

The Complaint Speech Act Set Produced by Arab Students in the UAE

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Abstract : It appears that the speech act of complaint has not received as much attention as other speech acts. However, the face-threatening nature of this speech act requires a special attention in multicultural contexts in particular. The teaching context in the UAE universities, where a big majority of teaching staff comes from other cultures, requires investigations into this speech act in order to improve communication between students and faculty. This session will outline the results of a study conducted with this purpose. The realization of complaints by Freshman English students in Communication courses at Petroleum Institute was investigated to identify communication patterns that seem to cause a strain. Data were collected using a role-play between a teacher and students, and a judgment scale completed by two of the instructors in the Communications Department. The initial findings reveal that the students had difficulty putting their case, produced the speech act of criticism along with a complaint and that they produced both requests and demands as candidate solutions. The judgement scales revealed that the students' attitude was not appropriate most of the time and that the judges would behave differently from students. It is concluded that speech acts, in general, and complaint, in particular, need to be taught to learners explicitly to improve interpersonal communication in multicultural societies. Some teaching ideas are provided to help increase foreign language learners' sociolinguistic competence.

Keywords : speech act, complaint, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, language teaching

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