not possible to come up with a set of semantic formulas in Olshtain and Cohen’s sense, in which each formula addresses only one of the sub-functions within the complaint.

Complaints can be produced in many different ways because they lack conventionalized and ritualized forms as can be found in greetings, apologies, refusals, etc. (House, 1979). This diversity of complaints made it necessary to change the notion of a set of semantic formulas and to use a set of strategies that complainers can address. Such a framework can account for the multi-functionality of complaint utterances that

was discussed above. It can also account for the fact that utterances often address more than one of the complaint categories at the same time, as discussed in section 5.1.1. The set of complaint categories was labeled *functional set of complaint strategies*.

In the analysis of the complaint, only those strategies are incorporated into the speech act set that address the main content areas addressed in complaints. This excludes the design of distinct semantic categories based on their directness such as the distinction between complaints and criticisms and requests and demands as proposed by DeCapua (1989) and Murphy and Neu (1995). In this study, directness is addressed in the sub-categories of each complaint strategy.

Figure 5.2 shows the functional set of four complaint categories, which can be addressed in a complaint. These components can occur in various combinations, as indicated by the rotating arrows.

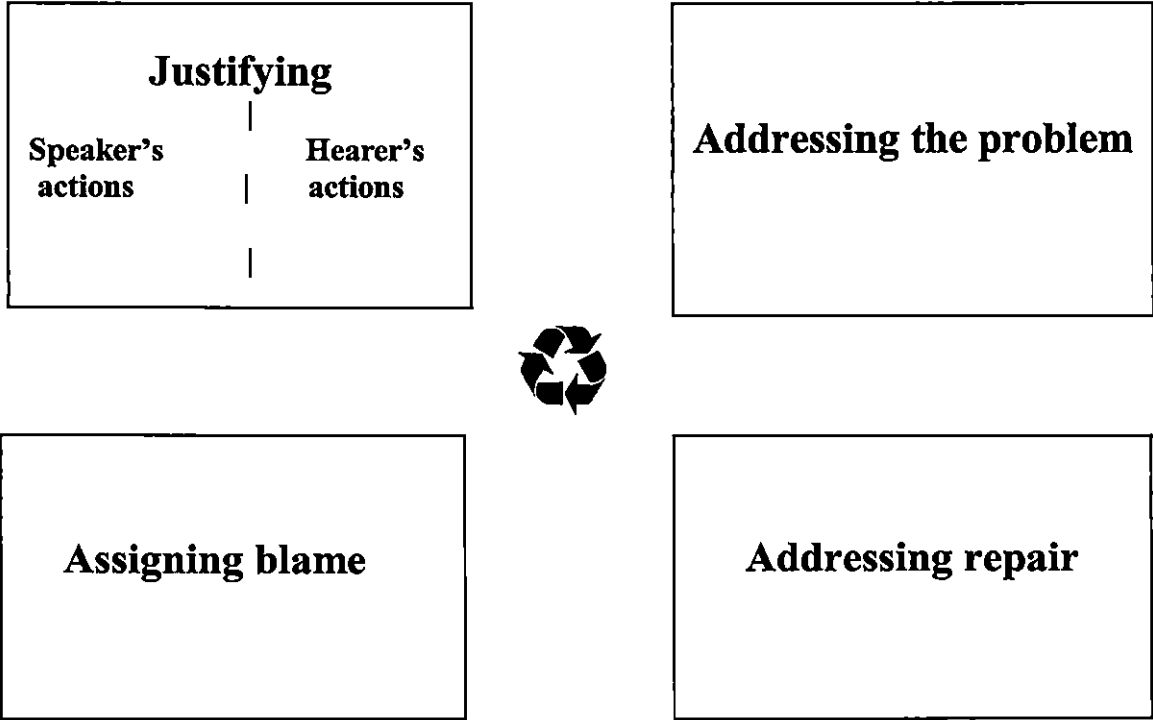


Figure 5.2. The functional set of complaint categories.

The following examples demonstrate that complaints can take on many different forms, depending on which content areas the complainer chooses to address (situation 1, reckless snow-boarder):

- (1) "*Are you crazy man? You are not alone on the slopes.*" [GerEng]
- (2) "*Watch where you're going next time. Don't cut people off.*" [CanEng]
- (3) "*Du hast doch wohl einen Knall, mich hier einfach so umzufahren. Hast du denn eigentlich nicht gesehen, daß ich da vorne stehe? Du kannst doch nicht einfach den Berg 'runterfahren und nicht aufpassen wo du hinfährst. Hier sind doch noch andere Leute unterwegs.*" [GerGer] (transl.: Are you crazy to run me over like that? Didn't you see that I was standing there? You can't just go down the hill without watching out where you're going. After all, there are other people here, too.)

In example 1, the complainer first blames the snow-boarder for the problem and then supplies a justification for his complaint. These two utterances also indirectly refer to the problem, the complainees dangerous way of snow-boarding. In the second example, the complainer explicitly addresses how the snow-boarder should change his behavior in the future. By stating what the complainees needs to do *better*, the speaker also indirectly refers to what the complainees has done wrong previously, which forms the problem (that the snowboarder *didn't* watch out and that he *did* cut her off). The form of address, *you*, indirectly points out that the snowboarder is to blame for what happened. In the third example, the complainer directly addresses the problem and blames the hearer for what has happened. She then supplies a possible justification for the hearer's action that would explain his action. Next, she addresses the problem again and finally justifies it again.

The separation of complaints into their sub-strategies and the subsequent analysis of the directness levels of the sub-strategies has the following advantages: (a) It allows for an analysis of the main components of complaints, taking into account the fact that they often encompass more than one utterance. (b) Semantic formulas are split by content, and then divided up into levels of directness, a fact, which (c) avoids the assignment of directness levels across different content areas. The disadvantage of such an analysis is that the complaints are analyzed deductively and not as a whole unit. This could not be avoided in an analysis that comprises more than one component.

5.2.4.3. Levels of directness

When producing a complaint, a speaker has to weigh between being forceful enough to get the message across while adhering to concerns of politeness and face loss, both of the speaker and the hearer. The strategies can be further adjusted in force through different degrees of directness. The directness levels within each of the main strategies are outlined in Figure 5.3. The first strategy in each category is the most indirect and the last one is the most direct.

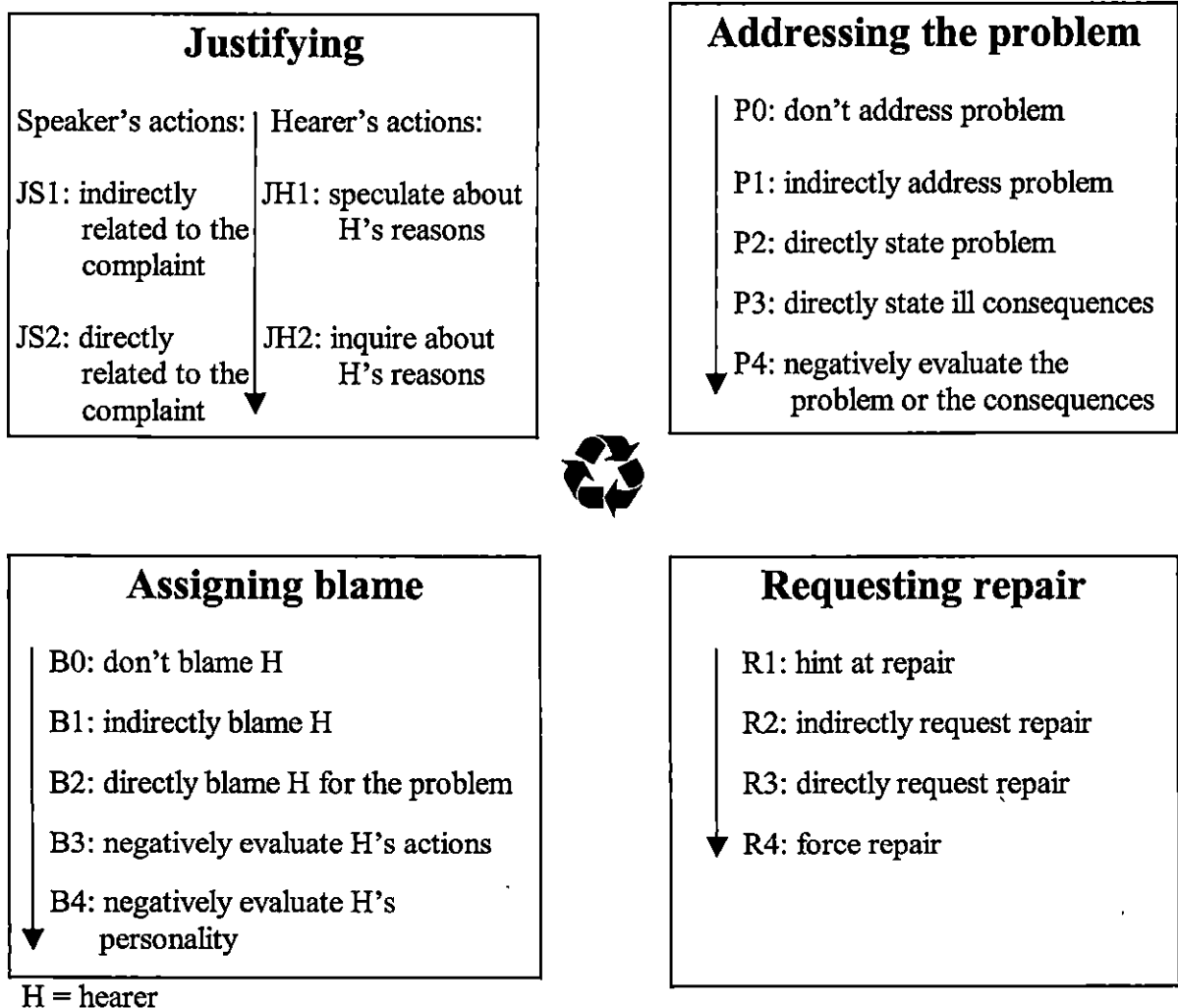


Figure 5.3. The functional set of complaint categories with levels of directness.

Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) terminology, the scales of directness within each of the main strategies range from 'off-record strategies' to 'on-record strategies.' Off-record strategies, such as implied meanings and hints, are non-transparent and therefore require inference on the hearer's part as to what the speaker's intentions are. An increase in directness through the use of on-record strategies causes an utterance to be more transparent and forceful, but at the same time it causes it to be more face-threatening to both interlocutors. It should be noted that distinctions between the directness levels within each of the complaint categories are certainly not absolute and rather a matter of degree, as observed also by Iwata (1999). They should therefore be regarded as a continuum on a scale of increasing directness (DeCapua, 1989).

'Zero' categories were added to the categories 'assigning blame' and 'addressing the problem.' This was necessary because not all respondents blamed the complainee indirectly or directly for the problem or pointed out that there was a problem. In this respect, the responses might in fact not be considered as complaints. Consider the blame assigned to the hearer in the first response and the lack of it in the second response. Both are responses to situation 2 (difficult statistics class):

- (1) *"I think many people in this class are quite confused by your lectures..."* (B2 + P2). [GerEng]
- (2) *"I'm not sure I'm up to the level, maybe, that we're expected to be for your class (JS1 + P1 + B0). And I was wondering how I can better prepare before coming to class so that I'm not so far behind (R1)".* [CanEng]

In the first example, the complainer directly makes the professor responsible for her problem by saying that the problem is caused by her lectures. The speaker in the second example mentions his own gaps in statistics, which indirectly refers to the problem that he cannot follow the classes. In doing so, he does not blame the professor for his difficulties, but rather makes it his own problem. This is also indicated by the fact that he does not address any changes the professor should make in her lectures, but that he addresses changes he himself should make. Due to the lack of responsibility assigned to the professor, the second response does not function as a complaint on the surface level and will not be perceived as such by the professor. It is therefore coded as B0.

In other situations, speakers seemed to pose 'normal' requests, without referring indirectly or directly to a problem. The following requests in response to situation 7 (lost

sweater) reveal the differences between ‘normal’ requests and those that imply that there is a problem:

- (1) *“Next time, please try to keep – manage to keep the sweater there in the corner.”*
(B1 + P1 + R3) [CanEng]
- (2) *“Can you order another one like it? Or can I get it from another store or something like that? (R2 + B0 + P0) [CanEng]*

In the first example, the speaker points out what the clerk needs to improve in the future. This request indirectly refers to the problem that the sweater is gone because the clerk did not take care of it. By pointing out what the clerk needs to improve, the speaker also indirectly blames the clerk for the problem. In the second example, the speaker poses a ‘normal’ request. His request does not refer to the problem that his sweater is lost or that the clerk is responsible for the loss. One would usually find such ‘normal’ requests in those situations in which a customer happens to like a sweater that was not available in his size and asks the clerk for assistance to find the right size. This utterance is coded as P0.

In those instances in which the complainer does not assign any blame and/or does not state the problem, it is questionable whether these responses can in fact be considered complaints. As pointed out in section 2.3.5.2, which described the working definition of complaints used in this study, these utterances provide important information about the use of directness across the three groups under investigation and their omission would distort the results of the data analysis. Their occurrence here is justified because all responses needed to be taken into consideration for the purpose of this study.

The following examples show the entire complaint sequences and the separation into utterances, which in turn were coded for the complaint categories and their directness levels:

- (1) *“I’m in your statistics class and my classmates and I are noticing it’s rather difficult (P2) and I’m curious if there’s any extra tutoring sessions or office hours where we can get some extra help (R1, B0).” [CanEng]*
- (2) *“Können Sie Ihren Hund nicht an der Leine halten? (B1+P1+R2) Das ist doch hier schließlich Leinenpflicht (JS2). Und sehen Sie sich mal meine Sachen an – total dreckig (P3)” [GerGer] (transl.: Can’t you keep your dog on a leash? After all, it is compulsory to have him on a leash here. And look at my clothes – completely dirty.)*

5.2.4.3.1. Addressing the problem

In complaints, the statement of the problem is inherently face-threatening to the hearer because the speaker assumes that the hearer is at least partially responsible for the problem. The four following sub-categories were devised to describe the different degrees of directness used as strategies to state the problem within the complaint: (P0) don't address the problem, (P1) indirectly address the problem, (P2) directly state problem, (P3) directly state ill consequences, (P4) negatively evaluate the problem or the consequences. These strategies range from utterances that do not address the problem at all and opaque, ambiguous utterances of what the speaker's problem is at the upper end of the scale, to clear and concise statements that leave no doubt about what is wrong at the lower end of the scale. The following examples illustrate the use of the four categories. The first response was produced in situation 4 (dirty dog), the other statements were produced in response to situation 8 (noisy neighbors), since the entire range of directness levels is not always used in the same situation:

(P0) *"Don't worry about it. It's just dirt, it'll wash out. It's a big dog and he probably just got away from you."* [CanEng]

(P1) *"Would you mind keeping the music down? I'm just trying to get some sleep tonight."* [CanEng]

(P2) *"...your music is far too loud"* [GerEng].

(P3) *"...Ich kann echt nicht einschlafen bei diesem Lärm"* [GerGer]
(transl.: I can go to sleep in with this noise at all).

(P4) *"...Ich muß morgen früh aufstehen und dann ist das ganz schön blöd."*
[GerGer](transl.: I need to get up early and then that's really pretty bad)

5.2.4.3.2. Assigning blame

A statement that projects blame on the hearer is face-threatening because he or she is criticized for having performed the unfavorable act. The face threat to the hearer varies depending on the degree of responsibility the complainer allocates to the complaine and the degree of directness that is considered appropriate for the situation. If blame is addressed, it can range from the least direct strategy in which the speaker inquires about H's involvement, to a negative evaluation of the hearer, which leaves no doubt about his or her responsibility and adds an open negative critique about the complaine's character.

The category of blame is sub-divided into (B0) don't blame H, (B1) indirectly blame H, (B2) directly blame H, (B3) negatively evaluate H's actions, and (B4) negatively evaluate H's personality. Examples for B0 through B3 are extracts from responses to situation 7 (lost sweater) and the example of B4 is taken from situation 1 (reckless snowboarder):

(B0) *"Can you order another one like it?"* [CanEng]

(B1) *"I asked you to put this sweater on hold for me and you said you would do this. And now it disappeared..."* [GerEng]

(B2) *"... and now you just sold it to somebody else."* [GerEng]

(B3) *"...ich finde das ziemlich enttäuschend, daß Sie nicht auf die Sachen achtgeben, die Ihnen Kunden geben."* [GerGer] (transl.: I find it rather disappointing that you don't take care of things customers give you.)

(B4) *"Are you crazy, man?"* [GerEng] *"...You crazy piece of shit."* [GerEng]

5.2.4.3.3. Requesting repair

A complainer can also choose to address some sort of repair in the complaint. Requests for repair are "pre-event acts" (Blum-Kulka, 1991), produced to affect the hearer's future behavior. What specifically the complainer wants to repair depends on the context. Requests tend to vary depending on whether repair can still be achieved or not. If immediate repair by the hearer is possible, complainers will expect the complainees to solve the problem. In other cases, in which the damage is already done and irreversible, complainers might want to point out the problem to avoid similar occurrences in the future. An apology and justification of why the complainees has caused the problem might also be in place. Exactly what kind of repair the complainer wants to obtain depends on the specific situation. Often, complainers point out what they expect the complainees to do, as the following examples illustrate:

"Don't you want to apologize?" (R2) [GerEng]

"Dafür mußt du mich wenigstens zu einem Drink einladen. Das bist du mir schuldig." (R3) [GerGer] (transl.: For doing that, you at least need to invite me for a drink. You owe me that.)

"Maybe you should keep a better eye on him."(R3) [CanEng]

"I'd really appreciate if you could have that letter for me by tomorrow." (R2) [CanEng]

In this study, requests for repair are sub-divided into (R1) hint at repair, (R2) indirectly request repair, (R3) directly request repair, and (R4) force repair. A rather indirect utterance is less imposing on the hearer because it leaves room for the hearer to deny the request without losing face while a direct utterance leaves no doubt about what is requested and to whom the request is made. The following examples illustrate directness levels R1 through R3 in response to situation 10 (stingy friend). Example R4 is taken from situation 6 (dirty roommate):

(R1) “...*Oh, I forgot my wallet.*” [CanEng]

(R2) “*Marsha, is it possible that you pay today?*” [GerEng]

(R3) “...*I think you should pay for the groceries now.*” [GerGer]
(transl.: ...and finally start to clean up here now.)

(R4) “...*If you're not going to clean the kitchen next time, I think you have to go and move out.*” [GerEng]

5.2.4.3.4. Justifying

In this study, justifications are regarded as components of the functional set of complaining because they are central to the argumentation. The logical reasoning in complaints is of great importance and forms a central part of the complaint strategies. This is why it is argued here that justifications should not be merely regarded as supportive moves, which mitigate the force of an utterance similar to the use of modality markers (as done for example in the CCSARP¹¹). Rather, they should be considered as being central components and of equal importance as the other functional categories.

Justifications are divided into those that justify the speaker's complaint by supplying reasons why the complaint is appropriate and necessary (speaker perspective) and those that supply or ask for possible justifications of why the hearer may have caused the problem (hearer perspective). In the speaker perspective, the complainer can supply two different kinds of justifications, those that are indirectly related to the problem and those that are directly related to it. In indirect justifications, the

¹¹ In the CCSARP and a number of later studies based on that coding scheme, justifications were viewed as optional additions to the main acts by which speakers tend to mitigate or aggravate the force of an utterance (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989).

complainer refers to special circumstances that cause him or her to complain. In this regard, these justifications supply reasons as to why the speaker's special situation have caused the complaint. Direct justifications, on the other hand, tend to state situational facts that point out that the complaine'e's actions were offensive. In the hearer perspective, the complainer either speculates about possible reasons the complaine'e might have had for causing the problem, or he or she directly inquires about the complaine'e's reasons. The first strategy was rated as less direct because the speaker shows some understanding by presupposing reasons for the complaine'e's wrong-doing. In the second strategy, however, the speaker demands justification by the hearer. These inquiries tend to be rather inquisitive, posed by more or less aggressive questions. This intensifies the force on the complaine'e to supply an answer that justifies his or her actions.

Consider the following justifications in response to situations 8 (loud neighbors) and 3 (expensive dry cleaner's):

Speaker perspective:

(JS1) "*...because I have important things to do in the morning.*" [CanEng]

(JS2) "*...Schließlich ist es schon mitten in der Nacht.*" [GerGer]
(transl.: After all, it's already the middle of the night.)

Hearer perspective:

(JH1) "*I was wondering if there's any confusion there...*" [CanEng]

(JH2) "*... so why am I scheduled?*" [GerEng]

Most justifications provide supporting arguments for the statement of the problem and/or the need for repair. However, in indirect complaints they frequently stand alone. Consider the following two reactions to situation 11 (late order on Valentine's Day):

(1) "*Excuse me, Miss. Have you forgotten us?*" (JH1 + P1 + B1) [GerEng]

(2) "*Excuse me, do you remember me? We ordered that wine and pasta a long time ago.*" (P2) *Would you check that order? (R2) I mean, I feel like you've forgotten us (JH1 + B1).*" [GerEng]

The utterances "*Have you forgotten us?*" and "*...I feel like you've forgotten us.*" serve different functions in these two complaints depending on their positioning in the interactional sequence. The first utterance "*Have you forgotten us?*" makes up the

entire complaint. It therefore functions as the justification of a problem that is indirectly conveyed in the statement. Consequently, this utterance were coded for categories JH1 + P1. The second complaint “*I feel like you’ve forgotten us,*” on the other hand, is preceded by a statement of the problem and a request and serves as a justification of both. Since the speaker directly referred to these complaint categories before he produces the justification, the utterance was coded as JH1 only.

5.2.5. Modality markers

Speakers can further adjust their utterances through the use of modifying phrases or words, which intensify or soften the pragmatic force conveyed in a speech act. Modality markers are often divided into *upgraders* and *downgraders* (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989; House & Kasper, 1981).

The contrastive pragmatic goals a speaker has when uttering a complaint (Leech, 1983) cause speakers to use both kinds of modifiers concurrently. The speaker’s need to persuade the hearer that there is a problem requires intensification while at the same time, concerns for politeness (the hearer’s face needs) require mitigation of the impositive force of the complaint. At the extreme ends of the directness scale, indirect complaints are often further mitigated by the use of downgraders, while very direct complaints tend to gain in force and face threat through the use of upgraders.

Consider the following complaint without modality markers:

“Can you turn the music down? I have to get up early and I can’t sleep. It’s coming through the walls good. So can you turn it down?” [CanEng]

The complaint changes in its intensity when modality markers are used. The following modality markers were used in this complaint:

“Do you think (appealer = downgrader) you can turn the music down a little (understater = downgrader)? I have to get up really (intensifier = upgrader) early and I can’t really (hedge = downgrader) sleep. It’s coming through the walls pretty (hedge = downgrader) good. So can you turn it down a little (understater = downgrader)?”

This example, taken from the data of this study in situation 8, shows that downgraders tend to mitigate the force of an utterance while upgraders intensify the proposition. It also reveals that the function of modality markers depends on the context in which it is

used. The modifier *really* functions as an intensifier in the utterance “*I have to get up really early,*” but it functions as a hedge in the following sentence “*I can’t really sleep.*”

The coding of the modality markers is mainly adapted from the CCSARP coding manual (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989) and from House and Kasper (1981). A few additional modifiers from other studies are used, as indicated below.

I. Upgraders:

Commitment indicators, also called **plus committers**, point out the speaker’s special engagement in the proposition (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285). (E.g. “I’m *sure/certain/positive* that I told you about it.” “*Ich weiß wirklich/ gewiß/ganz bestimmt/doch echt/bin mir sicher, daß ich Ihnen davon erzählt habe.*”)

Intensifiers are adverbial modifiers that intensify “certain elements of the proposition” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 285). (E.g. “I’m *really/very/enormously/so/quite* upset about you.” “Das ist *echt/so eine/solch eine/doch wirklich* ‘ne Sauerei!” “Das sieht ja hier *entsetzlich/furchtbar/schrecklich* aus!”)

The use of **lexical upgraders** shows a strong negative attitude by the speaker (House and Kasper, 1981, p. 170). (E.g. “You’re *crazy/an idiot/an asshole.*” “Look at this *mess/disaster.*” “Das sieht ja hier aus wie *ein Saustall/Schweinstall!*”)

II. Downgraders:

Appealers and **cajolers** function at the “interpersonal level of discourse” (Trosborg, 1987). **Appealers**, also referred to as **consultative devices**, are used to elicit a response from the hearer and/or to show the speaker’s intention to restore or retain a harmonious relationship with the listener. (E.g. “...*so it would be great if you could pay for the next shopping, okay?*” “*Meinst du nicht, daß du auch mal dran bist was zu unser’m Haushalt beizutragen?*”)

Cajolers show the speaker's concern for harmony. (E.g. "You see/you know/look, I've been doing the all the cleaning around here." "Weißt du/sieh mal, ich habe schon die ganze letzte Zeit alles saubergemacht hier.")

An **all-inclusive perspective** serves to "defocalize" the role of the complainer and/or that of the complaine (Trosborg, 1995, p. 322f). The impact of requests and complaints on the hearer is downtoned because both speech acts decrease in their focus on the complaine. The use of an all-inclusive perspective also reveals solidarity between the interlocutors. (E.g. "Let's go and clean, clean the kitchen..." "We don't want that – we don't want that people get a wrong impression of our house cleaning attitude.")

Sweeteners mitigate the degree of face threat to the complaine by pointing out a positive aspect before the speaker conveys the main proposition. (E.g. "Sie haben ja 'nen tollen Hund, aber..." (transl.: You have a nice dog, but...) "Du kannst ja ganz toll snow-boarden, aber..." (transl.: You are great at snow-boarding, but...)). Showing positive appreciation for past or future actions by the speaker also 'sweetens' an utterance and lowers the face-threat to the hearer. (E.g. "Das wäre echt nett." (transl.: That would be really nice.))

Downtoners express the speaker's tentativeness in that they "modulate the impact ... on the hearer" (Blum-Kulka et al.1989, p. 284). (E.g. "Could you possibly/just/simplely/perhaps/maybe turn down the music?" "Kannst Du vielleicht/einfach mal/ja mal/mal/eben/ nur mal die Musik leiser machen?")

Subjectivizers, also referred to as **minus committers**, indicate the speaker's subjective feelings toward proposition and lower the degree to which S is committed toward the proposition (Morrow, 1996). (E.g. "I think/suppose/guess/believe/I'm afraid I need to ask you to" "Ich glaube/meine/denke das geht doch wohl zu weit.")

Politeness markers reveal deference to the interlocutor and allude to the speaker's pledge for the hearer's cooperation (House & Kasper, 1981, p. 166). (E.g. "If you could please get it in by then..." "I'd appreciate it if you found time to write the letter." "Räum bitte die Küche auf.")

Through the use of **hedges** a speaker avoids a distinct statement of the proposition, thereby decreasing the provocation of the hearer (House & Kasper, 1981, p. 167). (E.g. "You kind of/sort of/somehow play a lot of music." "Ich kann irgendwie bei dieser lauten Musik nicht schlafen.")

Understaters are adverbial modifiers that minimize the state of affairs the speaker refers to in the proposition and thus the impact it has on the hearer (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 167). (E.g. "Could you be a little more quiet?" "You should turn down the music a little bit." "Der Unterricht ist ein bißchen/etwas zu schwierig für uns." (transl.: The instruction is a little too difficult for us.)

Through the use of **agent avoiders**, the speaker avoids mentioning the involved sides. (E.g. "Vielleicht könnte man am Unterricht was ändern." transl.: "Maybe one could change something about the class.")

The use of **imposition acknowledgements** reveals S's awareness that imposes on H (Morrow, 1995). (E.g. "I hope you don't mind, but...", "Would you mind...?", "Do you think you could...?")

Preparators direct the conversation toward the intended topic. (E.g. "Rob, I think we need to talk." "Du Berta, ich muß mal mir Dir reden." (transl.: Berta, I need to talk to you.)

Besides lexical and phrasal downgraders, there is a variety of other possibilities for speakers to modify the impact of their messages. In their coding manual for the CCSARP, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) also mention the use of grammatical aspect, the

conditional and subjective form, negation, time intensifiers, and the perspective used (hearer-oriented versus speaker-oriented utterances). Speakers also modify their messages through prosodic means such as intonation, stress, and pauses to achieve certain intended effects. While all these additional features add to the force an utterance, an analysis would by far exceed the scope of this study.

5.3. Summary

This chapter discussed the approach to the complaint data and the frameworks that were used in the analysis. The first part of this chapter described the importance of analyzing this data in the pragmatic context to derive an analysis that truly reflects speakers' pragmatic strategies. The second part presented the pragmatic strategies potential complainers decide upon when they are faced with a problem. These include the decision whether to actually realize a complaint or whether to opt out, the selection of the complaint categories that are addressed, the level of directness of these categories, and finally the selection of modality markers and their sub-groups.

Chapter 6: Results of the data analysis

The main objective of the data analysis is to compare the three groups on their differences in the realization of complaints and to investigate factors that might lead to cross-cultural variation. The analysis is divided into three main focus areas, the respondents' feedback about situational factors and their subsequent approach to the situation, the pragmalinguistic analysis is concerned with the realization of the complaints, and sociopragmatic analysis investigates the effect of social constellations on complaint behavior.

6.1. Respondent feedback

This section focuses on the respondents' feedback. Following the response to each situation, the participants were asked to rate the degree of frustration resulting from the problem. They were also asked whether they would complain in real life or not, and how explicit they rated the complaint they produced on tape.

6.1.1. Degree of frustration

The degree of frustration is the mean of two ratings, (a) the perceived severity of the consequences resulting from the situations and (b) the perceived degree of the complainees' wrongdoing in the situation. Both of these factors were rated by the participants on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. It was assumed that the higher the level of frustration, the more direct the strategies chosen to complain. The rationale of these ratings was discussed in detail in section 5.2.1. Figure 6.1 portrays the means for the level of frustration in each of the situations:

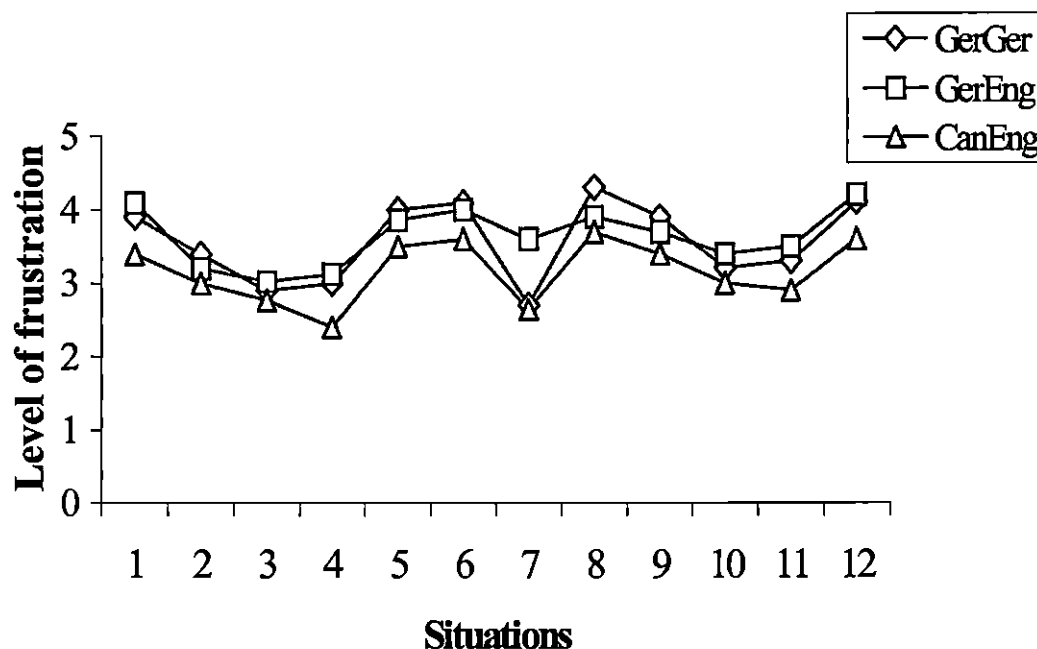


Figure 6.1. Degree of frustration

An analysis of variance was performed across all situations. The difference between the three groups was found to be significant [$F(2, 33) = 3.41, p = 0.045$]¹². In the *post hoc* analysis¹³, which compared the pairs of groups, the critical t value at which the statistical significance is reached was $t_{.05}(33) = \pm 2.04$. Differences were not significant between the two groups of Germans ($t = 0.24, p > .50$). The group of Canadian NSs consistently rated the situations as less frustrating than both German groups did. The differences between both groups of Germans and the group of Canadians were found to be significant (GerGer/CanEng: $t = 2.13, p < .05$; GerEng/CanEng: $t = 4.38, p < .001$).

A closer look at this graph reveals that the only situation that showed divergence from these trends was situation 7 (lost sweater). In this situation, the group of NNSs rated this situation as more frustrating than the German group. One reason for the higher frustration of the group of ESL learners might be the fact that this group has higher expectations of North American service industry. It is a well-known fact to

¹² Numbers for p -values are rounded to the nearest 1000th.

¹³ Fisher's protected t -test was used for all *post hoc* analyses based on Anovas.

Germans that North American businesses provide better customer-service. This might have caused the group of NNSs to set higher standards for satisfactory service in the Canadian setting.

The fact that Canadians were less frustrated with the situation suggests that they were less 'worked up' by the situations. This is an important fact to consider in the further analysis of the complaining strategies. If Canadians are less frustrated by the situations, they will most likely choose less direct strategies or not complain at all. Differences in the use of complaining strategies are discussed next.

6.1.2. Opting out of the complaint

All participants were asked whether they would have complained if they were faced with these complaints in real life or not. Figure 6.2 shows the number of participants in each group who indicated that they would have opted out of the complaint.

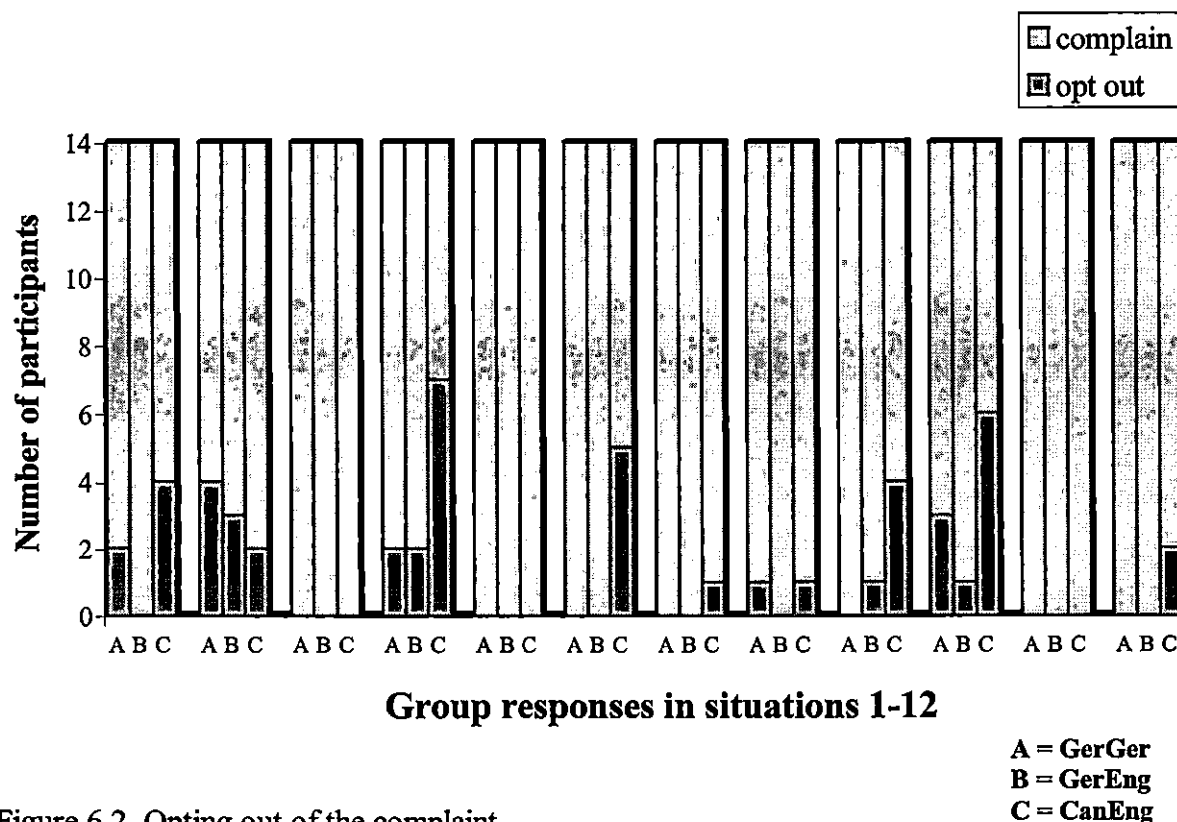


Figure 6.2. Opting out of the complaint.

A Chi-square analysis of the groups' decisions to opt out of the complaint was used for this categorical data. It revealed significant differences between the three groups [$\chi^2(2) = 22.91, p < .001$]. Analyses on the paired differences revealed no significance between both groups of Germans (GerGer/GerEng: $\chi^2(1) = 1.38, p > .10$). A significant difference was found when each of the two German groups was compared to the Canadian group (GerGer/CanEng: $\chi^2(1) = 10.48, p < .01$, GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2(1) = 18.13, p < .001$].

The ESL learners showed a slight trend to opt out more frequently than the German NSs did. This might have been caused by the fact that they are guests in a foreign country and therefore more concerned not to start arguments with natives of the host country. In post-discussions, their feedback was especially strong concerning situation 2 (difficult statistics class). Many respondents said that they might have not gone to the professor because they were just adjusting to the different university system and that their problems might have been connected with being new and having to adjust to taking classes in a foreign language. However, no significant difference was found between both German groups.

Figure 6.2 shows that Canadians indicated more often that they would have opted out of the complaint. This is true for all situations, except for situation 2 (difficult statistics class). In this situation, both German groups opted out of the complaint more often. This finding makes sense in the light of the different university systems in Canada and Germany. In Germany, students are used to big lectures and usually have little contact to the professors. In Canada, classes tend to be smaller and the exchange between professors and students about course matters is more common.

6.1.3. Explicitness of the complaint

After the respondents had produced a complaint, they were asked to rate how strong their complaint was. Since Canadians tend to prefer indirect strategies over more direct ones, it was speculated that they might in fact be more sensitive to direct strategies. This would cause them to perceive a certain level of directness as stronger than Germans would perceive the same level. While the actual analysis of the directness of the complaint strategies is discussed in section 6.1.1.2.2, it is interesting to view the groups'

directness ratings of their own responses. Figure 6.3 illustrates the means of the estimated degree of directness as estimated by the complainers:

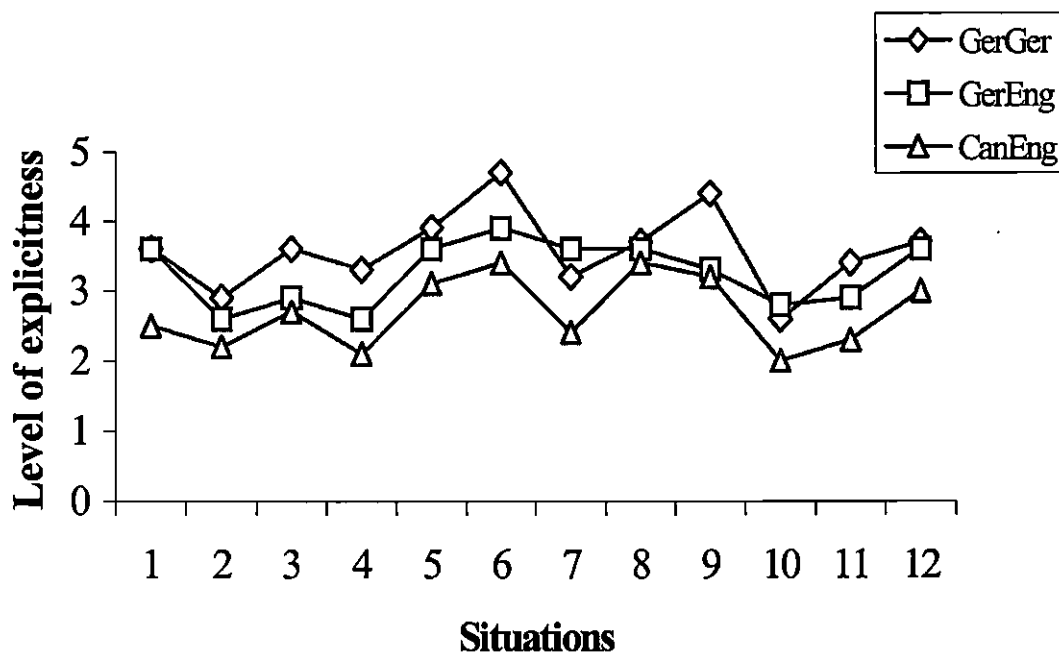


Figure 6.3. Explicitness of the complaint.

An overall comparison of the mean ratings across the situations shows that the Canadian NSs rated the directness of their complaints consistently lower than did the two groups of Germans. The ESL learners tended to rate the explicitness with which they produced the complaints as less direct than the group of German NSs did.

An analysis of variance was performed across the three groups. The difference between the three groups was found to be significant [$F(2, 33) = 9.61, p = 0.001$]. The critical t value at which statistical significance is reached was $t_{.05}(33) = \pm 2.04$. No significant difference was found in the comparison of two groups of Germans ($t = 1.70, p > .10$). Differences were found to be significant between both groups of Germans in comparison to the Canadian group (GerGer/ CanEng: $t = 4.38, p < .001$; GerEng/CanEng: $t = -2.69, p < .02$).

6.1.4. Discussion

The respondents' feedback revealed interesting differences in their perception of the complaint situations and the subsequent realization of the complaints. The respondents were asked (1) about the level of frustration resulting from each of the situations, (2) whether they would have complained if each of these situations had occurred in real-life, and (3) how strong they estimated their responses.

The whole reaction process by a complainer highly depends on the level of frustration. In other words, the more the potential complainer is annoyed by the situation, the more likely is the realization of the complaint and the stronger the reaction. The analysis of the level of frustration of the three groups showed that the Canadian group perceived each of the situations as less frustrating and that the difference between both groups of Germans and the Canadians were significant. This finding confirms the initial hypothesis that Germans would perceive the complaint situations as more severe.

While all groups showed similar trends in their frustration of the situations relative to each other, the Canadians did not get as 'wound up' as the two German groups did. This might have been part of the reason why the Canadians indicated more often that they would have opted out of the complaint in real life. Upon being asked why they would have remained silent if they felt unjustly treated, one recurring answer of the Canadians was that they were not confrontational. In other words, they did not want to cause a conflict with the interlocutor and rather endured the consequences and suppressed their anger. This finding confirms the original hypothesis that the Canadian group would opt out of the complaint more frequently than the other two groups. It also makes sense in the light of the previous results that Canadians are less frustrated and see less reason for starting an argument.

The ratings of explicitness revealed that the three groups perceived the directness with which they formed the complaints as different. Both German groups rated their complaints as being more explicit than the group of Canadians did. This finding does not support the original hypothesis. While it was assumed that Germans would rate the directness with which they approach the situations as lower, possibly as low as the Canadian group, the results indicate that both Germans were aware of the fact that they used a higher level of directness in their complaints. This is an interesting finding

concerning the question whether speakers are actually aware of how much directness they use. The next section reveals whether the respondents' perceptions of the degree of explicitness used in the complaints actually holds true.

6.2. Pragmalinguistic analysis

This section is concerned with the analysis of the recorded complaint responses and comparisons of these results across the three groups. The complaints are analyzed on their length, the use of complaint categories with their directness levels, as well as the use of phrasal and lexical modality markers. Statistical analyses were used to measure the significance of differences. For all statistical measures a confidence level of 95% was used. If differences were found to be significant across all three groups, post hoc tests were performed to locate the where exactly the variation occurred.

6.2.1. Length of complaints

The three groups vary in the amount of strategies they used to produce the complaint. As discussed in section 5.2.4.1, an utterance is defined as those strings of speech that address the same complaint categorie(s) with the same level of directness. The average length of complaints is portrayed in Figure 6.4:

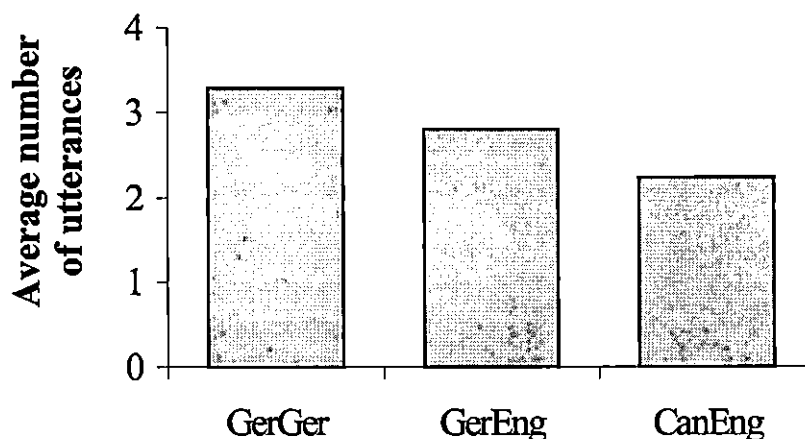


Figure 6.4. Length of the complaints.

A comparison of the average number of utterances across all situations reveals that the group of German NSs used an average of 3.29 utterances per complaint, compared to 2.8 by the German ESL learners and 2.24 by the group of Canadians.

An analysis of variance was performed on the total utterances per situation across groups. The difference was found to be significant [$F(2, 33) = 10.21, p = 0.000$]. The post hoc *t*-test revealed significant differences across all three groups. The critical *t* value at which statistical significance is reached was $t_{.05}(33) = \pm 2.04$. A comparison across pairs of groups revealed significant differences [GerGer/GerEng: $t = 2.14, p < .05$, GerGer/CanEng: $t = 4.51, p < 0.001$, CanEng/GerEng: $t = -2.37, p < .05$].

The statistical calculations confirm the observed trend that the differences of the length of complaints between both groups of NSs are great. The ESL group proved to be different from both groups of NSs in their length of complaints. The learners' average complaint length lied in between both groups of NSs, as the calculated *p*-values confirmed. Exactly which of the complaint categories the three groups addressed in these utterances is discussed next.

6.2.2. Use of complaint categories with levels of directness

In the examinations that investigate the use of directness levels, only the most direct formulas of a category used in a complaint are incorporated. Multiple counts within one complaint would distort the results because especially those complaints that are more direct tended to be more repetitive. Table 6.1 presents the strategies that were employed by the three groups in order to realize the complaints.

Table 6.1
Distribution of complaint strategies with levels of directness (in %).

Complaint Categories	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng
Justifying			
Speaker's actions:			
JS1	12.2	13.4	22.8
JS2	60.9	53.5	50.4
Hearer's actions:			
JH1	14.7	16.9	12.2
JH2	12.2	16.2	14.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Requesting repair			
R1	3.5	2.3	15.7
R2	55.6	55.8	60.0
R3	31.0	29.5	22.6
R4	9.9	12.4	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Addressing the problem			
P0	2.4	3.0	7.7
P1	32.7	32.7	51.8
P2	36.3	41.1	31.5
P3	15.5	14.3	6.5
P4	13.1	8.9	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Assigning blame			
B0	13.7	17.9	42.2
B1	53.0	52.4	39.3
B2	19.6	17.8	16.7
B3	10.7	8.3	1.8
B4	3.0	3.6	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note. Total number of strategies used:

Justifying: GerGer: n=156, GerEng: n=142, CanEng: n=123

Requesting repair: GerGer: n=142, GerEng: n=129, CanEng: n=115

Addressing the problem: all groups: n=168

Assigning blame: all groups: n=168

The distribution of these levels of directness is discussed individually for each complaint category. For each of the categories, the groups' preferences for directness levels are discussed. Chi-square analyses contrast the three groups on their use of the sub-strategies in each of the complaint categories. Examples are used throughout the discussion to illustrate the various levels of directness.

6.2.2.1. Addressing the problem

Speakers use this category to refer to a condition or action that causes them trouble. The manner in which this 'trouble spot' is addressed has many different shades. On the most indirect end of the scale, complainers can choose to avoid stating a problem altogether (P0) or they can indirectly refer to the problem through the use of one or more of the other complaint categories or the use of other hints (P1). More direct statements of the problem involve the direct reference to the problem (P2), the ill consequences the complainer has to face (P3), or negative evaluations of the problem and/or the consequences (P4). The analysis of the complaint behavior of the three groups in this category showed differences in the groups' preferences for directness. Figure 6.5 reveals the distribution of the directness levels.

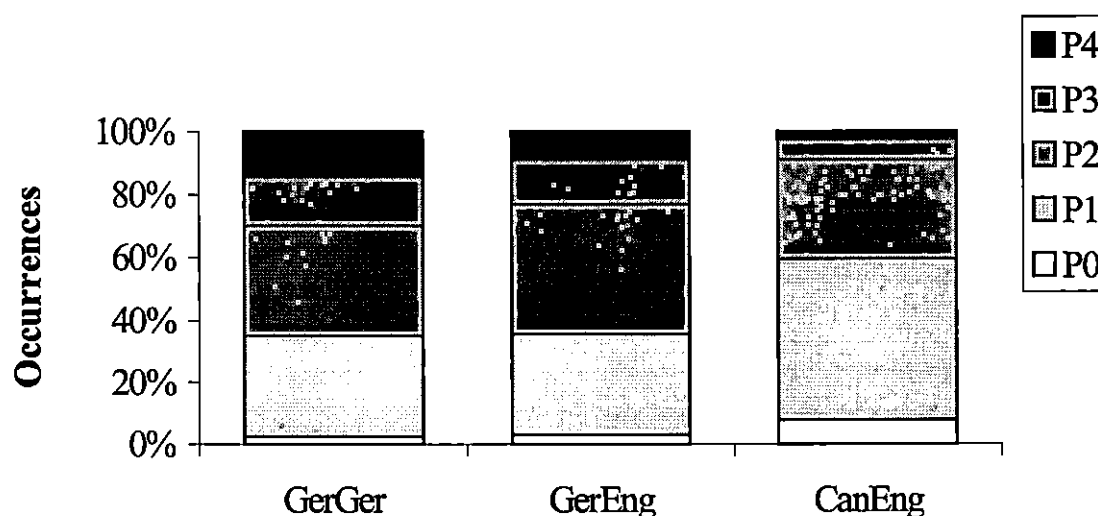


Figure 6.5. Addressing the problem

A comparison of the groups' choices of directness revealed significant differences between the three groups [GerGer/GerEng/ CanEng: $\chi^2 (8) = 39.74, p < .001$]. The two groups of Germans showed an overall similar behavior, the ESL group preferred slightly less direct statements. However, these differences were not at a level of significance [GerGer/GerEng: $\chi^2 (4) = 3.06, p > .10$]. Differences were found to be significant when each of the two German groups was compared to the Canadian group [GerGer/CanEng: $\chi^2 (4) = 32.66, p < .001$; GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2 (4) = 23.06, p < .001$].

Generally, Canadians preferred more indirect statements. They used the strategy P0 (no statement of the problem) in 7.7% of the instances, which is more than twice the percentage of observations made for both German groups (GerGer: 2.4%, GerEng: 3.0%). Statements of the problem were coded as indirect (P1) if complainers hinted at the problem or if they used other strategies, which indirectly addressed the problem. Canadians preferred to use indirect statements over more direct ones. This strategy appeared in 51.8% of the occurrences in the Canadian group, as opposed to 32.7% in the German groups.

Both groups of Germans preferred to use more direct statements, which described the problem (P2), the consequences (P3) or supplied negative evaluations of the problem and/or the consequences (P4). Strategy P2 was most often observed in the ESL data (41.1%). It occurred with medium frequency in the German NS data (36.3%), and it was used the least by the Canadians (31.5%). The distribution shows a relatively low level of complaints, which addressed the consequences resulting from the problem (GerGer: 15.5%, GerEng: 14.3%, CanEng: 6.5%). Most likely, speakers made more use of statements of the problem because in half of the situations the damage was not done yet, so that the complainees could still fix it. For example, in situation 6 (dirty roommate), the roommate will potentially clean the kitchen after the complaint has been realized and straighten up the kitchen before the Birthday guests arrive. Similarly, in situation 3 (expensive dry cleaner's), the clerk has the potential to reduce the price for the blanket to its usual rate. In other situations, however, the damage was done and the consequences were described rather explicitly. In situation 1, (reckless snowboarder), both German groups tended to describe in great detail how they fell and what they hurt.

The most direct strategies in this category are those utterances in which the complainers openly supplied negative value judgments of the situations. These negative evaluations of the problem and/or the consequences occurred most often in the German NS data (13.1%). The ESL group chose to use this strategy 8.9% of the time. Canadians used this strategy hardly ever (2.5%).

6.2.2.2. Assigning blame

Speakers can adjust the amount of blame they place on the hearer in their complaints. By assigning blame, the speaker directly or indirectly confronts the hearer with the fact that he or she is responsible for the problem. This makes the overall complaint more forceful, but it also increases the face-threat to the hearer. Figure 6.6 illustrates the distribution of the various directness levels across the three groups.

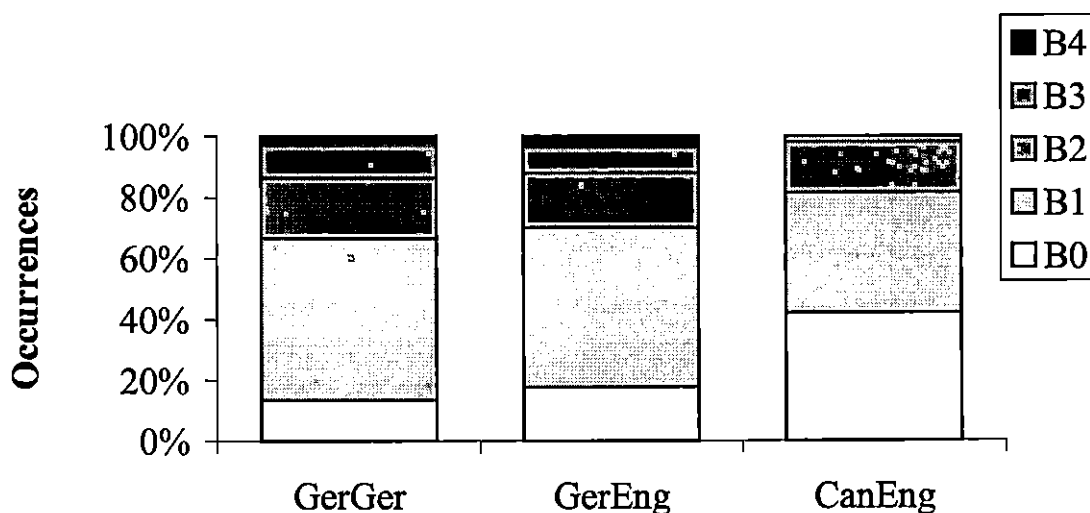


Figure 6.6. Assigning blame

The comparison reveals that Canadians preferred to use less direct strategies than the German NSs and the German ESL learners did. The analysis of variance between all three groups revealed significant differences [GerGer/GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2(8) = 53.1$, $p < .001$]. The analysis of the individual groups showed great similarity between both German groups [GerGer/GerEng: $\chi^2(4) = 1.61$, $p > .10$]. Significant differences were

found when each one of the German groups was compared to the Canadian group [GerGer/CanEng: $\chi^2(4) = 44.07, p < .001$; GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2(4) = 32.96, p < .001$].

Canadians showed a strong preference to use no blame (B0) or indirect blame (B1). Complaints were coded in the category B0 in those cases, in which the problem was described without addressing that the hearer was responsible for it. The following distribution of B0 and B1 was observed: GerGer: 13.7% and 53.0%, GerEng: 17.9% and 52.4%, CanEng: 42.2% and 39.3% respectively.

Both groups of Germans tended to make more use of the more direct categories. In many of the instances in which Canadians preferred to assign no blame, German NSs and learners tended to use indirect blame (B1). The Germans also made more use of the two most direct categories, which point out the speaker's unfavorable opinion about the complaine'e's actions (B3) or the complaine'e as a person (B4). The Canadians rarely used a negative evaluation of the hearer's actions (1.8% of the time), and they never chose to negatively evaluate the hearer's personality. The German groups, in contrast, made more use of both of these strategies. The German NSs used B3 in 10.7% and B4 3% of the instances. The ESL group used B3 8.3% and B4 3.6% of the time.

6.2.2.3. Requesting repair

As discussed earlier, complainers often do not only want to point out that they have a problem, but in many situations, they will also ask the complaine'e to fix it. The force, with which the complainer insists that the hearer repair the situation, varies. Complainers can make hints (R1), they can indirectly request repair (R2), they can choose to request repair in a direct manner (R3), or they can pose threats (R4). Figure 6.7 presents the distribution of the different levels of directness across the groups:

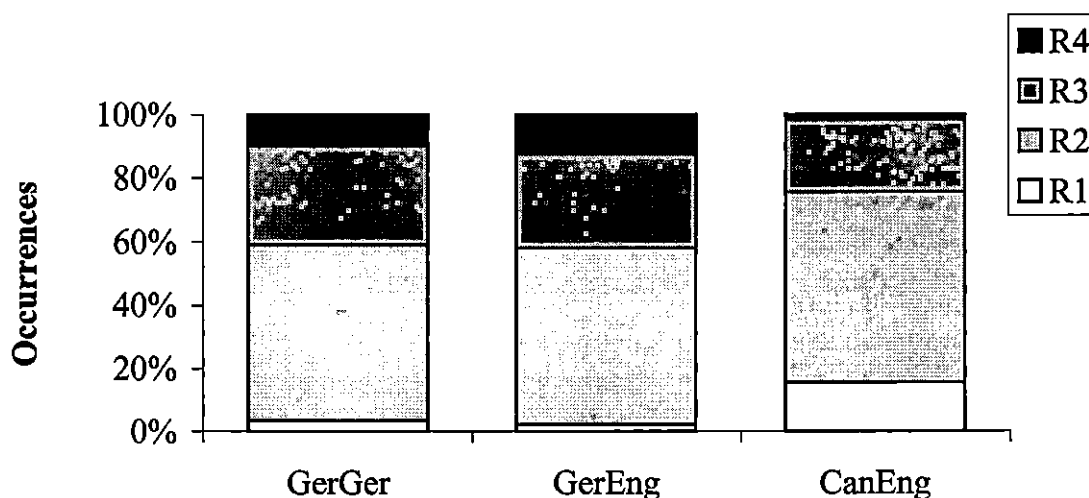


Figure 6.7. Requesting repair

A comparison of the groups' choices of directness levels in their requests revealed significant differences between the three groups [GerGer/GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2(6) = 30.44, p < .001$]. The two German groups were found to show great resemblance [GerGer/GerEng: $\chi^2(3) = 0.77, p > .10$]. Significant differences were found between each of the two German groups was compared to the Canadian group [GerGer/CanEng: $\chi^2(3) = 19.03, p < .001$, GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2(3) = 23.17, p < .001$].

The group of Canadians preferred more indirect strategies. Specifically, they made more use of the most indirect category R1 [GerGer: 3.5%, GerEng: 2.3%, and CanEng: 15.7%]. Indirect requests (R2) were used most by all three groups (GerGer: 55.6%, GerEng: 55.8%, CanEng: 60.0%). If complainers wanted to use more force to achieve repair, they used direct requests (R3). The following distribution of this category was observed: GerGer: 31%, GerEng: 29.5%, CanEng: 22.6%. Canadians made the least use of strategy R4 (GerGer 9.9%, GerEng: 12.4%, and CanEng: 1.7%). These threats are the most powerful, but at the same time the most face-threatening to the hearer. After all, the complainer basically indicates that he or she will cause unpleasant consequences to the complaine if the latter does not achieve to improve the situation.

6.2.2.4. Justifying

Speakers often use justifications as arguments that emphasize other complaint propositions. The presentation of this complaint category with its sub-strategies in section 5.2.4 pointed out that speakers can adopt up two different perspectives. They can either address their own complaint behavior or they can address the complaine'e's prior actions that caused the problem. It was found that each of the two justification perspectives have two directness levels. The distribution of these categories proved to be very similar across the three groups of respondents, as illustrated in Figure 6.8.

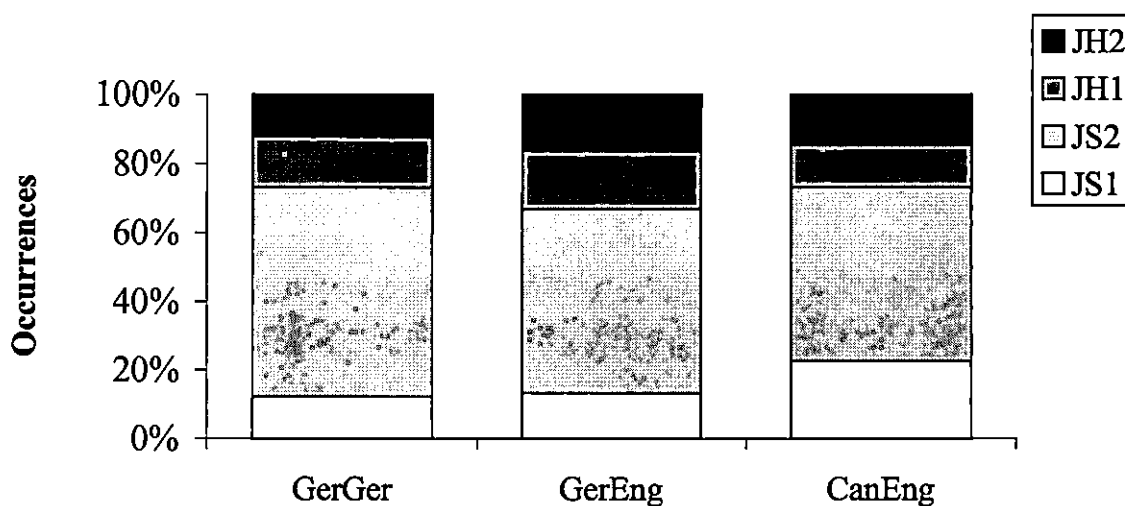


Figure 6.8. Justifying

A comparison of the groups' choices of directness levels in their justification strategies confirmed that there were no significant differences between the three groups [GerGer/GerEng/CanEng: $\chi^2(6) = 8.99, p > .10$]. All groups made more use of the justifications that addressed their own position (JS1 and JS2). They all used this perspective more than 66% of the time. Of the two directness levels, all groups made most use of the more direct strategy, JS2. This strategy had the following distribution across groups: GerGer: 60.9%, GerEng: 53.5%, CanEng: 50.4%. The more indirect category, JS1, was used about 13% of the time by the two groups of Germans and almost twice as often, in 22.8% of the instances, by the Canadians. Similarities were also found in the groups' use of those utterances that addressed the complaine'e's

involvement in the problem. All groups made about equal use of both directness levels. They used both directness levels of the speaker perspective about equally. (JH1: 14.7% (GerGer), 16.8% (GerEng), and 12.2% (CanEng). JH2: 12.2% (GerGer), 16.2% (GerEng), and 14.6% (CanEng)).

6.2.2.5. Discussion

The analysis of the four complaint categories revealed a strong pattern in the use of directness across the four complaint categories by the three groups under investigation. In all of the categories, both groups of Germans showed significant resemblance, with the English NNSs scoring only slightly lower in directness than the German NSs. In all four categories, both groups of Germans made use of more direct strategies, while Canadians preferred indirect ones. These differences were not found to be significant for the justifications, but they were significant in all the other three complaint categories, ‘addressing the problem,’ ‘assigning blame,’ and ‘requesting repair.’

In the complaint categories, ‘assigning blame’ and ‘requesting repair,’ the complainer directs his or her complaint directly to the complaine. When blame is used, the hearer’s involvement in the problem is addressed and when a request for repair is made, the hearer is asked to repair the situation. Consequently, both categories involve a high degree of face-threat to the hearer. The group of Canadians minimized the threat to the hearer’s face by using rather indirect strategies. Both groups of Germans used higher levels of directness, which posed a greater face-threat to the complaine.

The complaint category ‘assigning blame’ might be the most confrontational one of the four complaint categories because the complaine’s involvement in the problem is addressed. The more direct the blame, the more the hearer feels personally attacked because the speaker is directly pointing out that the hearer is responsible for the unfavorable situation. Therefore, it is more likely that these kinds of complaints will cause open conflict, or at least start a heated discussion about the situation, especially among status equals. For example, in situation 6 (dirty roommate), it is questionable whether complainees will start to clean up after they have been personally attacked. Chances are that they will start to make counter-arguments that the complainer is *too*

clean and *too* picky about everything, or that they are so mad that they will walk out and slam the door.

For the analysis, the categories 'addressing the problem' and 'assigning blame' were assigned 'zero-levels.' Speakers that used these strategies did not produce complaints because they did not state that there was a problem (P0), or, if they stated a problem, they did not always blame the hearer for it. Instead, they stated that the problem was due to their own failures. Canadians used these two strategies more frequently than both German groups. This difference was especially great in the category 'assigning blame,' where Canadians chose not to assign blame more than 40% of the time, more than twice as often as both German groups did. The strategies B0 and P0 are the least face-threatening and consequently the most hearer-friendly strategies because the speakers do not assign any blame to the hearer. In this respect it is important to note that over 40% of the Canadian responses might have not been perceived as complaints by the hearer.

This outcome is of great importance for the ESL learners. The ESL learners have not adjusted to a lower level of directness through their language instruction or their stay abroad (the reader is reminded that all ESL participants had stayed a minimum of 3 months in Canada prior to the data collection). The differences between the ESL learners and the Canadians also suggest that Canadians might not appreciate the learners' use of direct strategies when they receive such direct complaints. Since Canadians are not confrontational in their complaints, it can be surmised that they will not appreciate direct confrontation from others either.

The findings concerning the use of directness in the four complaint categories confirmed the original hypothesis that Canadians would use more indirect complaint strategies and that German native speakers would opt for more direct ones. While the ESL group was expected to be even more direct than the German NSs, the results revealed that their use of directness strongly resembled the group of German NSs. The respondents' good control over purely linguistic forms such as vocabulary and grammar might have kept the influence of additional second learning features, which might have further increased the directness of the complaints, to a minimum.

The findings also confirmed the respondents' ratings of their own complaints from the first section, which covered the respondents' feedback about the complaint

situations and their reactions. The different use of directness makes sense in light of the fact that Canadians are less frustrated than Germans by the complaint situations. If complainers don't feel as strongly about the situations, they do not get as wound up and feel less compelled to speak their mind about the incident.

6.2.3. Modality markers

Modality markers fine-tune the directness of complaints by altering the ultimate force of the utterance. They can mitigate or increase the intensity of an utterance. Speakers can use one or more modality markers to further adjust the directness of an utterance. Upgraders and downgraders frequently occur together, increasing and decreasing the utterances at the same time. The following utterance demonstrates this use: *...so I'm really (upgrader) a bit (downgrader) angry about it.* [GerEng].

This analysis is restricted to the use of lexical and phrasal modality markers. It leaves aside the use of other modality markers such as syntactic structures, prosodic means, and the use of the complaint perspective.

6.2.3.1. Use of upgraders and downgraders

The three groups differed in the amount of modality markers they used. Table 6.2 shows the groups' average use of upgraders and downgraders per utterance (raw scores).

Table 6.2

Frequency of modality markers per utterance

	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng
Upgraders	0.34	0.24	0.21
Downgraders	0.75	0.57	0.31

The analysis of the frequency of upgraders and downgraders revealed that the German NSs made most use of upgraders and downgraders. On average, they used 0.34 upgraders and 0.75 downgraders. The group of Canadians made the least used of both kinds of modality markers, using an average of 0.21 upgraders and 0.31 downgraders per utterance. The average number of markers used by the ESL group lies right in between

the average use of both groups of NSs with 0.24 upgraders and 0.57 downgraders per utterance.

An analysis of variance revealed significant differences in the groups' use of upgraders between the three groups [$F(2, 33) = 4.86, p = .014$]. The post hoc t -test revealed significant differences between the German NSs and both other groups. The critical t value at which statistical significance is reached was $t_{.05}(33) = \pm 2.04$. The statistical comparison across pairs of groups revealed significant differences between the German NSs and both other groups (GerGer/GerEng: $t = 2.10, p < .05$, GerGer/CanEng: $t = 3.05, p < .01$). A comparison between the Canadians and the ESL group revealed no significant difference ($t = -0.95, p > .40$).

The groups' differences in their use of downgraders were found to differ significantly as well [$F(2, 33) = 10.77, p = .000$]. The post hoc t -test revealed significant differences between all three groups. The critical t value at which statistical significance is reached was $t_{.05}(33) = \pm 2.04$. A comparison across pairs of groups revealed statistically significant differences (GerGer/GerEng: $t = 2.14, p < .05$, GerGer/CanEng: $t = 4.64, p < .001$, GerEng/CanEng: $t = -2.50, p < .02$).

Figures 6.9 and 6.10 show the graphic presentations of use of upgraders and downgraders by the three groups:

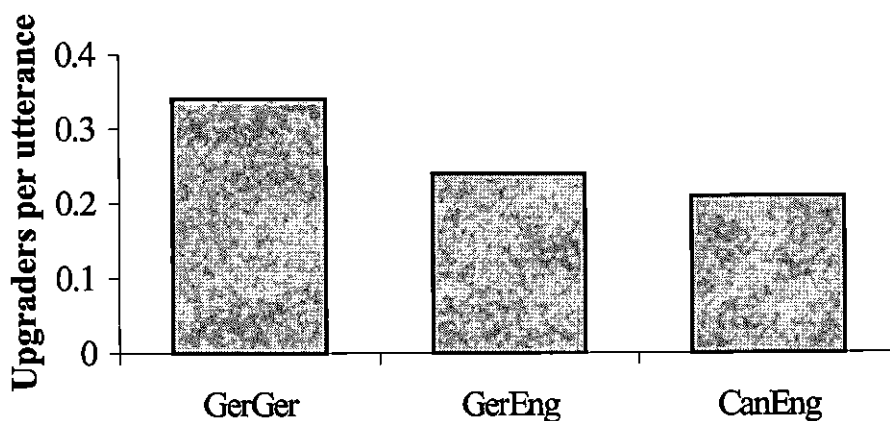


Figure 6.9. Use of upgraders

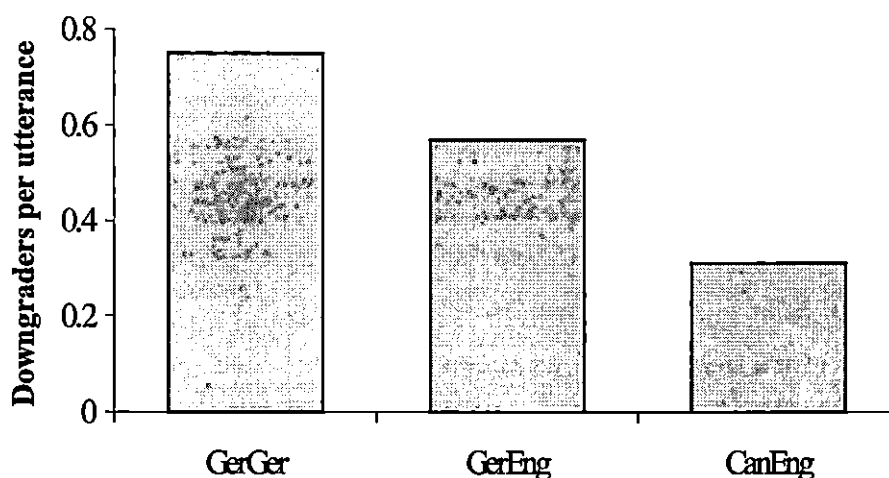


Figure 6.10 Use of downgraders

It was observed that upgraders were often used in statements of the problem to increase its intensity. Downgraders tended to be used more frequently to address repair and to assign blame to the hearer. Justifications often contained both kinds of markers. House and Kasper (1989) made similar findings about speakers' tendency to use downgraders for requests and upgraders for complaints (here called 'statement of the problem'). Examples of typical usage of upgraders and downgraders are shown below. The translation of the German modality markers is omitted if there is no literal equivalent for them in English.

- (1) "*Ich möchte Ihnen ja (downgrader) nur (downgrader) mal (downgrader) sagen—da muss echt (upgrader) was falsch gelaufen sein...*" [GerGer] (transl.: I just wanted to tell you, there must be something wrong...)
- (2) "*I was just (downgrader) wondering (downgrader) if there is any way to...*" [CanEng]

The frequent use of modality markers by German NSs is portrayed in the first example. The speaker uses three downgraders to approach the hearer about the problem and then intensifies his proposition with an upgrader. In example 2, the Canadian NS softens her request by using two downgraders.

The use of modality markers also depended on the degree of directness used in the complaint in general and the directness of the utterance in which it occurred specifically. Speakers who used indirect complaint strategies usually tended to use more downgraders than upgraders. It should be noted, however, that the versatility of the placement and use

further modulate their utterances as much. The ESL learners showed some similarities with the Canadian group. This similarity was significant in their use of upgraders, which both groups used less often than the German group. In the light of the fact that the learners were as direct as the German NSs in their use of the complaint categories, these findings might mean that the learners did not manage to modulate their responses enough to make it understandable why they use such a high degree of directness.

6.3. Sociopragmatic analysis

The sociopragmatic analysis focuses on the impact the social constellations have on the realization of complaints. The discussion of politeness theories by Brown and Levinson (1978) and Leech (1983) in the first section of this work discussed social constellations as factors that influence the degree of politeness and directness that is used. This chapter investigates whether complainers indeed adjusted their complaint strategies depending on the social constellations with their interlocutors. For this analysis, the situations had been carefully designed for their context-external factors of social distance and social power. The table, which was presented in section 4.3, is repeated here once more for convenience.

Table 6.3

Situations ordered by social relations.

Situations	Social power			Social distance	
	S>H	S<H	S=H	+	-
Lost sweater (7)	✓			✓	
Expensive dry cleaner's (3)	✓			✓	
Late order (11)	✓			✓	
Dirty dog (4)			✓	✓	
Line cutting (9)			✓	✓	
Reckless snowboarder (1)			✓	✓	
No letter of recommendation (12)		✓			✓
No vacation time (5)		✓			✓
Difficult statistics class (2)		✓			✓
Noisy neighbors (8)			✓		✓
Stingy friend (10)			✓		✓
Dirty roommate (6)			✓		✓

Note: S>H: Speaker has more social power than the interlocutor.

S<H: Speaker has less social power than the hearer.

S=H: Speaker and hearer are of equal social power.

S +: Speaker interacts with a stranger

S -: Speaker interacts with an acquaintance/friend

It should be stressed that in this analysis, the three groups of respondents are no longer compared to each other. Instead, the four groups of situations are compared across individuals in each of the groups. This sociopragmatic analysis is concerned with influences on the social constellations on the following complaint strategies: (a) the length of complaints, (b) choices of directness, and (c) the use of upgraders and downgraders. For all three investigations, analyses of variance were calculated with post hoc *t*-tests that compared the individual pairs of groups¹⁴. The cut-off point was at 95% probability. The findings are reported in tables 6.4 through 6.9.

6.3.1. Length of complaints

Do social constellations have an impact on the length of a complaint? The statistical analysis compared all four groups of situations on the average use of upgraders and downgraders they contained per utterance. The outcome revealed that speakers in fact did adjust the length of their complaints depending on the social relationship with their interlocutor. Table 6.4 shows which constellations had a significant effect on the speakers' choices of length and which ones did not.

Table 6.4

Influences of the social relations on the length of complaint.

Social relations 1 vs. 2	Length of the complaint		
	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD+ (clerk) (stranger)	No	No	No
S>H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (clerk) (boss, prof.)	No	No	1 < 2
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (clerk) (friend)	No	No	No
S=H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (stranger) (boss, prof.)	No	1 < 2	1 < 2
S=H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (stranger) (friend)	No	1 < 2	1 < 2
S<H, SD- vs. S=H, SD- (boss, prof.) (friend)	No	No	No

¹⁴ Fisher's protected *t*-test was used for all *post hoc* analyses following the Anovas.

The results show that social constellations did not have a significant effect on the length of the complaints produced by German NSs. Differences were found among ESL learners and Canadians. The statistical analysis revealed that both groups used significantly shorter complaints with strangers ($S=H$, $SD+$) than with friends ($S=H$, $SD-$) and superiors ($S<H$, $SD-$). Canadians also used more utterances when they talked to superiors as opposed to clerks in service situations.

6.3.2. Levels of directness

This analysis is concerned with the question whether speakers adjust the level of directness within each of the complaint categories depending on the social contact they have with their interlocutors. For this purpose, a point system was used, which assigned numbers to the individual sub-strategies in the four main complaint categories. The higher the directness level, the higher the number that was assigned. For example, the lowest directness levels in the categories 'repair' and 'justification' (R1, JS1 and JH1) received one point, the next more direct categories (R2 and JS2 and JH2) received two points, etc. As in the previous cross-cultural comparison of the use of complaint categories and their levels of directness, it was found necessary to give weight to the lack of utterances that addressed the two categories 'assigning blame' and 'addressing the problem' (B0 and P0). Consequently, they were counted as zero. Indirect strategies in these two categories (B1 and P1) were counted as one, etc. Tables 6.5 and 6.6 show the outcome of this analysis.

Table 6.5

Influences of the social relations on the use of directness: Assigning blame and requesting repair.

Social relations 1 vs. 2	Assigning blame			Requesting repair		
	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD+ (clerk) (stranger)	1 < 2	1 < 2	1 < 2	No	No	No
S>H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (clerk) (boss, prof.)	No	No	No	No	1 > 2	No
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (clerk) (friend)	No	1 < 2	1 < 2	No	No	No
S=H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (stranger) (boss, prof.)	1 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 2	No	No	No
S=H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (stranger) (friend)	No	No	No	No	No	No
S<H, SD- vs. S=H, SD- (boss, prof.) (friend)	1 < 2	1 < 2	1 < 2	No	No	No

Table 6.6

Influences of the social relations on the use of directness: Addressing the problem and justifying.

Social relations 1 vs. 2	Addressing the problem			Justifying		
	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD+ (clerk) (stranger)	No	No	No	No	No	No
S>H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (clerk) (boss, prof.)	No	No	No	No	No	No
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (clerk) (friend)	No	No	No	No	No	1 > 2
S=H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (stranger) (boss, prof.)	No	No	No	No	No	No
S=H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (stranger) (friend)	No	No	No	No	1 > 2	1 > 2
S<H, SD- vs. S=H, SD- (boss, prof.) (friend)	No	No	No	No	1 > 2	1 > 2

The results revealed a number of interesting findings. All three groups did not significantly differ in the directness with which they approach the complaint categories 'addressing the problem' and 'requesting repair.' Only the learners used significantly more direct requests with clerks than with authority figures. Significant differences were observed in the complaint categories 'assigning blame' and 'justifying.' All three groups reacted to the different social relations with the same directionality. In other words, they all showed similar patterns in their adjustments to the level of directness depending on who their interlocutor was. For example, in the last column in the blaming category, a comparison is made between how directly complainers blamed a person of greater authority (S<H, SD-) as opposed to a friend (S=H, SD-). All three groups blamed authority figures significantly less directly than they blamed their friends.

The three groups were most sensitive to the social constellations in the complaint situations when they assigned blame to the complaine. The following pattern emerged:

Table 6.7

Assigning blame (all groups).

Clerk < Stranger
Clerk < Friend
Boss/ Prof. < Stranger
Boss/ Prof. < Friend

The table shows that the three groups assigned significantly more direct blame to strangers and friends than when they complained to clerks in service situations and to authority figures in school or at work. The only variation was observed when the groups' blaming strategies were contrasted between clerks and friends. The group of NNS did not significantly distinguish their blaming behavior when complaining to these two groups of interlocutors.

Table 6.6 shows that in the justification category, the German NSs did not significantly adjust the directness based on their interlocutors. The Canadian group made most adjustments. They used less direct justification strategies significantly less

often with friends than with authority figures, strangers, and clerks. The following pattern emerged for the German ESL group and the Canadian NSs:

Table 6.8
Justifying (GerEng + CanEng).

Clerk > Friend ¹⁵
Stranger > Friend
Boss/ Prof. > Friend

6.3.3. Use of upgraders and downgraders

This analysis determines whether the two parameters of social distance and social power had a significant effect on complainers' use of upgraders and downgraders. For this purpose, the different social constellations used in the study were contrasted with each other again. Table 6.8 indicates where the effect of social relationships was significant and where it was not:

Table 6.9
Influences of the social constellations on the use of directness: Upgraders and downgraders.

Social relations 1 vs. 2	Use of upgraders			Use of downgraders		
	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng	GerGer	GerEng	CanEng
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD+ (clerk) (stranger)	No	No	No	No	No	No
S>H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (clerk) (boss, prof.)	No	No	No	1 < 2	1 < 2	1 < 2
S>H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (clerk) (friend)	No	No	No	No	No	No
S=H, SD+ vs. S<H, SD- (stranger) (boss, prof.)	No	No	No	No	1 < 2	No
S=H, SD+ vs. S=H, SD- (stranger) (friend)	1 < 2	1 < 2	1 < 2	No	No	1 < 2
S<H, SD- vs. S=H, SD- (boss, prof.) (friend)	No	No	No	No	No	No

15 CanEng only

Two main trends were observed, which hold true for all three groups. All groups used significantly more upgraders when they complained to their friends than when they complained to strangers. They all used significantly more downgraders in complaints to superiors than they did in service situations. German NSs also used significantly more downgraders when they talked to superiors than when they complained to strangers. Canadian NSs used more downgraders for friends than for strangers.

6.3.4. Discussion

The analyses in this section investigated the questions whether the three groups adjusted their complaining strategies depending on to whom they complained. An overall comparison of the length of the complaints, the directness used in the complaint categories, and the use of modality markers showed that the groups responded in similar ways. In other words, if the social factors had a significant effect on the groups, they always reacted in the same manner (with the same directionality).

The social constellations had the most effect on the Canadian group and the least effect on the German NSs. The ESL group adjusted their strategies more often than the German NSs, but not quite as often as the Canadians. The different effect the social variables had on the complainers does not support the original hypothesis. It was assumed prior to this study that all three groups would show roughly the same behavior toward the different social scenarios. In fact, the results show that Canadians seemed most aware of the social standing of their interlocutors, which in turn had an effect on their pragmatic choices. Especially unexpected was that the ESL group showed resemblance to Canadian strategies in the way they adjusted their pragmatic strategies to the social standing of the interlocutors. This might have been caused by the fact that they are guests in a foreign country and therefore more conscious of social factors, especially when these require more politeness.

Strategies were adjusted most when the speakers complained to friends and authority figures. The groups tended to use longer utterances in these two social constellations (except for the German NSs). When assigning blame, the three groups were most indirect when they related to authority figures and most direct when they

talked to friends. An analysis of the justification strategies showed the reverse trend. The complainers used more direct justification strategies when they related to authority figures and clerks than when they related to friends. At first glance, these two findings seem to be contradictory. However, it is important to remember the inherently different functions of these two complaining strategies. While the assignment of blame is inherently face-threatening to the hearer, justifications serve to rationalize the actions of either the complainer or the complaine. In this regard, justifications mitigate the force of the complaint to some extent.

Complainers' distinction between authority figures and friends is further emphasized through the use of modality markers. All groups tended to use more downgraders when they talked to authority figures in order to further increase the indirectness of the complaint. They all used more upgraders when they talked to friends in order to increase the intensity of their complaints and bring their points across.

6.4. Summary

This chapter discussed the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic behavior of German NSs, Canadian NSs, and the ESL group in their realization of complaints. The pragmalinguistic analysis examined the groups' production concerning the length and directness of the complaints. The directness of the groups' complaints was examined through analyses of the directness levels used within each of the four complaint categories as well as through the groups' use of modality markers. It was found that the German NSs used the longest complaints and the highest degrees of directness in the complaint categories. They also fine-tuned the directness of the complaint strategies mostly through frequent use of upgraders and downgraders. The group of Canadians used shorter and more indirect complaints with minor modification through modality markers. Their comparatively high use of the strategies B0 and P0 revealed that they made frequent use of strategies that addressed the situation without turning the response into a complaint. They frequently took the problem upon themselves without blaming the interlocutor in any way. These are in fact the most 'hearer-friendly' responses because the hearer is not told that he or she has caused the problem. The ESL learners showed strong resemblance to the German NSs in their choices of directness in the four complaint

categories. However, they differed significantly from the German NSs in the length of their complaints and their use of modality markers. The fact that the ESL group used short and direct complaints with little further modulation might in fact intensify the directness of the overall directness of the complaints.

The sociopragmatic analysis found that German NSs adjusted their complaints the least to social constellations while Canadians adjusted their complaints the most. The ESL group resembled the Canadians in that they showed almost as much adjustment to social factors. All three groups adjusted their complaint strategies the most when talking to friends and authority figures. When talking to these two groups, complainers tended to use the longest complaints. This was most likely caused by the fact that complainers invested most effort in complaining in these two constellations, with the difference that the directness was to be held to a minimum when relating to authority figures and pushed to the maximum when relating to friends. The analysis of the degree of directness in the complaint categories further stresses this trend. In the category 'assigning blame,' all three groups were most direct with friends and the least direct with authority figures. A similar trend was shown in the complaint category 'justifying,' with the exception that social constellations did not have significant effect on the group of German NSs. The effect that complaints to friends and superiors had on complaint strategies is further underlined through the groups' use of modality markers. Canadians and ESL learners adjusted their use of modality markers, using significantly more upgraders with friends and significantly more downgraders with authority figures.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of this study are presented, followed by implications of these results and methodological limitations of this study. This chapter concludes with suggestions for further research.

7.1. Summary of the findings

This study compared complaint realizations by NSs of Canadian English, NSs of German and German ESL learners of advanced proficiency in English. The complaint data were analyzed on the groups' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic complaint behavior.

For the analysis of the complaint data, a functional set of complaint categories was developed. It was found that complainers address one or more of the following complaint categories: (1) statement of the problem, (2) assignment of blame, (3) request for repair, and (4) justifications. Each of these content areas was further divided by the degree of directness contained in their sub-strategies. In the analysis, the complaint utterances were broken up and analyzed on their level of directness in each of the four complaint categories. Additional examinations were conducted on the length of the complaints and the use of modality markers.

The framework used to examine the directness of complaints proved useful for the analysis. Due to the separation of the complaints into a set of four complaint categories with different content areas, the coding of the complaint components seemed more straightforward and less arbitrary than when previous frameworks were fitted to the complaint data on a trial basis in the beginning stages of the analysis. Since the complaint framework was divided into more categories than in many of the previous studies, comparisons across content areas could be avoided. This ensured that clear distinctions in directness could be made and avoided subjective comparisons across different complaint aspects or subjective ratings of the entire complaint sequence.

The pragmalinguistic analyses suggest that both German groups, NSs and ESL learners alike, are significantly more direct than Canadians in the way they realize complaints. The groups' preferences differed considerably in the degree of directness

with which they approached the complaint categories 'assigning blame,' 'requesting repair,' and 'addressing the problem.' Both German groups made more use of direct strategies in these complaint categories.

The German NSs tended to make the most efforts to bring their point across. They used longer complaints and they adjusted the directness of the complaints more through the use of upgraders and downgraders. Canadians tended to use the shortest complaints with the fewest modality markers. The ESL group was found to make medium use of modality markers. The data analysis in this study showed that the ESL learners did not manage to adhere to the pragmatic norms of the target culture. While the ESL group showed a slight trend toward Canadian complaint behavior, they still revealed a predominant resemblance with the German NSs in most of the pragmalinguistic strategies they employed. This suggests that the language learners tended to transfer these strategies from their native language into the target language.

The sociopragmatic analysis revealed that while all three groups agreed in the directionality in which their pragmatic strategies changed, the German NSs showed the least adjustment to social constellations. The ESL group tended to be more conscious of social factors. Similar to the Canadian group, their pragmatic strategies were significantly affected by those situations in which they related to strangers, friends and authority figures. This heightened awareness of social factors by the ESL group might lie in the fact that they are guests in a foreign country and therefore more aware of those instances in which a high degree of politeness is required and/or that they might have adjusted to some extent to Canadian patterns.

The preference of both German groups to use more directness is in accordance with the findings concerning the level of frustration evoked by the problematic situations. Germans rated their frustration as significantly higher than did the Canadians. It is one factor that explains the divergence between both cultures in the pragmalinguistic domain. The fact that both German groups felt stronger about the situations caused them to invest more directness to show their frustration and/or to achieve repair in these situations. Another reason for Germans' preference for more directness in general might be the fact that German speakers assume stronger bonds between interlocutors (Odlin, 1989). Assuming a higher degree of intimacy, Germans feel that they can be

more open with their interlocutors. Finally, the fact that Canadians indicated more often that they would have avoided a confrontation by opting out of the complaint is most likely reflected in their indirect responses. The respondents who had opted out were generally not comfortable with producing a complaint, which is why they generally opted for indirect strategies when they were asked to provide a response anyway.

At this point, the reader is also reminded of an earlier statement that referred to the fact that speakers' use of directness is influenced by many different variables. The factors that are mentioned here are just part of an elaborate system of linguistic and psychological impulses based on speakers' individually and culturally determined values. The fact that the ESL characteristics showed a high degree of transfer in the pragmatic domain are understandable in the light of the fact that the perceptions of situational factors, which bring about their pragmatic choices, are very personal feelings. The ratings of the level of explicitness with which the three groups perceived their complaints suggest, however, that speakers are aware of how direct they are. This awareness might be an important and necessary tool for language learners to adjust the level of directness to some extent.

The strategic patterns observed in this study correspond with previous findings on German NSs and German ESL learners. Despite differences in methodology, the framework used for the complaint analysis, and situational factors, DeCapua (1989) made very similar observations on the comparison of Germans and Americans in their use of directness in service situations. DeCapua also found no difference between Germans speaking German and Germans speaking English in the use of complaint formulas (the reader is reminded of the possible interference caused by the fact that DeCapua used the same participants for both languages, which might have distorted her analysis). The outcome of this study also resembles her findings on the groups' use of modality markers to a great extent. As in this study, DeCapua also found that German NSs used more upgraders than speakers of American English and that the ESL group was located in the middle in relation to both other groups. House and Kasper (1981) described similar findings concerning German NSs in comparison to NSs of British English. Germans were found to be more direct than NSs of British English in both the

production of requests as well as complaints. They also found that Germans tended to intensify the strength of complaints through a higher number of upgraders than did speakers of British English.

7.2. Implications

The findings in this study raise important questions concerning implications for cross-cultural variation in the use of pragmatic strategies and the acquisition of pragmatic strategies by second language learners. This section will first discuss cross-cultural variation in pragmatic behavior in general and then refer to implications for the instruction of pragmatic competence in second language acquisition.

The analysis found that German NSs preferred a higher degree of directness when complaining to others. Can we conclude from the fact that Germans tend to prefer a higher level of directness in their complaints that Germans are necessarily more impolite to each other? Kasper and House (1981) discuss the need to look at such cross-cultural differences from an 'emic' standpoint and not from an 'etic' point of view (p. 184). This means that groups which differ in directness should not be judged by the same standards in terms of who is more polite. These kinds of judgments should be avoided because the comparison is relative and highly subjective, depending on which angle is taken. They lead to such stereotypes as 'Canadians are wimpy' and 'Germans are rude and impolite'.

For the area of second language acquisition, cross-cultural comparisons such as the one undertaken here are crucial. Language educators need to be aware of this kind of variation and tackle these cross-cultural differences in language instruction with their students. Bardovi-Harlig (1992) and Olshtain and Cohen (1991) stress the importance that language instructors themselves be educated in how to instruct students on pragmatic behavior. Teachers often lack the necessary pragmatic awareness in the language(s) they teach and they tend to instruct based on their introspection, which often proves to be incorrect or over-simplified. A heightened awareness of the pragmatics in the target language enables teachers to instruct pragmatics with the necessary authenticity and to better evaluate teaching materials on their natural language use.

should be able to point out, however, a rough range of directness from indirect complaints to those statements that are so direct that they could be considered criticisms. In addition, it is questionable whether pragmatic behavior of speech acts that involve a high degree of emotion *can* in fact be taught. If cross-cultural differences cause learners to relate to situational factors differently, they will inevitably show some negative transfer. The question remains as to whether students should be expected to adhere to pragmatic behavior in the target language community in this personal domain of language use and if so to what extent.

7.3. Methodological limitations

It is a limitation of this study that the complete interaction between complainer and complainee could not be captured with this data collection method. Respondents have noted that their complaints beyond the very first move would depend on the interlocutor's reaction. They argued that if the hearer volunteered an apology, some justification for his or her action, or some other form of compensation, their further reactions would be different than if the complainee disregarded whether something was wrong or was rude about it. In the latter case, respondents expressed the opinion that their additional moves would most likely decrease in politeness.

Some speakers stated that they would have avoided a confrontation with the speaker by opting out of performing the speech act. The fact that participants were initially asked whether they would opt out or not and then asked to respond to the situation, even if they had indicated they would have remained silent, posed difficulty for some respondents. In a future study, a better way would need to be found to give respondents the opportunity to opt out while at the same time avoiding an overuse of this option because it is easier for the participants.

The problem that respondents had to imagine themselves in a fictional situation and attempt to react to this artificial set-up as realistically as possible is another limitation of this study. Findings might have been different if real conflict situations with longer exchanges between interlocutors had been analyzed. The fact that the complainer would have been facing the complainee when producing the face-threatening act and could have reacted to his or her account of the situation, might have

also affected their use of directness to some extent.

It would have been preferable to select groups of people whose background is as similar as possible to keep the variation within each group to a minimum. The participants in each group came from various regions within Canada and Germany and these regional differences might have been an influencing factor that diversified the complaint responses within each of the groups. However, due to time restrictions and financial limitations, the access to suitable participants was limited. It is assumed that the cross-cultural differences (or similarities) between Canadian and German culture override those regional and individual differences within each of the groups so that overall trends in the use of pragmatic strategies could still be observed.

Another limitation of this study lies in the proficiency rating of the NNSs. While this study tested spoken language abilities, the language proficiency of the group of NNSs was based on their score in the TOEFL test, which is a written test. This means that while the group of NNSs seems to be at about the same language level in their writing, reading, and listening abilities, their oral proficiency might vary beyond that. Unfortunately, the administration of an oral speaking test prior to the data collection was not possible.

Finally, the fact that each group consisted of 14 participants limits the reliability of this study. After all, individual differences are not only found cross-culturally, but also among participants of the same cultural background. A few diverging scores, caused by shy German participants or outspoken Canadian students, for example, could have changed the results drastically due to the small number of participants in each group. Larger group sizes would have therefore been profitable. The number limitation was counteracted by selecting participants based on narrow characteristics such as age, language proficiency, previous stays abroad, education, and equal numbers of male and female participants.

7.4. Further research

It would be desirable to repeat a similar study on a larger scale and to make some changes in the methodology to eliminate some of the difficulties discussed above. For example, the use of open role-play would capture the exchange of arguments between

both interlocutors. This would enable the researcher to record the entire complaint sequence up to the point where some sort of closure is reached. Another possible data collection method, which would facilitate a higher degree of realism, is the use of video clips, as suggested by Cohen (personal communication, March 13, 2000). Video sequences could be shown about incidents that would evoke complaints. This would enable respondents to visualize details about the setting, the interlocutor, etc., which in turn would make the situation more realistic and leave less information up to the respondents' imagination. More information about complaints by NSs should be gathered in natural settings. Service desks in stores would be an ideal setting to record actual complaints by customers about goods that did not meet their expectations.

The complaining data produced a number of pragmatic aspects that require further investigation. While the analysis in this work has touched upon many different factors that influence the directness of complaints, many additional factors had to be neglected. For example, modality markers could have been analyzed in more detail to find out which kinds of markers were preferred by the different groups. They could have also been analyzed on the frequency with which they occurred in the different complaint categories. Prosodic behavior also tended to influence the directness level. It was observed, for example, that Canadian speakers tended to raise intonation in statements, which gave the hearer the impression that the speakers in fact were not so certain about the statements they made. However, detailed analyses would have by far exceeded the scope of this work.

This analysis showed that German ESL learners differed significantly from Canadians in the way they realized complaints. It would have been interesting to present the data from the ESL group and the Canadian NSs to other Canadians, and to have them rate the degree of politeness in the complaints, similar to Murphy and Neu's (1995) study on complaints. To detect differences in the groups' use of politeness is one thing, but to find out how NSs actually perceive and rate these different strategies is quite another. No conclusions can be drawn from the outcome of this research on how the complaints by the ESL group would have been perceived by Canadians. Based on the collected data in the study, a follow-up study could be conducted on NSs' perceptions of differences in pragmatic strategies and what impact they have on NSs' perception of politeness.

The outcome of this study raises many more additional questions concerning cross-cultural differences in the perception of politeness and directness and the acquisition of pragmatic competency in a second language. The following points present a few of the questions that arose during this research. It would be desirable to answer some of the following issues in the future:

- 1) How can language instruction be tailored to help language learners understand pragmatic differences across cultures? What kind of instruction would be the most effective in order to teach pragmatic competency? How can teachers help students adjust without undermining their own identity and cultural background and to what extent do language learners *wish* to blend in and adopt foreign speech behavior?
- 2) Would results have been similar if this study had been conducted with learners of lower language proficiency? How long of a stay is required in order to adjust to a higher degree to the speech behavior of the target culture and how does pragmatic competency develop over a longer stay in the target culture?
- 3) An important issue that is raised through this analysis concerns the acquisition of pragmatic competency and what types of activities are suitable for different proficiency levels. Since even advanced learners tend to preserve some of the pragmatic behavior from their native language, would it be useful for language learners to start this kind of instruction early, or should the teacher wait till students have a certain amount of linguistic tools to learn about pragmatic strategies?
- 4) What patterns emerge when Germans and Canadians are compared on speech acts that are not face threatening, such as offers, compliments, and invitations?

The above questions form just a few of the many questions that arose during the conduction of this study. More research in interlanguage pragmatics on complaints and other speech acts is needed to explore cross-cultural differences, to investigate the challenges language learners are facing because of these differences, and to research how pragmatic strategies can be taught in the classroom more effectively. In doing so, second language researchers and language instructors need to keep in mind the best interests of the students - they need to keep in mind what the major goal is in becoming communicatively competent in another language – learners' ability to convey their individual character traits and personal feelings in social interaction.

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Situation 5:

At work:

You have a part-time job at an advertising agency. You usually work 15 hours a week with changing schedules, which are worked out the week before. You have been invited to your best friend's wedding and have asked your boss, Mr. John Graves, to get this day off well in advance. When you look at the work schedule for the week of the wedding, you see that you are scheduled to work that day. So you go and to talk to him in his office. You say:

Would you have said anything in this situation? YES NO

How serious are the consequences for you resulting from this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
not very serious very serious

What is the degree of the boss' wrongdoing in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
low high

How strong/explicit is your reaction toward your boss in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
very mild very strong

Situation 6:

In your apartment:

You share an apartment with your good friend, Rob. In general, you get along with him well, just cleaning is a constant problem. He just doesn't care about dirt and messy rooms, but you do! Today is your birthday and you have invited some friends to celebrate with you. It's your friend's turn to clean the kitchen this week, but when you come in to start preparing some food, you see that the whole kitchen is a mess. You say to him:

Would you have said anything in this situation? YES NO

How serious are the consequences for you resulting from this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
not very serious very serious

What is the degree of your roommate's wrongdoing or failure in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
low high

How strong/explicit is your reaction toward your roommate in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
very mild very strong

Situation 7:

In the department store:

You found the perfect sweater at a department store. It looks like it's made for you! You didn't have enough money with you and asked the clerk to put it on hold for you. Now you are back with your credit card and tell the same clerk that you are back to pay for the sweater. She looks everywhere but it is gone and there is no other one in your size! Bummer! You really liked this sweater! So you say to the clerk:

Would you have said anything in this situation? YES NO

How serious are the consequences for you resulting from this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
not very serious very serious

What is the degree of the store clerk's wrongdoing in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
low high

How strong/explicit is your reaction toward the clerk in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
very mild very strong

Situation 8:

In your apartment complex:

You are annoyed about your neighbors. They are two girls, Kim and Debbie, who often play the music loud till late at night and keep you up. When you see each other in the apartment complex, you usually talk to each other, but you've always avoided addressing the noise late at night. Once again it is midnight and the music is blaring above. Now you've had enough of it and decide to tell them. You go up there and talk to Debbie. You say to her:

Would you have said anything in this situation? YES NO

How serious are the consequences for you resulting from this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
not very serious very serious

What is the degree of the neighbor's wrongdoing or failure in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
low high

How strong/explicit is your reaction the neighbor in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
very mild very strong

Situation 9:

At the grocery store:

You are in the super market. It is Friday night and there are a lot of people going shopping. At the meat counter a long line of seven people has formed. You have waited forever and are supposed to be the next one in line when a woman walks up and pushes to the front of the line, just in front of you. You are in a rush and say to the woman:

Would you have said anything in this situation? YES NO

How serious are the consequences for you resulting from this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
not very serious very serious

What is the degree of the shopper's wrongdoing in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
low high

How strong/explicit is your reaction toward the shopper in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
very mild very strong

Situation 10:

At home:

Your good friend Marsha from New York has come to visit you for a week. She's a great person and you are having a good time with her. After a few days, you notice that you are paying all the bills for the two of you: at the grocery store, at the movie theater, at the gas station, and other places. You feel that since she's staying with you for all this time, she should chip in a little money herself. So when it's time to pay for the next groceries, you say to her:

Would you have said anything in this situation? YES NO

How serious are the consequences for you resulting from this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
not very serious very serious

What is the degree of your friend's wrongdoing in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
low high

How strong/explicit is your reaction toward your friend in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
very mild very strong

Appendix B: Background questionnaire

Name: _____

Age: _____

Nationality: _____

Major: _____

ESL group only:

TOEFL score: _____ Date taken: _____

TSE score: _____ Date taken: _____

Have you been to another English speaking country? YES NO

If yes,

* how many times? _____

* for how long ? _____

(Please, give total time abroad prior to your current stay in Canada.)

How many years of English instruction have you had in your native country? _____

What was your last grade in English? _____

Do you use English in Germany? _____

If yes, for which purposes and how often? _____

Appendix C: Sample situation and response (English)

Please respond to the following situations. If you decide you would not say anything, please indicate this on the answer sheet and try to imagine a possible reaction to this situation.

Now you will get to listen to one example:

Situation 1:

At work:

One of your colleagues, Shelly, invites you to her wedding. You'd love to go but that day you can't be there. So when she asks you if you will attend her wedding, you say to her:

"I'm sorry Shelly, I have an important business meeting in the afternoon and won't be home till rather late. I wish I could come, though."

Okay, and now it's your turn.....

(See Appendix A)

Appendix D: Excerpt of the transcribed complaints

GERENG

Situation 10: (stingy friend)

1.
well considering all my payments for the last days
I think it's now your turn to pay for the groceries now

2:
Marsha do you some money fo-- uh to pay this stuff?
Uh I think I'm a little short this time

3:
uh so um Marsha
I don't have any money with me um
could you pay this time?

4:
I think the grocery
that's your treat now
because remember?
I paid all the bills
in the last week
so I think you should buy the groceries now

5:
uh so are you paying today?

6:
hey Marsha
would you mind paying for the groceries this time?
so I paid all of last weeks
so I think that now it would be your turn
to-- to spend some money in the next days
or what would you say?
do you think it's fair?

7:
what do you think about sharing the bill Marsha?

8:
I paid the last couple of days
uh now it's on you

9:
hey Marsha
um don't you think it's your turn
to .. pay this time?
cause--I don't know
I have paid for-- for you the last couple of days
and I just think it's up to you to to pay a little back

10:
hey Marsha
I'm running out of money now
since I paid all the last bills
what about you?
is it possible to do it?
pay it right now?

11:
uh
could you please pay this time?
because I've paid all the other times
and I run out of money by now

12:
Marsha
I've been pay -- uh I've been paying for .. everything this week
so it would be great if you could pay for the next shopping
okay?

13:
okay
I think it's your turn to pay
because I paid all the other bills
and um I think we have a good time together
but um we have to pay both of us
for all this um food
and I don't know what else
um so maybe you should pay the next bill

14:
Marsha
is it possible that you pay today?

CANENG

Situation 10: (stingy friend)

1:
 hey Marsha
 I left my wallet at home
 do you think you could uh cover the groceries today?

2:
 I got the last bill
 why don't you pick up this one

3:
 do you happen to have any change on you?

4:
 um
 you know
 I've been --
 it's -- uh this grocery bill is pretty high
 do you think we could split the cost ?
 or --

5.
 so are we gonna go Dutch on this one ?

6:
 Marsha
 would you mind getting this one this time?

7:
 I think I forgot my wallet in the car
 Um could you help me spot me for this one?

8:
 um would you mind helping me out with this bill
 uh just even pay half
 just because I-- I'm having a lot of trouble paying for my tuition
 and my books right now
 and um I need money for the rest of the semester

9:
 oh I don't think we can actually buy all these groceries
 um I don't really have enough cash for all this
 so if you get--
 if you want it
 great-- you can get it
 but um otherwise I'm putting some of this back

10:
 do you happen to have any money on you ?

11:

yikes

I'm going to have to start cutting back on groceries
my money is getting pretty tight

12:

do you mind get-- um getting the bill for the groceries this time around ?

13:

oh shoot

I've left my wallet at home
can you grab it this time

14:

oh

I forgot my wallet

GERGER**Situation 10: (stingy friend)**

1:
uh
du Marianne
könned wir uns nicht den uh das Geld für den Einkauf um jetzt teilen?
sonst wird das auf die Dauer ein bißchen teuer
ich mein wir können wir da ja zusammenlegen
und dann denk' ich ist das ja auch gar kein Problem oder?

2:
oh Marianne
ich sehe grade ich hab' gar kein Geld bei mir
könnst du nicht für mich mit bezahlen?

3:
ja Marianne
jetzt kannst du auch mal bezahlen
ich habe schon die ganzen anderen Male bezahlt
und ich sehe nicht ein daß ich jetzt alles für dich mitbezahle.

4:
schön was wir alles eingekauft haben hm?
(laughing)

5:
Marianne
meinst du nicht daß du auch mal dran bist
was zu unserem Haushalt beizutragen
wir leben ja beide davon

6:
wie wollen wir das denn heute mit dem bezahlen machen ?
wollen wie uns das teilen oder soll ich es wieder übernehmen ?

7:
weißt du was?
heute zahlst du mal
ich hab' ja auch keinen Goldesel zu Hause
wo komm wir denn da hin
wenn ich alles für dich zahle
du bist zwar meine beste Freundin
aber-- oder eine gute Freundin
aber ...ich hab' ja auch nicht so viel Geld
ne ?

8:
um
du Marianne
also uh
ist mir ja unangenehm

ich meine du bist mein Gast
 ich habe dich eingeladen
 aber -- tut mir leid
 aber ich kann mir das echt so nicht leisten
 also hier alles für uns uh zu bezahlen
 also wenn's dir nichts ausmacht
 könntest Du nicht auch mal ein bißchen was dazu beisteuern
 ich bin wirklich ein bißchen knapp bei Kasse

9:
 ich--
 hier Marianne
 ich bin echt ein bißchen pleite
 ich habe nicht mehr ganz so viel Kohle
 vielleicht könntest du den Einkauf diesmal bezahlen
 weil-- ich hab' ja auch gestern bezahlt
 und ich will das jetzt nicht aufrechnen oder so
 und du bist ja auch mein Gast
 aber um
 vielleicht könntest du mir da einfach ein bißchen entgegenkommen
 weil ich echt nicht mehr so viel Geld habe

10:
 hast du was dagegen auch mal zu bezahlen
 weil ... uh ich hab' bisher immer bezahlt
 und na ja so reich bin ich ja nun auch nicht

11:
 oh Marianne
 ich hab' meinen Geldbeutel vergessen
 leider mußt du jetzt für mich bezahlen
 kein Problem oder?

12:
 uh Marianne
 hör' zu
 ich hab' jetzt gerade ein bißchen wenig Geld mit mir
 könntest du jetzt das Ganze mal auslegen
 und wir machen das Ganze dann später noch aus ?

13:
 Marianne
 ich glaube wir müssen mal reden
 also ich habe das Gefühl in der letzten Zeit
 habe immer nur ich Geld ausgegeben
 auch wenn ich das gerne mache für dich
 aber ich bin auch nur Student
 und noch nicht Millionär
 und ich finde es eigentlich fair
 wenn du auch ab und zu mal
 das Essen bezahlst oder so
 daß wir so ein bißchen abwechseln
 uns da beim Einkaufen


14:
 uh willst du heute nicht mal einkaufen und kochen?

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