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Disagreement Realizations: Some Methodological Concerns

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Abstract

Interlanguage pragmatics is concerned with how nonnative speakers use and develop their L2 pragmatic competence (Kasper 1996: 145). In this context, realizations of face threatening speech acts that such speakers perform are examined and contrasted with those of native speakers of the same target language. This has been done with a view to minimizing communication breakdowns and developing a better mutual cross-cultural understanding. Yet, despite the large number of studies conducted in this field, only a few have manage to achieve their purpose. This is often the case due to some methodological flaws that characterize such studies. The current study sheds light on these methodological flaws so that future research yields more representative, credible and informative findings. In particular, the researcher provides a critique of the methodological perspectives adopted in contrastive cross-cultural research on disagreement realizations by reviewing eight studies that have examined disagreement strategies in English by speakers of different language backgrounds.

Keywords: Communication, Disagreement strategies, EFL, ESL, Interlanguage pragmatics, Methodological concerns, Politeness, Speech acts

1. Introduction

We human beings are odd compared with our nearest animal relatives. Unlike them, we can say what we want, when we want. All normal humans can produce and understand any number of new words and sentences. Humans use the multiple options of language often without thinking. But blindly, they sometimes fall into its traps. They are like spiders who exploit their webs, but themselves get caught in the sticky strands (Aitchison, 1997, p. 80)

It is no secret that in a world full of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and social diversity like that of ours, the likelihood of cross-cultural miscommunications to occur is great since each community has its own social rules of speaking (Hymes, 1967), but how these rules materialize on the ground and what factors lead to communication breakdowns among L2 learners and native speakers are questions that have got to be answered. Likewise, it is not fully known why L2 learners often face difficulties when they want to perform acts like requesting, disagreeing, apologizing, among others, in real-life communications in the target language in spite of learning the grammatical and formal structures of these acts in schools and universities. These puzzling and paradoxical questions and many others have attracted the interest of linguists from all over the world in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (e.g. Austin, 1962; Grice, 1975; Searle, 1975; Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Locher, 2004).

Interlanguage pragmatics is concerned with how nonnative speakers use and develop their L2 pragmatic competence (Kasper, 1996, p.145). In this context, realizations of face threatening speech acts that such speakers perform are examined and contrasted with those of native speakers of the same target language. This has been done with a view to minimizing communication breakdowns and developing a better mutual international understanding. Yet, despite the large number of studies conducted in this field, only a few have manage to achieve their purpose. This is often the case due to some methodological flaws that characterize such studies. When interlocutors communicate, many variables tend to intervene. These include, status, distance, power, topic, gender differences, cultural differences, among others. In addition to these variables, there is the data collection tool itself that is used. Is the data that is collected natural, that is recorded or written spontaneous conversations or is it artificial like for instance data collected via a role play or a discourse completion task? Even when it comes to artificial tools like a discourse completion task, is it written or recorded? Each tool makes a difference.

Unfortunately, not all studies that examine speech act realizations in general and face-threatening speech acts realizations in particular consider these variables thoroughly in their sampling and data collection procedures. In fact, failing to take these variables seriously into account may impact the findings of the study to the extent that they become unrepresentative or misleading. Apparently, in face-threatening acts like disagreement, every variable of those mentioned above matters. As for status, for instance, disagreeing with your boss may turn out to be different from disagreeing with your best friend or an employee that you are in charge of. In the first case, your boss is superior to you, your best friend is of an equal status and the employee who works for you is of an inferior status. Distance also

matters. The way you disagree with a close friend in your class may turn out to be different from the way you disagree with a classmate that you barely know. On the face of it, your, as an interlocutor, strategy should not be different because you and your communicative partners are both of an equal status, but because things are not always what they seem to be, here your relationship with each other may determine how you communicate and how you disagree. Topic could matter as well. The way you disagree with somebody who accuses you of cheating may turn out to be different from the way you disagree with the same person's statement about the best movie ever. In the first case, your failure to defend yourself may cause a serious threat to your face. In the latter scenario, there are no risks, it is only a matter of personal preference. Gender is yet another important variable. The way men disagree with other men may turn out to be different from the way men disagree with women, or the way women disagree with each other. Cultural differences may cause interlocutors to reach mutual understanding or may lead to communication breakdowns. Communication norms and politeness rules vary from culture to another. Some cultures are more direct than other cultures. Finally, the data elicitation tool a researcher uses affect the validity of the findings. Made up scenarios and role plays are not really representative of real-life speech acts realizations in general and face-threatening speech acts realizations in particular. In some data elicitation tools like written discourse completion tasks (WDCT), respondents may sometimes be asked to disagree with statements that they do not actually disagree with. Here, they are left with no choice but to write a disagreeing response, perhaps a fake one due to different reasons, one of which is that they have plenty of time to think and re-think whereas in a real conversation, they have no options but to be spontaneous. In light of the foregoing, this study attempts to provide a critique of the methodological perspectives adopted in contrastive cross-cultural research on disagreement realizations by reviewing eight studies that have examined disagreement strategies in English by speakers of different language backgrounds. However, before proceeding, a brief account of disagreement and its definition is provided.

Disagreement is defined as the "expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker" (Sifianou, 2012, p.1554). Since this act involves expressing an opposing view to that of the speaker, it constitutes a face-threatening act. More often, disagreement is a 'negatively affective speech act' (Walkinshaw, 2009) or a 'dispreferred' speech act (Sacks, 1987). Earlier research (see Kreutel, 2007) has shown that disagreement strategies that are used by native speakers often differ in complexity from those used by L2 learners.

2. Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into four sub-sections. In 2.1, three studies that compared the disagreement realizations of EFL learners with those of English native speakers are reviewed and critiqued, while in 2.2, three studies that examined the disagreement realizations of EFL learners are reviewed and critiqued. In section 2.3, disagreement strategies by native speakers of English and speakers of other languages are reviewed and critiqued. Recommendations for further research are outlined in section 2.4.

2.1 Comparison of Disagreement Strategies as Used by English Native Speakers and EFL learners

2.1.1 Disagreement Strategies by American Speakers of English and Japanese EFL Learners

Beebe and Takahashi (1989) examined the way Americans and Japanese perform face-threatening speech acts like disagreement and chastisement in English. The study was motivated by a stereotype not very much different from the one investigated by LoCastro (1986), which assumes that Japanese are indirect while Americans are direct in performing those speech acts. The researchers used two data elicitation tools. The first was note-taking which was employed to collect natural speech. Here, the researchers wrote a word-for-word transcription of the interactions that took place. It seems that the researchers were not happy with this method, and thus they resorted to a discourse completion test. This took the form of a written role-play questionnaire in which respondents were requested to write what they would say in each scenario, and if, for instance, they had nothing to say, they were allowed to opt out. The questionnaire "consisted of 12 items-two situations each of the following: correction, disagreement, chastisement, an embarrassing announcement, and two other speech acts as controls." Each item involved two situations, one in which an inferior disagrees with a superior and another in which the reverse happens. The situations were presented in a random order. 15 native speakers of English and 15 native speakers of Japanese filled out the questionnaire. The Japanese respondents had high-intermediate to advanced levels of ESL.

The findings revealed that when disagreeing with a lower-status interlocutor, Japanese were more likely to express blunt criticism than Americans. For instance, in one situation in which respondents assumed the role of corporate executive who needed to express disagreement with a plan proposed by an assistant, "85% criticized the lower-status person's plan, whereas only 7 out of 14 Americans (50%) did so" (ibid, p. 204). LoCastro (1986) did not take this variable of status into consideration in her study and thus, such a finding was not reported. Further, Americans tended to use more softeners and positive remarks when disagreeing with a higher-status interlocutor. Japanese, on the other hand, used more explicit expressions. Based on this, the findings provided evidence that Americans are not always more direct than Japanese in stating disagreement as the stereotype perpetuated. In fact, it is the other way round. Apparently, the findings of this study go against those of LoCastro (1986). Two factors may have led to this. The first factor has to do with variation in the topics chosen, while the second has to do with threat seriousness and power relations.

Though Beebe and Takahashi (1989) collected their data in two ways, i.e., (1) through writing notes and word-for-word transcriptions of naturally occurring instances of disagreement and chastisement, and (2) through using a written discourse completion task (WDCT), their study still suffered from some methodological limitations. The first has to do with what Spencer-Qatey (2004, p. 245) called the 'faultiness of memory' as a tool for providing accurate transcriptions. Using word-for-word recall as a tool can provide accurate transcriptions particularly when the conversations and turns are relatively short. But when they are long, this tool cannot capture all details, noting that transcriptions are made under

time pressure. In actuality, many details can be lost here and there like hesitations, moments of silence, and changes in intonation, among others. Even providing transcriptions of the exact words that were said may turn out to be challenging.

Another methodological concern to be highlighted here is the exclusion of scenarios in which respondents are of an equal status whether they are close or distant in the relationship. A third methodological concern has to do with the artificial nature of discourse completion tasks. The fact that Japanese speakers of English seemed to be more explicit in their disagreements with superiors than Americans could have been the result of training. According to Selinker (cited in Beebe and Takahashi, 1990, p. 208), “ESL classes in Japan stress the need for Japanese to be more direct and explicit in ESL than they are in Japanese. Thus, some of their directness may be a transfer of training.”

Another problem that may be cited here with regards to the use of discourse completions tests is that this tool may not provide spontaneous natural responses because respondents are given time to think before they are asked to write down their responses instead of saying them directly and openly. In actual conversations, interactants do not express their disagreements or chastisement in writing, but they do so through speaking. Giving respondents a lot of time to think and write their replies may not be representative of the dynamic nature of real-life communications in which speakers have to express their thoughts spontaneously on the spot. Similar to the LoCastro’s study, Beebe and Takahashi (1990) did not provide any demographic data about their respondents. One does not know if they are from an urban area or a rural one. Nor does one know if they work or not. Age as well is not incorporated though it is an important factor along with gender. Yet, despite these methodological limitations, their work is of great significance and is worthy of praise because they took many of the commonly held stereotypes about Japanese and Americans’ politeness norms and communication strategies to the test and provided beneficial insights into their communication styles and the similarities and differences that exist in their realizations of disagreements and chastisement.

2.1.2 Disagreement Strategies by American Speakers of English and Egyptian EFL Learners

In 2013, Fernandez (2013) investigated how Egyptian EFL learners disagree. To achieve this, she identified the strategies of disagreement used by Egyptian EFL learners in naturally elicited data and contrasted them with those employed by American English speakers. Further, the study aimed at finding if variables like data collection method and topic significantly affect the nature of disagreement strategies. For this, Fernandez used two data collection methods. In the first method, eight Facebook statuses were selected. They were divided into “polemic topics including politics, culture, human rights and less polemic ones dealing with free-time activities and personal tastes” (Fernandez, 2013, p.20). These statuses were then shared twice by different participants. There were 38 users who expressed disagreement when responding to the topics discussed in the different statuses. Their disagreement strategies were analyzed qualitatively in light of the frameworks suggested by Pomerantz (1984), Rose-Miller (2000) and Kreutel (2007).

Then, the 38 participants were administered a WDCT to investigate the possible differences in the disagreement strategies employed depending on the method of data collection (Fernandez, 2013, p.21). The WDCT had the eight statuses that were posted on Facebook and the participants were requested to comment on these statuses by disagreeing as if they would with a friend on Facebook (Fernandez, 2013, p.21).

In order to identify the differences in disagreement strategies between Egyptian learners of English and American English speakers, the same WDCT was administered to 26 native speakers of American English. The researcher replaced all the Egyptian culture-specific content with information relevant to the American culture since the goal was not to investigate how Americans disagree with statements related to another culture, but to examine how they would disagree when they deal with information relevant to their own culture (Fernandez, 2013, p.22). Findings revealed that Egyptian subjects who disagreed via Facebook resorted to strong disagreement strategies which included "bare negative forms like no, performatives such as I disagree, blunt statement of the opposite, rhetorical questions, sarcasm, oralization strategies and emoticons" (Fernandez, 2013, p.26). They also used mitigated disagreement strategies like 'token agreements, hedges, requests for clarification, expressions of regret, positive remarks, suggestions, giving explanations, onomatopoeia, humor, emoticons, and codeswitching.' When disagreement strategies in the Discourse Completion Test were compared with those on Facebook, the findings revealed that some strong disagreement strategies were used such as the "use of the bare negative, the performative and sarcasm were slightly more frequent on the DCT" (Fernandes, 2013, p.42). Further, the results showed that the use of blunt responses, insults, or sarcasm was more common in the WDCT than on Facebook. Fernandez (2013) notes that speakers [native and non-native alike] seem to be "more reluctant to use insults or negative judgments that might threaten their friends' positive face in real interaction [like that which takes place on Facebook]. With reference to the differences in disagreement strategies between the two groups of subjects, the findings showed that Egyptians used mitigated disagreement expressions like the use of hedges and token agreement more often than the Americans (Fernandez, 2013, p.64). Topic also played an important role in determining the type of the strategy to be used. When the topics are highly controversial, both Egyptians and native speakers of American English resorted to mitigation.

Although Fernandez's study represented a methodological improvement over some earlier studies by incorporating Facebook — a medium in which semi-natural-conversations take place —into its data collection procedures, there are still some methodological limitations that need to be highlighted. The fact that the 38 users who expressed their disagreement on Facebook did so to statuses shared by their friends limited the scope of the study to disagreement with peers only. Consequently, the data collected through this medium cannot be considered representative or informative because the same users might have used different strategies had they needed to disagree with higher-status interlocutors or even lower-status ones in the same medium. Further, comments on Facebook are recorded and documented. They are public and can easily be accessed at any time. Apparently, disagreeing with a statement in a post or a status is not as private as disagreeing with a friend in a personal

message. In fact, it is more like disagreeing with a speaker in a public meeting and thus it is not like that disagreement which takes place daily between two or three interlocutors. Accordingly, variables like the power and status of the writer of the post or status with whom we are disagreeing may need to be taken into account with extra caution and care.

Another methodological concern that needs to be brought to the fore is that the researcher did not have the opportunity to compare how American speakers could have responded to these statuses on Facebook. Instead, the 26 native speakers of English that the researcher had access to in her study, completed a written discourse completion task that had these statuses. Here another problem arises. The way these native speakers of English disagree on Facebook with their peers may be different. Many variables may affect their choice of strategy. One of these variables could relate to time limitations in the discourse completion task compared to the free time that they have when they are not taking a test. Another variable that could affect their choice of the strategy is the writer's comments to other users. They have plenty of time to analyze the writer's language and content before they respond. Is he or she confrontational, for instance, or diplomatic in responses? These variables may all intervene, making it not a straightforward thing to make generalizations about disagreement on Facebook.

The last point that may be raised here about the use of WDCT is that since the language used in computer-mediated-communications is a hybrid form that has characteristics of both writing and speaking (see Al-Sa'di and Hamdan, 2005; Denis, 2008; Hamdan, 2012), it might have been a better choice had the researcher recorded the subjects' responses instead of giving them time to write them down.

2.1.3 Disagreement strategies by Indonesian EFL learners and Australian Speakers of English

To investigate the similarities and differences between the Indonesian EFL learners and native speakers of English, Ramadhani (2012) compared the disagreement realizations of 20 Indonesian EFL learners with those of 20 Australian students studying in Indonesia. All participated ranged in age from 19 to 25. The Australian respondents were students in the Indonesian Language and Culture Learning Service (INCULS) program in the Faculty of Cultural Sciences. Ramahdani (2012) also examined the 'semantic formulae' that the two groups use with different interlocutors to see whether variables like familiarity, status and age make a difference. The data were collected via a discourse completion task that consisted of 10 situations, with differences between them with regard to familiarity, status, and age. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, using the refusal classification introduced by Beebe et al. (1990). According to Ramahdani (2012), both groups use 'statement of specific reason for noncompliance' the most when they disagree with their interlocutors. However, Australian learners (AL) employ this strategy more than Indonesian EFL learners. Further, the findings show that asking for clarification is the second most used strategy by the Australians whereas it was using terms of address for the Indonesians. Moreover, Australian students used more statements of negative feelings while Indonesian EFL learners used more statements of regret. Making or giving suggestions is another strategy that used by both groups. Australian students used expressions of positive opinion more frequently than Indonesian EFL learners. As for the familiarity variable, Indonesian EFL learners used more

statements of regret with unfamiliar interlocutors and fewer of them with familiar ones. The variable of familiarity does not seem to affect Australian students' choices with regard to the use 'statements of regret'. In relation to the status variable, Indonesian EFL learners used statements of regret more with higher status interlocutors than with lower status ones. In contrast, Australian students used statements of regret equally with both higher and lower status interlocutors. Indonesian EFL learners used statements of gratitude more than Australian students. Further, Indonesian EFL learners used statement of gratitude more often with higher status interlocutors than with lower status ones. Australian students, on the other hand, did not use these expressions with interlocutors of different status. As for the use of positive opinion, Australian students used this strategy most with higher status interlocutors, followed by less use with lower status interlocutors and least use with equal status ones. In contrast, Indonesian EFL learners used this strategy most with lower status interlocutors, followed by less use with higher status interlocutors. They did not use this strategy with those of equal status.

Ramadhani's work, similar to studies mentioned earlier, has some methodological perspectives that need to be highlighted. The first concern relates to the Australian sample who were selected from Australians living and studying in Indonesia. No measures were taken to ensure that their disagreement strategies were the same as those of Australians living in Australia! They might have formed some sort of a hybrid system that combines elements of both Indonesian and Australian cultures. It is not really uncommon that when people move from one place to another, they try to accommodate to the customs and norms of the new place. In order to make sure that the data are representative, disagreement realizations of Australians in Australia should first be examined and then compared with those of Australians studying in Indonesia.

Another limitation has to do with the data collection procedure. There are cultural differences between Indonesians on one hand and Australians on the other. In order to have a representative set of data, the situations used in the discourse completion task should be adapted to suit the cultural backgrounds of the subjects. Unfortunately, this point is sometimes neglected. Unless such adaptation is made, the collected data cannot be generalized because what is common and accepted in one culture may be strange and unaccepted in another. Further, written DCTs cannot reflect paralinguistic cues like intonation, stress, silence, hesitation among other. Data collected by means of WDTC are rather artificial and as such cannot be considered representative.

2.2 Non-native EFL Learners' Disagreement Strategies

2.2.1 Indonesian EFL Learners

In another study of Indonesian EFL learners' disagreement strategies, yet one of a different scope from that of Ramadhani (2012), Sofwan and Suwignyo (2011) examine the factors that influence the choice of disagreement made by Indonesian EFL learners. The sample of their study consisted of 60 college students of English, distributed evenly between first and third year; 15 males and 15 females were chosen from each year. The researchers regarded first year students to represent low proficiency level while regarding third year students to

represent high proficiency level. They ranged in age from 20 to 30. The researchers used two data collection methods. The first is a discourse completion task which consisted of 24 questions and had different conversational situations like lecturer-student, parent-child, manager-clerk, friend-friend, and husband-wife. Variables like social status and personal and non-personal involvement were singled out as 'moderator variables'. "Personal involvement is related to the opinions concerning a particular person rather than a group or an organization and non-personal involvement is vice versa" (ibid, p.45). Role plays were referred to as the contained 'simulations of communicative encounters'. Subjects were given cards that have the roles they needed to act. Then, they were given time to read the roles and to ask for any clarification they deem necessary about the vocabulary or the situation. As for classifying disagreement strategies, Sofwan and Suwignyo (2011) used Muntigl and Turnbull (1998)'s taxonomy.

With reference to the data collected through the WDCT, the findings show that both first and third year students have used 'contradiction' throughout all situations. As for disagreement related to personal involvement, first year students used more 'contradictions' than third year students. However, when it comes to non-personal involvement, third year students made more use of contradiction than first year students. The second most used strategy by both first and third year students is 'counterclaim'. Findings from role plays were similar to those from the WDCT. Both first and third year students produced 'contradiction' the most when they expressed their disagreements in all situations. However, contrary to the findings from the WDCT, here third year students used 'contradiction' more dominantly than first year students. Similar to the data from the WDCT, 'counterclaim' turned out to be the second most used strategy by both first and third year students. "The data showed that there is no significant difference between first year and third year students in realizing disagreement related to either personal or non-personal involvement factors" (ibid, p. 48). When using 'contradiction' as their disagreement strategy, students produced contradiction markers like 'no, I disagree', 'I don't think so', and 'I don't agree'. 'Challenging' and 'irrelevancy claims' were the least used by both groups. The researchers concluded that "there is no great difference in the realization of the disagreement strategies used by [the two groups of students which] indicate some development of pragmatic competence" (ibid, p.55).

The study conducted by Sofwan and Suwignyo (2011) is significant, but it also has some methodological limitations that impacted its findings negatively. The first limitation relates to the sampling procedure itself. The writers claim that the two study groups examined did not use significantly different disagreement strategies. This conclusion is based on the writers' impressionistic classification of the two study groups as showing different proficiency levels (low and high). In reality, this subjective distinction between the two groups was not supported by any independent language proficiency test. Thus, the reported lack of significant differences between the two groups in the used disagreement strategies may turn out to be ascribed to a similar lack of significant difference in the English proficiency level of the two groups had an independent test been used. EFL learners of the same proficiency level, particularly if low, may not possess a different language content that can show up in using different disagreement strategies.

Another limitation has to do with the classification used by the researchers to categorize disagreements. It recognizes only four disagreement strategies, while we, as users of language, use multiple strategies which cannot be confined to only those that are highlighted in the study. Mutingl and Turnbull (1998) did a phenomenal job when they suggested this classification, but it cannot represent all disagreement strategies that language users from all around the world use. In fact, there is a need for more classifications to be developed, but until then, an eclectic taxonomy based on Mutingle and Turbull's (1998) classification in addition to that of others like Rees-Miller (2000), Locher (2004), and Kreutel (2007) among others, could be used.

The third and last limitation has to do with the use of WDCTs and role plays as methods of data collection instead of using naturally occurring data. Unfortunately, these methods do not yield representative data. In real-life interactions, variables like status and personal or non-personal involvement drastically affect the way people express their disagreements.

2.2.2 Iranian EFL learners

Behnam and Niroomand (2011, p.204) investigated how power relations can influence politeness strategies that are used in disagreement among Iranian EFL learners. To this end, the researchers used a written discourse completion test (WDCT) which was completed by 40 Iranian EFL learners, categorized into two proficiency levels (intermediate and upper-mediate). The WDCT comprised five scenarios in which the subjects were supposed to disagree with "two higher statuses, two with peers and one lower status" (ibid: 204). The scenarios which covered a large variety of topics were borrowed from two studies that dealt with disagreement; namely, Takahashi and Beebe (1993) and Guodong and Jing (2005). The researchers modified the scenarios to suit the Iranian culture. For data analysis, the researchers used Muntigl and Turnbull (1998)'s taxonomy. The study showed that there was, indeed, a connection between the use of certain politeness strategies and power relations. For instance, when disagreeing with superiors, upper-mediate learners resort to using the least aggravating disagreeing strategies, namely; counterclaims and contradictions more than any other strategies. Further, it revealed that when learners encounter a situation in which they found themselves forced to disagree, they were "more sensitive to the use of more politeness strategies in disagreeing to high status people than low status people" (ibid, p. 213). Thus, the findings concur with what has been reported in the literature (Brown and Levinson, 1987) that variables such as "power relationships, social distance and degree of imposition constrain communication universally, but the value of these factors vary from context to context" (ibid, p. 213).

Despite the significance of this study, it also has its share of limitations. The first has to do with the sampling and the data elicitation tool. As mentioned earlier, WDCTs bring artificial data which may not be representative depending on a number of variables like the number of respondents, the number of scenarios and topics and the differences in status and distance between the hypothetical interlocutors, among others. Further, the findings of the study cannot be generalized because of age and gender-bias; in fact, its subjects are young university students who are mostly women, 35 out 40. In life, experience plays a role in the

way people communicate and view the world, and the way they reason, argue and disagree. Older people who have longer experience, who come from different occupational backgrounds may use disagreement strategies that differ in their characteristics from those of university students. Another point that needs to be mentioned relates to the fact that respondents were given time to plan and write their responses, something that does not usually take place in real-life communication. One more concern has to do with the number of the respondents and scenarios that are included. For the data to be informative and representative, first, a larger number of respondents is needed. Second, a larger set of various scenarios needs to be provided. Five scenarios are indicative, but may not necessarily be representative, as they do not give respondents much of an option.

2.2.3 Egyptian EFL Learners

Bakry (2015, p.2) examined "the interface of power and politeness strategies in disagreement within the context of Egyptian advanced EFL classrooms." In particular, she investigated the role of the topic and power relations in the choice of the disagreement strategy. The researcher collected her data through observing and video- taping discussions in which both students and professors were involved in two Business English classes in the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport. Bakry (2015, p.33) "paid six visits to [the two classes] each over a period of three weeks, with a total of 18 hours of observation." Before videotaping the discussions of the 55 students, 22 males and 32 females, the researcher took the consent of both professors and students and asked all students to fill two questionnaires. The first questionnaire elicited information about their background knowledge of English while the second elicited information about their relationships with their peers. The researcher also conducted interviews with ten of these students, five males and five females, and asked them questions about their disagreement strategies to identify their motives for disagreeing with their instructors as well as their peers.

Bakry's (2015) study demonstrated a great methodological improvement compared with earlier studies that depended only on WDCTs. Her study is based on interactional data, which adds a lot of credibility to it. Yet, in spite of using naturally occurring data, one concern remains. The language used in classrooms is not like that used in daily communications by nonnative speakers of English elsewhere. The classroom language is more controlled and more formal. Furthermore, several psychological factors may affect students' choices like self-esteem, anxiety and inhibition.

Yet, despite that methodological concern, Bakry's (2015) study is of great significance because it does not only provide a quantitative analysis of the disagreement strategies that are employed by Egyptian EFL students, but it also provides a qualitative analysis that offers insights into the factors which govern students' choice of a particular strategy. According to Bakry (2015, p. 42), when students disagreed with their teachers, the strategies they used included " (a) softened disagreement, under which come positive and negative politeness strategies as well as softened contradictions, (b) neither softened nor strengthened disagreements, and (c) aggravated disagreement in which students challenged the teachers' stances either through their facial expressions or intonation." The positive politeness

strategies that they used with their teachers included the use of humor, in group language in addition to token agreements. It should be noted here that though using humor to soften disagreement with instructors is acceptable by teachers as revealed in this study, it may not be accepted in other societies and other cultures. As for negative politeness strategies that were used by students when disagreeing with their teachers, these included the use of hedges and counterclaims. Finally, at some points, depending on the topic and the context, students used aggravated disagreement either through challenging questions or through L1 or L2 discourse markers like 'of course' as in ' of course, I am not cheating'. Moving to students' disagreement strategies towards their peers, the findings revealed that their positive politeness strategies involved the use of humor and token agreements while their negative politeness strategies involved the use of counterclaims and hedges. In addition to these two strategies, students did not resort to softened or mitigated disagreements through the use of contradictions.

In addition, Bakry's (2015) data revealed students' preference for the use of negative politeness with their peers. On the face of it, this finding may seem to be strange since the norm in such conditions is for students to use positive politeness more frequently since they are of the same social status, but Bakry (2015, p.84), however, attributes this "to the distant social distance and [students'] intimidation to oppose their peers in the presence of the teacher."

2.3 Disagreement strategies by native speakers of English and speakers of other languages

2.3.1 Disagreement Strategies by American Speakers of English and Chinese Mandarin Speakers

Guodong and Jing (2005) compared and contrasted disagreement strategies for politeness between Chinese Mandarin speakers and speakers of American English. For this purpose, they devised a written discourse completion task (WDCT) which consisted of five disagreement scenarios. College students in USA and Chinese mainland were asked to fill the WDCT with what they would say when they disagree with three peers, one higher-status interlocutor and one lower-status interlocutor. The WDCT was completed by 82 English native speakers of American college students (47 females and 35 males), and 96 Chinese respondents (37 females and 58 males) who were all non-English major students at the University of Science and Technology of China.

To detect and count disagreement strategies, of Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998) taxonomy, which recognizes four types of disagreement only, viz., irrelevancy claim, challenge, contradictions and counterclaim, was applied. Guodong and Jing (2005) report that the Chinese students tend to employ more politeness strategies and use more address forms when they disagree with higher-status interlocutors than the American students do. That is, instead of using the pronoun 'you', when disagreeing with a higher-status interlocutor, the Chinese students would opt for the use of address forms like 'teacher' among others. While only 3.7% of the American respondents used address forms like 'sir' or ma'am' when disagreeing with superiors, about 28% Chinese undergraduates used forms of address like "lao-shi ('teacher'), jiao-shou ('professor'), or dao-shi ('supervisor') before defending themselves." (ibid, p. 6) As

for disagreement with peers, the researchers note that with the increase of social distance (from friend to classmate to stranger), the contradictory statements from American students increase while their politeness strategies decrease. When it comes to the Chinese, on the other hand, the results are just the opposite. The rates of disagreement would decrease with the increase of social distance. This finding shows that Chinese students tend to seek more harmony as the social distance increases, while Americans show more interested in stating their opinions. According to Triandis and Singelis (cited in Guodong and Jing, 2005, p.7), "East Asian collectivists are especially eager to maintain harmonious relationships while individualists from the U. S. A. are more concerned with clearly giving opinions." Further, Guodong and Jing (2005) concluded that Chinese students apply more contradictory statement with their sisters than their American peers (ibid: 8). This is ascribed to the belief that Chinese males view themselves as superior to their sisters. In addition, the study suggested that female respondents in general were more sensitive to politeness; they also tended to incorporate more politeness strategies in their speech than males.

This study has important implications to both ESL and EFL teaching and learning. One of these implications is that researchers need "to probe into specific cultures for the exploitation of concrete speech acts and to identify the different patterns and discourse strategies [since] the connotation of politeness may vary across culture and gender]" (ibid, p. 10). Yet, despite the significance of this study, there are some methodological concerns that need to be highlighted here. The first methodological concern has to do with the data elicitation tool itself that has been used. Since, the study aims to make generalizations about speech, then, asking respondents to write what they would say instead may not provide informative and representative data. The scenarios are made up, but in daily communications, people do not write what they want to say, but utter what they have in mind spontaneously. In Cohen and Olshtain's words (1994, p. 148), discourse completion "is a projective measure of speaking and so the cognitive processes involved in producing utterances in response to this elicitation device may not truly reflect those used when having to speak relatively naturally." Another concern that is related to the data elicitation tool has to do with the division of scenarios. By giving respondents only one situation for disagreeing with higher and lower status interlocutors, the researchers might have constrained their subjects and forced them to do something they do not want to do. They may not, for instance, feel that this scenario requires that they disagree, but since they cannot opt out, they have no choice but to fake a response. Further, when questioned about their responses in role plays or discourse completion tasks, some respondents "… make it clear that they have never had to perform that speech act in that situation"(Cohen and Olshtain, 1994, p. 152). To make the findings more informative, it may be a good idea to ask respondents who filled the discourse completion tasks to read their responses if they are written, or listen to them if they are recorded, and provide a retrospective verbal report on their performance. They can, for instance, talk about how realistic they felt their responses were, what linguistic difficulties they faced, and what reasons made them come up with these responses.

2.3.2 Disagreement by Japanese and American Speakers of English

In an early study on the speech acts of agreement and disagreement, LoCastro (1986) examined the validity of the assumption that speech acts are universal or realized universally (Austin, 1962; Frazer 1978) by contrasting Japanese and American English to see whether speakers of both languages exhibit similarities or differences in the way they agree and disagree. She also investigated the "stereotype that says that Japanese will always agree with whatever is said to maintain social harmony, whereas Americans will aggressively state their true feelings in all situations" (LoCastro, 1986, p.8). To this end, and in order to examine Japanese respondents' strategies of agreement and disagreement, she asked one of her students, a native speaker of Japanese who studies anthropology and linguistics, to quire his "fellow students of the same year and major about food tastes while surreptitiously recording their responses" (ibid, p.10). He told them that he is just helping a friend who was asked to survey undergraduate students about their food tastes. She chose this method after consulting two of her colleagues, a sociolinguist and an anthropologist, who recommended her not to use an on the street interview or a questionnaire as Japanese "tend to respond on a questionnaire according to their perception of what the writer of the questionnaire wants" (ibid, p. 10). She has chosen food as the topic because she and her colleagues felt that it is a non-controversial topic, compared to religion or politics, and, thus, may lead to natural responses and involve less personal face or identity. LoCastro's Japanese assistant was involved in the discussion with his Japanese colleagues about Avocado and their food preferences. As for speakers of American English, she questioned and interviewed American EFL teachers about their food preferences, but it is important to mention here that some of those interviewed have been staying in Japan for a while, an extraneous variable which might have impacted their responses. The researcher asked both Japanese and American respondents two questions about avocados. The first one is 'Don't you think that avocados are good?' which invites agreement, while the second is 'Do you really think avocados are good?' which is a bit vague and has two interpretations, the first of which indicates that the speaker does not like avocados, while the other is more neutral.

The findings revealed that the Japanese responses were less elaborative and less direct than the American English responses, which confirms the stereotype with regard to food preferences. The topic may play a role in determining the directness of disagreement. "Americans, at least, when it comes to such things as food, a topic in which one need not invest so much of oneself as in, say, politics, religion, and money, do not hesitate to state their preferences" (LoCastro, 17, p. 1986). Japanese, on the other hand, "may be more concerned with not offending their conversational partners, even when discussing food" and tend to show more hesitance and reluctance while disagreeing (ibid, p. 19). The findings also revealed that both Japanese and American respondents expressed more disagreement than agreement to the second question, a finding that goes against Pomerantz' (1984) theorizing that agreements are more preferred than disagreements and are more common.

LoCastro's (1986) research is of great significance because it is one of the earliest cross-cultural studies which compared and contrasted agreement and disagreement strategies employed by Japanese and American Speakers of English. Such a comparison is of great

importance to cross-linguistic research because it provides a "reexamination of the assumption that speech acts are universal (ibid, p. 1)". Over the years, many developers of English Language Teaching (ELT) materials used to think that learning a foreign language for the language learner is "only a matter of learning new words, new expressions of the target language to do what one is already doing in one's own language" (ibid, p. 1). However, with the rapidly increasing research in the area of interlanguage pragmatics, this misconception began to wane and falter.

Despite the significance of LoCastro's study, some methodological concerns may be highlighted with regard to her work. The first has to do with her choice of the topic. Disagreement is all about confrontations. In order to elicit natural data that can be considered representative, different topics need to be involved, including those that are confrontational. As users of language, we all encounter some situations where we see people get into heated discussions, situations where they curse, mock and thrash each other in their attempt to express disagreement. Such strategies which are used may not appear if the sole topic under investigation is non-confrontational, e,g, food, as has been the case in LoCastro's study. Further, limiting the investigation to one topic may constrain the range of disagreement options usually available to respondents, as some of them may not be interested in the matter or the topic under examination. Another methodological concern to be highlighted here is the exclusion of important variables like status and distance, which could have added a lot to the findings. Even if Japanese undergraduates are all of the same status, their relationship with each other may affect their disagreement strategies. The way we disagree with close friends is different from the way we disagree with just a colleague that we know. A third methodological limitation has to do with the absence of demographic information about the respondents. Respondents may come from different cultural backgrounds, and this may affect their choices of disagreement strategies. Speakers of the same language may use different strategies depending on whether they come from a rural area or an urban one. A fourth concern is ethical. The responses of the Japanese subjects were recorded without their knowledge or prior consent; in fact, they did not know that their comments were being recorded surreptitiously. The final concern or limitation has to do with "the faultiness of memory as a source for accurate description of contexted language use," (Spencer-Qatey, 2004, p. 245) since LoCastro did not record EFL teachers' responses, but wrote them verbatim, instead.

2.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

As can be seen from the discussion presented above, though speech acts are universal, the way in which each act is performed varies cross-culturally. Conducting studies that examine L2 learners' realizations of face threatening speech acts is now more important than ever because in a world full of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and social diversity like that of ours, the likelihood of cross-cultural miscommunications to occur is great. In actuality, each community has its own social rules of speaking. Not knowing the pragmatic knowledge needed for performing these acts in L2 when conversing with native speakers of the target language may not only lead to misunderstandings but may also lead to serious communication breakdowns. In light of this, studies like the ones reported in this study are of

great importance because if they follow the proper methodological procedures, not only do they minimize miscommunications, but they also could promote and deepen international understandings. For studies in this field to be representative and awareness- raising, a reconsideration of many of the methodological procedures adopted so far is highly needed. More studies should base their findings on naturally-occurring data instead of artificial ones like those collected through discourse completion tasks and role plays. This is particularly important because in real life communications, especially heated ones, interactants do not have the leisure of writing their responses or planning for their disagreement strategy in advance. Further, in order to have representative data, variables like age, status, gender, culture, distance, among others, need to be taken into account more thoroughly since an exclusion of some of them could affect the validity of the findings negatively. In taking culture as a variable, for instance, the cultural items in a WDCT that is used to measure the disagreement strategies of Americans should not be used for measuring the disagreement strategies of Egyptian EFL learners. This should be avoided because the two groups have a lot of cultural differences between them. What is culturally not acceptable in one place, may be totally acceptable in another. While some cultures are direct, others are characterized by being less confrontational and less direct. What is mentioned about culture applies to the rest of variables.

The final concern to be highlighted here is that so far and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, most of the studies that examined the speech act of disagreement focused on English, whereas other languages like Arabic have not received any scholarly attention. In order to promote and deepen mutual understanding, disagreement realizations in more languages other than English need to be examined.

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