

Say What?: Filipino ESL Learners' Semantic Formula in Expressing Complaints

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Abstract

Complaining is one of the difficult tasks one has to do because when one complains, one does not only express some displeasure but also expects some form of repair. Hence, it is important for language learners to be taught how to effectively do so. Despite this, the teaching of the speech act of complaint has been taken for granted: either very little is included or it is absent in the language classroom instruction. This study attempts to examine how Filipino ESL learners structure their complaints. Featuring 18 situations calibrated on three social variables (interlocutors' social power and social distance, as well as the complainable acts' degree of severity), the discourse completion task elicited respondents' written expression of complaints, which were then analyzed using Schaefer's (1982, as cited in Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000) framework for analyzing the semantic formula of complaints. Results of the study provide a baseline data on respondents' language of complaining, which provides many pedagogical implications and serves as a springboard for the development of classroom resource materials leading to an informed and judicious teaching of pragmatics.

Keywords: complaints, pragmatics, speech act, speech act of complaints

Introduction

In his lecture in 1955 at Harvard University, the philosopher John L. Austin argued that there are various ways people do with language and that messages could not only be interpreted as either true or false. For him, when people say something, they do something. For example, if someone says, "It's cold," s/he may not only be commenting on the weather but may also be subtly requesting the hearer to either shut the window or turn up the temperature of the air conditioner. Thus, the idea of speech acts was borne.

Austin's student Searle expanded the idea by classifying the speech acts (Parker & Riley, 2005). He maintained that there may be several speech acts, but they may be classified into six: representatives, which allow speakers to make a proposition whose falsity or truthfulness could be assessed; directives, which allow speakers to demand the hearers to do something; commissives, which make the speakers to commit themselves to future action; expressives, which allow speakers to include their feelings about some state of affairs in their propositional content; declarations, which when performed successfully change the status or the condition of the hearer; and questions, which allow speakers to elicit information from the hearer (Parker & Riley, 2005).

Any speech act is said to be potentially-threatening to the face, a concept which refers to "the positive social value a person effectively claims for him [or her]" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5 as cited in Archer, Aijmer, & Wichmann, 2012). This idea of the face was adopted by Brown and Levinson (1987) to introduce the face threatening act (FTA), which deals with how a person's public image can be challenged. For Brown and Levinson, a model person is able to protect his/her face, and in doing so may harm the face of the challenger. Archer, Aijmer, and Wichmann (2012) maintained that keeping the face is always in the best interest of all participants in the communicative process. However, an FTA cannot be avoided, so politeness strategies need to be employed. Spencer-Oatey and Zegarac (2010) said that the language in an interaction is shaped by the participants, which includes the degrees of social distance and power among them; how face-threatening the content of the message is; and the activity, which affects the participants' language behavior and choices.

Among the speech acts that are considered high-threatening is the speech act of complaints. However, studies done on it are not as extensive as other speech acts like complimenting, apologizing, and refusing. De Leon and Parina (2016) surmised that it is rarely investigated, especially in the Asian context, because it almost always includes an unfavorable assessment of an addressee's speech or action, rendering it highly threatening to the face.

When complaining, a speaker articulates what s/he considers displeasing or annoying, which s/he perceives to have unfavorable outcomes (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987). However, complaining may not only be an expression of displeasure, but it may also require some form of remedy. Thus, Trosborg (1995) argued that complaining has both expressive and directive functions. As such, by articulating the disappointment or the displeasure, the speaker potentially harms the hearer's positive face, which yearns for acceptance and approval; by demanding a remedy, the speaker also threatens the negative face of the hearer, which yearns that one's freedom to do as one pleases be not curtailed (Ghaznavi, 2017).

Because complaining is a highly threatening speech act, many studies on complaints delve on the complaint strategies people use, which was pioneered by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987). They proposed the five severity scale of complaints which include *below*

the level of reproach, expression of annoyance or disapproval, explicit complaint, accusation and warning, and immediate threat. Among the studies that examined non-native English speakers' use of these strategies are those by Yaramahdi and Fathi (2015); Nakhle, Naghavi, and Razavi (2014); Chen, Chen, and Chang (2011); and Li and Suleiman (2017).

However, studies on the speech act of complaints do not always have to be focused on the complaint strategies used. They could also be on the semantic formulae of complaints as done by Trenchs (2000) and de Leon and Parina (2016).

In her study, Trenchs (2000) investigated how similar and different the semantic components of Catalan speakers' complaints are from those by American speakers. Using a discourse completion task, she had three groups (20 Americans, 20 Catalan-speaking students, and 27 Catalan ESL learners) respond to 12 complaint-provoking situations. She found out that the groups for the most part had similar ways in expressing complaints; however, she noted an occurrence of pragmatic transfer among the Catalan speakers. The differences were noticeable when speakers joked, preached, or cursed in making a complaint. It was also noted in the way they opted out or made conventional non-verbal sounds.

For their study, de Leon and Parina (2016) examined how Filipinos complain in both English and Tagalog. Specifically, they wanted to find out whether there was a relationship between their possibility to complain to three other factors: gender, language proficiency, and status. In addition, they also examined the semantic formulae used by male and female participants. Their results showed that there was no link between participants' likelihood to complain to either or the factors. However, they found out that the ways participants complained differed depending on the language they were using. Also, the semantic formulae male and female participants used differed.

Based on the surveyed literature and studies, majority of the investigations done on complaints were lodged in EFL settings; few have been done in ESL settings. This present study then aims to fill this gap and contribute to the literature on complaints in a context where English enjoys a second language status.

This present study is similar to Trenchs's and de Leon and Parina's in the sense that it also attempted to examine the semantic formulae used by participants to realize complaints. However, it is different from the previous studies because it analyzed complaints realized only in English by ESL learners. Specifically, the paper's objective is to identify what semantic components are present in ESL Filipinos' complaints.

Results of the study have many important pedagogical implications. What semantic patterns would emerge make up a baseline data that can be used to improve the teaching of pragmatics, an aspect of language teaching that is missing in the curriculum. They can inform how ESL learners articulate complaints in the target language and at the same time, reveal what language aspects need to be reinforced to improve the linguistic and pragmatic

repertoire of these students. Knowledge of these can lead to the development of meaningful materials and activities for pragmatic teaching.

Methods

The study employed a mixed methods research to answer the posited question. By mixing both quantitative and qualitative means, the researcher is able to have an eclectic approach in conducting research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Because this is a pragmatic study, the data sets that were collected were largely qualitative, elicited using a written discourse completion task (WDCT). However, descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages) were used to make sense of the data; hence, a basic quantitative analysis was done. A focus group discussion was also conducted to corroborate, expand, and elaborate on the data taken from the WDCT.

Participants. Using purposive sampling, thirty students taking basic communication classes in a leading Christian university in Dumaguete City, Philippines, were recruited to participate in the study. They were chosen based on their English language scores given to all basic communication students. Having garnered the top 30 highest scores, they are considered high-proficient ESL learners.

After responses had been categorized and analyzed, ten students who answered the WDCT were invited for a focus group discussion; however, only six were able to attend. This session provided additional data, which were incorporated in the discussion and analysis below.

Instruments. A written discourse completion task (WDCT) was used to elicit data. The WDCT is considered to be the most common method for pragmatics-based research (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Data is elicited by asking participants to write their responses to supplied situations that feature speech act occurrences.

Since this is a study of the speech act of complaints, participants were asked to respond to 18 complaint-provoking situations. These were calibrated on three variables: the speaker's social status and social distance with respect to the hearer's, and the severity of the offense. A respondent's social status can be low, equal, or high with respect to the addressee in each situation. Social distance can be unfamiliar when the interlocutors are strangers to each other and have not in any way engaged in a conversation; familiar when they are acquaintances, having had brief encounters previously; or close when they have established a strong relationship. Severity of the offense refers to the cost or damage of the complainable act; hence, it can either be high or low. Below is the summary of the 18 situations.

Table 1

A Summary of Situations for the Written Discourse Completion Task

Situation	Power	Distance	Offense
1. A scholarship officer hands you photocopied documents instead of your original ones.	low	unfamiliar	low
2. A police officer, at a check point, accidentally breaks a glass that is part of a set that you have received as a gift from your sibling.	low	unfamiliar	high
3. A platoon officer in your ROTC, missing to see your ID, gives you a minimal demerit.	low	familiar	low
4. The Accounts Officer you've had dealings before does not credit your last payment to your current billing.	low	familiar	high
5. Your aunt forgets to buy the gum, which you asked for.	low	close	low
6. Your mom accidentally throws the used tickets you've been collecting for a year for your scrapbook.	low	close	high
7. A shopper in a grocery accidentally and lightly hits you with a cart.	equal	unfamiliar	low
8. A fellow passenger jumps in line when you have been in queue for more than an hour.	equal	unfamiliar	high
9. A fellow student accidentally bumps you, almost making you drop the pot of plant your teacher has requested you to carry to the classroom.	equal	familiar	low
10. A fellow dormer plays music at 2:00 a.m., not allowing you to rest when you have an important presentation in a few hours.	equal	familiar	high
11. Your same-aged cousin comes late for your meet-up, almost making you late for the movie you're watching.	equal	close	low
12. Your friend crushing part of your project, which you have been working on for hours and which is due the following morning.	equal	close	high
13. A book attendant re-stacking the books you wanted to buy.	high	unfamiliar	low
14. A waiter accidentally spilling hot soup on you.	high	unfamiliar	high
15. A store cashier you know gives you your change that's lacking Php 2.00.	high	familiar	low
16. A laundry attendant you know who stains a brand new Calvin Klein jeans that your mom gifted you.	high	familiar	high
17. A niece who forgets to return for a few days your bag that she borrowed.	high	close	low
18. A nephew who returns an expensive bag which you have saved up for in terrible condition.	high	close	high

Another instrument used was the questionnaire for the FGD. Since the purpose of the FGD was to corroborate, validate, and expand the data elicited from the WDCT, the set of questions was formulated after the results of the WDCT had been sorted out.

Framework of Analysis. Responses to the WDCT were analyzed using Schaefer's framework (1982, as cited in Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). According to this framework, a complaint can have the following components: an **opener** that typically begins the

complaint; an **orientation** that introduces the speaker and gives what prompts the complaint; the **act statement** that mentions the complaint itself; the **justification**, which allows the complainer to explain why a complaint has to be made or to give some justifications for the hearer's actions; a **request for remedy**, which contains a request to repair the wrong that is perceived to have been done; a **valuation**, an expression of the speaker's feelings towards the action or the person who committed the offense; and a **closing** that signifies the end of the complaint. Below is a table of the semantic components with examples.

Table 2

Schaefer's Semantic Formula

Semantic Component	Example
Opener	"Excuse me, sir."
Orientation	"I have a concern about my statement of account."
Act Statement	"My last payment has not been reflected."
Justification	"It's not the first time that it's happened."
Request for Remedy	"Can you check it, please?"
Valuation	"This is so inconvenient."
Closing	"Thank you."

Data collection process. A letter, signifying the researcher's intent to conduct the research in the university was sent to the University Research Ethics Committee. Once, it was approved, the 30 students who qualified using the set criteria were recruited. They were then given the written consent form to brief them about the project. After they had agreed to participate in the study, they were given the WDCT to answer. Answers to the WDCT were then analyzed, after which the questions for the FGD were formulated. Ten students who had answered the WDCT were contacted later and invited to participate in the FGD. Only six were able to join; the four could not make it because of schedule constraints. Those who attended were again briefed about the project and the purpose of the FGD. They were asked to sign another consent form. During the FGD, a facilitator led the discussion and two recorders were present during the proceedings. After the discussion, a transcript was made and then validated using the recorders' notes and audio recording.

Results

Overall, 540 utterances were analyzed. Out of these, it was found out that the participants produced 114 semantic structures, which featured combinations of the semantic components of complaints. To illustrate, below are some elicited responses for Situation 1:

Opener

Act Statement

“Sir/ma’am, why are you keeping my original documents instead of the photocopied ones?”

Opener

Act Statement

Request for Remedy

“Excuse me, sir. You gave me the photocopied documents. Can I please get the original documents back?”

Opener

Act Statement

Justification

“Ma’am, excuse me. You have the original. I think I need them for my school records.”

Because of the number of semantic structures produced, frequency counts are spread out, and dominant patterns could only have minimal frequency shares. In fact, the top three patterns are **Valuation** (78), **Request for Remedy** (54), and **Opener - Act Statement** (41). However, examining the components of the complaints yielded interesting results.

Table 3

Semantic Components of Filipino ESL Learners' Complaints

Semantic Component	Frequency	Percentage
Opener (O)	237	43.89
Orientation (OR)	28	5.18
Act Statement (AS)	254	47.04
Justification (J)	180	33.33
Request for Remedy (R)	266	49.26
Valuation (V)	179	33.15
Closing (C)	19	3.52

Table 3 shows the number of semantic components found in the 540 utterances elicited from the participants. This means that regardless of the semantic structures produced, these components were present. Interestingly, the highest frequency counts are of the **Act Statement** and the **Request for Remedy**, which lend support to the idea that complaining is highly threatening to the face because it has both expressive and directive functions (Trosborg, 1995).

Almost half of the utterances contained requests for remedy. In a focus group discussion, the participants were asked if they always expected some form of repair when they complained. Two participants articulated that one complains because one wants something done.

S1: *...I don't complain about things if ...nothing is gonna come out of it. If I complain and ... the person is not gonna do anything about it, then I just wasted my time.*

S2: *I think that's the essence of the complaint. To have something done.*

Since the WDCT was calibrated on three variables, it is also worth noting if the same trend happens when the interlocutors have different social status and social distance and when the offenses have different degrees of severity.

Table 4

Semantic Components of Filipino ESL Learners' Complaints to People with Higher Status than Them

	With O		With OR		With AS		With J		With R		With V		With C	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Social Distance														
Unfamiliar	37	61.67	1	1.67	33	55	24	40	25	41.67	19	31.67	0	0
Familiar	44	73.33	17	28.33	34	56.67	27	45	27	45	21	35	3	5
Close	37	61.67	2	3.33	41	68.33	22	36.67	15	25	25	41.67	0	0
Severity														
Low	59	65.56	4	4.44	57	63.33	32	35.56	16	17.78	29	32.22	1	1.11
High	59	65.56	16	17.78	51	56.67	41	45.56	51	56.67	26	28.89	2	2.22

Items one to six of the WDCT feature a complainant with a lower status compared to the person being complained to. The social distance of the interlocutors is also different: they are unfamiliar to each other in items one and two, familiar to each other in items three and four, and close in items five and six. In terms of the severity of the offense, items one, three, and five are calibrated low while items two, four, and six are high.

Table 4 shows that what is consistently high in frequency count is the openers. This means that more than half of the complaints produced started with an opener, regardless of the social distance of the interlocutors or the severity of the offense. The following extracts illustrate this.

Situation 1:

Excuse me, sir. I'm supposed to keep the original documents. You've given me the photocopied ones.

Situation 2:

Excuse me, sir, I know checking our belonging is somehow part of your job. But you should've handled our stuff with care, sir.

Situation 3:

Sorry sir, I actually have my ID clipped in the lower part of my shirt.

Situation 4:

Hi! I have a concern about my statement of account. My last payment did not reflect when I checked it. Can you please do something about it?

The four complaints follow different semantic structures, but they all start with an opener. In Schaefer's framework (as cited in Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000), an opener typically opens the complaint. It could either be a formulaic adjuncts like the openers in Situations 1, 2, and 3, a salutation as in the opener in Situation 4, a name or an address, an attention getter, or a combination of other openers. Perhaps, the presence of openers in many of the complaints in these situations is an attempt of the complainants to appear polite despite having to issue a complaint. Rather than immediately mentioning what is wrong or what offended them, they included an opener that prompts whatever follows.

Aside from the opener, another component that is frequently present in the complaints is the act statement, which mentions the offense. The presence of this component is also high regardless of the interlocutors' social distance or the severity of the offense. This indicates that the participants seem not to have qualms about naming or mentioning what they perceive to be wrong.

Situation 5:

Tita, you forgot my gum. It's ok.

Situation 6:

Ma, why did you throw my tickets? I still have use for them.

The request for remedy is also high for the most part. However, when the social distance of the interlocutors is close, the request for remedy is lower compared to valuation.

This seems to indicate that when participants complain to people close to them, they do not usually expect them to do something about it; it seems that the act of complaining itself -- expressing how they feel about the offense or the person committing it -- seems to suffice. One participant in the focus group discussion intimated, "I think most of the time, especially if it's not a formal complaint, I don't necessarily expect a result. Sometimes it just feels good to complain." He added, "I think complaining becomes ... [a] friend in times of stress."

What is also interesting is the revelation that the participants tend to request for remedy when the offense is high; however, when it is low, the number of requests for remedy tend to be also low. One participant of the focus group discussion sheds light on this:

S2: As for me, ... it's like the severity of the offense. If it's just a minor thing, then like I would tell them, "Probably, you shouldn't do that the next time."

Table 5

Semantic Components of Filipino ESL Learners' Complaints to People with Equal Status as Them

	With O		With OR		With AS		With J		With R		With V		With C	
Social Distance	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Unfamiliar	24	40	0	0	13	21.67	12	20	27	45	27	45	2	3.33
Familiar	22	36.67	2	3.33	3	5	17	28.33	47	78.33	16	26.67	7	11.67
Close	6	10	1	1.67	33	55	17	28.33	35	58.33	25	41.66	0	0
Severity														
Low	14	15.56	1	1.11	26	28.89	10	11.11	39	43.33	41	45.56	1	1.11
High	38	42.22	2	2.22	23	25.56	36	40	70	77.78	27	30	8	8.89

Items seven to 12 of the WDCT feature interlocutors with equal status. For items seven and eight, their social distance is unfamiliar; for items nine and ten, familiar; and for items 11 and 12, close. The severity is low for items seven, nine, and 11; it is high for items eight, ten, and 12.

It appears that when participants complain to someone with equal status as them, their complaints tend to contain many requests for remedy. This semantic component has high frequency counts regardless of the social distance or the severity of the offense involved in the situations. This suggests that requests for remedy can be made more easily when there is no disparity in the interlocutors' social status. The following extracts show how the requests for remedy were phrased.

Situation 7:

Watch where you're going next time.

Situation 8:

Excuse me, sir. I know you're in a hurry and so are we. We've been here for more than an hour already. Can you please move to the back of the line? Thank you.

Situation 9:

Whoa! Eyes on the way, please. Please walk with caution, ok?

Situation 10:

Can you please lower the volume of your music? I can't sleep and I have a presentation early.

Situation 11:

It took you so long to come here. You have to treat me because you made me wait.

Situation 12:

I told you to be careful. Now it's ruined. You have to do something about it.

It is interesting to note that the request for remedy is at its highest frequency count when the participants are complaining to people who are familiar to them and when the complainable acts are considered to be severe. Results suggest that participants do not have difficulty complaining to people who have equal footing to them. They also highly demand for repair when the offense is considered costly for them or when it highly inconveniences them.

Other semantic components that registered high frequency counts are the act statement and valuation. Highest occurrence of act statement could be found in complaints addressed to people close to the complainer, which indicates the participants' propensity to express the problem when they are complaining to people with whom they have a close affinity. Perhaps, the nature of their relationship makes them less inhibited to do so. For valuation, it occurs most frequently in complaints addressed to strangers or those whom the

complainers are unfamiliar with. Perhaps, by expressing how they feel about the offense or the person committing it, the participants make it evident why the complaint has to be made.

Table 6

Semantic Components of Filipino ESL Learners' Complaints to People with Lower Status than Them

Social Distance	With O		With OR		With AS		With J		With R		With V		With C	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Unfamiliar	25	41.67	0	0	15	25	26	43.33	36	60	21	35	5	8.33
Familiar	26	43.33	1	1.67	46	76.67	11	18.33	27	45	10	16.67	1	1.67
Close	12	20	1	1.67	35	58.33	18	30	29	48.33	18	30	1	1.67
Severity														
Low	46	51.11	3	3.33	53	58.89	34	37.78	33	36.67	17	18.89	6	6.67
High	17	18.89	2	2.22	43	47.78	21	23.33	59	65.56	32	35.56	1	1.11

Items 13 to 18 feature situations in which the complainant has a higher status than the persons being complained to. The interlocutors have different social distance: for items 13 and 14, they are unfamiliar to each other; they are familiar with each other for items 15 and 16; and they are close for items 17 and 18. The complainable acts are considered low for items 13, 15, and 17; and high for items 14, 16, and 18.

The two components that are consistently high in frequency counts are act statement and request for remedy. This indicates that when lodging complaints to people with lower status than them, the participants often identify the problem, especially when they are acquainted with them or have a close relationship with them. Aside from this, they also often express requests for repair regardless of their distance with the addressees and especially when the severity of the offense is considered high. The following extracts show complaints that have both an act statement and a request for remedy.

Situation 13:

Excuse me, you restacked the books I was gonna buy. Can you help me get them back?

Act Statement

Request for remedy

Situation 14:

You ruined my outfit! I demand a free meal and dessert.

Act Statement

Request for Remedy

Situation 15:

Excuse me, sir. You gave me less and it is lacking Php 2.00. Can I get it?

Act Statement

Request for Remedy

Situation 16:

Request for Remedy

Act Statement

Excuse me. Can you re-do my jeans? There's a stain on it which I'm sure is not my doing because it's brand new.

Situation 17:

Gang, give back the bag of tita. I need it. It's over two days and you have not returned it yet.

Request for remedy

Act Statement

Situation 18:

Fix my bag. If you can't fix it, buy me another one. This bag is very expensive. You destroyed it.

Request for Remedy

Act Statement

Among the semantic components, the request for remedy is consistently high across social status and distance. It is noticeable that the requests become even more frequent when the offenses are considered severe. However, it is also worth noting that requests for remedy are fewest when the complainer has lower status compared to the person being complained to; requests for remedy are higher when the complainant had an equal status to or a higher status than the addressee. Baxter (1984) asserted that generally any face-threatening act is more likely to be committed by people with higher status, and that seems to be the same case when complaining.

The inclusion of act statement is high regardless of the severity of the offense. More than half of the complaints to situations with low severity and almost half of the complaints to situations with high severity contained act statement. This suggests that participants almost always mention the trouble source when they express complaints to people who have lower status than them.

Interestingly, more than half of the complaints to situations with low severity contained openers. Despite having more power than the complained, participants still used initiators, which can be devices to make complaints polite.

Discussion

The setting of the study is in the Philippines, which for many years has considered English as a second language. In fact, by law, together with the national language Filipino, English is used as a medium of instruction in basic education and higher learning institutions. Thus, Kachru (1997) listed the country to be among those in the outer circle in his Three-Circle Model of World Englishes. Edwards and Laporte (2015) described ESL varieties as “... those that have emerged in post colonial contexts and are considered to be norm-developing.”

Given this background, it is not surprising then that the participants of the study produced many semantic formulae in their expression of complaints, creating various combinations of semantic components. Because English is one of the official languages in the Philippines, Yumul-Florendo, (2012, p. 566) observed that “most Filipinos display competence and proficiency in using the language in a variety of domains; specifically, in education, religion, government, and business.”

However, because of the various formulae produced, a clear, dominant pattern could not be discerned; although, a closer examination of what components are included in the participants' complaints would yield significant insights. Three semantic components are frequently included in the participants' complaints: opener, act statement, and request for remedy.

Two important things need to be noted. First of all, Filipino culture is collectivist in nature, a kind of culture which Hofstede (1993) described as low individualism. That is, members of its society put premium on membership loyalty and respect. Hall (1976) regarded this culture as a high-context one in which the people are closely involved in each other's affairs. Consequently, because of these intimate relationships, a social hierarchy is born, making members of the culture careful and mindful because they believe words and deeds affect people. Second, two core values of Filipinos are *hiya* and *pakikipagkapwa*. Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) noted how foreign researchers have vaguely captured the essence of these values and cited Enriquez, a proponent of Filipino psychology, who provided a rethinking of these values. *Hiya* has been defined by foreign scholars as shame, but Enriquez thought this translation inadequate and proposed the more appropriate translation, “sense of propriety.” *Pakikipagkapwa*, on the other hand, refers to the value one puts in treating the other person as a fellow human being (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). These two things make complaining a challenging task for many Filipinos because as Trosborg (1995) put it, complaining has a conflictive function, rendering it non-polite. However, since complaining is an inevitable communicative task, Filipinos perform it and make a conscious effort to remain polite in order not to violate the values of *hiya* and *pakikipagkapwa*.

That many of the complaints included openers may signify the participants' attempt to cushion the effect of the act. In the FGD, some participants mentioned that using address and formulaic adjuncts, which are openers, is a way to make the complaint less aggressive and more polite. This is similar to what de Leon and Parina (2016) observed in their respondents' semantic formulae of complaints: that they seem to make the complaints more polite and amicable by using openers.

The fact that the highest occurrences of openers are in complaints to someone with a higher status than the complainer is also worth noting. This has something to do with the culture, having established a social hierarchy. To maintain harmony, the hierarchy needs to be acknowledged.

Trosborg (1995) said that the speech act of complaints has both expressive and directive functions. This is so because typically when one complains, one does not merely express one's displeasure or annoyance at something one deems unfavorable; one also expects the wrong to be repaired. The results of the study support this, having both request for repairs and act statements in many of the respondents' complaints. In fact, these are the two most frequently included components in their complaint realizations.

Results of the study show that the speech act of complaints is universal – that it occurs in any culture and its realizations feature semantic components that are similar across culture, although the semantic formulae might differ.

Conclusion

Results of the study show that Filipino ESL learners have different ways of expressing their complaints in the English language, as evidenced by the number of semantic structures that they produced. Also, this study found out that overall, almost half of the complaints contained act statements and requests for remedy. These have many pedagogical implications.

First of all, while the Filipino ESL learners were able to articulate their complaints, they must be prompted to reflect on how appropriate their expressions are. They must understand that linguistic knowledge is not enough; pragmatic knowledge is equally, if not more, important.

Second, pragmatics instruction has to be strengthened. The Filipino ESL learners need to consciously study the strategies of complaining in order for them to continuously expand their linguistic and sociolinguistic repertoire, which is a driving force of any pragmatic instruction. They have to learn politeness, and in some cases (im)politeness, so they must know what strengthens or mitigates their utterances.

Third, a major requirement for a successful pragmatics instruction is materials. Materials developers should be able to use the results of pragmatics studies to create, adapt, adopt materials that are tailor fit to their contexts.

Aside from these pedagogical implications, this study also prompts other Filipino pragmatics researchers to expand the scope of research. This study has many limitations that future studies might address. First of all, the study is descriptive in nature, only exploring the semantic structure/component of Filipino ESL learners' complaints in English. The results only provide a baseline data, which can be expanded by doing a full-scale cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic study. The results may be compared with the complaint realizations of native speakers of English and complaint realizations in a local language of the Philippines. Second, it only focuses on a specific aspect of complaint realizations. Aside from semantic formulae of complaints, other aspects can also be explored like complaint strategy used and modifications used in complaints.

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