Modifications in Complaint Realization: Moroccan EFL Learners As a Case Study

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating complaint external and internal modifications as employed by Moroccan learners of English at the tertiary level. These modifications are compared and contrasted against the strategies elicited in the same situations from Moroccan Arabic speakers and from native speakers of American English. More precisely, the study attempts to analyze how complaint modifications are influenced by the contextual variables of power and distance. Pragmatic transfer from Moroccan Arabic is also explored. The findings reveal that the interlanguage subjects and Moroccan speakers of Arabic showed more sensitivity to power. On the other hands, American participants' use of modification frequencies was more pronounced at the level of distance. This was interpreted as an instance of pragmatic transfer of cultural values . Finally, some pedagogical implications are highlighted.

Keywords: *Complaints, modifications, interlanguage pragmatics, contextual variables*

I.   Introduction

Interlanguage studies dealing with speech acts realization basically focus on strategy use in terms of frequency or directness.Yet, without taking into consideration other variables such as modifications, this study may not give a full picture of the strategies employed by the different groups of participants. House and Kasper (1992) suggest that directness alone may not be a decisive factor in spotting "the politeness" mechanisms adopted by the speakers. External and internal modifications are also investigated in this study in an attempt to account for their influence on the performance of the speech act of complaining by MLE, AE, and MA precipitants. In this study, the researcher analyzes and discusses the mitigating devices used by the participantsin their realization of complaints (i.e., supportive moves and internal modifications). Then, an attempt will be made to assess the participants' socio-pragmatic awareness of the 2 contextual variables of (a) of social power relationship between the speaker and the hearer, and (b) degree of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer. After analyzing directness with regards to pragmatic transfer, this section aims mainly at investigating modifications in terms of pragmatic transfer. To establish occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer with respect to complaint modifications, the following criteria were taken into consideration: negative pragmatic transfer is operational if there is a significant statistical difference in the frequency of a certain pragmatic feature between the MA and AE groups and between the MLE and AE groups and no statistically significant difference between the MA and MLE groups. With regard to this study, it is hypothesized that Moroccans EFL learners will use more external modifications and less internal modifications than native speakers of American English.

Theoretical background

Complains have been extensively discussed, this might not be the case in Morocco, in the literature compared to other speech acts such as request or apology. This can be explained by its face-threatening force that requires much attention and pragmatic awareness. Nevertheless, some empirical studies can serve as a theoretical framework for our study. This part sheds light on some widely adopted framework of encoding the speech acts realizations.

In this regard, One of the most frequently cited studies in this area is the one carried out by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), who explored complaints as realized by native and nonnative speakers of Hebrew. Based on their study, the researchers framed five categories for complaint realizations: (1) below the level of reproach, "No harm done, let's meet some other time"; (2) disapproval, "It's a shame that we have to work faster now"; (3) direct complaint, "You are always late and now we have less time to do this job"; (4) accusation and warning, "Next time don't expect me to sit here waiting for you"; and (5) threat, "If we don't finish the job today, I'll have to discuss it with the boss" (p. 202).

Another interesting investigation of the speech act of complaint is the one conducted by Trosborg (1995). The Latter studies direct complaints from a cross-cultural and inter-language perspective. She investigates complaints realizations by Danish learners of English, Danish native speakers, and English native speakers. Trosborg (1995) finds out that Danish learners of English use fewer strategies that do native speakers of English and Danish. Additionally, her study reveals that the strategies used by the native speakers of English when complaining to someone of higher social status are more direct than the one employed by other groups; Danish Native speakers and Danish learners of English.

In addition to complaint strategies, internal and external modifications have also been found to come into play in lessening or intensifying the impact of the speech act on the hearer. According to Trosborg (1995), there are two basic types of modifications which include of downgraders and upgraders.

1.Downgraders are different kinds of mitigating devices. Syntactic downgraders include strategies as interrogative (e.g. Can you/I...? May you/I...?), past tense modal verb forms (e.g. Could you...? Would you...?) and consultative device (e.g. Would you mind if..., Do you think you could...?), while lexical downgraders included politeness marker (e.g. please), downtoners (e.g. possibly, perhaps, maybe), subjectiviser (e.g. I think, I wonder, I'm afraid), and so on.

2. Upgraders intend to increase the complaint force. The following list of upgraders is based on House and Kasper (1989) and Franklin and Hardin (2012) classification. They include Overstater (e.g. absolutely, purely), intensifier adverbials (e.g. quite, really, just, very), plus Committer (e.g. I'm sure, certainly), lexical Intensifier (e.g. swear words), aggressive Interrogative (e.g Why haven't you told me before?,

Four types of external modifications, i.e. preparators, disarmers, providing evidence and substantiation used to justify the accusation and make the complaint more convincing.

1. preparators, used to foreground or warn the complainee about a forthcoming complaint 2.

3.   disarmers, employed to save the complainee's face and also the complainer's own face

4.   providing evidence, proving that the SUA was actually performed by the complainee (e.g.

5.   substantiation, examples to justify the complaint

A modified version of Trosborg' (1995) framework will be adopted by the researcher in the current study to encode the speech acts of complaints as realized by the three groups of informants; 1.Naive Speakers of American English, Morocco Learners of English, and Moroccan Arabic Speakers. This will be highlighted more in the methodology part.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) and Trosborg (1995) affirmed that complaints are used for two purposes. The first purpose is to show the complainer's negative attitudes dissatisfaction with the bad act performed by the complainee. The second purpose is to ask the complainee to compensate for the damages he/she has caused. So, when a speaker expresses complaining (expressive function), they implicitly request the hearer to perform a remedial act to make up for the loss of the speaker (directive function).

Murthy and Neu (1996) investigate how American native speakers of English and Korean learners of English express complaint about their grades to an American professor. The study yields some interesting results as to how disappointment is expressed by both groups. American speakers expressed complaint by hinting at their responsibility for the misconducts or what is perceived as such. Koreans performed the speech act of criticism instead by putting the blame on the professor. What is also noted among the Korean learners is the use of the second pronoun and the modal "should", which leads to a more personalization of the problem. Conversely, the American participants, Murphy and Neu (1996) state, tend to transfer the blame from the interlocutor to the problem. In general, the study concludes that the appropriateness of the sociolinguistic forms in complaints is a key player in maintaining or damaging communication.

External Modifications

Complaints realizations by the three group of participants were analyzed. A complete complaint was broken into five semantic components: Opener, disarmer, providing evidence, substantiation, and Closing. It should be pointed out that not all the complaints had all these semantic formulas, and they were not necessarily in the above listed order. The frequency of the use of the 5 semantic components in the complaints across the 5 situations is shown (in Table 15)

The results indicate that the MLE participants ($n = 279$) used supportive moves significantly more than did the AE participants ($n = 235$) and significantly less than did the MA participants ($n = 303$), indicating both native and target language influence. Further, chi-square pair comparisons of the five social categories revealed significant differences in situations 2, 4, and 5.

As shown in Table 15, the MLE participants' use of external modifications followed three different patterns. In line with previous studies on the interlanguage of speech acts realizations among Moroccan learners of English, an interesting pattern is observed in situation 3 and 5: the MLE participants' use of external modifications (23.33/23.89) was significantly more than that of both the AE (19.87/ 17.83) and MA (18.15 /19.22) participants respectively. The findings indicated that the Moroccan EFL learners produced significantly

more complaint modifications than did both the AE and MA groups, and therefore diverged from both the target and native language groups. The finding aligns with previous studies on EFL learners complaint productions (e.g., Chen, 2011; Hassall, 2001; Olshtain&Weinbach, 1993), which conclude that language learners with high proficiency levels have a tendency towards verbosity or "waffle phenomenon[1]" as (Edmondson & House, 1991; c.f. Hassall 2003) describe it. [2]In fact, overusing external modifications is a sign of pragmatic failure and " lack of appropriateness which might cause the hearer to react with impatience"" Blum-KulkaandOlshatain (1986, p. 175). This phenomenon was also referred to in Trosborg (1995), who investigates the interlanguage of complaint by Danish learners of English.

Table 15
Percentage, Raw Frequency, and Chi-Square Values of Total Number of Supportive Moves in the Five Social Categories

Situation	MLE N %	AE N %	MA N %	MLE-AE χ	MLE-MA χ	AE-MA χ
1 (-P / +D) **Reference letter**	79 **(29.26)**	69 **(29.13)**	93 (**30.29**)	0.004	1.342	1.167
2 (=P /-D) **Classmate contribution**	46 **(17.04)**	31 **(13.48)**	59 **(19.22)**	10.155*	37.875	10.612*T
3 (=P/ +D) **line cutter**	58 **(23.89)**	48 (**19.87**)	49 **(18.15)**	0.004 *	1.117 *	2.836
4 (+P/ +D) **Photocopyorder**	33 **(12.22)**	43 **(18.70)**	38 **(12.38)**	8.364*	2.205	10.573* **T**
5 (+ P /- D) **Assignment**	63 **(23.33)**	44 **(17.83)**	77 **(19.22)**	10.256*	37.001*	10.411
Total	279	235	303	4.132*	13.014*	31.314*

Note. P = social power, D= distance speakers, MLE = Moroccan learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic speakers, AE= American English speakers. **T** indicates the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer.*$p < 0.05$

She reports that Danish learners of English employed neither their L1norms nor the TL norms in their use of complaint modifications. With respect to the Moroccan context, this can be due to the lack of opportunities for interaction in EFL context. It can either be explained by the fact that learners equate verbosity with proficiency, or by an attempt to compensate for lacking complaint routines.

On the other hand, The criteria for the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer were operational in situation 2 with the absence of any significant difference between the MA (19.22%) and MLE (17,04%) groups, and since both groups used external modifications significantly more than did the AE group (13.48%).

Table 16
Frequency of External Modifications by the Three Groups

Modifications	Status of Participants MLE N %	AE N %	MA N %
Preparator	161 (57.71%)	147 (62.55%)	132 (43.56%)
Disarmers	10 (3.58%)	32 (13.62%)	23 (7.595)
Evidence	72 (25.81%)	17 (7.23%)	67 (22.11%)
Substantiation	54 (19.35%)	16 (6.81%)	65 (21.45%)

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[1] L2 learners are more verbose than the native speakers of English

Closing	11	(3.94%)	24	(10.21%)	16	(95.28%)
Total	279		235		303	

MLE = Moroccan learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic speakers, AE= American English speakers
A different pattern of negative pragmatic transfer was also noticed in situation 4 where AE participants (18,70%) adopted external modifications significantly more than did both MLE (12.22) and MA groups(12,38).

As indicated in (table 16), preparators were the most frequently used external modifications by the three groups (e.g., *"Excuse me, the back of the line is... (point indicating)"*); Several researchers (e.g,Ezzaoua, 2019; Hassall, 2001;Trosborg, 1995) have noted that *preparators* are conventionalized in most languages. Quantitatively, MLEs seem to approach native speakers' norms in terms of using preparators, yet, qualitatively, it seems that MLEs are unable in some instances to perform the speech act successfully eg*"A queue is a line where people line up and the first to come is the first to be served now please back off and wait like everyone else"*. According to an American rater, the overuse of preparators in forms like that makes the complaint sound rude and full of sarcasm.

More precisely, negative pragmatic transfer is observed in the MLE participants' underuse of *disarmers* which are adopted as a strategy to alleviate directness and save the complainee's face and also the complainer's own face (e.g., *" Hi Sir , it probably skipped your mind, but we do actually have an appointment today")* (Ezzaoua, 2020, p. 5). Negative transfer from the native language can be noticed in the overuse of providing evidence as a choice that supports the tendency toward verbosity by both MLE and MA groups (see Table 16).

All in all, the results indicate that complaint external modifications produced by MLE group are not as frequent as in American English. Since positive politeness-oriented cultures value taciturnity, negative politeness-oriented ones appreciate verbosity (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It seems likely that Moroccans display an inclination towards a positive politeness culture as the explicit expressions of complaints suggest themselves.

External Modifications Interacting with Contextual Variables
This section explores the effect of the contextual variables of social power and social distance on the three groups' use of complaint external modifications. It also discusses MLEs' tendency in their modifications choices compared to MA and AE subjects.

External Modifications and Social Power
The effect of the contextual variables of social power and social distance on the three groups' use of external modifications was also explored. As shown in (Table 17), chi-square pair comparisons of + P vs. = P, +P vs. –P, and = P vs. –P situations indicated that both the MA and MLE participants significantly changed their use of external modifications across to three power values, employing significantly more external modifications in low power situations (–P) followed by equal power situations (= P) and finally high power (+P) scenarios.

Table 17
Influence of Social Power on Use of external modifications by Group

Group	+P %	=P %	-P %	+P/=P χ^2	+P/-P χ^2	=P/-P χ^2
MLE	25.32%	33.01%	41.67%	7.446*	26.4730*	5.539*
AE	28.23%	33.47%	38.30%	0.890	5.0623*	2.007
MA	26.57%	33.43%	40.00%	7.734*	36.7440*	11.004*

Note. AE = American English speakers, MLE = Moroccan learners of English, MA= Moroccan Arabic speakers. (+P) = speaker has more social H), (=P) = speaker and hearer have equal social power (S = H), (–P) = speaker has less social power than hearer (S < H). *$p < 0.05$

Social power variable did not influence the choices made by AE participants except for a significant shift from (As can be shown in the table 17) low power situations (–P) to high power situations (+P). The shift of frequency of external modifications between high power situations and equal power situations (+P vs. = P)

and between equal power situations and low power situations (=P vs. –P) was not significantly influenced (see Table 17) .

As can be noted, this is another instance of negative pragmatic transfer as MLEs could not meet the pragmatic requirement of the target culture, while still under the influence of Moroccan Arabic. MLEs were over verbose in situations where they hold less power. This logic might fail if the speaker is not aware of the cultural specificities of the learnt language. The ultimate goal of learning a language is to be able to communicate effectively with native speakers of that language. Without taking the culture variable into consideration, interactions are prone to trigger communication breakdown.

Table18
Influence of Social Distance on Use of External Modifications by Group

Group	+ Distance %	- Distance %	+D/-D χ^2
MLE	51.38%	48.62%	0.071
AE	58.24%	40.66%	16.57*
MA	47.88%	52.13%	0.015

Note. AE = American speakers of English, MLE = Moroccan Learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic speakers . + distance = complainer and complainee know each other, - distance = complainer and complainee do not know each other. *p <0.05

With respect to the variable of social distance and its influence on verbosity and external modifications use, chi-square pair comparisons indicated that this variable was not significant as both MLE and MA groups use of external modifications was not influenced by how familiar or unfamiliar they are to the complainee. They used approximately the same number of external modifications with little consideration for distance. On the contrary, the American participants used significantly more modifications when addressing the complaint to an unfamiliar than to a familiar interlocutor. (see Table 18) The findings, as a matter of fact, partially support previous studies conducted on the interlanguage of complaint (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993;Suleiman, 2017; Tran 2002). They report that both native and non-native speakers produced wordy complaints to individuals with more social distance (e.g., acquaintances) than with less social distance (e.g., relatives). As for the first assumption, this study shows that American native speakers of English tend to use more external modifications when complaining to someone unfamiliar. However, the second assumption that non-native speakers would also be more verbose in unfamiliar situations seems to be inapplicable in this study. MLE group approximately produced the same number of external modification in the two distance levels. Conversely, American participant were more sensitive to social distance, and significantly used more external modifications when addressing someone they know.

This section has detailed the three groups' use of external modifications and investigated the influence of social power and social distance on their use. In general, the MLE participants used significantly more External modifications than did the AE participants, a tendency that was observed in situations 2, 3, and 5. The MLE participants exhibited a clear pattern in their use of external supportive moves: they diverged from the norms of AEs' complaints in almost all external modifications. They showed weak influence from the target culture, while they approximated the norms of Moroccan Arabic complaints, and showed a clear pragmatic transfer, especially in their use of evidence, substantiation, and closing. Negative pragmatic transfer was also evident in the effect of contextual variables; whereas the Moroccan participants (MLE and MAs) displayed more sensitivity to social status, the AE participants' use of external modification was significantly noted to be more under the influence social distance than social power. The following section will analyze and discuss the use of internal modifications among the three groups of participants.

Internal Modifications

Complaint Internal modifications are composed of downgraders and upgraders. As stated in the theoretical part, downgradersareused by a speaker in order to mitigate or soften their speech act realization (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p.19). Conversely, complaint upgradersare utilized by a speaker in order to strengthen or to intensify their complaint force (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989,p.19). There are two types of downgraders:Syntacticdowngraders which include strategies as interrogative *(e.g. Can you/I...? May you/I...?),* past tense modal verb forms *(e.g. Could you...? Would you...?)* and consultative device *(e.g. Would you mind*

if..., Do you think you could...?), while the other type is lexical downgraders which include politeness marker (e.g. please), downtoners*(e.g. possibly, perhaps, maybe),*subjectiviser(e.g. I think, I wonder, I'm afraid), and so on. On the other hand, Syntactic Upgraders include techniques such as overstaters (e.g. absolutely, purely), intensifier adverbials (e.g. quite, really, just, very), plus committer (e.g. I'm sure, certainly), lexical Intensifier (e.g. swear words), aggressive Interrogative (e.g. Why haven't you told me before?, and rhetorical appeal (e.g.Anyone can see that ..„It's common knowledge that..) (Blum-Kulka et all.,1989; Franklin & Hardin ,2012)

Blum-Kulka et all. (1989) who first coded these elements for internal modifications in their CCSARP, affirmed that they can be applicable only for English, and perhaps other Germanic languages.

Therefore, it is believed that Moroccan Arabic will not adhere to this classification of internal modifiers. Due to the interlanguage nature of this study, and the unavailability of any coding with respect to internal modifications in Moroccan Arabic, MA performances will not be taken into account in this section. (see Al-Momani, 2009; Suleiman 2010; for similar consideration).

Overall Use of Internal Modifications

Since our main concern in this interlanguage study is MLEs' performance of the speech act of complaining in the appropriate way in terms of politeness and face-saving techniques, we will consider the findings with regard to the use of downgraders and upgraders mitigating devices. According to Trosborg (1995), internal modifications may serve to mitigate the impact of the complaint. As shown in Table 19, the comparisons of the MLE and AE participants use of internal modifications showed that the MLE participants ($n = 181$) used significantly fewer modifications than did the AE participants ($n = 218$).

The results of Chi-square testing of the two groups' use of downgraders and upgraders in the five social categories confirmed the aforementioned tendency towards less internal modifications as AE participants surpassed significantly the MLE participants in the use of internal modifications in category 1 (N=58 and N=41, respectively), category 3 (N=50 and N=32, respectively), and category 5 (N=47 and N=29, respectively).

Surprisingly, the findings on table 19 seem to oppose previous studies (Blum-kulka&Olshtain,1986; Olshtain and Weinbach 1993), which claimed that nonnative speakers, in their attempt to sound less aggressive, might choose to utilize more downgraders in the hope of softening the face-threatening nature of complaints.

The results reveal that Moroccan learners of English are still in need for matching their language proficiency levels to their pragmatic and communicative competence, especially in handling a face-threatening speech act such as that of complaining. According to Trosborg (1995), the communicative act of complaining is an extremely difficult act to master even for advanced learners of English. This might stem from some reasons as suggested by Trosborg (1995) who adds that learners are not able to "combine individual strategies to establish an effective succession of strategies. They are also unable to support their complaints convincingly. They are less persistent in complaining than native speakers and give up too easily then faced with resistance from the accused." (370)

Internal Modifications by Strategy Types

Compared to AE participants, MLEs differed in their use of downgraders. They resorted to lexical modifier of politeness marker (N=49, 42.24%). In most cases, "please" was used. This choice was then followed by past tense modals (N=26, 22.41%) (Could, would).

As these two strategies constituted around 64.65% of the total internal modifications that the MLE participants used, their use of other internal modifications was largely marginal. The AE participants, on the other hand, overwhelmingly used past tense modals (N=71, 45.22%) to all other strategies, followed by consultative devices (N=32, 20.38%) politeness markers, and interrogatives in equal measure (N=15, 10.42%), cajoles (N=13, 8.28%), subjectivisers (N=9, 5,73) finally downtoners (N=2, 1.27%) ((see Table 20).

Table 20.
Percentage, Raw Frequency, and Chi-Square Values of Internal Modifications by Group

Internal Modifications		MLE		AE		MLE-AE
		N	%	N	%	X
Downgraders	**Interrogatives**	3	(2.59%)	15	(9.55%)	4.953*
	Pasttense modal	26	(22.41%)	71	(45.22%)	51.338*
	Consultative devices	11	(9.48%)	32	(20.38%)	36.721*
	Politeness marker	49	(42.24%)	15	(10.42%)	43.619*
	Downtoner	8	(6.90%)	2	(1.27%)	2.763
	Subjectiviser	15	(12.93%)	9	(5.73%)	3.626
Upgraders	**Cajolers**	4	(3.45%)	13	(8.28%)	36.562*

Total	**116 (100%)**	**157 (100%)**	**6.869***
Overstaters	6 (9.23%)	4 (6.78 %)	1.195

Intensifiers	36 (55.38%)	29 (49.15 %)	31.534*
Plus committer	5 (7.69%)	14 (23.73 %)	12.723*
Lexical intensifier	7 (10.77%)	3 (5.08 %)	3.779
Aggressive Interrogative	8 (12.31%)	4 (6.78 %)	1.327
rhetoricalappealer	3 (4.62%)	5 (8.47 %)	2.893
Total	**65 (100%)**	**59 (100%)**	2.098

Note. AE = native American English speakers, MLE = Moroccan learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic speakers.*p <0.05

The results indicated a significant deviation from the native speakers' norms in the preference for the type of complaint downgraders. The deviation can be seen in both underusing and overusing some more conventionalized downgraders. MLEs significantly underused interrogatives (e.g., "May I ask you….. ?"), past tense modals (e.g., " Would you, Could you ….?". The significant deviation was also observed in the overuse of politeness markers (e.g., "Please"). Interestingly, this can be due to negative pragmatic transfer. In a comparative study of Moroccan and English requests, offers, and thanks, Alaoui (2011) observes the MLEs current tendency in Moroccan Arabic as well. According to her, while modals and interrogatives are favored in English politeness, in Moroccan Arabic politeness markers are preferred. Es-Sobti (2004) also referred to this phenomenon, and explained that 'please' might probably represent a case of a negative transfer from French and Arabic subsequently (Je vousdemande pardon) (minfadlak)" (127).   Another explanation for The MLE participants' preference for the politeness marker over other types can be traced to the fact that "language learners' tendency to adhere to Grice's principle of clarity by using explicit and unambiguous means of expression, which is achieved with the use of the marker "please" (Al-Momani,2017,p.135). On the other hand, American participants varied their preferences and made use of other mi*tigating devices:*

14.Wow! I guess we need to hurry.. (subjectivisers) (S4, AE,#11)
15.This application is very important for me, you know (Cajoler).
Is there any way you can email it today? (interrogative) (S1, AE #21)

As for the distribution of upgraders, it is observed that MLE groups approximated the frequency of upgraders produced by the AE groups in four types of upgraders, namely, *Overstaters, lexical intensifiers, aggressive interrogative, and rhetorical appealer* . On the other hand, a significant deviation was noted in the production of two types of upgraders by MLE and AE groups, namely, *plus committers* (7.69% , 23.73 %, respectively), and *intensifiers* (55.38%, 49.15%, respectively). In this regard, MLE's tendency towards more *intensifiers* and *plus committers* compared to AE group can be explained by their pragmatic failure which is reflected in their way of mishandling directness in context.

Table 21
Percentage, Raw Frequency, and Chi-Square Values of syntactic and lexical downgraders and upgraders

Internal Modifications	MLE N %	AE N %	MLE-AE X
SyntacticDowngraders	44 (35.71%)	131 (81.95%)	8.539*
Lexical Downgraders	72 (64.26%)	26 (18.05%)	5.958*
Upraders	65 (46.10%)	59 (41.84%)	2.816

Note. AE = native American English speakers, MLE = Moroccan EFL learners, MA = native Moroccan Arabic speakers.*p <0.05

The comparison of syntactic and lexical modifiers used by the two groups of MLE and AE participants in table (21) attests that the two groups significantly differed, and favored completely different strategies. While the MLE group opted for more lexical modifiers (64.26%), The AE participants used more syntactic modifiers (81.05%). As for subjectivizers, most MLE participants used the expression " I think" , while AEs varied their

subjunctivizes and used the expression " I believe", " I guess", or " I suppose". This shows that MLE need to increase their linguistic repertoire. These results confirm our previous assumptions that MLEs tend to be over verbose

The overuse of lexical modifiers at the expense of lexical modifiers reveal a tendency toward wordiness to compensate for the lack of appropriateness. Moreover, the American participants were prone to combine more than one modification in their requests, a propensity that was not observed among MLE participants.

The MLEs' use of upgraders manifested a different pattern. The group approximated AE's frequency. The findings did not show any significant difference between the two groups in general.

Internal Modifications Interacting with Contextual Variables
After providing an overall analysis of the use of complaint internal modifications by the two groups of informants: MLE and AE participants, now we will delve into an investigation of   the effect of the contextual variables of social power and social distance on the three groups' use of internal modifiers.

Internal Modifications and Social Power
The results of comparing contextual variable of power across the three values (+ P vs. = P, +P vs. –P, and = P vs. –P) indicated that MLE shift from one power value to another was not significant. Conversely, the American participants used significantly more downgraders in cases of lower power (–P) than in equal power (=P) and higher power situations (+P). Yet, this tendency did not include the case of comparing (+P/=P). No significant result was observed between high and equal power contexts. (see Table 22). Strangely though it may seem, MLE participants' use of downgraders in the second situation was not significantly different from that of AE participants.

Having indicated that Moroccan society has collectivist tendencies (Hofstede, 2004), It is of relevance to review previous studies. These results seem to oppose whatSuleiman (2017) concludes. He   investigates Chinese EFL learners interlanguage tendencies, and plainly states that   "Collectivist culture stresses strong cohesion within groups … that are expected to protect and support each other, to be open to share ideas and express true feelings" (71). Suleiman (2017) attempts to confirm his claim by his findings which reported Chinese EFL learners' tendency toward producing less downgraders compared to native speakers of English. With regard to MLE use of more downgraders, this pattern can be either attributed to an inability to produce enough internal modifications, or animproving tendency towards nativelike norms.

Table22
Influence of Social Power on Use of Downgraders by Group

Group	+P %	=P %	-P %	+P/=P χ^2	+P/-P χ^2	=P/-P χ^2
AE	27.55%	30.61%	41.84%	0.038	4.503*	5.861*
MLE	30.14%	32.88%	36.99%	0.368	0.398	0.033

Note. AE = American English speakers, MLE = Moroccan learners of English. (+P) = speaker has more social H), (=P) = speaker and hearer have equal social power (S = H), (–P) = speaker has less social power than hearer (S < H).*p <0.05

Yet, based on the overall analysis of the use of downgraders, and which showed that there is a significant difference between MLE and AE participant, it can be deduced that MLEs are not able to produce the desirable quality and quantity of internal modifications. So, In addition to L1 cultural influence, MLEs realization of complaints is affected by the limited repertoire of linguistic forms in English. They cannot vary their use of downgraders as American native speakers. This result is consistent with studies on other speech acts which reported that English native speakers produced significantly more downgraders than EFL learners (eg., Al-Momani, 2009; Hassal, 2001; Hendriks, 2008).

The SPSS comparison of the independent variable of social distance and its effect on the use of downgraders indicated that the MLE participants used significantly more downgraders when complaining to someone they do not know than to someone they know.

Table23
Influence of Social Distance on Use of Downgraders by Group

Group	+ Distance %	- Distance %	+D/-D χ^2
AE	40.54%	59.46%	12.530*
MLE	55.06%	44.94%	9.806*

Note. AE = American speakers of English, MLE = Moroccan Learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic speakers . + distance = complainer and complainee know each other, - distance = complainer and complainee do not know each other. *p <0.05

The American participants also reached the threshold level of significance (p <0.05), but with a completely different pattern with the use of more downgraders in cases of low distance than in high distance contexts. (see Table 23).

On the whole, downgraders were the most highly used internal modifiers among the two groups, MLE: (64.09%) downgraders Vs (35.91%) upgraders, and AE: (72.35%) 0f downgraders/ (27.19%) of upgraders. However, It is obvious that the Moroccan EFL learners used more upgraders than did the American subjects, which may raise concern over the pragmatic awareness of the interlanguage subjects in this study, and their ability to handle the facework with the complainee.

II.   Conclusion

From a cross-cultural perspective, it is of paramount importance to delve into how Moroccan and Americans cultures perceive power and distance. The Moroccan Arabic participants in our study displayed a sensitivity towards social power, and on many occasions, it has been found out that this sensitivity was transferred to MLE participants. Having stated so, this confirms the fact that Moroccan society is a hierarchical one. It is more influenced by power relationships among its members (Ansari, 2011; Hofstede, 2010). This cultural filter can reflect different hierarchies of values. In contrast, the AE participants' levels of directness and use of external and internal modifications was influenced more by social distance and, to a lesser extent, by social power. These results support the classification of American culture as a horizontal one (Al-Momani, 2009; Shavitt, 2006). Horizontal cultures are sensitive more to familiarity than to social power (Beebe et al., 1990; Gudykunst& Ting-Toomey, 1988).

As for MLE, there were more deviations than similarities from the norms adopted by AEs. As stated previously, there were some developmental patterns with regard to MLEs' use directness level and perception of contextual variables. However, a tendency towards Moroccan Arabic norms was apparent at the level of directness, and at the level of showing sensitivity to contextual variables power. Latif (2014) concludes that Moroccan ESL learners transferred their Moroccan style-shifting patterns into English by selecting different strategies depending on the speaker's social status in relationship to the hearer.

The findings are not surprising given the fact that getting rid of the linguistic and pragmatic interference of L1 and selecting the most appropriate speech act strategy is a common tendency among learners.Communicating effectively requires advanced pragmatic awareness of the target language. Consequently, these results parallel previous findings regarding the problematic nature of modifications for Moroccan EFL learners.

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