A pragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticizing in university teacher-student talk

The case of English as a lingua franca

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The current study examined the realization of the speech act of criticizing by university teachers in their talk with students. To this end, role-plays were conducted with 60 university teachers (30 males and 30 females) at a private Saudi university which is characterized by its multicultural academic staff, and, hence, where English is used as a lingua franca. Recordings were transcribed and analyzed using an adapted version of Nguyen's (2005, 2013) model of criticism strategies. The results showed the teachers' preference for indirect over direct criticism strategies and their minimal use of modifiers, particularly internal ones. It was also found that the influence of the teacher's gender or years of teaching experience was small while the severity of the situation was a critical factor in the choice of appropriate strategies. The results were interpreted in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical model of politeness.

Keywords: pragmatics, English as a lingua franca, criticizing, speech act, teacher-student talk, politeness

1. Introduction

The current study examines the realization of the speech act of criticizing, which can be defined as "an illocutionary act whose illocutionary point is to give negative evaluation of the hearer's (H's) actions, choice, words and products for which he or she may be held responsible" (Nguyen 2005, 7). This speech act often aims to express the speaker's (S's) dissatisfaction with or dislike of H's action or to urge the H to improve his/her future actions to match the S's requirements or expectations. The current study examines the speech act of criticizing through focusing on the realization of criticism by university teachers in their interactions with

students. Talk in this institutionalized academic setting is expected to reflect the values underpinning the educational culture of the discourse (Hiraga and Turner 1996) and typifies participants' actions when shaping interactions (Araújo 2012). In the university context, teachers carefully consider a number of variables when opting to criticize the students' behavior. Among these variables are the institutional policies, the students' benefits and development, the teacher's prior knowledge of the student, the severity of the situation, the culture of the institution and the teacher's interpersonal relationship with the student (Cao 2005; Hiraga, Fujii and Turner 2003; Hyland and Hyland 2001). Hence, the teacher's choice of the appropriate criticism strategies is quite complicated as "teachers often have to weigh their choice of comment to accomplish a range of informational, pedagogic and interpersonal goals simultaneously" (Hyland and Hyland 2001, 187).

Another important characteristic of the current study is the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The current study was conducted in a private Saudi university where English is the medium of instruction. The university is characterized by its multicultural faculty members who possess high command of English. This situation parallels the widespread use of ELF in real life as it has become the language of choice in a variety of international settings (Riekkinen 2010). Traditionally, ELF was considered a learner language with deviant language use in comparison with how native speakers use the language. However, learning a foreign language is different from learning English as a global lingua franca. In regular language learning, learners often aspire to the native speaker models to improve their performance while ELF is used for global communication, whether with native or non-native speakers. In the ELF context, the deviations ELF speakers may produce are considered as linguistic innovations born out of a legitimate ELF development (Widdowson 1994) and ELF is slowly being recognized as a variety of the English language on its own right (e.g., Howatt and Widdowson 2004; Riekkinen 2010; Widdowson 1994) that is worthy of investigation with little or no reference to a native speaker model. The current study views ELF as a legitimate variety of English and considers Cogo and Dewey's (2006) argument that ELF speakers are content-oriented and thus their language often lacks interactional features, such as hedges, and Mauranen's (2003) claim that ELF users are particularly sensitive and co-operative language users because of their lack of familiarity with the interlocutors' cultures.

The current study represents an addition to the literature for a number of reasons. First, studies on the speech act of criticizing are relatively rare in comparison with other speech acts (Nguyen 2013; Nguyen 2005), such as apologizing (e.g., Chang 2016; El-Dakhs 2018; González-Cruz 2012), complimenting (e.g., Cai 2012; El-Dakhs 2017; Guo, Zhou & Chou 2012) and requesting and refusing (e.g., El-Dakhs 2018; Farenkia 2015; Morkus 2014). Second, examining university teachers'

oral criticism is under-researched. Most earlier studies addressed the provision of critical feedback on peers' or students' written work in institutional settings (e.g., Araújo 2012; Diani 2017; Hyland 2004; Hyland and Hyland 2001; Itakura and Tsui 2011; Salager-Meyer and Alcaraz Ariza 2004). This constitutes an intriguing gap in the literature because examining teacher-student interaction can contribute to relevant theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical implications. Third, in addition to examining the realization strategies of criticism in university teacher-student talk, the current study also explored the influence of gender and years of teaching experience on teachers' criticism behavior. Hence, the study results will also shed light on the role of two important social factors (i.e., gender and years of teaching experience) on university teachers' criticism patterns.

The current study draws on the face-saving perspective of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and a number of other relevant studies on the speech act of criticizing in its analysis of results. Hence, the two following sections of the current research article present an overview of Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model and a review of related literature on the politeness theory (Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987) as well as the speech act of criticizing. This is followed by a restatement of the study research questions and a description of the methodology and results. Finally, results are interpreted, pedagogical implications proposed and conclusions drawn.

2.   Literature review

2.1   Brown and Levinson's politeness theory

Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness draws on Goffman's (1967, 319) concept of "face" defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself." Viewing "face" as a person's public self-image, Brown and Levinson (1987, 66) considered "face" as "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction." Brown and Levinson (1987) further distinguished two types of face that people work jointly to preserve in interactions; positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to one's desire to be appreciated and approved of while negative face reflects one's desire to enjoy freedom of action without being impeded upon.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987, 70), "certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker." For example, the speech act of criticizing in the current study threatens both the positive and negative face of the

student. As Cao (2005) explains, criticizing jeopardizes the hearer's desire to be appreciated and approved of by calling his/her actions into question. Criticizing also threatens the hearer's negative face through attempting to impose a change of action on the hearer. Since it is in the best interest of interlocutors to maintain each other's face, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are either avoided (if possible) or a number of other redressive strategies are employed to soften the potential destructive effect of FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987) specify 5 super-strategies. The first strategy, referred to as "bald-on-record" reflects an unambiguous/ direct act which performs the FTA with maximum efficiency regardless of the hearer's face wants. The second and third strategies are also on-record, but include facework. Positive politeness, on the one hand, enhances the interlocutor's feeling of appreciation and approval while negative politeness, on the other hand, minimizes any imposition on the interlocutor. The fourth strategy is classified as off-record since it involves FTAs that are expressed ambiguously and indirectly to reduce the speaker's commitment to the FTA and allow room for negotiation of meaning. Ambiguity here includes metaphors, irony, hints, rhetorical questions, understatements, etc. The last politeness strategy is to prioritize harmony of inter-personal relationships by avoiding FTAs altogether.

It is worth noting that Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model has received a lot of criticism because it disregards the larger linguistic context (Hayashi 1996), claims that the direct relationship between face and politeness is universally valid (Baron 2002) and solely focuses on the self rather than social relationships in interaction (Spencer-Oatey 2000). More criticism was expressed by the proponents of postmodern or discursive politeness (e.g., Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003) who criticized the model for its inability to account for impoliteness as well as politeness (Eelen 2001) and being concerned with the model person rather than taking that person into account in relation to others (Watts 2003), among other things. Despite this criticism, the current study employs Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model because it offers an incisive description of linguistic strategies (e.g., Locher 2006; Pizziconi 2003) and has proved easy and flexible to use, particularly in the examination of a speech act.

2.2   The speech act of criticizing

Earlier studies on the speech act of criticizing have been carried out from different perspectives, such as genre, intercultural/cross-linguistic, cross-disciplinary and diachronic (see Salager-Meyer and Lewin (2011) for sample articles from these perspectives). However, the current review of literature classifies earlier studies into two broad categories of written and oral criticism. Under the written domain, a number of studies were conducted on the evaluative language in the genre of

book reviews (e.g., Alcaraz-Ariza 2002; Diani 2009; Moreno and Suárez 2008). For example, a cross-disciplinary study was conducted by Hyland (2004) who investigated how the evaluative language of "praise" and "criticism" was used in 160 book reviews representing different disciplines. Clear disciplinary variations emerged with respect to the extent to which reviewers employed the target speech acts and their preferred terms of expression.

Other studies on book reviews adopted a cross-linguistic approach (e.g., Araújo 2012; Itakura and Tsui 2011; Salager-Meyer and Alcaraz Ariza 2004) or focused on the use of politeness strategies (e.g., Diani 2017; Valor 2000). Cross-linguistically, Araújo (2012), for example, reported more similarities than differences in the book reviews produced by Brazilian and American graduate students in the Linguistics and Education areas. This was interpreted in terms of the influence of genre as the students appropriated their writing preferences to accomplish the genre purpose for classroom use despite the fact that some students had little experience with writing reviews. As for the use of politeness strategies, Valor (2000) highlighted the use of compliments as a positive politeness strategy in book reviews to maintain a harmonious relationship with the reviewee and to redress criticism. Similarly, Diani (2017) explored mitigation strategies in English and Italian book reviews and shed the light on the cultural influences on the use of mitigation strategies.

Studies on written communication also included research into the feedback of teachers and students at an academic setting. Hyland and Hyland (2001) analyzed two teachers' summary comments at the end of their ESL students' assignments over a complete proficiency course. It was found that praise was most frequently employed, often as a softener for criticisms and suggestions. The frequent use of mitigation strategies in the form of hedges, questions and personal attribution to redress criticism and suggestions was also noted. The researchers highlighted the value of mitigation in enhancing effective teacher-student relationships, but also pointed out that such indirectness potentially led to incomprehension and miscommunication. Likewise, Lü (2018) examined the use of emails by Chinese undergraduates to communicate pedagogical criticism to their western teachers. It was found that students tended to express their criticism directly and even sometimes used bald critical statements and a balance was observed between the use of positive and negative politeness strategies. The researchers concluded that the email represented a safe, polite and effective channel for students to express their critical views, and that people behave differently in computer-mediated from face-to-face communication as computer-mediated communication may buffer the negative feelings associated with unpleasant topics.

Other studies on the speech act of criticizing examined oral communication. For example, Farnia and Abdul Sattar (2015) revealed the preference of native

speakers of Persian for direct over indirect strategies of criticism when job performance, food, homework and research papers are criticized. They also highlighted the participants' use of mitigation devices to achieve politeness. Two other studies analyzed the evaluative language of judges in televised talent competitions. Chen and Rau (2015) focused on selected episodes of singing competitions in Taiwan, and found that the most common patterns were direct compliments, compliments followed by criticism and indirect criticism. Direct criticism was still employed as judges represent mentors to the candidates and can provide guidance to enhance their performance, but it only accounted for 11% of patterns. As for Tang (2016), evaluative communication was compared between a US-based talent competition and a Taiwan-based talent competition. The noted differences, including a higher frequency of indirect criticisms in the Taiwanese Chinese sub-corpus and the Taiwanese Chinese's higher use of heavily redressed direct criticism, were interpreted in terms of the Taiwanese Chinese's strong cultural tendency to emphasize group harmony and interpersonal relationships whereas Americans often preferred utilizing explicit codes to maximize their speech clarity.

Other studies on oral communication of criticism focused on the development of interlanguage pragmatics. For example, Nguyen (2005, 2013) found that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) language users criticized and responded to criticism very differently from native speakers of English. The comparison highlighted the influence of negative transfer on the learners' performance while it failed to show any positive influence for the learners' increased language proficiency on their pragmatic competence. Of more relevance to the current study is Hiraga, Fuji and Turner (2003) who examined the difficulties Japanese students studying in Great Britain faced with pragmatic understanding in tutorial sessions with British tutors. Differences in the power distance between teachers and students in the two cultures had an impact on communication. While British tutors paid attention to students' face, reflecting an egalitarian perspective of students as full members of the discourse community, students' face was not often attended to as much as the teacher's in the Japanese context because authoritarian interaction was more common in the Japanese context with students not granted a membership status in the academic community.

Few other studies on teacher-student interaction were carried out outside the domain of interlanguage pragmatics. Comparing tutor-student interaction in British and Japanese academic contexts, Hiraga and Turner (1996) showed that while British students primarily dealt with their own face wants, Japanese students showed more concern for the positive face of the tutor. It was also noted that negative face was highly attended to in the British context with both tutors and students carefully addressing the negative face of each other and the students particularly taking care of their own. In the Japanese context, however, neither tutors

nor students seemed to attend to each other's negative face or that of their own. The results were interpreted in terms of the British tutors' view of their students as members of the academic discourse community and the more hierarchical and authority-based relationship between students and teachers in the Japanese context. Similar cultural influences were noted by Cao (2005) who highlighted that lecturers' criticism to students is perfectly justified in the Chinese context while students, who are assigned an inferior status in the social hierarchy, are expected to submit to lecturers' instruction and show lecturers due respect and obedience. Of special interest to the current study is Riekkinen (2010) who examined the use of hedges in doctoral defenses when criticism was given by native speakers of English versus speakers of ELF. It was noted that ELF speakers used hedges differently than native speakers of English in terms of what expressions are used and how frequently they are used. However, these differences did not result in any communication problems.

The current study fits in the domain of oral communication as it examined the realization of the speech act of criticizing by university teachers to their students through 10 role-plays. More specifically, the current study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How do university teachers realize the speech act of criticizing in their talk with students?
2. How does gender influence university teachers' realization of the speech act of criticizing in their talk with students?
3. How does increased years of teaching experience influence university teachers' realization of the speech act of criticizing in their talk with students?

3.   Methodology

3.1   Participants

A total of 60 faculty members were recruited from a private Saudi university for the purpose of the study. The participants were gender-balanced consisting of 30 females and 30 males. The female participants ranged in age between 28 and 54 (Mean: 40.36) and in years of teaching experience between 4 and 36 (Mean: 14.36). They belonged to 9 nationalities; 5 Lebanese, 5 Saudis, 5 Egyptians, 5 Pakistanis, 4 Indians, 3 Malaysians, 1 Korean, 1 Singaporean and 1 South African. As for men, they ranged in age between 30 and 50 (Mean: 38) and in years of teaching experience between 3 and 30 (Mean: 14.3). They came from 14 countries; 5 Jordanians, 5 Egyptians, 5 Pakistanis, 3 Malaysians, 2 Indians, 2 Nigerians, 1 Slovak, 1 French, 1 Spanish, 1 Yemeni, 1 Palestinian, 1 Saudi, 1 Algerian and 1 Tunisian.

All participants had spent a minimum of seven months of service at the private Saudi university where the study was conducted. The longest years of service for the participants at the Saudi private university was 17 years while the mean was 5 years of service.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected through 10 role plays (see Appendix A) that included every-day situations university teachers are likely to face with their students, such as late attendance of class, attempt to cheat at an exam, submitting a partially pla-giarized assignment, responding rudely to the faculty member, etc. The partici-pants were directed to read the scenarios and respond in the manner they would naturally do with their students. Since male and female students are taught sep-arately at the target university, male faculty members responded as if they were addressing their male students while female faculty members imagined speaking to their female students. It was decided to collect data through role-plays, not the more commonly used written Discourse Completion Task, in order to increase the authenticity of data. Faculty members would produce more natural speech in role-plays. Afterwards, recordings got transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The researchers are aware though that ethnographic data collection would offer yet a higher level of authenticity, but opted for the use of role-plays in order to examine the criticism strategies within the same situations across all participants. Additionally, the use of role-plays was more feasible due to the difficulty of arrang-ing repeated visits to classrooms for data collection. It is worth noting that the use of English as the medium of instruction is enforced by a university policy, and, hence, even the Arabic-speaking teachers who participated in the study completed the role-plays in English as they would do in their classrooms.

3.3 Data coding

Data coding was based on an adapted version of Nguyen's (2005, 2013) coding scheme of the speech act of criticizing. The scheme included two main categories of criticism; i.e., direct criticism, which explicitly points out the problem with H's choice/actions/work/products/ etc., and indirect criticism, which implies the problems with H's choice/actions/work/products, etc. Each category included a number of subcategories. For example, the strategy of disapproval, which involves describing S's negative attitude towards H's choice, etc., fell under direct criticism while the strategy of correction, which involves fixing errors and asserting specific alternatives, came under indirect criticism. Context here definitely played a cen-tral role to decide whether an utterance is direct or indirect. In addition to these

two main categories, it was acknowledged that participants may opt out and/ or attempt to soften criticism using external (e.g., sweeteners and disarmers) and/or internal (e.g., downtoners and understaters) modifiers (Nguyen 2005, 2013). Appendixes (B) and (C) include detailed descriptions of all categories with their characteristics and sample utterances. Coding was limited to verbal behavior. Analysis of non-verbal criticism (e.g., Trees and Manusov 1998) was not addressed as it falls beyond the scope of the current study.

4.   Results

This section is divided into three subsections as per the study research questions.

4.1   How do university teachers realize the speech act of criticizing in their talk with students?

Table 1 shows the percentages of criticism strategies in terms of opting out, direct criticism and indirect criticism. The university teachers preferred the use of indirect strategies which represented 53.3% of the responses. The most frequent micro-strategies were demanding change (10.7%), indicating a standard (9.7%), requesting change (8.6%), advising change (7.1%), asking or presupposing (6.7%) and giving hints (5.2%). As for the direct strategies, which represented 43.1% of the responses, it is noted that the less direct the micro-strategy was, the more frequently it was used. For example, the extremely direct strategies of negative evaluation and disapproval account for 9.6% while showing the consequences of action and identifying the problem represented 22.9% and 10.4% respectively. Regarding opting out, it represented only 3.6% of the responses.

Table 2 shows the university teachers' preferences per situation. In four situations, the teachers produced more direct than indirect strategies. The percentage of direct strategies from the total number of strategies employed by teachers was (56.9%) when the teacher discovered the students' act of plagiarism in situation 10, (56.2%) when the student cheated in situation 7, (51.9%) when the student missed the deadline for assignment submission in situation 3 and (49.1%) when the student came late to class in situation 1. Four other situations showed a remarkably high use of indirect strategies. This was shown when the student received a low grade in situation 4 (69.5%), forgot the study materials in situation 2 (64.3%), used the cell phone in class in situation 8 (63%) and submitted a poor assignment in situation 6 (61.5%). As for opting out, three situations showed higher use of strategy than the average for the accumulative situations. These situations were the ones

Table 1. Percentages of criticizing strategies

Strategy	Sum	Percentage
Opting out	**46**	**3.6%**
Negative evaluation	49	3.8%
Disapproval	74	5.8%
Expression of disagreement	0	0%
Identification of problem	133	10.4%
Statement of difficulties	0	0%
Consequences	291	22.9%
Direct criticism	**547**	**43.1%**
Correction	0	0%
Indicating standard	124	9.7%
Preaching	39	3%
Demand for change	136	10.7%
Request for change	110	8.6%
Advice about change	91	7.1%
Suggestion for change	7	0.5%
Expression of uncertainty	15	1.1%
Asking/Presupposing	86	6.7%
Other hints	67	5.2%
Indirect criticism	**675**	**53.3%**

when the student was rude (6.8%), arrived late to class (5.6%) and used the cell phone (5.5%).

Table 2. Percentages of criticizing strategies per situation

Situation	Opting out		Direct criticism		Indirect criticism	
	Sum	Percentage	Sum	Percentage	Sum	Percentage
1	7	5.6%	61	49.1%	56	45.3%
2	1	.9%	45	34.8%	83	64.3%
3	3	.5%	66	51.9%	58	45.6%
4	4	3.2%	35	27.3%	89	69.5%
5	8	6.8%	53	44.1%	59	49.1%
6	3	2.1%	55	36.4%	93	61.5%
7	1	1%	63	56.2%	48	42.8%
8	6	5.5%	35	31.5%	70	63%
9	8	7%	48	41.7%	59	51.3%
10	5	3.3%	86	56.9%	60	39.7%

Table 3 shows that the use of modifiers, whether external or internal ones, was minimal. Only 167 external and 62 internal modifiers were produced. External

modifiers constituted almost three quarters of the total number of modifiers with grounders (e.g., Please, read these materials because my lecture is directly linked with that) (33.6%) being the most frequent, followed by disarmers (e.g., You're late again, but I think that's because of the traffic jam.) (15.2%), sweeteners (e.g., Your writing is generally good, but this part seems directly copied from the source.) (13.5%) and steers (e.g., I have some comments about your assignment) (10.4%) respectively. As for internal modifiers, the most frequent was cajolers (e.g., You know, you need to fix this problem.) (14.8%). Table 4 shows the use of modifiers per situations. With the small number of modifiers used, no significant patterns proved worthy of description. It is obvious though that the highest number of external modifiers was used in the situations where the student forgot the study materials (situation 2), received a low grade (situation 4) and forgot to prepare for class (situation 9).

Table 3. Percentages of modifiers

Strategy	Sum	Percentage
Steer	24	10.4%
Sweeteners	31	13.5%
Disarmers	35	15.2%
Grounders	77	33.6%
External modifiers	**167**	**72.9%**
Understaters	5	2.1%
Hedges	0	0%
Downtoners	16	6.9%
Cajolers	34	14.8%
Subjectivizers	7	3%
Internal modifiers	**62**	**27.1%**

Table 4. Percentages of modifiers per situation

Situation	External modifiers		Internal modifiers	
	Sum	Percentage	Sum	Percentage
1	14	82.3%	3	17.7%
2	30	78.9%	8	21.1%
3	14	70%	6	30%
4	25	69.4%	11	30.6%
5	5	50%	5	50%
6	17	73.9%	6	26.1%
7	4	50%	4	50%
8	18	81.8%	4	18.2%
9	27	79.4%	7	20.6%
10	13	61.9%	8	38.1%

4.2   How does gender influence university teachers' realization of the speech act of criticizing in their talk with students?

In order to examine the influence of gender on the teachers' criticism strategies, a T-test[1] was run to compare the averages of the two genders in order to identify any differences and show how statistically significant these differences are. As shown in Table 5, men produced significantly more negative evaluations, advice for change and other hints while women demanded change significantly more frequently.

Table 5. T-test results – influence of gender

Strategy	Gender	Mean	SD	T	Sig (2-tailed)
Negative evaluation	Female	.4333	.72793	−2.558	.013
	Male	1.2000	1.47157		
Demand for Change	Female	2.7333	1.61743	2.506	.015
	Male	1.8000	1.24291		
Advice about Change	Female	.9000	.84486	−3.831	.000
	Male	2.1333	1.54771		
Other Hints	Female	.7333	.98027	−2.507	.015
	Male	1.5000	1.35824		

These findings, however, underwent some change when the T-test was conducted per situation because choosing the most appropriate politeness strategy is situation-dependent (Holtgraves 1992). First, men produced more grounders when students came late to class, more advice for change when students forgot their materials, did not meet the deadline, behaved rudely and submitted partially plagiarized assignments, more hints when students attempted to cheat, more negative evaluations when students behaved rudely, attempted to cheat and did not prepare for class and more direct criticisms when students did not prepare for class. As for women, they produced significantly more hints when students received low grades, more disapprovals when they did not prepare for class, more demands for change when students submitted poor assignments and more questions when students did not prepare for class. Women also opted out more often when students received low grades.

The influence of gender was also examined through comparing the combination patterns of strategies as shown in Table 7. Among the noted differences are that the opting out strategy ranked 1st for women with 10% while it ranked

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1.   A T-test is a type of inferential statistics which is used to demonstrate if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups which may be related in certain features.

Table 6. T-test results – influence of gender per situation

Situation	Strategy	Gender	Mean	SD	T	Sig(2-tailed)
1	Grounder	Female	.0000	.00000	−2.112	.039
		Male	.1333	.34575		
2	Advice about change	Female	.0333	.18257	−2.047	.045
		Male	.2000	.40684		
3	Advice about change	Female	.0000	.00000	−2.408	.019
		Male	.1667	.37905		
4	Opting out	Female	.1333	.34575	2.112	.039
		Male	.0000	.00000		
	Other Hints	Female	.1333	.34575	2.112	.039
		Male	.0000	.00000		
5	Negative evaluation	Female	.0667	.25371	−2.408	.019
		Male	.3000	.46609		
	Disapproval	Female	.2667	.44978	2.633	.011
		Male	.0333	.18257		
	Advice about change	Female	.1333	.34575	−2.131	.037
		Male	.3667	.49013		
6	Demand for change	Female	.3667	.49013	2.530	.014
		Male	.1000	.30513		
7	Negative evaluation	Female	.0000	.00000	−2.112	.039
		Male	.1333	.34575		
	Other hints	Female	.0333	.18257	−2.633	.011
		Male	.2667	.44978		
9	Negative evaluation	Female	.0000	.00000	2.112	.039
		Male	.1333	.34575		
	Direct criticizing	Female	.5667	.81720	2.167	.034
		Male	1.0333	.85029		
	Asking/Presupposing	Female	.2000	.40684	2.047	.045
		Male	.0333	.18257		
10	Advice about change	Female	.0000	.00000	−2.112	.039
		Male	.1333	.34575		

2nd for men with 5%. A reverse pattern was noted for the indication of ill consequences which ranked 1st for men with 9% and second for women for 6.7%. It was also noted that demanding change on its own represented 4.7% of the patterns by women while it did not represent a frequent pattern for men who preferred requests for change (2.3%) and advice for change (2.3%) instead. Some similarities across gender were also observed. For example, indicating ill consequences by itself stood at 4% for women and 3.3% for men. Similarly, identifying problems with indicating ill consequences represented 4.3% for women and 3% for men.

Table 7. Percentages of combination patterns of strategies

Females		Males	
Combination pattern	Percentage	Combination pattern	Percentage
Opting out	10%	Consequences	9%
Consequences	6.7%	Opting out	5%
Consequences + Demand for Change	5%	Consequences + Standard	3.3%
Demand for Change	4.7%	Identification of Problem + Consequences	3%
Identification of Problem + Consequences	4.3%	Consequences + Other Hints	3%
Consequences + Indicating Standard	4%	Request for Change	2.3%
Asking/Presupposing	3.7%	Advice about Change	2.3%

4.3 How do increased years of teaching experience influence university teachers' realization of the speech act of criticizing in their talk with students?

In order to address the influence of increased years of teaching experience on the realization of criticism, a Pearson Correlation test[2] was run to measure the statistical relationship, or association, between the two variables. The results shown in Tables (8) and (9) revealed minimal influence. Overall, the more experienced the professors were, the more likely they steered and produced external modifiers. When the test was run per situations, however, some further differences emerged. The more experienced professors were, the less they demanded change when students came late to class, asked questions when students behaved rudely, advised change when students did not prepare for class and identified the problem in cases of plagiarism. The more experienced the professors were, the more they provided hints when students missed deadlines, produced cajolers when students behaved rudely, steered when students used the cell phone in class and produced external modifiers when students did not prepare for class or submitted partially plagiarized assignments.

Table 8. Pearson correlation test results – influence of years of teaching experience

Strategy	R	Sig
Steer	.300	.020
External modifiers	.297	.021

2. The Pearson Correlation test is a statistical measure of the linear correlation between two variables.

Table 9. Pearson correlation test results – influence of years of teaching experience per Situation

Situation	Strategy	R	Sig
1	Demand Change	−.264	.041
3	Other Hints	.300	.020
5	Asking/Presupposing	−.260	.045
	Cajolers	.308	.017
8	Steer	.388	.002
9	Advice about Change	−.275	.033
	External modifiers	.297	.021
10	Identification of Problem	−.280	.030
	External modifiers	.279	.031

5.   Discussion

An important finding of the current study is the university teachers' preference for indirect (53.3%) over direct criticism (43.1%) strategies. Within the indirect strategies, preference was mainly for those that reflect minimal imposition, such as requesting (8.6%) and advising (7.1%) change, asking/presupposing (6.7%) and other hints (5.2%). These strategies convey the message of criticizing, but allow the students at least theoretically to accept or reject the change, provide reasons or ignore the hints (Riekkinen 2010). Even when teachers opted for the more assertive indirect strategy of indicating a standard, reference was often made to institutional policies regarding late arrival to class, plagiarized assignments, attempting to cheat, etc. This minimizes the imposition from the teachers since the imposition is institutional. When teachers employed direct strategies, the extremely direct strategies of negative evaluation and disapproval were used at the minimum whereas less direct ones were preferred. Reference was also often made to institutional penalties (e.g., failing a course for plagiarism, being marked absent on the academic portal for arriving too late to class, etc.) and policies (e.g., disrespect is not allowed in this university). These preferences clearly show that teachers were trying to soften the content of the criticism for the sake of enhancing teacher-student relationship and balance the informational and pedagogic aspects with the interpersonal dimension (Hyland and Hyland 2001). As explained earlier, the faculty members in the study context are highly qualified and trained university professors who must be fully aware of the value of maintaining positive interpersonal relationships with students to enhance the learning process.

Teachers' attempt to soften their criticism is documented in earlier studies (e.g., Hiraga, Fuji and Turner 2003; Hiraga and Turner 1996; Hyland and Hyland 2001; Riekkinen 2010) but teachers seem to differ in their preferred strategies.

Teachers in the current study preferred the use of indirect strategies and the less direct strategies from the direct ones. However, teachers ($n=60$ responding to 10 situations each) showed little use of modifiers whether externally ($n=167$) or internally ($n=62$). Other studies demonstrated different preferences. For example, teachers used questions and suggestions similar to the current study in Hyland and Hyland (2001), but also frequently used hedges (internal modifier) and praise (external modifier). Similarly, teachers in Riekkinen (2010) showed a strong use of hedges. The minimal use of hedges in the current study may be interpreted in two ways. First, the teachers in the current study teach EFL learners and may thus wish to ensure the clarity of their messages by avoiding internal modifiers, which may not be well-noticed by EFL learners (Hyland 2000) or may even cause incomprehension and miscommunication (Hyland and Hyland 2001). Second, the different use of modifiers may be a general characteristic of ELF as noted in Riekkinen (2010) who showed that ELF teachers used hedges differently from native speakers without causing any communication problems.

The teachers' preferences in the current study support that the choice of appropriate strategies is situation-dependent (Holtgraves 1992; Brown and Levinson 1987). Contrary to the general pattern of findings, teachers in the current study produced more direct than indirect strategies for situations of plagiarism (56.9%), cheating (56.2%), missing deadlines (51.9%) and coming late to class (49.1%). The severity of these situations may have called for this tendency. Paying attention to the severity of the situation was also obvious when teachers used higher percentages than average of indirect strategies when students received low grades (69.5%), forgot the study materials 64.3%), checked their cell phones in class (63%) or submitted relatively poor assignments (61.5%). Teachers also used the highest number of external modifiers in less severe situations, such as forgetting the study materials, or in situations that are particularly sensitive to students, such as the student receiving a low grade.

In terms of politeness, it is clear that teachers in the current study are particularly sensitive to their students' face. As explained earlier, it is extremely important to maintain good rapport with their students. Face-work in the current study was mainly represented in reducing imposition on the students' negative face. This was achieved through the use of indirect strategies (negative politeness strategies) and rhetorical questions and hints (off-record strategies). Additionally, bald-on record strategies (e.g., negative evaluation and disapproval) were kept to the minimum. The results may reflect the increasing emphasis in teacher-training programs on the importance of providing constructive feedback that catalyzes, coaches, inspires confidence (Sadler 1998), involves students in their own teaching and learning (Hattie and Timperley 2007) and allows for dialogue between

students and teachers in a way that promotes thinking and reflection (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and William 2002).

The current results also revealed interesting insights regarding ELF. Earlier studies on criticism mainly highlighted EFL and ESL learners' preferences for direct criticism strategies (e.g., Lü 2018; Nguyen 2013) while ELF teachers in the current study manipulated indirect strategies successfully to fulfil their goals. This finding lends support to the treatment of ELF as a language variety of English rather than an ill-formed or illegitimate version. The teachers in the current study were highly proficient speakers of English who used the language to communicate with non-native speakers. Their purpose was global communication using English as a lingua franca. Hence, their language choices need not be compared to a native speaker's model, but should be examined as a language variety on its own (Howatt & Widdowson 2004; Riekkinen 2010; Widdowson 1994). The current results also support Cogo and Dewey's (2006) argument that ELF often lacks interactional features, such as hedges, and tends to be more content-driven. This can be explained in terms of Mauranen's (2003) claim that ELF speakers are sensitive and cooperative language users. It is assumed that the ELF teachers in the current study seemed to avoid the use of modifiers because EFL learners generally tend to miss modifiers (Hyland 2000) and miscomprehend indirect feedback (Hyland and Hyland 2001). The ELF teachers' choices thus aimed to enhance the learners' understanding.

In addition to examining the use of criticism strategies, the current study also addressed two important social factors; i.e., gender and years of teaching experience. Few significant differences were noted for both factors. As for gender, the main differences were that men produced significantly more negative evaluations, advice for change and hints while women tended to demand change more frequently. Differences were noted across situations, but without a clear pattern. For example, men produced more negative evaluations when students behaved rudely, cheated or did not prepare for class. Men advised for change more frequently when students forgot their materials, missed the deadline, behaved rudely or plagiarized. Women demanded change more frequently when students submitted poor assignments and opted out more often when students received low grades. The influence of the years of teaching experience was also minimal as the general pattern was for more experienced teachers to produce more steers and external modifiers. In certain situations, other results showed. For instance, the more experienced the teachers were, the less they demanded change from late students, the less they asked questions to rude students, the less advice they provided for those who did not prepare for class and the less they identified the problem in cases of plagiarism.

The minimal influence of these social factors can be best explained in terms of the focus of the current study on university teacher-student talk. As Araújo (2012) pointed out, participants tend to appropriate their actions to the conventions socially constructed by their discourse community. Hence, faculty members tend to behave in accordance with the social patterns of their community in terms of standard practices as per teacher training programs, institutional policies regarding instructional standards and regulations and the values underpinning the educational culture. In such institutionalized academic settings, harmonious practices are more commonly used. This was clear in the British tutors' versus Japanese tutors' behaviors in Hiraga and Turner (1996) and Hiraga, Fuji and Turner (2003) when the British applied more egalitarian practices while the Japanese exercised a more authoritarian approach. Similarly, although in a different context, American and Brazilian graduate students appropriated their writing preferences to write the classroom assignment of book reviews regardless of their experience with writing in this particular genre. What may have further contributed to the relatively homogenous behavior is that the mean for years of service at the same university was 5 years, a period that supports effective acculturation to the conventions and standard practices in the institution.

6. Conclusion

The current study examined the criticism strategies employed by university teachers in teacher-student talk in a context where English is used as a lingua franca. In this context, ELF teachers effectively manipulated criticism strategies to convey their messages while maintaining good interpersonal relationships with students. Communicating with non-native speakers and possessing excellent command of English, the ELF teachers' production was interpreted within their context, not through comparisons with native speakers' production. For example, the teachers' minimal use of modifiers was regarded as a legitimate feature of the ELF variety which suited the needs of the EFL learners' relatively poor command of English and their potential misunderstanding of indirect or modified messages. The ELF teachers also showed adequate sensitivity to politeness in their preference of indirect criticism strategies over direct ones and also in their tendency to use strategies of little directness among the cohort of direct criticism strategies. Great sensitivity was also shown to the students' negative face through reducing imposition on students and expressing criticism in a manner that allows them even theoretically to be the decision takers.

The influence of the teachers' gender and years of teaching experience, two seemingly important social variables, was surprisingly minimal in the current

study. This finding was relatively unexpected, particularly since university education in the current study is separate for the two sexes with a campus for male students and teachers and another campus for female students and teachers. However, the general context of the study seemed to greatly reduce the effect of such social variables as teachers, in this institutionalized academic setting, seemed to conform to the conventions of the academic community with reference to the culture of the place, institutional policies and standard pedagogical practices. The teachers' strong tendency to appropriate their behavior to the conventions and social patterns of the academic setting regardless of their gender or years of teaching experience was further enhanced by their teaching experience and their relatively long years of service at the same university (mean: 5 years). It must be noted though that the severity of the situation showed a strong influence in the current study. In fact, the teachers' criticism behavior was extremely situation-dependent. Teachers' choices of direct/indirect criticism strategies greatly varied along the severity continuum (e.g., cheating at the strong end and forgetting the study materials towards the other end).

The current study highlights the importance of carefully considering the situation and general context in pragmatic analyses of speech acts. The realization of speech acts is often situation-dependent and the general context of the study, such as the university setting in the current study, tends to typify the participants' contributions in interactions and may minimize the influence of other frequently examined social variables, such as gender. Careful consideration of the situation and context is also recommended in politeness research since preference for certain politeness strategies over others may reflect the situated linguistic behavior of the target institutionalized academic or professional settings. The current study also supports the use of English as a lingua franca as a legitimate variety of the English language that is worthy of investigation. ELF speakers with a high command of English, as is the case in the current study, should not be pooled together with language learners. Additionally, it is recommended for teacher-training programs to benefit from research in the area of speech acts. Novice teachers can benefit a great deal from training on the effective use of relevant speech acts, such as providing and responding to criticism, giving instructions and handling complaints. Finally, further research on the speech act of criticizing within specific contexts is recommended. It will also be helpful to further examine the use of English as a lingua franca in the world of academia and how politeness management may vary across cultures and contexts.

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Appendix A. Study: Examining university teacher-student talk

Instrument: Role-play

Dear Faculty Member,

Participation in this role-play is voluntary, so please feel free to refuse participation if you don't wish to take part in the study.

The aim of this study is to examine the university teacher-student talk. The data are collected through role-plays that will be recorded and later transcribed. The participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential. No special reward is offered for participation in the study. Your participation will, however, be highly appreciated by the researchers to help advance scientific research.

Procedure

You will read 10 scenarios which should make you criticize your student, especially that their wrong behavior has been repeated. You must respond in natural spoken English as you would do in real life while actually talking to your students. In case you feel that you would not say anything in real life, please say so and explain your reason(s).

Now, you will be reading one scenario at a time and then have your response to your student in natural spoken English recorded.

Situation (1)
Your student has arrived 15 minutes late to class again.

Situation (2)
Your student has forgotten to bring his/her study materials to class again. The materials are needed for class work.

Situation (3)
Your student did not submit the assignment by the deadline again.

Situation (4)
Your student has again received a low grade on the test. He/She does not seem to be exerting enough effort to improve their grades.

Situation (5)
Your student has again replied rudely to your comments in class. He/She generally adopts a dis-respectful attitude in class.

Situation (6)
Your student submitted an assignment in poor shape and quality. The student has repeatedly disregarded your layout specifications and does not seem to be putting enough effort into the work.

Situation (7)
Your student is trying to cheat at an exam. You warned him/her against this behavior before, but he/she is still trying to look into his/her colleague's answer paper.

Situation (8)
Your student is repeatedly checking the cell phone during the lecture. This seems to completely distract your student and make him/her miss the class content.

Situation (9)
Your student was instructed to prepare for the lecture through reading certain parts of the text-book before coming to class. The student has again not prepared for the lecture as instructed.

Situation (10)
Your student has submitted a partially plagiarized assignment. You had warned him/her against plagiarism once before and your plagiarism policy had been shared with the whole class.

Appendix B. Nguyen's (2005, 2013) coding scheme of the speech act of criticizing (adapted)

Type	Characteristics	Example
1. **Opting Out**		
2. **Direct Criticizing**	Explicitly pointing out the problem with H's choice/ actions/ work/ products/ etc.	
a. Negative evaluation	Usually expressed via evaluative adjectives with negative meaning or evaluative adjective with positive meaning plus negation.	*"Umm that's not really a good sentence."*
b. Disapproval	Describing S's attitude towards H's choice, etc.	*"I don't like the way you write that ah "I'm convinced about the idea" or "in my opinion."*
c. Expression of disagreement	Usually realized by means of negation word "No" or performatives "I don't agree" or "I disagree" (with or without modal) or via arguments against H.	*"I don't really agree with you."*
d. Identification of problem	Stating errors or problems found with H's choice, etc.	*"You had a few spelling mistakes."*

Type		Characteristics	Example
e.	Statement of difficulties	Usually expressed by means of such structures as "I find it difficult to understand…." "It's difficult to understand…."	"*I find it difficult to understand your idea.*"
f.	Consequences	Warning about negative consequences or negative effects of H's choice, etc. for H himself or herself or for the public.	"*Someone who doesn't agree with you (.) would straight away read that and turn off.*"
3.	**Indirect Criticizing**	Implying the problems with H's choice/ actions/ work/ products, etc.	
a.	Correction	Including all utterances which have the purpose of fixing errors by asserting specific alternatives to H's choice, etc.	"*And you put "their" I think t-h-e-r-e*"
b.	Indicating standard	Usually stated as a collective obligation rather than an obligation for H personally or as a rule which S thinks is commonly agreed upon and applied to all.	"*Theoretically, a conclusion needs to be some sort of a summary.*"
c.	Preaching	Usually stated as guidelines to H, with an implicature that H is incapable of making correct choices otherwise.	"*The following statement is meant to help you. You see, anyone can have an opinion, but the issue is whether they can back it up.*"
d.	Demand for change	Usually expressed via such structures as "you have to," "you must," "you are required to," "you need," or "it is necessary."	"*You must pay attention to grammar.*"
e.	Request for change	Usually expressed via such structures as "will you…..?," "can you…?," "would you….?" Or imperatives (with or without politeness markers), or want statement.	"*I still want you to consider some points.*"
f.	Advice about change	Usually expressed via the performative "I advise you…," or structures with "should" with or without modality	"*I mean conclusion should have some sort of improvement.*"
g.	Suggestion for change	Usually expressed via the performative "I suggest that…" or such structures as "you can," "you could," "it would be better if," or "why don't you," etc.	"*It could have been better to put a comma.*"
h.	Expression of uncertainty	Utterances expressing S's uncertainty to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of H's choice, etc.	"*Are there several paragraphs ah not sure about the paragraphs.*"
i.	Asking/ presupposing	Rhetorical questions to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of H's choice, etc.	"*Did you read your writing again after you finish it?*"
j.	Other hints	Including other kinds of hints that did not belong to (h) or (i). May include sarcasm.	"*I prefer a writing style which are not too personal.*"

Appendix C. Nguyen's (2005, 2013) coding scheme of modifiers (adapted)

Type	Characteristics		Example
1.	**External modifiers**		
a.	Steer	Utterances that S used to lead H onto the issue he or she was going to raise	*"Ah I have some comments about your writing."*
b.	Sweeteners	Compliments or positive remarks paid to H either before or after a criticizing to compensate for the offensive act.	*"There are quite good relevant ideas that you presented (.) ah but.."*
c.	Disarmers	Utterances that S used to show his or her awareness of the potential offences that his or her speech might cause H.	*"You had a few spelling mistakes (.) but I think that's because you're writing too quickly, (.) nothing too major."*
d.	Grounders	The reasons given by S to justify his or her intent	*"I think "is" is better than "are" there because traffic ah single?"*
2.	**Internal modifiers**		
a.	Understaters	Expressions that describe or represent (something) as being smaller or less important than it really is.	*"I think it's <u>a bit</u> salty for me, the soup."*
b.	Hedges	Mitigating word or construction used to lessen the impact of an utterance.	*"You are making <u>kind of</u> a statement with the pants though."*
c.	Downtoners	Words or phrases which reduce the force of another word or phrase.	*"Yes, I mean it <u>might</u> be but it still seems to me at <u>the moment</u> that <u>perhaps</u> it's not a good idea."*
d.	Cajolers	Flattery or insincere expressions to persuade someone to do something.	*"<u>you know</u>... <u>you see</u>"*
e.	Subjectivizers	Expressions of subjective opinion that lower the assertive force of an act.	*"<u>I think</u>" "<u>I feel</u>" "<u>I guess</u>" "<u>I believe</u>" "<u>I suppose</u>"*

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