Korean EFL Learners' Politeness Strategies in Their Complaints

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Park, Jihyon. 2001. Korean EFL Learners' Politeness Strategies in Their Complaints. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal, 9*(1), 185-209. In this study, the speech act set of complaint produced by Korean EFL learners was analyzed. Of interest is to see their pragmatic transfer in their complaints from their native language (Korean) to English. The participants in the study are Korean college students enrolled in College English classes at Chonnam National University in Korea. The channel of the communication is electronic mail (e-mail) and the context of the speech act is students complaining about their grades to their instructors. 38 emails written in English and 20 emails in Korean were analyzed with focus on their varying politeness strategies in complaining. The findings suggest that participants performance of speech act reflects their interlanguage pragmatics, which they established in their L2 independent of their L1. Pedagogical implications and limitations are also discussed. **(University of Arizona)**

1. Introduction

Communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) in language learning has been paid attention among SLA researchers and teachers. According to Hymes (1972), second language learners with high-level linguistic knowledge may not be able to manage successful communication if they do not understand cultural and context-specific norms of the speech community. An effective communication in one culture might not be effective in another, and, thus, non-native language users linguistic and

cultural background might cause negative linguistic and pragmatic transfer to their performance in L2.

In this study, the speech act sets of complaint produced by Korean EFL learners in their L1 and L2 are analyzed. Of interest is to see their sociopragmatic and pragma-linguistic transfer (Leech 1983; Thomas 1983) in their complaining emails in Korean and English. Especially, the focus will be given on organizational patterns and politeness strategies in the two languages.

2. Background Studies

Many researchers in the area of Contrastive Analysis (CA) have provided useful methods for illustrating cultural differences in rhetoric and for explaining the influence of first-language rhetorical patterns and norms on second-language writing behavior (Bell, Becker, & Dillon, 1995; Dillon, 1992, 1993, Hinds, 1987, 1990; Kaplan, 1966, 1972). Pedagogical implications of CA have been given a focal concern in second language teaching since the notion of "communicative competence" was introduced by Hymes (1972) and many other researchers (Savignon, 1972, 1983; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982; Munby, 1978; Canale & Swain, 1980). Second language learning is not merely learning linguistic forms but also their appropriate use in appropriate contexts.

Hymes (1971) defines communicative competence as "the ability to function in a truly communicative setting" (1971, 8)." The acquisition of communicative competence includes knowledge of the linguistic and pragmatic form as well as the appropriate context to produce it, which eventually comprises communicative norms in a speech community. In the area of second language acquisition research, there has been an increasing attention to L2 learners development of communicative competence with focus on pragmatic transfer in interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper, 1992).

Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) made a distinction between

sociopragmatic and *pragmalinguistic transfer*. Sociopragmatic transfer is learners transferring interpretation of contextual or situational factors while pragmalinguistic transfer is language learners use of linguistics forms affecting pragmatic and politeness values in their interlanguage utterances (House & Kasper, 1987; Bodman & Eisenstein, 1988; House 1988; Beebe et al, 1990).

Brown and Levinsons politeness model (1987) illustrates a variety of strategies in speech act, such as negative and positive strategies for "saving face."" Scollon and Scollon (1995) distinguish the strategies as involvement and independence strategies in their Face (Politeness) Systems. The strategies are manipulated by the participants of communication according to factors such as power relationship, distance, and weight of imposition. In the study, the participants are located in a hierarchical politeness system in that the writers are students and the readers are their instructors. The relationship can be presented as +P (power) and D (distance). In general, the relationship between teachers and students in Korean culture is interpreted as +D.

Figure 1: Hierarchical politeness system (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 46)

Speaker 1
(involvement strategies)

Speaker 2
(independence strategies)
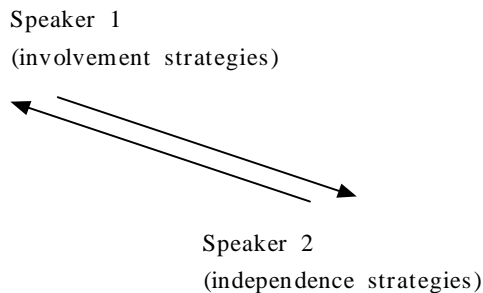
Scollon & Scollon (1995) notes that this kind of "hierarchical face system is quite familiar in business, governmental, and educational organizations (p. 46)." Thus, use of independence strategies in the emails in the study is expected according to this system.

There have been few contrastive studies of speech act set of

complaints produced by Korean EFL/ESL speakers. Murphy & New (1996) examined the speech act set by American native speakers and Korean non-native speakers of English in the context of expressing disapproval of their grade to a professor in an oral communication. They compared the speech act in the English language by the two different groups. They also conducted native English speakers acceptability judgments to Korean speakers speech act in order to observe whether their communication was successful or not, based on aggressiveness, respectfulness, credibility, and appropriateness. The findings indicated that Korean ESL speakers produced the speech act set of criticism while American native speakers of English produced the complaint speech act set. Their criteria to distinguish the two speech act sets were types of pronouns used (we vs. you), (de)personalization, acceptance or refusal of partial responsibility for the problem and others. American English native speakers acceptability judgments showed that most of speech act sets of Korean speakers in the study were aggressive and inappropriate lacking respectfulness and credibility.

Park et al. (1998) conducted a case study of contrastive rhetorical strategies for complaints in international business letters written by Koreans and Americans. Their findings illustrate that the native English speakers complaint message was direct and linear in their rhetorical pattern and impersonalising the problem by their lexical choice. In the meantime, Korean rhetorical pattern was indirect and non-linear and the lexical choice in Korean speakers letters presented emotional expressions, personalizing writers and/or readers ("You should have discussed this...").

In both studies above, researchers put their focus on the contrastive rhetorical strategies of native speakers of English and Korean ESL/EFL speakers. In this study, pragmatic transfer from L1 (Korean) to L2 (English) is examined with a focus on whether the politeness strategies in L2 (English) are transferred from L1 (Korean). The context of the communication in this study is similar to the one in Murphy & New (1996) but the form of the speech act differs in that emails are

examined in the study while they used face-to-face oral interviews.

3. Rational And Research Qeustions

The objectives of the present study are twofold: First, to compare the components of the speech act set produced by Korean EFL speakers in Korean and in English; and second, to examine their pragmatic transfer if any from their L1 to L2. The questions are as follows:

(1) Given the context of expressing disagreement regarding a grade to a professor, how will the organizational patterns be varied in emails written in Korean (L1) and English (L2) by Korean EFL speakers?

(2) Given the same context, how will communicative strategies in the speech act of complaint differ according to Korean and English? That is, what linguistic features and semantic components are used in the complaining emails in the two different languages?

4. Research Methods

4.1. Subjects and Source of Data

In this study, college students in Korea participated. They are enrolled in College English classes at Chonnam National University (CNU) in Kwangju, Korea. The College English class at the CNU is a general education course to teach intermediate level of English. The instructor is a professor at the department of English at the University and he gladly helped me to collect the data. To have one same recipient in collecting data was the key to control one of the extraneous variables.

A scenario to set up the context of expressing disapproval to a professor was given to students in four classes as follows:

You are taking the College English Class with me. You and three other friends studied together in a group for your final exam. After the final, you compared your answers with other friends of the study group and found that your answers were very similar to those of your friend. Later, you checked your grade and found out that you got a "C" while the other friends got A 's. Now you have to write an "e-mail" to me to complain about this result.

A total of 65 students participated from three classes: 40 of them wrote English emails and the rest 25 wrote Korean emails. They were instructed to write a complaining email to their professors based on the scenario. Among the data, there were 7 emails 5 from Korean emails, 2 from English emails saying that they would not complain about their grades at all but accept them. Therefore, Consequently, 58 emails were used in the analysis: 38 English emails and 20 Korean emails. All of the subjects were informed that the activity is a part of the course project.

4.2. Data Analysis

For the analysis of organizational patterns, five meaning components in letters found by Connor, David, and Rycker (1995) were applied: (I) identification of the problem, (II) discussion of relevant information, (III) a request for action, (IV) a topic shift which is not related to the problem, and (V) buffer, which is an optional element to neutralize or soften a negative message. Bovee and Thill defines a buffer as "a neutral, noncontroversial statement (1994, p. 269).""

These components are also found in Park et al. (1998) to analyze their business letters. They coded the sequential order of meaning components using the concept of categorical "moves" (Swales & Najjar, 1987). Their findings exhibit that English letters follow the general pattern of (I), (II), (III), and (V), while Koreans show (V), (II), (I), (III), and (V). The analysis of the rhetorical pattern in this study is also

based on such categorical move in Korean and English emails.

For the analysis of politeness strategies used in the emails, semantic components and linguistic features were examined focused on rhetorical style such as lexical choice, lexical hedges, (im)personalization, and types of requests, especially focusing on face-saving strategies.

4.3. Limitations and Advantages

The absence of data produced by English native speakers impeded the comparison of the speech acts of complaint between Korean EFL speakers and English native speakers, which suggests further research.

However, the purpose of this paper is to compare Korean speakers writings in their native language and English, which would reflect their interlanguage pragmatic strategies. In this context, one of the advantages of this study is to set the participants relationship as a constant variable, that is, students and their teacher.

Another advantage that should be noted is that the current study explores pragmatic differences caused by the two different languages in a homogeneous cultural setting. In other words, this study examines intra-cultural communication in two different languages, but not inter-cultural communication. It enables the study to reflect participants' belief and sense about the language *per se*, in this case, English, rather than the culture of the speech community.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

While Korean mails show consistent patterns in organization and politeness strategies, English data are varied in their use of rhetorical strategies. Some show pragmatic transfer from Korean, some are independent of both Korean and English, and some combine both Korean and English styles in a single letter. To avoid complication in presentation of data, Korean emails, which show consistency, will be analyzed first, followed by a comparison with English emails.

Grammatical mistakes in all samples presented below are preserved as in the originals, and the source of the examples are identified in parentheses for a later reference.

5.1. Korean Data

In terms of organization, the Korean emails of complaint commonly show the sequential order: Opening Buffer -> Explanation of Purpose -> Body -> Closing Buffer. Body is composed of discussion of relevant information, justification, complaints and candidate solution with request. Each component of body is padded with internal buffers besides opening and closing buffers. The following example shows a common organizing style in the Korean email data in this study.

Opening Buffer	*How are you, professor,* *I deeply appreciate for your teaching and advice during this semester. Your class was very impressive and I tried my best to do well in the class*
Explanation of Purpose	*I am sorry that I have to ask you about my grade and I'd appreciate it if you kindly let me know your thoughts on this.*
Discussion	*I was surprised to find my grade. My teammates, who I studied together, all received A's while I got a C. I think I did my very best for the class and its requirements. Also, I was never absent for the class. I'm wondering why I received the grade.*
Request	*I apologize for my rudeness by asking you about a grade, which I understand as your exclusive privilege. I'd greatly appreciate it if you kindly let me know why you gave me the grade.*
Closing Buffer	*Thanks,* *Take care,*

It is very common that the Korean letters begin with an opening buffer, which postpones writers point (Park et al., 1998) and also end with a closing buffer, which softens the negative point. Including buffers are common and important as well to save face of both the writer and the reader. Typical opening is composed of a combination of greetings with comments on weather, self-identification, expressions of thanks for the teacher, and/or a proactive apology about their writing a complaining mail. Common examples of the two kinds of openings from the English emails are shown as below:

· *It seems that winter has already arrived.*

· *I beg you a pardon for my writing this complaining letter to you in advance.*

· *How are you? Im one of the students who are taking your English class. This is my first English class in college and I learned a lot. Through your class, I gained self-confidence about my English.*

· *I am sorry that I was not able to write this mail earlier. I hope you enjoyed the warm weather last weekend.*

All of the Korean emails have opening buffers without an exception and some of the openings are almost the same length as or lengthier than body.

The opening buffers are followed by the explanation of the writing purpose, which is a very short transition between the opening and the body. Most of the Korean emails avoid using words like *disagree* or *complain,* which can have a connotation of challenging superiors authority. Instead, they maintain a neutral tone in explaining the purpose of writing the letter. (e.g. *Im writing to ask you about my grade*).

In the body, relevant information and justification of their disapproval are discussed based on the given scenario, so there is little variation in justification. Regarding complaining styles, Korean emails show a very

careful lexical selection, impersonalization of complaint sources for the purpose of saving face for both the writer and the professor or at least preventing their losing face.

Thus, the Korean email writers avoid placing blame directly on the reader by allowing the possibility of the complainers own error or something else from the outside. The writers share the responsibility of the matter by adding possibilities of their own mistakes which they haven't noticed yet, the professors possible error, and different opinions between the student and the professor, which the writer is ready to accept. Accordingly, the Korean emails do not sound like a complaint not to mention that they are far from blaming the reader.

The following samples, the students express their trust on the teachers evaluation. It seems that the writers try to save the professors face even if it will turn out to be his mistake.

· *Perhaps, I might have made mistakes in spite of myself but [··]*

· *Though the chances would be very slim, you might have made a mistake in grading. If not, I would think that there must have been a reason that I deserve the grade I got.*

· *Since you are extremely busy, there might be a possibility that you might make a mistake in grading.*

Otherwise, they avoid commenting who is responsible for this matter by excluding personal pronouns like *you* and *I*, which prevents losing face for both sides. Instead, they imply that the possible error, if any, is caused by outside factors.

· *Surely, I am sure that your evaluation was very professional and accurate, but I think there could have been some errors in my grade.*

· *I think your evaluation was very fair and accurate but Im concerned about a possibility that there might be an error in my case.*

· *Maybe there might have been some errors.*

Because of its nature, writing a complaining mail about a grade is a face-losing task for students in general. As one strategy to save the writers face while not damaging the professors face, they emphasize that they are not asking the professor to change their grade but just wondering about the reason they received the low grade.

· *We [the writer and his group study friends] thought that we would receive similar grades. Unfortunately, however, I received a C while my friends got As. I am wondering why.*

· *I don't have a complaint about my grade but I am just wondering how you evaluate my exam.*

In suggesting candidate solutions, the Korean writers, again, apologize for the situation that they have to bring up this uncomfortable issue to their teacher. In both apology and request, intense adverbs are used to show the writers emotion such as *truly, deeply,* or *greatly.*

· *I apologize for my rudeness by asking you about a grade, which I understand as your exclusive privilege. Id truly appreciate it if you kindly let me know why you gave me the grade.*

· *I am deeply sorry for this inconvenience but Id greatly appreciate if you reexamine my grade once more.*

· *I'm sorry for the inconvenience but would you recheck my final exam?*

Or, they appeal to the reader for the reconsideration using sophisticated honorifics in Korean such as *kindly, sincerely wish, would you.*

· *I wish you would kindly reexamine my grade and give me some explanations.*

· *I sincerely wish for your reconsideration.*

· *Would you examine if there was an error in grading my final?*

By using face-saving strategies, some writers lubricate their request with softening buffers such as mentioning the writers request is for his/her further development in the future or recognizing that the professor must be very busy.

· *I hope you would kindly let me know why you gave me a C because Id like to improve what I lack.*

· *Though I received a C, I don't have any special complaint because I learned a lot for this class. I understand you must be very busy at this time but I wish you would reexamine my scores?*

Closing buffer shows similar patters with the openings. The writers either apologize again for their complaining mails or show their respect towards the professor.

· *I apologize if I have offended you.*

· *I am sorry that I write you with this kind of matter. And, I appreciate for your class this semester.*

· *I apologize that I was not able to visit you in person. Thanks a lot for the last semester.*

· *One thing Id like to add here is I am really grateful for what I learned in your class. I hope there will be more chances to take your classes. Take care of yourself.*

· *I understand that you are very busy at this time. I appreciate for your time and kindness.*

· *Take care of yourself not to catch a cold.*

Generally speaking, the Korean emails show very sophisticated politeness strategies in terms of face-saving. The writers are careful in their lexical choice, use of honorific forms in Korean, and organizing

patterns. The main purpose of the politeness strategies is to keep balance in saving and losing face of both the writer and the reader.

5.2. English Data

The English emails of complaint also show similar organizing patterns as the Korean emails but sometimes without buffers: (Opening Buffer) Explanation of Purpose Body (Closing Buffer). When self-identification is considered as a non-buffer, because it has its own function rather than softening negative points, 15 English emails (about 40%) out of 38 mails get to the main point without an opening buffer. The sample emails with and without buffers are presented as below:

Opening Buffer	*Good morning, Mr. Shin? Hows everything? For myself, Im just fine. It is very cool today. Winter is just around the corner‥*	
Explanation of Purpose	*Well, I like to say about my grade.*	
Discussion	*As you know, I got the "C" in this work. I don't know [… …]*	*Mr. Shin, I can't accept my grade. I wonder why you give me "C" [… …]*
Request	*I am sorry to trouble you. But I'd appreciate very much, if you review my work for me.*	*I want you to recheck my work carefully. [… …]*
Closing Buffer	*Thank you, and have a nice day!*	

In addition, some English emails show an interesting organization pattern, which is not found in the Korean emails: enumerating the writers points. This pattern reflects the writers belief that that English writing should be linearly ordered with a clear presentation of the points.

· ***First,*** *you did not keep the manner of evaluation youd...* ***Another,*** *the result of the final exam was...* ***Thirdly,*** *I did my best.*

· ***First of all,*** *Thank-you for your new trial [··] And* ***secondly,*** *the reason that I send a mail is...*

· ***Most of all,*** *let me give you two reasons why[··]* ***First,*** *as you know, we [··]* ***Second,*** *if you ask something...*

· *Anyway, yesterday, I found that I got C grade in your course. I can not understand your evaluating way. So I write the four reason that I have to get A like this.*

> *1. Never being absent.*
> *2. Never skipping on sending email and writing diary and essay.*
> *3. Never making a noise in the class, but trying to participate in the class.*
> *4. Never cheating in the evaluating test. Studying hard for the test and getting good points.*

   Openings of the English emails are also found to be similar to the Korean emails, which seems like a pragmatic transfer from Korean to English. The topics in the opening buffers include weather, comments on the class, apologies for the complaints, and others. On the other hand, there are found interesting variations in the English emails, which cannot be found in the Korean mails at all. These variations do not follow the conventional writing styles in Korean nor English. They include rhetorical questions, command, blame, complaints, and strong emotional expressions. The following two sets of samples are placed at the very beginning of the email.

Transfer from Korean	Variations
How are you getting on? Nowadays it's cold and often rains. I want you take care of yourself.	**How could this happen in the world to me? How could you give me a "C" grade?**
Hello, Professor Shin! My name is Kim Eun-Yeong. I major in Japanese and take your lecture in this semester. ... I am thankful of you and your teaching. It's very helpful for me and my English is getting better and better thanks to you.	**Please read my writing carefully.** *If you feel rudeness in my writing, forgive me.*
First of all I am very sorry to write about what I am thinking about my achivement of a test.	**Mr. Shin, I can't accept my grade "C."** *I wonder why you give me "C." The others in my group have received "A"s. It isn't fair.*
I'm sorry that my first greeting is about complaining your evaluation.	**Oh, my god!** *I got a grade "C" in this class.* **It's so terrible!! I can't believe it.**

Likewise, in explaining the purpose of the mail, the writers do not hesitate using the words like *complain, unsatisfactory,* and *unreasonable,* unlike the Korean emails.

Transfer from Korean	**Variations**
I send this mail to require correction of my grade. I am sorry that I trouble you with this matter.	*I'm going to **complain** of my final exam grade.*
I have a question. It might be rude thing for you. If then, excuse me.	*The reason that I send this mail is I got an **unsatisfactory** result about the recent report.*
[... ...] I have some questions to you ...	*I think that you had some mistakes grading me so that I sent this letter. There's much to be said for it which is **unreasonable**.*

Descriptions of relevant information combined with the writers' complaints also show a variety of patterns that are very different from the Korean emails. In most of the English emails, writers' emotional descriptions can be found.

· ***But the result!!!** I can't believe it. You gave me "C", didn't you? Do you know what I received as grade? Unbelievalby I took "C". **Oh~ my god**.*

· ***I am shocked. Oh my god**! I recollected the past. I studied hard [... ...]*

· *I checked my grade and found out that I got C while the other friends got A 's. **Oh, my god!** [... ...]*

Similar face-saving strategies that are found in the Korean emails are also shown in the English emails such as acceptance of partial responsibility for the problem (e.g. *Perhaps, **I might make some mistakes**)* and impersonalization of complaint sources (e.g. ***There must***

be some misunderstanding). In the meantime, most of the English emails show criticism accompanied by amplifiers (e.g. *very, definitely*) and mitigators (e.g. *a little*). Criticism in the context of a hierarchical relationship, a student-professor relationship in this case, is very unlikely to be found in Korean pragmatics.

Transfer from Korean

Perhaps I might make some mistakes in my work, I think.

[... ...]I think there must be some misunderstanding or mistake on your work.

I hope your judgement is right. However in this result I think there might be some mistakes.

I cannot understand more and more about my marks. But, I think that you must have your own reason for gave "C" to me.

Variations

How can you give me the terrible score? "B"? That is not fare!! Why I have to have the B ?

Obviously, *it is **very** unfair.*

*I'm not a student who is begging for a grade. Although, why do I write this? Because I think you make a mistake **definitely**.*

*I'm a little **angry** to your judgement.*

*But you **disappointed** me. What is your evaluation standards? I can't understand why I received such a poor grade.*

Use of questioning is found as the most common usage in complaining and some are even rhetorical questions:

· *Why must I only suffer unfaireness? I can't believe this result.*

· *Anyway my three friends got "A"! But I got "C". Why?*

· *I studied English very much and partispated actively in class. Besides my group members who studied together with me got a "A". What happened?*

· *My partner got A+, but I got C! Actually, it doesn't make sense for me. Did I do something wrong? Or, Do I have any problem?*

· *But why I got C while my friend got A?*

Some English emails, reflecting the writers' concern about the inappropriateness of their writing the complaint mails, include their advice to the professor, which adds more inappropriateness in spite of the writer's intention.

· *You notice that I am having some problems with my attitude, but that doesn't seem a proper thing to do. Even if my deed makes you to be unpleasant, I think you have to separate the score from the attitude.*

Some go beyond criticism, producing even sarcasm:

· *I expected that I deserved to get "A," but I failed. The more interesting matter was that my friends who studied with me received the GOOD MARK; A!!! How reasonable you are!*

In most of the English email data, candidate solutions in the form of requests are suggested. The requests are mostly about asking the professor to reconsider the grade. Both indirect action requests occur and the most frequent usage for direct requests in the structure of "Please + imperative" while indirect action requests use the modals "could" or "would" in their questions, indicating politeness or hesitation.

The examples of the transferred politeness strategies show additional buffers before and/or after the requests. The requests deviated from pragmatic conventions both in Korean and English are proposed as a demand or a command accompanied by *as soon as possible, ASAP, or immediately.*

Transfer from Korean	Variations
If it is possible, would you re-check my answer sheet very carefully?	*Please think about my mark again.*
You must have checked it carefully, but please check again	*if you want to know about my opinion in detail, please e-mail me, as soon as possible.*
Could you mind reconsidering the exam scores? [... ...] if that's my mistake, I do apologize to you.	*If there isn't any problem [... ...], then please call me immediately.*
If I am not mistaken, would you consider it one more time?	*I think that it's surely your mistake to give such a grade (C's grade) for me. Please give me a attention about my grade.*
[... ...] I wish that you give a matter a serious consideration.	*Send your opinions to my mail. My e-mail address is [... ...]*

The following examples exhibit the writers' requests with use of threatening, which, in fact, might be interpreted as a joke, but still not appropriate in this context and also not found in the Korean emails.

· *I want to hear your explanation and what you have to say. If all of the reason that you have didn't make sense to me at all, I would say*

that I got a raw deal with you. Moreover, I'd tell everyone that there's no fair in this rat race.

· *Please, professor, appreciate my grade again! If you don't change my grade, I am going to leave this society, going to temple to be a buddihist. If so, as you know, our university will lose a prominent student.*

Closings in the English emails also show polarized tendency in using politeness strategies: from apologies for complaints to reminders of requests. Some of the examples are directive, demanding, and cynical.

Transfer from Korean	Variations
Most of all, I'm so sorry that I tell you my grade not by face-by-face but by this mail. [... ...] Take care of yourself, please. And ... Thank you so much.	*[If] you are on the students' side sincerely, it will be a good idea to think what I said over seriously.*
[... ...] thank you for your teaching during one semester. I learned many important things [... ...]	*Write soon and tell me what you decide.*
I'm sorry that I was some rudeness. [... ...] Enjoy for your weekend.	*I have confidence that my work is not worse than others'!!!*
[... ...] Again, I feel appreciate you give me chance to take minutes of your time.	*Thanks for reading my complaints and I hope to get reasonable reason, instead of clumsy excuse.*

Generally speaking, politeness strategies used in the English emails

are very inconsistent in their use. They show inappropriate lexical choice, personal emotions, and rudeness. Interestingly, most of the English data show a mixture of transferred and new pragmatics, which, sometimes, is difficult to be interpreted as "politeness" strategies. In their writing in English, Korean writers use transferred pragmatics from their native language at some point, and they also show new writing styles deviated both from the Korean and English pragmatics.

6. Conclusion

The comparison of the speech act set produced by Korean EFL speakers in Korean and in English show interesting findings. In the context of expressing disagreement regarding a grade to a professor, the Korean emails always reflect a "hierarchical politeness system (Scollon and Scollon, 1995)." In their organizing the complaining mail in Korean, the writers show frequent use of softening buffers before and after their complains and requests as well as at the beginning and the end of the letter itself. The writers are very careful in their lexical selection not to sound impolite and the politeness strategies are used for the purpose of saving face. In the Korean emails, the writers depersonalized the problem, combined politeness and hesitation markers, and showed avoidance of using personal pronouns, *you*.

On the other hand, in the English data, Korean non-native speakers in English demonstrate inappropriate sociolinguistic behavior in their complaining. Their transferred politeness strategies from Korean exhibit hierarchical distance between the writers and the reader, indicating their attempts to be polite and face-saving. However, most of the English emails are greatly diverged from the Korean data. The writers in English express their personal emotion (e.g. *Oh, my god, I cannot believe it!, it's terrible, I'm shocked ...),* aggressiveness (e.g. *I cannot accept ..., how could you ...?, obviously, it's not fair* ...), sarcasm and cynicism (e.g. I hope to get reasonable reason, instead of clumsy excuse, How reasonable you are!), demanding and directive expressions

(e.g. *please, call me immediately, write soon and tell me what you decide* ...).

In the English data, the writers personalize the problem, blame the professor by imposing all the responsibility on him, and direct the professor what action he should take. Their English writing styles show criticism rather than complaints but criticizing a superior is not accepted norms in Korean culture. In the given context, their writing can be perceived as aggressive, challenging, inappropriate and even rude. It is unlikely that the Korean writers in this context will achieve their goals by failing in the negotiation.

The aggressive writing style in the English mails, which is deviated from the accepted norm in Korean culture, may be caused by the virtual situation, which is based on an imaginary scenario. However, this assumption is weak in its logic because the Korean emails in the same context do not exhibit any deviation from the norm of its speech community.

It is also possible to posit that the inappropriate writing is accounted for by the writers' lack of proficiency in the language. This assumption is very plausible in that their writings have a huge amount of grammatical errors even in the basic level. They might have enough intention to be polite in their writing but their linguistic competence did not support it. However, again, some writers indicate high-level proficiency in English without many grammatical mistakes. Some of the writings demonstrate a sophisticated use of the English language but still they frequently show pragmatic inappropriateness, which suggests that communicative competence or pragmatic competence might develop independently of learners' linguistic competence.

Lastly, the findings provide some hint or reflection about Korean speakers' belief and sense about the English language, unfortunately far from the norms and conventions of its speech community, though.

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