Native EFL Raters' Criteria in Assessing the Speech Act of Complaint: The Case of American and British EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Despite the importance of interlanguage pragmatic rating (ILP) in the second language teaching and learning context, scant attention has been devoted to it. This study aims to investigate native EFL teachers' major criteria in assessing the speech act of complaint produced by Iranian EFL learners. To fulfill this end, two groups of experienced native raters, including American (n=47) and British (n=30) EFL/ESL teachers, were elected for evaluating the complaint discourse completion tests (DCTs) made from video-prompts which were answered by EFL learners before. The content analysis of raters' comments on the EFL learners' productions revealed eleven different criteria including logical reasoning and comments, politeness, linguistic appropriacy, semantic formula, interlocutors' relationship, register choice, formality, degree of intensity, cultural accommodations, degree of directness, and finally fluency and naturalness respectively from the most to the least frequent ones. The result of the t-test and chi-square analysis proved that British and American raters differed significantly in their degree of variations and preferences of these criteria. The results further showed that EFL learners' responses seemed unreasonable and impolite to native raters which might be due to the different cultural norms between L1 and L2 societies and consequently encourage us to be aware of the importance of teaching sociopragmatic knowledge to the EFL learners.

1. Introduction

During the last two decades, various studies have been conducted on teaching and testing interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Shin 2014; Cohen, 2014; Rose, 2005; Taguchi, 2011). Of all the factors deemed significant to the scholars, the issue of interlanguage pragmatics rating has not been explored much. Although, certain researchers (e.g., Alemi & Tajeddin 2013; Alemi, Eslami-Rasekh, & Rezanejad, 2013, 2014; Jianda, 2006) elaborated on several issues in interlanguage pragmatic rating, still many aspects of this area have remained untouched. Not unlike the previous studies on ILP rating, the present investigation focuses on EFL raters' dominant rating criteria whilst rating a speech act, in this case complaint, through analysis of their rated DCTs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *ILP Rating*

Among several issues that ILP studies cover, ILP assessment and rating are novel but critical areas which have been the focus of some researchers recently. Unfortunately pragmatic assessment has been neglected in many language courses and classes and despite its great importance, teachers seem to underestimate its position in EFL programs which might be due to several factors such as their lack of knowledge about pragmatic testing or absence of a valid method for undertaking it (Jianda, 2006).

According to Bachman (1990), pragmatic knowledge is one of the important aspects of language proficiency; he believes that linguistic and pragmatic aspects of language are inseparable, but this does not preclude the process of investigating pragmatic. Hudson, Brown, and Detmer's (1995) study on pragmatic tests was one of the important pragmatic assessment research in

which they proposed several methods for extracting pragmatic outputs. These methods are: discourse completion tasks, multiple-choice discourse completion tasks, oral discourse completion tasks, self-assessments, role play discourse tasks and role play self-assessments. The effectiveness of these methods was tested by Yamashita (1996); she implemented these tests in Japanese context with its Japanese translation and witnessed the appropriateness of all of them but multiple choice discourse completion tasks. Moreover, Bardovi-Harlig and Shin (2014) claimed that the six so called methods for assessing pragmatics are quite different in terms of reliability, validity and practicality. They further proposed six possible methods of assessing pragmatics using tasks that are used in previous pragmatic research. Their proposed testing methods were: conversation simulations (Bardovi-Harlig, Bastos, Burghardt, Chappetto, Nickels, & Rose, 2010), conversation simulations (Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga, 2014), written exchange (Kuha, 1997), conversational implicature task (Taguchi, 2005), speech act interpretation task (Koike, 1989, 1996), pragmatic acceptability judgment tasks (Bardovi- Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998), and prediction task (Koike & Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Aside from the above mentioned methods of pragmatic assessment, Walters (2007) proposed "conversation analysis" as an accurate and practical method for analyzing EFL learners' oral pragmatic competence.

The concept of rating is not unrelated to the assessment issues; studies on rating learners' outputs and specifying criteria for assessing them are not few (e.g., Eckes, 2005; Gamaroff, 2000), but there are quite limited investigations about pragmatic assessment due to several factors (*see* Jianda, 2006) and there are even narrower works on ILP rating which refers to the interface between raters' assessment and interlanguage pragmatic (Alemi & Tejeddin, 2013).

One of the main issues in rating L2 learners' productions is the problems with raters' bias which might bring the whole ranges of effects with itself such as (a) the halo effect, (b) the severity effect, (c) the central tendency effect, (d) inconsistency, and (e) the bias effect (Eckes, 2005; Knoch, Read, & Von Randow, 2007). Minimizing the effects of raters' bias is really important matter, since it might questions the validity of the test (Bachman, 1990). Youn (2007) investigated the effects of features such as test types, types of speech acts, groups of candidates, test items and their interactions on the three EFL raters' evaluation. The result of his study showed that different test types and speech acts affected raters' degrees of severity in their ratings.

Moreover, many studies were conducted to compare the native and non-native raters' rating criteria in different aspects of the language (e.g., Hsieh, 2011; Kim, 2009) and pragmatics is not an exception. Due to the cultural and social differences existing among native and nonnative raters, their criteria might be different from each other. The point has been proved by Alemi and Tajeddin (2013); they compared native and nonnative raters' criteria regarding the speech act of apology. They found that native and nonnative raters of English revealed significant differences in opting criteria for assessing the speech act of refusal; moreover, their pragmalinguistics and socio-pragmatics perception of politeness were not compatible. Furthermore, Alemi, Eslami-Rasekh, and Rezanajad (2014) analyzed non-native raters' pragmatic assessment of Iranian EFL learners' compliment productions. They found that several criteria such as "politeness", "sociopragmatic appropriateness", "interlocutors' characteristics and relationship", "linguistic appropriacy", "variety and range", "complexity", and "sincerity" were considered by non-native raters.

2.2. Complaint

Evidently speech acts studies date back to four decades ago when Austin (1962), for the first time, divided them into three sub-parts namely: (a) illocutionary force, (b) locutionary force, and (c) prelocutionary force based on different levels of an utterance. Far along, Searle (1976) further divided the illocutionary acts into five major types namely: Representatives, Directives, Commisives , Expressives and Declaration.

According to Newell and Stutman (1987), complaint could fit in any of the Searle's (1976) illocutionary acts' classifications based on the context in which it occurs; it could be directive when the complainer imposes a claim on the complainee, expressive when he express his psychological state or even representative once the speaker acknowledge his disagreement about the situation, etc. Generally, violation of speaker's expectations in desiring something, whether he wants something pleasant to occur or something unpleasant not to occur, leads to the speech act of complaint (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993). As it has been mentioned by Jacobs (1989), complaint could be the realization of putting blame on someone or something that is responsible for the present dissatisfaction. It might occur following or preceding some other speech act; as reported by Levinson (1983), complaint is usually followed by apology, while Laforest (2002) believed that it can also face with the rejection from the complainee. Moreover, Vásquez (2011) proposed that complaint can occur as a "speech act set", since in some case in can supplemented by advice and recommendation.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) divided the speech act of complaint into five levels based on their severity: (1) below the level of reprimand, (2) disapproval, (3) complaint, (4) accusation and warning, and (5) threat. Additionally, Boxer (1993) divided complaint into two major categories: (a) direct complaint and

(b) indirect complaint. While in direct complaint the speaker put the blame on the addressee and accuses him/her of being responsible for the perceived offence, indirect complaint is addressed to the person who is not present or it is given to the addressee who is not responsible for the present dissatisfaction (Boxer, 1993, 1996; D'Amico Reisner, 1985). Following the works of the previous scholars, Shea (2003) further proposed another categorization of the complaint speech act which includes: (1) justification, (2) Expressing the problem, (3) request for repair, (4) request for explanation, (5) disapproval (6) Expression of empathy and (7) warning.

As in other speech acts, complaint has a dominant semantic formula in each language. In their cross cultural analysis of complaint between L2 Korean learners of English and native English speakers, Murphy and Neu (1996) extracted the steps such as (1) an explanation of purpose, (2) a complaint, (3) a justification, and (4) a candidate solution as the major semantic formula of complaint speech act. Tnack (2002) ran a similar investigation regarding the speech acts of refusal and complaint. He perceived the (1) excusing self for imposition, such as, "Excuse me for interrupting;" (2) establishing context or support, as in, "I placed an order last week;" (3) a request, such as, "Can you please look for it?" and, (4) conveyance of a sense of urgency, as in, "I need it right away" as the dominant components employed by native speakers of English in accomplishing the speech act of complaint (Tnack, 2002, p. 7).

Moreover, several cross-cultural studies proved that age, sex, situational seriousness, and social class differences lead to various forms of complaint, which is also true among speakers in performing other speech acts (Cohen, 1996; Eslami-Rasekh, Jafari, & Mehregan, 2012; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2005). For example, Lin (2007) explored gender differences in Chinese complaints. She concluded that female participants were more polite than men;

furthermore, females' complaint utterances were longer than males'. They preferred the explicit complaint and opting out among various complaint strategies, while males chose to threat whilst complaining. There are also studies about the significant roles of factors such as age, culture, and educational levels on Chinese and native English speakers' complaint utterances (Ngai, Heung, Wong, & Chan, 2007; Yian, 2008).

To mention other cross -cultural studies of complaint, we can cite Ellwood's (2008) study of indirect complaints of French and Japanese students in classroom. She proposed variety of factors such as gender, and ethnic identity, individual characteristics of personality, and contextual factors effective in performing one's indirect complaint.

As literature indicates, there seems to be no study about ILP rating regarding to the speech act of complaint. Rating analysis of the complaint, which is a face threatening speech act to some extent, can be affective in both second language teaching and testing processes. In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, usually there are not many authentic sources to elaborate on; moreover, native speakers are not available to rate the learners' outcomes, thus EFL learners are not exposed to sufficient L2 input and ILP rating studies come handy. Meanwhile, L2 pragmatic knowledge are rooted in native speakers' cultural and social norms and they are taken for granted in native speakers' mind, hence understanding them for non-natives and L2 learners might not be so tangible (Widdowson, 2007). By referring to result of such studies, non-native teachers can get acquainted with native teachers' rating criteria; therefore, they can teach and assess EFL learners based on standard norms which are totally compatible with the target culture.

3. The Current Study

The aim of this study is to examine various criteria that native English teachers have in mind whilst rating EFL learners' complaint productions. To this end, following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the rating criteria and variation pattern of American and British teachers regarding the assessment of complaints produced by Iranian EFL learners?

2. Is there any significant difference between American and British teachers regarding the scores and rating criteria of the speech act of complaint produced by Iranian EFL learners?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Three groups of participants have contributed in this study: (a) Iranian EFL learners, (b) American native raters, and (c) British native raters.

12 Iranian EFL learners' were chosen to produce the required outputs for forming the DCTs; they were undergraduate university students and include both genders with upper-intermediate level English proficiency, so had the adequate linguistic adequacy to understand the stimuli and produce the related utterances; meanwhile, capable of performing the intended speech acts pragmatically native-like or differentiate socio-pragmatic norms to some degrees.

47 American native raters participated in this study to rate the EFL learners' productions. All of the American raters were graduated in Teaching English as second language (TESL), applied linguistics with at least 5 years of teaching experience, therefore, they were assumed to have sufficient

competence in English scocio-pragamtics and pragmalinguistics for evaluating learners' outputs.

In addition to the previous two groups, a group of 30 British ESL teachers also participated in this investigation as raters. Not unlike the American raters, British raters are all at least BA holders in TESL, or applied linguistics with teaching experiences ranging from 5-25 years. Therefore, they were expected to be proficient raters of the pragmatic knowledge of English.

4.2. Instrumentation

Since classic DCTs produce the least authentic data, video prompt were presented aurally-orally as the instrument of this study to increase the authenticity of learners' responses. After recording the learners' responses to the complaint video-prompts, they were transcribed bellow their related situations and finally they were sent to the raters in the form of answered WDCTs. It is important to note that those answers were selected to put in the final WDCT that seemed suitable for the purpose of this study; to put it differently, the selected answers should not be totally appropriate pragmatically, since the selected outputs should reflect the typical EFL learners' L2 pragmatic deficiencies. Finally the final WDCT included six different complaint situations varying in terms of power distance, imposition and formality with EFL learners' responses followed by 5-point Likert scales, ranging from very satisfying to very unsatisfying, and criteria sections for raters to note their scores and mentioning their criteria for assessing each situation.

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

To begin with, EFL learners were asked to watch video-prompts carefully and respond to them while their responses being recorded. As it was mentioned above, only some of the responses were nominated for rating due to their relevance and appropriateness to the purpose of the study. During the next step, to construct WDCT, all the situations from the video clips were summarized and transcribed followed by learners' answers. Subsequently, the developed WDCT with EFL learners' responses were sent to native raters via Email for evaluation. Raters were supposed to rate each answer based on their pragmatic appropriacy and explain their criteria and logic for evaluating in comment section before returning them.

4.4. Design

The mixed-method approach with the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis was employed in this study. To explore the data qualitatively, the detailed content analysis of native raters' explanation in comment section were employed; both groups' raters' responses were categorized in an Excel file for their comments to be scrutinized step by step, thus the criteria were extracted out of them. In the next phase, which is the quantitative part of the study, frequency calculation and descriptive analysis of each criterion was calculated to obtain raters' underlying macro criteria and their rating variations. Finally, for obtaining the degree of significant difference between British and American raters' criteria and rating scores, chi square analysis and independent samples t-test were run.

5. Result

In order to answer the first part of the first research question, that is discovering rating criteria that American and British teachers had in mind whilst assessing the speech act of complaint produced by Iranian EFL learners, content analysis of the raters' comments were conducted. The lists of the dominant criteria that have been extracted from American and British raters' responses are given below which have been arranged based on their overall frequencies:

(1) Logical reasoning and comments

The first criterion is logical reasoning and comments, which refers to raters' logical explanation and analysis of the problem as well as proposing some solutions. It also includes raters' critiques and judgments of the EFL learners' behaviors and acts. The examples of such comments are provided below.

Example: *Uhm. This complaint is not likely to result in a quick solution. Better to present the situation matter-of-factly and convey that you want the situation ameliorated immediately.*

(2) Politeness

The second criterion which is considered critical is politeness. Due to to the cultural discrepancies between the native and target societies, EFL learners tend to violate it in their productions which turns out to be embarrassing in some situations.

Example: *be polite even when you complain about something.*

(3) Linguistic appropriacy

This criterion includes raters' comments on grammatical and lexical flaws of the EFL learners' responses. Apparently native raters pay attention to linguistic accuracy even in pragmatic assessments. There were also some examples of structural deficiencies that one of them is presented here.

Example: *It makes sense but wrong use of word and structure in first sentence.*

(4) Semantic formula

The fourth criterion is a semantic formula, which is "a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy; any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question" (Cohen, 1996, p. 265). There were numbers of raters who considered some steps or strategy for performing the complaint speech act or proposing their own version of complaint with clear steps; such comments were considered as semantic-formula-related comments which can be observed in the following example.

Example: *The criteria for a proper complaint are that the plaintiff state (1) a brief but specific description of the problem and (2) what reparation is expected/acceptable; on certain occasions, it is also appropriate (3) to elaborate on the conditions under which the reparations are acceptable and, in extreme cases, (4) on the consequences of a failure to provide the expected reparation.*

(5) Interlocutors' relationship

Interlocutor's relationship refers to those comments in which the raters pointed out the degree of closeness and the status of speakers regarding one another. The following example implies this criterion.

Example: *Depending on the degree of intimacy in the relationship, and on the style of communication both parties prefer; some people will find this offensive and rude (too abrasive).*

(6) Register choice

According to Ferguson (1994), when a group of people contribute in regular communication situations, they might employ similar words, intonations, grammatical features, etc. Such varieties are known as register. Register analysis is an important part of pragmatic studies and the current work

is not an exception, so several comments on EFL learners register choice have been observed. They include remarks on linguistic or tone choice in a specific situation.

Example: *Inappropriate use of casual register ("hey", "man") suggests the diner can command the waiter without regard for his/her likely response, therefore disrespectful.*

(7) Formality

Formality denotes the fact that some situations call for formal and sophisticated language and others require less formal or informal language. Apparently recognizing such circumstances is not an easy task for non-native students. An example of this criterion is given bellow.

Example: *The tone of this comment is sarcastic and very rude, and you should never address an unfamiliar person as "man"; it's too informal.*

(8) Degree of intensity

This criterion implies learners' difficulty in conveying intensity of their complaints, since it might be too strong or too mild for the intended situation. EFL learners must tune their complaint intensity based on different contextual factors. The following example clarifies this point.

Example: *Accusatory and aggressive in tone and diction.*

(9) Cultural accommodation

Occasionally native raters tried to explain their cultural norms and compare the EFL learners' responses with the target cultures, since cultural awareness is a significant part of the L2 pragmatic knowledge.

Example: *The complaint uses language that is far too aggressive, and in the UK likely to make the situation worse. I would NEVER say 'hey man' to anybody.*

(10) Degree of directness

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The directness is one of the factors that have not been mentioned by raters considerably, despite its significance. In some situations, especially formal circumstances, it is better to employ hedges or some other linguistic devices to convey the complaint indirectly.

Example: *This statement is too indirect for this situation. It should be more forceful and direct.*

(11) Fluency and naturalness

The last criterion - fluency and naturalness of EFL learners' response - refers to raters' comments on the genuineness of the responses. Occasionally EFL learners' responses are not native-like or what a native speaker might say in that condition.

Example: *The suggestion of "playing with me" isn't appropriate to this situation and not something I would expect to hear from a native speaker.*
The frequency of all of the mentioned criteria is presented below in Table 1.
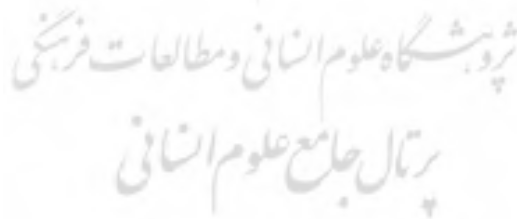
Table 1.Frequency of Complaint Criteria among American and British Raters

Situations	Groups	Pol	RC	LA	LRC	DI	FN	CA	IR	For	SF	DD	total
1	American raters	30	11	3	24	6	1	5	3	6	9	1	99
	British raters	24	0	0	10	6	1	8	0	14	4	1	68
2	American raters	7	6	10	11	4	2	0	11	1	7	1	60
	British raters	5	5	8	9	1	3	1	16	5	5	1	59
3	American raters	3	7	7	20	2	1	1	8	3	1	7	60
	British raters	3	2	3	12	5	4	0	10	7	1	1	48
4	American raters	9	3	12	30	1	5	1	0	1	17	2	81
	British raters	13	6	9	6	1	2	1	3	2	10	4	57
5	American raters	11	6	3	22	6	0	15	2	0	8	3	76
	British raters	11	4	4	15	5	0	5	0	2	2	2	50
6	American raters	17	10	12	16	8	3	1	11	10	10	5	103
	British raters	6	11	7	9	5	3	1	8	5	3	8	66
Total	Total American raters	77	43	47	123	27	12	23	35	21	52	19	479
	Total British raters	62	28	31	61	23	13	16	37	35	25	17	348
	Total native raters	139	71	78	184	50	25	39	72	56	77	36	827
Percentage	American raters	16.07%	8.97%	9.81%	25.67%	5.63%	2.5%	4.8%	7.3%	4.3%	10.85%	3.96%	99.86
	British raters	17.81%	8.04%	8.9%	17.52	6.6%	3.73%	4.59%	10.63%	10.05%	7.18%	4.88%	99.93
	Total percentage	16.8%	8.58%	9.43%	22.24%	6.04%	3.02%	4.71%	8.7%	6.77%	9.31%	4.35%	99.95

Note: Pol: Politeness, RC: Register choice, LA: Linguistic appropriacy, LRC Logical reasoning and comments, DI: Degree of intensity, FN: Frequency and natural ness, CA: Cultural accommodation, IR: Interlocutors' relationship, SF: Semantic formula, DD: Degree of directness, For: Formality

As it can be observed from Table 1, the most dominant criterion among 47 American and 30 British raters was logical reasoning and comment with 22.24% of the total comments (American raters= 25.67%, British raters= 17.52%). The second major criterion was politeness, whilst 16.8% raters considered it in their assessment (American raters= 16.07%, British raters= 17.81%). 9.43% of native raters' comments (American raters= 9.81%, British raters= 8.9%) include linguistic appropriacy. Moreover, the criteria semantic formula and interlocutors' relationship were declared by 9.31% (American=10.85%, British= 7.18%) and 8.7% (American= 7.3%, British= 10.63%) of the raters respectively. The next frequent criterion was register choice with the 8.58% of the total criteria (American= 8.97%, British= 8.04%). The rest of the mentioned criteria were formality observed in 6.77% of the overall criteria (American= 4.3%, British= 10.05%), degree of intensity mentioned in 6.4% of the criteria (American= 5.63%, British= 6.6%), followed by cultural accommodation and degree of directness in 4.71% (American=4.8%, British= 4.59) and 4.35% (American= 3.96%, British= 4.88%) of the criteria, as well as fluency and naturalness which only took 3.02% of the total criteria (American= 2.5%, British= 3.73%); therefore, it is the least frequent factor mentioned by native raters. It is quite important to note that the order of preference of the criteria was not totally similar to each other between the two groups of the raters. Thus, it is better to look at the criteria within each group again individually. Among American raters, logical comment was the most dominant criterion (25.67%), then politeness (16.07%), semantic formula (10.85%), linguistics appropriacy (9.81%), register choice (8.97%), interlocutors' relationship (7.3%), degree of intensity (5.63%), cultural accommodations (4.8%), formality (4.3%), degree of directness (3.96%), and finally fluency and naturalness (2.5%) which was the least frequent criterion.

On the other hand, unlike American raters, British employed politeness (17.81%) more often. After politeness they have indicated their tendency toward the subsequent criteria respectively: "logical comments and reasoning" (17.52%), interlocutors' relationship (10.63%), formality (10.5%), linguistic appropriacy (8.9%), register choice (8.04%), semantic formula (7.18%), degree of intensity (6.6%), degree of directness (4.88%), cultural accommodation (4.59%), and fluency and naturalness (3.73%). In order to make the result more comprehensive, a bar graph of frequency of the criteria is presented in Figure 1.
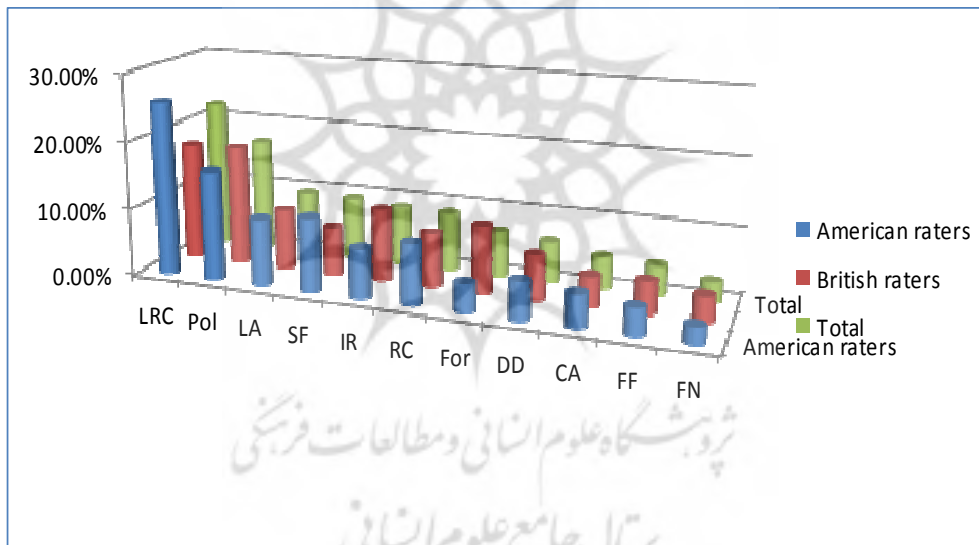

Figure 1. *The Total Percentage of the Complaint Criteria By British And American Raters*

Note: Pol: Politeness, RC: Register choice, LA: Linguistic appropriacy, LC Logical reasoning and comments, DI: Degree of intensity, FN: Frequency and natural ness, CA: Cultural accommodation, IR: Interlocutors' relationship, SF: Semantic formula, DD: Degree of directness, For: Formality:

Moreover, to give a more vivid picture, the transcription of each situation with EFL learners' responses and the raters' comments are presented below:

Situation 1

> 1. While eating in a restaurant, you notice an insect in your food. What would you say to complain to the waiter?
>
> **Answer:** *Hey man, come here. What the hell is it? Where on the earth do you cook your food?*

American rater

The tone of this comment is sarcastic and very rude, and you should never address an unfamiliar person as "man"; it's too informal. Most waiters would probably not react, but this still isn't the correct approach. First, you should say "Waiter" to catch their attention, then, tell them there is an insect in the food (and point to it so they can see it). Follow this by suggesting how to correct the problem; for example, you might suggest that they prepare the dish again, or suggest that they subtract the cost of the dish from your final bill (depending on how you feel after discovering the insect).

British rater

I would not advise my learners to use this answer, as it is not polite in any culture, but I would inform them that in a real life situation, it is possible to hear that and in this case it would indicate a strong complaint/annoyance or even anger on behalf of the speaker.

For situation 1, most of the native raters (66.7% of the British raters and 63.8% of the American raters) found the EFL learner's response very unsatisfactory. 69.2% of them commented on the politeness of the response, which was the most dominant criterion in this situation.

Situation 2

> 2. Your teacher asked you to help your friend with her studies before the class starts on Monday. It is Monday and your friend is late and keeps you waiting for 30 minutes. What would you say to complain?
>
> **Answer:** *Hey, you were playing with me, ha? You kept me waiting for a long time. Where were you?*

American rater

This comment is marginally appropriate but could be taken as an accusation (the listener might believe that you are insinuating that he/she was deliberately late). A better approach would be to ask "Hey, what happened?", which would be a question rather than a statement. The rest of the comment is ok.

British rater

Apart from the phrase "you were playing with me", the rest is something a native speaker would normally say. Punctuality is important in England, and sometimes, people demonstrate their annoyance even more explicitly than that. The two speakers also have the same age, so it is normal to speak like that with peers.

Most of the native raters rated the second situation as somewhat appropriate (50% of the British and 29.8% of the American raters). Moreover the dominant criterion was interlocutors' relationship which was mentioned by 34.6% of the raters.

Situation 3

> 3. Your older brother read your diary in which you had something you did not like anybody to know about that. What would you say to complain?
>
> **Answer:** *This is totally unacceptable! How could you let yourself read my personal diary? Don't you have any respect for other people's privacy?*

American rater

The criteria for a proper complaint are that the plaintiff state (1) a brief but specific description of the problem and (2) what reparation is expected/ acceptable; on certain occasions, it is also appropriate (3) to elaborate on the conditions under which the reparations are acceptable and, in extreme cases, (4) on the consequences of a failure to provide the expected reparation.

British rater

Age proximity and relationship status between the two speakers, plus the intensity of the complaint sounds like something a native speaker of English would use.

In the third situation, majority of the native raters rated the EFL learner's response very appropriate (43.3% of the British raters and 42.6% of the American raters). Besides, logical reasoning and comments turned out to be the most prevalent criterion.

Situation 4

> 4. The teacher gave you a lower-than-expected grade in your exam. What would you say to complain?
>
> **Answer:** *Excuse me, something might have been wrong. It's not my grade, sir.*

American rater

The speaker is polite but the ending comment is odd, although grammatically correct. A request from the student to ask how the grade was calculated would have been a better choice.

British rater

While quite acceptable in form, and non-confrontational, the problem here is the assumption that there has been a mistake. More appropriate

might be to take a different approach and ask for feedback, which might focus attention on the assignment. Directly suggesting a mistake in this way, no matter how politely, appears presumptuous.

Unlike the previous situations, in the fourth situation American and British raters' scores are not compatible; the majority of the British raters (36.7%) found the EFL learner's answer somewhat appropriate and the majority of the American raters (51.1%) rated the answer as unsatisfactory. In addition, logical reasoning and comments with the 46.2% was the most predominant criterion among the native raters in this situation.

Situation 5

5. Your car had been breaking down again and again. You decided to leave it in your neighborhood garage to have it fixed. Now that you've had your car back, you realize the same problems still stand. What would you say to complain to the mechanic?
Answer: *Thanks for trying to fix the car, but I think there's still something wrong with it. I think I'll have to take it somewhere else to have it fixed. Thanks anyway.*

American rater

This statement isn't necessarily wrong but it is sarcastic and is more than likely to upset the mechanic. What makes it unsatisfactory is that, culturally, we believe that if the car isn't fixed, the mechanic should work on it again without charging extra money (since we have already paid but the problem wasn't fixed, it is the mechanic's responsibility to check it again). What you are saying here is that the mechanic didn't fix it, so you're going to pay extra money to someone else (some mechanics would say "go ahead" and wouldn't care). The better way to solve this problem is to tell the

mechanic that the problem still exists and ask him/her to check it again. If the mechanic starts to suggest that there might be an extra fee, we would remind them that we paid to have the problem fixed but it wasn't (e.g. we've already paid); this insinuates that we are refusing to pay extra money since the mechanic did not do the job properly the first time. Again, this is a mistake based on culture rather than grammar.

British rater

This is quite polite and inoffensive, but it's ok. I would probably complain more directly, though I'd still be polite.

Most of the native raters (30% of the British raters and 31.9% of the American rater) selected somewhat appropriate in the situation 5. The leading criterion in this situation was logical reasoning and comments (47.4%).

Situation 6

6. Your roommate had a party the night before and left the kitchen in a mess. What would you say to complain?
Answer: *You'd better clean the kitchen you know? It's been YOUR party after all!*

American rater

It is a close relationship so okay to be direct. However, it might be more successful if it was more politely phrased.

British rater

We wouldn't say this in the UK unless we were being quite blunt, we'd normally phrase it something like this: "Could you let me know when you are cleaning the kitchen? Thanks."

In this situation, the two rater groups' scores were not well-matched again, since the majority of the British raters (36.7%) rated the EFL learners' answer as appropriate and most of the American raters (34%) rated it as unsatisfactory. Moreover, logical reasoning and comments was the most common criterion (32.1%).

In addition, to answer the second part of the first research question which is calculating the rating scores' variations, the mean and standard deviation of raters' scores were measured. Table 2 indicates the descriptive statistics of American and British raters' rating scores.

Table 2. American and British Raters' Score Variation

Situations	Nationality	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	American	47	1.00	4.00	1.51	.80
	British	30	1.00	4.00	1.50	.82
2	American	47	1.00	4.00	2.55	1.07
	British	30	1.00	5.00	3.00	.90
3	American	47	1.00	5.00	4.14	.95
	British	30	1.00	5.00	4.00	1.20
4	American	47	1.00	4.00	2.59	.85
	British	30	1.00	5.00	3.03	.92
5	American	47	1.00	5.00	2.80	1.05
	British	30	1.00	5.00	3.13	1.27
6	American	47	1.00	5.00	2.91	1.08
	British	30	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.25

The analysis of mean and standard deviation of the rating scores in each situation and across situations demonstrates that the raters' scores fluctuated based on the situations. Raters of both groups rated the third situation as the highest (American M= 4.1, British M= 4) and the first situation as the lowest (American M= 1.5, British M= 1.5). Moreover, the lowest standard deviation belonged to the first situation in both groups (American SD= .80, British SD=

.82); however, the highest standard deviation for the American group is the last situation (SD= 1.08), while for the British group it is the fifth situation (SD= 1.27). As a result it is fairly obvious from Tables 2 that British raters had more divergence in their scores comparing to Americans within all the situations, except in the second situation.

Moreover, to check if there is any significant difference between American and British teachers regarding their rating scores and mentioned criteria in assessing the speech act of complaint produced by EFL learners, which is the focus of the second research question, the chi-square was run to calculate the degree of difference existed among these two groups of raters. As displayed in Table 3, the American raters employed less criteria (17.9 %< Std. Residual = - 3 > - 1.96) while the British raters significantly assigned more criteria (19.6%, Std. Residual = 3.6 > 1.96).

Table 3 .Frequencies, Percentages and Standard Residuals of the American and British Raters' Criteria

			politeness		Total
			Non-given	given	
Nationality	American	Count	25944	5653	31597
		% within nationality	82.1%	17.9%	100.0%
		Std. Residual	1.5	-3.0	
	British	Count	18456	4512	22968
		% within nationality	80.4%	19.6%	100.0%
		Std. Residual	-1.7	3.6	
Total		Count	44400	10165	54565
		% within nationality	81.4%	18.6%	100.0%

As it is depicted in Table 4, the results of chi-square test (χ^2 (1) = 26.87, p >.05) indicated that there was a significant difference between British and American native speakers' ratings of the complaint speech act.

Table 4.Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.986[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	26.871	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	26.892	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	26.986	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	54565				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4278.74.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Moreover, an independent samples t-test was conducted between the rating scores of the American and British raters in order to observe whether there is any significant difference between their scores. Table 5 indicates the result of the t-test.

Table 5. *Independent samples t-test between the rating scores of the American and British raters*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total complaint	.247	.621	2.556	75	.013	1.635	.640	.361	2.909

As it is obvious from Table 5, the result of the t-test (t (75) = 2.55, p= .01) illustrate that there was a significant difference between the rating scores of

American and British raters in rating the EFL learners' outputs in the speech act of complaint, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

6. Discussion

As in other types of assessment, pragmatic assessment is affected by several factors such as test task, rater characteristics, and rating criteria (Alemi & Tajeddin, 2013). The last criteria, which was the focus of this study, have been analyzed by other researchers previously (e.g., Alemi & Tajeddin, 2013; Alemi, Eslami & Rezanejad, 2014; Eckes, 2005; Gamaroff, 2000; Jianda & Lijun, 2014; Wlater, 2007; Youn, 2007), but still there are several aspects of it which need further investigation. This study aimed to analyze the criteria that native raters (both English and American) considered during assessing EFL learners' production, 11 criteria have been extracted which denote raters' standards. The criteria are (a) logical reasoning and comments, (b) politeness, (c) linguistic appropriacy, (d) semantic formula, (e) interlocutors' relationship, (f) register choice, (g) formality, (h) degree of intensity, (i) cultural accommodation, (j) degree of directness, and (k) fluency and naturalness. However, the order of these criteria was slightly different between American and English.

Some of the extracted criteria were also present in previous studies. For example, in the analysis of the rating of the speech act of compliment by non-native raters, politeness, interlocutors' relationship, and linguistic appropriacy was mentioned too by the raters (Alemi, Eslami-Rasekh, & Rezanejad, 2014). Moreover, the existence of politenesss criterion was also observed in other studies (e.g., Alemi & Tajeddin, 2013; Taguchi, 2011), since it is considered as one of the dominant criteria in pragmatic assessment and advised by majority of the native raters. There were also some degrees of variations in raters' scores

which might be due to requirements of each situation or raters' different age, experience or major.

The significant difference existing between British and American's both scores and criteria preferences implies that the same language does not mean the same culture; people with the same language proved to have different pragmatic abilities (Wierzbicka, 2008). For example, politeness was the first prevailing criterion for British raters, while it was the second one for Americans. This point has been acknowledged in Barron's (2008) study of request speech act among inner-circle and outer circle English speakers and indicated that the two groups had different strategies for requesting.

In addition, the dominance of the politeness and logical comments shows that different languages require different pragmatic norms and emphasizes the necessity of the instruction for non-native speakers. As Taguchi (2011) noted, teaching pragmatic knowledge is indeed vital in the process of second language teaching; therefore, for EFL learners not to be considered as a rude speakers (as it has been mentioned by most of the native raters) it is urgent to learn the pragmatic conventions of the target language.

Moreover, the result of the current study proved that socio-pragmatics knowledge is also essential for performing proper L2 pragmatic outputs; our raters were quite conscious about sociopragmatic norms of the language such as logical reasoning and comments, politeness, interlocutors' relationship, degree of intensity, cultural accommodation, and degree of directness. Since the great part of the native raters' comments have fallen under this category, the previous claims by Alcon-Soler & Martinez-Flor (2008) about teachers' awareness and attention about socio-pragmatics which showed the uneven focus on pragmalinguistics knowledge have been rejected.

7. Conclusion and Implications

Although the importance of pragmatics in the process of L2 teaching and learning have been evident during the recent two decades, there are very few studies which have addressed the issue of pragmatic rating. The current investigation, in line with the work of Alemi and tajeddin (2013) and Alemi, Eslami-Rasekh, and Rezanejad (2013, 2014) who have worked on native and non-native raters' criteria during assessing the speech acts of refusal, apology, compliment, and compliment response, aimed to analyze such criteria regarding the speech act of complaint among 77 native American and British teachers. The two groups of the raters in this study performed differently in their rating and indicated substantial differences in both the order and the amount of reference to the mentioned criteria.

The results of the analysis imply the necessity of the L2 pragmatics for the EFL learners; the inappropriateness of the L2 learners' responses and native teachers comments on both socio-pragmatics and pragmalinguistic aspects of the learners' outputs demonstrate that it is obligatory to teach pragmatic knowledge to the learners, especially in foreign language contexts, in which both learners and teachers don't have enough access to the authentic input and materials. Through studying the result of this study and similar ones, non-native teachers can become familiar with native raters' comments and criteria and try to implement native-like standards and norms in their language classes, thereupon, EFL learners can develop pragmatic knowledge more efficiently and be secure from the troubles that L2 pragmatics deficiencies may bring up. The other implication of this study is related to the materials developers. Textbooks and curriculum designers should be conscious about the significance of pragmatic knowledge in L2 teaching programs and include the points which

seem important for native raters, especially socio-pragmatics points which are dominant in raters' rating comments.

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Appendix

Questionnaire: Speech Act Questionnaire (Complaint)

Professor's background:

a.   University Degree:

b.   Major:

c.   Gender: Male ☐   Female ☐

d.   Years of English teaching experience: *1-5*☐   *6-10*☐   *11+*☐

e.   Nationality:

f.   Native Language:

Dear Professor: *In the following situations, an English language learner (EFL learner) was supposed to make complaints. Please read the learner's answer in each situation and rate its appropriateness according to the following rating scale. Then provide your criteria and reasons for the selection of a particular point (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) on the scale.*

1.   While eating in a restaurant, you notice an insect in your food. What would you say to complain to the waiter?

Answer: *Hey man, come here. What the hell is it? Where on the earth do you cook your food?*

1. very unsatisfactory 2. unsatisfactory 3. somewhat appropriate 4. appropriate 5. most appropriate

Criteria:

_____

_____

_____

2. Your teacher asked you to help your friend with her studies before the class starts on Monday. It is Monday and your friend is late and keeps you waiting for 30 minutes. What would you say to complain?

Answer: *Hey, you were playing with me, ha? You kept me waiting for a long time. Where were you?*

1. very unsatisfactory 2. unsatisfactory 3. somewhat appropriate 4. appropriate 5. most appropriate

Criteria:

_____

_____

_____

3. Your older brother read your diary in which you had something you did not like anybody to know about that. What would you say to complain?

Answer: *This is totally unacceptable! How could you let yourself read my personal diary? Don't you have any respect for other people's privacy?*

1. very unsatisfactory 2. unsatisfactory 3. somewhat appropriate 4. appropriate 5. most appropriate

Criteria:

_____

_____

_____

4. The teacher gave you a lower-than-expected grade in your exam. What would you say to complain?

Answer: *Excuse me, something might have been wrong. It's not my grade, sir.*

1. very unsatisfactory 2. unsatisfactory 3. somewhat appropriate 4. appropriate 5. most appropriate

Criteria:

_____

_____

_____

5.   Your car had been breaking down again and again. You decided to leave it in your neighborhood garage to have it fixed. Now that you've had your car back, you realize the same problems still stand. What would you say to complain to the mechanic?

Answer: *Thanks for trying to fix the car, but I think there's still something wrong with it. I think I'll have to take it somewhere else to have it fixed. Thanks anyway.*

1. very unsatisfactory 2. unsatisfactory 3. somewhat appropriate 4. appropriate 5. most appropriate

Criteria:

_____

_____

_____

6.   Your roommate had a party the night before and left the kitchen in a mess. What would you say to complain?

Answer: *You'd better clean the kitchen you know? It's been YOUR party after all!*

1. very unsatisfactory 2. unsatisfactory 3. somewhat appropriate 4. appropriate 5. most appropriate

Criteria:

_____

_____

_____