

## A Study of Pragmatic Transfer in Criticism Strategies by Chinese EFL Learners

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*Speech acts as minimal unit of discourse analysis have been the focus of second language acquisition research as they not only represent language form but also reflect cultural values of the people who perform them. Like most other speech acts, the realisation of the speech act of criticising in the target language is influenced by the native language culture. Based on Nguyen's taxonomy of criticisms, this paper uses the peer-feedback tasks to conduct research on what kind of pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners occurs and how it occurs in academic setting. The oral data collected through a naturalised role-play are coded and analysed quantitatively among the Chinese EFL learner group, the native English group, and the native Chinese group. The post hoc interview is also conducted among these three groups to investigate the reasons why they choose a certain criticism strategy. This research has indicated that the Chinese EFL learner group displays indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion more frequently than the native English group and shows indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion with somewhat similar frequencies to the native Chinese group. These three criticism strategies show Chinese characteristics of valuing politeness, caring about the hearer's face and spiral thinking patterns. The research has shown that there is, to some extent, pragmatic transfer in indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion by Chinese EFL learners and how pragmatic transfer in these three criticism strategies occurs in academic setting.*

**Keywords:** *interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic transfer, criticism strategy, Chinese EFL learner*

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to study pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners in academic setting. This means that this study shall be done within the frame of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) because pragmatic transfer is a subdiscipline of interlanguage pragmatics. Interlanguage pragmatics, a branch of second language acquisition (SLA), examines second language (L2) learners' knowledge, use, and development in performing sociocultural functions (Taguchi 2017, p. 153). Such second language learners' knowledge is called pragmatic knowledge, and can be further understood both as a particular component of language users' general communicative knowledge, viz. knowledge of how verbal acts are understood and performed in accordance with a speaker's intention under contextual and discursal constraints" (Faerch and Kasper 1984, p. 214) and as a conceptual system that structures the way people view the world, particular set of

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beliefs, norms, and values (The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2014, p. 296). The understanding and the use of appropriate pragmatic knowledge will have an impact on effective intercultural communication. This is so because when people from different cultures communicate with each other without perceiving their different pragmatic knowledge, miscommunication may happen. To a certain degree this miscommunication is due to transfer of native pragmatic knowledge into target pragmatic knowledge in situations of intercultural communication (Zegarac and Pennington 2000), which is abbreviated as pragmatic transfer. Pragmatic transfer can be regarded as an influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information (Kasper 1992, p. 207).

Pragmatic transfer can be "positive transfer" or "negative transfer". The kind of transfer that causes interlanguage pragmatic behavior to be consistent with L2 norms is regarded as "positive", while the kind of transfer that causes interlanguage pragmatic behavior to be inconsistent with L2 norms is considered as "negative". Negative pragmatic transfer is hereinafter referred to as pragmatic transfer in this study.

One pragmatic transfer is criticising speech act. Criticising speech act refers to an illocutionary act whose illocutionary point is to give negative evaluation on the hearer's actions, choices, words, and products for which he or she may be held responsible (Nguyen 2005, p. 7). Based on the above definition of the criticising speech act, criticisms can be understood as expressions of dissatisfaction or negative comment (Hyland 2000, p. 44), and criticism strategies can be regarded as the pragmalinguistic conventions of usage by which criticising speech acts are realised.

Based on the above discussion about the concepts of interlanguage pragmatics, of pragmatic transfer, of criticising speech act, of criticisms and of criticism strategies, it is necessary to review the previous studies on criticising speech act, criticisms, criticism strategies and pragmatic transfer so as to: (1) have a panoramic view of them, (2) establish the necessity of this study.

### **Previous Studies on Criticising Speech Act, Criticisms, Criticism Strategies and Pragmatic Transfer**

Some previous studies have been made in several fields. The first field of the previous studies is on the nature of criticising speech act. Tracy et al. (1987, pp. 52-54) investigate the characteristics of good and bad criticisms as perceived by people from different cultural backgrounds via an open-ended questionnaire. They find five stylistic characteristics that distinguish "good" from "bad" criticisms. The five stylistic characteristics are: (1) A good criticism must display a positive language and a positive manner. (2) Positive changes suggested by a good criticism must be specific enough and the critic must provide help to make them possible. (3) Reasons for positive changes must be justified and must be explicit. (4) A negative criticism must be framed in a larger positive message. (5) A good criticism does not violate the relationship between interlocutors. These findings correspond well to Wajnryb's study (1993), who reports that an effective criticism, in his teachers-participants'

view, must be kept simple, specific, well-grounded in the lesson, must be linked to strategies for improvement and must be delivered as an attempt to share experience. It also needs to be softened by means of a number of strategies. These strategies include “measuring words” (to avoid being too negative), “soft-pedaling” (to use internal and external modifications to lessen the harshness of the criticism), “using affirmative language” such as “comforting messages”, “distancing and neutralising” (to depersonalise the criticism) and “using negotiating language” (to avoid imposing on the addressee). To save students’ face, one teacher even emphasises that a criticism should be “oblique and approached via the third person” (Wajnryb 1993, p. 60). Interestingly enough, this perception seems to clash with what the students in Wajnryb’s (1995) case study expect. She prefers to receive a direct and economical criticism rather than indirect, wordy, and time-wasting one. Zhu (2013) studies pragmatic transfer in the speech act of criticism at the levels of perception and production. He finds that at the levels of perception and production: (1) four types of relationship between L2 proficiency and pragmatic transfer are straight ascending type, straight descending type, U type and inverted U type. (2) In general the degree of pragmatic transfer decreases as L2 proficiency increases.

The second field of the previous studies is on communicative effects of direct and indirect criticisms. Toplak and Katz (2000) give the participants a set of passages in which one of the interlocutors criticises the other in two ways, directly (“You are not really helping me out”) or sarcastically (“You are really helping me out!”). Then they require the participants to complete a questionnaire for each passage about what the participants think the critic’s intent and the effect of the given criticism are from the perspectives of both the critic and the recipient. Similar to Wajnryb’s studies (1993, 1995), Toplak and Katz (2000) identify a difference between the speaker and the addressee in their judgments of the criticisms given. The addressee tends to view sarcasm (as opposed to a direct criticism) as more severe than the speaker intended. However, they also find that sarcasm is not perceived by the addressee as having a negative impact on the relationship between the interlocutors as direct criticisms.

The third field of the previous studies is on message clarity and politeness of criticisms. Tracy and Eisenberg (1990) investigate the preferences for message clarity and politeness in giving criticisms in a workplace context among people from different races, genders, and social status. They find that superiors tend to give more weight to message clarity than do subordinates. However, this preference also varies according to genders and races. For example, in either role, females are found to be more face-attentive than men and whites are more concerned about others’ positive face (i.e., the desire to be approved or accepted by others – Brown and Levinson 1987) than nonwhites.

The fourth field of the previous studies is on academic criticisms. Salager-Meyer and Ariza (2003) explore whether the frequency of academic criticisms varies in the four most frequent written genres of medical Spanish discourse – editorials, review articles, research papers and case reports and whether the frequency has changed over time. The corpus consists of 76 medical articles published between 1930 and 1999, divided into Block A (1930–1969) and Block B (1970–1999). Their research results show that the frequency of academic criticisms is

significantly greater in editorials than in the remaining genres for both blocks, followed by review articles, research papers and case reports, that the frequency of academic criticisms is significantly higher in Block B than in Block A, and that the frequency of academic criticisms has increased over time in all the genres except case reports. Such the overall increase in academic criticisms can be accounted for by the growth in the number of scientific publications over the past decades by the scientists' need to publish and by the paradigmatic shift from science being assertive to becoming skeptical and probabilistic, which is based on claim refutability and criticism. Cross-generic differences are explained in terms of the communicative function of each genre and of the rank/status power relations that exist between the social role assumed by the authors of the different genres and their audience.

The fifth field of the previous studies is on linguistically comparative study of Chinese and English criticisms, Chinese criticism strategies under the Chinese context, and the historical and cultural origins of Chinese criticism. Wu and Fan (2004) make a comparative study of Chinese and English criticisms and conclude that both Chinese criticism and English criticism share most of the strategies, but the frequency of each strategy and the specific expressions vary from culture to culture. Zhu (2004) investigates criticising speech act by native Chinese and shows that Chinese mostly choose to criticise others on private occasions by means of three types of different criticising strategies- coaching style, blame-style and evaluation style. Zhu (2005, 2007) also expounds the cultural and historical origins of Chinese criticism in view of the causes for criticising speech act and points out that Chinese criticism is based on hierarchy and moderation. Chen (2007) studies criticising speech act qualitatively in Chinese language context and proposes some findings of strategies: reasons, alternative, principle, threat, insult, reminder, punishment, irony, enquiry, demand, complement, folk wisdom and mixed use of strategies. Tian and Zhang (2009) explore the interaction between the criticism strategies and the deep driving forces of culture and believe that individuality serves as not only the great divide in Chinese and western cultures , but also the cultural support in applying different criticism strategies to different subjects at different phases. Cao (2010) analyses Chinese teachers' pragmatic criticism strategies, sentence choices, language features and pragmatic functions, discusses factors affecting their choice of pragmatic criticism strategies and shows that Chinese teachers employ off-record criticism strategies much more frequently than they use on- record criticism strategies.

The above studies have provided valuable insights into the nature of criticising speech act, communicative effects of direct and indirect criticisms, message clarity and politeness in giving criticisms in a workplace, academic criticisms in medical Spanish discourse, and linguistically comparative study of Chinese and English criticisms, Chinese criticism strategies under the Chinese context, and the historical and cultural origins of Chinese criticism. Although there has been some literature on criticism strategies, there has been little literature on pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies, even less literature on pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners in academic setting. Since Chinese and English speakers have different perceptions of how criticising speech act should be appropriately conducted, it is more likely that pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by

Chinese EFL learners occurs. Therefore for these two reasons it is necessary to conduct this study in order to know what criticism strategies are like for Chinese EFL learners and how the culture-specific backgrounds of Chinese EFL learners affect their criticism strategy use in English.

Before methodology is explored, it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework for this study.

### **Theoretical Framework for this Study**

In order to establish the theoretical framework, it is necessary to explore pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic judgments.

Successful performance of criticising speech act should be based on two judgments. The first judgment is pragmalinguistic judgment. Pragmalinguistic judgment, which is language-specific, concerns linguistic choices related to encoding the speaker's illocutionary force of criticising in an appropriate way. Pragmalinguistic judgment provides a basis for linguistic rationale for classification of criticism strategies for this study.

The classification of criticism strategies for this study is based on Nguyen's study of L2 New Zealand English criticisms and criticism responses in 2003 (Nguyen 2003). Nguyen's taxonomy of criticism strategies suggests that criticisms can be realised by direct criticism strategies, hedged criticism strategies, indirect criticism strategies and opting out. These strategies consist of a continuum of criticism strategies from direct criticism strategies to opting out. Direct criticism strategies are strategies in which the speaker's criticism intentions are clearly stated. Direct criticisms are performed by means of negative evaluation, disapproval, expression of disagreement, identification of problem and statement of difficulties. Hedged criticism strategies are strategies in which hedging devices are employed to soften criticism force. Such hedging devices are weakeners (e.g., sort of, kind of, somewhat), minimizers (e.g., minimum, least, smallest, slightest, fewest), question forms, tag questions, if-clause and impersonal forms. Indirect criticism strategies refer to those expressions in which the speaker's criticism intentions are not clearly indicated. These indirect expressions for criticisms do not show any conventionalised forms, that is, there is no indicator of criticising force in the utterance, so the hearer has to infer that the speaker is actually making a criticism. Indirect criticisms are performed by means of request for change, suggestion for change, correction, indicating standard and preaching. Opting out is a strategy in which the speaker remains silent and no criticism is made.

The second judgment is sociopragmatic judgment. Sociopragmatic judgment, which is culture-specific, involves both contextual factors (e.g., values, politeness, social power, social distance, rights and obligations, purpose of the criticism) and thinking patterns. Sociopragmatic judgment provides a basis for cultural rationale for the use of criticism strategies.

The cultural rationale for the use of criticism strategies lies in fundamental values of a given society and its respective thinking pattern. Weightings given to fundamental values and thinking patterns that influence criticism strategies may

vary with different cultures. This is also true of Chinese and English criticism strategies. Criticising behaviors in Chinese culture which encourages collectivism and are traditionally influenced by Confucian ideology are different from those in English culture which is identified as a culture high in individualistic value tendencies. The different criticizing behaviours in Chinese and English cultures manifest themselves in the following four aspects (Conner 1996, pp. 14–16, Samovar et al. 1998, pp. 108–109): (1) Chinese people prefer to criticise euphemistically, but English people tend to criticise straight and objectively. (2) Chinese people, who are influenced by Confucian ideology, believe that good interpersonal relationship is important and criticisms should save the hearer's face, but English people, who admire seeking- truth- from- fact spirit, think that criticisms should be expressed as what they are and in a direct way. (3) In a collectivism society, Chinese people give criticisms according to the hearer's social status, but in an individualistic society, English people give criticisms according to the fact regardless of the hearer's social status. (4) Chinese people tend to be spiral thinking pattern, but English people tend to be line thinking pattern. Pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic judgments provide a theoretical framework for this study.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Questions*

The present study attempts to answer the following two questions:

What kind of pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners occurs in academic setting?

How does pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners occur in academic setting?

### *Subjects*

The subjects are composed of three groups. They are the Chinese EFL learner group, the native English group, and the native Chinese group, and are randomly drawn from the Chinese EFL learner class, the native English class and the native Chinese class respectively. Each group consists of ten subjects, and the total number of subjects is 30.

### *Instrument*

In this study, the naturalised role-play is used as an instrument for data collection providing the corpus of data for analysis. The concept of “the naturalised role-play” is proposed by Tran in 2006 (Tran 2006). There are two components for the instrument of the naturalised role-play. One is situations, the purposes of which are to give a task in which the naturalised role-play is conducted for the role-play informant and in which research focus is made for the role-play researcher. The other is cards in which information is provided under which the role-play

informant conducts the naturalised role-play guided by the role-play researcher, and in which information is provided for the role-play researcher for guiding the role-play informant to conduct the naturalised role-play. The task of the naturalised role-play for this study is to comment on peers' essays in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary. English version of naturalised role-play for the Chinese EFL learner group and the native English group is shown in Appendix 1, and Chinese version of naturalised role-play for the native Chinese group is shown in Appendix 2.

### *Data Collection*

Each subject in the Chinese EFL learner group and in the native English group writes an English essay entitled *How to Solve Traffic Problems in Your City*. Each subject in the native Chinese group writes a Chinese essay *如何解决您的城市里的交通问题*. Ten English essays are collected from the Chinese EFL learner group, ten English essays are collected from the native English group, and ten Chinese essays are collected from the native Chinese group. The total number of the collected essays is 30.

Before the naturalised role-play is performed, the instructions have been given to all the subjects that the Chinese EFL learner group and the native English group are required to role play in English and that the native Chinese group is required to role play in Chinese. The subjects' role-play conversations are recorded and transcribed, and criticisms are identified. Each subject participating in the naturalised role-play produces eight criticisms for his/her peer's essay in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary. The total number of criticisms collected is eighty criticisms in English by the Chinese EFL learner group, eighty criticisms in English by the native English group, and eighty criticisms in Chinese by the native Chinese group. In order to make the data comparable, eighty criticisms in Chinese from the native Chinese group are translated into English. Therefore eighty criticisms in English from the Chinese EFL learner group, eighty criticisms in English from the native English group and eighty criticisms in English translation version from the native Chinese group are coded for statistical analysis. The total number of the collected criticism is 240.

### *Data Analysis*

Based on Nguyen's taxonomy of criticism strategies, all the collected criticisms are coded, corpus of criticism strategies is produced, and its samples are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Samples of Corpus of Criticism Strategies

Category	Type	Characteristics	Examples
1. Direct Criticism:		explicitly pointing out the problem with H's choices/actions/words/products, etc.	
	a. Negative Evaluation	usually expressed via evaluative adjectives with negative meaning or evaluative adjective with positive meaning plus negation.	<i><u>I don't think</u> it's a good idea to support your argument.</i>
	b. Disapproval	describing S's attitude towards H's choice, etc.	<i><u>I don't favour</u> the way you write that essay.</i>
	c. Expression of Disagreement	usually realised 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><u>I don't agree</u> with you about your conclusions.</i>
	d. Identification of Problem	stating errors or problems found with H's choice, etc.	<i>And <u>there are some incorrect words</u>, for example "nowadays".</i>
	e. Statement of Difficulties	usually expressed by means of such structures as "I find it difficult to understand...", "It's difficult to understand..."	<i><u>I find it difficult to understand</u> Your opinion.</i>
2. Hedged	Hedged	usually expressed by weakeners (sort of, kind of, somewhat), minimizers (minimum, least, smallest, slightest, fewest), question forms, tag questions, if-clause and impersonal forms.	<i><u>If I were</u> you, <u>I would use</u> "safer" instead of "safe".</i>
3. Indirect Criticism		implying the problems with H's choice/actions/words/products,	
	a. Request for Change	usually expressed via such structures as "will you ...?", "can you ...?", "would you ...?" or "must", "want" imperatives	<i><u>Will you consider</u> some points?</i>
	b. Suggestion for Change	usually expressed via the performative "I suggest that ...", "I advise you" or such structures as "you can", "you could", "it would be better if" or "why don't you" etc., or structures with "should" with or without modality	<i><u>Why don't you</u> put a comma here?</i>
	c. Correction	including all utterances which have the purpose of fixing errors by asserting specific alternatives to H's choice,	<i>"safer" not "safe", you should use comparison here.</i>
	d. Indicating Standard	usually stated as a collective obligation rather than an	<i><u>Theoretically</u>, a conclusion <u>needs to be</u> some sort of a</i>



		obligation for H personally or as a rule which S thinks is commonly agreed upon and applied to all	<i>summary.</i>
	e. Preaching	usually stated as guidelines to H, with an implicature that H is incapable of making correct choices otherwise.	<i><u>The following statement is meant to help you. You see, anyone can have an opinion, but the issue is whether statement can support your opinion or not.</u></i>
4. Opting Out	Opting Out	no words	silent

Based on Nguyen's taxonomy of criticism strategies as shown in Table 1, according to their respective groups, all the coded criticisms are input into computer, and are quantitatively analysed by employing SPSS 11. Pearson Chi-Square test is used because it is an appropriate statistical instrument for frequency data. For the analysis of linguistic forms, the descriptive statistics are employed to count the frequency and percentage of each strategy for each group.

Frequencies of each category of direct criticism strategies, hedged criticism strategies, indirect criticism strategies and opting out for the Chinese EFL learner group, the native English group and the native Chinese group are calculated. Frequencies of each type of criticism strategies for the Chinese EFL learner group, the native English group and the native Chinese group are also counted. Pearson Chi-Square test is conducted to decide whether strategy variable (row variable) is related to group variable (column variable). Significant value for Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value is set at 0.05 for all the analysis in this study. If Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value for these two variables (strategy variable and group variable) is less than 0.05, a conclusion can be made that strategy variable is related to group variable to a certain degree. If Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value for these two variables (strategy variable and group variable) is greater than 0.05, a conclusion can be made that strategy variable is independent of group variable.

Served as a supplement to the quantitative study, the post hoc interview is conducted on the Chinese EFL learner group, the native English group and the native Chinese group in order to explore their ideas about the reasons why they choose a certain criticism strategy. This can make this study more accurate and give a true picture of what is like about distribution of criticism strategy use among the Chinese EFL learner group, the native English group and the native Chinese group. Such quantitative and qualitative studies support the reliability and the validity for this study.

## Results and Discussion

### *Statistical Results of Criticism Strategies*

The statistical results are shown in Tables 2-5.

**Table 2.** Frequencies and Percentages of Each Category of Criticism Strategies by the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native English Group

Category	The Chinese EFL Learner Group	The Native English Group	Total
Direct Criticism	28(35%)	53(66.25%)	81(101.25%)
Hedged	10(12.5%)	7(8.75%)	17(21.25%)
Indirect Criticism	42(52.5%)	20(25%)	62(77.5%)
Opting Out	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	80(100%)	80(100%)	160(200%)

Pearson Chi-Square value=20.000 df=16 Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value=0.0213

Note: The percentage of each category of criticism strategies in each group is provided in parentheses after the frequency. The number of frequency of each category of criticism strategies in the group is equal to the sum of frequency of each type of criticism strategies in this group under this category of criticism strategies.

**Table 3.** Frequencies and Percentages of Each Type of Criticism Strategies by the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native English Group

Category	Type	The Chinese EFL Learner Group	The Native English Group	Total
Direct Criticism	Negative Evaluation	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Disapproval	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Expression of Disagreement	2(2.5%)	2(2.5%)	4(5%)
	Identification of Problem	26(32.5%)	51(63.75%)	77(96.25%)
	Statement of Difficulties	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Hedged	Hedged	10(12.5%)	7(8.75%)	17(21.25%)
Indirect Criticism	Request for Change	15(18.75%)	1(1.25%)	16(20%)
	Suggestion for Change	27(33.75%)	19(23.75%)	46(57.5%)
	Correction	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Indicating Standard	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Preaching	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Opting Out	Opting Out	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	Total	80(100%)	80(100%)	160(200%)

Pearson Chi-Square value=78.000 df=72 Asymp.Sig. (2-sided) value=0.0234

Note: The percentage of each type of criticism strategies in each group is provided in parentheses after the frequency. The number of frequency of each category of criticism strategies in the group is equal to the sum of frequency of each type of criticism strategies in this group under this category of criticism strategies.

**Table 4.** Frequencies and Percentages of Each Category of Criticism Strategies by the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native Chinese Group

Category	The Chinese EFL learner Group	The Native Chinese Group	Total
Direct Criticism	28(35%)	37(46.25%)	65(81.25%)
Hedged	10(12.5%)	6(7.5%)	16(20%)
Indirect Criticism	42(52.5%)	37(46.25%)	79(98.75%)
Opting Out	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	80(100%)	80(100%)	160(200%)

Pearson Chi-Square value =20.000 df=16 Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value=0.0205

Note: The percentage of each category of criticism strategies in each group is provided in parentheses after the frequency. The number of frequency of each category of criticism strategies in the group is equal to the sum of frequency of each type of criticism strategies in this group under this category of criticism strategies.

**Table 5.** *Frequencies and Percentages of Each Type of Criticism Strategies by the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native Chinese Group*

Category	Type	The Chinese EFL Learner Group	The Native Chinese Group	Total
Direct Criticism	.Negative Evaluation	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Disapproval	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Expression of Disagreement	2(2.5%)	2(2.5%)	4(5%)
	Identification of Problem	26(32.5%)	35(43.75%)	61(76.25%)
	Statement of Difficulties	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Hedged	Hedged	10(12.5%)	6(7.5%)	16(20%)
Indirect Criticism	Request for Change	15(18.75%)	10(12.5%)	25(31.25%)
	Suggestion For change	27(33.75%)	27(33.75%)	54(67.5%)
	Correction	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Indicating Standard	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Preaching	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Opting Out	Opting Out	0(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	Total	80(100%)	80(100%)	160(200%)

*Pearson Chi-Square value=78.000 df=72 Asymp.Sig. (2-sided) value=0.0258*

Note: The percentage of each type of criticism strategies in each group is provided in parentheses after the frequency. The number of frequency of each category of criticism strategies in the group is equal to the sum of frequency of each type of criticism strategies in this group under this category of criticism strategies.

#### *Differences in Frequencies of Criticism Strategies Used Between the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native English Group*

In order to answer the first research question of what kind of pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners occurs in academic setting, differences in frequencies of criticism strategies used between the Chinese EFL learner group and the native English group are described according to Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2 displays frequencies and percentages of each category of criticism strategies by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native English group. It can be seen from Table 2 that Pearson Chi-Square value is 20.000, df is 16, and Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value is 0.0213. Because Asymp.Sig. (2-sided) value is less than 0.05, this means that frequencies of categories of criticism strategies used by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native English group are related to their respective groups. In other words, frequencies of each category of criticism strategies are distributed correlatively across the Chinese EFL learner group and the native English group. The strategy that is used most frequently by the Chinese EFL learner group is indirect criticism strategies (indirect criticism strategies=42) whereas the most common strategy used by the native English group is direct criticism strategies (direct criticism strategies=53). It can be concluded from Table

2 that the Chinese EFL learner group tends to produce far fewer frequencies of direct criticism strategies but noticeably more frequencies of indirect criticism strategies (direct criticism strategies=28, indirect criticism strategies=42) than the native English group (direct criticism strategies=53, indirect criticism strategies=20).

Table 3 shows frequencies and percentages of each type of criticism strategies by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native English group. It is shown from Table 3 that frequencies of types of criticism strategies are correlated with their respective groups because Asymp.Sig. value (2-sided) (0.0234) is smaller than 0.05. No criticism strategies of negative evaluation, disapproval, statement of difficulties, correction, indicating standard and preaching have been found in the data of the Chinese EFL learner group and the native English group because these criticism strategies are beyond the need of the peer-feedback tasks in this study. The Chinese EFL learner group (hedged criticism strategies=10) uses hedged criticism strategies more frequently than the native English group (hedged criticism strategies=7).

Table 3 also indicates that frequencies of criticism strategies used by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native English group are considerably different. Table 3 demonstrates that expression of disagreement are employed with the same small frequencies between the Chinese EFL learner group (expression of disagreement=2) and the native English group (expression of disagreement=2) because expression of disagreement is seldom used in peer-feedback tasks. The Chinese EFL learner group (identification of problem=26) uses identification of problem less frequently than the native English group (identification of problem=51). This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that English language proficiency of the Chinese EFL learner group is lower than English language proficiency of the native English group. It is more difficult for the Chinese EFL learner group to identify problems in English than the native English group to identify problems in English. Therefore the Chinese EFL learner group falls behind the native English group in the frequency of identification of problem with which they use this strategy. Concerning request and suggestion, Table 3 shows that these two criticism strategies are employed overwhelmingly by the Chinese EFL learner group (request=15 and suggestion=27) while being hardly avoided (request=1) or relatively less frequently used (suggestion=19) by the native English group.

#### *Similarities in Frequencies of Criticism Strategies Used Between the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native Chinese Group*

In order to answer the first research question of what kind of pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners occurs in academic setting, *similarities* in frequencies of criticism strategies used between the Chinese EFL learner group and the native Chinese group are described according to Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4 shows frequencies and percentages of each category of criticism strategies by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native Chinese group. It is shown from Table 4 that Pearson Chi-Square value is 20.000, df is 16, and Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) value is 0.0205. Frequencies of categories of criticism strategies

used by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native Chinese group are correlated with their respective groups because Asymp.Sig. value (2-sided) (0.0205) is smaller than 0.05. The most common strategy used by the Chinese EFL learner group is indirect criticism strategies (indirect criticism strategies=42), which is also the most frequently used criticism strategy by the native Chinese group (indirect criticism strategies=37) and different from that of the native English group (direct criticism strategies=53). This indicates that the Chinese EFL learner group and the native Chinese group most like to employ indirect criticism strategies in conducting their peer-feedback tasks and the native English group most prefers to use direct criticism strategies in performing their peer-feedback tasks. It can be concluded that the Chinese EFL learner group's preference for indirect criticism strategies may be expected to reflect an influence from the learners' L1 culture. This finding is in compliance with Cao Jia's finding that Chinese teachers mainly use off-record criticisms (similar to indirect criticism strategies in this paper) in their criticism speeches (Cao 2010).

The Chinese EFL learner group's preference for indirect criticism strategies is due to the fact that Chinese EFL learner group is influenced by Chinese culture to a certain degree. Chinese culture is based on Confucianism, which constitutes the perception of politeness in Chinese culture. Gu (1990) explores the relationship between the modern "politeness" and the ancient Chinese concept "Li" and proposes the politeness maxims related to Chinese culture. In his Generosity Maxim he discusses politeness values in Chinese culture. From this maxim, it can be seen that in Chinese culture polite language and indirect language should be encouraged to use in giving negative evaluation on the hearer's actions, choices, words, and products for which he or she may be held responsible. Therefore, the relatively frequent occurrence of indirect criticism strategies in the Chinese EFL learner group and the native Chinese group is perhaps reflective of this cultural value and spiral thinking patterns of Chinese culture. In contrast with Chinese culture, English culture is based on Individualism, which leads to the linear thinking pattern of native English speakers and therefore direct expression of their views about what they think. The relatively frequent occurrence of direct criticism strategies is perhaps a representation of their culture values and their linear thinking patterns (Kaplan 1988).

The Chinese EFL learner group (hedged criticism strategies=10) uses hedged criticism strategies more frequently than both the native English group (hedged criticism strategies=7) and the native Chinese group (hedged criticism strategies=6). This phenomenon can be explained by the Chinese EFL learner group's overgeneralisation of politeness principle. They consider politeness principle to be the most important factor in conducting their peer-feedback tasks. Therefore the Chinese EFL learner group tends to use hedged devices to soften their criticism force more frequently than both the native English group and the native Chinese group.

Table 5 gives frequencies and percentages of each type of criticism strategies by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native Chinese group. It can be seen from Table 5 that frequencies of types of criticism strategies are distributed correlatively across the Chinese EFL learner group and the native Chinese group

because Asymp.Sig. value (2-sided) (0.0258) is smaller than 0.05. The general picture that Table 5 gives is that frequencies of types of criticism strategy use by the Chinese EFL learner group and by the native Chinese group are somewhat similar.

No criticism strategies of negative evaluation, disapproval, statement of difficulties, correction, indicating standard and preaching have been found in the data of the native Chinese group because the performance of the peer-feedback tasks in this study requires no need of these criticism strategies. Table 5 also shows that expression of disagreement is seldom used between the Chinese EFL learner group (expression of disagreement=2) and the native Chinese group (expression of disagreement=2). There is a difference in the use of identification of problem between the Chinese EFL learner group (identification of problem=26) and the native Chinese group (identification of problem=35), and the Chinese EFL learner group employs this strategy less frequently than the native Chinese group. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that English language proficiency of the Chinese EFL learner group is lower than Chinese language proficiency of the native Chinese group, which makes the Chinese EFL learner group more difficult to use identification of problem in English than the native Chinese group does in Chinese. Therefore neither L1 positive nor negative transfer is found in the criticism strategy of identification of problem. As for request and suggestion, the Chinese EFL learner group (request=15, suggestion=27) shows somewhat similar behaviours to the native Chinese group (request=10, suggestion=27) in the frequency of the use of these two criticism strategies, which is very different from those of the native English group (request=1, suggestion=19). This indicates that the Chinese EFL learner group's preference for these two strategies is likely negatively influenced by their L1 pragmalinguistic routines.

#### *Discussion of the Post Hoc Interview*

In order to answer the second research question of how pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners occurs in academic setting, based on Chinese and English cultures, the post hoc interview is explored.

It can be argued that the Chinese EFL learner group's frequent employment of suggestion and request is influenced by their L1 cultural values in which Chinese culture is collectively rather than individualistically oriented, and the sense of community is quite strong. This often makes Chinese, by and large, feel responsible for other people's deeds, especially for helping the people who have done something wrong to correct themselves. Giving suggestion for change or even request for change in this case is such a way as demonstrating care, sincerity, and friendliness in Chinese culture rather than showing interference and face-threatening as it would probably be in English culture, which constitutes the perception of being polite ["li mao": 礼貌] and having Li ["you li": 有礼] in Chinese culture. Being polite and having Li in Chinese culture is a key step for smooth interpersonal and social interactions and harmony within the hierarchy in Chinese culture (Lee 2018, p. 32). When asked in the post hoc interview about their use of suggestion, seven out of the ten Chinese EFL learners say that they regard this as a polite way of pointing out other people's errors since in Chinese culture giving suggestion is

also polite. For example, a learner says: “Chinese people usually give suggestions to one another, senior give suggestions to junior, people of the same age give suggestions to one another. This is a good way which is accepted by the society.” Likewise, some instances of the learners’ request might also have been an indication of this L1 influence. When interviewed, four out of the ten Chinese EFL learners who use this criticism strategy comment that it is important to emphasise rules and make their peers realise their errors, without being aware that this could be inappropriate in the L2. For example, a learner says: “I think it’s reasonable to use must here. When we need to make other people aware of their errors, we’d better use this structure.”

In terms of suggestion and request linguistic realisations, many learners also report perceiving a similarity between Chinese and English in the post hoc interview. For example, a learner says: “I think they (i.e., ‘yin gai’ [应该] and ‘should’) are equivalent in terms of politeness, and semantically ‘yin gai [应该]’ is ‘should’ if translated into English”. Another learner comments: “I think ‘bi xu’ [必须] is equivalent to ‘must’ in English”. Presumably, it is this perception of Chinese-English equivalence that contributes to the learners’ frequent use of “should” and “must” when they give suggestion and request in English respectively. Indeed, some learners explicitly admit having transferred these two structures from Chinese: “I transferred from Chinese, for example, in Chinese I would say you shouldn’t do this, you shouldn’t do that. So ah because I often say so in Chinese. I also translate it into English because ‘yin gai [应该]’ and ‘should’ are equivalent. They are both polite”; “ah I usually say so in Chinese. ah You must do this, you must do that. So when I translate it into English, it is influenced by my Chinese”. What is more, it is also linguistically realised by “should” in all the 12 instances where it occurs. It is clear that the learners’ frequent use of suggestion and request in criticism strategies in this study is mainly influenced by their L1, and gives support to the fact that Chinese EFL learners favour these two criticism strategies when they perform their criticising speech act. In contrast with the frequent employment of suggestion and request by the Chinese EFL learner group (request=15, suggestion=27) and the native Chinese group (request=10, suggestion=27), the native English group hardly avoids employing request (request=1) and relatively uses less frequently suggestion (suggestion=19). This phenomenon is related to English culture, which is identified as a culture high in individualistic value tendencies (Ting-Toomey 1999). They think that it is the teacher’s responsibility to request or suggest their students to correct mistakes the students have made. Therefore the native English group relatively uses less frequently these two criticism strategies in conducting their peer-feedback tasks in this study.

The above discussion has demonstrated that there are not only remarkable differences in the frequencies of indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion between the Chinese EFL learner group and the native English group, but also somewhat similarities in the frequencies of indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion between the Chinese EFL learner group and the native Chinese group. These research results provide a positive answer to the first research question. There is pragmatic transfer in the use of indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion in English by Chinese EFL learners in academic setting.

With reference to the second research question of how pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies in English as a foreign language by Chinese EFL learners occurs in academic setting, the cultural causes and the overgeneralisation causes of pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners have been identified. The criticism strategies that are pragmatically negatively transferred from Chinese into English are indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion. These three criticism strategies show Chinese characteristics of valuing politeness, caring about the hearer's face and spiral thinking patterns. These research findings give a positive answer to the second research question and explain how pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies in English as a foreign language by Chinese EFL learners occurs in academic setting.

## **Conclusions**

While pragmatic transfer is evident in the use of indirect criticism strategies, request and suggestion in the Chinese EFL learner group, as indicated above, there are also instances where expected transfer is less frequently found in the use of direct criticism strategies in the Chinese EFL learner group. Also no instances in the use of negative evaluation, disapproval, statement of difficulties, correction, indicating standard and preaching have been found in the Chinese EFL learner group. This could possibly be evidence of what Ellis (1994) refers to as "playing it safe", i.e., when the learners are not sure of the appropriateness of a certain pragmatic feature, they decide to make less use of it (Edmondson and House 1991). As Kasper and Blum-Kulka claim, as newcomers to new culture, the learners may be inclined to employ less severe strategies than do the native speakers, to avoid at all costs being considered impolite (Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993, p. 115).

In summary, this study makes an addition in the existing knowledge of the field. Despite this contribution, however, a word of caution should be given here. As many transfer researchers (e.g., Takahashi 1996) have warned, it is not always possible to determine when the learners fall back on their mother tongue and when they draw on universal pragmatic knowledge or previously acquired pragmatic knowledge. One possible way to identify whether pragmatic transfer is L1-induced or IL-specific, as Ellis (1994) suggests, is to conduct a two-dimensional study, in which data are collected from not only the learner of the target language group, the native speaker of the target language group, and the native speaker of the learners' mother tongue group, but also from a group of the native speakers of the target language who also learn the learners' mother tongue. As Baba (1999) does in her study on American-Japanese compliment responses, it would have been preferable to have gathered data from a group of Chinese EFL learners, a group of native English speakers, a group of native Chinese speakers and a group of English learners of Chinese as a foreign language for this study. However, given that such a group of English learners of Chinese as a foreign language is not available for my study, all the findings about pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies are based largely on the performance of the Chinese EFL learner group as compared with the native English group and with the native Chinese group and on the reported



information about the Chinese EFL learners' ideas about the reasons why they choose a certain criticism strategy from the post-hoc interview. With this limitation, therefore, further studies are required to be conducted: (1) in terms of a group of Chinese EFL learners, a group of native English speakers, a group of native Chinese speakers and a group of English learners of Chinese as a foreign language in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of mechanism for pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners. (2) In terms of longitudinal study in order to understand how pragmatic competence is acquired in terms of pragmatic transfer in performance of criticising speech act by Chinese EFL learners. (3) In terms of contextualisation cues in order to know how Chinese EFL learners learn to manage and use their criticism strategies in a manner compatible with English language norms. By so doing, a systematic description of pragmatic transfer in criticism strategies by Chinese EFL learners can eventually be hoped to be achieved.

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## Appendix 1: English Version for the Chinese EFL Learner Group and the Native English Group

### *Naturalised Role-Play*

**Directions:** The following situations describe the role-play informant and the role-play researcher in certain familiar roles. Please listen to the research focus and the role-play description, and identify yourself with the character “you” in it. The task of the researcher is to lead the conversation in a flexible and natural way. If you have any question, please feel free to ask.

**Situation:** ① To the role-play informant: Research focus: You are a student in your class. Your peer has written an English essay *How to Solve Traffic Problems in Your City*. Your English teacher asks you to comment on your peer’s essay in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary.

Role-play description: Recently your class has written an English essay *How to Solve Traffic Problems in Your City*. Today your English teacher asks your class to comment on your peer’s essay in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary.

Your peer approaches you and says some greetings. Your two talk. The talk should include the following points (See the card for role-play informant below).

**Card:** ② In the card for the role-play informant:

- (When being asked) Please comment on your peer’s essay.

(When being asked) Please tell your peer methods to improve his/her essay.

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life.

**Situation:** ③ To the role-play researcher:

Research focus: You are a student in your class. You have written an English essay *How to Solve Traffic Problems in Your City*. Your English teacher asks you to get your peer’s opinions about your essay in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary.

Role-play description: Recently your class has written an English essay *How to Solve Traffic Problems in Your City*. Today your English teacher asks your class to get your peer’s opinions about your essay in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary.

Your peer approaches you and says some greetings. Your two talk. The talk should include the following points (See the card for role-play researcher below).

**Card:** ④ In the card for the role-play researcher:

- Please ask your peer what problems occur in your essay.

- Please ask your peer how your essay can be improved.

- When it is most natural during the talk, ask your peer’s opinions about your essay in terms of essay topic, essay organisation, wandering off the topic, writing contents, quality of argumentation, coherence, grammar and vocabulary.

Please make the conversation as natural as possible. Speak as you would in real life. It is very important that you ask your questions naturally and make your

questions a part of the normal talk. Do not make it obvious that the criticising tasks are among the research focus listed in the card for you.

## Appendix 2: Chinese Version for the Native Chinese Group

### 自然角色扮演

**说明：**以下情况描述了在某些熟悉角色中角色扮演信息提供者和角色扮演研究者的情况。请听研究重点和角色扮演的描述，并认同其中的角色“您”。研究者的任务是以灵活自然的方式引导对话。如果您有任何问题，请随时提出。

#### 情景：

①给角色扮演信息提供者：

**研究重点：**您是您班上的一位学生。您的同学写了一篇题目为“如何解决您所在城市的交通问题”的汉语作文。您的汉语老师要求您从写作主题、写作组织、离题情况、写作内容、论辩质量、连贯性、语法和词汇等方面对您的同学的作文进行评论。

**角色扮演描述：**最近您们班的同学写了一篇题目为“如何解决您所在城市的交通问题”的汉语作文。今天，您们班的汉语老师要求全班同学从写作主题、写作组织、离题情况、写作内容、论辩质量、连贯性、语法和词汇等方面对班上同学的作文进行评论。您的同学走过来跟您说了几句问候语。您们俩在对话，对话应该包括以下几点（见下面的角色扮演信息提供者的卡片）。

#### 卡片：

②在角色扮演信息提供者的卡片中：

（当被征询时）请评论您的同学的作文。

（当被征询时）请告诉您的同学如何改进他/她的作文的方法。

请像在现实生活中一样尽可能自然地对话。

#### 情景：

③给角色扮演研究人员：

**研究重点：**您是您班上的一位学生。您写了一篇题目为“如何解决您所在城市的交通问题”的汉语作文。您的汉语老师要求您从写作主题、写作组织、离题情况、写作内容、论辩质量、连贯性、语法和词汇等方面征询您的同学对您的作文的意见。

**角色扮演描述：**最近您们班的同学写了一篇题目为“如何解决您所在城市的交通问题”的汉语作文。今天，您们班的汉语老师让您们班的全体同学从写作主题、写作组织、离题情况、写作内容、论辩质量、连贯性、语法和词汇等方面去征询别的同学对自己作文的意见。

您的同学走过来跟您说了几句问候语。您们俩在对话。对话应该包括以下几点（见下文角色扮演研究者的卡片）。

#### 卡片：

④在角色扮演研究者的卡片中：

请征询您的同学您的作文有什么问题。

请征询您的同学您如何改进您的作文。

在对话过程最自然的时候，从写作主题、写作组织、离题情况、写作内容、论证质量、连贯性、语法和词汇等方面征询别的同学对您的作文的意见。

请尽可能像在现实生活中那样自然地对话。重要的一点是，您要自然地提出问题，并使您的问题成为正常对话的一部分。不要把批评任务明显地列在卡片上的研究重点中。