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A Preliminary Study of Complaint Speech Act Strategies between Indonesian and Japanese Female Students

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Abstract

This preliminary study aims to examine similarities and differences in the use of complaint strategies by Indonesian and Japanese speakers in relation to interpersonal closeness. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design using contrastive analysis. Data were collected through a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) involving an academic situation in which a friend neglected a group assignment, with five Indonesian female university students (IFS) and five Japanese female university students (JFS) as participants. A questionnaire was also administered to obtain contextual information supporting the DCT responses. The complaint utterances were coded according to the five complaint strategies proposed by Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) and compared across the two groups and interlocutor conditions. The findings show that interpersonal closeness was associated with differences in the use of complaint strategies in both groups. JFS employed a wider range of strategies, whereas IFS predominantly used *Complaint* and *Warning and Accusation*, which represent more direct complaint strategies. Interpersonal closeness was also reflected in the linguistic realization of complaints. JFS more often used interrogative and context-dependent forms, while IFS relied more on explicit negative evaluations and prohibitive forms. The role of interpersonal closeness differed between the groups: it was more apparent in linguistic realization among IFS and in both strategy distribution and linguistic realization among JFS. These findings highlight the relevance of interpersonal closeness in understanding cross-cultural differences in complaint strategies in Indonesian and Japanese.

Keywords: Contrastive Analysis; Complaint Speech Act Strategy; Interpersonal Closeness

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1. Introduction

Complaint speech acts are a type of expressive speech act used to express a speakers disappointment or dissatisfaction with things, actions, situations, or circumstances that do not meet their expectations (Trosborg, 1995; Al-Ebadi et al., 2020; Indahningrum et al., 2023). They may be directed toward the speaker, another person, or a particular situation that gives rise to the complaint, and may be expressed either directly or indirectly (Li and Suleiman, 2017; Boxer, as cited in Ilham et al., 2019). However, complaints are not used solely to express negative feelings (Ikeuchi, 2010); they may also serve interpersonal purposes, such as encouraging the interlocutor to address a problematic action in an effort to maintain the relationship, or, conversely, creating social distance between the interlocutors (Ramadani and Indrayani, 2018; Fiqih and Sudana, 2022). This suggests that the function of complaint speech acts extends beyond the expression of negative emotions and may vary according to the interpersonal purposes pursued by the speaker. Complaints may thus encourage the interlocutor to rectify a particular action or situation as a means of maintaining the interpersonal relationship (Ramadani and Indrayani, 2018; Fiqih and Sudana, 2022), but they may also contribute to greater social distance when the complaint gives rise to conflict or interpersonal problems (Zhang, 2017; Lailiyah et al., 2023). These differences indicate that the interpretation of complaint speech acts cannot be separated from the context of the interaction, including the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor.

In interactions involving interpersonal relationships, complaint speech acts have the potential to give rise to an FTA (Face Threatening Act) because they involve negative evaluations of actions or circumstances associated with the interlocutor (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Yule, 2014; Li and Suleiman, 2017; Al-Ebadi et al., 2020). Speakers therefore need to consider how complaints are conveyed so that their communicative goals can be achieved without causing unintended consequences for the interpersonal relationship. One consideration is the selection of a complaint strategy based on the degree of interpersonal closeness between the speaker and the interlocutor (Indahningrum et al., 2023).

Complaint strategies refer to the ways in which dissatisfaction is realized, with different strategies potentially reflecting different levels of complaint severity. Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) classify complaint strategies according to the degree of severity perceived by speakers as the party affected by the interlocutors actions. Their framework comprises five strategies: 1) *Below the Level of Reproach*, which involves indirect complaints; 2) *Disapproval*, which expresses disagreement or disapproval toward the interlocutors actions; 3) *Complaint*, which involves a direct expression of dissatisfaction; 4) *Warning and Accusation*, which includes warnings or accusations concerning the problematic action; and 5) *Threat*, which involves the use of threats in response to the perceived harm. Because complaints may contain negative evaluations of the interlocutors actions or of situations perceived as unfavorable to the speaker, their realization may vary depending on the situational context and relevant social factors (Takamizawa et al., 2016; Indriyani, 2019). One social factor that may influence the selection of complaint strategies is social distance, particularly the degree of interpersonal closeness between the interlocutors.

Social distance refers to the degree of relational proximity between individuals and may be shaped by factors such as social status, age, gender, hierarchy, and culturally shared

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values and norms (Qizi, 2026). Brown and Hübscher (2022) explain that the concept of social distance draws on the notion of space to understand how individuals establish and navigate social relationships during interaction. In language use, social distance may be reflected in speakers' linguistic choices. More formal or polite language can signal greater social distance, whereas more familiar language may indicate greater interpersonal closeness. The degree of closeness within a social relationship may also be reflected in sentence structure, linguistic style, forms of address, and the strategies speakers employ (Qizi, 2026). Thus, social distance can shape how language is used to establish and manage relationships between speakers and their interlocutors. In the context of complaint speech acts, the degree of interpersonal closeness may therefore be one consideration in how speakers choose to express dissatisfaction toward their interlocutors. In sociolinguistics, gender is understood as a social construct shaped by particular sociocultural contexts, including the roles, functions, and responsibilities associated with women and men, which are shaped through sociocultural processes and may change over time and reflect the particular culture (Mulawarman et al., 2021; Malki, 2022; Satriatama, 2024). These expectations may be reflected in language use, making gender a relevant social factor in the realization of speech acts, including complaints (Furkatovna et al., 2021; Malki, 2021). The relationship between social factors, particularly social distance and gender, and the realization of complaint speech acts has been examined in previous studies of both Japanese and Indonesian.

Previous studies on Japanese complaint speech acts have suggested a tendency toward indirect complaint strategies, particularly in relation to interpersonal relationships. Ishizuka (2015), for example, found that Japanese speakers tended to express complaints indirectly when confronted with situations perceived as unfavorable to them. Similarly, Iwai (2024) reported that complaints were expressed through a combination of two types of strategies: negative politeness strategies and complaint strategies. Koseki and Nguyen (2025) likewise identified the use of indirect complaint strategies as an attempt to maintain both the speakers and the interlocutors face. Taken together, these findings suggest that Japanese speakers may place considerable emphasis on mitigating complaints and maintaining interpersonal relationships when expressing dissatisfaction.

Studies of complaint speech acts in Indonesian, by contrast, have generally reported more explicit forms of complaint, although their realization may vary according to social and situational factors. Auliya et al. (2021) found that Indonesian female speakers tended to express complaints subjectively, while Fiqih and Sudana (2022) reported a relatively high frequency of direct complaint strategies among Indonesian female speakers. Lailiyah et al. (2023) further found that Indonesian female speakers used mitigated forms of direct complaints depending on the degree of discomfort they experienced. Taken together, these findings suggest that Indonesian speakers, particularly female speakers in the studies reviewed, may be more likely to use relatively explicit complaint expressions while adjusting how complaints are conveyed in response to interpersonal relationships and situational conditions.

Differences in the use of complaint speech acts between Indonesian and Japanese speakers have also been reported in comparative studies. For example, Ramadhan and Savana (2026) found that, in online hotel service reviews, Japanese users tended to maintain greater politeness when expressing complaints than Indonesian users. Although this study provides

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insight into differences in complaint speech acts between Indonesian and Japanese speakers, it does not specifically examine how the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the target of the complaint, particularly the degree of interpersonal closeness, relates to the selection of complaint strategies. Meanwhile, previous studies discussed above have indicated that social factors may be associated with how complaints are realized in both speech communities. However, research examining the role of social distance, particularly interpersonal closeness, in the use of complaint strategies remains limited, especially in comparative research involving Indonesian and Japanese speakers.

Addressing this gap, the present study compares the use of complaint strategies among Indonesian and Japanese female speakers across everyday communicative situations involving different degrees of social distance. The study adopts a comparative approach in which social distance serves as the primarily contextual factor for examining variation in complaint strategy selection. Female speakers are selected as a methodological control to minimize variation associated with gender differences, allowing the analysis to focus more specifically on the relationship between speakers backgrounds, interpersonal closeness, and the realization of complaint strategies.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a contrastive analysis approach. The qualitative approach was used to identify and interpret the complaint strategies employed by Indonesian and Japanese female speakers. Contrastive analysis was applied to identify similarities and differences between the two groups in their use of complaint strategies and their linguistic realizations across situations involving different degrees of interpersonal closeness. The findings are presented descriptively to explain the similarities and differences identified in the data. The study aimed to identify similarities and differences in the use of complaint strategies between Indonesian and Japanese female speakers across everyday situations involving different degrees of interpersonal closeness. The study involved 10 participants, comprising five Indonesian female speakers and five Japanese female speakers, all of whom were currently enrolled university students from various academic disciplines. To reduce the potential influence of second-language knowledge on the data, participants from Japanese language or literature programs and other foreign language-related programs were excluded. Restricting the sample to female speakers also served as a methodological control for variation associated with gender, allowing the analysis to focus on differences and similarities in complaint strategy use between the two groups and their relationship to interpersonal closeness.

This study used written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as the primarily instruments to collect data on complaint expressions, while a questionnaire was used to obtain supporting contextual information that complemented and strengthened the analysis. Both instruments were administered through Google Forms. The DCT consisted of one situation involving four interlocutor variables, as presented in Table 1, whereas the questionnaire contained 10 questions related to the context of the situation used in the DCT.

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The situation used in this study was adapted from complaint scenarios developed by Lee (2006). The selected scenario involves a friend failing to complete an assigned task, resulting in a disadvantage to the speaker. This situation was selected because it is relevant to university students experiences, provides a clear basis for the expression of complaints, and can be adapted to interlocutors differing in gender and interpersonal closeness. In this study, the scenario was modified by incorporating interlocutor conditions based on gender and social distance, following the criteria proposed by Brown and Hübscher (2022). These modifications were intended to reflect university students everyday contexts while preserving the core situation across both participant groups. The limited sample size and the use of a single academic scenario reflect the preliminary nature of this study, involved five Indonesian female speakers (IFS) and five Japanese female speakers (JFS) due to recruitment and time constraints. Rather than aiming for generalization, the study seeks to identify patterns in complaint strategy use within the present dataset that can inform further research.

Data were collected by recruiting participants who met the predetermined criteria and asking them to complete the research instruments through Google Forms. Each participant responded to four interlocutor conditions that differed in term of interpersonal closeness and gender. After the data were collected, the DCT responses underwent a screening process to ensure that the responses contained utterances relevant to the given situation rather than merely descriptions of actions that participants would take.

Table 1. The DCT Instrument

No	Interlocutor Variables	Situation
1	Close Male Friend	You and your friend are working together on a group assignment. Each group member is responsible for a different part, which must be completed before the submission deadline. However, when the deadline arrives, your friend still has not completed their part and has not provided a clear reason. As a result, the assignment cannot be submitted on time, and your grade is reduced.
2	Non-close Male Friend	
3	Close Female Friend	
4	Non- Close Female Friend	

Table 2. Coding of Complaint Strategies

No	Strategies	Code	Example Data
1	*Below the Level of Reproach,* indirect complaints	BLR	IFS : - JFS: What's the matter? Have you been busy or something? (どうしたの？忙しかったとか?/ *Doushita no? Ishogashikatta toka?*)
2	*Disapproval,* expresses disagreement or dissatisfaction	DIS	IFS : - JFS: I was feeling sluggish, so it couldn't be helped. (だるかったししょうがない/ *Darukattashi, shouganai*)
3	*Complaint*, direct complaints	CPT	IFS : Our submission was late and our grade was reduced. (*Tugas kita jadi telat dikumpulin, nilainya jadi kepotong.*) JFS: So it's ridiculous that you haven't done the assignment (課題やってないはふざけてる/ *Kadai yattenai wa fuzaketeru.*)
4	*Warning and Accusation*	WA	IFS : Don't let this become a habit. (*Jangan dibiasakan*) JFS: Don't get carried away. (調子乗らないで/ *Choushi noranaide*
5	*Threat*	TH	IFS : Next time, I don't want us to be in the same group. (*Lain kali gausa sekelompok)* JFS: Don't ever show your face again. (二度とその顔を見せるな/ *Nido to sono kao o miseru na*)

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This process yieled 40 complaint utterances for analysis: 20 from Indonesia female speakers (IFS) and 20 form Japanese female speakers (JFS). These utterances were equally distributed across interlocutor gender, with 20 utterances addressed to female interlocutors and 20 addressed to male interlocutors.

The screened DCT responses were analyzed by first identifying utterances that realized complaint speech acts. These utterances were then classified according to the complaint strategy framework proposed by Olshtain and Weinbach (1993), using the codes presented in Table 2, and grouped by participant group and interlocutor condition, which differed in terms of gender and social distance. As a single utterance could contain more than one complaint strategy, each identified strategy was counted separately when calculating the frequency of strategy use. The frequency and percentage of each strategy were used descriptively to summarize its distribution across conditions. To examine their linguistic realizations, the analysis focused on utterances representing the most frequently used strategy in each interlocutor condition. Finally, the findings from IFS and JFS were compared to identify similarities and differences in the use and linguistic realization of complaint strategies.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Distribution of Complaint Speech Act Strategies

The findings of the data analysis are presented in Table 3, which shows the distribution of complaint speech act strategies used by IFS and JFS across four interlocutor conditions in scenario involves a friend failing to complete an assigned task, resulting in a disadvantage to the speaker. The percentages were calculated based on the total number of identified strategy instances.

Overall, the 20 complaint utterances produced by IFS contained 34 instances of complaint strategies, representing three of the five strategy types in the classification framework. *Warning and Accusation* was the most frequently identified strategy, occurring 20 times (58,82%), followed by *Complaint* strategy which occurred 13 times (38,24%). In contrast, *Threat* was identified only 1 time (2,94%). The 20 complaint utterances produced by JFS, by comparison, contained 31 instances of complaint strategies, representing all five complaint strategy types in the classification framework. *Complaint* occurred most frequently, with 9 instances (29,03%), followed by *Warning and Accusation*, with 7 instances (22,58%). The other three strategy types, *Below the Level of Reproach*, *Disapproval*, and *Threat*, occured at the same frequency, with 5 instances (16,13%).

These findings indicate greater variation in the complaint strategy types identified in the JFS data than in the IFS data. This finding is consistent with Iwai (2024), who reported that Japanese speakers may combine different strategies when expressing complaints to their interlocutors. However, whereas Iwai (2024) examined the combination of complaint strategies in relation to politeness strategies, the present study shows that variation among JFS can also occur across different types of complaint strategies themselves. Another finding is that both groups showed the use of *Complaint* and *Warning and Accusation*.

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The use of *Complaint* in the IFS data is consistent with Fiqih and Sudana (2022), who reported a relatively high frequency of direct complaints among Indonesian speakers, particularly female speakers. In contrast, the finding for JFS differs from those of Ishizuka (2015) and Koseki and Nguyen (2025), which reported the use of indirect complaints among Japanese speakers.

This difference may be related to the situational context presented in the DCT, in which the interlocutors failure to complete an assigned task directly affected the outcome of the speakers group work. Taken together, the variation identified in this study suggests that complaint strategy use cannot be understood solely in terms of speakers' linguistic backgrounds but should also be considered in relation to the situational context and interpersonal relationships within the interaction.

These distributions suggest different patterns between IFS and JFS across interlocutor conditions defined by social distance and gender, with further examined in the following section 3.2 and section 3.3.

Table 3. Distribution of IFS and JFS Complaint Speech Act Strategies

No	Variable	IFS					JFS				
		BLR	**DIS**	**CPT**	**WA**	**TH**	**BLR**	**DIS**	**CPT**	**WA**	**TH**
1	Close Male Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8,82%)	5 (14,71%)	1 (2,94%)	0 (0%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)
2	Non-close Male Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8,82%)	5 (14,71%)	0 (0%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)
3	Close Female Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (11,76%)	5 (14,71%)	0 (0%)	1 (3,23%)	1 (3,23%)	3 (9,68%)	1 (3,23%)	2 (6,45%)
4	Non-close Female Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8,82%)	5 (14,71%)	0 (0%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)
Total		**0** (0%)	**0** (0%)	**13** (38.24%)	**20** (58,82%)	**1** (2,94%)	**5** (16,13%)	**5** (16,13%)	**9** (29,03%)	**7** (22,58%)	**5** (16,13%)
Total Strategy Instances				**34** (100%)					**31** (100%)		

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3.2 The Use of Complaint Speech Act Strategies towards Close Friends

This section presents and compares the complaint strategies used by IFS and JFS when addressing close friends, both male and female friends, to identify similarities and differences in strategy distribution between the two groups. The frequency distribution of complaint strategies across these two condition is presented in Table 4.

Based on the distribution presented in Table 4, three complaint strategy types were identified in the IFS data when addressing close friends: *Complaint, Warning and Accusation* and *Threat*. In contrast, all five strategy types were identified in the JFS data: *Below the Level of Reproach, Disapproval, Complaint, Warning and Accusation* and *Threat*. Across the two close-friend conditions, *Warning and Accusation* was the most frequent strategy in the IFS data, whereas the JFS data showed a more varied distribution across several strategies. In both the close male friend and close female friend condition, *Warning and Accusation* was the most frequently identified strategy in the IFS data, occuring 5 times (14,71%) in each condition. In the close male friend condition, three strategies, *Disapproval, Complaint* and *Warning and Accusation*, occured at the same frequency in the JFS data, with 2 instances each (6,45%). In the close female friend *Complaint* occured most frequently in the JFS data, with 3 instances (9,68%).

Overall, the relatively consistent use of complaint strategies in the IFS data suggests that interpersonal closeness may provide greater room for more explicit complaint expression toward close friends. In contrast, in the JFS data, closeness with the interlocutor was not necessarily associated with the use of strategies indicating more direct complaints. Although JFS data also showed the use of direct complaint strategies toward close friends, the linguistic forms used still reflected some degree of caution in their expression.

This pattern suggests that interpersonal closeness does not necessarily eliminate attention to the potential negative impact of complaint utterances, but that such attention may be realized differently across the two groups. Thus, the differences between IFS and JFS are reflected not only in strategy choice but also in how those strategies are linguistically realized. Nevertheless, in both groups, complaints functioned not only as expressions of dissatisfaction but also as evaluations of the interlocutors behavior, conveying an expectation that the behavior would be recognized and not repeated.

Table 4. Distribution of IFS and JFS Complaint Speech Act Strategies towards Close Friends

Variable	**IFS**					**JFS**				
	BLR	**DIS**	**CPT**	**WA**	**TH**	**BLR**	**DIS**	**CPT**	**WA**	**TH**
Close Male Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8,82%)	5 (14,71%)	1 (2,94%)	0 (0%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)
Close Female Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (11,76%)	5 (14,71%)	0 (0%)	1 (3,23%)	1 (3,23%)	3 (9,68%)	1 (3,23%)	2 (6,45%)
Total	**18** (54,55%)					**15** (45,45%)				
Note:	The total refers to the number of complaint strategy instances, not the number of complaint utterances. A single utterance may contain more than one complain strategy.									

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The following examples illustrate the use of the *Warning and Accusation strategy*, as proposed by Olshtain and Weinbach (1993), in the close male friend condition. This strategy had the highest frequency in this condition.

IFS 2 *Jangan gitu, harusnya dikerjain dari awal supaya kita ga telat gini. Jangan dibiasakan.*
Don't do that. It should have worked on it from the beginning so we wouldn't have been late. Don't let this become a habit.

JFS 3 ねえ、調子乗らないで、なんでそんなことするの？
Nee, choushi noranaide, nande sonna koto suru no?
Hey, don't get carried away. Why would you do something like that?

In IFS 2, imperative forms are marked by the use of *jangan* (don't), as in *jangan gitu* (don't do that) and *jangan dibiasakan* (don't let this become a habit). These expressions realize the *Warning and Accusation* strategy and function as the main complaint act. The warning function is reinforced by *jangan dibiasakan*, indicating that the speaker not only responds to the interlocutors failure to complete the assigned task but also reminds them not to repeat similar behavior. A similar realization can be found in JFS 3 through the imperative form ～*naide* (don't). The warning is further reinforced by *choushi noranaide* (don't get carried away), which evaluates the interlocutors behavior as inappropriate.

The *accusation* component in IFS 2 is expressed directly through *harusnya dikerjakan dari awal* (it should have worked on it from the beginning), which attributes responsibility to the interlocutor for failing to complete the assigned task. The accompanying expression *supaya kita ga telat gini* (so we wouldn't have been late) further supports the complaint by highlighting its consequence. In contrast, JFS 3 does not explicitly state the behavior considered problematic but questions it through the interrogative form *nande sonna koto suru no?* (why would you do something like that?). The interrogative form conveys the accusation without explicitly attributing responsibility, making the evaluation more dependent on the situational context.

Thus, the two data share a similar realization of the *Warning* component but differ in how the *Accusation* component is conveyed. In the close male friend condition, the IFS data present the evaluation and attribution of responsibility more explicitly, whereas the JFS data convey the evaluation through an interrogative form that relies more on the situational context. This finding is consistent with Olshtain and Weinbach's (1993) framework, which identifies warnings and accusations as forms through which complaints can be directed at an interlocutor held responsible for the problematic situation.

As examples of the linguistic realization of complaint in the close female friend condition, IFS 1 and JFS 1 are presented below. Both utterances were classified as instances of the *Complaint* strategy.

IFS 1 *kenapa ga bilang dari awal kalau ada kendala? kan dari awal udah sepakat buat ngumpulin tepat waktu, tugas kita jadi telat dikumpulin, nilainya jadi kepotong. Sekiranya butuh bantuan tuh bilang.*
Why didn't you tell me from the beginning that you were having difficulties? We had already agreed to submit the assignment on time, but because of this, our submission was late and our grade was reduced. If you needed help, you should have said so.

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JFS 1 連絡取れなくて、むしろ心配してたのに課題やってないはふざけてる。せめて、連絡して。
Renraku torenakute, mushiro shinpaishiteta noni kadai yattenai wa fuzaketeru. Semete, renrakushite.
I couldn't get in touch with you, and I was actually worried, so it's ridiculous that you haven't done the assignment. At the very least, get in touch.

In both examples, the realization of the *Complaint* strategy toward a close female friend involves a complaint act accompanied by references to the interlocutors violation, its consequences, and a closing statement in the form of advice.

In IFS 1, the complaint is realized through the sequence *kan dari awal udah sepakat buat ngumpulin tepat waktu, tugas kita jadi telat dikumpulin, nilainya jadi kepotong* (We had already agreed to submit the assignment on time, but because of this, our submission was late and our grade was reduced). The reference to the prior agreement establishes the expected behavior, while the following expressions highlight the consequences of the interlocutors failure. Thus, the complaint is supported by explicit references to the violation and its consequences.

A similar pattern is found in JFS 1 through the expression *kadai yattenai wa fuzaketeru* (it's ridiculous that you haven't done the assignment), which evaluates the interlocutors failure to complete the assigned task. However, compared with IFS 1, the violation and its consequences are not described in as much detail. The expression *renraku torenakute, mushiro shinpaishiteta* (I couldn't get in touch with you, so I was actually worried) instead highlights the effect of the lack of communication on the speaker.

Thus, IFS 1 presents the complaint more explicitly through references to the prior agreement and its consequences, whereas JFS 1 places greater emphasis on evaluating the action and its effect on the speaker. The closing statements in both examples, expressed as advice, function as supportive moves by directing the interlocutor toward the expected course of action following the complaint. This pattern can be discussed in relation to Koseki and Nguyen (2025) and Lailiyah et al. (2023), particularly their discussion of how additional linguistic elements may accompany complaints and potentially reduce their face-threatening impact.

3.3 The Use of Complaint Speech Act Strategies towards Non-Close Friends

This section presents and compares the complaint strategies used by IFS and JFS when addressing non-close friends, both male and female friends, to identify similarities and differences in strategy distribution etween the two groups. The frequency distribution of complaint strategies across these two condition is presented in Table 5. Based on the distribution presented in Table 5, two complaint strategy types were identified in the IFS data when addressing non-close friends: *Complaint* and *Warning and Accusation*. In contrast, all five strategy types were identified in the JFS data: *Below the Level of Reproach, Disapproval, Complaint, Warning and Accusation*, and *Threat*. In both the non-close male and non-close female friend conditions, *Warning and Accusation* occurred most frequently in the IFS data, with 5 instances (14.71%) in each condition. Meanwhile, all five strategy types were again

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identified in the JFS data, with *Below the Level of Reproach, Complaint*, and *Warning and Accusation* occurring most frequently, with 2 instances each (6.45%).

Overall, the JFS data showed a wider range of complaint strategy types than the IFS data across the two non-close friend conditions. The IFS data were characterized by the higher frequency of *Warning and Accusation*, whereas the JFS data showed a more varied distribution across several strategies. Compared with the close-friend conditions, the JFS data continued to show variation in strategy use when addressing non-close friends, although differences were observed in the frequency distribution. This pattern suggests that, compared with IFS, JFS participants showed greater consideration of interpersonal closeness in their use of complaint strategies, even in a situation involving relatively serious consequences, such as a friends negligence in completing a group assignment. In the non-close male friend condition, differences were observed in the linguistic realization of complaints through the *Complaint* strategy.

IFS 1 *Kenapa bagian tugas kamu belum selesai? Ini tugasnya jadi telat dikumpulin, nilai kelompok berkurang. kalau ada masalah, lain kali bilang aja dari awal.*
Why haven't you finished your part of the assignment? (because of this) the assignment was submitted late, and (our) groups grade was reduced. If there was a problem, you should have told us from the beginning.

JFS 3 なんでそんなことしたの？ 事前に連絡とか出来なかった？
Nande sonna koto shita no? Jizen ni renraku toka dekinakatta?
Why did you do that? Couldn't you have contacted us beforehand?

The two examples from the IFS and JFS data illustrate the realization of the *Complaint* strategy through different linguistic forms. In IFS 1, the *Complaint* strategy is realized through a direct evaluation of the consequences of the interlocutors actions, as expressed in *ini tugasnya jadi telat dikumpulin* (the assignment was submitted late), reinforced by *nilai kelompok berkurang* (the groups grade was reduced). Although the utterance contains a direct evaluation, IFS 1 begins with the interrogative *kenapa bagian tugas kamu belum selesai?* (why haven't you finished your part of the assignment?), which seeks an explanation for the interlocutors actions rather than directly expressing dissatisfaction. This form allows the complaint to be conveyed less directly in an interaction involving a non-close male friend. This finding is consistent with Lailiyah et al. (2023), who found that Indonesian female speakers may mitigate direct complaints depending on the interactional context.

JFS 3, meanwhile, contains two interrogative forms within a single sequence of complaint utterances, each serving a different function. The expression *jizen ni renraku toka dekinakatta?* (Couldn't you have contacted us beforehand?) asks for an explanation of the interlocutors failure to act as expected, while *nande sonna koto shita no?* (why did you do that?) questions the reason behind the interlocutors action. Thus, the two interrogatives direct the evaluation toward different aspects: the failure to meet the speakers expectation and the reason underlying the interlocutors action. The use of interrogative forms allows the complaint to be conveyed less directly, which can be understood in relation to Koseki and

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Nguyen (2025), who highlighted Japanese speakers attention to face when expressing complaints.

A comparison of IFS 1 and JFS 3 shows that both groups use interrogative forms in realizing the *Complaint* strategy, but the forms are used differently. In IFS 1, the interrogative is combined with a direct evaluation of the consequences of the interlocutors actions, whereas in JFS 3, the questions focus on the mismatch between the interlocutors actions and the speakers expectations, as well as the reason underlying those actions. The complaint condition involving a non-close female friend is showed by IFS 3 and JFS 1, both of which were classified as instances of the *Warning and Accusation* strategy by Olshtain and Weinbach (1993).

IFS 3 *Kamu jangan kayak gini dong. Kita bahkan enggak kenal, enggak akrab. Jadi jangan seenaknya gitu. Enggak ngehargain kita yang udah ngerjain. Kamu seenaknya aja, padahal kita juga jadi kena batunya.*
Don't act like this. We don't even know each other well, we're not close. So don't just do whatever you want. You're not respecting those of us who have already done our part. You acted as you pleased, and we ended up suffering the consequences too.

JFS 1 まぁしょうがないけど、もし遅れそうなら先に連絡しておいてくれたらありがたかったな。。
Maa shouganai kedo, moshi okuresou nara saki ni renraku shite oitekuretara arigatakatta na ...
Well, i guess it can't be helped, but i would have appreciated it if you had let me know in advance if you thought you were going to be late.

The two data differ in their linguistic realization of the *Warning and Accusation* strategy. In IFS 3, the *warning* component is explicitly realized through the prohibitive form *jangan* (don't), as in *kamu jangan kayak gini dong* (don't act like this) and *jadi jangan seenaknya gitu* (so don't just do whatever you want), directing the interlocutor not to repeat the inappropriate behavior. The expression *seenaknya* (do whatever you want) further reinforces the negative evaluation, while *enggak ngehargain kita yang udah ngerjain* (you're not respecting those of us who have already done our part) explicitly attributes responsibility to the interlocutor.

Table 5. Distribution of IFS and JFS Complaint Speech Act Strategies towards Non-Close Friends

Situation	IFS					JFS				
	BLR	**DIS**	**CPT**	**WA**	**TH**	**BLR**	**DIS**	**CPT**	**WA**	**TH**
Non-close Male Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8,82%)	5 (14,71%)	0 (0%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)
Non-close Female Friend	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8,82%)	5 (14,71%)	0 (0%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)	2 (6,45%)	2 (6,45%)	1 (3,23%)
Total	**16** (50%)					**16** (50%)				
Note:	The total refers to the number of complaint strategy instances, not the number of complaint utterances. A single utterance may contain more than one complain strategy.									

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In contrast, JFS 1 realizes the strategy through *moshi okuresou nara saki ni renraku shite oitekuretara arigatakatta na* (I would have appreciated it if you had let me know in advance if you thought you were going to be late), which expresses an unmet expectation rather than an explicit prohibition. Thus, while IFS 3 conveys the warning and accusation through explicit prohibition, negative evaluation, and attribution of responsibility, JFS 1 presents them less explicitly through the speakers expectation.

Social distance is also linguistically realized differently. IFS 3 explicitly refers to the relationship through *kita bahkan enggak kenal, enggak akrab* (we don't even know each other well, we're not close), making social distance part of the speakers evaluation of the interlocutors behavior. JFS 1, by contrast, does not explicitly refer to the relationship, leaving social distance primarily as contextual information for interpreting the complaint.

Across the two levels of interpersonal closeness, the IFS data showed a relatively stable range of complaint strategies, with *Warning and Accusation* remaining prominent in both conditions, whereas the JFS data showed greater variation in strategy distribution. These patterns suggest that interpersonal closeness was reflected differently across the two groups, with greater variation in strategy distribution in the JFS data and more stable strategy use but different linguistic realizations in the IFS data.

3.4 The Role of Interpersonal Closeness in the Use of Complaint Strategy

Based on the findings, interpersonal closeness appears to be associated with the realization of complaint speech acts in both groups, although this association is reflected in different ways. In the IFS data, the use of complaint strategies was relatively consistent across close and non-close friend conditions, involving three strategy types: *Warning and Accusation*, *Complaint*, and *Threat*. This pattern is broadly consistent with Fiqih and Sudana (2022), who identified the use of direct complaints among Indonesian speakers. In contrast, the JFS data showed clearer differences in the distribution and range of strategies across interpersonal closeness conditions. This finding is in line with Iwai (2024), who found that Japanese speakers may combine different complaint strategies even when interacting with friends. These finding suggest that interpersonal closeness may be associated with variation in complaint strategy selection, although the pattern differes between the two groups.

In the IFS data, the role of interpersonal closeness was more apparent in linguistic realization than in strategy selection. Complaints directed at close friends were often realized through more explicit negative evaluations and prohibitive forms, whereas complaints directed at non-close friends showed modifications in their formulation, such as the use of interrogative forms at the beginning of an utterance and advice at its end. Thus, although the range of strategies identified in the IFS data remained relatively stable, interpersonal closeness appears to be associated with how these strategies were linguistically realized. Nevertheless, the present findings further suggest that the use of a direct complaint strategy does not necessarily mean that complaints are expressed in the same way across different interpersonal conditions. Even when the same strategy was used, linguistic modifications were found in complaints directed at non-close interlocutors. This pattern is consistent with Lailiyah et al. (2023), who found that direct complaints may be linguistically modified to mitigate their potential face threatening impact. This suggest that interpersonal closeness may

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shape not only whether a complaint strategy is selected, but also how that strategy is formulated linguistically.

In the JFS data, interpersonal closeness was reflected in both strategy distribution and linguistic realization. For example, *Below the Level of Reproach* was identified more frequently in conditions involving non-close interlocutors. The use of interrogative forms and other linguistic forms that allow complaints to be conveyed less directly also indicates variation in how complaints were formulated across interlocutor conditions. This pattern differs from Ishizuka (2015), which indicated a preference for indirect complaints in disadvantageous situations. The present findings suggest a more differentiated pattern: JFS respondents could also use direct complaint strategies in situations involving disadvantage, although their use varied across interlocutor conditions in both strategy distribution and linguistic realization. This finding is consistent with Ramadhan and Savana (2026), who suggested that Japanese speakers may adjust their complaint expressions according to interpersonal closeness. Although their study examined naturally occurring online reviews, the present findings similarly indicate that interpersonal closeness may be associated with variation in both strategy selection and linguistic realization.

Overall, interpersonal closeness appears to be relevant to the realization of complaints in both groups, although its role is reflected differently. In the IFS data, this association was more clearly observed in the linguistic realization of a relatively stable range of strategies. In the JFS data, differences in interpersonal closeness were reflected in both strategy distribution and linguistic realization. These findings suggest that interpersonal closeness may operate at the level of linguistic realization and, under certain interpersonal conditions, at the level of strategy distribution, with different patterns observed across the two groups. The findings extend previous research by showing the interpersonal closeness may be associated with complaint strategy selection as well as with the linguistic realization of those strategies, with teh relative prominence of these aspects differing across the two groups.

4. Conclusions

This study examined the use of complaint speech acts by Indonesian female students (IFS) and Japanese female students (JFS). Both groups used complaints to express dissatisfaction with an interlocutor perceived as responsible for a negative outcome, but they differed in the distribution and linguistic realization of their strategies. JFS used a wider range of complaint strategies and, in several cases, expressed complaints through less explicit and more context-dependent forms, whereas IFS showed relatively stable preferences for *Complaint* and *Warning and Accusation* and tended to express negative evaluations more explicitly. Interpersonal closeness was also relevant to the selection and realization of complaint strategies in both groups, although its role differed: among IFS, its influence was more apparent in linguistic realization, whereas among JFS, it was reflected in both strategy distribution and linguistic realization.

These findings may contribute to cross-cultural pragmatic research by highlighting the relevance of interpersonal closeness to both complaint strategy selection and linguistic realization. They also suggest that Japanese Language Teaching (JLT) may benefit from

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fostering learners pragmatic awareness of how complaints are formulated according to interpersonal relationships, supporting more context choices when expressing dissatisfaction. This study was limited to five female university students in each group and a single academic situation involving friends. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary patterns within the present dataset rather than as generalizable characteristics of Indonesian and Japanese female speakers. Future research could involve more participants and a wider range of complaint situations to examine whether similar patterns emerge across different interpersonal and situational contexts.

Author Contributions

Author 1: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing; Author 2: conceptualization, methodology, supervision, writing – review and editing.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Generative AI Usage Declaration

Generative AI or AI-assisted technologies, such as ChatGPT and DeepL, were used during manuscript preparation to assist with English vocabulary and terminology selection, translation and language editing to improving the readability and language of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and revised the AI-assisted output and take full responsibility for the cotent of the manuscript.

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