

INVESTIGATION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES: COMPLAINTS IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS - A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF TURKISH AND ENGLISH

INVESTIGAÇÃO DE ESTRATÉGIAS DE ELEGÂNCIA: RECLAMAÇÕES EM AMBIENTES ONLINE - UM ESTUDO INTERCULTURAL DE TURCO E INGLÊS

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ABSTRACT

Politeness is a strategy functioning to show respect to the interlocutor, as well as to express certain intentions without directly violating politeness norms. In the context of complaints, politeness strategies are used to form certain meaning constructions intended by customers. This article aims to identify the types of complaints and politeness strategies used by English and Turkish speakers on the Internet. This study employs a qualitative research design with an interpretation approach to data in the form of written utterances. The data sources are phrases and sentences in Turkish and English. Data were collected from two websites designed for English complaints and Turkish complaints. The data collection technique was by making corpus data entries with the limitation of criteria of clothing, home appliances, and beverage companies. The number of data selected for the data corpus was 100 complaints from each website. The data were analyzed by identifying the types of politeness strategies and types of complaints that emerged from the speech used by complainers in English and Turkish. The classified data is then further interpreted in the context of low and high culture, and the findings are presented in the form of differences in the use of strategies by English and Turkish customers. The results of the data analysis and interpretation show significant differences between English-speaking customers and Turkish-speaking customers in the use of politeness strategies to give complaints. These contrasting differences are strongly influenced by cultural factors and the culture of the speakers of a language. Further investigation has been carried out in discussion and the importance of politeness strategies in English language teaching context were explained.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, complaints, English, Turkish, cross-cultural comparison, ELT.

RESUMO

Polidez é uma estratégia que funciona para mostrar respeito ao interlocutor, bem como para expressar certas intenções sem violar diretamente as normas de polidez. No contexto de reclamações, estratégias de polidez são usadas para formar certas construções de significado pretendidas pelos clientes. Este artigo tem como objetivo identificar os tipos de reclamações e estratégias de polidez usadas por falantes de inglês e turco na Internet. Este estudo emprega um design de pesquisa qualitativa com uma abordagem de interpretação de dados na forma de declarações escritas. As fontes de dados são frases e sentenças em turco e inglês. Os dados foram coletados de dois sites projetados para reclamações em inglês e reclamações em turco. A técnica de coleta de dados foi por meio de entradas de dados de corpus com a limitação de critérios de empresas de roupas, eletrodomésticos e bebidas. O número de dados selecionados para o corpus de dados foi de 100 reclamações de cada site. Os dados foram analisados identificando os tipos de estratégias de polidez e tipos de reclamações que emergiram da fala usada pelos reclamantes em inglês e turco. Os dados classificados são então interpretados no contexto de baixa e alta cultura, e as descobertas são apresentadas na forma de diferenças no uso de estratégias por clientes ingleses e turcos. Os resultados da análise e interpretação dos dados mostram diferenças significativas entre clientes que falam inglês e clientes que falam turco no uso de estratégias de polidez para fazer reclamações. Essas diferenças contrastantes são fortemente influenciadas por fatores culturais e pela cultura dos falantes de uma língua. Investigações posteriores foram realizadas em discussão e a importância das estratégias de polidez no contexto do ensino da língua inglesa foi explicada.

Palavras-chave: Estratégias de polidez, reclamações, inglês, turco, comparação intercultural, ELT.

Introduction

Language is a traditional system, consisting of verbal or written symbols, used by human beings to express themselves for various purposes (Crystal & Robins, 2021). The components of language, proposed by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2003), which are phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, syntax, context, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics, function to construct meaningful communication among human beings.

In order to communicate successfully, pragmatic competence, defined by Chomsky (1980, p.224) as “the knowledge of conditions and manner of the appropriate use of the language, in conformity with various purposes”, is a requirement. As obvious from the definition, pragmatic competence includes the use of language appropriately under different circumstances. One of these circumstances might be any interaction that requires being polite. According to Cambridge Dictionary, being polite is defined as maintaining good relations with the interactant by demonstrating value and respect, through altering or toning down the things being said in order not to be too straight or commanding. Politeness has

an important role in communication. Hence, Brown and Levinson (1978) came up with a theory of politeness which is a prototype designed to demonstrate politeness strategies in conversations. Their model of politeness consists of four categories; positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record.

Positive politeness is explained by Yule (2006) as the strategy to lead the listener or requester to appeal to a common goal, in a specific relationship by using certain expressions. In natural conversation, the speaker and hearer are expected to usually perform positive politeness to claim common ground or show the willingness to respond and maintain a conversation in order to save each other's faces. Sapitri, et al (2019) stated that positive politeness refers to what can be conveyed to satisfy the needs of the positive face of a person, whereas 'negative politeness' works in two ways. Meanwhile, negative politeness is a strategy function to redress action and to save the hearer's negative face. In the negative strategy, the hearer is allowed to have the freedom to act out certain actions. This type of strategy usually occurs when a social distance exists between the speaker and the hearer. Because of that distance, people seek to maintain other people's faces by keeping out of their way and giving them space in negative politeness strategies (Pennington, 2013). Furthermore, Brown and Levinson also believe that sometimes people use very direct strategies to communicate things. The most direct strategy from the politeness framework from Brown and Levinson is Bald on record. This strategy is believed to be the most direct strategy since it brings the effort to save another's face in a clear, unambiguous, and concise way. Whenever the speaker wants to perform any FTA with maximum efficiency and is beyond his desire to appease the listener's face, the Bald on strategy will be used. (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The last politeness strategy from Brown and Levinson's framework is Off record strategy. Off-record is believed as the politest and most indirect strategy among other strategies in the politeness framework. In the off-record strategy, the speaker usually expresses something truly off or irrelevant from the actual meaning. Daar, et al (2023) state that Off record strategy is used when the speaker asks an indirect question that requires the listener to interpret. It can be said that the Off-record

strategy allows the speaker to be off from the actual topic of the conversation to express their thoughts and emphasize specific meaning to the hearer.

For the present study, the Politeness Theory offered by Brown and Levinson (1987) was preferred as it still remains one of the most influential frameworks in linguistic politeness research, despite the emergence of newer models. As mentioned above, their framework provides a clear categorization of politeness strategies which makes it a structured and widely recognized model for analyzing both verbal and non-verbal interactions (Sapitri, et al. 2019) across different languages and cultures (Nuraini, 2021).

On the other hand, complaints have another place in communication which are used to demonstrate, mostly negative feelings or attitudes. To illuminate this topic, the theory of speech acts, which is theorized by Austin (1962), defined as the performing actions of utterances by Yule (1996), might be considered significant. It has three parts: locution, illocution, and perlocution. Searle (1979) has posited that complaints are illocutionary acts. So far, scholars have postulated various criteria to analyze the complaints (Nuzzo, 2007; Trosborg, 1995). The present study applies the modified version of Nuzzo's criteria by Marocchini (2017) and Table 1 illustrates the classification of complaints analysis created by her.

Table 1 – Classification of complaints analysis

Type	Description
1 Declaration of negative action	The complainer mentions and criticizes the negative action in not an aggressive way without giving any reference to the action or the actor.
2 Indirect blame	The complainer clearly but indirectly blames the interlocutor.
3 Direct blame	The complainer clearly and directly blames the interlocutor.
4 Action disgrace	The complainer focuses on the negative action itself, which may be in an aggressive way.
5 Actor disgrace	The complainer blames the interlocutor for the negative action, may be ironically.

Source: Marocchini, 2017, p. 81.

In the investigation of the literature on complaints and politeness theory, it has been found that studies focused on politeness strategies by using discourse completion tasks (Marocchini, 2007), politeness strategies applied in online environments (Adel, Davoudi, & Ramazanzadeh, 2016; Barrere, 2017; Etae et al., 2017; Maros & Rosli, 2017; Ranalan, 2018; Knehtl, 2019; Pinay-an & Buslon, 2019;

Ramli, et.al., 2019; Junita, 2020; Trisnawati & Fussalam, 2020), politeness strategies used while expressing complaints (Kozlova, 2004; Wijayanto, et.al, 2013; Al-khawaldeh, 2016; Masjedi & Paramasivam, 2018; Fakhrozy, 2019), politeness strategies used while expressing complaints on online environments (Park, 2001; Astia, 2020). The results of the above studies showed that positive politeness was the most frequent strategy used by individuals in their contexts (Adel et al., 2016; Etae et al., 2017; Maros & Rosli, 2017; Ranalan, 2018; Pinay-an & Buslon, 2019; Ramli, et.al, 2019; Trisnawati & Fussalam, 2020) and while complaining (Kozlova, 2004; Wijayanto, et.al. 2013; Fakhrozy, 2019). Only the results of the study carried by Masjedi and Paramasivam (2018) showed that Iranians' usage of politeness strategies varied and negative politeness was the most frequent one. Additionally, Astia (2020) conducted a study with students from various backgrounds on the use of politeness strategies while making complaints on WhatsApp chats, and the results showed that the use of politeness strategies differentiated from culture to culture. While the student who was a member of culture which has directness used mostly bald on record strategy, the student who was a member of a culture which has indirectness used negative politeness strategies more. Thongtong (2022) compared the politeness strategies in business emails written by EFL learners by comparing the genders and proficiency levels. The results showed that male and female learners in high groups used more indirect strategies and hedges in their emails. Banguis et al. (2023) investigated the politeness strategies in e-complaints written by students regarding blended learning, and the results showed that students used different types of politeness strategies, including bald on record, positive and negative politeness.

To date, emphasis has been on the investigation of politeness strategies with various purposes either by using discourse completion tasks or online discussion boards, with scant attention given to the cross-cultural evaluation of politeness strategies while complaining in online environments designed for only complaints. It is of interest to compare politeness strategies and complaint types used by Turkish language speakers and English language speakers while making complaints in online environments. There are differences in communication types of different

cultures, as proposed by Hall (1976) with a theory of high-context cultures and low-context cultures. This distinction explains how the cultural characteristics affect communication (Frank, 2013). While high-context cultures mainly rely on implicit messages, shared understanding, low-context cultures use mostly explicit and direct communication way relying on words rather than context (Frank, 2013). According to this distinction, it might be regarded as English-speaking countries are low-context cultures and Turkish speaking countries are high-context cultures. Grounded on these differences, it is expected to observe differences in using politeness strategies while complaining between English language speakers and Turkish language speakers, but no study has been observed conducted on this matter.

Based on this gap in the literature, the present study set out to investigate and compare the politeness strategies and complaint types used by Turkish and English language speakers to complain in online environments. The motivation behind the present study is the belief of its contribution to the field from different aspects. First, it is believed the results will be beneficial for linguists who study politeness strategies. Second, it may provide a better understanding of the politeness strategies in online environments. Third, it may also provide a deeper understanding of politeness strategies and complaint types used by different language speakers while complaining. Fourth, it may encourage researchers to investigate the underlying reasons for the use of specific politeness strategies while complaining.

The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What strategies of politeness are used for complaining in an online environment by Turkish language speakers?
2. What strategies of politeness are used for complaining in an online environment by English language speakers?
3. What are the differences in terms of cultural factors between politeness strategies used for complaining in online environments by Turkish and English language speakers?

Hypotheses

Below hypotheses were formed based on the results of the study of Astia (2020), which claimed the use of politeness strategies varied from culture to culture based on the communication type. English is not only used by the British or the American but also serves as the lingua franca throughout the world (Seidlhofer, 2005, p.339). Hence, the hypotheses for English language users included the aspects of different cultures from the inner circle postulated by Kachru (1992).

1. English language speakers will use negative politeness strategies most frequently. *(British culture is an indirect culture) (Evason, 2020).*
2. English language speakers will use bald on record strategies most frequently. *(American and Australian cultures are direct cultures) (Evason, 2016a; Evason, 2016b).*
3. English language speakers will use positive politeness strategies most frequently.
4. Turkish language speakers will use negative politeness strategies most frequently. *(Turkish culture is an indirect culture) (Evason, 2019).*
5. Turkish language speakers will use bald on record strategies most frequently.

Method

Research Design

The present study executes a qualitative research design (Creswell, 1994), which is the process of non-numerical data collection and analysis to get a comprehensive understanding of cases. Among various qualitative research designs, an ethnography study is used to gather better insights of the members of a whole community (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). As living in a technology-centered era, the number of users using online environments has increased, so people have become more active in online environments due to several reasons. Correspondingly, it might be more beneficial to adopt a technology-centered study to investigate the cases of people in online environments. Therefore, the present study adopts a study

type, which is the combination of ethnography and computer-mediated communication studies, called Discourse-centered Online Ethnography (DCOE) suggested by Androutsopoulos (2008). DCOE is defined as the adaptation of ethnographic observations for the selection and interpretation of diary data to clarify the relationships between digital texts and their production and reaction practices (Georgalou, 2010, p.60).

Additionally, as it is of interest to compare Turkish and English language speakers' use of politeness strategies and complaint types while complaining in online environments, the present study implements a cross-cultural study, which is the systematic analogy of cultures (Essau & Keval, 2011). In an attempt to compare these two cultures, the cross-cultural study serves better as a research type by focusing on and analyzing the differences and similarities between cultures. It is important to point out that in the English data, there were both native and non-native English speakers.

In this present study, the cultural aspects of both languages are compared from the perspective of pragmatics to connect the sociocultural and the language produced by the speakers. The strategies of politeness used by the speakers of both languages are described based on the background characteristics of each culture to see the link between socio-cultural aspects and the pragmatic meaning of their utterances.

Data Collection – Corpus

The data for the present study will be selected from two websites designed to make complaints about any service that individuals have taken. As the study is a cross-cultural study, one of the websites has been designed for Turkish language speakers, titled “şikayetvar”, on the other hand, the other one has been designed for English language speakers, titled “complaintsboard”. “Complaintsboard” platform is used by both native and non-native English language speakers around the world.

“Şikayetvar” was established in 2001, and for the final statistics of the website (retrieved on 26th of January 2025), there are 12.715.260 members, 219.742 registered brands, 3.572.895 solved complaints (“şikayetvar.com”, n.d.).

“Complaintsboard” was established in 2004, and for the final statistics of the website (retrieved on 26th of January 2025), there are businesses over 40.000, and solved complaints 30.000 (“complaintsboard.com”, n.d.)

The data was collected from both websites’ complaints entries to create a data corpus based on the following criteria:

1. Data corpus will consist of the complaints made on one clothes shopping brand which is a global brand, having stores in different countries.
2. Data corpus will consist of the complaints made on one home department store brand which is a global brand, having stores in different countries.
3. Data corpus will consist of the complaints made on one beverages brand which is a global brand, having stores in different countries.

Based on these three criteria, three brands have been selected. Upon the reviewing of whole data related to these three brands on both websites, it has been found that the numbers of complaints are not distributed equally. So, based on the date of complaint publication, from the most recent to the least, 100 complaints from each website were selected for data corpus.

Data Analysis

Data analysis has been done by carrying out a content analysis for the purpose of investigation of the corpus to make meaningful interpretations from the written entries (Weber, 1990, p.117). As the first step of content analysis, the complaints entries have been read several times to identify the keywords related to the complaint analysis (see introduction section for the table), and politeness strategies of each four types (positive, negative, bald on record, off record) offered by Brown and Levinson (1987). Upon identifying the keywords, the coding process which consists of two steps will start. First, the identified keywords of the entries will be labeled based on the types of politeness strategies and complaints, and then it will be focused on the most frequent codes to reorganize them (Dörnyei, 2007). In an attempt to validate the codes, an external auditor, who is an expert on pragmatics, will be asked to review the codes based on the types of politeness strategies and complaints.

For the final step of data analysis, the frequencies of the codes will be calculated to interpret the corpus data related to the use of politeness strategies of Turkish and English language speakers while making complaints on online websites designed for just this purpose.

Results and Discussion

The study analyzed the complaints in online environments, written by Turkish language speakers and English language speakers by focusing on the used politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987). For each language, 100 entries were analyzed and the frequency of occurrences of politeness strategies was shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – The frequency of politeness strategies used

Types of politeness strategies	In Turkish language (TD)	In English language (ED)
	Percentage	
Positive Politeness	2%	42%
Negative Politeness	25%	45%
Bald on Record	73%	11%
Off Record	-	2%
Total	100%	100%

Grounded on the classification of complaints by Marocchini (2017), the entries were also analyzed in terms of used complaint types. Table 3 shows the frequency of complaints in both the Turkish and English languages.

Table 3 – The frequency of complaints types used

Types of complaints	In Turkish language (TD)	In English language (ED)
	Percentage	
Declaration of negative action	17%	2%
Indirect blame	20%	5%
Direct blame	39%	33%
Action disgrace	19%	39%
Actor disgrace	10%	21%
Total	100%	100%

Politeness Strategies used in the Turkish language in complaints

The analysis of 100 entries of Turkish language complaints data showed that the bald on record strategy was the most commonly used politeness strategy by Turkish language speakers. It was followed by negative politeness and the least frequency was observed in positive politeness. Regarding the types of complaints, it was observed that Turkish speakers mostly wrote complaints in which they directly blamed the companies. It was observed that the other complaint types were more balanced and that one was not dominant over the other. The result that emerged in this condition shows that Turkish speakers use bald-on-record strategies a lot and take direct blame while complaining.

According to Table X, the most common politeness strategy used by Turkish language speakers is bald on record, which occurs 73%. The second most common strategy is negative politeness, which occurs 25%. On the other hand, while no entry using off record strategy was observed, only 2% of the entries used positive politeness.

The following section explains the strategies and the kinds of complaints that go along with them.

Bald on record

With 73% occurrences, the bald-on-record strategy was the most commonly used politeness strategy by Turkish language speakers. A similar result was found by Kaur et al. (2022), reporting that customers tend to use bald-on-record strategies in online discussion rooms. In this type of politeness strategy, complaints are direct, confrontational, and mostly demand immediate action, with the lack of softeners, hedging, or indirect questions. In most cases, the complainers directly state the problem and express their dissatisfaction without using any hedges, mitigating language, or indirect phrasing. Table 4 shows the excerpts and their explanation for the following instances. They show their strong dissatisfaction in their complaints (TD#1), they use rhetorical questions with an accusatory tone (TD#2), and Sometimes, they use exaggeration by showing frustration (TD#3). They used imperatives to show their urgent demand (TD#4). They used emotional intensity

while blaming the company, for example in TD#5. They use certain statements to label the brand negatively, as illustrated in TD#6. They did not pay attention to the company's side as well (TD#7).

Table 4 – Excerpts and explanation regarding bald-on-record strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
TD#1 “Bir daha asla ... 'dan alışveriş yapmam. (I will never shop at ... again.)”.	strong dissatisfaction
TD#2 Bu nasıl bir müşteri hizmeti? (What kind of customer services is this?)”.	rhetorical questions with an accusatory tone
TD#3 “Bu kadar sorumsuzluk olamaz! (There can be no such irresponsibility!)”.	exaggeration by showing frustration
TD#4 “Hemen çözüm bekliyorum? (I expect a solution immediately!)”.	imperatives to show urgent demand
TD#5 “Yazıklar olsun. (Shame on you.)”.	emotional intensity
TD#6 “... pişmanlıktır. (... is a regret.)”.	certain statements to label the brand negatively
TD#7 “Beni ilgilendirmez, sorununuzu çözün.”(It's none of my business, solve your problem.)”.	No attention to the company's side

Negative politeness

The second most used politeness strategy is negative politeness. In these complaints, the complainers use more formal, indirect, but less aggressive language. They accept that it could be a potential inconvenience for the company, but still complain anyway. In most cases, the complainers emphasize their disappointment while accepting the rules and procedures of the companies. A similar result was reported by Kaur et al. (2022) claiming that the customers who were aware of the background of the problem they face still wonder about the potential solutions. Additionally, they show their regret by emphasizing their own sides to justify the requests, which is a common characteristic of negative politeness. Table 5 shows the sample excerpts and explanation of following samples. They used formal requests (TD#8). In some complaints, they used formal phrasing in a formal tone, for example in TD#9. They imply their expectation of professionalism (TD#10) and use indirect complaints to ask for clarification (TD#11). They show their disappointment by avoiding being hostile (TD#12), and they explain their hopes by avoiding using a blaming tone (TD#13).

Table 5 – Excerpts and explanations regarding negative politeness strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
TD#8 “ <i>Lütfen bu konuda yardımcı olur musunuz? (Could you please help me with this?)</i> ”.	formal requests
TD#9 “ <i>Müşteri memnuniyeti açısından bu durumun değerlendirilmesini rica ediyorum. (I request that this situation be evaluated in terms of customer satisfaction.)</i> ”.	formal phrasing in a formal tone
TD#10 “ <i>Hassasiyet göstermenizi bekliyorum. (I expect you to show sensitivity.)</i> ”.	expectation of professionalism
TD#11 “ <i>Bu konuda açıklama yapabilir misiniz? (Can you explain this situation?)</i> ”.	indirect complaints to ask for clarification
TD#12 “ <i>Markanıza olan güvenim sarsıldı. (I lost my confidence in your brand.)</i> ”.	disappointment by avoiding being hostile
TD#13 “ <i>Umarım en kısa sürede bir çözüm bulunur. (I hope a solution could be found soon.)</i> ”.	Explanation of hopes by avoiding using a blaming tone

Positive politeness

In the complaints written by Turkish language speakers, no direct use of positive politeness has been observed; however, in some complaints, there are some phrases to show positive politeness, as shown in Table 6. These complaints include friendliness, shared identity, or past positive experiences. They show their loyalty to the brand by showing the reference (TD#14). They use some expressions to soften their complaints (TD#15), and they try to balance their praise of the brand and complaint (TD#16). They express their disappointment while trying to be respectful (TD#17) and sometimes they use positive expressions to recognize the good service provided by the company before complaining (TD#18).

Table 6 – Excerpts and explanations regarding positive politeness strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
TD#14 “ <i>Senelerdir alışveriş yapıyorum ama böyle bir şey yaşamadım. (I've been shopping for years and I've never experienced anything like this.)</i> ”.	showing loyalty to brand by showing the reference
TD#15 “ <i>Normalde çok memnunum ama bu sefer sorun yaşadım. (Normally I am very happy, but this time I had a problem.)</i> ”.	expressions to soften complaints
TD#16 “ <i>Çalışanlar genellikle ilgili ama bu kez farklıydı. (The staff is usually very helpful, but this time it was different.)</i> ”.	balancing praise to the brand and complaint
TD#17 “ <i>Markanıza güveniyorum, ancak bu durum beni üzdü. (I trust your brand, but this situation made me upset.)</i> ”.	Expression of disappointment while trying to be respectful
TD#18 “ <i>Güler yüzlü hizmetinize almıştım. (I had gotten used to your friendly service.)</i> ”.	positive expressions to recognize the good service provided by the company before complaining

Politeness Strategies used in the English language in complaints

The results from data analysis in English complaints show that four types of politeness are all used by English speakers to convey their thoughts about the products and services they bring. From 100 entries analyzed, the final percentage shows the domination of the negative strategy as the most frequent type occurs, and the Off record strategy as the least frequent type of politeness used. These politeness strategies expressed in specific types of complaints as well, with the majority of complaints types are showing disgrace for the negative action, and directly blaming the interlocutor for the inconveniences they experienced. The focus of the majority of English speakers is to express their dissatisfaction by framing out their inconvenience and what happened between them and the brands they are complaining to. This can be seen from the way the speakers use negative strategies which indirectly notify the mistakes made by these brands, without necessarily saying that these brands are directly harming them in practice. This strategy is then accompanied by action disgrace as the type of complaints that prove the previous statement because, in action disgrace type, the complaints are made focusing on the action and describing the scenario of the negative action itself.

Based on Table 2, negative politeness is placed as the most used strategy with 45% occurrences, followed by positive strategy in the second place with a total percentage of 42%. Both negative and positive politeness strategies are commonly

used to express the common ground between the speakers and the hearer and to indirectly express disappointments. Comparatively, Bald on record and Off Record occur rarely with just 11% and 2% percentage for each. Below in Table 7, the explanation for the strategies is described along with the type of complaints that accompany them.

Negative Politeness

Table 7 – Excerpts and explanations regarding negative politeness strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
ED#1 <i>“And even if I am the first one to report the problem, you should help me to report it to the higher level or to the technical team”</i>	Indirectly ask the interlocutor to do something
ED#2 <i>“This is on the 9th day, and the day I'm supposed to be receiving it.”</i>	Be conventionally indirect expressing the fault of the brand
ED#3 <i>“ She tells me she can't do anything about it, neither can “...”, and then I should contact my post office (who will not let you change it and tells you “...” is responsible for changing it).”</i>	Being pessimistic
ED#4 <i>On the scheduled date, 18.12, when I showed up at the “...” store to pick up the goods, there was nothing available.</i>	Expressing disappointment by make things explicit about the store
ED#5 <i>I feel that “...” is intentionally making this process difficult</i>	Being pessimistic

From data ED#1, the speaker indirectly says that the customer service should do something, which in this context is reporting to the technical team. This is included as a negative strategy according to Brown & Levinson's framework since the speaker just uses another word to convey what they truly want the hearer to do in real action. The speaker can just simply say “report my case to your technical team”, but rather than being direct and imperative, the speaker chooses to say it indirectly by expressing additional narrative “and even if I am the first one to report the problem”, which makes her statement does not sound as an imperative sentence. Furthermore, the speaker shows that she is focusing on the action taken by the customer service which she regrets most, that is not reporting her case. This strategy conveys the speaker's interest to disgrace the action made by the customer service. Moreover, showing pessimistic feelings is also another method of using a negative strategy that is commonly found in the result of data analysis. In data ED#5, the speaker shows that the action taken by the company to resolve the issue is not

efficient and that they intentionally did not want to resolve the issue. By saying “intentionally making this process difficult”, the speaker is indirectly being pessimistic towards the process and capacity of the company’s staff to work professionally and solve the issue she is complaining about.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness placed as the second most used strategy from the data analysis, it is because the tendency of English speakers to write the background story and description of their shopping experience before directly expressing their complaints. From the ten entries analyzed, the positive strategy occurs as the way the speakers build the common ground and relation between them and the interlocutor, which in this context is the brands they complaining to. Table 8 shows some excerpts and their explanations about positive politeness strategies.

Table 8 – Excerpts and explanations regarding positive politeness strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
ED#6 <i>“So, I called again and after yet another lengthy waiting time on the customer helpline, spoke to a woman who assured me all I needed was a cable called “...” and it was mentioned in the instructions (it was not) and kindly sent me one because of all the trouble I had experienced.”</i>	Assert common ground by expressing their identity as customer and seller
ED#7 <i>“It past 9 days, so I contacted “...” to see what was going on.</i>	Claim reflexivity with the hearer by giving reason (<i>it past 9 days</i>)
ED#8 <i>I asked to talk to a technical person to help me solve the issue.</i>	Asking for help , intensifying his interest to the technical person
ED#9 <i>The representative said she doesn't think that the system was in problems.</i>	Expressing disappointment by make things explicit about the store
ED#10 <i>As a loyal customer, I believe it is important to address this issue promptly considering I have purchased all my home furniture from “...” Croydon, London(Bill attached for reference).</i>	Claim common ground by expressing identity markers between the speaker and hearer

ED#6

So, I called again and after yet another lengthy waiting time on the customer helpline, spoke to a woman who assured me all I needed was a cable called “...” and it was mentioned in the instructions (it was not) and kindly sent me one because of all the trouble I had experienced.

From data ED#6, the speaker tried to claim common ground by showing the in-group membership with the hearer. In the context of ED#6, the speaker identifies

themselves as someone who talks about customer service and has to discuss a matter that is understood by both the speaker and the customer service. The speaker uses “I called again” as an identity marker that he or she is a customer, and mentions “spoke to a woman who assured me” as the identity of the woman as a customer service officer. The complaints strategy used in ED#6 is to disgrace the actor as the speaker mainly complaint about how the customer service person fails to satisfy his or her demand. The marker of this strategy can be found in the statement “... spoke to a woman who assured me all I needed was a cable called “...” and it was mentioned in the instructions (it was not) and kindly sent me one because of all the trouble I had experienced.”, where the speaker identify that the customer service person said something that is not available in the instruction of the products. The act of pointing out the customer service mistake is included as the expression of disgracing the actor. Furthermore, positive strategy could also be expressed by showing the common ground between the speaker and the hearer, this can be found in data ED#10. In ED#10, the speaker mentioned that she is a “loyal customer” which intended to show that the speaker and the hearer (the company) are actually on the same side and have a mutual relationship. Claiming the common ground is included as one of the ways to show positive strategy in politeness.

Bald-On-Record

As bald on strategy focuses on how the speaker does not attempt to minimize the face-threatening situation to the other people involved in that conversation, that is the reason why Bald on record is considered as the most direct politeness strategy. From the English data entries, which some examples were shown in Table 9, it is found that not so many English speakers went bold by directly giving imperative sentences within their complaints, but rather used other indirect strategies to convey disappointment. Speakers who use this strategy usually show their anger throughout their complaints, take a look at the analysis below.

Table 9 – Excerpts and explanations regarding bold-on-record politeness strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
ED#11 <i>AVOID AT ALL COSTS they have my items AND my money!</i>	Showing anger and disappointments by giving direct warning
ED#12 <i>So transfer me to someone can"</i>	Direct imperative sentence to express the speaker's demand towards the hearer
ED#13 <i>I AM NOW TRULY FED UP ! and want "... " to either, send a lighting technician to my house to successfully install my smart lighting or, refund my money for what looks like a truly bogus set of products !</i>	Direct imperative sentence to express disappointments and demand towards the hearer

ED#11

"AVOID AT ALL COSTS they have my items AND my money!"

From data ED#11, the speaker states that the brand is very harmful to the customer so they should just stop buying from that brand. The sentence "avoid at all costs" is classified as an imperative sentence where the speaker asks people to do something, which in this case is purchasing things from that brand. This bald-on strategy used in data ED#11 is in line with the type of complaints the speaker shows. Since the speaker expresses anger using that mentioned imperative sentence, the complaint type occurs as a direct blame strategy. When the speaker directly points out that the inconvenience they felt is caused by the mentioned actor, in this case, the company, she completely puts all the blame on the company. In practice, the bald-on strategy is used to show that the speaker is not willing to save the face of the hearer by being indirect. The bald-on record strategy can also be performed by the use of direct imperative sentences such as in data #ED12. The speaker gives a command to the hearer to show what she wants directly, "So transfer me.." This can be seen as the demand imposed on the hearer. Expressing demand using direct imperative sentences is included as Bald on record strategy in politeness.

Off-record

As off-record is a politeness strategy that focuses on making indirect expressions, often time not directly relevant to the topic being talked about, Off record usually occurs when the speakers intend to emphasize specific meaning from

their utterances even though it is not directly said. The common expression of Off record appears as a sign of Maxim violation by the speakers, which means the speakers intentionally broke the traditional role of cooperative conversation between the speakers and the hearer involved. In this study, even though the number is not really high, it is found that some speakers use Off-record in a way they ask rhetorical questions, be ironic, use metaphors, and overstate something. Below in Table 10 is the explanation of the data sample.

Table 6 – Excerpts and explanation regarding off-record politeness strategies

Excerpt	Explanation
ED#14 <i>“Now, they want to send me the order, after they issued an order cancellation paper! HOW DO YOU SHIP A CANCELED ORDER?”</i>	Asking rhetorical question
ED#15 <i>The looks I kept getting as I sat there watching them, let me know they hate me.</i>	Being irrelevant to the topic of complaints
ED#16 <i>So I leave on good faith that my money will be refunded but being you don't support military.</i>	Being irrelevant with the topic of complaints
ED#17 <i>Im for real going to stop eating and drinking there if these prices seriously don't change!</i>	Being ironic and overstate the issue (high price)

ED#14

“Now, they want to send me the order, after they issued an order cancellation paper! HOW DO YOU SHIP A CANCELED ORDER?”

in data ED#14, it can be seen that the speaker uses rhetorical questions to emphasize the solution given by the customer service is useless and not solve the problem at all. The question “how do you ship a cancelled order” shows that the speaker is confused and angry about the response, and is not satisfied with the answer given. This includes an off-record strategy because the speakers do not focus on the issue or topic of the conversation, but rather express their thoughts using other, not directly relevant to the actual issue but imposing the fault of the hearer which in this context is the customer services agent. Besides being off-record by asking rhetorical questions, some speakers also found expressing Off-record strategy by talking about completely irrelevant issues, this can be seen in data ED#16 where the complaint is about a refund, but the speaker brought up the

military issue with no explanation and correlation. This shows that the speaker uses an off-record strategy to express disappointments.

Comparison of Politeness Strategies in Turkish and English Complaints

The detailed analysis of the data in both Turkish and English language showed some differences in complaints. A previous recent study by Nham, Cai, and Wannaruk (2023) reported that the choice of politeness strategies differs based on some factors such as social status, social distance, pragmatic transfer, and input in the target language. In the present study, regarding the most frequently employed politeness strategies while complaining, Turkish language speakers use bald on record while native and non-native English speakers use negative politeness followed by positive politeness strategies. According to the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers choose their strategies based on how much a given utterance might threaten the listener's *face*. In many English-speaking cultures, there is a strong norm to avoid the imposition on others' faces (Konakahara, 2017). While complaining is face-threatening in its nature, English speakers often employ negative politeness to minimize imposition, and Turkish speakers just see the act of complaining as a straightforward way to address issues. It might be related to that the bald-on-record strategy in the Turkish context is regarded as an efficient way of communicating urgency or dissatisfaction.

Another possible reason behind this difference might be based on the cultural conceptions of directness and relationship dynamics of these contexts. As the self-perception and how the speaker positions themselves with other people affects the way they put distance or not in a conversation. Thus, affecting the strategy they use in politeness. The social distance between the speaker and the hearer is a fundamental factor determining politeness, aside from power and formality dimensions (Arif, et al, 2018). In this study, English speakers are found to consider the social distance between them and the brand they are complaining with, so the negative and positive strategies are more dominant than other, more direct strategies. English speakers preserve social harmony, which leads to more use of indirect complaint strategies. On the other hand, in the Turkish context, complainers

focus on frankness and immediacy while expressing their complaints, which in turn may affect their choice of politeness strategy as a necessary step toward resolving their problems. This cultural relativity is related to the norms and culture commonly accepted in Turkish and English. As Saputra, et al (2021) mentioned politeness itself is a social propriety, which is an act where an individual's reasonable behavior and respect for others is demonstrated in accordance with the norms prevailing in society.

One particularly noteworthy observation in this study is mostly about the use of direct strategies by Turkish language speakers while complaining. The following aspects are associated with directness. One of the observations in this regard is that English language speakers use uppercase letters in their complaints, while Turkish speakers do not use them. A study by Heath (2021) showed that the capital letters on social media show a variety of emotions, such as anger, loudness, or seriousness. Therefore, it might be claimed that English language speakers use uppercase letters to express their anger, while Turkish language speakers just directly state their complaints. This result is in line with a previous study by Öztürk and Aytan (2023) which reported that Turkish speakers use direct strategies while expressing their complaints.

Another observation noted between the two data is that there is no off-record strategy in expressing complaints by Turkish language speakers, while English language speakers somehow used off-record strategies with some rhetorical questions and being ironic. It might be related that Turkish people mostly prefer direct and clear communication strategies over off-record strategies while complaining to ensure their concerns are understood and addressed promptly.

Politeness Strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching Contexts

The present study analyzed the politeness strategies used by both Turkish and English language speakers. As the quality of education is directly related to the quality of educators (Sultana, 2024), the results of the present study might be helpful for EFL educators and learners to be more aware of how cultural norms influence language use for better achievement in the language learning process. This

awareness might help students avoid misunderstandings or unintentional rudeness while communicating in English in an intercultural context, by providing an actual language use (Demirezen, 1991). It is important to not forget and keep in mind the place of culture and cultural teaching in language education (Turkan and Çelik, 2007). Additionally, as it is known that politeness strategies are a key component of pragmatic competence, which is significant in EFL teaching. Language learners might have the opportunity to use more appropriate language in different social contexts when they comprehend how politeness functions in English-speaking cultures. They may choose the right register and level of formality, use indirect language, or employ hedging expressions. Another contribution to the EFL might be related to the speech acts, as this study focused on complaints. As speech acts are important in the process of language learning (Khamkhien, 2022), the analysis of strategies may help learners navigate social interactions more effectively, ensuring that complaining strategies are in line with native speakers' expectations. Besides, as critical thinking is a significant part of language learning, the analysis and comparison of politeness strategies enhance critical thinking about language use and communication. Learners may have the opportunity to explore how linguistic choices reflect broader cultural values by fostering a deeper understanding of the nuances in both languages. Finally, in EFL classes, learners can benefit from insights into politeness strategies while interacting with their peers and teachers. When they recognize different levels of formality or indirectness required in English, they can adapt their language to the classroom environment and improve their communication with other language speakers. When politeness strategies are integrated into the EFL curriculum, language educators can incorporate sociolinguistic components into language learning and help students understand how social factors affect politeness in English.

Conclusion

As language is the core of communication, there is a need for careful investigation of language use by both native and non-native speakers from different cultures. Within this context, the present study aimed to identify the politeness strategies and complaint types used by both Turkish and English language speakers while complaining about a product/service in an online environment. The data for the study was created as a corpus of 100 entries in online complaint websites which are designed for Turkish language speakers and English language speakers. The analysis included a careful content analysis to identify the politeness strategies and complaint types. As some entries included more than one strategy, the frequencies of strategies were reported in this study. The results showed that while Turkish language speakers use mostly the bald on record strategy which is a direct strategy, English language speakers, who are both native and non-native, use negative and positive politeness strategies mostly, which include hedging or indirect features. It was observed that Turkish language speakers are more direct while complaining in order to reach a solution as soon as possible, while English language speakers are more careful while complaining in order not to threaten the companies. These findings might be beneficial for both pragmatics researchers and educators of English as a foreign language.

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