

Gender and Questions as Complaints: An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

This paper investigates how male and female Thai EFL learners use questions to perform complaints similarly or differently. The participants were first-year English major Thai undergraduate students. The role play was a research instrument used for data collection. The chi-square analysis showed statistically significant differences between the male and female questions. The male learners utilized “appeal” more frequently while the female learners opted for “inquiry” more frequently. The male learners tended to use the questions to solve the problems while the female learners tended to opt for the questions to inquire about the problems and to ask for information.

Keywords: Complaint, Questions, Gender, Complaint Strategies, Interlanguage Pragmatics

Introduction

The question ‘Have you seen my car key?’ can have more than one kind of function. A primary function of questions is asking for information or answers. For example, when you lose your car key at home, you may ask your sister whether she has seen the car key. Your sister may need to provide a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to the question. However, the question, ‘Have you seen my car key?’ can be used to complain to your sister who has lost your car key. Since you need to get your car key back, you may lodge the complaint to your sister to indicate that something needs to be done to solve the problem.

Complaints have principally been investigated from a speech act perspective and from a politeness aspect. The speech act of complaint is performed when a complainer expresses dissatisfaction concerning a bad experience or action in the past or present (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993; Schegloff, 2005). With regard to the politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), the complaint is a face threatening act (FTA) that threatens both the complainees’ positive and negative faces as well as the complainer’s positive face. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 62) have defined positive and negative faces as follows. The positive face want can be referred to a person’s want to be desirable or to be liked, whereas the negative face want is considered a person’s want for their actions to be unimpeded. A complainees’ positive face is threatened when a complainer does not care about the complainees’ desire to be liked or accepted. The complainees’ negative face is threatened when his or her freedom is restricted. The complainer’s positive face is possibly threatened when he or she is impolite and the complainees perhaps dislikes the complainer.

Men and women may use questions to complain differently. The issue of men and women performing learners’ complaints or interlanguage complaints has been controversial for years. Previous studies investigating the complaints of male and female learners have

resulted in different findings. For example, Trenchs's study (1995) shows that male learners say nothing and do not do face-threatening acts when complaining. In contrast, female learners use more commands to appeal to solutions when complaining than male learners do. On the other hand, Sukyadi's study (2012) claims that male learners use the complaint strategy of direct accusation more than their female counterparts, who choose to perform indirect complaints instead.

This paper aims to bridge the gaps in the research concerning the controversial issues between male and female complaints, and discover how male and female Thai EFL learners use question forms both similarly or differently with regard to the selection of complaint strategies. It is interesting to explore the way in which one question form can be used in different complaint strategies.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it provides an insight into the current issues of how Thai EFL learners of different genders use questions in the speech act of complaint. Besides, results from this study widen the interlanguage pragmatic field by exploring questions and complaint strategies utilized by Thai EFL learners. Practically, different kinds of questions and complaint strategies may be used to teach students in both English language classrooms and English textbooks.

Literature Review

Questions

Questions have been categorized differently in the linguistic subfields of syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse. In the syntax of questions, Quirk *et al.* (1972) identify two main categories of questions: *yes-no* questions and *wh*-questions. For *yes-no* questions, an appropriate answer of 'yes' or 'no' is expected. *Wh*-questions are marked by use of *wh*-words, e.g., *what*, *why* and *where*. It is conventional that *wh*-words are used to request the provision of unknown information, and the expected answers are given in response.

Meanwhile, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) categorize questions based on a syntactic-semantic classification. According to this classification, there are categories of questions: closed and open questions. *Yes-no* questions and tag-questions are included in the category of closed-questions because they require minimal replies. Open-ended questions allow for a wider range of possible answers.

From a pragmatic perspective, Ilie (2015) proposes a distinction between standard and nonstandard questions. Questions that are used to seek answers such as 'yes' or 'no' or pieces of information are normally referred to as standard questions. Questions that fulfill functions other than eliciting information or explicit answers are considered nonstandard questions. Apart from informative answers, questions may elicit several other types of responses such as permission granting and suggestion acceptance (e.g., Ilie 1994; Kiefer 1988).

For the discourse functions of questions, Athanasiadou (1991) proposes these categories: rhetorical questions, exam questions and questions of indirect requests. Rhetorical questions such as 'What advantage does he get?' and 'Why should we test the two things together?' are used to express reproach, wonder, or concern about a particular message to hold the attention of a hearer. Exam questions including 'What time is it' and 'How many syllables does the word 'Yawn' contain?' are used to test a hearer's knowledge. Questions of indirect requests function as requests for actions. Polite requests like 'Could you comment on my paper?', 'Can you help me?' and 'Would you mind not making so much noise?' are used to induce a hearer to do something.

Complaints

There are three elements in performing complaints. First, a complainer is observed to have dissatisfaction. For example, a situation does not meet their expectations or it may be an unhappy situation (Drew and Holt, 1998; Edwards, 2005; Pomerantz, 1978). Second, a complainer expresses his or her feelings towards a situation (Schegloff, 2005). When complaints are performed, the complainer can convey his or her negative emotions, such as displeasure, sorrow, pain and dislike (Trosborg, 1995; Yule, 1996). In addition to these two elements, there is a third element related to the complaint which is assigning the responsibility for these problems (Márquez-Reiter, 2013). A complainer may appeal to complainees to do something for him or her, for example, getting complainees to apologize or to repair problems. A complainer may seek remedial actions concerning the problems (Márquez-Reiter, 2005; Trosborg, 1995).

Studies commonly differentiate between direct and indirect complaints. The direct complaint is aimed at a complainees who is present at the scene (Sauer, 2000; Boxer, 1999). In business contexts, a complainees may be a business owner or a business representative. That complainees might need to be responsible for a problem or help solve it. In contrast, the indirect complaint is performed to a recipient about some absent party or external circumstances (Drew, 1998). Boxer (1999) claims that indirect complaints are similar to storytelling (Jefferson, 1988; Allami, 2006) in which the addressee is not held responsible for a perceived offence.

Complaints have multi-layered characteristics and a complaint sequence is more flexible in the number of turn-taking (Leelaharattanarak, 2016, p. 97). According to Murphy and Neu (1996, p. 193), the speech act of complaint is considered “a speech act set”. In their analysis of the speech act set of complaints performed by American native speakers and by Korean non-native speakers of English, Murphy and Neu have found that complainers produced a speech act set of complaint which is made up of an explanation of purpose, a justification, a criticism and a request. In a speech act set of complaints, complaint strategies, including trouble-telling and criticism (Cupach & Carson, 2002), can be used to help formulate the act of complaining.

Strategies used in performing complaints have been explored in many studies. Previous studies (e.g., Rhurakvit, 2011; Rinnert and Nogami, 2006; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993; Umar, 2006) investigated interlanguage complaints, which are complaints performed in a foreign language by language learners or non-native speakers. Rhurakvit (2011) explored the characteristics of the interlanguage complaints of Thai learners of English who were in different study contexts. Examples of complaint strategies in Rhurakvit’s study were (a) provision of context, (b) expression of disappointment, (c) negative assessment, (d) irony, (e) challenging, (f) warning, (g) suggestion and (h) request for repair. Umar (2006) compared the pragmatic competence of advanced Sudanese learners of English to that of native speakers when performing the speech act of complaint. In Umar’s study (2006), Sudanese learners of English performed their complaints by (a) excusing self for imposition ‘*Sorry to bother you, boss.*’ (b) establishing context or support ‘*This letter is really very important.*’, (c) making a request ‘*Could you please help me clean the room before you leave?*’, (d) conveying of sense of dissatisfaction, disappoint or annoyance ‘*I am very disappointed and a bit angry.*’ and (e) warning ‘*I would think twice before I let you or anyone else use this place again.*’

Language and Gender

How men and women utilize their language is related to Difference Theory. Men and women belong to separate subcultures. They learn different ways of communicating in their same-sex peer groups at a young age. Boys like to play in large hierarchical groups in which they learn a competitive style of speech, whereas girls like to play in small best friend groups in which they learn a supportive speech style (Maltz andorker, 1982). Difference Theory involves male and female styles and different rules for using each specific language. The key features of Difference Theory relate to psychological differences and socialization differences in social power. Under this theory, biological differences lead to different rates of language acquisition in addition to causing psychological differences (Buffery & Gray, 1972; McGlone, 1980).

In Difference Theory, women's speech has been described differently from that of men. Holmes (1995, p. 1) states that "There is certainly plenty of evidence of differences between women and men." Previous studies in the area of how women and men use language differently have investigated politeness, which is one of the evident differences (Noisiri, 2002). According to Ayu and Sukyadi (2011, p. 2), certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness are used more frequently by women than by men. Women communicate tentatively and politely while men communicate in order to occupy a superior position (Leaper and Robnett, 2011, p. 129). Holmes (1995) also claims that women's speech is more polite than men's speech as women tend to provide supportive responses and avoid disagreement, whereas men tend to control conversations by asking questions and interrupting interlocutors. Women tend to place more value on making connections, seeking involvement, and concentrating on interdependencies between people (e.g., Chodorow, 1974; Gilligan, 1982). On the other hand, men value autonomy and seek independence.

In Thai contexts, Noisiri (2002) studied complaints performed by Thai men and women. Her findings revealed that Thai men and women used different strategies in performing their complaints. Noisiri claimed that men opted for the strategy of hinting less frequently than women. Thai women tended to lodge their complaints less intensively than men. Thai men did not hesitate to complain directly when a complainee made him feel dissatisfied. Noisiri concluded that men tended to lodge complaints directly while women tended to convey their complaints in an indirect and soft manner. She posited that the differences between male and female complaints might be due to socialization in Thai culture. Noisiri (2002, p. 13) explained that Thai girls were taught to behave gently and modestly while Thai boys were encouraged to behave in a straightforward way.

Methodology

The Scope of the Study

A complaint is performed when a complainer expresses dissatisfaction concerning a bad experience in business contexts. The complaint data was compiled from direct or face-to-face complaints performed by customers to a business owner or a business representative in severe situations¹; for example when the airline lost a passenger's luggage through carelessness at an airport or when rashes broke out all over a customer's face after receiving facial treatment at a beauty clinic. The investigation of questions was based on question types. Questions in

¹ There was complaint data in severe, moderate and mild situations in the dissertation (source?). The three levels of situation severity were determined by 100 questionnaire respondents (Thongtong, 2018).

this paper are syntactic forms and are not strategies. Questions occurring during the speech act of complaint can be used in different complaint strategies (inquiries, appeals and reasons). There were stand-out questions and tag questions. *Wh*-word embedded questions as part of statements (e.g., 'I don't know *where* the manager is.') were not included in this paper.

Data Collection

The participants were 30 male and 30 female first-year English major Thai undergraduate students from Chiang Mai University. Their age range was 18 to 20. Their Ordinary National Educational Test (O-Net) scores in English were 85 or higher, meaning that their English proficiency is considered high.

The participants were not taught to use questions to complain. They were asked to watch video clips concerning severe situations. The role-play moderators, who were native speakers of English, were informed that they were not allowed to give clues, hints or simplify their language for the participants. After that, the participants performed direct or face-to-face complaints about the severe situations with the role-play moderators. They had no time for their role-play preparations in advance. Their role plays were video recorded and their complaints were subsequently analyzed. This paper, which is a part of Ph.D. research, mainly focused on stand-out questions and tag questions for data collection.²

Data Analysis

One syntactic form can be used in different complaint strategies. The syntactic forms of questions were chosen as the focus. Following Quirk et al (1972) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), stand-out questions and tag questions were used to group questions as complaints. The stand-out questions were divided into yes-no questions and *wh*-questions. The tag questions were the short questions at the end of sentences.

Complaint strategies, which are the use of words, phrases or sentences to inquire, appeal and give reasons when performing complaints, were analyzed to investigate questions occurring during the speech act of complaint. The complaint strategies were coded based on the strategy coding scheme adapted from those of Jaisue (2006), Prykarpatska (2008) and Rhurakvit (2011). Jaisue's 2006 study showed that in performing complaints, complaint strategies such as appeal and inquiry could be used. Prykarpatska (2008) proposed a strategy of request for repair which was used to ask for compensation for the problem. Rhurakvit (2011) pinpointed that complainers opted for the complaint strategies of context provision and expression of disappointment when they performed the complaints. In other words, complainers stated reasons such as describing personal situations and expressing dissatisfaction to explain why problems should be tackled in performing the complaints. Following the strategies used in the previous studies, the complaint strategies used in this study are appeals, inquiries and reasons. The complaint strategy coding schemes that were used are shown in Table 1 below. The italic text items are complaint strategies in question forms.

² In Ph.D. research, when participants role played to perform complaints, other syntactic forms including affirmative and imperative sentences were found.

Table 1: Complaint Strategies

Complaint Strategies	Definitions	Examples
Appeal	asking for help, repair, or request to solve problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Is there a way you can....?</i> 2. <i>Could you possibly give me a refund?</i>
Inquiry	seeking answers and expecting the complaineer to remove doubts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>What's the deal?</i> 2. <i>Is it possible that your staff are not good enough?</i>
Reason	explaining why problems should be solved	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You are so careless. <i>Why don't you have a camera monitor where my bag is?</i> 2. It's unacceptable. <i>How can you do this to me?</i>

Complaint strategies used by the Thai EFL learners were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The frequency and percentage analysis concerned the occurrences of the learners' complaint strategies. The chi-square analysis was carried out to examine significant differences. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses focused on how male and female Thai EFL learners used questions as complaints in severe situations both similarly and differently.

The principle of triangulation in the process of data analysis was held to determine validity and reliability. We, the two coders, were given definitions of question types and complaint strategies and then worked separately. To avoid subjectivity, the given definitions were strictly followed. Question forms, complaint strategies, occurrences of question forms and occurrences of complaint strategies were doubled-checked at two different times. The occurrences of question forms and complaint strategies of the two coders were compared and contrasted. If there were any inconsistencies, all occurrences of question forms and complaint strategies were rechecked to ensure consistency in the data.

Results and Discussion

Strategy Use

When performing complaints, the learners employed questions in order to inquire, appeal and give reasons. There were 183 questions as complaints – 93 male questions and 90 female questions. As visible below in Table 2, the numbers refer to the occurrences of complaint strategies and their percentages. The italic and bold text indicate the gender that used this complaint strategy more often in their questions.

Table and Bar Chart 2: The Occurrences of Complaint Strategies

Complaint Strategies Used in Questions	Male (M)	Female (F)
Inquiry	35 (37.64%)	49 (54.44%)
Appeal	40 (43.01%)	21 (23.33%)
Reason	18 (19.35%)	20 (22.22%)
Total	93 (100%)	90 (100%)

Strategy	Male (M)	Female (F)
Inquiry	35	49
Appeal	40	21
Reason	18	20

There are some similarities and differences between male and female questions. In the following sub-sections, the similarities are discussed first and are then followed by the differences.

Similarities

The occurrence of male and female complaint strategies used in questions were similar. In Table 2, the use of male complaint strategies was in 93 questions while that of the female group was in 90 questions. Both male and female learners opted for complaint strategies of inquiries, appeals and reasons to form questions in their complaints. Another similarity was the occurrence of the male and female complaint strategy of reason. The use of the complaint strategy of reason was in 18 questions or 19.35 % of the male group, while that of the female group was in 20 questions or 22.22 %. These are very similar numbers between the two groups, especially when compared to the other complaint strategies.

One notable observation made was the realizing of the complaint strategy of inquiry in questions for both males and females. The inquiries used by the male and female groups were not very different. The use of their inquiries was clear and straightforward. The following examples show how the inquiries were utilized. The abbreviations M and F stand for male and female. The numbers indicate the participants' number. The italic and bold text indicates the questions used in the complaint strategy of inquiry.

Example (1): at the airport

F-25: I lost my luggage. It should have come on the conveyor belt by now.

Role-play moderator: I do apologize for this inconvenience.

F-25: ***Is it a common occurrence?***

Role-play moderator: This usually happens since this airport is really busy. For now, I'll make a few phone calls and see if your luggage is there. You just have to wait over there.

F-25: ***Will that be long? Do you know?***

Role-play moderator: It might be around 15 minutes.

F-25: ***What will happen if it is lost?***

Role-play moderator: I can't tell you anything right now, but we will try our best to track your luggage.

F-25: ***Are you a manager?***

Role-play moderator: No, I'm not. I am ground staff.
 F-25: ***What's your name?***
 Role-play moderator: I'm John.
 F-25: Ok, John. I will wait over there and will come back again.

In (1), F-25, role-playing a passenger who lost her luggage, initiated her complaints with the statements 'I lost my luggage.' and 'It should have come on the conveyor belt by now.' After that, she opted for the complaint strategy of inquiry to inquire about the problem. F-25 asked whether the problem of the lost luggage was a usual case and the complainees replied that it was. The inquiry allowed the complainees to give an explanation without answering the question, as the complainees further explained that the airport was really busy. The inquiry enabled the complainer to introduce new topics of complaint, including the time duration for the problem solution, possible future actions and the complainees' personal information. F-25 then asked whether she needed to wait for a long time and wondered about the future action in case her luggage could not be tracked. The information associated with the complainees such as his or her name or the position were inquired. Both *yes-no* questions and *wh*-questions were used. Such use of these questions were examples of standard questions as specific pieces of information were expected in response by F-25. A complainees' negative face was threatened since inquiries created pressure on the complainees to answer questions to expel F-25's doubts.

Example (2): at the beauty clinic

M-18: I have rashes on my face after receiving facial treatment.
 Role-play moderator: Some patients have allergic reactions to the treatment. We're really sorry about that.
 M-18: ***How long does it take to recover from the rashes?***
 Role-play moderator: Just one or two days or within 48 hours.
 M-18: ***Will I have a scar here?***
 Role-play moderator: No, no, no. It's just a slow healing process. I will give you some medicine to heal the rashes.
 M-18: Thank you very much. ***How many pills should I take a day?***
 Role-play moderator: You need to take two pills twice a day in the morning and before going to bed.
 M-18: ***I don't have to pay for the pills, do I?***
 Role-play moderator: You don't have to. They are free of charge.

In (2), M-20 performed a role play as a customer at a beauty clinic with rashes on his face. Both stand-out questions and a tag question were employed. M-20 inquired about problems such as the amount of time required to recover from the rashes and the possible consequences of having the rashes. After the complainees had provided him with some pills, M-20 asked follow-up questions about the solution e.g., number of pills that he needed to take to heal the rashes and the additional payment that he needed to pay for the treatment. M-20 was the one who controlled the floor of complaints. M-20 was a customer or a service receiver who had power over the complainees. The saying 'The customer is always right.' or 'The customer is God.' indicated that the complainees needed to provide satisfactory service (Leelaharattanarak, 2016). The complainer could ask any questions concerning the problems and solutions. When M-20 used the complaint strategy of inquiry, he encouraged the complainees to respond to the complaints.

In business contexts, business representatives or service providers are subordinates who have less power than customers or service receivers (Leelaharattanarak, 2016, p. 131). Business representatives are socio-professionally expected to serve the customer's need and satisfaction (King, 1995). Consequently, the relationship between service providers and service receivers is likely to be unequal. Business representatives need to be concerned about their interpersonal relationship with customers; they need to respond to customers' complaints carefully and avoid explicitly confronting the customers. Business representatives or service providers need to respond to customers' inquiries when problems arise.

Another similarity found was the use of the complaint strategy of reason. Both male and female learners used stand-out questions to form rhetorical questions in order to give reasons to make complainers believe why problems should be tackled. In the following example, M-20 employed the complaint strategy of reason to complain in a rhetorical question form as follows:

Example (3): at the airport

Role-play moderator:

This is an unusual case. Right now, our security department hasn't reported anything.

M-20:

Do you know how much my luggage costs? It's more expensive than your airline business.

Role-play moderator:

I'm sorry for your inconvenience. Here is a customer property claim form. If you can fill it out, we'll try to locate your luggage as soon as we can.

In (3), the complaint strategy of reason with a *yes-no* question was used to indicate that the lost luggage was expensive. In other words, M-20's luggage needed to be tracked because he really wanted his luggage back and it would cost a lot to replace. M-20 initiated his question by using '*Do you know...?*' to draw the complainer's attention. Then, he used a hyperbole to exaggerate that his luggage was more expensive than the airline business. His rhetorical *yes-no* question did not require an answer. The use of M-20's question form was a statement of opinion rather than a question in search of information. His question was used to convey sarcasm. This example (3) was a kind of nonstandard question that was not used for eliciting information. M-20's complaint could be interpreted as a strong reprobation by which some individual's positive face was, intrinsically, being invaded (Gil, 2002).

Example (4): at the beauty clinic

F-15:

I've just used the beauty clinic. And you can see I got a scary rash on my face. ***What kind of treatment did you give me?*** My face is now ugly. ***How could you do this to me? Who will be responsible for this?***

Role-play moderator:

Oh, I'm extremely sorry about that. Maybe you're allergic to something. Could you please wait for a moment? Our dermatologist will arrive here soon.

In (4), shown above, F-15 performed the role play as a customer who had rashes on her face after the facial treatment. She used the complaint strategy of reason with *wh*-questions with the question words '*what*', '*how*' and '*who*' to perform the complaints. F-15 gave the reason to make the complainer believe that the clinic provided her with the bad treatment, thus causing the rashes on her face. It was not acceptable for F-15 that her face was ugly. She used questions indicating that someone needed to be held responsible for her

problem. The rhetorical questions were used to assert that the problem needed to be tackled rather than questioning. Example (4) included nonstandard questions. F-15 kept using question forms without expecting answers or help from the complaine. In the complaine's replies, the complaine knew that F-15 was dissatisfied. The complaine immediately apologized to F-15.

The use of nonstandard questions in giving the reasons was related to pragmatic functions for both males and females (Yuan, 2018). One of the pragmatic functions of questions as complaints was emphatic function. The questions as complaints can be used to highlight the theme of speech, strengthen the speaker's attitude, and better serve his or her purpose of delivering the speech (Yuan, 2018, p. 115). Such use of questions might be considered a kind of communicative skill in performing the questions as complaints.

Differences

The male and female learners differed in the use of their questions. In Table 2, the occurrences of the complaint strategy of inquiry were different for males and females. Thirty-five questions or 37.64 % of the complaint strategy of inquiry were used by the male group, while 49 questions or 54.44 % of the complaint strategy of inquiry were used by the female group. In addition, the male group differed from the female group in the use of complaint strategy of appeal. The male group employed the complaint strategy of appeal in 40 questions or 43.01 % whereas the female group used it in 21 questions or 23.33 %.

The chi-square analysis was conducted to investigate significant differences between the male and female questions. Table 3 below shows the Pearson chi-square value and its asymptotic significance (two-sided) of the use of male and female complaint strategies in the question forms. The italic and bold numbers indicate significant differences.

Table 3: Chi-Square Analysis Results

Gender	Pearson Chi-Square	Inquiry	Appeal	Reason
Male and Female	Value Asymptotic Significance (two-sided)	13.021 <i>P = 0.001</i>	30.963 <i>P = 0.000</i>	5.467 P = 0.065

The chi-square results revealed that the male and female learners were significantly different in their use of complaint strategies of inquiry and appeal. The associations between the gender and complaint strategies were observed with value = 13.021, $p = 0.001$ in the use of the complaint strategy of inquiry, value = 30.963, $p = 0.000$ in the use of the complaint strategy of appeal and value = 5.467, $p = 0.065$ in the use of the complaint strategy of reason. The values labeled two-sided asymptotic significance which were 0.001 and 0.000 indicated significant differences in the use of male and female questions for inquiry and appeal. On the other hand, men and women did not significantly differ in their use of the complaint strategy of reason. The value labeled two-sided asymptotic significance was 0.065, and any value higher than 0.05 indicated an insignificant difference.

The male learners differed from the female learners in their use of questions in the complaint strategy of appeal. The use of questions for appealing was consistent with Wood (2005), who stated that men used the questions to appeal because they had the underlying purpose of using language instrumentally. Furthermore, the use of questions for a clear

purpose, including appealing, was in line with Winter and Udomsak (2002), who proposed that male questions were directive and achievement oriented.

The male learners used questions to perform the complaints to inquire, appeal and give reasons. They did not choose to say nothing as claimed by Trenchs's study (1995). Yet, the results were parallel with Trenchs's study (1995) in that men used the questions to appeal to the complaine more frequently than women. Trenchs concluded that the male and female learners had different complaint performance in terms of strategy choices. Women opted for more inquiries than men when performing the complaints (e.g., Dubois and Crouch, 1975; Fishman, 1990; Lakoff, 1973; Trench 1995).

The strategy realizations of male and female learners were different. One of the notable differences was the use of the complaint strategy of appeal with question forms. The female learners used hedging devices and ellipses when they utilized the questions to appeal while men employed forms of contraction and informal appeals with the questions. Consider the following examples:

Example (5): at the airport

- F-7: I can't find my luggage now I've arrived.
- Role-play moderator: Very sorry to hear that. What I can do is I can give you this luggage property claim form. If you can fill that out with the description of your luggage and your contact number, we will give it back as soon as possible and we will call you.
- F-7: I don't have time to fill in this form. I think you lost my luggage. ***Is it possible that you give me compensation?***
- Role-play moderator: You know, I can't honestly tell you right now. We have an electronic tracking system, hopefully we'll find your luggage.
- F-7: ***Perhaps, could you give me a free hotel stay while I'm waiting for my luggage?*** I have nothing right now. I'm so exhausted from the journey and I really need to rest.
- Role-play moderator: I'm sorry but you actually need to stay in the airport so the security can have a chance to talk with you.

In (5) F-7 role played as a passenger who could not find her luggage. The complaint strategy of appeal with *yes-no* questions was used with hedging devices such as '*possible*' and '*perhaps*' to appeal to the complaine to repair the problem. Such use of hedging devices with the questions might allow the complainer to convey uncertainty as F-7 might not be sure whether they could get compensation for the hotel stay. The use of female hedges seems to support what Lakoff (1973) claims. That is, that female speech can be characterized by hedges which, for Lakoff, indicates hesitation. The use of questions and hedges was parallel with Holmes (2001, p. 286), who proposed that the use of hedges and question forms are female characteristics.

Example (6): at the airport

- F-9: Hi, it appears that my luggage is not on the conveyor belt. ***Is there anything you can...?***
- Role-play moderator: Very sorry to hear that. What I can do is I can give you this luggage property claim form. If you can fill that out with the description of your luggage and your contact number, we will track your luggage as soon as possible and we will let you know as soon as possible.

In (6), when F-9 performed the role play where she lost her luggage, she opted for the complaint strategy of appeal to ask for help to repair the problem or to do something for her by using a *yes-no* question. The verbal responses such as ‘Yes, there is.’ were not expected. F-9 used an ellipsis with her incomplete question. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 227), an ellipsis is used to leave the implicature hanging in the air. F-9 was vague in appealing when she performed the complaint. Alternatively, F-9 could keep the complaint going by not performing the complaint with a clear finish. It could be a way of indicating that F-9 wanted to call for the complainees’s attention and continue with the verbal flow. The complainees responded to her complaint that he or she would track her luggage and would inform her as soon as possible. The use of ellipsis was found in the female complaints while the male learners did not choose to use the ellipsis to appeal for help or problem repair.

Example (7): at the beauty clinic

- Role-play moderator: What kind of service did you get from my clinic?
M-12: Just a normal facial. I come here weekly and I don't know what happened today. But like this is not normal.
Role-play moderator: It's not normal. We're really sorry about this.
M-12: ***Got any cream or medicine for me?***
Role-play moderator: Here you are. I suggest that you take these tablets twice a day. The rash should get better immediately. However, if it doesn't get better, then please come and see us again and it's good for you to see our specialist.
M-12: Ok. ***How about some sort of reimbursement?*** This is not acceptable to me.
Role-play moderator: We'll look into it and we'll also ask our specialist when you come back and do your regular treatment.
M-12: ***What about giving me a free facial massage, too?***
Role-play moderator: We can give you a fifteen percent discount like our VIP customers.
M-12: That's ok. I'm happy now. Thank you very much.

In (7), M-12 role played to appeal to the complainees for some cream, medicine, reimbursement and the facial massage because of the rashes on his face. The complaint strategy of appeal with a *yes-no* question can be used in a form of contraction. The question as complaint in ‘*Got any cream or medicine for me?*’ was the contraction form of ‘*Have you got any cream or medicine for me?*’. In appealing for the reimbursement and free facial massage, M-12 employed *wh*-questions with *wh*-words ‘*How about?*’ and ‘*What about?*’. The two questions would be more formally phrased as ‘*Could I ask for a reimbursement?*’ or ‘*Would you please provide me with a free facial massage, too?*’. Such use of contraction and *wh*-words allowed the complainer to perform informal complaints, thus making the situation less serious. With regard to Brown and Levinson (1987), such use of informal and contraction forms is associated with a positive politeness strategy and in this case was a way to convey in-group membership. Therefore, the presence of contraction may mark an utterance as being positively polite (Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 111).

Questions as Complaints and (Im)politeness

The male and female questions as complaints can be either polite or impolite. Concepts of (im)politeness vary in different situations and in different cultures. Whether any particular communication signal is actually perceived by the target to be polite or impolite depends on

the context. When the male and female learners utilized the questions as complaints to appeal for help or repair the problem, they could perform (im)polite complaints. Consider the following examples:

Example (8): at the beauty clinic

- M-5: I'm not happy with you and I probably won't come back. I've become like an old man now.
- Role-play moderator: This is an unusual case. I'm extremely sorry, sir. We will take responsibility for this if it's our fault.
- M-5: ***Can you give my money back or would you like to give me credit for the facial treatment?***
- Role-play moderator: I think you need to meet our specialist first.

In (8) M-5 used the complaint strategy of appeal with a *yes-no* question to appeal for help or to repair the problem. The modal verbs 'can' and 'would' were used to form the question. According to Boncea (2014), modal verbs can be used to mitigate face-threatening acts. By using the question as complaint to appeal, M-5 provided options for the complainees to choose ways to solve the problem. The complainees could choose whether he or she would give the complainer a refund or give credit. The use of question to appeal is a polite way of not forcing the complainees to solve the problem in one specific way.

Example (9): at the beauty clinic

- F-23: ***May I ask for a full refund?***
- Role-play moderator: Because you have signed the contract, we can't give you hundred percent refund, but we can give you a fifty percent or half refund.

Example (10): at the beauty clinic

- M-2: I just used your facial treatment and I have a really bad rash on my face. I don't really know what to do.
- Role-play moderator: Well, sometimes it happens. People's skin reacts with the facial treatment.
- M-2: I may give you some negative reviews because I'm not satisfied with your service. ***Have you thought about upgrading me to be one of your VIP customers?***
- Role-play moderator: We can do that. No problem.

In (9) and (10), both F-23 and M-2 role played to appeal to the complainer to repair the problem. F-23 appealed for the full refund while M-2 appealed to become a VIP customer. Both of them violated the Tact Maxim and Generosity Maxim. With regard to Leech's Maxims (1983), the Tact Maxim was violated as they did not provide any benefits for the complainees. The Generosity Maxim was violated when they did not minimize the benefits for themselves. The complainers' questions used to appeal implied an intrusion on the complainees' territory as they attempted to get the complainees to do something for them.

The questions used with complaint strategies can be used to cause offense. Human interactions are not harmonious and cooperative in practice when people perform the complaints (e.g. Culpeper, 2011; Rhurakvit, 2011). Culpeper (2005, p. 38) defines impoliteness as those occasions when (a) the speaker communicates in an intentionally face-

threatening manner, or (b) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-threatening, or a combination of (a) and (b). When the male and female learners used the questions to give reasons, they could perform face-threatening acts intentionally. Examples are illustrated below.

Example (11): at the airport

- M-7: I was standing at the baggage claim for about two hours. Probably about an hour longer than it needed to and my bag never showed up.
- Role-play moderator: That's really unusual. The bag should have showed up by now.
- M-7: It's really inconvenient. *Is this your best standard service?* You lost your passenger's luggage.
- Role-play moderator: I apologize for the inconvenience. The best I can do is have you fill up this Customer Property Claim Form. It might take some time but as soon as we find the bag we'll try to return it to you.

In (11), M-7 role played that he lost his luggage. He used a yes-no question to perform the complaint by giving his reasons that it was really inconvenient that he lost his luggage and he needed to get the problem fixed. He used the question to complain in an ironic tone when he said: 'Is this your best standard service?' M-7's question was a nonstandard question. He did not intend to ask a question, but he complained that the staff did not provide the passenger with good service. In the worst case scenario the airline lost his luggage through carelessness.

Example (12): at the airport

- F-18: I need my bag. I have nothing. I am in a foreign country. This is really inconvenient for me. *You want me to sleep here at the airport, don't you?*
- Role-play moderator: I'm sorry but you have to calm down first. As right now, there's nothing that we can do. I understand your situation. This can happen.

F-18 role played as a passenger in example (12). She was not satisfied when the airline lost her luggage. F-18 really needed her luggage. She used a tag question to perform the complaint that she had the problem as she lost her luggage and the problem needed to be solved. She used the complaint strategy of reason to imply that she did not want to sleep at the airport to strengthen her complaint. The question was not aimed at asking for pieces of information. She conveyed her complaint in a sarcastic tone and wanted to explain her problem to make the complainees believe that the situation was inconvenient for her.

The questions as complaints in (11) and (12) were in line with Culpeper's impoliteness concept (2008). Normally, the intended meaning of questions as complaints with a sarcastic tone was opposite to the meaning which appeared on the surface. In (11), M-7 did not mean that the service was the best and in (12), F-8 did not want to sleep at the airport. When the complainers were obviously insincere or used the questions as complaints with the sarcastic tone, their questions as complaints conveyed a genuinely impolite message designed to threaten the complainees' positive face. Complainees' positive faces were

threatened when M-7 and F-8 did not care about the complainers' desire to be liked or accepted. The complainers' positive faces were possibly threatened when M-7 and F-8 were impolite and the complainers perhaps disliked the complainer.

Questions and Complaints and Conversational Maxims

The conversational-maxim perspective relies principally on the work of Grice's Cooperative Principle Maxims (1975). The male and female questions can be used to soften the face-threatening acts. Examples are provided as in:

Example (13): at the airport

F-10: I have an important and urgent business trip, but I can't find my luggage now. *Is there any chance that you guys can get up and take ...?*

Role-play moderator: I'm sorry for this inconvenience, sir. We can't do anything until you fill out this this customer property claim form.

In (13), F-10 performed the role play that she lost her luggage and she used a *yes-no* question to appeal to the complainer for help or to repair the problem. F-10 used an ellipsis with her incomplete question. The Gricean Maxim of Quantity was violated as F-10 provided less information than required. In addition, she violated the Gricean Maxim of Manner because F-10's question was not quite clear. She did not state precisely what she wanted. The implicature, which F-10 implied with her question as complaint, was hanging in the air. F-10 possibly implicated that 'Get the luggage returned.' or 'Take the luggage back.' Such use of ellipsis enabled the complainer to use the question as complaint by not severely threatening the complainer's face. According to Charoenroop (2016), using an ellipsis allows a speaker to convey ambiguous or unclear messages. By leaving questions or utterances unfinished, a speaker gives an opening to a listener by making the speech act less imposing (McGloin, 1990; Tanaka, 2004).

Example (14): at the beauty clinic

M-30: I got a facial earlier today, and I believe I have had a negative reaction.

Role-play moderator: Oh, no. May I have a look?

M-30: It hurts badly. My face is breaking out with rashes. *How can I live without my handsome face?* I also have an important date tonight.

Role-play moderator: I can recommend you to see our specialist. Here she comes. Please go to room number three.

In (14), M-30 role played that he has rashes on his face. He used the complaint strategy of reason with a *wh*-question to indicate that the problem needed to be solved. He could not live without his handsome face. M-30 flouted the Gricean Maxim of Quality by not being truthful. He exaggerated his complaint as it was impossible to live without his handsome face. His question as complaint can be referred to indirectness and euphemism. He implicated that he wanted to heal and remove the rashes on his face now. M-30's question made his complaint vivid and urgent for the problem solution.

Conclusion

It has been found that questions can be used to ask questions, appeal, and give reasons. The male learners differed from the female learners when they utilized the questions. The questions used by the male and female groups were significantly different in their use of the complaint strategies of inquiry and appeal. The female group employed the questions to inquire more frequently than the male group. The male learners used the questions to appeal for help or solve the problem more frequently than their female counterparts. Nonetheless, both male and female questions were not significantly different when they opted for the complaint strategy of reason. Both groups used *yes-no* questions and *wh*-questions to form rhetorical questions when giving reasons. When it comes to interlanguage complaints in business contexts, gender may be considered an important variable regarding questions utilized in performing the complaints.

There are many other factors influencing a speaker's complaint strategy. Further studies may explore other factors such as power, social status, and personality traits. Other complaint strategies should be further investigated in order to see the whole picture of how complaints can be performed in other fields. To triangulate the results, interview data should be included. It should be noted that the implications of this paper might not be applicable to other contexts such as political contexts or medical contexts.

Learners may have difficulties in their communication if they do not have opportunities to learn how to use different kinds of questions. We suggest that learners should be given the chance to learn about different functions of questions from authentic or natural data in different situations and in various cultures so that they can be aware of the use of questions in communication, such as performing complaints, inquiring, appealing for help and giving reasons. It might be interesting if both male and female students could perform role plays in different situations by using question forms with friends, teachers or native speakers of English.

In addition, information and additional exercises concerning several types of questions should be included in students' study materials so that students and teachers can implement the materials to improve students' competence in using different kinds of questions in language classrooms. Both young and adult learners should be trained to develop their ability in utilizing questions in various functions. We believe that knowledge of questions can be very useful in daily communication, for workplace or business contexts.

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