

# A Study of Complaint Speech Acts in Turkish Learners of English İngilizce Öğrenen Türklerin Şikâyet Söz Eylemi Üzerine bir Çalışma

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## Abstract

The current study investigates whether or how Turkish learners of English (TLEs) transfer pragmatic knowledge from their native language into English when performing the speech act of complaining. A total of 3000 written responses collected from TLEs and native speakers of both English (ENSs) and Turkish (TNSs) via a ten-item discourse completion task were analyzed. The study points to diverse results: it reveals that (1) *requests, hints, and annoyance* are the most commonly-used strategies by all three groups. (2) TLEs use the strategies *hints, ill consequences, direct accusation, and threats/warnings* at frequencies that are closer to the ENSs' frequencies, (3) the TLEs, ENSs and TNSs are statistically indistinguishable in their use of *annoyance, blame (behavior), and blame (person)*, and finally (4) the TLEs use *modified blame* at an intermediate level with respect to the ENSs and the TNSs, reflecting weak negative pragmatic transfer.

**Keywords:** pragmatic transfer, speech acts, complaints, Turkish, English, Turkish learners of English

## Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce öğrenen Türklerin (TLE) şikâyet söz eylemini gerçekleştirirken anadillerinden edimbilimsel bir aktarım yapıp yapmadıklarını veya ne tür bir aktarım yaptıklarını incelemektir. Bu çalışmada anadili İngilizce (ENS), anadili Türkçe (TNS) olan katılımcılardan ve İngilizce öğrenen Türklerden (TLE) 10 maddelik söylem tamamlama testi verilerek toplanan 3000 yazılı yanıt incelenmiştir. Çalışmadan farklı sonuçlar çıkmıştır: (1) Üç grubun da en çok kullandığı stratejilerin *soru, ima, rahatsız olduğunu gösterme* olduğu, (2) İngilizce öğrenen Türklerin *ima, olumsuz sonuçlara işaret etme, doğrudan suçlama ve tehdit/uyarı* stratejilerini anadili İngilizce olanlara yakın sıklıkta kullandıkları, (3) her üç grubun da istatistiksel fark göstermeksizin *rahatsız olduğunu gösterme, eylemi suçlama, karşı tarafa suç yüklemeye* stratejilerini benzer şekilde kullandıkları, (4) İngilizce öğrenen Türklerin *dolaylı suçlama* stratejisini anadili Türkçe ve İngilizce olanların arasında bir sıklıkta kullandıkları ve böylece zayıf olumsuz edimbilimsel bir aktarımın oluştuğu gözlemlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Edimbilimsel aktarım, söz eylem, şikâyet, Türkçe, İngilizce, İngilizce öğrenen Türkler

## Introduction

Speech acts, or communicative acts, are a popular area of study within sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Speech acts operate via universal pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975; Leech 1983); however, they are conceptualized and verbalized differently across cultures and languages. Many authors have written about the sociolinguistic rules of speech acts under different headings such as interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic competence and cross-cultural speech act studies (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Canale & Swain, 1980; Trosborg, 1995). Foreign language learners who lack target language mastery of speech acts such as complimenting, refusing and complaining risk the danger of being misunderstood, or might even experience a complete

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communication breakdown (Cohen, 1996b, Thomas, 1995). To investigate what type of complaint strategies foreign language learners use and whether these strategies are different from native speaker usage seems to be of importance for language learning and teaching. For instance, in a recent study, Delen and Tavil (2010) reported that learners of English<sup>\*\*\*</sup> at a private university in Turkey were not able to produce complaints appropriately or their complaints lacked variety. In addition, the idea that speakers transfer strategies from their native language into their second language has been the focus of attention in many studies (Bou-Franch, 1998; Corder, 1981; Kasper, 1992). This study looks at the patterns and frequency of complaints of Turkish learners of English (TLEs), native speakers of English (ENSs) and Turkish native speakers (TNSs) in order to investigate whether Turkish learners of English (TLE) transfer complaint strategies from their first language (Turkish) when speaking English.

### *Theoretical Background*

The current study examines complaining from a speech act theory perspective (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Within this framework, authors have defined complaints in the following way: Speaker (S) voices an expression of annoyance or disappointment at a state of affairs or a wrongdoing towards a Hearer (H) who somehow bears responsibility for the state of affairs, or is at least perceived to do so by S (Dersley & Wooton, 2000; House & Kasper, 1981; Monzoni, 2009; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, 1993; Trosborg, 1995). Searle (1975) distinguishes between *expressive complaints* and *directive complaints* by adding the essential conditions that in *expressive complaints*, S should seek sympathy or commiseration from H, and in *directive complaints*, S should issue a directive; that is, an attempt to persuade H to do something to repair the damage. Other authors have attempted to further divide complaints into *direct complaints* (where the speaker directly addresses a problem or unacceptable situation, as when complaining to a neighbor who has been playing loud music [Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993]) and *indirect complaints* (where the S indirectly addresses a problem or situation by seeking sympathy from a H, as when complaining about living in a crowded city) (Boxer, 1993; Jacobs, 1989; Vásquez, 2011). Often, the distinction between a *direct* and an *indirect* complaint is likely to be blurred, especially if it is not clear whether H is responsible for the wrongdoing suffered by S (Jacobs, 1989).

Studies have investigated complaining behavior of both native speakers (NS) and nonnative speakers (NNS) of English. Monocultural complaint studies have been carried out on speakers of American English (Boxer, 1993; Schaefer, 1982), British English (Bonikowska, 1988), British and American English (Drew & Holt, 1988), and other languages such as Finnish (Ruusuuvuori & Lindfors, 2009), French (LaForest, 2002, 2009), Italian (Monzoni, 2009), Korean (Oh, 2003), Slovenian (Orthaber & Marquez-Reiter, 2011), and Turkish (Bayraktaroğlu, 1992). Other studies have taken a cross-cultural (comparing two cultures/languages) or an interlanguage perspective where researchers have focused on NNSs of English from language backgrounds such as Bruneian English (Henry & Ho, 2010), Catalan (Trenchs, 1995), Chinese (Arent, 1996; Chen, 2009; Yian, 2008), Danish (Trosborg, 1995), German (House & Kasper, 1981), Japanese (e.g. Inoue, 1982; Rinnert, Nogami, & Iwai, 2006; Shea 2003), Korean (Moon, 2001; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Ouellette, 2001), Malaysian (Farnia, Buchheit, & Bintisalim 2010), Persian (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh & Fatahi, 2004), Russian (Kozlova, 2004), Sudanese (Umar, 2006), Turkish (Deveci, 2003; Önalın, 2009) and Ukrainian (Prykarpatska, 2008).

Complaint studies often focus on stylistic differences (Kozlova, 2004) between the complaint behavior of English speakers and speakers of other languages. Among the findings, speakers of American English tend to use more requests as a part of their speech act sets when compared to Koreans (Murphy & Neu, 1996); rhetorical questions and humor are characteristic of the complaining behavior of Russian native speakers (Kozlova, 2004); “conversationally

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> It should be noted that these students were intermediate level students who had been attending an intensive English program (preparatory school) for 10 months.

elliptic clauses... subtle word games ... [and] widely known jokes" (Prykarpatska, 2008, p. 90) occur in Ukrainian data; and idiomatic expressions are often found to occur in English native speaker complaints (Drew & Holt, 1988). Shea (2003) accounts for the relatively low level of complaints in her Japanese participants as stemming from the "low importance placed on verbal communication" (p. 13) by the Japanese. As mentioned above, Murphy & Neu (1996) investigate Korean NNS complaints to an authority figure (a university professor). They report that *denial of responsibility*, the use of *demands* rather than *requests* and the use of the modal verb 'should' caused the complaints of Korean NNSs to be judged as inappropriate by American native speakers. A similar study reports that Korean NNSs convey a *sense of urgency* in their questions and requests, and tend to add emotional pleas and personal details to their complaints, which might be considered irritating to Americans (Tanck, 2004).

As can be seen from the examples above, many studies have focused on mapping cross-cultural differences. Studies on pragmatic transfer might shed light on potential problems in cross-cultural or interlanguage communication which can help improve teaching and teaching materials in foreign language learning. Pragmatic transfer, briefly, is the influence that previous pragmatic knowledge has on the use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge (Kasper 1992). More specifically, *negative pragmatic transfer* is the use of L1-based pragmatic knowledge when speaking in the target language where such a use results in perceptions and behaviors that are different from target language norms; *positive transfer*, on the other hand, is an effect of the L1 on the L2 such that results in perceptions and behaviors that are consistent with TL norms (Kasper, 1992). The majority of researchers are interested in negative transfer, since positive transfer is difficult to distinguish from universal pragmatic knowledge (Shea, 2003).

This study makes, as a first step, a cross-cultural comparison of the speech act of complaining. The researchers first compare complaining trends that exist in English with the trends that exist in Turkish. These two sets of data are referred to as the baseline data. A third set of data (interlanguage data) comes from a group of English language learners who speak Turkish as their L1. Their language behavior, also referred to as their pragmatic behavior, or in this case, their complaining behavior, is compared to that of the other two sets of data in order to determine which group they resemble more closely. This is done by measuring the frequency with which they employ specific complaint strategies, and also by comparing TLEs to the TNSs or the ENSs in terms of what complaint strategies or complaining styles they use.

The current study seeks answers to the following questions, based on a corpus of elicited written data:

1. What strategies do TLEs, ENSs and TNSs prefer to use when complaining?
2. a) How do the ENSs and TNSs compare in their use of complaint strategies?  
b) Do the TLEs exhibit L1 pragmatic transfer in their use of complaint strategies?

## Method

### *Participants*

Data were collected from three different informant groups. 100 Turkish learners of English (TLEs), 92 native speakers of English (ENSs) and 108 native speakers of Turkish; i.e., non-English speakers (TNSs) were recruited from various universities in London, England, and Istanbul, Turkey. All participants were between the ages of 17 and 30 years, with the exception of the English native speakers, some of who were over thirty years old (17-45 years).

A demographic questionnaire was administered in addition to the DCT to find out about the background of the participants. The ENSs were defined as having been raised by English native speaking parents or guardians as children, and having grown up in a country where English was the sole official language (e.g. the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand,

South Africa, etc.). Because it was difficult to find ENSs in Turkey, it was necessary to employ alternative recruitment methods in order to obtain the 92 participants. Fifty-eight participants were recruited on the campus of a university in Istanbul. Twenty-six of them were recruited on the campus of a university in London. Eight ENSs were instructed to fill out and return the open-ended questionnaire via email.

The Turkish native speakers were defined as having been raised by L1 Turkish speaking parents or guardians. They had 7-9 years of English in primary school. None of them had studied English beyond high school. All of them were students at a Turkish speaking university. None of them had attended university level English preparatory programs, although all of them claimed to have some degree of English language instruction in high school.

The TLE group was defined as having spoken Turkish at home with L1 speaking Turkish parents or guardians. They had all graduated from the preparatory program in July 2010, and had thus been qualified for university-level coursework at an English language medium university in Istanbul, Turkey. In order to graduate from the English preparatory program, all of the participants had been required to pass a proficiency examination which was based on the competency standards set by the Common European Framework.

#### *Instrument*

A written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in Turkish and English comprising 10 everyday situations was used to collect complaints from participants. DCTs have been used extensively in researching speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments or complaints. A short description of situations is provided, which prompts informants to write what they would actually say in such a situation (see Appendix). The largest project to have used this data collection instrument is the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), which investigated a range of languages in an effort to measure the directness levels of participants in their requests and apologies (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Several researchers have used DCTs to study complaints (Arent, 1996, etc.) but there have been relatively few studies which have focused on complaints in Turkish learners of English (Deveci, 2006; Önalın 2009).

The situations on the DCT were based on similar situations that appeared in DCTs utilized by Arent (1995), Bonikowska (1988), Chen (2009), Deveci (2003), Murphy & Neu (1996), Olshtain & Weinbach (1987), Ouellette (2001), Piotrowska (1987), Prykarpatska (2008), Shea (2003), Tanck (2004), and Trenchs (1995). More specifically, Situations 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were either taken or adapted/created from sources such as the ones mentioned above. Situations 1, 2, 4 and 5 were not adapted from earlier studies, but created from scratch by the current researcher based on field notes and interviews with participants. Table 1 provides the characterization of the situations (see Appendix for item descriptions):

Table 1.

#### *A Characterization of the Situations in the DCT*

Strategy	Roles of Speaker and Hearer
1. Broken phone	C*: customer; E: customer care representative
2. Cinema	C: undefined; E: undefined
3. Sister	C: sibling; E: sister
4. TV	C: undefined; E: host
5. Angry Father	C: son /daughter; E: father
6. Splash	C: pedestrian; E: driver
7. Trash	C: neighbor; E: neighbor
8. Refused Entry	C: student; E: invigilator
9. Teacher Forgets	C: Student; E: professor
10. Noisy Neighbor	C: undefined; E: neighbor

\*C= Complainer, E = Complaine

Two versions of the DCT task were created for the current study, one version in English and the other in Turkish. The original situations were all written in English first, and later translated from English into Turkish, modified (changing names, etc.) to suit the Turkish context, and finally translated back into Turkish and proofread by three different native speakers of Turkish in order to check for any inconsistencies and problems. Both the English and Turkish versions were piloted before data collection. The English version was administered to both the ENS and TLE and the Turkish version was administered to TNS to be able to detect pragmatic transfer.

*Data Analysis*

Trosborg's (1995) and Yian's (2008) coding schemes were applied to the DCT data. The following eight strategies were adapted from Trosborg (1995), Strategy 1 being the most indirect and Strategy 8 being the most direct: *hints, annoyance, ill consequences, indirect accusation, direct accusation, modified blame, blame (behavior) and blame (personal)*. Three new categories: *directive acts, warnings and opting out* were added to refine the coding scheme and cover all response types in the data, and the total number of strategies became eleven, as can be seen in Table 2. The first column describes the broad strategies, the second column details the specific complaints strategies, and the third column provides examples in English (most examples are taken and adapted from Trosborg, 1995, p. 316-319).

Table 2.

*The Coding Scheme for the Current Study*

Category	Strategy	Example
---	Str. 1 Opting out	N/A I would say nothing
Cat. I.	Str. 2 Hints	Don't see much of you these days, do I?
<i>No explicit reproach</i>		
Cat II. <i>Expression of disapproval</i>	Str. 3 Annoyance	You know I don't like dust, I'm allergic to dust, Didn't you know it?
	Str. 4: Ill consequences	Now I will probably lose my insurance
Cat. III. <i>Accusation</i>	Str. 5: Indirect	Look at the mess, haven't you done any cleaning up for the last week?
	Str. 6: Direct	You used to do the cleaning up all the time. What's up with you now?
	Str. 7: Modified blame	"You could have said so, I mean, if you had so much to do." And "it's boring to stay here and I hate living in a mess, anyway you ought to clean up after you."
Cat. IV: <i>Blame</i>	Str. 8: Explicit blame (behavior)	"You never clean up after yourself, I'm sick and tired of it."
	Str. 9: explicit blame (person)	"Mete, (swear word) really, one can never trust you a damn."
Cat. V: <i>Directive acts</i>	Str.10: Request for repair	"Would you mind doing your share of the duties as soon as possible?"
	Str. 11: Threat.	"I shall be leaving soon (if you don't do your share of the cleaning)."



The above table was used when interpreting the responses from the various groups (TLE, ENS, TNS) in the various situations (1-10). It was possible for several codes to occur in one response; however, in the current study no effort was made to record the exact order either which the strategies occurred. The following example illustrates how multiple strategies are combined to form a response:

TLE 65; Situation (1):

Broken Phone. This phone does not work (HINT) and your staff did not help me. (DIRECT ACCUSATION) I am not happy about that (ANNOYANCE) and if you do not find a solution for my phone I will not use your product anymore. (WARNING/THREAT)

A one-way ANOVA was used to do statistical testing. To increase the reliability of the instrument, another rater who had not done research on speech acts before, was asked to code 10% of the data. Her codes reproduced those of the current researchers at a rate of 96%.

### Results

Research question 1 was: What strategies do TLEs, ENSs and TNSs prefer to use when complaining? The complaint strategies are presented below (Table 3) in the order of overall frequency with which they were found among the three groups. Table 3 also gives the percentage distribution of complaint strategy types for TLEs, ENSs and TNSs.

Table 3.

*Frequency of Strategy Use among the Three Groups*

	TLE		ENS		TNS		Total
	N=100		N=92		N=108		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Requests	499	29.81	583	36.14	557	30.06	1639
Hints	508	30.35	444	27.53	423	22.83	1375
Annoyance	153	9.14	175	10.85	189	10.20	517
Threats/warnings	93	5.56	83	5.15	146	7.88	322
Direct accusations	89	5.32	82	5.08	142	7.66	313
Modified blame	76	4.54	35	2.17	135	7.29	246
Indirect accusations	76	4.54	48	2.98	89	4.80	213
Blame (personal)	35	2.09	47	2.91	49	2.64	131
Blame (behavior)	39	2.33	19	1.18	42	2.27	100
Ill Consequences	4	0.24	5	0.31	26	1.40	35
All Strategies combined	1674	100.00	1613	100.00	1853	100.00	5140

All three groups show a similar tendency in their preference for complaint strategies. On average, *requests*, *hints* and *annoyance* occurred with the greatest frequency, and made up about seventy percent of complaining behavior for all three groups. *Threats/warning* was the fourth most popular strategy choice. The remainder of the strategies, *ill consequences*, *indirect accusation*, *direct accusation*, *modified blame*, *blame (behavior)*, and *blame (person)*, which Trosborg (1995) describes as being more direct and less polite than *hints* and *annoyance*, seemed to occur at a lower frequency. *Opting out* was noted to occur at an approximate rate of 5% on average. *Opting out* (not complaining or avoiding complaining) will not be further discussed in the current study, since it does not represent a verbal strategy.

In the second part of the analysis, the research questions were: ‘How do the TLEs, ENSs and TNSs compare in their use of complaint strategies?’ and more specifically ‘Do the TLEs exhibit pragmatic transfer in their use of complaint strategies?’ One-way ANOVA was used for statistical testing. Four patterns emerged in the comparison of TLEs’ use of individual complaint strategies to those of ENSs and TNSs. Table 4 illustrates five operational definitions (Strong; Weak; None; Positive; Not Applicable):

Table 4.  
*Theoretical Framework based on Statistical Findings*

Strategy number	Strategy	F	$p \leq 0.05?$	Pragmatic Transfer
---	---	---	---	Strong
7	Mod. Blame	F (2,296) = 18.78	Yes	Weak
5	Indirect Accusation	F (2,297) = 3.82		
4	Ill Consequences	F (2,297) = 11.29	Yes	None (ENS-like)
11	Threats/warnings	F (2,297) = 6.18		
6	Direct Accusation	F (2,297) = 5.99		
2	Hints	F (2,296) = 5.99		
1	Opting out	F (2,297) = 11.29	No	Positive
3	Annoyance	F (2,297) = 1.65		
8	Blame (B)	F (2,297) = 2.67		
9	Blame (P)	F (2,297) = 0.80	Yes	Not applicable
10	Requests	F (2,296) = 10.04		

Table 4 compares the TLEs to the ENSs and TNSs with respect to strategy use. Statistical findings demonstrated that four patterns exist, depending on whether the TLEs resemble either the ENSs or the TNSs exclusively, resemble them both, or resemble neither.

## Discussion

### *Strong Negative Pragmatic Transfer*

The findings were considered consistent with the effects of strong negative pragmatic transfer when the ENSs had a significantly greater or lower frequency of a strategy than the TNSs, and the TLEs were statistically indistinguishable from the TNSs, but were significantly different from the ENSs. (In notation form, this is equivalent to two alternative possibilities:  $TLE \approx TNS < ENS$ , or  $TLE \approx TNS > ENS$ ). No instances consistent with the concept of Strong Pragmatic Transfer were found among the data. One possible explanation is that the TLEs had had twenty-five hours per week of classroom instruction for six months, which might have had beneficial effects on the TLEs’ L2 pragmatic competence. Another is that the TLEs had had extensive L2 input during the formative periods of their lives. Yet another possible explanation is that the DCT task allowed the students more thinking time in which to access and activate their pragmatic competence. This allowed them the opportunity to supply responses that were more ENS-like.

*Weak Negative Pragmatic Transfer*

The findings for modified blame and indirect accusations were consistent with the concept of weak negative pragmatic transfer when the differences between either the ENSs and the TNSs alone, or all three groups, were significant, and when the TLEs' frequency score fell between that of the ENSs and TNSs, a "distinctive intermediate position in which opposing forces of transfer from L1 and convergence to TL were both manifested" (Shea, 2003, p. 43). In notation form it looks like the following:  $ENS < TLE < TNS$ , or  $ENS > TLE > TNS$ . Modified Blame often occurred as rhetorical questions in a situation ('Splash') where a car passes by and splashes dirty water on the 'participant', in the TLE data: 'Are you blind?!'; 'Hey! Why do you drive a car if you don't know what to do?'; and in the TNS data: 'Olum sen nasıl araba kullanıyorsun .... (Boy, how do you drive?!); 'Ehliyetini bakkaldan mı aldın?' (Did you get your license from the grocer's?)' or 'Kör müsün oğlum?' (Are you blind, boy?). In contrast, modified blame in the form of rhetorical questions did not seem to occur very often in ENS responses but more often as imperatives; for example, 'Watch where you're driving!' These findings support the statistical findings which are consistent with the concept of weak negative pragmatic transfer (Shea, 2003).

In making *indirect accusations*, the TLEs not only conveyed the illocutionary force of an accusation, but also seemed to convey a sense of 'urgency' (Tanck, 2004) which might be irritating to a teacher in a real-life situation: 'Did you finish working on our assignments?' In the case of *indirect accusations*, one TLE responded: 'When can we get our homework assignments back?' The propositional content rules for *indirect accusation*, if satisfied, state that the student was indirectly accusing his teacher of being slow, thereby having performed a complaint (Searle, 1969; Trosborg, 1995). In addition to an accusation, the TLE also neglected to use milder complaint strategies (Trosborg, 1995) or openers (Piotrowska, 1987), thereby conveying a sense of urgency. TNSs were quite similar in this regard: *Hocam ödevleri okudunuz mu? Pazartesi sınav olmadan önce onu inceleme fırsatı bulabilir miyim?* (Teacher, have you [VOUS] marked the assignment? Will I have a chance to go over it before the exam on Monday?). In contrast, ENSs seemed to make careful use of mild complaints and openers to avoid conveying a sense of urgency: 'Hi, how are you? I was just wondering whether you'd had a chance to mark my assignment yet.'

*No Transfer/ENS-like behavior*

The prerequisite for the case of No Transfer/ENS-like behavior was that, for a given strategy, the TLE group should present with frequencies that were (1) statistically indistinguishable from the ENSs (2) statistically distinct from the TNSs. The interpretation of these findings was "the triumph of convergence to [the] TL in which the L1 was overcome" (Shea, 2003, p. 43).

*Threats/warnings*, in which the complainer attacks the complainees' face\*\*\*\* (Brown and Levinson, 1987) openly by issuing a threat, warning or ultimatum, was the fourth most-commonly used strategy across the three groups. TLEs issued *Threats/warnings* at a frequency that was indistinguishable from that of ENSs, but in this regard, distinct from that of TNSs,  $F(2,297) = 6.18, p < 0.01$ . However certain examples also point to non-ENS-like behavior; for example, TLEs issued cryptic threats, or puzzling, mysterious expressions with hidden or obscure meanings. Prykarpatska (2008) describes this cryptic language as "subtle word games... allusions, [and] irony" (p. 91-92). In Situation (3) *cinema*, several cinema-goers distract the participant from the film as they noisily crunch their popcorn. One TLE wrote the following dialogue: 'Cinema Goer: Yes, What is it? Participant: Step outside and I will show you what "it" is.' "It" is assumed to refer to the problem, as in "What is the problem?" But the threatening "Step outside" and "I will show you what "it" is" uses word games to reinterpret a helpful question (What is it) as an invitation to a fight or to a confrontation. All in all, word games and plays on words seem to accompany even threats which can lead to dangerous altercations. One TNS, Situation (4) TV, where the

\*\*\*\* According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) *face* is the 'public self image' or 'reputation' of a person. They state that "...face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction."



participant is forced to watch a tasteless TV program by his/her friends, says the following: '*Hadi abi deđiřtirin řunu! Ona karřı olan nefretim birazdan size kızgınlık olarak yansıyabilir* (Change this, man! In a little while, my hatred for that celebrity will transform into anger towards you!) The idea of one's hatred for a TV celebrity somehow transforming into anger towards a friend was not found in the ENS responses. To a native speaker of English, the playful, quasi-poetic language used by this participant would probably be misinterpreted as a veiled threat rather than as a request for repair.

The absence of pragmatic transfer accompanied by ENS-like complaining behavior might have been due to several reasons. One possibility is that the TLE participants had either travelled abroad extensively or had some form of access to native speaker input, and failed to mention this in the demographic questionnaire. Another possibility might have been the practice effect, or the positive effects on language skills that come from disciplined study of that language. A third possibility might have been the extra thinking time given to the participants. Such thinking time would not have been possible in a spoken task. Fourth, the complaint components in the questions (*hints, ill consequences, direct accusations, threats/warnings, annoyance, blame (behavior, personal)*) might have involved universally available pragmatic strategies. This means that the participants might have had the ability to successfully realize these strategies without needing any practice or didactic learning.

#### *Positive Transfer*

A lack of statistically significant findings in the frequencies of a particular feature of language in the L1, L2, or Interlanguage (IL) equates to positive transfer (Kasper, 1992). Three strategies, *annoyance, blame (person)* and *blame (behavior)* were used in a way that was consistent with the current study's definition of Positive Transfer. Because *blame (behavior, person)* occur very infrequently in the data, they are excluded from the current discussion.

A complainer can express *annoyance* by expressing disapproval about a state of affairs. The frequency of *annoyance* generated by ENSs, TLEs and TNSs (see Table 3) was 10.85%, 9.14%, and 10.20% respectively. The analysis of variance revealed no significant differences for the means for *annoyance* (see Table 4) among the three groups,  $F(2,297) = 1.65, p > 0.05$ .

For example, in Situation (4) TV, the ENSs tended to supply a short expression of *annoyance* followed by a request: 'I really can't stand this TV show. Can we turn the channel over please?' whereas the TLE responses spanned three of four sentences and left out the requests: 'OK! That's it! I can't handle this guy and its killing me. I Freaking Hate him. How can you be this silly and actually (sic) sit down and watch a show about him!'

TNSs and TLEs also used rhetorical questions in the L1 and statements in the target language: 'what is so important or attractive about her/him!' and '*Bu ne saygısızlık? (What sort of disrespect is this?)*' As we can see, in Turkish, annoyance often seems to occur as a rhetorical question, thus providing a basis for negative transfer, whereas in English it occurs as a statement, such as in Situation (4) TV: 'Can you please turn over the channel? I've endured this torture long enough.'

#### *Pragmatic Transfer not Applicable*

In the case of *requests*, all three groups (ENSs, TLEs, and TNSs) were significantly different from each other, but the TLE group did not fall between the other two groups in terms of strategic frequency. The concept of Weak Pragmatic Transfer was therefore not applicable to *requests*. *Requests* were placed into a category of their own: Pragmatic Transfer not Applicable. The frequencies for requests for TLEs, TNSs, and ENSs were: 29.81%, and 30.06%, 36.14% (in notation form, TLE < TNS < ENS). *Requests* occurred most frequently in conjunction with *annoyance* and *hints*. Although TLEs seemed to use requests at a significantly lower frequency than TNSs in certain contexts, their complaint behavior seemed to have similar qualities. Requests are noticeably absent from the complaining behavior of TNSs.

## Conclusion

The current study attempted to investigate the complaining behavior of Turkish learners of English by comparing them with two other baseline groups: native speakers of Turkish and native speakers of English, using a corpus of 3000 written responses to a DCT. The results indicated that 69.3% of the TLE responses consisted of the strategies *annoyance*, *hints*, and *requests*. Similar values were obtained for the other two groups. The TLEs exhibited ENS-like frequency values for the majority of complaint strategies, positive pragmatic transfer in three instances, and weak negative pragmatic transfer in one case. One finding, that of *requests*, did not seem to fit into the predefined scenarios for pragmatic transfer. Throughout the study, statistical findings were contrasted with individual examples of language use that seemed to reflect a degree of L1 transfer. Some of the results confirm the idea that universally available pragmatic strategies are responsible for similar strategy use, and others support the idea of culture-specific language use.

*Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research*

This study is only one of a handful that examines the complaint behavior of Turkish learners of English. Based only on written elicited data, it only portrays what students would say in a particular situation. More studies in authentic contexts need to be done in order to make conclusions about complaint realizations of TLEs with some certainty. Future studies need to investigate the effects of social variables (such as age, gender and socioeconomic backgrounds of interlocutors) as well context (such as social distance, power inequalities and severity of offense).

Similarly, pragmatic transfer, as it applies to complaining in Turkish learners, needs to be investigated further. It is difficult to make generalizations about pragmatic transfer based only on the frequency data obtained in the current study. Takahashi (1996, p. 189) observed that it is difficult to discern whether "observed performance is attributable to L1 transfer, IL overgeneralization, or instructional effects (transfer of training)." Bou-Franch (1998) recommends supplementing performance data with other kinds of data. One example is *verbal reports* to give us "insights regarding the choices individuals make about their speech behavior" (Cohen, 1996a, p. 26).

Finally, because complaining has not been defined from a Turkish perspective, but rather from a Western one (Trosborg, 1995), the theoretical framework for complaining used by the current study is based on a Western understanding of the phenomenon. Further research needs to be done in order to characterize the phenomenon of complaining from an Eastern standpoint (Bayraktaroğlu, 1992).

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## Appendix

### *Discourse Completion Task*

1. You have just bought a brand-new cellular phone, but when you get home, you find that the phone does not work properly. You go to the shop, but the salespeople do not want to help you. Also, they will not give you back your money. You are upset about this. You call the company and tell your problem to Roberta, the customer representative. What do you say to her?
2. You are in the cinema, watching a film with great interest. However, some people sitting right behind you are making too much noise while eating their popcorn. The sound keeps getting louder and you can no longer concentrate on the film. What do you say to them?
3. Your sister is in the airport, waiting for her flight to Canada. You are a bit concerned because she is going far away. You make her promise to call you as soon as she arrives in Canada, but she forgets. She calls one week later. You remind her of the promise she made, but she denies it. What do you say to her?
4. You and a group of your friends are over Ray's house, eating snacks and watching a program on TV about a celebrity. You hate this celebrity; however, you say nothing and watch for fifteen minutes. Finally, you cannot wait anymore. You need to say something. What do you say to them?
5. Your father keeps insisting that you go find a job and earn some money. He does not understand that it is very hard to find a job these days. You have been talking to him over breakfast. He is very angry because you have not found a job yet. What do you say to him?
6. You are walking down the street. It is raining. A car passes by and splashes dirty water all over your trousers. The driver stops at a red traffic light. He is a young male, maybe 17-18 years old. What do you say to him?
7. Your neighbor's son Johnny has left his garbage near your front door. The garbage smells and it is probably bad for your health. You are not very pleased about this and have decided to talk to him about it. You knock on the door and Johnny opens it. What do you say to him?
8. You have a final examination today, and you are late for your exam. You do not have a car. You get into a taxi and ask the driver to go fast, but find yourself in the middle of a traffic jam. The exam begins soon, and you are very angry. You arrive at the examination center ten minutes late. Mr. Cohen tells you 'Sorry, but you cannot take the exam.' What do you say to him?
9. Professor Slatsky-Edwards was supposed to mark and return your assignments by Monday morning. It is now Friday and she has not marked them yet. You are concerned because she is also going to give you a test on the assigned topic on the following Monday. You visit the professor in her office. What do you say to her?
10. It is 12 midnight on a Wednesday. You have been trying to fall asleep for two hours, but your next-door neighbor is having a party next door. You cannot sleep because of the loud noise and music. This is not the first time. Your neighbor has thrown several loud and noisy parties over the past month. Since your neighbor has not taken you seriously, you decide to speak with her very firmly this time. What do you say to her?