

## **Gender-Based Differences in Hakka Complaint Realization\*\***

Wu Jui-chun\*

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the complaint behavior of Hakka-speaking men and women, including average sentence length and frequency of various complaint strategies used by each gender. Data was collected via responses to an oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT), consisting of 18 complaint-provoking scenarios. Each situation presented respondents with a detailed description of the context, the gender and social status of the interlocutors, and the social distance between them. The results suggest that female Hakka speakers are more polite than males, since they tended to use longer sentences to weaken or soften the force of a complaint and frequently chose an Ask for Repair strategy, as thrift is a virtue highly regarded by the Hakka. On the other hand, the results suggest that male Hakka speakers are generally more aggressive, in that they tended to choose relatively severe complaint strategies. As for the influence of socio-pragmatic factors, it was found that Hakka speakers were

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more sensitive to the relative social status of interlocutors than to the social distance between them, and were more inclined to use an Opt Out strategy when facing recipients of higher social status. With the diminution of social status, linguistic politeness was also reduced. Ask for Repair strategies were most often directed at interlocutors of equal social status, and less often to those of higher or lower social status. Besides this, the findings suggest that female speakers are relatively sensitive and thoughtful communicators, since they tended to be more sensitive to the gender of the interlocutors. In short, this study reveals several gender-based distinctions as well as some culture-specific features in Hakka complaint behaviors.

**Keywords:** complaint, gender difference, social status, social distance, Hakka

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Motivations

A complaint is a highly Face-Threatening Act (FTA)<sup>1</sup> (Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987) and has been described as essentially impolite behavior (Trosborg 1995) which, if not managed cautiously, might seriously damage the harmonious atmosphere between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H). Olshtain and Weinbach (1993:108) define complaint as a speech act where “the speaker expresses displeasure or annoyance—censure—as a reaction to a past or on-going action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavorably.” Since a complaint is an FTA directed toward H, and since its conflictive nature threatens the social goal of maintaining harmony and equilibrium between S and H (Leech

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1 Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987) describe politeness in terms of the concept of “face” (as in the expression, “to lose face”). Respect for face is defined as showing consideration for other people’s feelings. Everybody has “face needs” or basic wants, and people generally cooperate in helping each other maintain face, and satisfying each other’s face needs (at least partially). A face-threatening act (FTA) is an act which challenges the face needs of an interlocutor.

1983), the complainer is typically torn between the need to present certain demands, and a desire to preserve emotional balance. If the complainer prefers to maintain social harmony, s/he will choose softer complaint strategies and more polite lexical or linguistic modifications. Otherwise, s/he will select more direct strategies and aggravating modifications.

Over the past two decades, the Hakka<sup>2</sup> language in Taiwan has attracted interest from numerous researchers in the subfields of phonetics, phonology, and syntax. However, there is still a lack of published research in the areas of pragmatics or sociolinguistics. To address this, the present study intends to explore the speech act of complaining as performed by Hakka speakers in certain specially-designed situations.

## 1.2 Gender Difference

Gender has long been recognized as a crucial variable in language use. Since the 1970s, much has been written about gender differentiation and its impact on language. First, in many countries, women are consistently found to use higher frequencies of standard forms (see Holmes 1991:208 for details).<sup>3</sup> Trudgill (1983:162) described this as the “most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past twenty years.” Besides this, women are generally believed to be more cooperative, facilitative, supportive, and less competitive in conversation (Coates 1989, 1995; Holmes 1984, 1986, 1989, 1991, 1995), willing to accommodate to their addressees’ style of speech (Mulac et al. 1988), and concerned for the face needs of the person they are addressing.

Empirical studies of language use (Lakoff 1973; Phillips et al. 1987; Brown & Levinson 1987) also demonstrate that women express themselves more

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2 Hakka is one of the main dialects of the Chinese language family. Divided into several dialects, it is spoken by linguistic minorities concentrated in the PRC provinces of Guangdong (廣東), Fujian (福建), Jiangxi (江西), Guangxi (廣西), Sichuan (四川), Hunan (湖南), Guizhou (貴州) and Hainan (海南島), as well as Singapore and Taiwan.

3 For different viewpoints on this issue, see Coates (2004) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999).

politely than men. Lakoff (1973) pointed out a series of linguistic features that are used more often by women, and which in her opinion express uncertainty and a lack of confidence. She claimed that women use more “super polite forms” such as tag questions, hesitation markers, euphemisms, and rising intonation on declaratives. In addition, she also found that women tend to use more emphatic stress and intensifying adverbials. Other researchers comparing women’s and men’s interactional behavior have suggested that women utilize more back-channeling devices of positive minimal response (e.g. mm, hmm, uh-huh, yeah) than men (Fishman 1983; Leet-Pellegrini 1980).

Although a large body of research compares women’s and men’s language use, the ways in which women’s use of particular speech acts differs from men’s is still under-researched. Holmes’ (1988) research into New Zealanders’ complimenting behavior was one of the earliest studies to systematically examine the issue of gender differences in speech acts. From a corpus of over 450 compliment exchanges, she found that women directed compliments to one another significantly more often than they did to men, or than men did to each other. Holmes also claimed that women complimented each other about their appearance more often than anything else, while compliments about possessions occurred significantly more often between men.

A later study by Holmes (1989) examined gender differences in the choice of apology strategies. Similar to her study on compliments, she found that women apologize to each other significantly more often than they do to men, or than men do to each other. Moreover, she found that women direct most of their apologies to female friends, whereas men direct them to socially distant women. The fact that men use more formal strategies suggests to her that “men may regard apologies as signals of social distance or as devices to be used only in cases of relatively serious offence” (1989: 199). Holmes even concluded that apologies have gender-specific functions: for women, they express solidarity and concern for others, while men regard them as “admissions of weakness, inadequacy or failure” (Holmes 1995: 175).

However, the data is not so straightforward. Although Tannen (1994) and Meyerhoff (1999) also found that women are more willing to apologize than men, Bean and Johnstone (1994) found that American men apologize twice as often as women during telephone interviews, where apologies serve as discourse managing devices. Christie (2005), analyzing parliamentary debate, discovered that apologies tend to have gender-specific functions: male Members of Parliament (MPs) apologize as a means of performing an FTA, while female MPs use apology to express concern and take responsibility.

Moreover, from Discourse Completion Task (DCT) data, Hong (1997) concluded that Chinese women behave more politely than men when making requests, and use more lexical modifications such as pre-grounders, post-grounders, “qing” (please), and imposition-minimizers. Such differences are strongly affected by request situations and social relations.

The only study of gender difference in the speech act of complaint is Lin (2007). Using data from DCT and Scaled-Rating Questionnaires (SRQ) collected from 60 Taiwanese university students, she found that in general, females produce longer utterances than males when making complaints. In addition, females are more easily disturbed, and are thus more inclined to complain upon encountering a complaint-provoking situation. As for complaint strategies, male speakers resort to threatening (blaming/cursing/threatening) strategies noticeably more often, while female speakers use more explicit complaint and opt out strategies. Lin also considered the effect of different contextual factors. However, the participants in her study were all college students, whose socialization might be regarded as in some way incomplete, thereby affecting their interpersonal communication skills to some extent. This probably accounts for threatening strategies being so common among the male participants. If relatively mature, well-socialized participants were recruited, their performances might be more varied, and better reflect general language use.

Though few in number, previous studies of compliment, apology, request, and complaint all basically suggest that gender difference is a decisive factor in the

performance of speech acts.

### 1.3 The Speech Act of Complaint

There are lots of studies concerning the speech act of complaint (Alicke et al. 1992; Boxer 1993a, b, c; Chang 2001; Chen et al. 2010; Eslami-Rasekh 2004; Frescura 1995; Laforest 2002; Lin 2007; Murphy & Neu 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach 1987; 1993; Tatsuki 2000; Trosborg 1995; Weinbach 1988; Yu 2006, 2009). Most of these provide a complete methodology and discussion; I will review some for ease of comparison with the present study.

Boxer (1993c) compared indirect complaint (IC) behavior and responses to IC between native English speakers and Japanese learners of English. She found that there are great differences between NNS/NS exchanges (non-native speaker utters an IC, native speaker responds) and NS/NNS exchanges (native speaker utters an IC, non-native speaker responds). The great differences lay in their use of the nonsubstantive and commiseration response types. To be more precise, 52.9% of NNS responses to NS ICs were nonsubstantive-type, compared to only 2.4% of NS responses to NNS ICs. On the other hand, 61.2% of NS responses to NNS ICs were commiseration-type, compared to only 20.3% of NNS responses to NS ICs. This suggests that Japanese learners are frequently unaware that an IC calls for a substantive response. Hence, they often respond with no more than a back-channeling move. Furthermore, Boxer provided an example and explained that NNS find it easy to use exclamation to express commiseration; therefore, commiseration-type responses are most frequently used by NNS. Generally speaking, her study concerns interlanguage pragmatic use and suggests the importance of societal values and cultural differences.

On the other hand, after testing 35 Israeli university students, Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) and Weinbach (1988) found that Hebrew speakers tend to cluster around three central strategies: disapproval, complaint, and warning. When the speaker is of lower status than the hearer, the tendency is to opt for less severe complaints (disapproval and complaint); on the other hand, when the interlocutors

are equals or the speaker is of higher social status, there is a stronger tendency for more serious realizations (complaint and warning). Later on, Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) investigated the socio-pragmatic features of the interlanguage of complaining as exhibited by learners of Hebrew as a second language. Their study generally confirmed Wolfson's (1989) "bulge" phenomenon, which implies that "when speakers are less certain about roles and relationships with their interlocutors, they negotiate more and accordingly use more words." (Olshtain & Weinbach 1993: 118) They also found that learners always use longer utterances than native speakers, and this is more prominent when speakers have higher social status than the hearers.

Since Hakka is a dialect of Chinese, I will now focus on the studies of Chinese complaint behavior and see how these two languages differ from each other. Chang (2001) found that elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and college students tend to choose various complaint types in Chinese. Though older students sometimes select a "Face Complaint" strategy, they usually opt out and avoid FTA's in order to maintain harmonious relationships. On the other hand, younger students are more likely to ask for help. Chang also found that older students use more offensive or impolite phrases than younger ones. However, the subjects in her study are all students. Compared to other members of society, students live relatively simple lives, and are less socialized, which might influence their communication skills and expressive style. A more convincing conclusion about Chinese complaint behavior might be reached by recruiting non-students for a study.

Besides this, Yu (2006, 2009) compared the complaint behavior of native speakers of Chinese (NSC) and native speakers of English (NSE) and found that NSE complain more frequently than NSC, and use diverse linguistic options to complain. He also examined the responses to indirect complaints, and proposed that NSE use the techniques of questioning, joking or teasing, and commiseration more often, while NSC favor keeping silent or switching topic and advising or lecturing. He explained that such diversity is due to differences in the core values of American

and Chinese culture. Consequently, Yu suggested that foreign language users must acquaint themselves with the culture of the target language in order to avoid some possible intercultural misunderstandings. Later, Chen et al. (2010) investigated the efficacy of EFL instruction on Chinese students' productions of complaints. They found that, although learners tended to transfer L1 pragmatic knowledge to L2 before receiving instruction, after explicit instruction their use of semantic formulas, semantic content and linguistic forms improved. Thus, they concluded that proper instruction is constructive for L2 learners and suggested that such instruction should be implemented in an EFL classroom to increase learners' pragmatic competence.

In short, though there are many studies concerning complaint behavior, some probing into native language use, some examining the phenomenon of interlanguage, research into the speech act of complaining as performed by Chinese speakers is still at a preliminary phase. Besides this, to the best of my knowledge, none has apparently focused on gender difference in Hakka complaint behavior. Accordingly, this study will delve into the complaint performance of both male and female Hakka speakers.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Questions

Since the choice of complaint strategies has usually been found to be determined by socio-pragmatic factors such as social status, social distance, and the gender of the interlocutors, this paper will control for these variables. It specifically addresses the following questions:

- (1) Under similar conditions, do Hakka male and female speakers choose different complaint strategies?
- (2) How do socio-pragmatic factors influence Hakka speakers' choice of complaint strategies?
- (3) Do socio-pragmatic variables affect choice of complaint strategies differently for male and female Hakka speakers?



## 2.2 Participants

To eliminate the possible effect of age, the participants in this study included thirty elder Hakka speakers aged 50-70, and thirty in their prime, aged 20-40. Each group was composed of 15 males and 15 females. Here, Hakka speakers are defined as those whose parents are Hakka (i.e., who speak Hakka as their mother tongue) and as such, acquired Hakka as their first language. The participants were all from northern Taiwan <sup>4</sup> and spoke the Sixian <sup>5</sup> dialect of Hakka as their first language. Most of them were classmates, friends, or relatives of the five recording assistants <sup>6</sup> and the author. Four groups were established:

15 senior males

15 junior adult males

15 senior females

15 junior adult females

Appendix A shows the age range and mean age of each group and the age distribution of all participants.

## 2.3 Instrument

The complaining data for the present study were collected via an oral DCT. Most scholars consider DCT to be a fast and effective research method which is capable of successfully controlling for socio-pragmatic factors (such as gender, age, social status, etc.) DCT is generally divided into written and oral forms. Oral DCT is thought to be closer to “closed role play” (Kasper & Dahl 1991), and thus more authentic as language data than written DCT (Yuan 2001). In fact, Yuan’s study shows that informants provided longer responses as well as more exclamation particles, repetition, inversion, and omission, all of which are characteristics of natural language use. Because of these considerations, and because written forms of

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4 Including Taipei (臺北), Taoyuan (桃園), Hsinchu (新竹), and Miaoli (苗栗).

5 Five dialects of Hakka are spoken in Taiwan: Sixian (四縣), Hailu (海陸), Dapu (大埔), Raoping (饒平), and Zhaoan (詔安). Of these, Sixian is the most widely used.

6 The five assistants were also Sixian Hakka speakers living in Taoyuan, Hsinchu, and Miaoli.

the Hakka language are still not widely used in Taiwan, oral DCT was chosen.

The three independent variables—Social Status, Social Distance, and Gender of the interlocutors—were embedded in the situation-descriptions of the oral DCT. The variable Social Status, which reflects the “power” of the complainees relative to the complainer, was assigned a conventional three-level division (high, equal, and low).<sup>7</sup> By “social distance” is meant the degree of familiarity between the complainers and their addressees (Holmes 1995; Wolfson 1989). Again, following the conventions of socio-pragmatic research, three levels of Social Distance are distinguished (namely intimate, acquaintance, and stranger). The last factor concerns the gender of the interlocutors. With other factors controlled, half of the DCT situations involve male interlocutors, and half female. 18 oral DCT were given to the four groups of participants. I constructed the scenarios with reference to past studies (Lin 2007; Murphy & New 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach 1987, 1993; Trosborg 1995), and discussed them with several native Hakka speakers to ensure that the scenarios were roughly equivalent in terms of severity of offense. Each scenario described some instance of socially-unacceptable behavior (by the standards of Hakka or wider Chinese culture), and was designed to elicit expressions of censure. The 18 DCT situations included various combinations of Social Status, Social Distance and Gender. (See Appendix B for a detailed description.)

A high-quality recording was made by a female native speaker of Sixian Hakka, who was asked to read the 18 scenarios with a clear voice.

## 2.4 Procedure

All four groups completed a background questionnaire before listening to the DCT recording. The questionnaire asked the participants’ ages, mother tongue, the language used at home, and their parents’ mother tongue. Except for age and gender, the informants formed quite a homogeneous group: All named Sixian Hakka as both their and their parents’ mother tongue, and all lived in northern Taiwan.

After brief but clear instructions, the research assistants began recording the

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7 Indicated by [+P], [=P], and [-P] respectively.

participants’ oral responses via a high quality recorder. In addition, efforts were made to ensure that the participants clearly understood the social status, social distance, and gender of the complaint recipient in each situation. To that end, the participants were given a card showing the role of the complaint recipient, for example, “your (female) best friend,” “your father,” etc. There was no time limit for the oral DCT.

2.5 Data Coding and Analysis

All the recorded data were first transcribed by trained assistants, and then coded and analyzed according to the needs of the study (for example, the complaint types, the complaining strategies, modifications, etc.).

3. Results and Discussion

All the oral DCT data were analyzed via the SPSS statistics software.

3.1 Length of Utterances

Since we did not limit the response time, participants could take as much time as they liked to finish each scenario. After counting the number of characters in each response,<sup>8</sup> we found that on average, female participants produced longer utterances than their male counterparts. Table 1 shows the average utterance length for male

8 The length of an utterance is found by counting characters (syllables) instead of words. Additionally we exclude some of the repetitions and disfluencies. For example:  
Bai-tog   ngi   lau   ngai   von-go,   mo                   ngai   voi   hang   fab-lud...fab-lud   ge  
Please   you   LAU   I   change   otherwise   I   can   go   law   law   POSS  
拜託   你   摻   涯   換過,   無                   涯   會   行   法律...   法律   个  
fong...fong-fab.  
method.  
方... 方法  
‘Please replace it (with a new car) for me. Otherwise, I will appeal to the law.’  
In this case, the respondent stammered at the end of the sentence; however, we only counted “fab-lud” and “fong-fab” once and ignored the disfluencies. As such, this sentence contains 16 characters.

and female participants. The *t*-test shows that the length of utterance is significantly different with regard to gender ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 1. Length of Utterances

|  | Male          | SD     | Female        | SD    | P            | Overall |
|--|---------------|--------|---------------|-------|--------------|---------|
| Mean length of utterances (characters) | <b>36.395</b> | 32.993 | <b>42.835</b> | 35.82 | <b>0.008</b> | 39.615  |

According to Lee (1999) and Wolfson (1989), the use of longer utterances is generally thought to be a mitigating strategy. That is, speakers resort to longer utterances to soften the possible impact of a complaint on the recipients. Compare the following two examples: example (1) is extracted from the response of a senior female participant and example (2) from a senior male participant. Examples (1) and (2) are their responses to the first scenario in Appendix B, in which the recipient’s father was cheated by swindlers into withdrawing 500,000 NTD (New Taiwan Dollars, roughly 17,000 USD ) from his/her savings account.

- (1)<sup>9</sup> A-ba    en    id-tin    oi        xien loi    bo        gin-cad,    ngi  
Father    we    must    want    first come    report    policeman    you  
阿爸    恩    一定    愛    先 來    報    警察,    你  
  
oi        ti,        lia-ha    sa-fi    song    pien-ngin    ge        sii-qin  
want    know    now    society    up    cheating    POSS<sup>10</sup>    thing  
愛    知    這下    社會    上    騙人    个    東西  
  
dong-do o,    ngi    he    jiab-do    tien-fa,    ngi    id-tin    oi    xien da  
a lot    SFP    you    is    pick up    telephone    you    must    want first call  
當多    喔,    你    係    接到    電話,    你    一定    愛    先 打

9 “The Manual of Taiwan Hakka Tongyong Romanization System” published by the Ministry of Education (Taiwan) in 2009 is used to render the data.

10 The following abbreviations are used for their corresponding grammatical functions: POSS is a possessive marker; LAU is a multi-functional word in Hakka; SFP stands for “sentence final particle,” and COMP is a comparative marker.

tien-fa        bun    ngai   o,    gai    lia-ha    en    du-do    sii-qin,  
 telephone    BUN   I    SFP   then   now    we    meet    thing  
 電話        分    涯    喔,    該    這下    恩    堵捌    事情,  
  
 m-pa,        a-ba,    ngi    m-sii    song-xim   ho,   en   xiong   ban-fab   loi  
 no-afraid   father   you   without   sad        SFP   we   think   idea   come  
 毋怕,        阿爸,   你   毋使   傷心        吼,   恩   想    辦法   來  
  
 gie-giet    lia    sii-qin    ho,   en    loi-hi    gin-cad-kiug    o,    kon   oi  
 solve    this   thing        SFP   we    go        police office    SFP   see   want  
 解決    這   事情        喔,   恩    來去        警察局        喔,   看   愛  
  
 ngiong-ban-hin    loi        mi-bu    lia-ge    sii-qin,    ngi    han-he    oi  
 how                come    make up   this    thing    you    still    want  
 仰般形            來    彌補    這個    事情,    你    還係    愛  
  
 tung        ge        fam-fab    ge        nging    gong    cud-loi,    oi    lau  
 together   that    criminal   POSS   person   speak   out        want   LAU  
 同        該        犯法    個        人        講        出來,    愛    摻  
  
 gi    zuk-chud-loi,    an-ngiong-hin   kon   en    ge    qien    na-ded   zhon-loi  
 he   catch            then            see   we   POSS   money   take   back  
 佢   抓出來,        恁仰形        看   恩   個    錢    拿得   轉來  
  
 mo    ho.  
 not    SFP  
 無    吼.

‘Father, we must report this to the police first. You need to know that nowadays there are many swindlers. If you answer the phone [and don’t know who the caller is], you must give me a call first. Since this has already happened, don’t worry, and don’t be sad. Let’s try to find a solution. Let’s go to the police station and see how to offset the loss. You need to tell the policeman about the swindler and see if he can be arrested and if we can get our money back.’

- (2) A-ba, m he seu qien ne, ngi ngiong-voi qin-cai  
 Father not is little money SFP you how without concern  
 阿爸 毋 係 小 錢 呢, 你 仰會 盡採
- liang bun nging sa m mun-go ngai? ngi ha-bai  
 withdraw BUN person but not ask me you next time  
 領 分 人 卻 毋 問過 涯? 你 下擺
- m-ho an-ngiong-hin, ng-siib-van qin nan con o, ho,  
 no do this five hundred thousand very hard earn SFP SFP  
 毋好 恁仰形, 五十萬 盡 難 賺 喔, 吼,
- ba-ba, ha-bai ka se-ngi deu e.  
 Father next time COMP careful a little SFP  
 爸爸 下擺 較 細義 兜 仔.

‘Father, that’s not a small amount of money. How could you withdraw [that much] money for others without asking me? Don’t do that next time! It is hard to earn five hundred thousand dollars. Father, be more careful next time!’

In example (1) above, the senior female participant uses longer utterances to first tell her father what to do (call the police), then comfort him (don’t be sad), and finally solve the problem together (go to the police station together and see if they can get their money back). In our study, female participants tended to use milder strategies and longer sentences to mitigate the hostile effect of a complaint. On the other hand, most males performed like the one in example (2), in which the male participant uses more severe strategies and shorter utterances without concern for the complaineer’s face needs. Thus, we can conclude that compared to males, females are generally more polite in conversation, in that they are willing to soften the impact of a complaint by adding more lexical and syntactic modifications in order to make it less forceful. This confirms the general declaration made by some sociolinguists that females are more considerate speakers than males (Coates 1995, 2004; Holmes 1988). It also justifies the conclusion that females are more likely to use positive,

polite expressions and mitigating strategies that avoid or weaken threats to an interlocutor’s face.

With regard to how the utterance lengths of male and female participants differs with regard to the three socio-pragmatic factors, the statistical results show that Social Distance had no significant effect on utterance lengths. This confirms the similar findings of much earlier research.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, Social Status and Gender had a great influence on utterance length ( $p < .05$  and  $.01$  respectively).<sup>12</sup> Table 2 below illustrates the mean utterance length produced by both genders in response to interlocutors from various social groups.

Table 2. The Mean Utterance Length for Different Groups

| Gender | Social Group | Mean  | Gender | Social Group | Mean  |
|--------|--------------|-------|--------|--------------|-------|
| M      | + P          | 38.93 | F      | + P          | 45.55 |
| M      | = P          | 33.93 | F      | = P          | 39.08 |
| M      | – P          | 36.99 | F      | – P          | 43.63 |
| M      | + D          | 38.28 | F      | + D          | 44.4  |
| M      | = D          | 36.85 | F      | = D          | 41.77 |
| M      | – D          | 34.74 | F      | – D          | 42.09 |
| M      | M            | 35.49 | F      | M            | 42.97 |
| M      | F            | 37.75 | F      | F            | 48.85 |

*Note:* “P” refers to Social Status or power. “+P” indicates that the interlocutor’s Social Status is higher than that of the participant, “=P” indicates that they are of equal Social Status, etc. “D” refers to Social Distance. “M” stands for male interlocutors, and “F” for female interlocutors.

If we use a line chart to represent these differences (Figure 1, below), it becomes clear that female speakers consistently use longer sentences than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the line chart shows greater variation in the curve for females; the curve for males is comparatively flat.

11 For example, Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) and Trosborg (1995). This will be discussed in the next section.

12 The precise p-value for each factors are 0.011, 0.799, and 0.001 for Social Status, Social Distance, and gender of the interlocutors, respectively.

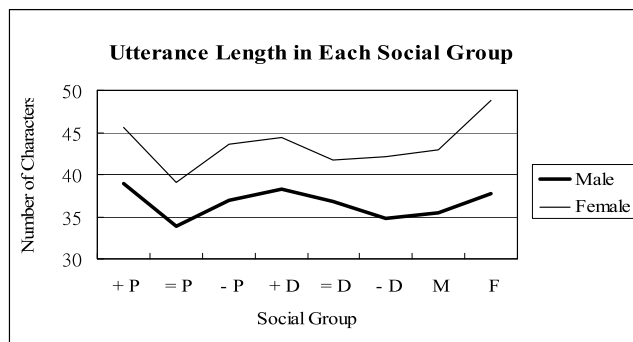


Figure 1. The Mean Utterance Lengths of Different Groups

This provides evidence that supports the claim that females are generally more responsive to their relationship with their interlocutor (Holmes 1995). In other words, female complainers are more conscious of the identity (i.e., the relative social power, familiarity, and gender) of their complaint recipients, and as such are more willing to adjust the length of their complaint depending on the recipient. Since it is usually claimed that women's sensitivity to linguistic norms is often attributed to their insecure social position (Coates 2004), we can tentatively suggest that female Hakka speakers, like women in most traditional oriental cultures, are relatively unselfconfident and unassertive in Hakka culture.

It is also interesting to note that on the left-hand side of Figure 1, which shows performances toward complaint recipients of different social statuses, the “bulge” (Wolfson 1988, 1989) phenomenon clearly occurs. Wolfson (1989: 129) claimed that there is a difference between “the speech behavior which middle-class Americans use to intimates, status unequals, and strangers on the one hand, and to nonintimates, status equal friends, co-workers, and acquaintances on the other.” In our data, the performances tending toward the two extremes of social power—[+P] and [−P]—seem to show very similar results, i.e., participants used longer utterances when complaining to recipients of higher and lower social status; on the other hand, when complaining to recipients of equal social power, they tended to use shorter utterances.



In short, the comparison between complaint utterance lengths with respect to these socio-pragmatic factors suggests that female Hakka speakers are more polite and sensitive than their male counterparts. The next section discusses whether these differences also exist in their selection of complaint strategies.

### 3.2 Complaint Strategies

The classification adopted here for coding the modification of the collected complaints was derived from Lin (2007), Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993) and Trosborg (1995).<sup>13</sup> A similar classification has been widely used and adapted to examine complaints among native and non-native speakers in different languages. Based on the current DCT corpus, we therefore divided complaints into five major categories, each composed of two different strategies. (See Table 3, below.) The classification of the complaint data into various categories and strategies was decided by the researcher and verified by two trained assistants, who were also native speakers of Sixian Hakka. Both raters independently verified the researcher's coding of the data in its entirety. On the whole, the coding of both raters coincided with the researcher's original classifications in nearly 95% of the analyzed data. In cases where discrepancies were noted, the researcher discussed each case with each rater till an agreement was attained.

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13 Lin (2007) classifies seven major complaining strategies, some of which were further categorized into two to three sub-types. The seven strategies are: *opt out*, *justification of addressee*, *justification of speaker*, *expression of annoyance*, *explicit complaint*, *asking for repair*, and *threat/cursing/blaming/filthy words*. Olshtain & Weinbach (1987; 1993) establish five realization patterns, namely, *below the level of reproach*, *expression of annoyance or disapproval*, *explicit complaint*, *accusation and warning*, and *immediate threat*. Trosborg (1995) divides complaint strategies into four categories and eight strategies. Category I, *no explicit reproach*, includes one strategy: *hints*; Category II, *disapproval*, includes two strategies: *annoyance*, and *ill consequences*; Category III, *accusation*, includes two strategies: *indirect*, and *direct*; and Category IV, *blame*, includes three strategies: *modified blame*, *explicit blame (behavior)*, and *explicit blame (person)*.

Table 3. Complaint Categories and Strategies

| Complaint Category         | Complaint Strategy   |
|----------------------------|--|
| C1 Opt Out                 | S1 Justify the complaine'e's actions<br>S2 Express resignation           |
| C2 Expression of Annoyance | S3 Express annoyance<br>S4 Show bad consequences                         |
| C3 Ask for Repair          | S5 Request repair<br>S6 Demand repair                                    |
| C4 Threaten or Warn        | S7 Threaten<br>S8 Warn   |
| C5 Explicit Complaint      | S9 Explicitly blame the behavior<br>S10 Explicitly blame the complaine'e |

Examples<sup>14</sup>

S1: It's so cold outside—I feel so sorry to have to ask you to come out!

S2: It can't be helped. Business is business.

S3: That really makes me angry!

S4: After I ate it, I had diarrhea, and had to go to the hospital for an intravenous drip!

S5: Please repair the front door for me!

S6: You're going to have to pay for that!

S7: Next time, dry the floor.

S8: If you destroy my house, I won't vote for you.

S9: This is cheating, dishonest behavior!

S10: How could you be so careless? Look, you spilled the soup!

In order to see whether the performances between male and female speakers reached a statistically significant level, independent samples *t*-tests were applied. Table 4 below demonstrates the differences between male and female speakers in various socio-pragmatic factors by complaint categories.

Though the statistical results listed above do not show any clear tendency,<sup>15</sup>

14 The examples have been translated into English for the reader's convenience.

15 A more general statistic result comparing male/female differences in each socio-pragmatic factor does not yield significance either (with *p*-values of 0.07, 0.49 and 0.65 in Social Status, Social Distance and Gender of the interlocutors, respectively). However, though not significant, we

Table 4. Male/Female Differences in Complaint Categories in Different Factors\*

| Complaint Category \ Factors | + P  | = P  | − P  | + D  | = D  | − D  | M    | F    |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| C1                           | 0.87 | 0.04 | 0.24 | 1    | 0.21 | 0.08 | 0.01 | 0.92 |
| C2                           | 0.48 | 0.03 | 0.63 | 1    | 0.48 | 0.04 | 0.45 | 0.60 |
| C3                           | 0.09 | 0.15 | 0.28 | 0.96 | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.01 | 0.45 |
| C4                           | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.49 | 0.40 | 0.29 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.20 |
| C5                           | 1    | 0.78 | 0.89 | 0.32 | 0.41 | 0.73 | 1    | 0.86 |

\*In this table, p-values for each complaint category and levels of socio-pragmatic factors are provided. The shaded parts refer to those that reach a statistically significant level ( $p < .05$ ).

there are still some interesting divergences in male and female complaint behavior. First, let me start by exploring the role of social status. It has been pointed out that speakers commonly find it difficult to complain to persons of higher social status. According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983), speakers of Hebrew behave differently when the social status of their interlocutor changes. When the speaker is of lower status than the hearer, the tendency is to opt for less severe complaints; when the interlocutors are equals, or when the speaker has higher social status, complaints become more severe. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) also have similar findings. Figure 2 (below) illustrates male and female participants' responses to interlocutors of high, equal, and low social status.

As can be seen in the figure, both males and females seem to use the Opt Out category more often with interlocutors of higher social class than those of equal social class, and apply it to those of lower social class least of all.<sup>16</sup> As mentioned

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can roughly tell that of the three, Social Status seems to affect their performances more since its p-value is very near .05.

16 To be exact, males used this category 25.3% of the time with respect to interlocutors of high social class, and only 12.7% and 5.3% of the time with those of equal or low social class, respectively. The corresponding figures for female speakers were 24%, 6.7%, and 2.9%.

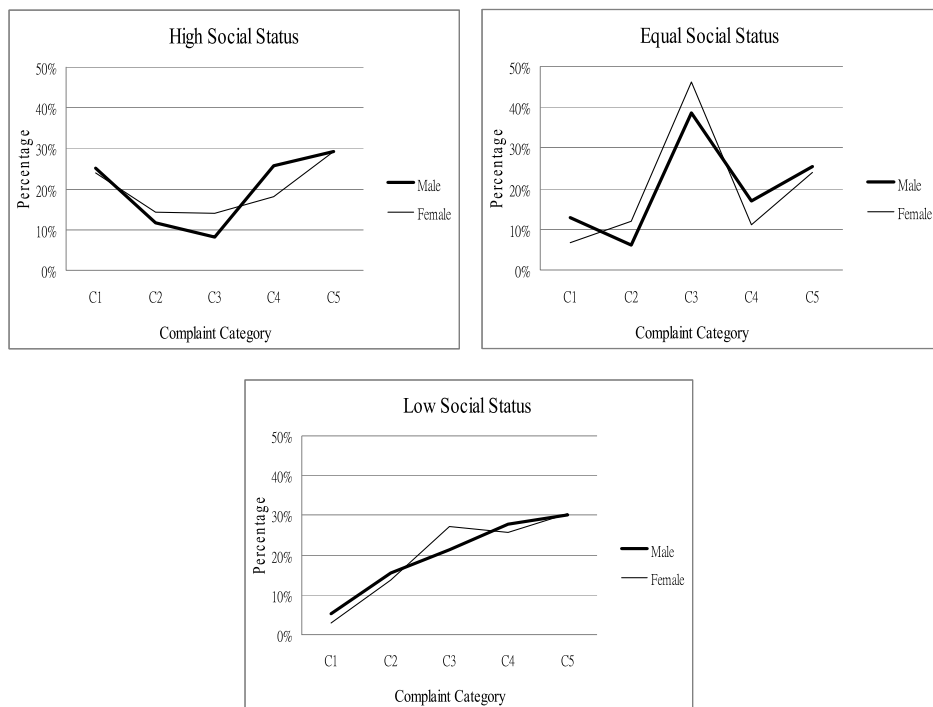


Figure 2. The Effect of Social Status

earlier, the Opt Out category is composed of two strategies, namely, Justify the complaine'e's actions (S1) and Express resignation (S2) and could be viewed as containing less severe complaining strategies. Such results generally echo the findings of Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Olshtain & Weinbach (1987). Besides, participants used S1 more than S2 with respect to interlocutors of higher social status, but used S2 more than S1 with people of equal or lower social status.<sup>17</sup> This tendency shows that participants of both genders were more polite to members of

17 Again, the precise percentages for each strategy are as follows:

|    |        | Higher Social Class | Equal Social Class | Lower Social Class |
|----|--------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| S1 | Male   | 16.2%               | 4.3%               | 0.4%               |
|    | Female | 17.8%               | 1.8%               | 0.8%               |
| S2 | Male   | 9.1%                | 8.5%               | 4.9%               |
|    | Female | 6.3%                | 4.9%               | 2.1%               |

the higher-status group, since they were more willing to make excuses for their interlocutors. In addition, it was found that except where social status was equal, females used the Justify the complaine'e's actions strategy more often than male speakers, with both high- and low-status groups. This again supports the claim that females are more considerate than males, in that they try harder to find excuses for the complaine'es in order to save their negative face.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, for all social statuses, male complainers consistently used more C4 (Threaten or Warn) strategies than their female counterparts.<sup>19</sup> For example:

- (3) Ngi co-bun-ngid koi ge rhog-e hoi ngai shid-do  
 you yesterday prescribe POSS medicine harm I eat  
 你 昨晡日 開 个 藥仔 害 涯 食捌

hi liab-e, ho-ded mo shid si, he shid si kon ngi oi ngiong  
 have measles luckily not eat die is eat die see you want how  
 起 粒仔, 好得 無 食 死, 係 食 死 看 你 愛 仰

poi.

compensate

賠.

'The medicine you prescribed yesterday has given me measles. Luckily I did not die. If I died, you could hardly compensate me.'

- (4) Sam-gong-ban-rha han cau ma-gai, ngi kon gag-biag-e ciu loi  
 very late at night still noise what you see neighbor then come  
 三更半夜 還 吵 麼該, 你 看 隔壁仔 就 來

18 Politeness involves showing concern for two different kinds of face needs: negative face needs (the need not to be accused or denigrated) and positive face needs (the need to be liked and admired). Behavior which avoids accusing or denigrating others (i.e., threatening their face) is described as evidence of "negative politeness," while sociable behavior expressing warmth towards an addressee is "positive politeness" behavior. (See Coates 2004:105 and Holmes 1995:5)

19 Though according to the results of the Proportion Test, such differences do not reach statistically significant levels ( $p > .05$ ).

hem le, den-ha gi sii voi bo gin-cad-e o.  
 shout SFP a moment he then will report policeman SFP  
 喊 了, 等下 佢 使 會 報 警察仔 喔.

‘It’s very late at night, why are you still making a racket? Look, a neighbor is coming over to yell at you, and in a moment he will probably report you to the police.’

In example (3) and (4), the complaint recipients are a doctor and a daughter, who are identified as having higher social power [+P] and lower social power [−P], respectively. The present data quite clearly shows that male participants used a C4 strategy, threatening or warning their complaint recipients regardless of their relative social power. This finding echoes a consistent observation of sociolinguists; that is, compared to females, males are more aggressive interlocutors (Coates 1995, 2004).

On the other hand, we found that female participants used C3 (Ask for Repair) more, which at first glance, seems to counter the general claim that females are more polite. After all, C3 is basically face-threatening, and an offense to negative politeness. However, it reflects a unique aspect of Hakka culture, in which great thriftiness is ascribed to Hakka women (Constable 1994; Erbaugh 1992; Harrel 1987). This traditional virtue probably reflects the historic experience of the Hakka, whose ancestors mostly came to Taiwan from China’s Guangdong (廣東) Province. In the beginning, they settled on land with limited fertility, and generally lacked business experience. As a group, they acquired a conservative sense of financial management, and are stereotypically regarded as thrifty or even stingy. Constable (1994) claims the special characteristics of Hakka—that they are hardworking, honest, frugal, thrifty, cooperative, etc.—are all believed to stem from the fact that they were once poor. These Hakka qualities, “distinguish them from other Chinese because they are linked to the hardships, migrations, and poverty that only the Hakka experienced” (1994: 130). Moreover, this characteristic thriftiness would have been more obvious in female Hakka speakers, since men spent their days doing farm work, and it was the women who cooked for the family, and had to carefully

consider questions of revenue and expenditure.<sup>20</sup> According to our oral DCT data, female speakers often “asked for repair” to cover many types of losses<sup>21</sup> (e.g., a broken computer, a smashed door, and medical expenses for a broken leg):

- (5) Tien-no he ngai dag-ngid oi iung-do ge dong-xi,  
 Computer is I everyday want use POSS thing  
 電腦 係 涯 逐日 愛 用到 个 東西,  
 lia-ha ngi lau ngai deb fai-ted, ngai xiong-oi ma-fan  
 now you LAU I throw broken I want trouble  
 這下 你 摻 涯 擲 壞忒, 涯 想愛 麻煩  
 ngi o, ko-nen oi poi ngai.  
 you SFP possible want compensate I  
 你 喔, 可能 愛 賠 涯.

‘The computer is something I need to use every day, now you’ve dropped and broken it. I may want you to compensate me for the computer.’

20 This virtue of frugality is no longer so noticeable among younger Hakka-speaking females. It would be quite interesting to investigate the effects of age on this issue. Since that is not the focus of the present study, we will leave this question for future research.

21 On the other hand, male speakers tended to use C4 (Threatening or Warning) and C5 (Explicit Complaint) when responding to the same situations. For example:

- (i) Ngi den-ga-ha ngai oi hi qim gin-cad loi kon oi ngiong-e.  
 you wait I want go find policeman come see want how  
 你 等加下 涯 愛 去 尋 警察 來 看 愛 仰仔.  
 ‘You wait for me. I will find a policeman and see what to do.’
- (ii) Ngi voi koi cha-e mo? lu an-tai-tiau he mo kon-do he-mo?  
 You can drive car not road so big is not see is-not  
 你 會 開 車仔 無? 路 恁大條 係 毋 看到 係無?  
 ‘Can’t you drive? The road is so big, don’t you see it?’
- (iii) Giag lau ti-nai to ka qiang deu-e, mog hoi heu-boi ge ngin doi-do  
 quick LAU floor mop COMP clean a little not harm back POSS person fall  
 遽 摻 地泥 拖 較 淨 兜仔, 莫 害 後背 个 人 跌倒  
 ‘Quickly mop the floor a little bit cleaner. Don’t let other people slip over.’

- (6) Ngi lia-ha cong-do lia (mun) an tai-kung, kon oi gam ngi  
 You now crash this (door) so big-hole see want ask you  
 你 這下 撞到 這 (門) 係 大孔, 看 愛 甘 你  
 poi han moi gam ngi poi.  
 compensate or no ask you compensate  
 賠 還 無愛 甘 你 賠.

‘You have crashed into the door and now it has such a big hole in it. Won’t you compensate me for the door?’

- (7) Lia-ha giog-gud died ton-ted, oi gam ngi poi  
 Now foot-bone fall down broken want ask you compensate  
 這下 腳骨 跌 斷忒, 愛 甘 你 賠.

‘My foot is broken now. You have to compensate me for the injury.’

It is worth mentioning that though female participants used the Ask for Repair strategy more often than males, we see from example (5) to (7) above that in so doing, they tended to use downgraders to downplay the likely impact of the utterance on the recipient. In example (5), the speaker used ‘ko-nen’ (possible), which is a downtoner, to soften the directness of the complaint. In example (6), the speaker used the interrogative form, which functions like an appeal (at the interpersonal level of discourse) to restore harmony between the speaker and the hearer. However, as internal modification is not our concern here, we will leave it for further research.

Furthermore, if we compare both male and female responses to people of the three different social statuses, it is quite clear that both genders use C3 (Ask for Repair) most frequently when responding to interlocutors of equal social status. This is perhaps because when facing interlocutors of higher social status, they are concerned about saving their ‘negative face’, but feel fewer scruples with respect to interlocutors of equal social status. On the other hand, if the interlocutor is of lower social status, the complainer may hesitate to ask for repair, out of a perception that people of lower social status may be unable to pay.



Now let's look into the relationship between Gender and Social Distance. Figure 3 illustrates the complaint category used when encountering interlocutors of different social distances.

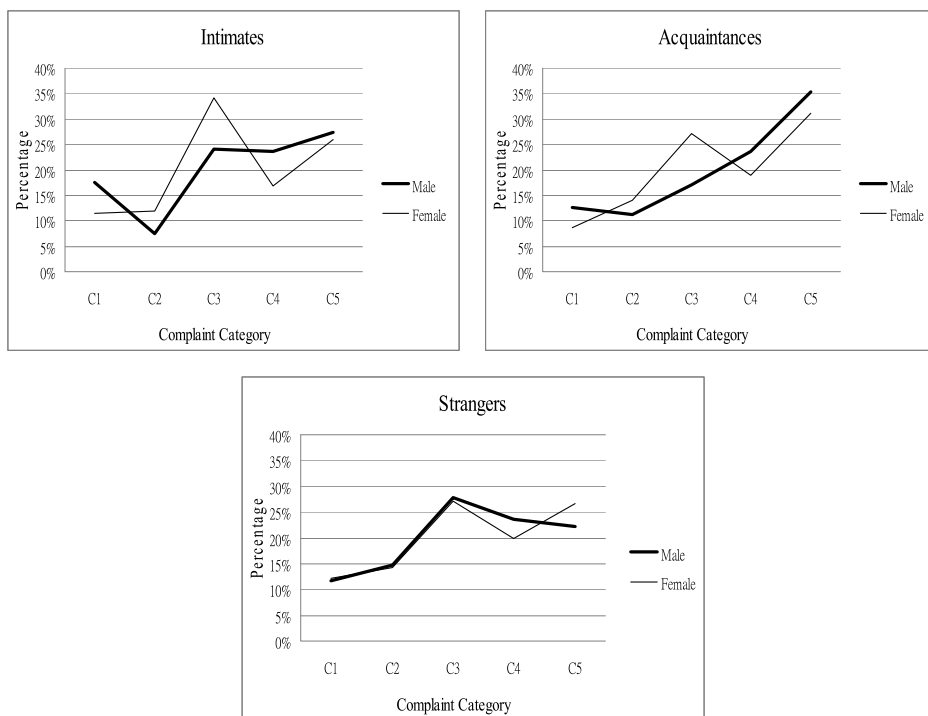


Figure 3. The Effect of Social Distance

As shown in Figure 3, the tendencies to use C3 and C4 were almost the same as those found in Figure 2.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that with strangers, male and female speakers' utterances were almost indistinguishable with respect to C1, C2 and C3. Such results partially confirm Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) and Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) findings. Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) argued that in Israeli society, social distance is a weak predictor of strategy choices when making requests, while

<sup>22</sup> That is, female speakers apart from those in the "strangers" group generally used C3 more than males, and this difference is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). On the other hand, female participants used C4 less often than their male counterparts.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) claimed that the insertion of social distance as a variable caused no significant differences in Hebrew speakers' complaint strategies. Trosborg (1995: 372) even described social distance as a "negative predictor" in that, generally speaking, "least effort (fewer strategies, less internal and external modification) was exerted in role constellations marked for social distance." In our findings, male and female Hakka speakers sometimes perform identically toward recipients of the same social distance ("Strangers" in our findings). In other words, [+D] creates a barely noticeable difference in male and female Hakka speakers' choices of complaint strategies. This is probably because when facing "strangers," both males and females are not that concerned about deciding on a strategy, i.e., they respond unconsciously without thinking of the correct linguistic forms or appropriate degree of politeness, since the recipient is socially distant from them. Therefore, males tend to be not so aggressive and females not as considerate. As a result, they choose similar strategies.

Finally, Figure 4 summarizes the participants' performances when complaining to male and female interlocutors.

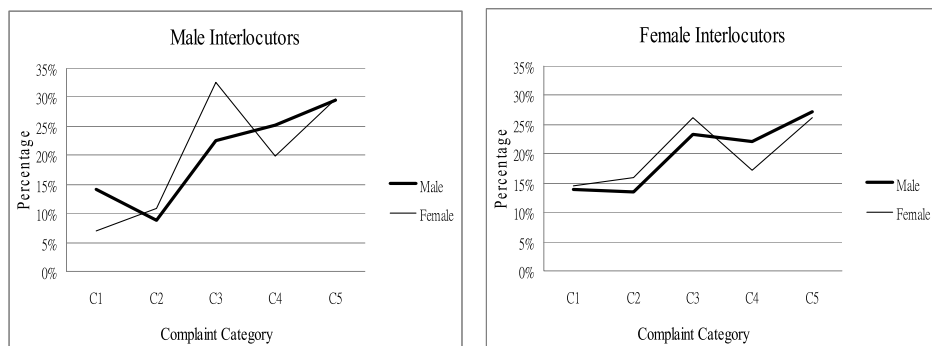


Figure 4. The Effect of the Interlocutor's Gender

Again, there is a similar general tendency—females used C3 (Ask for Repair) more, and C4 (Threaten and Warn) less. Besides, female participants used C2 (Expression of Annoyance) more than their male counterparts, though not to a significant degree. In other words, females expressed their feelings more frequently.

This confirms a widely-cited feature of “feminine” interactional style, namely that women’s discourse tends to be affectively oriented (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). This sensitivity to gender difference is more clearly visible in Figure 5.

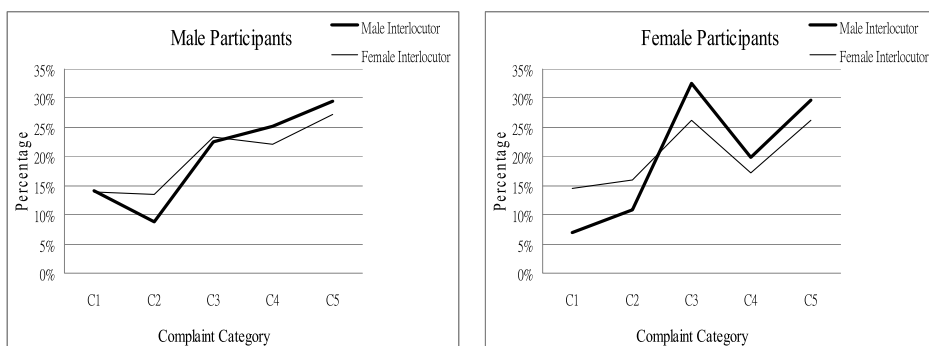


Figure 5. Male and Female Participants Facing Interlocutors of Different Genders

Figure 5 shows male and female participants’ strategies when complaining to interlocutors of different genders. In the group of female participants, although only the difference in C1 reached a statistically-significant level ( $p < .05$ ),<sup>23</sup> it is quite obvious that the trends of the two curves are very different to those of the male participants. Male participants seemed not to be very conscious of the gender of their interlocutors, and performed very similarly with both, especially in terms of C1 and C3. In other words, female speakers are more responsive to the gender of their interlocutors than males; therefore their performance with different genders also diverges. This again supports the assertion that females are more sensitive than males, in that they tend to use dissimilar complaining strategies toward different recipients, while men on the other hand tend to be less responsive to the speech of others, and to their conversational needs (Holmes 2008).

It is also interesting to probe into female participants’ performances in C1 (Opt

23 The difference in C2 and C3 also almost reaches the statistically-significant level, at  $p=0.06$  and  $0.08$ , respectively.

Out). To be exact, they use C1 only about 7% of the time with male interlocutors, but up to 14.4% of the time with female interlocutors. If we take apart C1 and examine the composing complaint strategies more closely, female respondents used S1 (Justify the complaine'e's actions) 4.7% of the time and S2 (Express resignation) 2.3% of the time with male interlocutors, but S1 8.1% and S2 6.3% of the time with female interlocutors. That is to say, when complaining to females, female participants on the one hand seek more excuses for them, while on the other give up complaining in more situations than when complaining to males. This implies that females are generally kinder and more polite to female interlocutors; however, at the same time, they also feel it is more often useless to complain to females than to males. This suggests that females know how to approach interactions with other females better than males know to approach interactions with other males.

#### 4. General Discussion and Implications

In the present study, I examine gender differences in complaint realization patterns with reference to such socio-pragmatic factors as social status, social distance, and gender of the interlocutors. Several gender-based distinctions are found, and among them, some are culture-specific characteristics.

First of all, this study's data suggests that male Hakka speakers are more aggressive in that they consistently used more severe complaint strategies (Threaten and Warn) compared to their female counterparts. The data also suggests that females are more polite in conversation since they tend to use longer sentences designed to weaken or soften the force of the complaint. The vast literature on gender differences in linguistic performance shows tendencies for aggressiveness in male and politeness in female language use and claims that these differences are universal. Hakka speakers' performances when complaining basically provide evidence for such universal gender differences.

It has also been claimed that speech acts cannot be truly understood without reference to cultural values and attitudes (Wierzbicka 1985, 1991). This study also

supports this claim, revealing the unique value Hakka ascribe to “thrift” among female speakers. According to the present data, female participants used Ask for Repair strategies more often than males. This definitely introduced a dilemma for females, since this strategy tends to threaten the interlocutors’ ‘negative face.’ However, just as Wierzbicka (1985) argues that linguistic differences are due to aspects of culture much deeper than mere norms of politeness, from their choices, we can be moderately confident that culture indeed overrides civility with respect to the complaint realization of female Hakka speakers. In other words, deeper cultural values shape female Hakka speakers’ language choices more effectively than the so-called universal tendency for females to use polite language. This implies that a linguistic study of culture-specific speech acts has a great deal to contribute to the connection between linguistic courtesy and cultural worth.

Another noteworthy issue is the role of these socio-pragmatic factors in Hakka speakers’ choices of complaint strategies. I find that Social Distance has a weaker influence on both men and women’s choices of complaint strategies compared with Social Status. In other words, male and female Hakka speakers are inclined to select similar strategies when their interlocutors are of the same level of familiarity. They even performed almost identically when complaining to strangers. Such an outcome suggests that social distance, to some extent, ‘neutralizes’ the gender difference in Hakka speakers’ language use, especially when interlocutors are unfamiliar persons ([+D]). Though some previous studies also found that the inclusion of the variable Social Distance created no remarkable difference in language use (Olshtain & Weinbach 1987; Blum-Kulka et al. 1985; Trosborg 1995), this study is the first one to point out the interaction between the variables of social distance and gender of the language users. Based on the data, I can tentatively conclude that when complaining to unacquainted interlocutors, Social Distance is not a potential trigger for male and female Hakka speakers’ to decide on divergent complaint strategies. However, much more verification across a larger number of studies and communicative acts is needed before drawing a definite conclusion.

On the other hand, Hakka speakers are more aware of the social status of their

interlocutors. Both male and female participants used Opt Out strategies more often with interlocutors of higher social status than with those of equal or lower social status. This tendency reveals that the politeness of their language diminishes along with the social status of their interlocutor. Furthermore, Social Status also influenced the choice of an Ask for Repair strategy, which participants employed more often with interlocutors of equal social status, and less often with those of higher or lower social status. The decisive role of social status can also be explained from a culture-specific viewpoint. Since Hakka are mostly farming peoples, they think of themselves as “the carriers of true Han Chinese spirit, exemplified by a strong sense of filial piety, emphasis on education and other Confucian values.” (Thrasher 2008:15)<sup>24</sup> Maintaining those values of hard working, perseverance, and Confucian tradition, it is easy to explain why they would be more sensitive to social status. This again substantiates the entrenched role of culture in daily language use.

As for the degree of responsiveness, the performance of male Hakka speakers also diverges greatly from that of female speakers. According to the results of this study, males are less sensitive to the gender of their interlocutors; conversely, females are much more responsive. Such results echo the claim that females are more sensitive and thoughtful in conversation than males.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Concluding Remarks

This study investigates gender difference in northern Taiwan by examining complaint strategy selection among male and female Hakka speakers with respect to three socio-pragmatic factors: Social Status, Social Distance, and Gender of the interlocutor. Based on authentic oral DCT data, this paper contributes to the field of Hakka language research in that it is the first to probe socio-pragmatic issues in

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24 Chinese culture is famous for its Confucian traditions honoring people of higher social status, which is often associated with age and wisdom.

the speech act of complaining and to provide understanding of gender difference in Hakka speakers' complaint behavior. There are some gender-based features and some culture-specific differences in Hakka men and women's language use. This study also reveals some interesting patterns and tendencies which could serve as the basis for future studies of other speech acts as well as the baseline for cross-cultural comparisons.

## 5.2 Future Research

If we compare the performance of Hakka speakers and Mandarin speakers (the majority) in Taiwan, we can easily see that owing to the circumstances of Taiwan's Early Hakka immigrants and some special cultural characteristics, Hakka speakers indeed choose different complaining strategies. While Taiwanese college students select an Explicit Complaint strategy as their first choice (Lin 2007), most Hakka speakers are apt to use an Ask for Repair strategy, which is the last choice for Mandarin users.<sup>25</sup> Such divergent choice of strategies raise an interesting question, that is, what if an act of complaint happens between a Hakka and a Mandarin speaker? How do they feel when an unexpected strategy was selected? This might be an interesting topic for future study. Moreover, as I mentioned in section 3.2, the use of internal modification, which includes upgraders and downgraders, might also be an issue worthy of further scrutiny. An important task for a complainer is to express his/her irritation and to avoid acting in a manner that is too face-threatening to an interlocutor. Given that a complaint may be aggravated or strengthened by the insertion of upgraders or softened or weakened by the inclusion of downgraders (Trosborg 1995), it is fascinating to observe how male and female Hakka speakers elastically use these modifications. And since it has been claimed that politeness is the major motivation of using such internal modifications (Searle 1991), do males use more upgraders and females more downgraders? Do the frequencies of

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25 In Lin (2007), it was found that the overall preference order of the complaint strategies are Explicit Complaint (27.53%), followed by Opt Out (20.26%), and the least frequent one is Ask for Repair (11.48%).

usage vary with the social status, social distance, and gender of the interlocutors? It is hoped that future studies explore the usage of such devices to broaden our understanding of linguistic politeness in the Hakka language.

Appendices

Appendix A    Age Range and Mean Age of Each Group

|           |              |                |              |                |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Group     | Junior Males | Junior Females | Senior Males | Senior Females |
| Age Range | 20-39        | 20-38          | 50-69        | 50-65          |
| Mean Age  | 24.4         | 23.9           | 59.5         | 54.5           |

| The Distribution of the Ages of the Participants |              |                |              |                |
|--|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| No.  | Junior Males | Junior Females | Senior Males | Senior Females |
| 1  | 22           | 21             | 62           | 53             |
| 2  | 39           | 22             | 66           | 56             |
| 3  | 31           | 38             | 67           | 65             |
| 4  | 24           | 20             | 55           | 51             |
| 5  | 22           | 20             | 55           | 50             |
| 6  | 22           | 22             | 62           | 58             |
| 7  | 20           | 23             | 50           | 55             |
| 8  | 28           | 21             | 54           | 54             |
| 9  | 27           | 21             | 57           | 51             |
| 10   | 23           | 21             | 58           | 52             |
| 11   | 24           | 22             | 50           | 52             |
| 12   | 20           | 22             | 69           | 51             |
| 13   | 21           | 32             | 69           | 56             |
| 14   | 22           | 30             | 53           | 64             |
| 15   | 21           | 23             | 65           | 50             |



### Appendix B The 18 Complaint-Provoking Scenarios

Interlocutor social power (P), social distance (D), and gender (M & F).

| Social Status | Social Distance | Gender | Role  | Situation  |
|---------------|-----------------|--------|---|--|
| + P           | - D             | M      | Your father   | Your father was cheated by swindlers, who persuaded him to withdraw 500,000 NT (New Taiwan Dollars, roughly USD 17,000) from your savings account.                                       |
| + P           | - D             | F      | Your mother   | You mother went into your room without your permission and cleaned it. Unfortunately, she threw away an envelope containing 300,000 NT (roughly USD 10,000).                             |
| + P           | = D             | M      | A male friend who is the mayor  | Part of your house was constructed without a permit, but the city has not done anything about it for years. Now the mayor wants to win re-election, so he orders your house pulled down. |
| + P           | = D             | F      | A female friend who is a judge  | You were in a car accident with another person, but the judge sided with the other person, and fined you 100,000 NT (roughly USD 3,500).   |
| + P           | + D             | M      | A male doctor after the first consultation                                | You went to a clinic for the first time, but the medicine the doctor prescribed caused a severe allergic reaction, with redness and swelling all over your body.                         |
| + P           | + D             | F      | A female elementary school teacher whom you have not seen for a long time | You have an appointment with your teacher, but she arrives more than fifty minutes late.   |

|     |     |   |  |   |
|-----|-----|---|--|---|
| = P | - D | M | A best friend (male)                                 | Your best friend borrowed your car, but sadly wrecked it.   |
| = P | - D | F | A best friend (female)                               | Your best friend borrowed a photo album from you. The photos inside are very old and irreplaceable. Unfortunately, she lost it. |
| = P | = D | M | A male neighbor who lived next to you for years      | Your neighbor crashed his car into your front door while he was trying to back up.  |
| = P | = D | F | A female neighbor who lived next to you for years    | Just as you are leaving for a party, your neighbor accidentally overturns a can of paint, which spills right onto your head.    |
| = P | + D | M | A male passenger at the airport                      | At the airport, a stranger picked up your baggage by mistake. Unfortunately, he dropped it and broke your computer inside.      |
| = P | + D | F | A woman sitting in front of you in the movie theater | She and her friends are chatting loudly about the movie's plot.   |
| - P | - D | M | Your son   | You told your son to eat at the dining table, but he disobeyed and spilled a bowl of greasy chicken soup onto your bed.         |
| - P | - D | F | Your daughter  | Your daughter has been disturbing your neighbors by listening to loud music at midnight.  |
| - P | = D | M | A male friend who is a car salesman                  | You bought a car from this person, but it turned out to have water damage.  |
| - P | = D | F | A female friend who sells seafood in the market      | You bought some seafood from this person. After eating it, you suffered vomiting and diarrhea.                                  |

|     |     |   |                                       |   |
|-----|-----|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| - P | + D | M | A male cleaner (garbage man)          | You were dressing up for a party when the garbage truck came. Just as you threw your trash into the truck, the garbage man accidentally splashed garbage all over your clothes. |
| - P | + D | F | A female cleaner (restroom attendant) | You went to the restroom, but the attendant neglected to dry the floor after mopping. Unfortunately, you slipped and broke your leg.  |

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# 客語抱怨行為的性別差異

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## 摘 要

本文旨在探討性別在客家話「抱怨」這個語言行為中所扮演的角色。透過言談情境填充問卷（Discourse Completion Task）的語料蒐集，我們發現就平均抱怨語長度而言，女性的平均抱怨長度比男性長，顯示女性傾向使用較長的句子來弱化「抱怨」可能對受話者帶來的威脅和衝擊，也展現女性比男性有禮貌的一面。此外，客家女性特有的「節儉」美德，也表現在其抱怨策略的選擇上，她們比男性選用更多的「要求賠償」策略。反之，男性則展現具侵略性的特質，選用較多相對較嚴厲的抱怨策略。就社會語用變項來看，客語使用者對受話者社會地位的改變比較敏感，且在面對社會地位高者傾向使用「放棄抱怨」的策略；而隨著受話者社會地位降低，抱怨者的禮貌也隨之遞減。此外我們也發現女性是較敏感且體貼的會話者，因為她們較易依著受話者性別的改變而選用不同的抱怨策略。

**關鍵詞：**抱怨、性別差異、社會地位、社會距離、客語

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