ABSTRACT

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Dissertation Title: CEBUANOS’ AND AMERICANS’ REALIZATIONS OF COMPLAINTS: A CROSS-CULTURAL AND INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATIC STUDY

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This study examined the complaint realizations of Cebuano users, American students in the Philippines, and Cebuano-speaking ESL learners with different English proficiency levels. Specifically, the study looked into the participants’ semantic components of complaints, complaint strategy use, and use of modifications in order to compare a speech act realization cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. In addition, the study investigated the American students’ and Cebuano-speaking ESL learners’ metapragmatic awareness.

To determine their complaint realizations, the participants answered a written discourse completion task, which featured 18 complaint-provoking situations that were calibrated on three variables: interlocutors’ social power and distance and the severity of the offense. The American students and Cebuano-speaking ESL learners completed the English version while the Cebuano users completed the Cebuano version. The data elicited were analyzed using the following frameworks: (1) Schaefer’s Semantic Formula of Complaints (1982, cited in Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000), Li and Suleiman’s Complaint Strategies...
(2017), and Trosborg’s (1995) and House and Kasper’s (1981) Modifications. The results of these were corroborated and expanded during the focus group discussions.

To determine their metapragmatic awareness, the American students and Cebuano-speaking ESL learners answered a questionnaire, which has two parts: a pragmatic judgment task and a self-rating of their attitude towards complaining and social variables affecting the act of complaining.

Data revealed that participants have similarities and differences in their expression of complaints. All groups’ complaints featured three frequently included semantic components: openers, act statements, and requests for repair, validating Trosborg’s idea (1995) that complaining has both expressive and directive functions. All groups also demonstrated preference for explicit complaints; however, the American students showed more usage of indirect strategies, suggesting that the Cebuano users and the Cebuano-speaking ESL learners were more explicit in complaining. All groups showed usage of both internal and external modifications, but the Cebuano users and the Cebuano ESL learners used more of these than the Americans did, indicating that while their complaint strategy is explicit complaint, they make use of modifications to lessen its threat.

In terms of metapragmatic awareness, the American students and the Cebuano-speaking ESL learners reveal cognizance of the social factors affecting their language choices. However, their views on complaining with regards to social status and severity of offense slightly differed as evidenced by their contrasting judgments of complaint realizations to three situations. These results were also supported by the difference in their ratings for two items: politeness and social distance (3.58 for high proficient ESL learners, 3.52 for low proficient ESL learners, and 3.11 for American students) and politeness and severity of offense (3.42 for high proficient ESL learners, 3.43 for low proficient ESL learners, and 2.97 for American students). These ratings indicate that it is important for
Cebuano-speaking ESL learners to observe politeness when complaining to people with different social status and when complaining about situations with different levels of severity; however, American students only found observing these somewhat important.

Such results provide baseline data that have many pedagogical implications for pragmatics instruction as discussed in the final chapter.