

- Vol. VII, No. II (Spring 2022)    ▪ p- ISSN: 2708-2091    ▪ e-ISSN: 2708-3586    ▪ L-ISSN: 2708-2091
- Pages: 149 – 158    ▪ DOI: [10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-II\).16](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-II).16)    ▪ URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-II\).16](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-II).16)
- Citation: Ishtiaq, M., Gul, N., & Iqbal, S. W. (2022). An Analysis of the Participants Disagreement Strategies in Computer-mediated Intercultural Communication (CMIC). *Global Sociological Review*, VII(II), 149-158. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-II\).16](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-II).16)

## An Analysis of the Participants Disagreement Strategies in Computer-mediated Intercultural Communication (CMIC)

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Muhammad Ishtiaq      | Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Degree College Takht-e-Nasrati Karak, KP, Pakistan.   |
| Nasim Gul             | Lecturer, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, KP, Pakistan.<br>Email: <a href="mailto:naseemgul2016@gmail.com">naseemgul2016@gmail.com</a> ( <i>Corresponding Author</i> ) |
| Sahibzada Wasim Iqbal | Lecturer, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of Lakki Marwat, KP, Pakistan.   |

**Abstract:** *This study explores disagreement strategies in the context of a multicultural Computer-mediated-classroom (CMC) with English as a medium of instruction and communication. It studies how disagreement strategies are influenced by the participants' own cultural pragmatic rules and pose problems for others to follow them as intended. The speech acts of strong and mitigated disagreement are analysed in detail, with different participants employing different strategies as adopted from their respective cultures. CMC, being a contemporary medium of communication in its own right, is rich in new possibilities for intercultural exchange and collaboration in virtual rather than physical space in which the participants' strategies express differing opinions, or a change in the interpretation of an idea, in the form of contrastive connectives and concessive transition markers. The study concludes that speakers with a lower level of linguistic competence need to be equipped with essential pragmalinguistic strategies and skills in disagreement strategies in intercultural situations.*

**Key Words:** CMC, Disagreement Strategies, Multicultural Classrooms, Pragmalinguistics

### Introduction

Multicultural classrooms have the potential to provide ethnographers with a stronghold to access immediate information about problems and issues that surround the process or flow of intercultural communication, especially when the class is mediated through a computer or digital medium. In contexts such as these, when English has the status of lingua franca (ELF) or contact/link language, the multicultural classroom serves as an opportunity to perceive different issues which are the product of different mediums of communication and multicultural participants. In a multicultural classroom with English as a medium of instruction and communication, pragmatic "rules" and disagreement strategies" are influenced by the

participants' own cultural pragmatic rules and pose problems for others to follow them as intended. Different speech acts such as 'disagreement', 'request', or 'compliments' can potentially be analysed with different participants employing different contextualisation cues and strategies as adopted from their respective cultures, but the present study has been delimited to the analysis of Disagreement strategies only.

Specialists in the fields of Linguistics and Communication offer newer perspectives of looking at the dynamics of good manners and effective communication and their positive effects during interactions. Explaining and demonstrating the highest standards of conversation manners and effective communication in the context of mono-lingual/-cultural and face-to-face interaction cannot

be effectively and appropriately applied to multilingual/cultural and online modes of communication and interaction. The present research will focus on evaluating conversation manners and principles of turn-taking in the light of the principles of good manners and effective communication propounded by theorists such as [Paul Grice \(1975\)](#) and [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#), who are well grounded in a monolingual, monocultural, linguistic-oriented, essentialist approach to the study of discourse and conversation. Alongside these, the researcher will also take into consideration the parallel set of theories and approaches such as the intercultural model of communication by [Kecskes \(2004, 2011\)](#) and other latest developments in the disciplines of Linguistics and Communication.

Communication guides us that successful communication should have the qualities of conciseness, clarity, correctness, concreteness, consideration, and courtesy and violation of these tacitly understood principles in the form of cutting others short of taking over the turn, speaking more than is required, or not letting others have their turn, leads to opposition and an indecent environment devoid of good manners but in the context of CMIC there might be some in compliance to these tacit assumptions on the part of interlocutors which might be interpreted in a radically different way by the two different sets of theories and approaches.

In a Multicultural classroom with ELF, the speakers though, possessing English as a shared language, but they differ in their sociocultural contexts in which, according to Kecskes, there are "preferred ways of saying things" (2007: 192). The present study evaluates how interactants in a multicultural computer-mediated (virtual) learning environment realised speech acts such as 'disagreement', 'request' and 'compliments' during their online and digital interaction in a live class. The online live classroom setting furnishes an ideal setting for the promotion of negotiation and discussion where 'disagreement', 'request' and 'compliments' are to be anticipated (Angouri and Locher, 2012). In intercultural groups of participants/interactants, the way different speech acts were realised using different contextualisation cues led to misunderstandings, miscommunication and, at times, communication failure/breakdown.

## Literature Review

---

Linguistics teaches us the principle, "Make your conversational contribution such as is required .. in which you are engaged" ([Grice, 1975:5](#)). For maintaining cooperation during a conversation, the four maxims are recommended by Grice the maxim of quantity, of quality, of relevance, and of manner. Embedded in these maxims is an implied sense of consideration of politeness and keeping the 'face' of the participants/interlocutors involved in an interaction. According to Yule, politeness is showing awareness of and giving consideration to the conversational participant's emotional sense of self (2020). It is a natural and instinctive human trait that in conversation or interaction, every participant generally desires that the interlocutor(s) at the other end should recognise and take care of his/her face. To keep politeness intact and keep face-saving acts (in which we take care of the other person's self-image, known as 'face' in pragmatics, according to [Yule, 2010](#)) rather than face-threatening acts in a conversation and interaction, the interactants share certain agreed upon assumptions, values and belief based on prior experience and common sense such as to speak in a suitable and soft tone if the other participant is a stranger, unfamiliar or superior in rank or authority etc. Likewise, in a speech event, the strategy of either cutting others short or interrupting in the middle when they have not yet finished or indicated any noticeable cue to give the floor or lingering too much when taking hold of the floor and not letting others take their turns in a conversation tantamount to rudeness on the part of the conversational participants in either case. Linguistics recommends the use of appropriate hedges for maintaining the face-saving value of the other party and to abide by the third maxim in particular, i.e. quality maxim, meant for establishing cooperation in a conversational event. The maxims of manner and of quality recommend that for an idea to get across successfully, it should be communicated rationally and logically, if possible.

Apart from the verbal aspect, non-verbal communication forms a significant and crucial part of any communication process that can make it successful or break/fail it to occur ideally. According to [Mehrabian and Ferris \(1967:248-252\)](#), the influence of different constituents in a communicative event varies, like in the overall

communication as per their statistics, face yields as much as 55%, tone carries a significance value of 38%, and words carries as low as 7% of the total weight of importance. The statistics can vary and do not hold constant depending upon the differences in variables in different contexts. Abercrombie sheds light on the status of interrelation between language and paralinguistic features in the following way, "We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our whole body." (1968: 55). According to Murphy, Peck, and O'Neill, components of personal appearance like hairstyles, neatness, clothing, jewellery, stature and posture etc., convey different impressions about the age, occupation, nationality, confidence, social status, economic level, poor or good judgment in different circumstances (Murphy et al. 1997). All these variables sometimes convey more than what is simply conveyed merely by the verbal aspect of communication.

### **Problem Statement**

---

The patterns that emerge in any language and communication setting or situation are not merely dependent on linguistic features but also have whole sets of nonlinguistic or extra-linguistic features in conjunction with the set of linguistic features, both of which finally shape, determine and characterise a situation as consisting of meaningful interaction and based on a systematic correlation and interplay between the various elements both within the sets and between the sets of linguistic and extra-linguistic features. It stands to reason that change in either one or another set of features will necessarily result in a different pattern and correlation between the features involving both sets. In this connection, the relatively new and emergent mode of online communication setting generally known as Computer-mediated communication (CMC) among participants of a community display a different set of nonlinguistic features. However, when CMC takes place between interlocutors hailing from different regions, cultures and languages, the situation gets more complex in the sense that both sets of features (linguistic & nonlinguistic) form quite a new situation with relatively few things shared by the interactants or based on their prior assumptions. So, the application of a theory/framework developed primarily for a monolingual and monocultural setting may not be applied appropriately and needs modification,

reconceptualisation or, in some cases, a radical redefinition of the concepts, models, frameworks, theories and approaches that do not capture at all or at best capture only partially the essence of the communicative events and its pattern in the backdrop of this emerging phenomenon of Computer-Mediated Intercultural Communication (CMIC).

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

---

The study aims to show how a theory/model/framework/approach primarily designed for a monolingual and intracultural communication setting results in an inappropriate application or, at worst, misapplication to a communication setting where either interactants' linguistic or nonlinguistic or both linguistic as well as nonlinguistic sets of features differ in the sense that the communication situation is based on the multilingual and intercultural setting. And more particularly when the mode of interaction is not physical and face-to-face but online and Computer-Mediated Intercultural Communication (CMIC).

### **Research Questions**

---

1. Is there any significant difference between intracultural and intercultural communication settings and discourse processes, or do all communication situations share the same universal principles of communication independent of language and culture?
2. Do the use/non-use of disagreement strategies in CMIC lead simply to misunderstanding or complete miscommunication between/among the interlocutors?

### **Theoretical Framework**

---

Using an interactional sociolinguistics approach, in order to shed light on the potential and possible sources of misunderstanding and, at times, miscommunication, the role of contextualisation cues in the CMIC setting will be analysed due to their pivotal role in any kind of oral and written text, dialogue, and discourse analysis. According to Gumperz, contextual cues are any linguistic or paralinguistic signals giving/assigning meaning to an

utterance and being present in the surface structure of a message that is empirically detectable (1982).

In the present study, Conversation Analysis (CA) will be employed as a research method due to its obvious advantages of coming up with a "description and analysis of the sequencing of action and organisation of turns at the micro level of verbal and nonverbal acts" (Kecskes, 2014, p.224). Apart from its descriptive and analytic edge, it is also empirically motivated, has well-defined methodological procedures, and has the likelihood of being replicated.

In this study, one of the fastest growing fields of research serving as the main source of data in intercultural settings, i.e. computer-mediated intercultural communication (CMIC), will be utilised for data collection. It will be based on the online interaction between the teacher and the students in the first place and between the students themselves exclusively. CMIC takes place between one or more interlocutors via the instrument of a computer or other digital resources as a tool for interaction in a virtual rather than physical space.

The analysis of data will be based on in-depth illustrations of differences that exist in the use/non-use of disagreement strategies in the collaborative setting of an instructional event. Aspects such as what are the effects of CMIC setting on the use of disagreement strategies (whether it leads to misunderstanding, miscommunication or no effect at all) will be analysed in detail.

### **The Rationale for the Study**

---

According to Savignon and Roitmeier (2004), CMC is a contemporary medium of communication in its own right, rich in new possibilities for intercultural exchange and collaboration in virtual rather than physical space. For instance, their study shows participants' strategies used to express differing opinions, or a change in the interpretation of an idea, in the form of contrastive connectives and concessive transition markers. Similarly, strategies adopted and developed by participants in the present study will be explored.

### **Significance of the Study**

---

So far, all the research studies in CMC, but in CMIC in particular, indicate the fact that research grounded

in multicultural and multilingual participants will benefit from the use of Computer-Mediated Intercultural Communication to a great extent because CMIC seems to offer a relatively unexplored means of intercultural collaboration and understanding in a relatively new virtual space. The present study will focus on the role of disagreement strategies in the context of CMIC and its potential relevance to and effect on cooperation and politeness strategies.

## **Methodology**

---

### **Setting**

---

The participants for this study include a group of 15 students (both sexes) at undergraduate, graduate, master's and doctoral levels registered in the course of English Linguistics. The proficiency level of all the students in these groups is roughly the same, with a little bit of variation. In addition to the participants' almost equal linguistic proficiency, they had a good knowledge of one other academic and linguistic proficiency. Secondly, the participants had established a sense of group/community because they had been organised together as a member of their limited academic community for many months/semesters. Even some of the participants had developed an intimate friendships between them and engaged in the routine and usual interaction outside class. Importantly, the nature of communicative interaction (in a class) necessitated the participants to work as members of a close-knit group and led to a decidedly cooperative rather than competitive environment. This situation is also different from other situations, which emerge as ad-hoc setups where English serves in the capacity of lingua franca among participants/interactants who are relative strangers to each other (Kecskes 2007). All the participants came from widely different regions and languages and primarily used English as a lingua franca between teacher-students as well as between student-student interactions.

### **Data Description**

---

The data obtained for this study actually comprised graduate, master and doctoral students' oral interactions in an online class, especially when they are involved in negotiating a particular point or issue of concern regarding the topic/subject under

discussion during the class. The data may have obvious limitations in terms of size and time span, but it is appreciable as it delivers us an authentic and real-life sample of intercultural communication mediated through a computer in a situation in which English functions as a Lingua Franca.

### Data Analysis

This section focuses on the analysis of various interactional/communicative acts such as *disagreement, interruption, floor, misinterpretation of the contextualisation cues, repair* etc., that participants hailing from different cultures are involved in a computer-mediated interactional setting. It is essential to restate once again that all the partakers have good relationships with one another because they are all classmates. The general atmosphere of the class is usually quite comfortable, friendly, and cooperative. Such context is generally conducive to a more welcoming and collaborative environment and efforts on the part of interactants in order to get to an exchange characterised by harmony rather than disagreement.

Though the participants want to preserve a cooperative and friendly relationship and environment among themselves and try to abide by the politeness strategies, the computer-mediated intercultural environment makes it particularly challenging to retain all the strategies intact in a virtual and online space. All this happens despite the participants' conscious efforts to "get one's point across without seeming self-righteous or being injurious" (Locher 2004: 94).

### The Classification of Disagreement Expressions

Different authors have categorised the expressions of "Disagreement" in different ways. This article may not review all of those different ways in a thorough way. However, a very brief review of four well-known and frequently used taxonomies of "Disagreement" is hereby carried out. According to Pomerantz (1984), disagreement is typically dispreferred in conversation analysis. Furthermore, a differentiation between 'strong' and 'weak' disagreement on sequential grounds is also made by her, such as 'a strong disagreement' involves merely the disagreement component, e.g., "I don't think so",

whereas 'a weak disagreement' comprises additional structures such as *hesitation markers, fillers, token agreements* e. g. *yes, but, nevertheless, however* etc. Although covered in a divergent field, Pomerantz classification of disagreement seems comparable to those of Kakavá (1993), who distinguished three different linguistic recognitions of 'disagreement': *strong, strong yet mitigated, and mitigated*. One major difference between the second and the third categories involves the aspects of *explicitness* of disagreement, which is quite clear and visible in the second category, whereas in the third category, the disagreement may go with digressions or reformulations.

It is worth emphasising here to note that despite much worth and importance of these disagreement taxonomies in real-life actual physical interaction as these are virtually related to face-to-face interaction and communication, they have no applicability, validity and appropriacy to computer-mediated communication, in which the system of turns is a bit different compared to that of the normal face-to-face interactions in the sense that there happen to be frequent interruptions, overlaps, and digression especially in a multiparty interaction. Miller (2000) has actually based her arrangement of 'disagreement' on the famous theory of politeness of Brown and Levinson (1987), which pays special consideration and attention to differences related in terms of *ranking and power*. She also classifies disagreement into three kinds: the first one is softened disagreement', which employs either positive or negative politeness strategies, followed by 'unmodified disagreement' roughly corresponding to that of Pomerantz's category of 'strong disagreement' with no softening/mitigation involved at all, and, lastly, the category of 'aggravated or intensified disagreement' which is part of neither Pomerantz's nor Kakavá's taxonomies. The third type – aggravated disagreement – is, however, characteristic and representative of conflicting situations and discourse.

A significant taxonomy of disagreement is by Kreutel (2007), with one noteworthy distinction in the sense that it is primarily designed with EFL and ESL learners in mind instead of native speakers. Her distinction between *desirable and undesirable features* in non-native or EFL/ESL speakers language of disagreement strategies is particularly

significant. Kreutels taxonomy has the following set of 'Desirable features': (2007: 326): "Token agreement, Hedges, Requests for clarifications, Explanations, Expressions of regret, Positive remarks, Suggestions, etc. The set of 'Undesirable' features comprises Message abandonment, Total lack of mitigation, Use of performatives, e.g. *I disagree*, Use of performative negations, e.g. *I don't agree*, Use of bare exclamation, or Blunt statements of the opposite etc. His taxonomy defines the degree of desirability by comparing non-native or EFL/ESL speakers disagreement expressions with native speakers disagreement strategies. No doubt, the distinction between *desirable and undesirable features* is a significant one, but at the same time, it is made complicated by the fact that all expressions inclusive of 'disagreement' are almost always contextually bound in the sense that what is desirable in one specific context may not necessarily be so in another different context. For instance, an apparently undesirable feature, e.g. a blunt and straightforward 'disagreement' may be a suitable response given in a competitive context because, in such a situation, speakers need to make their points stressed and emphatic while the same can potentially be extremely undesirable given in a collaborative and cooperative context in which the participants/interactants try to uphold a good rapport among themselves. Undoubtedly, some recent and contemporary works demonstrate that native speakers also utter "undesirable disagreements" depending on different contexts (e.g., Lawson 2009).

The methodology of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) instead of naturally occurring interaction as employed by Kreutel in order to collect her data is not free of flaws. Hence, the present study renames Kreutels linguistic instantiation comparable to that of Pomerantz's distinction between strong and weak or mitigated disagreement. It is also worth noting that participants may choose for and employ a blend of quite a lot of linguistic realisations and strategies in a single 'disagreement' expression, as is illustrated in the following conversation in which one of the participants first makes a clarification request by asking the question "Why do you think this analysis is more appropriate than the other one?" and

subsequently uses 'hedges' in order to make his point, e.g. "I'm not sure about this, but I think ."

## Data Analysis

Keeping in view the complexity of the speech act of 'disagreement', the range of various linguistic realisations in two subcategories of strong and mitigated disagreement, the researcher opted predominantly for a more in-depth qualitative analysis instead of pure quantitative analyses.

## Strong Disagreement

A hallmark of strong disagreement is the lack of any and all sort of mitigation strategies. Or we may say that in case of strong disagreements, the head acts basically contain expressions such as 'bare negative forms' i. e. "no way," "of course not," complete reduplication of negation "no, no, no," or explicit practice of performative verbs, e.g. "I disagree" etc. and sometimes, blunt statement of the opposite. According to Kreutel (2007), strong disagreement, though an unwelcome and objectionable feature, tends to be a characteristic of non-natives' strategy rather than the native speakers. The present study demonstrates that interlocutors seem like they are well aware of the face-threatening effects of bare negatives in a collaborative and cooperative framework involving peers and teachers. Consequently, very rare instances of expressions of bare negative disagreement were observed in the communication between interlocutors in computer-mediated interaction. Similarly, us of strong performative or performative negation of disagreement was also found occasionally. One can hardly find even a single instance in the interaction where the strong performative verb, e.g. "I disagree", is employed without being mitigated by some softening expressions or hedges. Likewise, the negative performative "I don't agree" emerges merely on five to seven occasions, as exemplified in the following paragraphs. However, all instances are quite carefully softened and mitigated.

*It was really an excellent analysis, Maria! The only point that I disagree with: .. I think we can declare it like this .. this is why I don't think so.*

In the above excerpt, the speaker initiates the disagreement strategy with a positive note on Maria's earlier work ("Excellent analysis, Maria!") well before

he/she embarks on proper disagreement. Even then, it has further been softened by the use of the softening expression "the only point" and hedges such as "I think" in conjunction with the provision of a sound argument for his/her disagreement with his class fellow. The discourse segment is concluded by another hedge "this is why I don't think so "

*"There is only one point on which I am not in complete agreement with Maria. I think Tracy . . . because it seems like she . . . ; however, . . . what do you think Anna?"*

In this example, too obviously, the use of the negative performative can be observed. In this case, the mitigation, however, is provided by weakening the force of disagreement with the help of expression ("there is only one part"). Besides this, the interlocuter also provides details and clarifications for why she does disagree by the use of hedges such as ("I think . . . , it seems) and, finally, the participant does ask for the opinion (what do you think Anna?) of the other fellow.

*This sentence has two participants; either of them is an actor because either has an active role in participation. They are the agents of 'married' and 'lived.' I'm sorry, but I don't agree with Maria's comment: 'The text includes both actor and goal as shown in 'they.' For me, there isn't any goal. I have found the following example in a novel by Hemingway: 'He was married by the first lady who was nice to him'. In this sentence, 'he' is the goal because it is a passive sentence, and the agent is 'by the first lady who was nice to him.' The verb 'married' is a material process of doing, as in our example. I just want to help you to understand it, Maria, but my explanation may not be so good."*

This comparatively longer stretch is significant because, in this case, the utterer starts with a blunt statement of the opposite ("This sentence has two participants; either of them is an actor . . . "). Here the interactant attempts to moderate and soften the force of disagreement by resorting to the apologetic tone of "I'm sorry." After repeating the point ("for me, there isn't any goal"), the interlocuter furnishes a detailed analogy by means of explanation in order to justify his/her own position. Finally, the entire talk, in his/her turn, is locked on a note of humility, mutual care and modesty ("my explanation may not be so good").

Interestingly, all the interlocutors in this discussion do possess a significant level of linguistic competence (as already demonstrated in class activities/discussion). It seems that the level of their pragmatic skills, competence and aptitude is not at par with their linguistic proficiency; rather, it sounds a bit faulty due to the fact that the mitigating and softening strategies or the down toner expressions used come somewhat belated in the comment. Consequently, the earlier part of the message sounds mostly blunt and inconsiderate. It is noticeable, nevertheless, that the participant tries to appear sociable, friendly, and cooperative rather than conflictive.

The sandwich pattern, as defined and explained by Kreutel (2007: 338), seems to be lacking here. In this strategy, the mitigation strategies surround, i.e. precedes and follow the expression of disagreement instead of being simply put after an expression of disagreement.

It is concluded that notwithstanding being non-natives, the interlocutors in the present study try to cautiously evade the acts of strong disagreement. This feature can be ascribed to the participants' high level of linguistic competence, which triggers pragmatic competence (except for a few instances of the occasional use of blunt disagreements, which sound ruthless, insensitive and rude and offensive). As Bardovi-Harlig (1999) states that high level of linguistic competence helps improve the level of pragmatic competence but does not necessarily guarantee it for sure. This study also contradicts the previous works (e.g., Pearson 1986; Beebe and Takahashi 1989); it brings itself into line with recent works, which also endorsed the non-use of undesirable features on the part of non-native speakers in interaction as it was falsely believed.

In addition, another possible reason for the lack of strategy of strong disagreements can be attributed to a shared and mutual longing on the part of members of participants as the community of practice to preserve the arena as much free of conflict as possible on account of the collaborative nature of the activity and the participants' cognisance of it. Hence, "the bulge effect" defined by [Wolfson \(1990\)](#) can be observed and witnessed. As per Kreutels (2007: 333) interpretation, Wolfson attributes this phenomenon to the fact that relationships between status-equals have the potential for a reduction of the

existing social distance since the status of the relationship is relatively uncertain and, therefore, open to redefinition .

### Mitigated or Softened Disagreement

Mitigated disagreement refers to linguistic expressions that are helpful in minimising the face-threatening effects of straightforward, blunt disagreeing statements and expressions. Among the list of mitigated disagreement linguistic strategies, some of the familiar and "desirable" features are token agreement, i.e., "the yes, but formula, use of hedges, requests for clarification, expressions of regret, use of positive remarks, suggestions, and giving explanations etc."

### Token Agreement

The token agreement can be considered one of the most frequently used strategies by L1 or mother tongue speakers. The phenomenon of token agreement is discussed and substantiated by several authors such as (Pomerantz 1984; LoCastro 1986; Pearson 1986; Kothoff 1993; Kuo 1994; Burdine 2001; Locher 2004; among others). Though considered to be primarily a strategy of native speakers, participants in the current study, despite being non-natives, predominantly used token agreement in many different circumstances. Occasionally it is used as the only mitigating strategy as in (a); however, quite recurrently, it is also employed as part of more intricate and composite answers as in (b) below.

- (a) *"Mehboob, I totally agree However, I would like to point out something that strikes me .although she is the goal".*  
 (b) *I agree with the last part. But, why do you think ? I think .since hes ..*

For example, (b) the token agreement ("I agree . . . but") formula is employed along with added mitigating strategies, i.e. inquiring about the speaker's his/her judgement ("why do you think . . . ?"), hedges and prevarications ("I think . . .") and clarifications ("since he's . . .").

*I agree with your The only explanation I can think of but I think .. Still, it could also ..*

In the above example, the interlocutor begins with a token agreement and restates the other participant's explanation before he/she actually

disagrees ("but I think. . .). Additional mitigated strategies employed are hedges (The only explanation I can think of, I think, still, it could also be ) etc.

*"Very interesting analysis, Anas! My ideas concerning the analysis are similar to yours, but for the fifth semantic role, I think. . . I dont see . in my opinion. I agree with your interpretation of the domes as symbols of wealth and power".*

This instance offers a mixed sort of response in which the token agreement (My idea is the same, but for. . .) is actually heralded by the additional mitigating strategy in the form of constructive evaluation and acknowledgement of the speaker and her work ("very interesting analysis!"). This indicates that the speaker noticeably wants to disagree with his/her partner but does so in a really mitigated, polite and softened way, trying his/her best to avoid the disruption in the group rapport. So, the interlocuter actually starts his/her disagreement preceded by a hedge ("I think"). As a final point, the interlocuter ends the talk on a note of agreement. This pattern/structure in which a token agreement precedes and follows the disagreement echoes Kreutelsnotion (2007: 338) of the "sandwich pattern": "Most of the native speakers use mitigation not only at the beginning of their utterances but also at the end, creating a certain sandwich pattern that wraps the dispreferred speech act into preferred reactions .

Quite unusually, either of the above two examples is uttered by participants possessing a high level of linguistic proficiency, and this gives a sort of hint that linguistic proficiency has a correlation with pragmatic competence. Interestingly, responses of students with not a quite high level of linguistic proficiency in the class generally lack token agreement or combined responses; instead, their preferred strategy is to recourse to message abandonment, which Kreutel considers as a highly undesirable feature since, in this case, the question asked by a participant is not answered at all.

Besides the mitigating strategy of token agreement, which has been analysed in quite detail, the researcher also observed other mitigating strategies such as Hedges, *Giving Explanations, Requesting for Clarifications, Expressions of Regret,*

*Positive Remarks etc.* but could not analyse all these strategies in detail due to limitation of space.

## **Conclusions**

---

The present study envisioned to answer the two proposed research questions and demonstrate that there exists some strong correlation between interlocutors' high level of linguistic proficiency and proficient use of the disagreement strategies. Interlocutors with a high level of linguistic proficiency generally tend to closely follow the same disagreement strategies as used by native speakers for avoiding face-threatening acts. Furthermore, non-native speakers, contrary to popular belief, like the native speakers, demonstrate a wide variety of native-like choices, e.g. *token agreement, hedges, request for an explanation, producing constructive observations and providing clarifications etc.* The present study exhibits that linguistic proficiency is obviously correlated and helps to develop pragmatic

competence. Some other key variables and factors, such as the familiarity with the other interlocutors' level of linguistic proficiency and the decidedly collaborative nature of the activity along with linguistic proficiency, seem to play a decisive role in this regard. This situation is rather different from other ad-hoc setups where interlocutors encounter merely for a brief span. Hence, it is natural that this study conducted in a different context yields different results from earlier research such as [Kecskes \(2007\)](#).

Undeniably, the continuing research in the field tries to address issues such as how speakers with a lower linguistic competence should be equipped with essential pragmalinguistic strategies and skills so that they grow more competent and resourceful in the field of pragmalinguistics, especially in disagreement strategies in intercultural situations. Future research also aims to conduct studies based on a larger corpus and in combination with a quantitative/qualitative approach.

## References

---

- Abercrombie, D. (1968). *Paralanguage*. *British Journal of Disorders of Communication* 3(1), 55-59.
- Brown, P., Levinson, S. C., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* 4, Cambridge University press.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). *Logic and conversation*. In *Speech acts* 41-58.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.
- Kakavá, C. (1993). *Negotiation of disagreement by Greeks in conversations and classroom discourse*. Georgetown University.
- Kecskes, I. (2011). Understanding the role of context in language use. *Pragmatics and context*, Toronto, Antares.
- Locher, M. A. (2010). *Power and politeness in action: Disagreements in oral communication* (Vol. 12). Walter de Gruyter.
- Mehrabian, A., & Ferris, S. R. (1967). Inference of attitudes from nonverbal communication in two channels. *Journal of consulting psychology*, 31(3), 248.
- Murphy, H. A., Hildebrandt, H. W., & Thomas, J. P. (1997). *Effective business communications*.
- Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: Some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shaped.
- Rees-Miller, J. (2000). Power, severity, and context in disagreement. *Journal of pragmatics*, 32(8), 1087-1111.
- Wolfson, N. (1990). The Bulge: A Theory of S. peech Behavior and Social Distance. *Penn Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 2(1), 55-83.
- Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language*. Cambridge university press.