THE SPEECH ACT OF COMPLAINT AS REALIZED BY ADVANCED SUDANESE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

By

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Abstract

This study aims to compare the pragmatic competence of advanced Sudanese learners of English to that of native speakers when performing the speech act of complaint. The sample of this study involves sixty subjects: forty-six of them are Sudanese students pursuing graduate programs in English at four Sudanese universities and the rest are British native speakers of English.

To generate data for this study, the subjects both native and nonnative are given a “Discourse Completion Test” wherein they are requested to provide their natural responses to three prompts denoting the target speech act of complaint. Responses of native speakers are reviewed to identify common components of the target speech act to establish a set of baseline responses. The responses given by the Sudanese advanced learners of English are then compared to the native speakers’ of English.

The results of this study show that the quality of the components produced by the Sudanese learners of English differ significantly from those made by the native speakers. It is shown that in spite of their relatively long period of learning English, the Sudanese sample doesn’t demonstrate sufficient linguistic or socio-pragmatic skills that qualify them to produce appropriate complaint in English.

The study ends up with a series of suggestions and recommend--dations that aim to enhance linguistic and cultural understanding of the target language.
أسلوب التعبير عن الشكوى والتظالم بالإنجليزية

كما أدرك الدارسون السودانيون

د. عبدالمجيد الطيب عمر

ملخص الدراسة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد قدرات الطلاب السودانيين من دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية في المستوى المتقدم في التعبير عن الشكوي والتظالم باللغة الإنجليزية مقارنةً بأداء الناطقين الأصليين بها.

تتكون عينة الدراسة الجملية من ستين فردًا منهم ستة وأربعون دارسًا سودانيًا مسجلين في برامج دراسات عليا في اللغة الإنجليزية في أربع جامعات سودانية وأربعة عشر بريطانية يعملون في السودان. للحصول على بيانات لهذه الدراسة، قام الباحث بإعطاء أفراد العينة من السودانيين والناطقين الأصليين باللغة الإنجليزية وطلب منهم تعبئة Discourse Completion Test استمارة اختيار إجابة المحادثة. هذه الاستمارة بكتابة ردودهم واستجاباتهم الطبيعية على ثلاثة مواقف حياتية تتطلب الشكوى أو التظالم.

اختار الباحث ردود واستجابات الناطقين الأصليين باللغة الإنجليزية كمعيار لقياس صحة ردود الدارسين السودانيين من حيث المكونات اللغوية أو الخطيئة. وقد أشارت نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى فروق معتربة بين أساليب الشكوى السائدة في المجموعة، حيث أثبتت الدراسة أن الدارسين السودانيين يعبرون عن اللغة الإنجليزية على الرغم من الضغوط الطويلة نسبيًا التي قضوها في دراسة اللغة الأجنبية لم يدركوا المستوى الذي يؤولهم للتعبير عن شكوكهم بالأسلوب المناسب الذي يمكن أن يكون مقبولاً لدى المتحدثين الأصليين باللغة الإنجليزية.

وقد اختتمت الدراسة بمجموعة من التوصيات والمقترحات التي من شأنها تعزيز وتدعيم قدرات الدارسين السودانيين في اللغة الإنجليزية ورفع إدراكهم للمستوى النشأة للغة الأجنبية بما يمكنهم من استخدام الأساليب المناسبة للتعبير عن المواقف الحياتية المختلفة مثل الشكوى والتظالم والشجاعة والطلب والاعتداد.
The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English

**Introduction**

During the last few decades, the importance of communicative competence has been widely acknowledged in the field of second/foreign language teaching and learning. Hymes (1972), for instance, maintains that second language learners must learn to speak not only grammatically, but also "appropriately" to achieve communicative goals. This concept of "appropriateness" is further explained by Novick (2000) who postulates that second or foreign language learners must acquire not only linguistic rules such as morphology, syntax, phonology and vocabulary, but they must acquire socio-cultural rules of language use also.

Acquisition of socio-cultural rules, which is widely known as pragmatic competence, is crucial to second language learners. Tanck, (2002) says speakers who seem "fluent" in a foreign language due to their command of the grammatical rules of that language and its vocabulary may still lack pragmatic competence, and as a result they may not be able to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate.

Appropriateness of language use can be realized by acknowledging the social identity of the listener in terms of the relative social status and the level of acquaintance between participants (Moon, 2001). Furthermore, appropriateness of specific speech acts is governed by the social norms involved in language use (Manes, 1983). Unfortunately, nonnative speakers may not be fully aware of all the socio-linguistic rules governing the appropriateness of speech acts in the target language (Einsentein & Bodman, 1998). This state may lead some second language learners to use their first language rules of speaking when using a second language (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss–Welts, 1990; Bergam and Kasper, 1993; Olshtain and Weinback 1993; Weizman, 1993; Al-Amar, 2000; Tanck 2002; Umar, 2004.)

Since languages are different and their use is governed by
community-specific rules, transfer of language (L1) rules when using a second language could lead to generate pragmatically inappropriate linguistic forms. Al-Amar (2000) warns that non-native speakers who do not use pragmatically appropriate language "run the risk of appearing "uncooperative" at the least or more seriously "rude" or "insulting" (p.4). Scollon and Scollon (1993) also assure that violation of pragmatic rules is bound to lead to communication breakdowns.

To avoid such miscommunications and their negative impact on human relations, applied linguists and more particularly those who are concerned with second language teaching are expected to address the question of pragmatics and speech act appropriateness more seriously. Kasper, (1997) affirms that competences, whether linguistic or pragmatic, should be developed and learned systematically.

It is now generally believed that pragmatic competence could be better acquired through systematic provision of learning opportunities that enhance its attainment (Novick, 2000). Yet, it is widely held that material for teaching pragmatics should be based on careful analysis of socio-linguistic deviations that characterize the performance of non-native speakers when using a target language (Tanck, 2002).

Along this line, comes this study as an investigation into the differences between native speakers and Sudanese learners of English production of complaints. The results of this investigation will help to identify the pragmatic deviations that may stain the Sudanese learners' complaints and to provide examples that the Sudanese English Language teachers and syllabus designers can utilize to explain situations in which students may fail pragmatically and, in turn, to develop material to handle these problems.

Review of Literature

This part reviews literature related to studies on the speech act of complaint with the aim of driving insights from previous works and justify the present research. This review will include both theoretical and
The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English

empirical studies. In the theoretical studies section, politeness and speech act theories will be highlighted. The other section reviews empirical studies on the speech act of complaint with the aim of providing a framework for this current investigation.

Theoretical Considerations

*Speech Act Theory*

The speech act theory is largely attributed to the British Philosopher J.L. Austin (1962) who claims that many utterances, termed performatives, do not only communicate information, but are equivalent to actions. That is to say, through the use of these utterances, people do things or have others do things for them; they apologize, promise, request, refuse, complain, etc. Utterances that may be used to realize the above functions are known as speech acts.

Austin (1962), then, classifies speech acts into five groups including: "verdicatives" (giving a verdict), "expositives" (fitting utterances into the course of an argument or conversation), "exercitire" (exercising power, rights or influence), "behabitatives, (demonstrating attitudes or social behavior), and "commissives" (promising or otherwise undertaking). One problem of this taxonomy, however, is that the categories are not mutually exclusive and they often overlap (Reiter, 2000).

Searle (1969), (Austin’s student), explains that speech acts are performed in real situations of language use. Thus, the underlined assumption in speech act theory is that the minimal unit of human communication is the performance of certain kinds of acts or functions.

Based on the above, Searle (1979) provides a classification of speech acts according to their functions. He proposes five categories including "directives", "calmatives"," representatives", "declaratives" and "expressives". The focus of this study which is “complaint” is categorized as “expressives”. This is the case where the speaker
expresses disappointment, joy, like, dislike, etc. Put in a wider academic framework, one may say that "expressives" represent the speaker's psychological state, attitudes, and feelings. The typical acts that come under this category are complaint, apology, and gratitude.

The Speech Act of Complaint

Complaint is an expression of a psychological state of being dissatisfied or unhappy about something. According to Tanck (2002), the speech act of complaint occurs when a speaker reacts with displeasure or annoyance to an action that has affected him/her in an unfavorable manner.

Olshtain and Weinback (1987) specify the necessary preconditions for the speech act of complaint as follows:

1. The speaker expects a favorable event to occur (an appointment, the return of a debt, the fulfillment of a promise, etc), or an unfavorable event to be prevented from occurring, (a damage, an insult etc), the action results, therefore, in the violation of speaker's expectations by either having enabled or failed to prevent the offensive event.
2. The speaker sees an action as having unfavorable consequences for him/her-self. The action is therefore the offensive act.
3. The speaker holds the hearer responsible for the action.
4. The speaker chooses to express his/her dissatisfaction and frustration verbally.

It is generally agreed that the speech act of complaint is face-threatening to the hearer. When the speaker makes direct complaints, he/she is more likely to threat the hearer's face, or say hurt his/her feelings and hence impair the relationship between them. (Moon, 2001).

According to Sauer, (2000), speakers may tend to use a variety of linguistic forms and nonverbal signals in order to save the hearer's face and remain polite even when performing the inherently face-threatening
The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English

speech act of complaint. Of course, this requires a higher, level of pragmatic competence.

Unfortunately, many nonnative speakers lack both the socio-cultural and the linguistic competences that may qualify them to perform appropriate speech acts. They may not be quite familiar with the native speaker's conventions in complaining and hence they might not be able to make the right choice of linguistic forms or non-verbal signals that might help to mitigate the face-threatening effects of this speech act (Moon, 2001). More particularly, the Sudanese learners of English, from whom the sample of this study is drawn, are expected to face greater challenge in performing appropriate speech act of complaint in English, their language and culture being markedly different from that of the target language community.

A Selected Review of Empirical Studies on Complaint

Speech act of complaint has not been widely studied as it is the case with other speech acts of request, apology, promise and refusal. However, the few studies conducted into this area would serve to provide a good framework for this investigation.

One of the most widely quoted studies in this area, is the one conducted by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), who investigate the speech act of complaint as produced by native and nonnative speakers of Hebrew. The researchers develop Five categories that are based on severity of the complaint for a specific scenario in which one colleague had waited for another colleague who arrived late to an appointment. The five categories are: (1) below the level of reproach, "No harm done, let's meet some other time"; (2) disapproval, "It's a shame that we have to work faster now"; (3) direct complaint, "You are always late and now we have less time to do this job"; (4) accusation and warning, "Next time don't expect me to sit here waiting for you"; and (5) threat, "If we don't finish the job today, I'll have to discuss it with the boss" (p. 202). The
results of this study indicate that all members of the sample in both
groups (native and nonnative speakers of Hebrew) make use of the five
strategies mentioned above. However, in this particular scenario, the
sample shows greater tendency to use the middle three strategies in this
scale, i.e., disapproval, complaint and accusation. The two extreme
strategies, i.e., "below the level of reproach" and "threat" are found to be
less frequently used.

Another study is done by Murphy and Neu (1996). In this case the
researchers study the speech act of complaint as produced by American
and Korean Learners of English. Four semantic formulas are identified.
These are : (1) an explanation of purpose, (2) a complaint, (3) a
justification, and (4) a candidate solution : request. The results of this
investigation reveal a high correlation between native and nonnative
speakers when producing three of the four speech act components –
explanation of purpose, justification, and candidate solution. Native
speakers (Americans) and nonnative speakers (Koreans), however differ
in production of the second component, (the complaint). The American
subjects produce a complaint in each instance, i.e., "I think, uh, it’s just
my opinion may be the grade was a little low," whereas most Koreans
produce a criticism, i.e., "But you just only look at your point of view
and uh you just didn’t recognize my point "(p.200). Such criticism, say
the authors, is very much likely to offend the hearer and may probably
lead to communication breakdown in an American context.

Moon (2001) studies the speech act of complaint as produced by
129 native and nonnative speakers of English. The native language
backgrounds of the 56 nonnative subjects are widely ranged. There are
15 kinds of first languages including: Chinese, Farsi, Greek, Japanese,
Korean, Napali, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Tagalog, Tigringa
and Vietnamese. In order to collect data of NS and NNS utterances in
complaints, questionnaires are used with a "Discourse Completion Test"
(DCT). The (DCT) gives four prompts that provide the subjects with
The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English

complaint situations. The data collected from the subjects is analyzed based on the notion of "severity of the complaint". The results of this study reveal that nonnative speaker subjects do not always make complaints following the appropriate ways of NS's complaints. They tend to make complaints in a more explicit way, whereas native subjects use more implicit ways of complaints.

Quite recently Tanck (2002) conducts research that aims to compare the pragmatic competence of adult ESL speakers to that of adult native English speakers when performing the speech act of complaints and refusals. To generate data for this study, the subjects are given a "Discourse Completion Test" wherein they are asked to write their responses to six prompts, resembling the two acts and two distracters, within familiar, equal and superior\inferior relationships. Responses of native English speakers are reviewed for evidence of common components of speech act sets to establish a set of baseline responses. The responses made by the nonnative speakers are then evaluated for the presence and quality of the speech act components as compared to the native speakers. The results of this study show that while native and nonnative speakers often produce almost identical speech act set components for complaints and refusals, the quality of the components produced by nonnative speakers differ markedly from those made by the native speakers sample. It is also found that the nonnative speakers' responses, though generally linguistically correct, lack the pragmatic elements that allow these face-threatening acts of complaint and refusal to be well received by the hearer.

From the above literature review which covers both theoretical and empirical studies, one may come up with the following conclusions.
First, speech acts are performed in real situations of language use. They are used not only to inform, but also to have things done. Second, complaint is a speech act that occurs when a speaker reacts with
dissatisfaction or annoyance to an action that has unfavorably affected him/her. Third, complaint is a face-threatening act and native speakers of English tend to realize it through the use of more indirect strategies. Fourth, nonnative speakers of English may not be quite familiar with the native speakers conventions of complaining and as such their complaints may sound rather "impolite" and this may lead to communication breakdown.

To avoid such communication breakdowns and other misgivings, it is felt important to analyze second language learners’ socio-cultural communicative competence to see to what extent they adhere to the rules of politeness in the target language community. This can possibly be done by comparing their speech act behavior to that of native speakers. Such comparisons may help applied linguists, and most particularly second / foreign language teachers and syllabus designers to account for deviations that may characterize nonnative speakers' performance and to suggest the most salient strategies that may help the learners to acquire the pragmalinguistic aspects of the target language. Along this line comes this study as an investigation into the speech act of complaint as produced by advanced Sudanese learners of English. It is hoped that this investigation would shed some light on the problems that face these learners in performing the challenging task of making proper complaint in English.

Questions of the study

This study, being an investigation into the speech act of complaint as performed by advance Sudanese learners of English, is intended to address the following questions:

0- Do advanced Sudanese learners of English adopt the native speakers' conventions when they perform the speech act of complaint?
0- Do advanced Sudanese learners of English choose the appropriate linguistic and pragmatic forms when performing complaint in English?

0- Is there any evidence of pragmatic transfer from the mother tongue to the second language?

Method

Overview

To compare the pragmatic competence of advanced Sudanese learners of English to that of native speakers of English when performing the speech act of complaint, all subjects are given a "Discourse Completion Test" and they are requested to write their natural responses to three prompts representing the designated speech act within familiar-equal, and inferior-superior relationships. The "Discourse Completion Test" has been used repeatedly as the bases of many speech act studies, including Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) study of complaint and Tanck's (2002) study of complaint and refusal.

Responses of native English speakers are analyzed for evidence of common components of speech act sets to establish a set of baseline responses that may serve as a yard-stick to measure the level of appropriateness of the nonnative speakers complaints. The responses made by the advanced Sudanese learners of English are then evaluated for the presence of these components and their appropriateness.

The Subjects

The sample of this study consists of sixty subjects. Forty-six of them are advanced Sudanese learners of English and fourteen British native speakers of English. The members of the Sudanese sample are graduate students pursuing graduate courses in English at four different Sudanese universities. More specifically, fifteen subjects of this sample
are drawn from Khartoum University, twelve from Juba University, ten from EL-Gazeerah University and nine subjects are from The Islamic University of Omdurman. This sample is formed of equal numbers of male and female subjects (23 males and 23 females). All subjects have studied English for more than ten years. It is also revealed that their ages range between 25 and 46 years. The native speakers sample consists of six males and eight females. They are all British expatriates working in the Sudan. Four of them are teachers, and ten are aid assistants working with international organizations operating in the country. Their ages range between 26 and 50 years.

**Data Collection**

To collect data for this study, the researcher has used two main instruments: a "Demographic Survey" and a "Discourse Completion Test", (DCT). In the "Demographic Survey", the subjects are requested to give basic information such as age, gender, level of education and first language. The Sudanese learners are further asked to give information about their English learning environments, length of period of English study, frequency and context of English use, and self-rating of English fluency.

The Discourse Completion Test, (henceforth DCT) is a form of questionnaire depicting some natural situations to which the respondents are expected to react making complaints. In this case the (DCT) gives three prompts that provide the subjects with complaint situations and the subjects are, then, asked to write their natural responses for each situation. The prompts suggest equal or unequal power in the relationship between the interlocutors. Scenarios involve either the subject and a friend, the subject and a stranger, and the subject and a boss. These are interacting under the following situations:

**Situation One:**

Knowing that your room will be vacant over the weekend as you
The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English

are visiting your family who lives in another city, your friend requests to stay in your room over the weekend to prepare for his / her final exams. You permit him / her to stay. However, when you come back you find that your friend has behaved carelessly and messed up the room.

**Situation Two :**

You need to buy a ticket to travel to a nearby city to visit your family over the weekend. You go to the ticket office at the bus station and you have to wait in a long line to get a ticket. The tickets are almost sold out. You have been waiting there for more than an hour. While you are standing in line, some one about your age, tries to cut in line in front of you.

**Situation Three :**

You are applying for a position with a highly reputed company. The interview committee wants to have a recommendation letter from your employer. Your boss agrees to send this letter directly to the company. A month later you discover that the committee has not received this letter. You go to your boss's office to find out what has happened.

The above (DCT) has been designed after an intensive review of studies done in the area of pragmatics and more particularly on the speech act of complaint. Three studies are found to be specially helpful in designing this (DCT). These are Olshtain and Weinbach's, (1987), Moon's (2001) and Tanck's (2002) studies. Situations in the original studies are radically modified and adapted to suit the Sudanese context.

The modified form of the (DCT) is given to four staff members in the department of English at the University of Khartoum for validation. Their suggestions and observations are well taken into consideration in designing the final form of the (DCT). For further validation the (DCT) is piloted on five subjects and a few amendments are made.

The final form of the (DCT) (appendix A) together with the
Demographic "Survey" (Appendix B) are given to the subjects from both groups; the British native speakers of English and the advanced Sudanese learners of English. The (DCT) and the "Demographic Survey" are administered by the researcher himself for the native speakers. However, in the case of the Sudanese learners, three colleagues have provided invaluable assistance in conducting the (DCT) and the Survey.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected through the (DCT) are analyzed. This analysis involves independent examination of each response for the three situations. The native speakers responses to the (DCT) are used as criteria to decide the level of appropriateness of the Sudanese learners of English complaints. Common components of speech act sets found in the Native Speakers' complaints are used to establish a set of baseline responses.

In analyzing complaints made by native speakers for the above situations, it is found that these may include some or all of the following components:

1. Excusing Self for Imposition, "Sorry to bother you boss";
2. Establishing Context or Support, "This letter is really very important, they said";
3. A Request "Could you please help me clean the room before you leave";
4. Conveyance of Sense of Dissatisfaction, Disappoint or Annoyance, "I am very disappointed and a bit angry";
5. Warning or Threat, "I would think twice before I let you or any one else use this place again".

Generally speaking, one or more of the above components are produced in each of the three situations by native speakers. It is obvious that the use of one or more of these components depends largely on the social distance between the interlocutors and the severity of the offensive act. Frequency of occurrence of these components as used by native and nonnative speakers is presented in tables for each situation; native speakers' performance will be taken as a yard-stick to measure the appropriateness of the complaints of Sudanese learners of English.
Results and Discussion

In this part of the study, the findings will be presented and discussed. Responses of both native and nonnative subjects will be compared and discussed separately for each situation.

Situation One:

Knowing that your room will be vacant over the weekend as you are visiting your family who lives in another city, your friend requests to stay in your room over the weekend to prepare for his / her final exams. You permit him / her to stay. However, when you come back you find that your friend has behaved carelessly and messed up the room.

In response to this prompt, in which the speaker is complaining to a friend who has messed up the speaker's room, native speakers of English and Sudanese advanced learners of English tend to apply similar complaint components, but with different levels of frequency. The frequency of use (by both native and nonnative speakers) of individual components of complaint for this situation is summarized in Table 1 and Graph 1 below:

Table 1: Complaint made to a friend who messes up speaker’s room

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Complainer</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Excusing self for imposing</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SALE</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Establishing context or support</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SALE</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Request</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SALE</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Conveyance of a sense of annoyance or dissatisfaction</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SALE</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Warning or direct criticism</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SALE</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BNS = British native speakers SALE = Sudanese advance learners of English
From the above Table and Graph, one can clearly observe the discrepancy in the level of frequency in which each individual component is used. The native speakers tend to use these components a lot more frequently than the Sudanese learners of English. The native speakers, for instance, use the third component, i.e., request, (67%) compared to (24%) by the Sudanese learners. It is also noticed that native speakers "convey annoyance" more often than the Sudanese learners. The percentage is (72%) compared to (31%). The two groups have also shown marked differences in using warning and direct criticism. The native speakers use this component (34%) more than the Sudanese learners of English when complaining to a friend who messes up their rooms.

The above data may reveal that the Sudanese group is more reserved in making complaint to a friend who messes up their rooms. Their complaints seem too modest compared to that of their British native counterparts and hence they would sound rather inappropriate if they were to make such complaints in a target language context.

This modesty in expressing complaints can be explained in the light of the socio-cultural differences between the two groups and in the
light of pragmatic transfer. Friendship seems to be viewed differently in the two cultures. In the Sudanese culture, a friend is rather a special person. For most Sudanese, a friend should not be reproved or criticized specially at his / her friend’s home. This fact, perhaps, has led many Sudanese to abstain from making direct complaint or conveying annoyance at their friends’ offensive act.

However, the limited number of components used by the Sudanese learners of English compared to that used by the native speakers to perform the speech act of complaint could also be attributed to the limitation of the nonnative speakers linguistic competence.

Sample complaints made by BNS in response to situation one

1. This room is terribly messed up!
2. What happens? It sounds like you have been too busy.
3. Could you please clean the room before you leave?
4. I would think twice before let you or anyone else use this room.

Sample complaints made by ASLE in response to situation one

1. “What happened?”
2. “What happen? You seemed to be very busy.”
3. “Sorry. The room is not very clean. We have to clean it now.”
4. “Don’t worry. I would do the cleaning myself.”
5. “Ok, it is made dirty. Never mind. I don’t mind.”

The above provide typical examples of the Sudanese way of making complaint to a friend. Although the first statement “What happened” resembles an appropriate way of making complaint in the target language, the rest of the utterances may hardly be so. They are characterized with marked deviations from native complaints.

In response No. 2, for instance, the subject says “What happen?” instead of ‘What happened?” or “what happens?” Although this might not seriously impair communication, it reveals the weakness of the
linguistic competence of the nonnative subjects.

In the third example, the subject opens his/her complaint with an apology “Sorry” which can not serve as a successful strategy for making complaint. In a Western context one apologizes when he/she offends others, not when being offended. Paradoxically, the subject ends up this sentence by making an obligation statement “We have to clean it now” which sounds very awkward in this context.

In the fourth example, “Don’t worry. I would do the cleaning myself”. The speaker sounds like apologizing rather than complaining, providing a typical example of pragmatic transfer. The speaker sounds too complacent.

Another feature that characterizes the complaints of the Sudanese non-native speakers of English in this situation is that they are short and brief and they rarely combine more than two of the components commonly found in native speakers complaints. All this reduces the quality of the Sudanese Learners complaint and renders them inappropriate in western contexts.

**Situation Two:**

You need to buy a ticket to travel to a nearby city to visit your family over the weekend. You go to the ticket office at the bus station and you have to wait in a long line to get a ticket. The tickets are almost sold out. You have been waiting there for more than an hour. While you are standing in line, some one about your age, tries to cut in line in front of you!

The responses of both native and non-native speakers are summarized in Table 2 and Graph 2 below. The Table and Graph reflect the components used by both British Native Speakers of English and the Sudanese Learners of English to realize the speech act of complaint. They also reveal the percentage of those who use each component.
Table 2: Situation Two – Complaint made to a stranger who tries to cut in line at a ticket office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Complainer</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Excusing oneself for imposing</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Establishing context</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Request</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conveyance of sense of annoyance</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Warning and criticism</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table and Graph show that the two groups use the same components, but they AGAIN differ in the percentages with which these
components are used.

The first component, i.e., “Excusing Oneself for Imposing”, for instance, is used by the Native Speakers as twice as much as the Sudanese Learners of English. The ratio is 7.4: 3.6. The two groups use components three and four (Requesting and conveyance of annoyance) with almost similar levels of frequency. However, when it comes to the last component which involves “Direct Criticism”, more Sudanese learners of English are found using this component more often than their native counterparts. In fact, the percentage of Sudanese learners who use this component is almost five times as much as the British native speakers of English. The ratio is 4.6: 1.

Since the Sudanese learners of English “Excuse Themselves for Imposing” much less often and use “Direct Criticism” much more frequently than the native speaker, their complaints would sound more confrontational and hence less appropriate in the target language context.

Sample Complaints made by BNS in response to Situation Two
1. Would you mind going back to the end of the end of the queue?
2. This is rather unfair!
3. Excuse me! Do you know that we have been waiting on this dull queue for over an hour?

Sample complaints made by ASLE to Situation Two
1. “Please can you go back behind the end of the line?”
2. “Hey! Please don’t cut the line like that. We have been waiting here since the morning. We all want to get tickets. You are no better than anyone here. You must go behind the line.
3. “Excuse me, you came late and you want to get your ticket before others? No, you cannot. This is selfish of you. Go to the waiting line.”
4. “Oh my God! Excuse me; you cannot cut in line like this. This is frustrating. This is uncivilized behavior”.

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28 Vol. 18-N0.2- Jumada II 1427AH. July 2006
5. “Sorry, this is unjust. Who are you to get a ticket before others?

The above samples from nonnative speakers show that the Sudanese learners of English demonstrate much lower level of courtesy in forming complaint to a stranger who cuts in line at a bus station. Those learners tend to express their annoyance more explicitly; “We have been waiting here since the morning” “This is frustrating”; “This is unjust”. They also tend to criticize the hearer for cutting in line. “This is selfish”; “You are no better than anyone here”; “Who are you to get a ticket before others?” and “This is uncivilized behavior”. 

The use of explicit complaint and direct criticism of the hearer render the complaint of the Sudanese learners of English inappropriate. They will be taken as insults rather than complaints if uttered in a British context.

Inappropriate performance of complaint by the Sudanese learners of English could also be attributed to linguistic limitations. The Sudanese learners, for instance, do not seem to be aware of the difference between “Excuse me” and “Sorry” and they use them interchangeably. Linguistic limitation may also appear in example No. 3, where the speaker says “Go to the waiting line” which sounds rather vague. Further, in example No. 2 the speaker uses a rather colloquial language “You are no better than anyone here”.

One more thing that makes the Sudanese learners of English complaints sound more inappropriate is their intensive used of “imperatives”. Imperatives are used quite frequently in most of the complaints uttered. See the following examples:

1. “Don’t cut the line like that”.
2. “You must go behind us”.
3. “Go to the waiting line”.
4. “Go to your place”.

This intensive use of imperatives can be cited as a clear example
of pragmatic transfer.

**Situation Three:**

You are applying for a position with a highly reputed company. The interview committee wants to have a recommendation letter from your previous employer. Your boss agrees to send this letter directly to the company. A month later you discover that the committee has not received this letter. You go to your boss's office to find out what has happened.

In response to this situation, the native speakers and the Sudanese learners of English make different forms of complaints. These differences are found mainly at the level of directness of complaint and in the frequency with which they use these components. Table 3 and Graph 3 below indicate these differences.

**Table 3: Complaints made to a boss for not sending a letter of recommendation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Complainer</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Excusing Oneself for Imposing</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Establishing Context / Support</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Request</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conveying Sense of Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Criticism or Warning</td>
<td>BNS</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASLE</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 3 and Graph 3 above, one may discover that both BNS and Sudanese learners of English use “Establishing Context” component and “Request” with very similar levels of frequency in realizing complaint. The ratio is 9.7 : 9.0 and 9.3 : 9.0 for the two components respectively; however, differences between the two groups are found in the use of two crucial components of complaint; “Excusing Self for Imposing” and “Conveying Sense of Annoyance or Dissatisfaction”. Whereas native speakers tend to “Excuse themselves for Imposing” more often than Sudanese, learners, Sudanese learners of English use to “Convey Dissatisfaction” more frequently than their native counterparts. The later component, i.e., “Expressing Annoyance” is used by (40%) of Sudanese learners while used by only (10%) of the native speakers of the language. Further, whereas native speakers do not find it adequate to criticize their boss, (6%) of the Sudanese sample does so.

Direct ‘Conveyance of Disappointment’, associated with occasional ‘Criticism’ of the boss render complaints of Sudanese learners
of English rather unacceptable.

In fact, this situation is quite different from the previous ones in that the complaint is made about a more serious matter; that is not sending an important letter of recommendation. Also this situation differs with regard to the relation between the interlocutors; that is, a power difference exists between them. So, a higher level of politeness is expected to be demonstrated. However, the Sudanese sample does not seem to give much weight to higher ranking factor and thus their complaints sound more direct and hence less appropriate to the context.

Sample Complaints made by ASLE in response to Situation Three

1. "Excuse me; how about the recommendation letter; did you send it? The committee wanted it urgently".

2. "Sorry Sir, I am inquiring about the recommendation letter. The committee said they don't receive it. If you don't send it, I lost the job".

3. "Excuse me, why don't you send the recommendation letter? They said they haven't get it".

4. "Sir, I feel bad when I discovered you did not send the recommendation letter.

Considering the sample complaints of this group, one may observe the rather explicit way of complaint of the Sudanese sample. One may also notice the linguistic limitations of the Sudanese Learners of English. This can be documented in the following examples

1. "The committee said they don't receive it". (Use of a wrong tense in a reported speech).

2. “If you don’t sent it, I lost the job”. (Wrong use of tenses and wrong conditional clause)

Ignorance of the socio-pragmatic rules of the target language that govern interaction between interlocutors under such constraints (a person
in lower position complaining to some one in higher position such as the boss), accompanied with linguistic limitations seem to reflect negatively on the performance of complaint of some of the Sudanese learners of English, and render them inappropriate.

Summary and Conclusion

The main objective of this investigation is to explore the differences between advanced Sudanese learners of English and native speakers’ production of the speech act of complaint. Analysis of data generated through a (DCT) reveals some important results.

It is found that advanced Sudanese learners of English, in spite of the so many years they spend in learning English, are yet not capable of performing adequate complaints in English. Their utterances are not always consistent with native speakers in terms of appropriateness to the situation. It is also found that advanced Sudanese learners of English produce fewer components of the semantic formulas necessary for making the target speech act of complaints.

Pragmatically, the Sudanese learners of English seem to swing between two extremes. They are either too complacent (when complaining to a close friend) or too confrontational, (when complaining to a stranger who cuts in line) and in both cases they fail to conduct complaint appropriately in English. Sudanese learners of English seem to resort to conventions of their own culture when performing this speech act, and hence their complaint will be inappropriate if used in the target language context.

Pragmalinguistic deficiency is further demonstrated in the repeated use of imperatives, such as “Go back to the end of the line” and “Don’t cut in the line”. It is also demonstrated in wrong inquiries directed to the boss “Why don’t you send the recommendation letter” Which suggests that the boss can be held accountable by the student. In a British
cultural setting such a question is unacceptable.

Failure to perform proper complaints is largely attributable to cultural differences, pragmatic transfer, and limitation of linguistic competence.

Implications of the Study

This study has some important theoretical and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, this study reveals that advanced Sudanese learners of English do not always follow the same conventions of native speakers when performing the speech act of complaints. Instead, they resort to their own socio-cultural background to reformulate their complaint strategies. This implies that it is not always the target language norms that decide the choice of certain speech act strategies.

In spite of the relatively long period of learning English (ten years plus), the Sudanese learners of English do not demonstrate sufficient linguistic or socio-pragmatic skills that qualify them to produce appropriate complaint in English. This may lead to question the efficacy of the teaching methods and approaches adopted in the country.

On the pedagogical level, this study reveals the importance of the cultural dimension for proper communication in the target language context. To help students realize maximum pragmatic success, teachers need to make their students fully aware of the specific speech act sets and the accompanying linguistic features to produce appropriate and acceptable complaint and other important speech acts (Tanck, 2002).

Umar, (2004) claims that this awareness could only be enhanced through a variety of classroom drills and exercises that involve realization of the target speech act in different situations. Learners should be given ample time to practice these drills of pragmatic competence “until they become part of their linguistic repertoire” (P.24). Morrow, (1996) proposes that specific speech act instruction could improve
The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English

pragmatic competence of nonnative speakers, and Hudson, (2001) suggests the use of (DCT) in the classroom to focus on the social distance between speakers. Role play may also be recommended as a classroom procedure to enhance linguistic and cultural appropriateness of different speech acts.

Suggestions for Further Research

This research concentrates on the speech act of complaint which demands more social interaction skills as well as many face-saving strategies. Further studies should be launched to tackle the different variables that may affect the production of this challenging speech act. Sex and age differences together with the level of offence involved should all be carefully studied in future research. Further studies should also involve larger samples and more situations to yield more valid results.
APPENDIX A
Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

Directions: Please write your response in the blank area. Do not spend a lot of time thinking about what answer you think you should provide; instead, please respond as naturally as possible.

Situation One:
Knowing that your room will be vacant over the weekend as you are visiting your family who lives in another city, your friend requests to stay in your room over the weekend to prepare for his / her final exams. You permit him / her to stay. However, when you come back you find that your friend has behaved carelessly and messed up the room.

Situation Two:
You need to buy a ticket to travel to a nearby city to visit your family over the weekend. You go to the ticket office at the bus station and you have to wait in a long line to get a ticket. The tickets are almost sold out. You have been waiting there for more than an hour. While you are standing in line, some one about your age, tries to cut in line in front of you.

Situation Three:
You are applying for a position with a highly reputed company. The interview committee wants to have a recommendation letter from your previous employer. Your boss agrees to send this letter directly to the company. A month later you discover that the committee has not received this letter. You go to your boss's office to find out what has happened.

Thank you for your efforts and time,...
APPENDIX B
Demographic Information

0. Age :
0. Gender :
0. Is English your First Language?
   (If yes, you don’t need to answer the following questions)
0. For how many years have you studied English?
0. Have you had a chance to study English outside of the classroom?
0. What has your English Study focused on (i.e., grammar, translation, conversation, reading and writing skills?)
0. How often do you use English outside the school or university?
0. Do you consider yourself fluent enough in English?
References


The speech act of complaint as realized by advanced Sudanese learners of English


