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# A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF COMPLAINTS

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# INTRODUCTION

**Speech acts** = minimal linguistic units; language acts / speech units.

General **speech act theory**:

- all utterances in addition to their meaning, also perform specific acts via a specific communicative force of that utterance.
- **Complaints** = speech act that expresses speaker's disapproval of the hearer's behaviour.

# COMPLAINTS

- The speaker expresses displeasure/annoyance as a reaction to a past or ongoing action that affects the speaker unfavourably;
- “an illocutionary act in which the speaker expresses disapproval or negative feelings toward the state of affairs described in the proposition and for which the hearer is held responsible either directly or indirectly” (Trosborg, 1995).
- multiple speech acts (Clyne, Ball and Neil, 1991) that usually spread over several turns (Murphy and Neu, 1996).

# COMPLAINTS

- behabitives (Austin, 1962) – show speaker's behaviour;
- expressive acts (Searle, 1969) – express speaker's feelings/attitude;
- conflictive acts (Leech, 1983) – threat/accusation/cursing etc.
- face threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987);
- retrospective acts (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995) –  
used as a reactions to an action that affected the speaker unfavourably;

# METHODOLOGY

## ❑ Instrument:

- Open-ended discourse completion task (DCT).

## ❑ Participants:

University students

## ❑ Quantitative method

- Conveyed by an SPSS system

## ❑ Qualitative method

- Used to correlate the statistical data with the sociocultural features.

# ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Type of a perspective in complaints	focalising speaker perspective
	focalising hearer perspective
	defocalising speaker perspective
	defocalising hearer perspective

➤ **focalising** = the intent is to emphasize the role of the referent in the situation; a specific reference.

➤ **defocalising** = the intent is to minimise the role of the referent in the situation or completely exclude the referent.

# ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Category	No.	Strategy
No explicit reproach	1	Hints
Expression of disapproval	2	Annoyance
	3	Ill consequences
Accusation	4	Indirect accusations
	5	Direct accusation
Blame	6	Modified blame
	7	Explicit blame (behaviour)
	8	Explicit blame (person)

Internal modifiers			1	Openers
	Upgraders		2	Intensifiers
			3	Commitment upgraders
			4	Expletives
			5	Overstaters
	Downgraders	Softeners	6	Downtoners
			7	Understaters
		Fillers	8	Hedge
			9	Appealers
			10	Cajole
	11	Subjectiviers		
External modifiers			12	Alerters
			13	Preparators
			14	Grounders
			15	Disarmers
			16	Sweeteners

# THE MOST FREQUENT FORM OF A COMPLAINT

- Similarities vs differences.
- American English vs Macedonian



# COMPLAINTS – SIMILARITIES:

- use of a **hearer-oriented perspective**;
- the use of a **specific reference** toward the hearer;
- the use of a **nonspecific reference** toward the hearer, when he/she has an unequal social status with the interlocutor and involves a high severity imposition;
- use of **pre-acts** used to notify the hearer;
- use of strategies of **disapproval or annoyance**;

# CONCLUSION

- ❖ There are differences in the language structure of the speech act of complaining that result from the variable influence of the social parameters over the utterances of the two sample groups; however they **do not show significant statistical difference.**
- ❖ **Similarities outnumber the differences in the act of complaining in American English & Macedonian.**