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# **The Structure of Business Complaint Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Previous studies reveal a consensus among scholars regarding the need of business firms to understand and respond effectively to customers' complaints (Liu & McClure, 2001). Trading companies are one of these business contexts in which it is essential to determine 'proper' methods for conducting and handling a customer's complaint, especially since customer's complaints frequently occur in the trading industry.

The present study analyses the sequential and interactional characteristics of business complaints and responses to them for both local citizens and customer service members in anonymized electronic audio recordings of 25 hours of naturally-occurring complaint phone calls to the Complaint Unit (CU) of a Furniture Trading Company (FTC) in Saudi Arabia. The participants of the study are members of the general public (customers) who called to complain about issues related to the services of this company during the study period together with the institutional staff members working in this company. A mixed methods approach is employed for data analysis. Quantitatively, the study develops a structured coding system for the core sequences of Saudi Arabic complaint phone calls. Qualitative analysis of some interactions complements the quantitative analysis. The interactional behaviour of Saudi Arabic speakers identified in Saudi Arabic telephone complaints is interpreted on the basis of the socio-cultural norms of the Saudi society that determine the interactional behaviour of the speakers. The framework for data analysis integrates the identified sequential organization and verbal strategies of complaint phone calls found in the literature with additional aspects which the researcher considered necessary to address the corpus of the Saudi Arabic complaint calls.

The analysis suggests that in the context of institutional complaint discourse, complaints are Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) but not inherently impolite in themselves. It also indicates that it is possible to identify a basic overall structural organization of the Saudi Arabic business complaints consisting of highly routinized recurring interactional moves. In institutional settings, there are some universal complaining strategies and other culture-specific ones. The choice of different complaint strategies and graders is explained in terms of a number of factors that affect the speech behaviour of complaining by native Saudi Arabic speakers in institutional discourse, including cultural norms, the customer's level of dissatisfaction, power, goals, and emotions. The study provides further evidence as to the role of culture in contextualizing speech utterances in Saudi institutional complaints.

Drawing on the findings of the study, as well as taking into consideration certain contextual determinants in conflictual Saudi Arabic business exchanges, the thesis proposes an analytical framework of natural spoken complaint business interactions applied effectively to the Saudi Arabic culture and likely to be equally applicable to other languages and/or to other Arabic dialects.

## DEDICATION

*To my parents,  
to whom my debt is inexpressible*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praise to Allah only the Lord of the Worlds, and peace and salutation to be upon all Prophets, to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his household and Companions.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

C	Caller
CA	Conversation Analysis
CCB	Consumer Complaint Behaviour
CCC	Customer Care Centre
CD	Compact Discs
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CF	Consent Form
C of P	Community of Practice
CSR	Customer Service Representative
CT	Call-Taker
CU	Complaint Unit
DCT	Discourse Completion Test
ESL	English as a Second Language
FPP	First Pair Part
FTAs	Face-Threatening Acts
FTC	Furniture Trading Company
IT	Information Technology
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MCI	Ministry of Commerce and Investment
MPs	Model Persons
PC	Personal Computer
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PP	Politeness Principle
SPP	Second Pair Part
UAHPEC	University of Auckland Human Participant Ethics Committee
VLC	VideoLan Media Player

## TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

The following transliteration system is adopted from Saleh (2002).

Arabic Letter	Name	Transliteration
ا	'alif	aa (if a vowel)
ء	hamza	'
ب	baa	b
ت	taa	t
ث	thaa	th
ج	jiim	J
ح	Haa	H
خ	khaa	kh
د	daal	d
ذ	dhaal	dh
ر	raa	r
ز	zaay	z
س	siin	s
ش	shiin	sh
ص	Saad	S
ض	Daad	D
ط	Taa	T
ظ	Zaa	Z
ع	'ayn	ʕ
غ	ghayn	gh
ف	faa	f
ق	qaaf	q
ك	kaaf	k
ل	laam	l
م	miim	m
ن	nuun	n
هـ	haa	h
و	waaw	w or uu (for the vowel)
ي	yaa	y or ii ( for the vowel)
ـَ	fatHa	a ( short vowel as in ago)
ـُ	Damma	u ( short vowel as in put)
ـِ	kasra	i (short vowel as in fit)



## **CHAPTER ONE Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Communication is a process of interacting within the social and sociocultural norms of a society (Zeyrek, 2012). In this process, it is not only propositional meanings which are conveyed. Rather, the speaker also performs actions by speaking. These acts are known in pragmatics as 'speech acts'.

A speech act is defined as “the sort of act one performs in uttering a sentence” (Austin, 1962, p.12). Speech act theory is based on the belief that “the minimal unit of human communication is not a sentence or other expression, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving orders, describing, explaining, apologizing, thanking, and congratulating, etc.” (Searle, Kiefer, & Bierwisch, 1980, p.31).

Among these speech acts, complaint is a pervasive, forceful, and regularly occurring form of human interaction. It is also a “challenging” speech act as its performance requires a great deal of social interaction skill and many face-saving strategies (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006). It is even more complex than other speech acts in the sense that it does not have pre-determined forms and its interpretations are negotiable (Chen, Chen, & Chang, 2011). The production of a proper complaint depends on a wide range of factors including the social status of the speaker, the social status of the addressee, the relationship between the two, and the severity of the complaint.

In institutional business communication, customers’ complaints to business firms are inevitable. The difficulty for a dissatisfied customer is how to complain effectively in a way that can ensure that the demanded remedial action will be undertaken. The customer’s feelings of frustration and disappointment need to be expressed clearly and convincingly so as “to regain emotional balance or in order to get things done properly” (Linli, 2011, p.7). For customer service staff, the task is even heftier. This is because effective methods of handling a customer’s complaint have critical effects on “post-purchase management, customer retention and long-term customer relationship retention” (Liu & McClure, 2001, p.55). Consequently, business firms need “to understand and respond more effectively to consumers’ dissatisfactions, complaints and defections” (Liu & McClure, 2001, p.54).

In spite of the sensitivity and importance of handling a business complaint effectively, none of the studies the researcher reviewed discuss the issue of analysing complaint interactions in

Saudi Arabic, in general, nor of examining the telephone complaints of trading companies and their responses in business Saudi Arabic communication, in particular. It is the need to investigate this topic which has motivated a research project on analysing business complaint calls in Saudi Arabic.

### **1.1 Background of context: Saudi Arabic**

While many varieties of colloquial Arabic are spoken in Saudi Arabia including Egyptian Arabic, Iraqi Arabic, and Jordanian Arabic, the focus in this research is calls made by Saudi Arabic speakers<sup>1</sup>. In line with the socio-pragmatic<sup>2</sup> approach, it is necessary to present a background of the cultural concepts and social norms of Saudi Arabia that form the basis for many communication patterns used in spoken Saudi Arabic (Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Wierzbicka, 2003; Cutting, 2008; Peeters, 2009; Rieschild, 2011). Cultural concepts in this sense refers to the “system of values and norms that are collectively shared between groups of people” (Adeyemi-Bello & Kincaid, 2012, p.4) and those that affect how people behave, act, and respond in their communities (Obeidat, Shannak, Masa’deh, & Al-Jarrah, 2012). As Wolfson (1989) states, “each culture has its own unique set of conventions, rules, and patterns for the conduct of communication and these must be understood in the context of the general system that reflects the values” (p.2). A presentation of the cultural and linguistic background will facilitate a clear understanding of the values and norms reflected in conversation strategies used by speakers in the examined data.

The following sub-sections describe the socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia and shed light on the basic ‘visible’, ‘explicit’, and ‘observable’ cultural norms and practices (DeLong & Fahey, 2000) in so far as they impact data analysis. The description provided is based on both published literature and my insider knowledge as a Saudi national and as an insider of Saudi culture.

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in section 3.2.2, among the forty calls that I excluded from analysis were those in which the Cs, after listening to their dialects, were judged to be Arabs but not native Saudi speakers (for example, Egyptian Arabic, Iraqi Arabic, or Syrian Arabic). They were excluded as the focus of this research is analysing complaint calls performed by *native Saudi Arabic* speakers.

<sup>2</sup> A review of the literature on the socio-pragmatic approach to pragmatics is presented in section 2.1.6.

### 1.1.1 Saudi Arabia: The country and its socio-economic development

Saudi Arabia covers the greater part (approximately 80%) of the Arabian Peninsula (Ismail, 2012; Kattuah, 2013). It is one of the largest Arabian countries. Though its socio-economic status has developed dramatically in the last several decades like other Gulf states, the country still preserves its conservative Muslim identity where “customs, traditions, and tribal standards permeate all aspects of the social order” (Ismail, 2012, p.261).

In 1938, oil was found which enhanced social and economic growth in the region (Al-Rasheed, 2002). The source of the Saudi wealth and the main income producer is oil. The country is the keeper of one-third of the World’s known oil (Choudhury & Al-Sahlawi, 2000; Niblock, 2006). Of the country’s exports, oil accounts for more than 90% and almost 75% of government revenue (Ben Mansur, 2013). Oil income moved the economy of the country from ‘subsistence’ to one of ‘high expenditure’ (Kattuah, 2013). Because of this massive and continuing investment as the world’s leading oil producer and exporter, Saudi Arabia is an attractive market for local and international enterprises and retail shopping in its major cities (Badghish, Stanton, & Hu, 2015). The country has become one of the most consumer-oriented societies in the world (Al-Khateeb, 1998). It is rated the 13<sup>th</sup> most economically competitive country in the world and has been rated as the best place to do business in the entire Arab World and Middle East (Ben Mansur, 2013). The Saudi retail sector is well developed with a number of large modern retail chains, some Western (Marinov, 2007), which means that the retail competition is increasing within the country. These commercial developments and a highly competitive business atmosphere, in which the current FTC is situated, mean that commercial companies need to manage the needs of their consumers in order to sustain their competitive position and to maintain customer relationships (Ali, 2007; Kattuah, 2013). Among the major methods to achieve this sustainability is to consider costumers’ complaints (Shammout & Haddad, 2014), work hard to avoid the existence of problems and develop the skills of the personnel who are to satisfy customers’ needs, namely front-line staff and CTs as those who leave customers with either a good/bad impression towards the organization (Aburoub, Hersh, & Aladwan, 2011).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia now has high quality public and private organizations with increasing strategy policies and is “a market that offers good opportunities for foreign companies” (Ben Mansur, 2013, p.1). The growth of private and public sectors is encouraged by the government to decrease the county’s dependence on oil and to produce employment opportunities for the growing Saudi population (Al-Ghamdi, Sohail, & Al-Khaldi, 2000).

Kuttah (2013) comments that “by the turn of this century, the country was entrenched in the top echelons of international organizations, benchmarking its achievements against the leaders, and embarked on a successful strategy to accommodate and educate its youth” (p.17).

As Saudi Arabia constitutes the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula and it is a huge consumer market, research in this area has the potential to make a significant impact on our broader understanding of complaint work in an important non-Western culture.

### 1.1.2 Saudi Arabic: Language and culture

The native language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic. It has two forms: Classical<sup>3</sup> (*Fusha*) and Colloquial (*Amiya*). Classical Arabic (also called written or literary Arabic) is the language of the Holy Quran. In all formal occasions, Classical Arabic is the expected variety. It is the Arabic used in formal domains such as newspapers, books, religious sermons, judicial courts, and formal speeches (Peters, 2005; Ismail, 2012). Colloquial Arabic (also called spoken Arabic or native dialect), on the other hand, is the language spoken during informal situations (i.e., casual conversations) in the area extending from Iraq down to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman (Holes, 1984). The version of colloquial Arabic in each country has its own rules of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and each country has its own local dialects.

In ordinary everyday conversation, Saudi Arabic is spoken with many colloquial variations (i.e., dialects or vernaculars). These dialects correspond to their geographic regions. The major four are: *Najdi* (spoken in the central part of the country- Najd), *Hijazi* (spoken on the west coast of the country- al-Hijaz), *Janubi* (spoken on Asir province in the south) and *Shargi* (spoken in the eastern region- al-Hasa) (Omar, 1975; Ingham, 2006; Zuhur, 2011). Though slight differences in pronunciation and vocabulary exist between the three different local dialects of Saudi Arabic, “these are not so great as to prevent oral communication between people from opposite sides of the country” (Lipsky, 1959, p.32). In other words, the local dialects of Saudi Arabia are ‘mutually intelligible’ (Long, 2005). A *Najdi* speaker, for example, could use different lexical items than those used by a speaker of the *Hijazi* dialect, yet each can

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<sup>3</sup> Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the most widely used version of Arabic nowadays in Arabic speaking countries, is very similar to classic (Quranic) Arabic. Both are formal versions of Arabic. The major difference between the two is in the contexts in which they are used. Classical Arabic is used in literature and writing while MSA is mostly used in speaking.

understand the other despite these differences. In complaint phone calls analysed in this study, two local dialects are used: *Najdi* and *Hijazi*<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.1.2.1 Religion and the Islamic heritage

One of the most distinctive features of the Saudi culture is religion (Obeidat, Shannak, Masa'deh, & Al-Jarrah, 2012). Culturally speaking, Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and it is the guardian of the two holy cities Mecca and Medina, both features giving the country “a central religious importance in the Muslim world” (Al-Khateeb, 1998, p. 170). Islam is the only religion that is permitted to be expressed openly in Saudi Arabia (Kattuah, 2013). Thus, the Islamic religion plays a major role in Saudis' lives (Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013) and most aspects of the Saudi culture such as social life and traditions are rooted in Islam (Kavoossi, 2000; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007). Al-Khateeb (1998) considers Saudi Arabia as one of the few Muslim countries in which Sharia-law<sup>5</sup> is the basis for the country's legal system. These laws are derived from three sources: The Holy Quran (the holy book of God's words), the Sunnah (Muhammed's sayings), and Ijtihad (the interpretations of the Quran and the Sunnah by the four Muslim schools Shafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Hanifi) (Feghali, 1997; Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000). Basic Islamic values are preserved in conservative Saudi society. The Islamic nature of Saudi Arabia affects most of Saudis' acts, customs, and verbal behaviours. For instance, Saudis use many expressions referring to God's willingness such as *insha'allah* (God willing) in their conversations to indicate that “God is the ultimate causality independent from empirical assessment of cause and effect” (Long, 2005, p.25)<sup>6</sup>. The use of such expressions relates to Hofstede's (2001) dimension of ‘avoidance of uncertainty’ of which the Saudi society is classified as high because of the strong Islamic belief in fatalism (Bjerke & Al-Meer, 1993; Al-Ageel, 2016). The future never can be known, and it is something only controlled by God as the following Quranic verse reveals in Surat Al-Kahf: اكتب 28 امت بالمشاركة

(Surat al-Kahf: 23) (وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًا إِلَّا أَن يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ)

---

<sup>4</sup> Both dialects are colloquially used in informal and nearly all everyday speaking situations. Because *slight* differences exist between the two dialects in pronunciation and vocabulary and because of the limited number of calls in the Najdi dialect (six calls), dialect differences in the production and realization of the speech act of complaint are not dealt with in this study.

<sup>5</sup> This is defined as “the basic law that sets out the system of governance, rights of citizens, and powers and duties of the government in 83 articles” (Rajkhan, 2014, p.1).

<sup>6</sup> The same expression in English implies that difficulties exist or there is some doubt about the outcome, but in the Saudi culture it is used to reassure.

“Nor say of anything, I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow unless (you add) if Allah wills” (18:23).

Semantically, the use of the discourse conditional *insha'allah* (God willing) is to acknowledge the might of God and deference to Him being the Controller of the universe and the One who can confirm the occurrence of future events (Farghal, 1995). Pragmatically, this expression, among other religious-based expressions, entails politeness as politic ritualized markers showing good natured personality and respect (see section 1.1.3 for an explanation of religious expressions as politeness markers in Saudi Arabic).

In addition, one of the cultural values that distinguishes the Saudi culture from other Muslim societies is the conservative nature of the relationship between the genders (Al-Adailah, 2007; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Al-Ageel, 2010). Islamic virtues of modesty and chastity require that men do not converse or socialize directly with women who are not their relatives and vice versa unless in formal settings where specific tasks are to be done as in workplace settings (Zuhur, 2011). Women and men interact outside the domestic space of family infrequently, (Ismail, 2012). Very often, the relations of both men and women are limited to homo-social ones (Ismail, 2012), that is, interactions are restricted to one's own sex.

Women are ordered by religion, law, and society to wear *abaaya* (veil) outside their homes or in the presence of a non-kinsman (AlMunajjed, 1997). This is explained in terms of chastity, purity, and decency linked to the veil as a symbol of distance from unrelated men. On the basis of the Islamic rules and according to the norms of the Saudi Arabic culture, Saudi women are to maintain “a high degree of social distance when communicating with non-kinsmen” (Abalalaa, 2015, p. 48). For instance, all compliments from Saudi male strangers are rejected and considered to be offensive behaviour by Saudi women (Al-Ageel, 2010). In addition, male speakers may not thank a stranger female as profusely as they would do with male speakers (Alsohaibani, 2017). This is because of cultural, particularly religious restrictions, as unknown women are to be treated more formally and not more than necessary<sup>7</sup>. Male interlocutors prefer to sacrifice the elaborated thanking of such women “in order to save the female's negative face for her not to be embarrassed” (p.220). Thus, *shokran* (thanks) may only be uttered rather than elaborated forms of thanking.

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<sup>7</sup> The use of fictive kin terms in male-female interactions who are strangers (non-kins) is explained in section 1.1.3.

Saudi Arabia has a collectivist culture (Al-Khatib, 2006; Al-Ageel, 2016). This refers to a culture that places high value on the interests of the group over those of the individual and where emphasis is directed towards the “duty to in-group and maintaining harmony” (LeFebvre & Franke, 2013, p.129). Brotherhood and loyalty are encouraged by many verses of the Quran such as verse 10 in Surat al-Hujurat:

(Surat al-Hujurat: 10) (إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ)

“All believers are brothers, so make peace between your brothers and be mindful of your duty to Allah that you may be shown mercy” (49:10).

As members of a collective culture, Saudi people are very loyal to their social groups such as families and friends. Emphasis is placed on ethics and expected social behaviors such as the old traditions of hospitality and generosity which Saudis offer to strangers, friends, and family (Ali, 2007). Saudis are interdependent, reliant on each other, and appreciate the sense of the group. They highly value and respect family and friend relationships (Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013). Social relations are marked by sensitivity which refers to being sympathetic to a person who is suffering distress. A stranger’s needs are to be met before he asks for them. The elderly are to be respected and formality marks the relations among different generations and genders. Finally, a social quality of the Saudi culture is a person’s avoidance of being the bearer of bad news (Lipsky, 1959; Metz, 1992).

#### 1.1.2.2 The Saudi family structure

Saudis are very family oriented (Rajkhan, 2014). At most social levels, loyalty of individuals in the Saudi society is to their families, tribes, and religious sects (Al-Ageel, 2016). Respect is the norm for elder family members as parents, grandparents, and parents-in-law (Aba-alalaa, 2015). In order to gain the contentment of the parents (i.e., *ridda*), they are to be respected and not opposed (Zuhur, 2011). This is because Quranic verses show that it is very important to show a high degree of politeness and respect to parents. For example,

(وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِذَا يَبُلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أَلْفٌ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا)

(Surat Al-Isra: 23)

*“Your Lord has decreed to you that: You shall worship none but Him, and you shall be kind to your parents; if one or both of them live to their old age in your lifetime, you shall not say to them any word of contempt nor repel them and you shall address them in kind words” (17:23).*

In general, the norms in the Saudi society are rooted in Islamic teachings and Arab customs that Saudis learn at an early age at school and from their families (Ali, 2007). One of the Saudi norms is to give precedence to elders over the young so that in any social gathering, for instance, the eldest is to be greeted first, and should be served first with food and drinks. The structure of Saudi families is patriarchal in which the domination is male-oriented with decisions made by men as a cultural norm, civil rule, and juridical legislations support this authority (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Fathers normally hold the highest status in the family and are decision-makers for their children in terms of education and marriage, and are in charge of duties outside the household (Altorki, 1986).

#### *1.1.2.3 Class distinction*

Saudi society is classified as having a large power distance with a strong social hierarchy that prevails (Hofstede, 2001; Al Ageel, 2010; Aba-alalaa, 2015). This is because the Saudi culture is a collectivist one which, according to Hofstede (2001), is typical of countries with tolerance for large power distance<sup>8</sup>. The difference in the social status is primarily based on geographic origin, occupation, wealth or poverty, and being of tribal/non-tribal background (AlMunajjed, 1997; Aba-alalaa, 2015). Major variation in social class exists, with the main categories including: the upper class (the very rich consisting almost entirely of the royal family and its collateral branches). This class is situated at the top of the hierarchy followed by a large middle-class group (intellectual elite and merchants with traditional education such as lawyers, scientists, and teachers), and some lower class at the bottom (with limited incomes made of nomadic Bedouin, seminomadic herdsmen) (Zuhur, 2011). Greater formality and consideration of the other's face prevail in the conversations of middle class people, while disrespect and rudeness are stereotypical of the conversations of Bedouins and rural people (for example, aggressive, uncooperative, do not consider other people's feelings, and may not listen to others). This explains the rationale for including in this study the description of the social class of the Cs as being middle class (see section 3.2.1). The social class in this study is, however, limited to the economic social class as access to the Cs was not possible to discuss social class in a broader sense (i.e., geographic origins, occupation, or background). The claim that I am

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<sup>8</sup> Hofstede (2001) notes that a negative relationship exists between collectivism and the dimension of power distance: countries with a large power distance tend to be more collectivist.

making, but one which I cannot prove because of limitations in revealing the socio-economic background of the Cs, is that it is unlikely that Saudis of poor socio-economic background buy furniture from an expensive trading company as it costs too much (i.e., they are more likely to buy it second hand). Additionally, I know that upper-class people are less likely to call the CU of the FTC because wealthy elites interact less commonly with middle-class people.

A summary of the cultural aspects of the Saudi culture explained above is presented in Table 1.1 according to Hofstede's (1983, 2001)<sup>9</sup> four cultural value dimensions: Power Distance [PD], Individualism versus Collectivism [IC], Masculinity versus Femininity [MF], and Uncertainty Avoidance [UA].

Table 1. 1 Hofstede's (1983, 2001) cultural dimensions for Saudi Arabia

Cultural Dimension	Definition	The Saudi Culture
Power Distance [PD]	the extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (i.e., people value hierarchical relationships and respect authority).	large power distance society which accepts hierarchical status.
Individualism vs. Collectivism [IC]	the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of a group.	Saudi culture has a collectivist nature (i.e., loyalty to social groups such as families and friends).
Masculinity vs. Femininity [MF]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a masculine society focuses more on competition, achievements, and success with men seen as assertive and tough. Feminine cultures care more about others and quality of life.</li> <li>• role differentiation between males and females is high in masculine but not in feminine cultures.</li> </ul>	Saudi society is a masculine culture. Other researchers (e.g., Bjerke & Al-Meer, 1993; Weir, 2001) disagree with Hofstede and consider that the Saudi culture mediates between masculinity (competitive nature due to economic changes; gender segregation) and femininity (high tendency to build friendly relationships, loyal to family members and other social group).

<sup>9</sup> A measurement used to determine the organisational culture of a country (Al-Gahtani, Hubona, & Wang, 2007).

Uncertainty Avoidance [UA]	the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (i.e., degree of acceptance/rejection of ambiguity or unknown situations in the future).	Saudi culture is classified as high in uncertainty avoidance because of the strong Islamic belief in fatalism reflected by religious expressions such as <i>'in sha'allah</i> (if God wills).
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#### 1.1.2.4 Communication styles

When it comes to communication style, that is the ways of expressing one-self using patterns that are known to be typical of the Saudi people, Saudis aim to build good personal rapport in any type of human communication whether social, business, or governmental (Long, 2005). In their discourse, certain conversational norms are known. These include, but are not limited to, the frequent use of proverbs. Elaboration in explaining an event is favoured by Saudis; they typically stretch out their description of an idea or an event. Repetition is favoured to keep the attention of the listener or the reader and/or to provide more explanation (Feghali, 1997). Exaggeration is also a marked feature in Saudis communication style to show the high importance of either doing or avoiding the requested act (Marzari, 2006). It is often recommended in the Saudi culture to exaggerate important matters for the sake of promoting actions and taking them seriously (Alsharif & Alyousef, 2017). Saudis are normally hard bargainers and regard the bargaining process as a normal part of both business and social life (Wang, 2008). In social discourse, it is expected that a Saudi speaker can boast about his personal abilities, achievements, and possessions. Also, Saudi speakers might find it difficult to admit deficiencies in themselves, and spend a long time explaining that a fault or a failure was caused by another person (Lipsky, 1959). Particularly relevant to the current research is that when Arabs perform a direct complaint in Arabic, oaths are frequently used by males and females (Saleh, 2010). Direct Saudi complaints that occur in service situations are characterized by being ‘aggressive’, ‘angry’, ‘very negative’, and ‘demanding’ with frequent use of expressions of being cheated followed by a threatening action from the customer (Badghaish, Fletcher, & Stanton, 2012; Badghish et al., 2015). Saudis are willing, if not satisfied, to escalate their complaints to the management and are prepared to use social networks to increase pressure (Badghish et al., 2015). Saudi females are as aggressive as males when the complaint is about a problem with a product (i.e., a service encounter complaint)

(Badghish et al., 2015). In certain cases depending on the personality of the complainer, Saudi females may resort to the help of a male member of their families when complaining (e.g., father, brother) as a source of an “additional power because if they [the sellers] see a male complaining they solve the problem” (Badghish et al., 2015, p.57). When accompanied by a male, Badghish et al., (2015) notice that female Saudis’ complaining behaviour becomes equally, or even more, aggressive than their escort. In general, with complaints, Saudi nationals expect respect, active attention, attentive listening, an apology, and compensation. This is best explained by the following quotation from a male Saudi citizen, explaining the expectation of most Saudis, when he was complaining about a Saudi Arabian electrical goods retailer:

“We usually expect to be compensated but unfortunately compensation is never happening in Saudi Arabia. Apology and better service is the only expected action in Saudi Arabia if it is a good company” (Badghish et al., 2015, p.61).

Additionally, Saudis are very emotional people. They expect others, including foreigners, to display periodic emotions (Ghanem, Kalliny, & Elgoul, 2013; Samarah, 2015). When negotiating, Saudis often use personalized arguments, appeals, and insistent persuasion. Finally, Saudi Arabia is a high context culture (Viviano, 2003). This refers to a culture in which greater confidence is placed in the nonverbal aspects of communication than the verbal aspects (Gudykunst, 1997). Internal meaning is embedded in the information and the listener is expected to be able to read “between the lines” (Hall, 1976). Hence, nonverbal communication plays a significant role in communicating one’s opinion which can be indirectly implied through eye contact, verbal tone, and facial expressions<sup>10</sup>. In addition, being a high context culture, a range of contextual factors affects how individuals communicate (Hall, 1976). Thus, “knowing the identity of the individual with whom one is interacting can often be crucial to knowing how to act or to communicate” (St. Amant, 2002, p.200).

### 1.1.3 The politeness system in Saudi Arabic and the fear of losing face

Though studies in Arabic politeness in general and Saudi Arabic politeness in particular are limited, there are certain linguistic techniques that have been identified by most Arab linguists to be associated with being polite in Arab communities.

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<sup>10</sup> In telephone calls, the type of data in this research and with the absence of face-to-face communication, the verbal tone, pitch, interruption, and loud amplitude are the available means to infer the C’s opinion (for example, raising voice as a sign of anger or rapid speech as an indication of a sense of urgency).

The word *mu'adab* (polite) in Arabic is used to refer to a person who exhibits polite behavioural aspects in relationships with others. Polite behaviour takes into consideration positive aspects of face and connectedness with others (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). In Arab communities, the use of politeness strategies aims to reflect an intimate and a close relationship that marks the in-group identity feature of the Arabic culture.

When taking face into consideration in any speech behaviour, Arabs consider many factors including honour, pride, power, religious beliefs, and self-image. A response to social behaviour is shaped in a way that avoids the loss of face or the cause of the hearer's discomfort, embarrassment, or sadness by the use of compromise, patience, and self-control (Communicaid Group Ltd., 2009). In the Saudi Arabic culture, it is preferable to avoid pressure, confrontation, and conflict and verbal attacks are restrained to indirect instead of face-to-face arguments or more verbal confrontations (Cassell & Blake, 2012; Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013). Respect along with dignity are key factors that affect behaviour. A response to a request, for example, could be lengthy negotiations and excuses but not a direct refusal such as 'no' or 'I cannot', even if the person of whom a request is made has no intention of honouring the request (Al-Issa, 1998). Put differently, in the Saudi context, politeness stands for "showing tactfulness, using good manners and etiquette when interacting with other people, and maintaining self-control with the interlocutor, regardless of his/her behaviour" (Hariri, 2017, p.29).

As mentioned in section 1.1.2.1, Saudi Arabic politeness is strongly marked by its religious character. Religious vocabulary, expressions and praise entail politeness (Bouchara, 2015). Castelton (2006) reports that religious expressions are more extensively used in Saudi Arabic than in other Arab nationalities to promote hospitality, humility, and respect because of the high conservative status of Saudi people. Forms of politeness are highly conventional ritualized markers, such as '*allah yTawl suumrak*' (may God give you long life) and '*allah yHayyiik*' (may God greet you), '*jazaak allah khaair*' (may God reward you), and '*allah yirDa salaik*' (may God be pleased with you). Bouchara (2015) argues that a proper understanding of such religious expressions as strategies used by speakers to indicate politeness relies on shared socio-cultural norms and beliefs.

Straightforward politeness expressions (that vary in structure) are mostly considered polite in Saudi Arabic when used for thanking, asking, or inquiring about a service in a shop. Examples are (Al-Shurafa, 1997, p.27):

*ʕafwan*<sup>11</sup> excuse me; sorry (a lexical item)

*saamhiini* forgive me (when addressing a singular female) (an imperative clause; a request)

*'alf shukr* thousands of thanks (a noun phrase)

The manifestation of honorifics is done through the use of titles, kinship terms, teknonyms<sup>12</sup>, greetings, and polite requests using expressions such as *'law Samaht*' and *'Edha Takarramt*' (please), *'dhaa ma ʕaliik amir*' (if it does not burden you) and *'faDlaan laa amraan*' (a favour not a command) (Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015; Aba-alalaa, 2015). Politeness in Saudi Arabic might also be indicated by the use of interrogative forms to reflect indirectness. The interrogative form *'jaahza alTabkha?'* (Is the meal ready?) in informal contexts is considered more polite than giving a direct order to have the meal. Direct requests are more preferred by Saudis in situations where the speaker is in a higher position than the hearer (+Power) or when both are close friends (=Power) (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015). This is attributed to two factors specifically characterizing the Saudi culture: *mayanah* ميانة (the high degree of informality and directness in requests between interlocutors with a close relationship) and *kulfah* كلفة (the high degree of formality and respect resulting from high power/social distance existing between interlocutors) (Abuamsha, 2010; Al-Ageel, 2016). The former is related to directness and the latter to indirectness in requests. Thus, it is more common to make a direct request without fear of losing face between sisters because of the high degree of *mayanah* whereas the high degree of *kulfah* with a boss or with an unfamiliar person leads to the employment of more politeness strategies or formulaic expressions of deference "to show that there is an awareness about the distant relationship between interlocutors and hence the high degree of *kulfah*" (Al-Ageel, 2016, p. 44).

When referring to a personal characteristic such as appearance or a moral quality such as generosity, compliments and expressions of praise are normally used to be polite. *'Yhabil*' (makes one go mad!) is used to praise someone's appearance or for complimenting personal achievements. When criticizing, it is more polite to use a proverb so as not to hurt the feelings of the hearer by criticizing him/her directly and causing him/her to lose face. Furthermore, a

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<sup>11</sup> The word *'ʕafwan*' can also mean 'you are welcome' when used as a reply to *'shukran*' (thank you).

<sup>12</sup> This is defined as "the practice of addressing an adult not by his or her name, but by the name of a child, adding the relationship between the child and the adult" (Lee & Harvey, 1973, p.38). In Saudi Arabic, for example, a man/women with a son called *'Faisal*' will be called *'Ubu Faisal*' (father of Faisal) or *'Um Faisal*' (mother of Faisal). This is explained in terms of the higher status awarded to men and women after the birth of a son (Zuhur, 2011).

person might feel offended because of a refusal to greet or lack of response to a greeting. When negotiating, a Saudi speaker aims to persuade the listener by the frequent use of personalized arguments and appeals.

Within the Saudi Arabic politeness system, there are different forms to address people of different status, intimacy, and relationships expected more in messages addressed upwards (Hariri, 2017). The use of a proper form of address is often considered a sign of positive politeness (Mazid, 2006). It is very common, for example, to use forms of address that stand for brotherhood or kinship terms such as *'akhii'* (my brother), *'ukhtii'* (my sister), *'khalii'* (my uncle) and *'khaltii'* (my aunt) (Al-Ageel, 2016). People in lower hierarchical levels are expected to show more respect and politeness to those of higher hierarchical levels (Hariri, 2017). For instance, addressing an elderly male by his first name is impolite; *'fammii'* (paternal uncle) should be used before his name. Similarly, persons with high ranks such as doctors or professors are to be respected and called by their formal titles (*Dr.* or *Prof.*) to maintain power differences between interactants. It is considered belittling to call these people by their first name without their titles. In-group identity or involvement markers such as *'faziizi'* (my dear) and *'yakhuyii'* (my brother) are also used as politeness markers that mitigate a potentially offensive action and maximize the closeness between speakers (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Particularly relevant to this research is the use of tropic kin terms with strangers as interactants are strangers of different ages and genders. These are kin terms used to “implement a social relationship that is non-congruent with the actual social relation that exists between the participants” (Aba-alalaa, 2015, p.42). Examples of tropic kin terms are *'akh/ukht'* (brother/sister), *'wledi/benti'* (my son/my daughter), and *'fammii'* (paternal uncle). It is stereotypically polite and interactionally appropriate in the Saudi culture to address a stranger of a different age than the speaker using tropic kin terms. To older strangers, regardless of gender, the use of tropic kin terms indexes deference as elder people in the Saudi culture take precedence over young people. However, when addressing a stranger of young/same age as the speaker, the tropic kin term used such as *'aakh'* (brother) or *'ukhtii'* (my sister) is admissible, indicates respect, and maintains distance and not intimacy. What is to be emphasized is that terms of address differ intra-socially and can be judged “based on the features of the sub-group (gender group, age group, etc.)” (Aba-alalaa, 2015, p. 127).

In contrast, a number of verbal behaviours are regarded as impolite in Saudi Arabic conversations. Culturally speaking, impoliteness in this context refers to the “deliberate violation of culturally specific norms of politeness with the intent to offend when the speaker

knows what those norms are and intentionally chooses to go against them” (Lanteigne, 2007, p.93). Raised voices are unacceptable especially when talking to elders or during cross-gender encounters. Taboo words are not to be used as this undervalues the other party. The excessive use of interruption might also indicate rudeness, especially interruptions intended to ridicule the other’s opinion. Criticism of someone’s work is taken as a personal insult (Danielewicz-Betz & Mamidi, 2009). If such criticism is necessary to be done, it should be preceded by a praise of good points along with “assurances of high regard for the individual” (Danielewicz-Betz & Mamidi, 2009, p.4). Arabs in general regard bluntness as very disrespectful behaviour and often respond in kind way (Samarah, 2015).

Though the points mentioned above are known to be the *basic* politeness principles in Saudi Arabic conversations, the way they are expressed differs from one individual to another and from situation to situation. In other words, the manifestation of politeness aspects in an interaction depends on a number of factors including the context of the situation, the social status of the participants and the solidarity of the relationship (Al-Shurafa, 1997). For instance, it is necessary to be polite to someone who is of higher social and educational status than the speaker. Being polite with someone who is of the same social level, however, is not expected. Hence, one aim of the current study is to find out how politeness is expressed by Saudi Arabic speakers in a specific context; namely the institutional talk that takes place in the Complaint Unit (CU) of a Furniture Trading Company (FTC).

#### 1.1.4 The Saudi Arabic workplace: Gender segregation and management style

The values and standards typical in a society affect organizations and customers of that society (Walter & Shyan, 1999; Hong & Chiu, 2002; Ali, 2007). As the birthplace of the religion of Islam, workplace ethics and business environments in Saudi Arabia are greatly affected by Islamic teachings that are deeply integrated in the laws of the country (Kayed, 2006; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008; Cassell & Blake, 2012). Despite the scale of infrastructural development that the country has gone through in the past three decades, Sharia-law, the legal system in Saudi Arabia, is the code of conduct which affects business deals, defined as suitable for all times and places (Global Affairs Canada, 2011; Bukhari, 2014). Social behaviours such as generosity, respect, and solidarity affect the way Saudis handle business dealings (Gorrill, 2004). Article 3 of the Saudi Labour Code states that “work is the right of every citizen. No

one else may exercise such right unless the conditions provided for in this Law are fulfilled. All citizens are equal in the right to work.”<sup>13</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, and empowered by education (Ismail, 2012), a woman is guaranteed the right to work. This is to promote progress and equality in the society as well as to enhance the country’s development (Rajkhan, 2014). However, in accordance with Islamic law, she has to work in an appropriate environment that is considered to “suit” the female mentality and physique such as work as a doctor, nurse, teacher, or banker (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Certain jobs remain open only for men such as political, ministerial, diplomatic, and high-level managerial positions (Global Affairs Canada, 2011). Because of the religious concern for female purity and honour, the government enforces physical gender segregation and society endorses it (Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013). It is the law that public places such as schools, banks, and public transportation are designed to keep women physically apart from men (AlMunajjed 1997; Ismail, 2012). Similarly, gender segregation is the cultural norm in domestic locations such as at weddings and family gatherings (Aba-alalaa, 2015). Unless necessary such as in workplaces where there are shortages of specialists as in the medical field, industrial companies, media, and some business institutions (Hariri, 2017), genders are not to be mixed and they should be allocated separate places so there is no direct contact between men and women (AlMunajjed, 1997; Hariri, 2017). This separation is explained within the context of Islamic laws (Al-Khateeb, 1998).

Certain core cultural values, strengthened by Islam (Ali, 1995), prevail in the Saudi workplace context (Ali, 2009). These, to name just a few, are the values of honesty, loyalty, equity, hospitality, warm greetings, good manners, trust, hard work, self-discipline, and cooperation. Communication in the Saudi Arabic workplace is to be courteous with great emphasis placed upon preserving the customer’s dignity through avoiding disagreements and refusals and the use of compromise, patience, and self-control (Ali, 2007). In the Saudi business environment, preventing the loss of face is as important and essential as success in business (Gorrill, 2004; Ali, 2007). Business providers and customers are to be respectful and observant of the Islamic culture and traditions. For instance, male-female interactions in business contexts should be formal and strictly limited to the process of buying and selling. When scheduling meetings, these are to be held in times other than the five daily prayer times and religious holidays of Hajj (the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) and Ramadan (the month of fasting). In addition,

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<sup>13</sup> Saudi Arabia Ministry of Labor. *The Labor Code Article 3*, available at <http://portal.mol.gov.sa/ar/Pages/OrganizeWork.aspx?m=>

business in Saudi Arabia is based on personal connection and established social networks which is essential to be successful (Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013).

Finally, the management style in the Saudi Arabic business culture is strictly hierarchical in nature (Cassell & Blake, 2012; Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013). Managers are authoritarian leaders. Decisions are made by the highest-ranking person and then implemented down the chain of command to subordinates characterized as having “strong dependence needs” (Bhuiyan, 1998). A head of Department could meet with his/her staff members to discuss new ideas, but the execution of these ideas is to be approved by a superior of a higher rank (Drummond & Al-Anazi, 1997). This entails that Saudi Arabia workers tend neither to use their initiative nor to make decisions on their own but wait for direction from their managers. It is also acceptable for members of professional staff to go and ask for answers/feedback from their supervisors even when they are being delegated tasks by their supervisors (Global Affairs Canada, 2011).

The lack of training courses that meet the needs of employees in workplaces is one of the major problems in Saudi organizations (Obeidat, Shannak, Masa'deh, & Al-Jarrah, 2012). Saudi workplaces, as research indicates, consider job and management training a lower priority (Achouni, 2009; Soltani & Liao, 2010). Al-Rasheed (2001) points out that this is due to the fact that Arab managers consider training courses as a cost rather than an investment. Training programs, though they can be expensive, can alternatively be considered an investment rather than a cost of employment (Garavan, Costine, & Barnicle, 1999).

Training methods are limited to lectures and discussions rather than group discussions, role-playing, or case studies which are rarely used (Al-Raisi, Amin, & Tahir, 2011). Moreover, training courses mostly adopt international materials that have unfamiliar concepts and are taught in English (Wilkins, 2001; Al Gahtani, 2002). These factors are challenges that hinder skills development and improvement in training. Al Gahtani (2002) and Kattuah (2013) argue that the language of training should be in Arabic and training courses are not to be off-the-shelf type courses but designed to focus on Saudi cultural conditions and tailored directly to the needs of the organization.

With continuous technological changes and the consequent globalization, Saudi organizations arguably need to continuously revise their job descriptions and train their staff members for the economical challenges of the competitive global market (Acton & Golden, 2003; Ali, 2009; Vance, 2010). To achieve the desired outcomes of training, management should assist course designers by identifying skills gaps (i.e., work ethic, specialized knowledge, and generic skills)

and required skills standards so these can be taken into account before and after training (Baqadir, Patrick, & Burns, 2011; Kattuah, 2013).

It is necessary to point out that it is difficult to make fixed generalizations regarding the status of training in Saudi Arabia based on findings of firms that have been examined such as Saudi banks, airlines, and telecommunication companies. This is because other Saudi organizations have different values and experience varied needs (Kattuah, 2013). Confirming the availability and efficiency of training provided to employees in the FTC can be done by examining the views of the employees (i.e., CTs) in relation to the type of training received to deal with complaint calls and their satisfaction with its input and post-training outcomes. Due to restrictions imposed by the company (see section 3.2.3), employees in the current research were not asked about their views of the training provided to them. Comments were given by the General Head of the CU regarding the content and the period of training dedicated to employees. A follow-up study to this one that considers the workers' perception to training and its alignment to the needs of the company and customers would indeed lead to interesting findings.

All in all, the description presented above shows that the concept of 'culture' is needed to better understand how organizations operate, including the profound impact of religion and Islamic heritage in governing the behaviours of employees working in Saudi organizations. Beliefs, values, religion, and social organization in a culture are amongst the elements that affect and are expressed through the linguistic choices made by members of cultural groups (Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Hofstede, 2001; Everett, 2005). The Saudi culture has different characteristics from those of Western communities being an Islamic state with most Saudis being religious and conservative. Accordingly, Obeidat et al., (2012) argue that Saudi organizations should adapt different managerial theories and practices that adhere to religious rules as they are part of the Saudi lifestyle and account for customers' complaining styles (Badghish et al., 2015). Thus, it is hoped that the findings of this study will help the managers in the Saudi FTC understand the various cultural implications of the Saudi culture and design distinctive organizational strategies and managerial procedures, including how to deal with complaints and mitigate their negative consequences, in a way that suits the norms of the Saudi cultural context.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Complaints are delivered not just by using the proper lexical items or syntactic structures. More importantly and usually neglected, a complainer has to complain in a way that can convince the receiver of the 'validity' of his/her complaint. Similarly, the receiver of a complaint has to respond in a way that indicates that he/she is trying to solve the problem. This is what Boxer (1993) asserts by stating that “the manner in which the addressee responds to an indirect complaint can significantly promote further interaction...depending on the type of response elicited, the complaint sequence can affirm or reaffirm solidarity among the interlocutors or alienate them from each other” (p.286).

In the business sphere, interlocutors dealing with the speech act of complaint need to be aware of the strategies for performing and handling that complex form of human interaction. Inappropriate expression of and response to a complaint in business would have undesired effects on both the customer and the customer service provider. For the former, the accusation needs to be justifiable in a way that makes the complaint ‘convincing’ (Trosborg, 1995). If it is not so, then a complainer can expect a rejection of the complaint or a refusal of the remedial request (Linli, 2011). On the other hand, ineffective handling of customers’ complaints “increases their dissatisfaction and harms a marketer’s reputation” (Liu & McClure, 2001, p.58).

Driven by the importance and sensitivity of the problem of complaining and responding to complaints effectively, this research addresses the question of what constitutes an appropriate business complaint in the Saudi culture along with highlighting the factors that affect its formulation. This is done by providing a detailed descriptive analysis of Saudi native speakers’ complaint behaviour in the institutional setting of a FTC.

## **1.3 Purpose of the study**

Broadly speaking, the purpose of this study is to identify aspects of the interactional behaviour of complaints in a particular culture and under specific formal institutional conditions. More specifically, the primary aim of the study is to analyse the sequential and interactional characteristics of direct complaints and their responses for both local citizens and customer service members in calls to the CU of a Saudi Arabic FTC. The secondary objective, which arises out of the findings of the first, is to interpret the interactional behaviour of Saudi Arabic speakers in business complaint practices on the basis of Saudi Arabic socio-cultural norms.

#### **1.4 Research approach**

The research falls within the areas of genre analysis (Swales, 1990) and socio-pragmatics (Escandell-Vidal, 2004; Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005). From the genre analysis perspective, this research explores the schematic structural moves and stages, whether obligatory or optional, and the linguistic features of Saudi Arabic speakers' telephone business complaints (Sun, 2005). To enrich the discussion and to account for the correlation between the analyses of texts and of the cultural context (Lam & Yu, 2013), the structural perspective is complemented with the socio-pragmatic perspective. The study attempts to elucidate the impact of shared cultural norms relating to religion, social distance, power, status, and gender that underpin the interactional behaviour of native Saudi Arabic speakers in business complaint interactions (e.g., Holmes & Riddiford, 2011). Expressed differently, the aim of this study is to examine the conversationalist behaviour of Saudi Arabic business complaints (micro-level) and to situate the analysis within the broader construct of how individuals within Saudi society create and maintain appropriate norms of interaction according to socio-cultural values (macro-level) (Mey, 1993, 1998).

Combining the genre analysis and socio-pragmatic approaches in the current research is possible simply because of the deep and intrinsic correlation between linguistic and social factors (Al-Khawaldeh, 2014; Alsohaibani, 2017). Cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes are “heavily institutionalised in societies” (Al-Khawaldeh, 2014, p.14) and these socio-contextual variables play a major role in the way speakers linguistically behave in a situational setting. In this way, genres emerge from the text-level cultural resources used by particular cultural groups (File, 2017).

#### **1.5 Research questions**

Within a socio-pragmatic perspective, and conducting a genre-focused analysis which adopts a mixed-method approach for data analysis, the research attempts to answer the following four research questions:

1. a. What is the basic structure of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic?
- b. What is the frequency of each structural type of Saudi Arabic complaint business call in the data?

2. a. What are the linguistic strategies customers and customer service members employ when conducting/responding to business complaint calls in Saudi Arabic?  
b. Which of those linguistic strategies are used most frequently?
3. a. What graders are used by the Saudi Arabic customers to minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint?  
b. Which of those graders are used most frequently?
4. a. Is there any relationship between the customers’ level of dissatisfaction and their use of verbal complaint strategies and graders?  
b. If yes, how does the customers’ level of dissatisfaction correlate with their use of verbal complaint strategies and graders?

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The significance of the present research stems from the fact that it has a mixture of theoretical, practical, and pedagogical implications.

In relation to the theoretical significance, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the field of pragmatics by describing the linguistic means and strategies used to express feelings of annoyance and dissatisfaction. The study will also help in achieving a better understanding of the notion of complaints in relation to business complaint calls. It will also enrich speech act theory by constructing an analytical framework of natural spoken complaint business interactions applied effectively to the Saudi culture and which could be equally applicable to other languages and/or to other Arabic dialects. More specifically, the analysis will provide knowledge about how the speech act of complaint is produced and dealt with in Saudi Arabic complaint calls, an area that has received little attention until now.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study will hopefully help local citizens and complaint department staff members find more effective methods and procedures that can help them achieve the best outcomes in their conversational exchanges. Furthermore, the discussions and findings of this study will help to identify any weaknesses in the methods used by staff members while answering complaint calls for persuading and calming down the caller (C) in a complaint call which will, consequently, “affect the overall level of customer

satisfaction and long-term customer loyalty” (Linli, 2011, p.11). Thus, managers of trading companies can incorporate the insights gained from this research in training programs developed for the purpose of enlightening customer service staff members about 'efficient' procedures and strategies for handling the complaints of customers with different levels of dissatisfaction.

As for the pedagogical significance, such a socio-pragmatic analysis of complaints will be of value to the teaching of Arabic language functions to foreign students. This is because the study indicates and evaluates the strategies used by Saudi Arabic native speakers for expressing and responding to annoying matters. Teaching foreign language functions is consistent with modern trends in sociolinguistics and learning strategies of foreign languages, which assume that learners must acquire not only the syntax or phonology of a foreign language, but they must also acquire the pragmatic conventions of language use. Finally, business course teachers can make use of the findings of the study in teaching their students the pragmatic strategies for responding to customer’s complaints in business communication.

### **1.7 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis has six chapters. Following the current introduction, the remainder of the thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on institutional talk, politeness theory, and speech act theory. It also presents a review of research on call centre discourse and defines the speech act of complaint and lists its functions. It then discusses the existing theoretical frameworks relevant to the structure, verbal strategies, and modifications used in the speech act of complaint. The chapter also explains the special features of business complaints and lists the six-level scale of customers’ intensity of dissatisfaction. It moves on to review the literature on previous research on complaints.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology followed in conducting the present research. The study uses anonymized electronic audio recordings of naturally occurring colloquial Saudi Arabic complaint telephone calls. After transcribing the data, a socio-pragmatic approach with a focus on genre is adopted. Existing classification systems of the components of the speech act of complaint in the literature are used, with modifications made by the researcher. The chapter concludes by listing the steps followed for data analysis.

Chapter 4 reports the quantitative findings in relation to each research question. It reports the most frequent trends in performing and responding to business complaints by Saudi Arabic customers and staff members. In particular, it investigates the frequencies of the basic structure identified for a Saudi Arabic complaint phone call, the linguistic strategies used to perform and respond to the complaint, the graders used either to downgrade or upgrade the perceived face threat of a complaint, and how the customer's level of dissatisfaction correlates with those strategies and graders.

At a discourse level, Chapter 5 reports the qualitative findings of each research question. The main objective of this chapter is to provide an in-depth examination of the basic structure of the Saudi Arabic complaint calls in service encounters which contain various types of linguistic strategies and graders. Four interactions selected 'purposefully' provide answers to qualitative research questions. A discussion section follows the presentation of findings in relation to each research question, with a consideration of the role of Saudi Arabic socio-cultural values in the interactional behaviour of Saudi Arabic speakers in business complaint practices.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the main findings, discussing them, and highlighting the contributions that this study makes to the fields of sociolinguistics, pedagogy, and business; acknowledging the limitations of the study, and suggesting directions for further research. The results confirmed the possibility of identifying a 'basic' structure for the 'natural' Saudi Arabic complaint phone calls. Compulsory and/or optional verbal strategies are employed by the Cs either to announce or justify their complaints. Within these strategies or in their immediate linguistic context, certain verbal elements are optionally inserted by the Cs to minimize and/or maximize the force of the complaint. The selection of these strategies and graders significantly correlates with the C's level of dissatisfaction which might increase/decrease within the course of the call. Considering the socio-cultural elements potentially helps in understanding how interlocutors' complaint behaviour is impacted by social and cultural norms. Based on these findings, a discursive approach for the analysis of 'natural' complaints in service encounters is proposed.

## **CHAPTER TWO Review of Literature**

### **Review of Literature**

This chapter presents a review of literature on theoretical issues that underpin many concepts and approaches used to analyse the speech act of complaint. It further outlines the basic linguistic strategies for performing and responding to a complaint. The findings of previous empirical studies done on complaints are also provided.

To this end, the literature is reviewed according to three aspects: theoretical considerations (section 2.1), linguistic considerations (section 2.2), and empirical considerations (section 2.3). In relation to theoretical considerations, institutional talk is defined according to the perspective of discourse analysis, Conversation Analysis (CA), genre analysis, and socio-pragmatics. The issue of the structure of telephone conversations is then addressed followed by a review of relevant literature in call centre discourse within the context of a workplace setting. Next, an overview of speech act theory and politeness theory is presented. Section 2.2 provides the necessary background to the speech act of complaint by defining it, discussing its strategies, conversational sequence, modifications, and finally levels of dissatisfaction associated with a complaint. Finally, section 2.3 presents the findings of a number of cross-cultural studies that have investigated the differences and similarities in realizing and responding to the speech act of complaint. Section 2.4 concludes this chapter.

#### **2.1 Theoretical considerations: Institutional talk, telephone conversations, and politeness theory**

##### **2.1.1 Institutional discourse**

The study of discourse in institutional settings focuses on discourse that occurs in workplaces whether they are commercial (small shops and open-air markets) or non-commercial settings (visitor information centre) (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). These workplaces typically comprise “communities of practice that, at some level, are task-oriented” (Yates, 2010, p.111).

The type of discourse that takes place in these communities of practice is known as ‘institutional discourse’. These are interactions between institutional representatives and clients that have four characteristics (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Heritage, 2005; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999; Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). First, they are task-oriented. Their aim is to achieve an institution-specific goal that could be done due to the participants’ institution-relevant

identities: doctor and patient, teacher and student, bride and groom. Second, the features of these interactions vary widely across different institutional settings. What might be considered an appropriate interactional behaviour in one institution might not be in another institutional setting. Third, participants have institutional roles. Service seekers have the right to seek a service and service providers are responsible for providing that service. Participants may, however, shift from these institutional roles to interpersonal ones when they are engaged in relational talk to reinforce interpersonal relations. Finally, the interactions are linked to specific inferential frameworks and procedures related to specific institutional contexts. Speakers have shared knowledge about how to do and say things according to shared knowledge of vocabulary and turn-taking systems. In institutional settings, topics are largely restricted to what participants consider to be related to relevant transactions. A customer, for example, has the right to request a service but it is unlikely for him to inquire about the service provider's appointment with the doctor (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015).

An example of the above-mentioned elements of institutional talk in the context of a marriage ceremony is given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of institutional talk in a marriage ceremony (Heritage, 2005, p.106)

Characteristic	Example
Participants have a specific goal to be accomplished	Goal: getting married Identities: bride and groom, religious official, supporters, guests.
There are specific constraints through which a contribution would be considered either allowable to the interaction or not	Participants must act as in a marriage ceremony. No departures are allowable.
The interaction is linked to specific inferential frameworks and procedures	Sticking to the ceremonial aim of 'getting married'. Leaving the ceremony implies that the marriage is completed and/or may ruin the ceremony as a marriage altogether.

Different analytical approaches are used to analyse institutional discourse. These include, but are not limited to, CA (a more descriptive approach to institutional discourse analysis focusing on how spoken discourse is organized and developed in interaction), discourse analysis (which aims to identify how institutional members achieve certain communicative goals through

performing certain communicative acts using contextual understandings), interactional sociolinguistics (which seeks replicable methods of sociolinguistic analysis by investigating linguistic forms in intercultural communication), and critical discourse analysis (which addresses broader social issues such as the relationship between discourse, power, and dominance in social interactions and draws on social and philosophical theories to analyse spoken discourse) (Mayr, 2008). Though they appear to be different, approaches used to analyse institutions and their discourse share the assumption that discourse performs social practices; it is the means through which employees and others interact with and comprehend each other when performing social practices.

As the current study focuses on analysing the language used in an institutional context (i.e., FTC) and on analysing the overall structural organization of Saudi Arabic business complaint phone calls to discover the ways in which members of this community of practice (C of P) communicate with each other, a brief account of the basic notions of discourse analysis and CA in relation to institutional talk is an essential part of this review.

### 2.1.2 Institutional talk in discourse analysis

The objective of discourse analysis in institutional contexts is to identify how participants perform certain communicative acts (doing things through language) using shared knowledge, ideas, and beliefs to facilitate the comprehension of the language they use (context). For instance, the community of a telephone call centre has some communicative characteristics, which may include operators answering the phone with a kind tone and watching the pitch of their voices throughout the call in a way that conveys a sense of sincerity and confidence (Cameron, 2000a).

Overall, theorists in discourse analysis strongly believe that *natural* data is the most suitable type of data for discourse analytic studies, including analysing discourse in institutional settings (Boxer, 2010; Félix-Brasdefer, 2010; Golato, 2003; Maynard, 1989; Wolfson, 1986). For this purpose, using audio or video recordings of actual conversations is stressed over the use of observation, interviews, or data elicitation procedures such as Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs)<sup>14</sup> (Boxer, 2010; Maynard, 1989). This is because the results obtained by observation

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<sup>14</sup> A DCT is a written questionnaire used to elicit particular speech acts. Subjects are presented with “short descriptions of a particular situation intended to reveal the pattern of a speech act being studied” (Nurani, 2009, p.667). They are then asked to write down what they would say or how would they react in this situation.

depend on the ethnographer's skills and his/her abilities to take reliable and detailed notes. The same applies to interviews where the results depend heavily on the interviewer's capacities and the participant's willingness and honesty in reporting past experiences. DCTs are merely reflections of participant's experience of interacting in a given situation and their results are based on 'probability-based assertions' (Golato, 2003). Recorded data, however, enables the reader to participate in analysing the data with the researcher as the reader can analyse the data by him/herself. In this sense, a reader can verify the researcher's analysis of interactional patterns 'independently'.

Scholars also agree that for a good qualitative discourse analytic research of natural data, considering contextual determinates is a necessity (Golato, 2003; Maynard, 1989; Wolfson, 1986). The analyst has to be careful when dealing with this type of data as certain factors might affect some features of the speech behaviour being analysed (i.e., context, age, sex, and the length of acquaintance). This necessitates considering the setting in which the speech occurs and the relationship among speakers. By doing so, the researcher is able to discover any factors that might affect the speech of native speakers in a particular group or society.

Analysing institutional communication using discourse analytical methods leads to advantages in the social and economic sphere. Such analysis might have "some significance for both labor and management, especially in the push towards industrial democracy" (Clyne, Ball, & Neil, 2011, p.312). Despite this potential advantage, Maynard (1989) argues that very little is actually known about intercultural discourse in various institutional settings. Thus, there is a need "to uncover, document, and describe the inner workings and overall structures of some agency, which demands a qualitative, inductive, "bottom up" approach" (p.127); a gap which the following research attempts to fulfil in the institutional context of the FTC.

### 2.1.3 Institutional talk in CA

CA's objective is to discover the sequences that underlie the production and interpretation of talk-in-interaction using naturally recorded talk. It is based on the assumption that "ordinary talk is a highly organized, socially ordered phenomenon" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p.11).

Though most of the early work conducted in the field of CA focused on 'ordinary conversations', CA has also been applied to different types of 'institutional conversations' such

as job interviews (Button & Lee, 1987), medical examinations (Heritage & Sefi, 1992), and service encounters (Jefferson & Lee, 1981; Merritt, 1984).

In ‘institutional’ CA, the aim is to analyse how talk in *social institutions* is organized. It is based on the assumption that it is possible to identify an overall structural organization of an institutional interaction (i.e., the specific locations of certain segments of talk as openings and closings) (Heritage, 2005). This, however, does not entail that the occurrence of the identified elements is compulsory. Rather, “the participants may well reopen sections and reinstate task orientations that had been previously treated as complete” (Heritage, 2005, p.122).

A call to 911 would have the following structure:

Phase	Activity
1	Opening
2	Request
3	Interrogative series
4	Response
5	Closing

Figure 2.1 The overall structure of Emergency Service (adopted from Heritage, 2005, p.120)

Six features characterize the ‘institutionality’ of an interaction (Heritage, 2005): (a) turn-taking; (b) overall structural organization of interaction; (c) sequence organization; (d) turn design; (e) lexical choice, and (f) epistemological and other forms of asymmetry.

As the current research adopts a discourse analytic approach rather than a CA approach to analyse Saudi Arabic complaint calls in an institutional setting, not all of the six aspects of conversation are going to be discussed in analysis. The researcher draws on only two notions of CA in data analysis: overall structural organization of a complaint call (explained in section 2.2.3); and adjacency pairs. The illustrations in the coming paragraphs show the notion of adjacency pairs and their relation to the overall structural organization of the interaction.

Adjacency pairs are key elements in conversation through which meaning is conveyed (Paltridge, 2012), and frequently occur in the overall structural organisation of institutional Saudi Arabic phone calls (Al-Husseini, 2007). They are defined as sequences of talk which consist of two turns uttered by different speakers with each being placed one after the other

(Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Each adjacency pair is made of a First Pair Part (FPP) produced by one speaker and a Second Pair Part (SPP) produced by another speaker (Psathas, 1995). The former is an utterance that initiates a type of interaction such as a request, an offer, or a question. The latter, on the other hand, is an utterance that responds to the FPP such as a rejection, acceptance, and an answer.

The mechanism by which adjacency pairs works is the production of the SPP after the completion of the FPP as in (Psathas, 1995, p.16):

(1) Greeting-Return Greeting

A: *Hi*

B: *Hi*

(2) Question-Answer

A: *What are you doin'?*

B: *Nothin*

(3) Invitation-Accept/Decline

A: *Wanna go out tonight?*

B: *Sure.*

A: *Wanna go out tonight?*

B: *Sorry, I'm busy.*

The FPP determines what is to be a 'proper' SPP. Producing an irrelevant SPP, or even slight pauses or hesitations, would be an indication of certain kinds of troubles in the interaction. On the other hand, using adjacency pairs 'properly' facilitates the interaction in critical positions such as openings and closings because they "provide persons with ready-made methods for achieving specific outcomes" (Psathas, 1995, p.18).

Among the conversations that come to be of interest to linguists in the field of discourse analysis and CA are ordinary and institutional telephone calls (examples are Button, 1987; Hopper, 1989a; Placencia, 1992; and Sifianou, 1989). As the current research analyses this type of conversation in an institutional setting of a Saudi Arabic company and aims to discover whether the features of the parts that constitute the structure of telephone calls are universal or vary in different languages and cultures, the following section discusses the supposedly universal features of the structure of telephone calls.

#### 2.1.4 The structure of telephone interactions

The study of the organizational structure of telephone calls aims to discover the rules that govern the conversational sequence of calls. It was first introduced by Harvey Sacks (1935-1975) who observed whether a turn may provide a slot for a next turn which, when it occurs combines with the first turn to form a conversational unit, an adjacency pair. For instance, a service provider turn of “*Hello, this is Mr Smith, can I help you?*” would provide a next turn from the caller (C), one in which he/she gives his/her name (Sacks, 1992; Luke & Pavlidou, 2002). The two turns constitute an adjacency pair.

Schegloff (1968) first proposed a well-known framework for the study of telephone calls which was refined in 1979 and elaborated in 1986. It was a ‘template’ of a set of four core sequences typical of openings in North America: summons/answer, identification, greetings, and inquiry (see section 2.1.6.1) in which variations can occur (Hopper, 1992). Starting from the late 1980s, Robert Hopper (Hopper, 1989a, 1989b, 1992) provides detailed insights on the structure of telephone openings in Arabic, French, and Chinese. He proposes the ‘universality’ of the four-routine sequences identified by Schegloff but also stresses his ‘situationist’ position in the sense that “any concrete realisation is in the hands of the interacting participants” (Have, 2002, p.234). In other words, Hopper demonstrates that telephone openings do not always follow Schegloff’s model. Yet, the canonical pattern helps in discovering deviations. Participants, according to Hopper, might deviate from the four-stage routine to signal special circumstances (e.g., switchboard openings), relationships (e.g., intimacy), and culture.

Inspired by the late 60s and early 70s work of Sacks (1975) and Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986), and apart from the data provided by Hopper (1989a, 1989b, 1992), studying telephone conversations has witnessed growing interest (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002a; Sun, 2005). Subsequent researchers analyse telephone calls of languages other than American English. Telephone conversation openings in particular have been investigated in different languages and various speech communities such as French (Godard, 1977), Greek (Sifianou, 1989), Dutch (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1991), Swedish (Lindström, 1994), Greek and German (Pavlidou 1994), Finnish (Halmari, 1993), and Taiwanese mandarin (Hopper & Chen, 1996). This range of work confirms that telephone interactions are a highly structured activity (Luke, 2002) and that there are structural similarities as well as differences to Schegloff’s (1968) American English data. For example, Godard asserts that the summon-answer sequence in French telephone openings does occur, but it is interpreted differently than in American telephone openings. It is

interpreted as an indication of the answerer's availability to be interrupted in the middle of what he/she is saying not as an indication that the channel of communication is open. Thus, French Cs provide an apology in the opening sequence. Likewise, Hopper and Chen state that telephone conversation openings in Taiwan are similar to those in American English. However, there are cultural variations in the greeting. Distinctive greetings tokens and relatively formal terms of address for family members mark the greeting sequence in the telephone openings. In this way, speakers reflect their orientation to interpersonal relationships.

The study of telephone calls has become prominent due to "several attractive properties which are not found in other kinds of data" (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002, p.5). Recordings of telephone conversations provide a much more faithful reflection of the actual speech event because they lack visual information found in face-to-face interaction. The analyst can get from the recordings exactly what was available to the participants. In contrast, the visual information in face-to-face interaction is only available to the participants and not necessarily to the analyst (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002a). In addition, telephone conversations lack the complexity of having many participants in one situation (except for conference calls). In almost all calls, there are two participants talking to each other. This is an advantage in the sense that having a conversation with two interlocutors makes it easy to follow, transcribe, and analyse. Finally, telephone conversations have clear and fixed borders besides being highly structured (Archer, Aijmer, & Wichmann, 2012). Thus, it would be possible for the analyst to study the recurring patterns of openings and closings as well as the development of the whole conversation.

By and large, cross-cultural analysis conducted on the structure of telephone calls has mostly focused on three parts of a call: openings, closings, and topic management. Most work has been done on telephone openings and closings (Varcasia, 2013). The reason behind the interest in openings and closings is that "they are easily identifiable sequences with clearly demarcated beginnings and ends" (Reiter & Luke, 2010, p.105).

The following paragraphs present the basic sequences of everyday telephone openings, topic management, and closings. A detailed analysis of the conversational sequences of a complaint call (the topic of the current study) is explained in section 2.2.3.

#### *2.1.4.1 Telephone call openings*

A typical telephone conversation usually begins with four core sequences (Schegloff, 1979; Archer et al., 2012) that might vary from one call to another depending on the nature of the call (an ordinary or a business call) (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002) (see section 2.1.4.4). These are:

1. A summons-answer sequence (a): this consists of a telephone ring (summons) and first thing said by the answerer (answer) to indicate that the channel of communication is open.
2. An identification/ recognition sequence (b): participants identify themselves through self-identification and/or recognition.

A self-identification sequence could be performed in one of two patterns: (a) as a preliminary to another task (self-identification followed by the reason for the call); or (b) self-identification as the main activity (both the C and the recipient know the reason for the call and thus there is no need for the C to announce it). The choice of one of the two types of self-identification patterns depends on the type of the call. With business calls, the type of call under investigation in the current research, self-identification is usually followed by the reason for the call (the first pattern). In contrast, private household telephone calls lack a section specifying the reason for the call so as to emphasise the 'routineness' of the call (the second pattern) (Park, 2002).

3. An exchange of greetings (c): in which greeting formulas are exchanged.
4. Inquiry in the form of 'How are you?' exchange (d): which reflects the fact that the state of one party concerns the other. An introduction of the first topic is uttered then by the C.

The organizational structure of telephone openings mentioned above is illustrated in Example 4 below (Schegloff, 1979, p.69):

(4) (ring)

- (a) A (Answerer): *Hello*
- (b) C (Caller): *Hello Ida?*  
A: *Yeah.*
- (c) C: *Hi. This is Carla.*  
A: *Hi Carla.*
- (d) C: *How are you?*  
A: *Okay*  
C: *Good*  
A: *How about you?*  
C: *Fine.*

Starting from the late 1980s, telephone call openings have been the focus of several studies in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics. The issues of universality and cultural specificity, aspects of openings such as turn-taking and initiation of sequences, and the functions of the opening sequences have been examined and identified by many researchers (for example Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Archer et al., 2012). Park (2002) observes that the opening sequences of Japanese and Korean telephone interactions are organised in a very similar way to that identified by Schegloff(1968) for American openings. The same finding is stated by

Taleghani-Nikazm (2002a) when analysing Persian telephone conversation openings. Despite similarities to Schegloff's opening structure, those studies assert that the openings they examine have their own characteristics. In Japanese and Korean telephone openings, when the C can recognise the recipient, other-recognition is preferred over self-identification as illustrated in Example 5 below (Park, 2002, p.29):

(5) (ring) (between friends)- Japanese

R: *moshimoshi*,

Hello

C: *a? Morisan?*

oh, Mrs.Mori?

R: *hai*

Yes.

According to Taleghani-Nikazm (2002a), different levels of politeness are displayed in the identification/recognition and the 'How are you?' sequences in formal Persian telephone openings. Participants raise the politeness level by deploying a variety of deferential phrases. Also, the 'How are you?' sequence could be repeated in the openings of Persian calls. Consequently, the move after the second 'How are you?' is not the first topic move in these calls.

#### 2.1.4.2 Telephone call topic management

Because of the great variation in the sequences occurring between the openings and the closings of telephone interactions such as the statement of the 'reason-to-call', the initiation of the first topic and moves towards closings, very few studies have analysed the overall structure of everyday telephone calls (Hui, 2014). Yet, the identifiable stages of openings and closings make it easy to label the stages that occur between them as the 'body' of the call or 'topic management' (Hopper, 1992; González, 2010; Hui, 2014).

Broadly speaking, previous research on topic management in telephone interactions focuses on three aspects (Luke, 2002; Reiter & Luke, 2010). First, each call is made for a reason. Even calls that do not have an explicit reason (i.e., calling just for chat) are "oriented to as though they might have one" (Luke, 2002, p.172). Second, the reason for the call is mostly brought up by the C who knows it, not the receiver of the call who may or may not know. Finally, the reason for the call is stated in a position immediately after the last sequence of Schegloff's (1979) four basic opening sequences (see section 2.1.4.1). This reason is stated once it has been ascertained that the C is calling the right place and the recipient's availability is indicated.

Little research is available to ascertain how topic management in ordinary telephone conversation is structured in languages other than English (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002; Luke, 2002). However, Luke analyses 105 telephone calls between family and friends in Hong Kong. Recalling Button and Casey's (1984) distinction between 'topic-initiation' (topic initial elicitor) and 'topic-introduction' (to produce the topic) of the reason-for-call, Luke notes that these two tasks can be performed either by the same speaker or by two different speakers. It is always the C who introduces the reason-for-call and this is mostly placed in the anchor position (i.e., a location allocated to establish the topic of the talk). There are also cases in which the introduction of the reason-for-call could occur before the anchor position (pre-emption) or after it (late introduction). Similar to other languages, Luke claims, the initiation of the first topic is indicated by the use of a variety of markers. Though they are different in forms in the Hong Kong data, markers signalling the first topic have the same semantics (*what's up, Hey, yes*) and the same discourse function (to attract the recipient's attention to the topic).

#### 2.1.4.3 Telephone call closings

As for a telephone closing, it can take a long time to complete because it has several steps (Archer et al., 2012). In addition, the beginning of closings, as opposed to openings, cannot always be easily identified (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002; Pavlidou, 2002; Pan, Scollon & Scollon, 2002; Sun, 2005; Reiter & Luke, 2010).

Generally speaking, the closing of a conversation indicates the participants' readiness to terminate the contact (i.e., not having any new thing to say). The "archetype closing" (Button, 1987) or "canonical closing" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) consists of two adjacency pairs: a pre-closing sequence followed by a terminal exchange. Pre-closings are indications of the first speaker's intentions "to shut down a conversation that is in progress" (Wong, 2009, p.276). For the most part, pre-closing sequences are lexical items that constitute the FPP of an adjacency pair 'yes', 'alright', 'okay' which indicate for both parties that no new topic will be introduced (Button, 1987; Pavlidou, 2002). A SPP follows these FPPs, as Examples 6 and 7 show (Wong, 2009, p.277):

(6) A: *O.K.*

B: *O.K.*

(7) A: *Okay?*

B: *Alright.*

Pre-closing sequences may lead to a further talk (Wong, 2009). In some cases, the recipient of the pre-closing sequence may continue speaking or introduce a new topic by inserting an

'unmentioned mentionable'. In such cases, closing a telephone conversation might be delayed and the phone call would be extended.

Terminal exchanges immediately follow pre-closing sequences (Button, 1987; Pavlidou, 2002). They indicate that participants have reached an agreement and involve uttering an adjacency pair of 'good-bye', 'ok', and 'see you' at the end of a topic (Wong, 2009). If the first speaker utters 'bye', 'okay', or 'thank you', he/she is trying to reflect his/her intention to close the conversation. The hearer, consequently, should utter a 'reciprocal response' of 'bye', 'see you', or 'you're welcome' as in Example 8 below (Wong, 2009, p.275). If the form of 'good bye' is absent in the conversation, the C is to be considered angry or ill-mannered.

(8) A: *O.K.*

B: *O.K.*

A: *Bye Bye.*

B: *Bye.*

Though the exchanges of goodbye and leave-taking may often be perceived as mechanical as they have canonical or archetypal patterns, they are not meaningless (Laver, 1981; Pavlidou, 2002; Sun, 2005). They play an important role in the negotiation and the development of the relationship between the participants in the conversation. Levinson (1983) describes closings as a socially delicate matter because either overly-hasty or overly-slow terminations may lead to unwelcome interference.

Following the example of Schegloff and Sacks (1973), other researchers have investigated aspects of telephone closings in English (Button, 1990), Spanish (Placencia, 1997), German and Greek (Pavlidou, 2002), and Japanese (Takami, 2002). These studies share the focus on the theme of linguistic and cultural variation in closing sequences. Pavlidou (2002), for instance, points at the difficulty of identifying the last topic and the closing sequence. A common way of closing in Greek telephone calls between friends and relatives is through the expression of agreement to the last thing being said or asking for a confirmation through markers of agreement such as 'yes', 'okay', and 'fine'. Pavlidou adds that the termination of the call can be sometimes foreshadowed before the pre-closing sequence begins using sequences initiated by 'that's all' or 'so'. Takami (2002) affirms Pavlidou's idea related to the difficulty of identifying the initiation of closing. Closing telephone conversations between friends and relatives in Japanese, according to Takami, is a face-threatening act as "interlocutors cooperate to maintain face" (p.3). She adds one sequence to Schegloff's (1973) canonical

closing: leave-taking. This is the several moves between the pre-closing sequences and terminal exchanges. The four most frequent leave-taking sequences, according to Takami, are wishing each other health and happiness, promise of future contact, message, and gratitude or apology (p.14).

In summary, the wide range of cross-cultural studies presented above reveal interesting observations related to the structure of ordinary telephone interactions. They also highlight certain factors that contribute to the structure of telephone interactions. The following subsection discusses these.

#### *2.1.4.4 Factors leading to variations in telephone calls structures and interactional strategies*

As mentioned earlier (see section 2.1.4), a large number of studies on calls in languages other than English (e.g., French, Dutch, and Greek) have confirmed the initial contributions of Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986) and Hopper (1989a, 1989b, 1992) related to the well organised sequential structure of telephone calls, especially in the initial stage. These models “held up fairly well in the face of data from a range of linguistic and cultural settings” (Reiter & Luke, 2010, p.111). However, several studies also assert that this structure can vary depending on a range of factors (e.g., Godard, 1977; Sifianou, 2002; Arminen, 2005; Varcasia, 2007). Three of these are: the nature of the call, the participants’ status and relationships, and the cultural context.

##### *Nature of call*

Broadly speaking, telephone interactions are of two types: social/personal and business/institutional. The former are calls between acquainted parties engaging in everyday conversation which include family, friends, and acquaintances (Schegloff, 1973; Hopper, 1992; Yotsukura, 2002; Sun, 2004). The latter, on the other hand, are rigid and ritualised calls involving unacquainted parties and are calls made to businesses and institutions (e.g., emergency calls Zimmerman, 1984; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987; Frankel, 1989; Zimmerman, 1992; Whalen, 1995; Wakin & Zimmerman, 1999; Hertiage & Clayman, 2010). For a detailed explanation of the structure of business/institutional telephone interactions, see section 2.1.7.

Generally speaking, Sifianou (2002) asserts that a ‘canonical pattern’ of telephone calls is evident only with calls that are a means to manage business involving interactants with distant relationships and infrequent telephone contact. These calls display specialisation and reduction

of the sequences of ordinary telephone interactions. Specialisation refers to the existence of specific utterances in recurrent locations whereas reduction refers to the omission of some elements found in ordinary telephone calls (e.g., the greeting sequence and self-identification) (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987). Spontaneity and effusiveness on the other hand characterize interactions between closely related people such as among close friends. In such situations, the telephone is viewed as a personal means to “chat and exchange news with one’s friends” (Sifianou, 2002, p.80) and talkativeness is highly expected and accepted.

The issue of the orderliness of institutional rather than personal telephone calls is also confirmed by Park (2002). The opening sequences of Japanese business transactional calls have a clear order but not the private household ones. In institutional calls, according to Park, the ‘reason-for-call’ is to be specified by the C but it could be absent in social calls.

Specifically related to the sequences of telephone conversation openings, the length of the response to the ‘How are you?’ sequence in Iranian telephone calls (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002b) and Arabic telephone calls (Saadah, 2009) is related to the nature of the call. This sequence elicits a longer response when the call is for a social rather than for a business purpose. To Muslims and Arabs, the use of the ‘How are you?’ sequence is necessary only in informal conversations such as those among close friends and relatives (Saadah, 2009). It is, pragmatically speaking, an instance of phatic communication (Malinowski, 1923) and a sign of intimacy between Arab family members. Its absence reveals the impression of being unfriendly or unsociable. Example 9 reflects the position of the ‘How are you?’ sequence in Arabic telephone openings between family members (Saadah, 2009, p.180):

(9) Layla (mother): >essalamu zalayku-<

‘Peace be upon you’

Nora (daughter): <ahlei::n yamma>, wa zalaykum essalaa:mu wa raḥmatullahi wa barakatu=

‘Hello my mother and peace be upon you too and God’s mercy and blessings’

Layla: =kei:f elḥaa::l.

‘How are you’

Nora: elḥamdullellah rabbi elzalameen keif Seh[ti:k

‘Thanks God how is your health?’

The exchange of greetings, Reiter and Luke (2010) assert, may be regularly absent in the openings of business calls as Cs go directly into business (reason-for-call). This absence of the ‘How are you?’ sequence adds to the ‘formal’ or ‘business-like’ character of business calls as the first topic is introduced at an early position right after the identification/recognition

sequence (Lindstöröm, 1994; Luke, 2002). In Japanese business telephone conversations, the absence of the greeting sequence is expected and the forms of salutation are different from those used in everyday Japanese telephone calls (Yotsukura, 2002).

#### *C and CT relationship*

One of the factors that leads to the variation in the structure of telephone interactions is the relationship between the C and the receiver of the call.

In calls between conversationalists with personal relationships and those with frequent contact, some elements of the canonical pattern can be omitted (Sifianou, 2002). Explicit self-identification may be unnecessary as the participants may recognize each other's voices during the first word uttered by the recipient and the first turn of the C. When uttered, the recipient's social status to the C affects the length and the selection of words in the identification/recognition sequence (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002b). Repeatedly inquiring about each other's well-being is a feature for maintaining the interpersonal aspect of the communication in Iranian informal calls. Sun (2002) holds a different view towards the self-identification sequence in ordinary telephone conversations. Rather than just being a structural procedure, C's identification is an essential part in Chinese telephone calls as it serves an important social function: to signify and enhance rapport-building. In their study of telephone openings in Taiwan, Hopper and Chen (1996) find that Taiwanese Cs orient to their interpersonal relationship through deploying a variety of greeting phrases. For example, the C may indicate intimacy between family members by a recognitional naming of the answerer. The answerer, on the other hand, shows intimacy by using no name (for family members) to reflect certainty. The performance of the opening in such situations is attributed to the influence of the Confucian virtue of Li (propriety), which requires the adaption of a member of society's talk to the speaker's age, status, and intimacy relationship.

#### *Cultural context*

Besides the nature of the call and the relationship between the participants, variations in the structure of calls might occur due to cultural conventions and social practices in which these calls are performed. Since Schegloff's (1968, 1979, 1986) pioneering work in American telephone openings, many researchers have investigated the topic of both universal and culture-specific characteristics of telephone interactions (e.g., Godard, 1977; Sifianou, 1989; Lindstöröm, 1994; Hopper & Chen, 1996).

In analysing her English and French calls, Godard (1977) discovers that some of Schegloff's (1968, 1979, 1986) categories do not fit well with her data. Thus, she argues that his 'summons-response' sequence cannot be universally applied. To Godard, some of Schegloff's work is culture-specific and is not universally applicable to telephone conversations of different languages.

More recent studies also support Godard's view (1977) that though some of the canonical patterns of openings and closings are universal, others are culture-sensitive and context-specific (Luke, 2002). For instance, telephone openings of ordinary telephone conversations in Arab communities are characterized by intimate interpersonal relationships and expanded 'How are you?' sequence; a distinctive feature to this community and context (Saadah, 2009). In Greek intimate calls, which Sifianou examines, greetings are frequently absent and interlocutors rarely identify themselves and when they decide to do so they do that after the greeting sequence and not before it. Greeks develop their personal opening styles and they use phatic utterances in telephone openings more than Germans do (Pavlidou, 1994). Even in business telephone conversations, cultures differ in the way a sequence in the call is interpreted. The 'How are you?' sequence in Finnish business calls is treated as a question that requires an elaborated answer (i.e., a lengthy non-topical sequence) while the same sequence elicits a short answer from an American English speaker of '*I am fine*' or '*good*' (Halmari, 1993).

Closings of telephone conversations also differ across cultures. Chinese closings are different from the English ones in relation to the initiation of closing, length and structure of leave-taking, and interactional styles such as repetition and overlaps (Sun, 2005). For instance, although it might occur, leave-taking in an adjacency pair is not the most common pattern in Chinese interactions. More than one exchange of goodbye is more typical in this culture, especially among acquainted parties suggesting "a high involvement style as the norm" (Sun, 2005, p.126). Overlap and repetition in the closing is the norm rather than the exception.

Summing up, then, studies into the sequential organization of everyday telephone conversations reviewed above indicate that there are certain elements that mark the openings, topic management, and closings of telephone interactions and that Schegloff's (1968, 1979, 1986) analytical framework has been an indispensable platform for various studies. However, the categorisation and the existence of a canonical format varies among studies (e.g., identification/recognition sequence and exchange of 'How are you?'). This variation depends on the reason for the call (social or business), the relationship between the participants

(acquainted or unacquainted parties), and cultural practices (norms of language use in a culture). In this sense, Schegloff's framework should be seen as a template against which the structure of the intended data is to be examined rather than a specification of how the structure of a call should proceed. Hence, a major aim of this research is to examine and identify the differences that do exist in the highly structured behaviour of telephone conversations in the institutional context of Saudi Arabic business complaints in terms of the parameters provided by the universal framework of Schegloff.

Departure from Schegloff's (1968, 1979, 1986) analytical framework is expected when the context of the calls entails specific constraints and has interactional goals such as in the context of call centres or a business complaints department. Two approaches that pay heed to the textual and the cultural context and their effect on social interactions are genre analysis and socio-pragmatics. These are discussed in the following sub-sections.

#### 2.1.5 Institutional talk in genre analysis

A genre is a type of goal-directed, staged, and purposeful communicative event that people engage in as members of their cultures (Martin, 1984; Swales, 1990). Such communicative events, whether written or spoken, could be very common such as service encounters or news reports in newspapers, or rare such as a presidential press conference (Tiainen, 2012). Swales adds that the communicative events in genre analysis are comprised not only of the discourse itself, but also include the role of the discourse and the cultural environment of its production and perception. What makes a collection of communicative events a genre is that they share a set of communicative purposes and that this set of communicative purposes is recognized by the members of a discourse community (Swales, 1990). In addition to purpose, genre emerges from repeated social actions in recurring situations which lead to regularities in structure, style, and content (Miller, 1984; Bazerman, 1997; Devitt, 2004; Bhatia, 2004). Genre studies in non-literary disciplines define genre according to the social context of the event (Swales, 1990; Eggins & Martin, 1997). All of these different definitions of the concept of genre share the same assumption: the focus of genre studies is on the social purposes of the discourse and those purposes are the ones that determine the schematic language realization.

The analysis of patterning in a genre yields useful information about the construction of texts (Hyland, 2013). It also provides an understanding of how language is used and shaped by the socio-cultural environment (Bhatia, 2002). This is because a generic description is a resource

reflecting procedures, practices, and conventions that makes a text relevant to its socio-cultural context (Tiainen, 2012). The task of the genre researcher, then, is to investigate how the social and cultural norms of a social group are realized through language by analysing macro and micro textual patterns and linguistic features reflected in a set of texts that represent that particular genre (File, 2017). As the social context of the language is a cultural variable that differs from one society to another (Alsohaibani, 2017), genre analysis accounts for language variation exhibited in different social settings (Paltridge, 1997).

Complaint telephone calls, the type of data in this research, may be classified as a genre as they are a class of communicative events with distinctive moves in which language plays a pivotal (not merely incidental) role and have a consistent communicative purpose of reporting a problem and solving it (Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1994). They are social actions taken in the same socio-cultural context and are characterized by being socially shared and regular patterning activities to constitute a class of communicative events (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2004; Tiainen, 2012). In addition, the analysis of the data has revealed that Saudi Arabic complaint calls reflect a specific sequence of information, organizational pattern or moves in Bhatia's terms (1994) (see chapter 4).

Genre theory seeks to understand the relationship between groups of people and the way they communicate. It is based on the relationship between 'language' and 'society' (File, 2017). The assumption of the theory is that we refer to recurring ways and generalizable features using language through which we perform recurring social and communicative problems and purposes (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 2004; Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). For example, members of a society or a culture orient to typical practices for managing social encounters when performing meetings, professional presentations, or engaging in sale exchanges (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyland, 2010; File, 2017).

Over the last ten years, there has been a marked interest in genre-based analysis of different sorts of texts (Devitt, 2015). Genre analysis has been one of the most productive frameworks for analysing specialized communication in academic, professional, and institutional contexts (Hyland, 2013). Swales (1981, 1990) developed the genre analysis approach, as a subfield of discourse analysis and applied linguistics, with the aim of exploring the context in which a genre is used and its construction, identifying the schematic structure of moves (i.e., communicative functions) of that genre, and the key linguistic features characterizing the moves or steps (Al-Momani, 2014; Basturkmen, 2014). Genre analysis is not only restricted to

specific linguistic features but also includes the study of the social context, culture, ideology, and the social practices of the discourse community (Swales, 1998). It is used to describe texts within their textual and social contexts. Essentially, the approach rejects the idea that individual texts should be treated in isolation from either their use or context (Martin, 1984; Flowerdew, 2002; Devitt, 2004). The two are interrelated as “a detailed textual analysis and a contextual analysis should complement each other in helping to develop a better understanding of the genre under investigation” (Wang, 2006, p.40).

For business discourse, genre-based studies (for example, Swales & Roger, 1995; Zhu, 2000; Flowerdew & Wan, 2006) aim at moving from the textual aspects of a specific business discourse type to the examination of how “a text type is socially constructed by members of the corporate discourse community in which it occurs” (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2013). The aim is, expressed differently, to explain business discourse from a socio-cultural and institutional perspective. Although there is value in purely textual studies, a useful understanding of the role of genre in an institutional setting should be socially “contextualized” (Swales & Rogers, 1995).

As a type of business discourse, service encounters are a particular genre (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015) because of their distinctive overall discourse structure, goals, and participant roles. The genre of the service encounter defines the elements characterizing these encounters with regard to the obligatory and optional elements of the transactional talk such as sales request, sale purchase, openings, greetings, small talk, and phatic exchanges (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). It also refers to the “cultural expectations of appropriate unfolding of social activity in the society” (Ventola, 2005, p.29). Speakers in the genre of service encounters “incrementally accomplish the discourse they are engaged in by following shared schemas and orienting to them moment by moment in the interaction” (Varcasia, 2013, p.138).

Following Swales (1981, 1990), a number of genre-based researchers have analysed discourse to investigate the schematic structure of discourse in different settings such as academic and research settings (for example, Johns, 2002; Peacock 2002; Kaufer, Ishizaki, Collins, & Vlachos, 2004), professional and organizational interaction (for example, Davidson, 2000; Barton, 2004; Feng & Shi, 2004), and call centre communication (for example, Lockwood, Forey, & Price, 2008; Xu, Wang, Forey, & Li, 2010) (see section 2.1.7.2). Genre research has been applied to workplace texts with the general purpose of empowering non-native speakers with linguistic knowledge required for successful workplace communication (File, 2017).

Within a genre, genre theorists identify macro-level stages in addition to micro-levels. Macro-level genre levels are the functional stages that make up the linguistic activity and the ways these stages progress from start to end whereas the micro-levels are the ways in which the different functional stages are realized using linguistic features such as turn taking, interactional patterns, and lexicogrammatical choices made by the speakers. An example given by File (2017) is the genre of the nurse handover meetings in which the macro-level genre analysis identifies the functions of the three stages of this genre and their progression: Opening (O), Patient Status Update (PSU), and Closing (C) (Lazzaro-Salazar, 2013). The opening stage signals the beginning of the official business. The PSU stage, the primary stage of the meeting, functions to understand a patient's progress in order to create an on-going care plan. The short closing stage functions to close the meeting. At a more micro level genre analysis, the opening stage is realized by the discourse markers that signal the attempt to begin the meeting such as "*right, shall we get started*", the PSU stage contains summarizing acts to summarize decisions and evaluative acts such as "*good, that's good to hear*", and the closing stage is often marked by a token of thanks.

Certain methodological and analytical considerations need to be taken into account for researchers interested in exploring the linguistic features of a particular genre (Bhatia, 2002; Tiainen, 2012; File, 2017). First, to be able to make claims about a genre, a researcher has to collect authentic and complete instances of the genre under analysis. Second, an adequate number of texts are to be collected to support the claims, though there is no specific number of texts required as there might be constraints affecting the data collection process and the researcher's goals. Finally, additional forms of data other than close linguistic analysis of authentic texts, such as ethnographic interviews, can be helpful to develop a fuller picture of a particular genre. These additional sources can explain contextual factors affecting the speakers' performance, provide warrant for claims, and validate findings from linguistic analysis (Edge & Richards, 1998; Wang, 2006; Manor-Binyamini, 2011). The theoretical framework for the present study leans heavily on genre analysis and investigates the linguistic features of the genre-texts (i.e., Saudi Arabic complaint calls). An ethnographic approach to studying the genre of Saudi Arabic complaint calls would surely have provided interesting results, but due to constraints imposed by the FTC (see sections 3.2.2. and 3.2.3), the analysis is restricted to texts and known socio-cultural context.

Since the environment surrounding the utterance is important in genre analysis to understand meaning (Schiffrin, 1987), complaint utterances in this study are not divorced from their

context. Specifically, the cultural context (i.e., norms of the Saudi Arabic culture) is referred to in order to understand how language is used to accomplish the social action of complaining in the service encounter with representatives of a FTC. Interpretation of utterances in this thesis is based on the linguistic context (i.e., local context) and the ‘general-knowledge’ context (i.e., cultural norms) (Huang, 2014). The former refers to the surrounding utterances that occur in the same call while the latter refers to the common ground (Stalnaker, 1974), being the background assumptions shared by members of a society.

#### 2.1.6 Institutional talk in socio-pragmatics

Pragmatics is “the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language” (Huang, 2014, p. 2). The focus in pragmatics is what people mean with their utterances rather than the linguistic meaning of these utterances (Yule, 1996). Consequently, a pragmatic study involves examining utterances in their context and considering how the context influences what is said (Stalnaker, 1972; Yule, 1996; Karthik, 2013). Pragmatics in this sense is the study of the “contextual meaning” (Yule, 1996, p.3) through which people’s assumptions, purposes, goals, and kinds of actions (for example, requests) are performed linguistically. In fact, one of the most important dimensions of context according to Morgan (1977) is the cultural context. This is the understanding of the social norms of behaviour and speech and the cultural norms covering interpersonal relations. Speakers and hearers refer to these norms in encoding and decoding linguistic meaning during an exchange (Chakrani, 2007).

A ‘culture’ is a set of ways of thinking and behaving that “members of a group learn as a result of socialisation and that determine their beliefs and behaviour” (Escandell-Vidal, 2004, p. 358). Different cultures have different values and beliefs, which influence the use of language and how people communicate (Leelaharattanarak, 2016). No two cultures are the same as Wolfson (1981) states: “each culture has its own unique set of conventions, rules, and patterns for the conduct of communication and these must be understood in the context of the general system that reflects the values” (p.2). Though it might be difficult to interpret what is meant by speakers<sup>2</sup> when they perform utterances (i.e., what is actually in their minds), the regularity that can be derived from general shared cultural norms of a social group facilitates the interpretation of speakers’ meaning. As Yule (1996) puts it:

Within a familiar social group, we normally find it easy to be polite and say appropriate things. In a new, unfamiliar social setting, we are often unsure about what to say and worry that we might say the wrong thing. (p.5)

Though different perspectives exist in the domain of pragmatics, one main general trend is the socio-cultural approach (Fraser, 2004; Escandell-Vidal, 2004; Hovden & Moe, 2017). Socio-pragmatics is “the sociological interface of pragmatics” (Leech, 1983, p.10). Márquez Reiter and Placencia (2005) define socio-pragmatics as the study of “the underlying norms of speaker and hearer meaning as reflected in the (appropriate) realization of speech acts, the organization of conversation, politeness manifestations and sociopragmatic variation” (p.213). It is a branch of pragmatics that focuses on the influence of extralinguistic or external factors such as social distance, power relations, and the cultural background of the interlocutors on the performance and interpretation of a particular illocution or linguistic form (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005; Meisl, 2014). The interest of socio-pragmatic researchers is examining the interlocutors’ beliefs on the basis of relevant social and cultural values (Leech, 1983; Escandell-Vidal, 2004). The norms that underlie the usage of language by a given social group are the common practices and regulations of socially approved forms of behaviour (Escandell-Vidal, 2004). To identify these norms, a researcher analyses the behaviour of a population sample in a series of situations with different social variables and tries to draw generalizations from the frequencies obtained (Escandell-Vidal, 2004). Such analysis makes the implicit cultural norms that underlie the interactional features of a social group become explicit. It also provides access to ‘variational pragmatics’ and ‘socio-pragmatic variations’ (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005; Schneider & Barron, 2008) through which cultures exhibit differences in the interactional behaviour as a result of sociocultural factors and cultural norms including variations in speech act realizations, variation in conversational organizations, and politeness variations.

To date, several studies have investigated the interrelation between the cultural norms and rules of a particular society in the performance of speech acts and strategies. These include the different realization and interpretation of facework in various cultures (for example, Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Taha, 2006; Cutting, 2008; Peeters, 2009; Rieschild, 2011) (see section 2.1.9) and the realizations of speech acts such as refusals (for example, Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Al-Kahtani, 2005, Chang, 2008), requests (for example, Barron, 2003; Woodfield, 2008), apology (for example, Afghari, 2007; Chamani & Zareipur, 2010; Shariati & Chamani, 2010), and complaints (see section 2.3). In general, such studies have provided evidence that it is vital for the performance of speech acts to be appropriately ‘cultured’. The

performance of speech acts typically follows the pragmatic rules and the socio-cultural norms of the target language. This is done so that these speech acts convey their communicative intent and reflect an appropriate use of language in its context.

The crucial role of culture is particularly apparent in the workplace setting. Employers agree that socio-pragmatic skills are needed to succeed in the workplace as this sort of knowledge contributes to the construction of a satisfying professional identity (Holmes & Riddiford, 2011). Workplace discourse is affected by the wider society in which the workplace is situated. Workplace discourse is said to be restricted by ‘Socio-Pragmatic Interactional Principles’ (SIPs) (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003) that determine the appropriateness of a behaviour according to “fundamental social entitlements” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 13) such as conventions regarding turn-taking in a job interview or a customer relations encounter (Fletcher, 2017). For instance, Dunn (2011) identifies honorifics, verbal strategies, and body language as necessary social norms to sound polite in Japanese business etiquette training. Using the verb ‘*itashimashita*’ (do) with a slight bow in an apology is considered less polite than the use of the verb ‘*shimashita*’ (do) with a deeper bow. Also, along with the use of honorifics, the use of verbal strategies such as cushion words and question forms as in ‘*shitsuree desu ga, o-ikutsu desu ka?*’ (excuse me but, how old are you?) makes an expression a polite one. The study indicates that teaching the professional use of language even to native speakers when training for business purposes is of a great importance. Chakrani (2007) supports the idea that the socio-pragmatic aspect is important in contextualizing speech utterances in institutional discourse in his analysis in the Morocco setting. Bargaining discourse, for instance, is based on the cultural context as Chakrani notices differences in language when comparing the language of local sellers with local buyers as opposed to the language the latter use with tourists. Persuasive speech acts are based on the knowledge of the local Moroccan culture. Because parental obedience is culturally important in Morocco, a buyer’s use of the phrase ‘*La:h jərđi: ʕla: wuldi*’ (may God be pleased with you my son) following a suggestion that the seller reduce the price is socially and interactionally meaningful. It is used as a discursive strategic expression to support the communicative message and helps in the interactional goal of winning the bargain. In addition, the expression transfers the relation between the buyer and the seller from an “unfamiliar and symmetrical vendor-buyer business relationship” (p.48) to a familiar father-son relationship. Consequently, Chakrani argues, the interpretation of speech acts should not solely be based on the meaning

of the illocutionary force behind utterances but also on the cultural meaning that these utterances have acquired in a culture.

Knowledge of the socio-pragmatic rules that control the language of a culture serves to facilitate social communication and minimize confrontation among individuals from different speech communities (Ting-Toomy, 1988; Farahat, 2009). Norms of appropriate linguistic behaviour differ from one culture to another (Stukan, 2018): an utterance can sound appropriate for speakers of one language but may be rude or impolite for speakers of other languages, and vice versa. In addition, discovering the correlation between the use of linguistic forms and the social norms in a society provides insights into the socio-pragmatic aspect of the use of language and the variations in the use of linguistic forms among different societies (Kumari, 2015). Most relevant to this research, the analysis of the socio-cultural dimensions relevant to the selection of appropriate complaint strategies and responding to them in a specific socio-cultural context is important. This is because the inappropriate use of strategies can impact negatively on workplace relationships. Speakers in institutional settings select appropriate forms that are consistent with their transactional and relational goals as well as consistent with their desired presentation of a professional identity in a social interaction in ways that are acceptable within norms of behaviours in the Saudi Arabic culture (Holmes & Riddiford, 2011).

Among discourse types in which context has a significant role in the manifestation of a generic structure and in which appropriate cultural communication skills are needed to ensure effective service is the context of call centre discourse. Analysing talk in institutional settings, a number of researchers highlight specific models and structural patterns in different institutional and cultural contexts. For instance, courtrooms (Atkinson & Drew, 1979), medical consultations (Silverman, 1987; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999), emergency calls (Zimmerman, 1984; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987), commercial call centres (Lockwood, Forey & Price, 2008; Xu, Wang, Forey, & Li, 2010; Hui, 2014). As the type of data in the current study is institutional telephone interactions to complaints department/s, and this falls within the broad definition of call centres (see below), the following section will focus on reviewing the relevant existing work in the area of call centre research.

### 2.1.7 Research on call centre discourse

Since their appearance in the early 1990s and with the advancement in Information Technology (IT) and telecommunications, the call centre industry has become an important and a growing type of customer service work (Anton, 2000; Feinberg, Kim, Hokama, de Ruyter, & Keen, 2000). In almost all business sectors, call centres are to be found offering different services including, but not limited to, commercial and technical support, helpdesks, providing instructions, booking of trips and hotels, hospital assistance and healthcare, and selling activities (Varcasia, 2013). This industry enables firms to provide better customer service, manage the relationship with customers, and extend sales (Jeong, Bekmamedova, & Kurnia, 2012). It is not just a vital link between companies and their customers but also a strategic marketing tool which helps in the competitive atmosphere of the business industry (Borman, 2006) and enables organizations to provide customer service at a significantly lower cost (Paulet, 2004).

There is no single universal definition of call centres (Dawson, 2002). Basically, ‘customers service centres’, ‘telephone call centres’, or ‘customer satisfaction centres’ are dedicated centres in which employees use sophisticated computer systems to make outbound or receive inbound telephone calls covering different topics such as marketing, sales, customer service, technical support, telemarketing and financial management (Taylor & Bian, 1999; Gans, Koole, & Mandelbaum, 2003). To Bodin and Dawson (1999), a call centre is defined as “a place where calls are placed, in high volume for the purpose of sales, marketing, customer service, telemarketing, technical support or other specialized business activity” (p.45). According to Holman (2005), a call centre is a work setting in which business is managed mainly through computer and telephone-based technologies. Hauptfleisch (2006) defines call centres as “a business that integrates advanced technology with an effectively designed business process and human resources” (p.23). What all these definitions share are that: (1) call centres are dedicated operations in which employees focus on serving customers; (2) in these settings, employees use telephones and computers; and finally (3) calls in call centres are processed and controlled by an automatic system.

Research in call centres has received increasing attention from different disciplines: business management, sociology, and linguistics. To date, most call centre research focuses on business and management issues such as the management of the customer relationship, recruitment criteria, employees’ stress and well-being, and job design (for example, Irish, 2000; Knights &

McCabe, 2003; Brock, 2004). Other researchers tackle applied linguistic issues related to these calls, mainly communication skills (for example, Cameron 2000a, Cameron, 2000b, Adolph, Brown, Carter, Crawford, & Sahota, 2004; Forey & Lockwood, 2007), employee language assessment (Friginal, 2007), and training in employee accent neutralization (Cowie, 2007).

#### *2.1.7.1 Types of call centres*

A call centre can be located either within a company, staffed with the company's own employees or outsourced to another company that functions outside of the business and is specialized in call centre services. The former is known as an 'in-house' call centre and the latter is referred to as an 'outsourced' call centre (Govender, 2016). Call centres can also be classified as 'onshore' or 'offshore' (Hui, 2017). The former refers to call centres that have local employees working in a country whereas the latter refers to centres that subcontract their operations to a centre in another country, usually developing ones such as the Philippines, India, or Malaysia.

Calls that call centres can handle are 'inbound' or 'outbound' calls (Varcasia, 2013). In general, inbound calls are calls from other employees within the company such as the technical support help desk in a university (Hui, 2014) or those that focus on helping customers of the company who contact a CSR. The primary activities of the agent of outbound calls are to sell and provide telemarketing with the help of standardized scripts (Lewin & Sager, 2007; Rod & Ashill, 2013). Outbound calls in some companies can also be performed in response to a previous customer's request such as in banks (Hui, 2014). It follows that, in function, CSRs in inbound call centres are to deal with complaints, requests, and inquiries for which they need to be more customer-oriented, calm, patient, and empathetic (Lloyd & Payne, 2009; Rod & Ashill, 2013). On the other hand, companies use outbound calls as a way to reach potential customers.

The call centre in which the present research takes place is an in-house CU of a FTC in Saudi Arabia which dedicates a free phone line that receives local calls (i.e., inbound calls in which Cs initiate the calls to make complaints) for its customers (see section 3.2.1).

Though some workplace studies analyse issues in 'onshore' call centres, where CSRs speak the same variety of English as the Cs (for example, Mulholland, 2004; Witt, Andrews & Carlson, 2004; Rose & Wright, 2005), a considerable proportion of the literature on call centre interaction focuses on international operations of 'outsourced' centres, such as in India and the Philippines (for example, Friginal, 2007; Lockwood, Forey, & Price, 2008; Friginal, 2013; Lam & Yu, 2013). In these globalized workspaces, the contact is between CSRs from different socio-

economic, ethnolinguistic, and cultural backgrounds than that of the customers. In this thesis, however, Cs and CTs converse in the same regional dialect (i.e., Saudi Arabic) and deal with local operations. Thus, much call centre literature dealing with intercultural language issues such as assessing L2 proficiency (mainly English proficiency) used by agents in outsourced call centres and evaluating specialized instruments used to measure their performance is not directly relevant to the scope of this research. Other themes in the call centre literature, on the other hand, align to this research because these themes exist in the corpus of the Saudi Arabic calls. These are areas of business and linguistic concern such as CSRs styling, generic structure and communication strategies including rapport management and politeness strategies. They are presented in more detail in the following sub-sections.

#### *2.1.7.2 Call centre discourse*

In the late 1990s, research on the organizational, occupational, and technical aspects of call centres began to emerge (Hui, 2017). These studies show how the specific goals of call centre interactions can be performed through the linguistic features that pattern call centre discourse. Previous research also established that the language used in call centres either enables or prevents the achievement of successful service outcomes. This is because, presumably, smooth and efficient communication leads to an understanding between customers and CSRs (Cameron, 2000a; Hui, 2010).

As mentioned in section 2.1.7.1, the most common topics discussed in the literature on call centres, and the ones that are relevant to the current research, are explained in the coming sub-sections. I will start by explaining the unique generic structure of call centre discourse followed by a review of common communication strategies linked to call centre discourse.

#### *Generic structure*

Studies analysing the generic structure of call centre interactions aim at discovering regularities in this distinct type of conversation in different contexts such as helplines (for example, Adolphs et al., 2004; Baker, Emmison, & Firth, 2005; Stacey, Graham, O'Connor, & Pomey, 2005) and commercial call centre interactions (for example, Lockwood, Forey, & Price, 2008; Xu, Wang, Forey, & Li, 2010). Though much research has been done on the language used in call centres, according to Hui (2017), there is a lack of studies analysing the overall structure of this type of discourse. The following paragraphs present examples of generic structures identified in calls to emergency service (Zimmerman, 1984, 1992; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987), helplines (Houtkoop, Jansen, & Walstock, 2005; Landqvist, 2005), and commercial call

centres (Lockwood et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2010; Hui, 2014). This is because they are ones that present an analysis of the whole structure of calls rather than specific components such as openings and closings. The generic structure identified for complaint calls, the main focus of this research, will feature in a later section (see section 2.2.3).

Zimmerman (1984) and Whalen and Zimmerman (1987), reporting on one of the pioneering studies analysing topic management in emergency calls (i.e., institutional calls), identify five major components: opening/identification/acknowledgment, reason of call (reporting a problem or requesting assistance), interrogative series initiated and directed by the call-taker (CT), response (offer or deny to the request or complaint), and closing. The major component in such types of calls is the ‘request-response’ adjacency pair. As Example 10 shows, the C makes the request for help at the start of the call (a) and the CT responds to that request (c). Interrogative series or contingency questions are inserted between the request and its response (b). These questions are initiated by the CT in order to gain the necessary information before uttering the SPP of the adjacency pair (request-response) (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987, p.174).

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>(10) D (Dispatcher): <i>Mid-City Emergency</i></p> <p>(a) C (Caller): <i>Um yeah (.) somebody Jus' vandalized my car,</i></p> <p>(b) D: <i>What's your address.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">C: <i>Thirty three twenty two: Elm</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">D: <i>Is this uh house or an apartment</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">C: <i>Ih tst uh house</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">D: <i>Uh-your las' name.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">C: <i>Minsky,</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">D: <i>How do you spell it.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">C: <i>M.I.N.S.K.Y</i></p> <p>(c) D: <i>Wull sen' somebody out to see you</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">C: <i>Than' you</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">D: <i>Umhm bye.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">C: <i>Bye.</i></p> | <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="font-size: 2em; margin-right: 5px;">}</div> <div style="margin-right: 5px;">}</div> <div style="font-size: 2em; margin-right: 5px;">}</div> </div> | <p>Opening:<br/>Answer/Identification<br/>Acknowledgment/Reason<br/>for call (request for help)</p> <p>Contingency questions</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Closing</p> |
|--|--|---|

The purpose of calls being institutional ones (distressed people reporting problems and seeking help) was a factor in the adoption of a rigid structure marked by specialized ‘conversational machinery’ (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987, p.181). This consequently characterized emergency

calls by reduced sequences such as the reduction of the opening sequence. Following the lines of Zimmerman (1984, 1992b) and Whalen and Zimmerman (1987), the structure of emergency calls received further attention (for example, Tracy & Anderson, 1999; Tracy & Ange, 2002; Landqvist, 2005). These studies provide further support to Zimmerman's account of the overall structure of service calls and concur in characterizing the topic management stage in these calls as reduced and specialized.

The structure of calls to helpline desks is a collaborative construction of a problem-reporting scenario. CTs and Cs closely and elegantly collaborate in performing the various stages of the calls. Houtkoop, et al., (2005) stressed this collaborative nature of help calls in their description of problem calls to the communication centre help desk of a Dutch bank's branch office. Agents were to help in solving telecommunication problems in the bank and if they could not, they transferred the problem to a Dutch telecommunication company known as K.P.N.. The structure of the calls was: opening (identification sequence, greeting sequence, and sometimes how-are-you sequence), narrative accounts of the problem (CT asked questions to diagnose the problem and C answered them), announcement that the problem could not be fixed (CT reported that the problem was to be reported to K.P.N.), requesting information to fill out the form and verify the correctness of information, reading the problem and the problem description and giving the C a reference number, and finally closing. What Houtkoop et al., emphasized is the collaborative nature of the talk by 'working aloud': CTs worked aloud when recording the description of the problem, or read back what had been recorded, Cs checked the entry and corrected when necessary. This strategy helped in improving the quality of the service simply because it guaranteed that the information reported matched the information that the C provided.

Another piece of work presenting a generic structure of calls to helplines is that of Landqvist (2005) who investigated advice regarding treatment from the public to a Poison Information Centre (PIC). Calls were typically organized as: opening/identification, reason for call/request for information, interrogative series, advice, and closing. Though Landqvist's focus was analysing the advice-giving sequences to show their complexity, the study reinforces Houtkoop's et al., (2005) belief regarding the 'collaborative' nature of helplines calls. Cs were not merely passive recipients of the advice but contributed actively in the construction of the call.

In the context of commercial call centres, Lockwood et al., (2008) identified a generic structure of inbound calls to outsourced call centres in the Philippines. Although every call was unique, this structure consisted of six obligatory stages: opening, purpose, gathering information, purpose, service, and closing. One optional stage was ‘summarizing’ that might occur between ‘service’ and ‘closing’.

Attempts have also been made by Xu et al., (2010) to investigate whether the genre of call centre discourse had universal language functions by comparing 100 Chinese and 100 L2 English call centres’ interactions taken from a call centre of a telecommunication products technical support company in China. The structure identified consisted of three generic stages: opening, servicing, and closing. Within these stages, five moves were identified: greeting exchange (opening), purpose, information, and service exchanges (servicing) and farewell exchange (closing). To the researchers, it was possible and valid to generalize the generic structure of call centre genre, but this structure was flexible and dynamic. The existence of a typical generic structure for call-centre encounters was justified in terms of common communicative goals, similar social practices, and general industrial rules shared by professionals in the industry. What Xu et al., added was that an approach to genre study should not only analyse language itself but also look at cultural, social, institutional, and interactional factors. This is done in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural features of call centre discourse. An example given by Xu et al., on the effect of social factors on the genre structure of call centres, was the development in technology and how this advanced the methods of communicating with customers. As stated “changes in communication media may lead to changes in the use of language, generic structure of discourse, and social practices in the profession” (p.470).

Focusing more on the interpersonal relationship in call centre discourse, a structure of in-house call centre discourse of three types of calls a routine call (request for information), an atypical call (request for an action), and a complaint call (request for a corrective action) was presented by Hui (2014)<sup>15</sup>. In a data set of 770 minutes of authentic New Zealand call centre discourse, the researcher identified a four-stage generic structure of transactional calls in the context of call centres: opening, request for assistance, solution negotiation, and closing with obligatory and optional elements at each stage. The researcher commented that no variation was evident

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<sup>15</sup> This structure is revisited in section 2.2.3.

in the opening and closing stages, but considerable variation in the request for assistance and solution negotiation stage was present.

All in all, the literature in call centre generic structures shows that researchers agree on the existence of a generic structure in this particular context (i.e., outsourced and in-house call centres). The transactional aspects of the proposed structures in this genre are similar. In addition, opening and closing are stages that exist in all the models discussed above. ‘Purpose’, ‘gathering information’ and ‘servicing’ are the dominant stages in these calls as these types of calls are to help and provide information by the CSRs. Yet, each identified structure varies in how the stages are expressed due to the unique circumstances, constraints, and transactional goals that the context imposes such as the obligatory move of ‘customer identification’ in commercial call centres in the very first few minutes of the call (Forey & Lockwood, 2007; Hui, 2014). Complaint calls to call centres, as the data of this research, can have additional elements to the identified call centre discourse generic structure discussed above (suggested generic structures of complaint calls found in the literature are discussed in detail in section 2.2.3). Among these are, for example, the stage of ‘problem/solution negotiation’ (see section 2.2.3) in which most of the calls’ time may be spent as the data of the current research indicates (see section 6.1.1).

The discourse of call centres is not only characterized by the existence of a generic structure, at least within some contexts. It also has specific strategies that have been found to facilitate communication. These are explained next.

### *Communication strategies*

The linguistic behaviour of employees and customers in call centres is marked by distinctive features identified by researchers (for example, Taylor, 1998; Cameron 2000a; Cameron, 2000b; Cowie, 2007). The special strategies, or common routines, which operators are encouraged to use involve active listening, avoiding a confrontational situation by giving minimal responses, maintaining positivity, and employing appropriate politeness formulas as well as maintaining good prosody and voice quality (Crome, 1998; Cameron, 2000a). Customers can also use politeness markers with their requests to manage the situation and maintain rapport (Hui, 2014). Distinctive communication strategies employed in call centre discourse, therefore, often exist as an aid in order to reach the goal of the interaction, to facilitate communication, and to avoid miscommunication that can cause longer and unnecessary parts of the interaction (Hood, 2010; Hui, 2017). As a relatively new context for

workplace research, not many studies identified the communication strategies used in call centres (Hui, 2014). Strategies mostly used in call centre discourse and their impact in a call centre conversation is discussed in the following sub-sections.

*Interpersonal relationships, rapport management and politeness*

As a direct channel between companies and their customers, service providers working in call centres maintain the relationship which is of a 'paramount importance' not only to smooth relations but also to aid in the transactional process and the outcomes of the workplace (Varcasia, 2013; Fletcher, 2017). This interpersonal relationship, the most important aspect of workplace communication (Fletcher, 2017), is constructed and maintained through verbal exchanges and voice quality as CSRs and customers communicate with each other through telephonic verbal conversation (Wan, 2008).

Hood and Forey (2008) investigated how interpersonal relationships were maintained in seven calls initiated by customers in the US to an off-shore call centre in the Philippines. Interest was directed to the expressions of emotions in calls containing expressions of frustration by the C such as '*not right*', '*this mess*', and '*very crappy*'. Though calls were problematic in the sense that there was not a ready answer to the C's query or a solution to his/her problem, the calls included elements that functioned to restore a good relationship such as 'implicit' rather than 'explicit' expressions of attitude by both speakers (explicit attitude was only present in certain cases by the C but not the CSRs), the exchange of polite closing moves of '*thank you*' and '*you're welcome*', and the CSR returning the calls to a reduced level of emotional intensity by being silent rather than echoing the intensity of the C.

Friginal (2008) found that politeness markers in offshore call centres were present. Although callers used polite words (e.g. *please*, *thanks*, *appreciate*) and some '*ma'ams*' or '*sirs*', agents had very high frequencies of these features across the board. This is because it is an expected behaviour that agents show respect and courtesy when serving customers (D'Ausilio, 1998). In a later study, Friginal (2009) categorized polite and respect markers in outsourced call centres into four sub-categories (p.173): (1) polite speech act formulae (*thank you*, *appreciate*); (2) polite requests (*please*); (3) apologies (*sorry*, *apologize*, *pardon*); and (4) respect markers (*ma'am*, *sir*, and *titles*). Call centre interactions investigated by Friginal had a very high frequency of all these markers.

Besides the construction of interpersonal meaning through verbal exchanges (emotion conveyed by words), Wan (2008) investigated a sample of problematic conversations between

Filipino CSRs and American customers focusing on how voice quality (emotion carried by sounds) constructed the prosodies leading to interpersonal meaning and communication breakdown in call centre discourse. The key features of voice quality that constructed interpersonal relationship included: tension, loudness, pitch register (high/low), roughness, breathiness, vibrato, and nasality. For example, C's loudness associated with faster speed functioned to obtain the speakership, claim for more territory, and indicated a sense of aggression. Breathiness produced by CSRs functioned to release pressure and stress as an alternative to building up anger. CSRs, according to Wan, are required to sustain high levels of interpersonal interaction with the customers through relying not only verbiage but also voice quality especially during emotional labour<sup>16</sup> (Hochschild, 1983; Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy, 2000).

Related to the issue of building interpersonal relationships is that of rapport management and rapport building in call centre interactions between the CSRs and the Cs. The Rapport Management framework, which connects politeness theory, face theory, and social pragmatics, explains how language is used to manage relationships. Using the broader term 'rapport' rather than politeness, Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2008) argues that rapport management (management of harmony-disharmony among people) has three main components: the management of face, management of sociality rights, and the management of interactional goals. Face management involves the management of the needs of face and is concerned with people's sense of honour, reputation, and dignity. Sociality rights, on the other hand, relate to social expectancies and are concerned with people's sense of fairness and social inclusion/exclusion. Interactional goals refers to the management of the interaction towards the achievement of transactional, relational, or both goals according to the type of activity, interactional roles, and the relations of participants. Essentially, a Rapport Management framework does not entirely contradict politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It goes beyond it by including an enhanced concept of face to be both the social/public identity face along with individual/private face. In other words, the framework considers the different contextual dimensions under which rapport expressions are used and evaluated by others.

According to Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2000), five interrelated domains play important roles in managing rapport (p.19): the *illocutionary domain* (the performance of speech acts such as apologies and requests), *discourse domain* (topic choice, structure, and sequencing. For

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<sup>16</sup> Emotional labour is the process of regulating feelings and expressions as part of the work role (Grandey, 2000).

example, raising a sensitive topic can be rapport-threatening), *participation domain* (including turn-taking, overlaps, and back channelling as well as the listener's verbal and non-verbal responses), *stylistic domain* (choice of tone, formality level, and choice of genre-appropriate terms of addressee and honorifics), and the *non-verbal domain* (eye contact and hand gestures which are not applicable to telephonic conversations). All these domains are to be handled appropriately for the sake of creating/maintaining harmonious relations.

Needless to say, there are also factors within the context of the interaction that influence people's usage of rapport management strategies (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). The first is the speakers' orientation towards rapport. Interactants may have rapport-enhancement orientation (desire to strength relations), rapport-maintenance orientation (desire to maintain/protect relations), or rapport-neglect orientations (lack of desire to maintain relations because of a focus on self). The second factor is message content (i.e., cost-benefit considerations). The cost can be time, effort, impositions, or inconvenience among others. No doubt, rapport needs to be managed to achieve the benefit through resorting to rapport maintaining strategies as apologies and expressions of gratitude. Third, interactional roles are also a factor that can influence the use of rapport management strategies. With roles as teacher-student, sales assistance-customer, friend-friend, power is determined, and this consequently specifies the rights and obligations of each role member. A teacher, for instance, has the obligation to handle class management but also the right to expect students to comply with his/her directives. Finally, socio-pragmatic conventions that societies develop govern strategies used to manage rapport. A strategy can be used as a rapport management enhancing one if it is perceived to be so according to societal conventions. For example, some societies value overt expression of 'modesty' among acquaintances and strangers while other societies prefer more 'honest' evaluations.

The last factor mentioned-above (i.e., socio-pragmatic) confirms the point that cultures differ in the emphasis they place on rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Differences are in two things. First, cultures may differ in the sensitivity to these components so that more rapport work is needed in certain situations than others. Second, cultures may also differ in the ways for showing rapport. A strategy used to maintain rapport in one culture is not necessarily used in another. According to this view, it is clear how difficult it is to manage rapport effectively, especially in a context with a high FTA such as complaints. This is because considering an action as a rapport threat and/or rapport enhancing depends not only on what is said (i.e., content of the utterance) but also on how interactants react and interpret it under prescribed cultural norms. This is clear in the forms of address used to encode interpersonal relationships

between interlocutors that can be influenced by social practices and cultural norms (Clyne, Norrby, & Warren, 2009). For example, in Saudi Arabia, people who are familiar with each other such as colleagues and/or supervisors in the workplace prefer to be called by an honorific name such as parent (nickname that includes their oldest son's name -son's name prefixed by *Abu* (father of) for a male speaker or *Um* (mother of) for a female speaker). This is a way to maintain rapport and indicate a more familiar and respectful relationship, but this may be regarded an unacceptable action in other cultures (Al Ali & Elzubair, 2016) (see section 1.1 for a detailed description of the cultural norms of Saudi Arabia).

A growing body of research has emerged examining the importance of rapport management between agents and customers in services from a marketing perspective (for example, Beaty, Mayer, Coleman, Ellis Reynolds, & Lee, 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999). More specifically, in the context of call centre, a number of studies examine the ways in which CSRs and their Cs establish, build, and maintain rapport throughout the course of their exchanges. This is done as for the role of customer/contact employee rapport is an important relationship variable (Macintosh, 2009). Rapport management has been suggested as relevant to ensuring a high quality of service delivery, customer satisfaction, and word-of-mouth communication (Schnurr & Chan, 2009; Macintosh, 2009; Ho, 2014).

Gremler and Gwinner (2000) define rapport in services as “a customer’s perception of having an enjoyable interaction with the service provider employee, characterized by a personal connection between the two interactants” (p.92). A prescribed ‘rapport-building’ speech style for call centres workers was suggested by Hultgren (2011). Despite the fact that she analysed call centre materials intended for call centre agents in four different countries (Britain, Denmark, Hong Kong, and the Philippines), Hultgren (2011) identified a globally appropriate call centre speech style characterized as a ‘rapport-building’ one. It comprised of nine rapport-building elements: active listening (sounds as *mhm, uh-huh*); understand the customer (summarize to check own understanding with the customer), an element which recalls Houtkoop’s, et al., (2005) ‘collaborative nature’ of call centre calls (see sub-title generic structure in section 2.1.7.2); avoid jargon (no technical terms such as *back office, delivery area, processing team*); signpost (CSRs advise the customer what they are going to do such as *firstly, ok you will receive*); empathize (*I understand, I will help you*); small talk (weather, pick up on special events); greetings; acknowledgments (acknowledge and offer to help such as *let me see how can I help, I can certainly help with that*); and hold on notifications (asks C’s permission to put them on hold such as *just a moment, fine just one moment then*). Yet, Hultgren admitted

that “although it is possible to identify a distinct global call center style, there is also evidence of subtle local inflections of this style” (p.43). Two different countries, as found in the styles of Danish as opposed to British workers, may not embrace the appropriate call centre style at the same level: a point which supports Spencer-Oatey’s (2000) ‘socio-pragmatic’ factor influencing rapport management enactment.

Hui (2014) demonstrated the applicability of the rapport management approach to telephone conversations of an in-house call centre. During the course of the calls, CSRs and customers exchanged speech acts such as requests, refusals, and greetings. In spite of the wide range of rapport management strategies that she discovered in authentic calls from a New Zealand call centre (i.e., initial rapport-building, cooperative meaning-making, engagement, and exceeding customers’ expectations), all strategies were appealing to the Cs’ quality face and respected their associated rights. CSRs adapted their interactional responses to the Cs’ style and to the various requirements of the call. Cs also shared with the CSRs strategies which appealed to each other’s face and respected each other’s rights such as sharing a laugh. In a nutshell, Hui argued that the transactional goal of the calls was met along with the establishment of good rapport, built and maintained throughout the exchanges by rapport management strategies which were “vital” and “pervasive” in the telephone exchanges (p.183).

FTAs can be performed in call centre interactions along with strategies that enhance face and build rapport. This is what Harrington (2018) indicated in the interactions of collection agents during debt collection in a UK based utilities call centre. The in-house textual materials, including training manuals, showed that there were aspects of rapport concerns that collectors should attain (i.e., relational function) while at the same time performing the threatening act of collecting debt (i.e., transactional function). Performing these two contradictory acts (i.e., FTA and rapport maintenance) meant that agents were to protect their professional face as company representative and also manage satisfactorily the customer’s face. Thus, for the sake of performing the first task (collecting debt), agents used closed questions, superior factual information, interruption to control or regain control of the conversation, and an assertive (but not aggressive) tone of voice. All these features were used to avoid the consequences of lack of certainty or commitment (Cameron, 2000b). As for rapport management features, collectors were polite and courteous at all times in collection interactions, used open questions that promoted extended talk, and were empathetic. Deciding when to be authoritative and when to aim at maintaining rapport was the choice of the collector. Thus, agents were to be given freedom on the choice of strategies depending on the flow of the interaction. This flexibility

would enable them to cope with the unpredictable face work demands and hence follow Spencer-Oatey's (2005) suggestion that for effective rapport management, speakers need to assess and reassess their reactions while considering their interlocutor's face (this issue of CSR's styling is further explained in section 2.1.7.2).

Rapport can also be managed by the use of relational talk (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Koester, 2006; Hultgren, 2011; Ho, 2014). This is defined as "short sequences of non-transactional talk occurring in the middle of (rather than before or after) a transactional encounter and thus involves a temporary switch out of the transactional genre being performed" (Koester, 2006, p.142). Such talk cannot be considered irrelevant to the workplace. Besides creating involvement and affiliation, it is used as it plays a role in the performance of the talk at hand (Regan, 2000; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). It, in addition, functions to fulfil the wants of positive face and to "establish, maintain, or renew social relationships" (Holmes, 2000, p.49).

The existence of relational communication in the workplace depends on the role of the speakers. Koester (2006) illustrated that co-workers were most likely to engage in relational talk during the day but in all the service encounters she investigated, there were no phatic exchanges. According to Koester, the absence of phatic communication in service encounters was because the server and the servee did not attempt to build relationships. However, recent research demonstrates the opposite. Small talk is a key component in service encounters (Pullin, 2010; Hultgren, 2011). Hultgren reported that small talk was frequently a reoccurring feature throughout the discourse of agents in outsourced call centres from four different countries. Small talk was inevitable but differences among call centres might be on the 'amount' or how much small talk an interaction can tolerate. The Philippine agents, for instance, used limited small talk, as opposed to the British agents, as they thought it might affect the smooth and efficient processing of the call. One explanation for this can be, besides the nature of the call, the socio-cultural norms of the society (i.e., cultural ethos) (Brown & Levinson, 1987) which can control the existence and the limit of small talk among interactants. In the Saudi culture, for instance, this sort of talk is to be avoided especially in male-female strangers' interactions in which participants perceive the service exchange as purely a business transaction (i.e., preference for a 'transactional' rather than an 'interactional' speech style) (Ali, 2009) (see section 1.1 for a detailed description of the cultural norms of Saudi Arabia).

### *Impoliteness*

As explained in the previous section, face needs can be maintained through rapport management strategies. Yet, it is inevitable that call centre agents encounter face-attacks (i.e., verbal aggression) expressed through face-aggravating strategies from customers, especially in emotionally-loaded interactions such as complaints. Impoliteness research in call centre contexts focuses on the challenges CSRs face when handling customers' impolite behaviours.

In call centre work, verbal attacks against the institutional representative are frequent (Jagodziński & Archer, 2015). Customers call with problems that include expressions of disapproval, criticism, shouting, sarcasm, and displays of (uncontrolled) negative emotions (Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Jagodziński & Archer, 2015). Orthaber and Reiter (2011) state that "the agent must assume that face threats to their institutional face will be made, just as the customers are likely to assume that, in the light of their grievances, they have the right to threaten the agent's institutional face" (p.3863).

Generally speaking, interpretation of impoliteness largely depends on the interaction between the hypothesized social norms and contextual variables such as the interlocutors' relationship (Koh, 2013). Face attacks do appear to be tacitly accepted as an integral part of interactions that take place between the CSRs and customers. Merritt (1976) confirms this point justifying it on the basis of service agents being "oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service" (p.321).

Jagodziński (2013) indicates that impoliteness is not only a normative practice but is often instrumental. Customers, when their needs are not met in ways that are satisfactory to them and to achieve extra-linguistic goals such as to obtain compensation (Bousfield, 2010), can use verbal aggression to achieve certain tangible benefits (i.e., instrumental impoliteness). When irate Cs are impolite or aggressive, an agent should be calm and remain polite (Jagodziński & Archer, 2015).

A possible method to reduce tension in such situations is the employment of politeness markers (Hui, 2014). Politeness markers are used by both Cs and CSRs in call centres either in onshore or offshore operations (Adolphs et al., 2004; Friginal, 2008). Their existence is crucial as participants do not know each other and interactions to call centres usually involve face-threatening acts such as requests and refusals (Hui, 2017). Agents reduce tension, maintain customer's loyalty, and establish rapport during service interactions. Thus, they employ linguistic strategies that can satisfy the customers especially during problematic calls

(D'Ausilio, 1998; Granered, 2004; Friginal, 2009). These strategies are combined with suprasegmental features of speech such as intonation and volume (Friginal, 2009).

The job of a call centre agent is inherently stressful. The pressure is intense because agents know their work is being measured and their speech is monitored, which leaves them “mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted” (Taylor & Biain, 1999, p.115). In addition, CSRs are always restricted in time allowed for handling each call and at the same time they have to satisfy the customer’s needs (Wan, 2008). In most telephone call centres, CSRs attempt to increase the number of calls taken by reducing the average handling time (AHT) (Tylor, 1998; Taylor & Bian, 1999). To do so, Wan (2008) and Lam and Yu (2013) noticed that the CSRs down-scale the Cs’ emotional level when the latter up-scaled the degree of seriousness of complaining by breathiness and being silent in order to maintain interpersonal relationship with the customer.

### *Styling of CSRs*

In sociolinguistic conceptions, style usually entails that the speaker has options to choose from. This, however, does not apply to the context of CSRs in most call centres. They are not to make spontaneous stylistic judgments and adjustments. In other words, they are not their own ‘stylistic agents’ and cannot carry out their own ‘self-styling’ (Eckert, 1996; Cameron, 2000a).

Call centres attempt to regulate talk to maximize efficiency by setting in advance how long an interaction should be and what moves to utter. This tendency, however, has been rejected by some linguists (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Cameron, 2000b; Varcasia, 2013). They argue that the role of interaction is shaped as the talk progresses. Global shaping characterizes interactions in call centres, as for many kinds of institutional talk, but sticking to a rationalized script can raise problems (Cameron, 2000b). Mirchandani (2012) describes workers in call centres who experienced scripts as ‘de-skilled’, ‘repetitive’, and ‘tedious’ (p.87). Additionally, when the management of the workplace pre-assigns scripts, they are exerting a macro level of power over their employees by controlling their talk (Hui, 2017).

Cameron (2000a) studied the prescribed linguistic and vocal styling for operators in telephone call centres in the UK. She identified styling rules that fell under two main categories: suprasegmental (use of voice, voice quality, intonation) and management of interaction (to avoid gaps and overlaps, use minimal responses, ask open questions and wait so the C can assimilate important information). She argued that there was a significant intensification of organizations to control their employees’ language. Cameron criticized that trend and argued

that organizations should encourage employees to make decisions on what to do, how, and when. The same belief was stated by Lockwood et al., (2008) in that CSRs should be comprehensible by making interactions flexible rather than imposing rules for agents to talk in a certain way. Practices of scripting and styling are necessary for local management, but they place constraints on the freedom of participants to design their talk.

Developing her earlier work, Cameron (2008), examining calls from an onshore call centre in the UK, stressed the fact that the standardized use of language imposed by organizations on their employees restricted the ability of CSRs to perform their work effectively. When the behaviour of the CSRs is constrained, this “may have consequences for them-not in the local context of their current interaction with a caller, but in the broader context of their ongoing relationship with the organization they work for” (p.152). In a recent study, Jagodziński and Archer (2015) presented an argument similar to that of Cameron (2000a, 2008). They stated that since call centre institutions view language as fundamental to their functioning, the co-creation of the customer experience must be accompanied by its linguistic co-construction. This can only be achieved by giving employees more interactional freedom than they tend to have in practice.

Having a prescribed style does not even ensure that agents will stick to it. Hence, the desired goals of “leading to ‘better’ quality assurance and greater cost effectiveness” (Hui, 2017, p.178) may not be achieved. As mentioned earlier (see section 2.1.7.2), Hultgren (2011) was able to discover a globally prescribed speech style used by agents in four call centres located in Britain, Denmark, Hong Kong, and Philippines. There was global agreement on what constituted an appropriate call centre style in terms of active listening, understanding the customer, avoiding jargon, empathizing, small talk, and others. Yet, this style was not adopted at the same level in different countries. Danish workers adhered significantly less to the prescribed speech style than did their British counterparts.

Though the majority of studies hold a similar view on the use of a ‘standardized’ interactional style being a harmful control against calling agents’ conduct (Cameron, 2000a; Cameron, 2000b; Lockwood et al., 2008; Hultgren, 2011; Harrington, 2018), other researchers support its usage (Leidner, 1993; Cook-Gumperz, 2001). For instance, Woydack and Rampton (2016) considered the use of a script helpful and beneficial when agents speaking English as L2 in an onshore UK call centre used it when making and receiving calls in English (i.e., conversing in a language in which they were not really fluent). It was a ‘workplace tool’ rather than “an

instrument of oppressive subordination” (p.728) helping in acquiring knowledge and practice of using English in the workplace. Workers, Woydack and Rampton continued, can refashion scripts and this means that Cameron’s (2000b) and Mirchandani’s (2012) view in relation to scripts being deskilling is refuted.

Accounting for the contradiction regarding CSR’s styling, I comment that the local deployment of a prescribed style can in principle be helpful in providing a unified style and clear guidance for CSRs, especially those using an L2. Yet, in practice, it is not necessarily the case that this style will be effective for performing the transactional task. An alternative and perhaps a more tenable solution is to set broad guide lines that guide CSRs during interactions, but at the same time afford agents greater ‘autonomy’ (Harrington, 2018). From my point of view, a prescribed style may not suit the different personalities of the customers and the different circumstances leading to the problem. Failing to adjust style to the requirement of the call by restricting the institutional staff’s linguistic behaviours cannot help in achieving a satisfactory resolution. Simply put, I suggest that in order to compromise the contradictory views regarding imposing/not imposing a prescribed style is to allow the CSRs to choose ‘this way’ or ‘that way’ after being assisted with some general guidelines. Such a ‘flexible’ prescribed style can partially cope with the strictly hierarchical Saudi Arabian business culture (Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013). In the Saudi management system, the immediate supervisor of a unit or a division can propose changes, but the final decision is made after consulting with the highest rank administrator within the professional ladder (Krupa & Ostrowska, 2016). Lockwood et al., (2008) state that such a system has an impact on the CSR’s ability to make decisions, a necessary trait in Western cultures. Cultural issues of hierarchy lead CSRs not to anticipate problems and introduce creative solutions. Rather, they would rely on the higher authority on the organization to dictate the decision.

### *2.1.7.3 Summary of research on call centre discourse*

Overall, then, the literature on call centre discourse shows that in the context of customer service call centres, a successful interplay of service knowledge, cultural communication skills, and interpersonal communicative strategies is needed to ensure effective service to customers. Most of the literature addressing the relationship between the customer and the call centre agent focuses on the influence of language and communication on the overall satisfaction of the customer. Though most studies have been conducted in offshore call centres and highlighted conditions and constraints faced by professionals in this industry, the literature provides

insights regarding the features of the professional discourse in the call centre context and how these features are influenced by organisational aspects (for example, enactment of power by management on employees). An evident example is the practice of styling and its influence on CSR's creativity to deal with the call as it develops.

It can be claimed that although a generic structure of the discourse of in-house and outsourced call centres with almost similar components is identified in previous studies (see section 2.1.7.2) because professionals in this industry share common communicative goals, we cannot take for granted that a globalized style of dealing with customers in call centres will necessarily cause the same effects, interpretation, or reactions to the locals in another culture. Put differently, although it is possible to identify a distinct global call centre style, it is also possible that there might be local inflections to this style.

In addition, there is a consensus among scholars regarding the role and the importance of interpersonal relationships between contact personnel and customers in a service. Generally, it is believed that a strong personal bond contributes to a number of positive outcomes in customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997) and in generating positive word-of-mouth (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). As success in business is highly dependent upon building positive relationships between parties (Friginal, 2009), politeness in this context is regarded as an essential part of the communication strategies that allow for the emergence/maintenance of trust and respect. The notion of rapport is implied when describing the role of politeness in building or maintaining relationships and establishing solidarity in interpersonal communication. Rapport can be managed in call centre discourse using language strategies such as the offer of help statement and address forms. As the literature reviewed indicates, when customers have specific interactional goals or wants, especially transactional ones that require relational work, they may consciously manage interactions in a way that enhances, maintains or even damages rapport. Similarly, CSRs have experience in rapport management, personalised support and accuracy in information transmission as these factors have been suggested to be basics for the achievement of high quality service delivery (Friginal, 2007, 2013). No doubt, appropriate rapport management strategies are determined by cultural conventions and contextual and individual preferences and not just by conscious choice of lexical items. This is why the interpersonal dynamic in call centre discourse is complex.

Finally, the literature reveals that consideration of local knowledge is helpful for a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic features of call centre discourse. For this

purpose, a variety of approaches have been used to analyse call centre discourse including ethnographic studies and corpus linguistics. Yet, these approaches are not always available to the researchers (Sarangi, 2004). I could not use methods used by other researchers (for instance, observation, interviews) as there were constraints imposed by the company to access the research site (see sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3): “Call centres are known to be particularly draconian” (Taylor & Bain, 2005). The numerous complications regarding confidentiality and data protection compliance that surround accessing interactive data represents a “significant methodological hurdle” of this research site (Hood & Forey, 2008, p.390).

Having defined what is meant by institutional discourse and telephone conversations and after reviewing call centre research, the review will now move on to discuss the basic notions of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976) and the models for analysing politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983; Watts, 2003). The investigation of the speech act of complaint in Saudi Arabic institutional telephone conversations relies on the conceptual framework of speech act theory and the study of politeness.

#### 2.1.8 Speech act theory

The basic assumption of speech act theory is that linguistic meaning can be explained by the use of words and sentences revealing different speech acts. These are actions performed in saying something such as requesting, questioning, complaining, and promising (Austin, 1962). Put differently, speech act theory attempts to explain how a speaker’s utterances are relevant to the surrounding world.

The speech act of complaint belongs to Austin’s (1962) *behabitives* category which refers to speech acts reflecting attitude or social behaviour, and to Searle’s (1976) *expressives* category defined as illocutionary acts that describe the speaker’s psychological state and attitude about what is stated in the propositional content.

It should be mentioned that Austin’s (1962) and Searle’s (1976) classification of speech acts as simple illocutionary acts that are uttered in isolation and are governed by constitutive rules was rejected by some (Barron, 2003; Levinson, 1983; Sugawara, 2009). Sugawara (2009) claims that there is no finite number of pragmatic rules that can be associated with the infinite number of combinations of different acts (i.e., when more than one illocutionary act occurs in a sequence). In other words, it is possible that an utterance may have multiple illocutionary functions. For instance, the speech act of negotiation is made up of various indirect

illocutionary acts such as reporting a problem with a hearer's act, rejecting the requested act, and guessing the hearer's inner state. Thus, it is necessary to examine carefully the sequence of talk surrounding the act when conducting a speech act analysis of naturally occurring data; an aim which this study pursues through examining the whole stretch of discourse.

Another important issue discussed by many theorists in relation to speech acts is related to the universality versus culture-specificity of speech acts. One view is that speech acts exist in all cultures, but their performance differs from one culture to another (Gumperz, 1982; Meier, 2010). For example, complaining, narrating, explaining, arguing, emphasizing, and directing are said to be universal pragmatic functions, but their conceptualization and realization differ across cultures. This difference in the performance of speech acts is due to certain cultural conventions and assumptions (Meier, 2010). Culture has its dimensions that affect the way a speech act is realized and performed. This relationship between culture and the performance of speech acts is presented in the following figure:

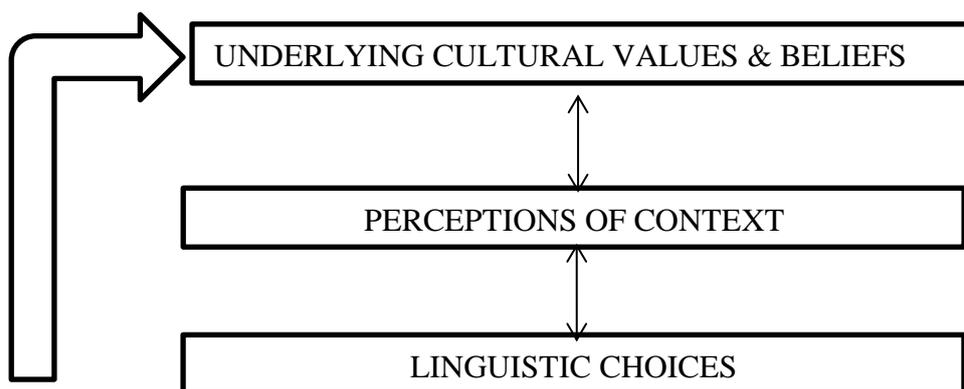


Figure 2.2 The relationship between culture, context, and language (adopted from Meier, 2010, p.77)

Figure 2.2 represents the relationship between underlying cultural values and beliefs and the linguistic choices made according to context. Cultural values and beliefs create a perception about the context and its variables of age, gender, and relationships amongst others. Depending on this perception, a particular speech act is performed using certain linguistic choices for its realization. These choices in turn enhance the cultural values and beliefs that affected them, as represented in the arrow from the bottom box reaching the top one.

Consequently, any research conducted for the purpose of analysing speech acts in natural data has to examine carefully the surrounding discourse and the cultural norms in which the speech

act under examination is used. In the current research, the relationship between the cultural concepts of Saudi Arabia and the realization of the speech act of complaint by Saudi Arabic speakers is considered in analysis. This connection facilitates a better understanding of the Saudi values and norms reflected in the complaint strategies used by the speakers in the examined data.

Part of the cultural values and beliefs that shape how a speech act is to be performed is the socio-culturally appropriate behaviours which abide by the expectations of a society (Yu, 2003). The following section sheds light on politeness theory and its relation to speech acts performance.

#### 2.1.9 Politeness theory

Politeness and facework are two basic social concepts in pragmatics in general and in the study of speech acts in particular. The notion of ‘politeness’ has a variety of definitions in the literature. Generally, it is a norm of social behaviour which is reflected in the linguistic choices in communication and aims to minimize conflict and confrontation (Al-Zahrani, 1997; Lakoff, 1974; Yu, 2003).

The literature has many models of linguistic politeness based on different perspectives: politeness from a conversational maxims perspective (Leech, 1983), politeness with a view to the concept of face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and politeness as a social norm shared by interlocutors in a context (Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005).

The first approach to politeness study is the conversational maxims perspective. Leech (1983) introduces the Politeness Principle (PP), the purpose of which is to “maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” (p.82). He proposes six maxims of politeness: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Sympathy, and Agreement. These maxims operate at a cost/benefit or praise/dispraise level. For the speaker, politeness goes higher if the cost/dispraise goes higher and the benefit/praise goes higher for the addressee.

Leech (1983) also differentiates between ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ politeness. Absolute politeness is associated with acts which are inherently polite or impolite while relative politeness belongs to acts which depend on their context of situation. For instance, orders are inherently impolite whereas offers are inherently polite. For complaints, according to Leech, they are inherently and by definition impolite. In this study, approaching the ‘institutional’

complaint as an absolute impolite speech act does not appear to be the case. The researcher argues that the speech act of complaint is not inherently impolite. Assessment of politeness depends to a large extent on the *context* of the interaction<sup>17</sup>.

The second approach to politeness study draws on a face management view. Brown and Levinson (1987), who were among the first to propose a universal model of linguistic politeness; one that is considered the most influential approach to facework and speech act performance (Ji, 2000; Kádár & Haugh, 2013), assume that “politeness is prototypically exhibited in conversation and other kinds of face-to-face interchange” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.41). All Model Persons (MPs) (i.e., competent adult members of a society) have two special properties: *rationality* and *face*. The first refers to the “availability of a precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.58). Face, on the other hand, refers to a MP’s two specific needs: “the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved of in certain respects” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.58). Face, according to Brown and Levinson, is of two types (p.61):

1. Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction- i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.
2. Positive face: the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.

In any interaction, Brown and Levinson (1987) presuppose that the two MPs (Speaker (S) and Hearer (H)) have “the mutual interest” to maintain each other’s face (p.60). If S wants to preserve H’s face when producing a Face-threatening act (FTA), he/she has to resort to strategies that minimize the face threat of the FTA. There are four strategies (p.60):

1. Make FTA baldly on record: this refers to situations in which the communicative intention of the S to do an act A is clear to participants. For instance, if S utters ‘*I will report you to your supervisor*’, participants would concur that this is an ‘unambiguous’ expression of S’s intention: S is committing himself to that future act and goes ‘on record’ as threatening to do so.
2. Make FTA with redressive action- attends to the H’s positive face (i.e., positive politeness): this is when the S clearly (a) indicates that he/she wants what the H wants. This aims to enhance solidarity and H’s positive face; or (b) attends to the H’s negative face (i.e., negative

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<sup>17</sup> More elaboration on that idea is in section 6.1.2.

politeness): this is when the S satisfies and does not interfere with the H's desire for freedom of action.

3. Make FTA with off-record politeness: the S is indirect in his/her act so that "there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.69). For example, saying '*Damn, I'm out of cash, I forgot to go to the bank today*' might be inferred as the S's intention to borrow some cash from H, but S "cannot be held to have committed [himself] to that intent" (p.69). The S recognises the H's negative face. Off record strategies are realized linguistically by metaphors, irony, rhetorical questions, understatements, and tautologies.

4. Don't-do-the FTA (opting out): The S does not perform a speech act because it costs in terms of face loss.

Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that the notion of 'face', with its two basic desires of the positive and the negative, is universal. They also add that the strategies mentioned above are universal. They are "available to persons in any culture as rational means of dealing with the face of others" (p.244). They further argue that three socio-cultural variables determine the assessment of politeness when doing a FTA: the social distance between the S and the H, the relative power of the H over the S, and the absolute ranking of imposition in a culture (p.74). Social distance is the degree of familiarity between the interactants. This is measured by "the frequency of interaction and the kinds of material and nonmaterial goods exchanged between S and H" (p.77). The more the social distance increases, the more the degree of politeness increases. Power, on the other hand, is associated with control and submission (Larina, 2005). The more powerful the H is, the more polite the S is to be. Finally, the absolute ranking of imposition refers to the degree of difficulty in performing the act to the H. The greater the imposition to the H, the more indirect (polite) the S's act is.

Though Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987) has been used in much empirical research in various disciplines, there have been various objections to it as well (Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Mills, 2003; Fraser, 2004; Locher, 2004). One of the most important criticisms directed towards this theory is that the notion of face is culture-dependent and that cultures differ in the ways they express consideration for others (Matsumoto, 1988; Eelen, 2001), not as Brown and Levinson's claim that "the mutual knowledge of member's public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal" (p.62). Matsumoto (1988) argues that many non-western societies are group-oriented. For instance, Japanese culture is sensitive to conformity with group norms. Honorifics are "one of the relation-acknowledging devices that indicate the

interlocutors' status differences, but (contrary to Brown and Levinson's claim) they are not used as a redress for an FTA" (Fukada & Asato, 2004, p.1993). Gu (1990) also mentions that the expressions '*thank you*' and '*excuse me*' are intrinsically polite acts in the Chinese context and do not, as claimed by Brown and Levinson, threaten the addressee's negative face. Because of that, Gu (1990) and Chen (1993) argue that Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is only applicable to western societies as their notion of face is derived from an individualistic perspective.

A further key criticism centres on Brown and Levinson's (1987) unjustifiable correlation between politeness and indirectness. The higher the level of indirectness, the more polite an utterance is. Thus, a direct request, according to Brown and Levinson, is an impolite act as it threatens the face of the addressee. Yet, this is rejected by Grainger and Mills (2016) who claim that many indirect expressions in English are highly conventionalised and that it is not easy to know the speaker's intention of being polite or impolite. They also add that indirectness can sometimes entail impoliteness when it is interpreted socially as causing distance between speakers. This means that direct requests are not impolite acts in all cultures. Indirectness in asking a friend to close the window in Japanese as in '*isn't it a little chilly?*' is a positive politeness strategy whereas it is an independence or negative politeness in English as in '*can I close the window?*' (Paltridge, 2012, p. 54). In a nutshell, politeness may be universal phenomenon, but politeness strategies are language and culture specific.

Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987) have been criticised for their assertion that there are certain acts that are intrinsically FTAs such as requests, complaints, compliments, and apologies. Holmes (1995) states that the perception of an act as being a FTA depends on the context. A complement, according to Holmes, can be a non FTA. Rather, it could be a face-supporting act in which both interactants are being positively polite and the face of both is not threatened. Wierzbicka (1991) adds that asserting that certain speech acts are FTA is culturally biased: a speech act might be considered a threatening act in one culture but not in another. For example, imperative requests are the most frequent, appropriate, and polite requests in Russian and Polish but not in English.

Scollon and Scollon (1995) claim that the terms 'positive' and 'negative' might mislead people who may think that positive politeness is 'good' while negative politeness is 'bad'. They suggest the use of the expressions 'involvement' (for positive face) and 'independence' (for

negative face). Scollon and Scollon add that both aspects can be projected in any communicative event and that emphasising one may threaten the other.

Finally, there is no reference in Brown and Levinson's theory to the difference between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness. For instance, silence could be used as a positive politeness strategy when it functions as a sign of solidarity and rapport while it can also be a negative politeness strategy if it functions as a distancing tactic. In the current research, silence when performed by the CT (as a response to the C) could be a realization of the Don't-do-the FTA strategy used as a positive politeness strategy. El-Shafey (1990), Nakane (2006), and Shigemasu and Ikeda (2006) classify the Don't-do-the FTA (i.e., silence) as a positive politeness strategy when it functions as a sign of solidarity and rapport, that is, when the act is done nonverbally although the FTA is not uttered. Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2008) reviewed and adapted Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of face and proposed a sociopragmatic framework which extends the field of politeness to cover rapport management (see section 2.1.7.2 for more details on the Rapport Management framework).

The last perspective to politeness is the social norm perspective. This is referred to as 'post-modern' or 'discursive' approaches to politeness (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005). The post-modern approach to politeness "advocates a greater focus on the evaluations made by participants through interaction" rather than shared notions of politeness (Singh, 2010, p.39). In this approach, politeness refers to the "mutually shared forms of consideration for others in a given culture" (Watts, 2003, p.30).

A major contribution to research in the post-modernist approach is Watt's (2003) introduction to the concept of *politic behaviour*. It is defined as "that behaviour, linguistic and non-linguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction" (p.276). It is ritualized and is socio-culturally determined. Impoliteness, in this sense, refers to the violation of politic behaviour. Identifying utterances as being polite or impolite, according to Watts, depends on the interaction itself and the interpretation of the interlocutors.

Some utterances, Watts (2003) elaborates, do not denote politeness by themselves, but are ritualized by society as being appropriate. Examples are the formulaic utterances 'please' and 'thank you'. It is also possible that in some utterances face-saving strategies are absent, but this absence does not entail impoliteness (Koh, 2013). Examples are: (a) when the focus is more on the proposition as in the case of emergency; (b) when the participants' status is very different

as in the cases of classrooms or courtrooms; or (c) when the social distance between participants is not high as in the case of friends. In these cases, a FTA might occur but not be dealt with as being impolite. Yet, it is the context which determines whether a FTA is a polite or an impolite one (Holmes, 1995; Watts, 2003; Locher, 2004; Koh, 2013). A FTA, such as the speech act of complaint, is not impolite in itself in the context of institutional complaint discourse because some impolite acts are perceived as being acceptable in that context. Similarly, it is polite to say to a close friend, but not to a superior at work, “*you must have a cup of coffee with me tomorrow*”.

When it comes to the Saudi context, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) and Watts’s (2003) politeness approaches both offer advantages when analysing the politeness/impoliteness strategies used in institutional complaint interactions. This is because: (1) Brown and Levinson’s framework relies on Speech Act Theory which justifies its use in this research; (2) the concept of ‘face’, a central aspect in complaint interactions (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016), is relevant to the Saudi culture. It regulates people’s speech behaviour and is used to signify honour, dignity, and respect. In the Saudi culture, politeness is strongly linked to the low tolerance for criticism and the importance of positive face. One is expected to express goodwill rather than criticise a person’s ideas or bluntly refuse a request (Al-Issa, 1998; Nuredeen, 2008; Eshreteh, 2014). For example, in refusals, Arabs find it difficult to refuse a request or an invitation directly by saying ‘*no*’ or ‘*I cannot*’. Instead, they feel obliged to come up with convincing explanation of the refusal to save their face as well as the others’ face. Such elaborated responses may be interpreted by American speakers (who are more direct) as exaggeration. Besides, the applicability of Brown and Levinson’s model (1987) has already been tested on Egyptian Arabic (El-Shafey, 1990), Tunisian Arabic (Elarbi, 1997), Palestinian Arabic (Atawneh, 1991; Atawneh & Sridhar, 1993), as well as with the speech acts of offers and requests in Saudi Arabic (Al-Qahtani, 2009; Al-Ageel, 2016; Hariri, 2017)<sup>18</sup>, in which the researchers stated explicitly that Saudi speakers were aware of the need to save face and used politeness strategies to redress the FTAs of offers and requests; (2) When analysing complaints in the Saudi culture, it is also important to contextualize the speech act and not consider it in

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<sup>18</sup> These studies investigated certain individual speech acts collected through written questionnaires, interviews, and DCTs. They focused on single utterances rather than extended interactions containing various speech acts. This indicates that the current research adds to the previous findings related to the applicability of Brown and Levinson’s model (1987) to the Arabic culture in general, and the Saudi culture in particular, by analysing ‘authentic’ spoken interactions of complaint calls that contain different speech acts (e.g., apology, promise, requests, etc.).

isolation (e.g., taking into consideration contextual factors when analysing politeness) as certain acts might be considered impolite when they are decontextualized.

The present study reconciles Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Watts's (2003) proposals of facework and politic behaviour, respectively. Both theories prove to be applicable frameworks for the analysis of speech acts in empirical work and in a wide range of languages and cultures. On the one hand, Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness was an attempt to investigate the universal principles of verbal interaction. On the basis of these principles, a universal framework of polite verbal behaviour was provided (i.e., variation of social factors as distance, power, and weight of imposition and the consequent influence of these variables on the formulation of politeness strategies). On the other hand, the theory of Watts accounted for the variation on the social and contextual factors considered when analysing human interaction. Depending on social and contextual variables, the interpretation of polite and impolite behaviour is different from one culture to another.

Hence, in the current research, polite behaviour is judged on the basis of the situational context (i.e., micro-aspects reflected in the content of the calls and information provided by the company)<sup>19</sup> and the social/cultural context (i.e., macro-aspects from an insider's viewpoint reflecting the Saudi socio-cultural shaped norms of appropriateness). Locher (2004) claims that what is meant and perceived as polite should depend on judgments of what is appropriate in the context, the situation, and the evoked norms. In service encounters, social actions such as greetings, direct and indirect requests are considered polite or impolite on the basis of the communicative situations and the culture (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). The knowledge of what is an appropriate norm of behaviour in certain contexts is apparently known to speakers (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016). For instance, in the context of this study (i.e., complaint calls performed within the cultural norms of the Saudi culture), direct requests are typically considered 'politic behaviour' because the discourse is highly goal-oriented. Directness in requesting is one strategic device that can be used by the Cs for the purpose of achieving the task's goal and as a means to respect the CT's time. Besides the nature of the task, culturally speaking, the level of directness of requests is motivated by religion (an aspect of the culture) (Hariri, 2017). Requests should be direct and to the point as cross-gender interactions between strangers in the Saudi religious speech community should be restricted to the task rather than being performed

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<sup>19</sup> Interviewing participants would have allowed me to analyse particular aspects of politeness while taking into account participants' perspectives, but this was not possible due to the constraints imposed by the company (see section 3.2.2).

in a manner that could be interpreted as a social relationship building interaction (Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010). Similarly, religious expressions can be a type of softener as well as culture-specific expressions holding religious value and entailing politeness. Simply put, a politic behaviour, in this research, is the kind of behaviour that adheres to situational and cultural norms of appropriateness. In other words, a politic and/or face-saving act is “a softener to minimise or avoid conflict, a positive enhancer of social rapport as well as a culture-specific set of social values that are maintained to satisfy mutual expectations” (Al-Khawaldeh, 2014, p.79).

Although Watts’s (2003) and Locher and Watts’s (2005) C of P framework cannot be applied to the data of this research because Cs and CTs do not form a C of P (i.e., calls are interactions between individuals who usually do not know each other, they do not develop special practices of communication around making this type of complaint calls as they do not frequently engage in communication for a long period of time in a specific context), I find it useful to apply the notion of ‘politic behaviour’ to the context of institutional complaint calls in order to address the assumption of Brown and Levinson (1987) that the speech act of complaint is inherently “impolite”, “rude”, or “discourteous” (Locher & Watts, 2005, p.29). The data indicates certain expected ‘appropriate’ linguistic expressions that are used by the Cs and the operators to get the situation rectified (a reflection of the general shared cultural and societal norms rather than the norms of a C of P). When complaining/responding to a complaint, participants interact on the basis of what is appropriate and inappropriate in that context. These are what Watts refer to as “institutionalized”, “appropriate”, “non-salient” and “expectable” behaviours in relation to politic behaviour.

The previous section (2.1) reviews the basic theoretical notions in relation to institutional talk, speech act theory, and politeness theory. The next section (2.2) provides the necessary linguistic considerations related to the speech act of complaint.

## **2.2 Linguistic considerations: The speech act of complaint**

### **2.2.1 Defining complaints**

In contrast to the speech acts of apologizing, thanking, and refusing, the complaint has received relatively little attention from researchers (Deveci, 2003). Nevertheless, a body of research has investigated the enactment of complaining within the framework of discourse analysis and

speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Boxer, 1993; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1985; Searle, 1976).

When analyzing complaints, studies commonly differentiate between two types of complaint: *direct* (first-party complaints) and *indirect* (third-party complaints). The former refers to a face-threatening act directed towards a recipient who is present at the scene and responsible (at least partially) for the perceived offense and/or capable of solving the problem (Sauer, 2000; Monzoni, 2008; Linli, 2011; Salmani Nodoushan, 2014). It has an implicit or an explicit accusation and at least one explicit or implicit directive (Daly, Holmes, Newton, & Stubbe, 2003). On the other hand, an indirect complaint is a non-face-threatening speech act expressed to a third-party who is not held responsible for the offence (Vasquez, 2011). It is similar to trouble-telling (Jefferson, 1988) or griping (Allami, 2006) where the trouble source is absent (Sato, 2010). In purpose, indirect complaints usually function as a solidarity-building device in social interactions (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010) and is a means “to provide emotional release or to off-load negative effect, rather than provoke actions to redress the offense” (Ghaznavi, 2017, p.2).

The current study is limited to direct complaints for two reasons: (1) direct complaints are the most common to occur in business communication (Linli, 2011; Ghaznavi, 2017); (2) it is expected that in the phone complaints directed to a CU, customers will complain directly to service providers (Hui, 2010). Service providers are responsible for remedying the offense. This assumption is reinforced by Boxer’s assertion (2010) that a complaint department usually deals with direct complaints. Due to these two reasons, the definitions provided in the coming sections are specifically related to direct or first-party complaints.

Another distinction that should be made when defining a complaint is between a *social/personal* and a *business/institutional* complaint. The former refers to “an illocutionary act in which the speaker expresses negative feelings toward the hearer. The speaker does so because he/she thinks that the hearer should be responsible for a socially unacceptable past event” (Chen et al., 2011, p.255). This definition of complaint echoes that of Maros (2007) who characterizes the speech act of complaint as one which compares what “is” with what “should” have happened to a recipient responsible for having “enabled or failed to prevent the offensive event” (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1985, p. 195). To Traverso (2008) and Heinemann and Traverso (2009), any type of comment that has “the slightest negative valence” is considered a complaint (Heinemann & Traverso, 2009, p.2383).

Business or institutional complaints, the type of complaint the current study investigates, is a

complaint that is relevant to an institution and could only be addressed and resolved by the related institution (Edwards, 2005). The speaker (the customer) expresses displeasure or annoyance as a reaction to a past or an ongoing action to the hearer (the service provider) in which the latter is assigned, at least partially, responsible for remedying the offense (Trosborg, 1995). The action performed by the complainer is referred to as the Consumer Complaint Behaviour (CCB). It is “an action taken by an individual that involves communicating something negative regarding a product or service to either the firm manufacturing or marketing that product or service, or to some third-party organizational entity” (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981, p.6).

The complaints analyzed in this study fall under the category of institutional complaints. This is because they occur in the specific workplace of a FTC and have to follow certain conditions and procedures for performing and responding to them according to the norms of the company.

### 2.2.2 Personal/social complaints and business/institutional complaints: Special features

All in all, the above-mentioned definitions of social and business complaints share some aspects, but differ in others. Both are a behavioral reaction to dissatisfaction through which one expresses, using verbal expressions having the illocutionary force of censure, dissatisfaction and unfairness to another person who: (a) is responsible directly, or partially, for the complainable (which already occurred or is still going) and/or; (b) could resolve the problem or at least help in achieving a remedial action.

Furthermore, social and business complaint exchanges are frequently long (Sato, 2010). This is because the complainer needs to explain explicitly his/her feelings of anger and annoyance and at the same time he/she needs to provide justifiable reasons for complaining. The complaineé also has to protect him/herself by using strategies such as negation, explaining excuses, or performing a counter-complaint. Depending on the complaineé’s response, the complainer might extend his/her complaint and the interaction becomes longer.

On the other hand, customers’ complaints in business are characterized by three features. First, they are both ‘prospective’ and ‘retrospective’ (Márquez Reiter, 2005): ‘prospective’ as the complainer attempts to influence the recipient so that the remedial goal is performed; ‘retrospective’ as the complainer passes judgment on something that the company has done or failed to do.

Second, in business complaints, it is not the recipient's 'personal' face that is being threatened. Rather, it is "likely to be the professional or institutional face" (Márquez Reiter, 2005, p.485). This is because institutional representatives are expected to deal with customer's complaints as part of their ascribed roles. In this setting, agents can save their own personal face from what is regarded as a personal attack and deal with complaints as a face-threat to their 'institutional' face. Customers are likely to assume that they have the right to threaten the agent's institutional face as a way of expressing their grievance.

Finally, it is expected with business complaints that participants are not familiar with each other and it is less likely that they will develop a relationship in the future. The discourse is also highly goal-oriented (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016; Ide, 1998; Linli, 2011). The focus is on the business of the call (Zimmerman, 1992b). Thus, absence of solidarity and/or linguistic devices of commiseration is to be expected in such a type of instrumental complaint<sup>20</sup> (Norris, 1998).

Proper management of CCB affects several aspects of an institution (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008). Good complaint management "affects repurchase intentions, customer trust and commitment, and long-term relationships" (p.48). A good and a satisfactory handling of a complaint increases a company's profit. Complaints by themselves can draw the attention of the company's management to specific problems and suggest possible methods of recovery. Moreover, knowledge of CCB is of a great advantage to service providers (Gustafsson, 2009; Linli, 2011). Through analyzing and assessing proper processes for handling/dealing with a customer's complaint, service providers can be aware of the fact that different customers behave differently and be ready to use suitable and efficient tools to shift the problem to a positive outcome. Depending on the way a service is recovered, a customer's negative/positive emotions develop. Good service recovery can reduce the customer's feelings of anger and depression while at the same time increasing the positive emotions of happiness and pleasure. On the other hand, poor service recovery increases negative emotions and diminishes positive ones.

Having defined what is meant by the speech act of complaint, what follows is an account of the four linguistic aspects of analysis considered in this study (see section 3.3.3). These are: (a) conversational sequence of moves (section 2.2.3), (b) verbal strategies of performing and responding to a complaint (section 2.2.4), (c) modifications used to minimize/maximize a

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<sup>20</sup> These are complaints that aim at achieving a remedial action in a form of changing things (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1985).

complaint (section 2.2.5) and lastly, (d) the scale of the customers' level of dissatisfaction (section 2.2.6).

### 2.2.3 Conversational sequence of moves

The first aspect of analysis in this study is concerned with the conversational sequence of moves: how participants opened, developed, and ended their call. Hence, the discussion in this section deals with a set of continuation options that mark the structure of a complaint discourse (i.e., its pattern) (Franck, 1979).

Complaints in service encounters is a particular genre that has a specific overall discourse structure determined by the goals and the roles of the participants in the interaction (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). Yotsukura (2002) suggests a general structure of telephone interactions with the thematic content of reporting a problem and offering assistance in Japanese business transactions. Five parts are identified: an opening section, a transition section consisting of an attention caller element and a brief statement of the reason for the call, a general report of the problem, a summary of the problem that might include an assurance or an offer of assistance, and finally a closing section. Within this structure, absence of certain elements found in ordinary telephone complaint interactions is highly expected such as the exchange of greeting. What is noticeable in Yotsukura's analysis is that participants avoid 'explicit' mention of the problem, and prefer to state the reason of the call in general followed by various details in a series of utterances (i.e., the answerer is to infer what is implied by the C). Of course, the reason for such a finding is the type of calls analyzed. They are business calls among institutional employees<sup>21</sup>: service representatives answered by experienced service providers rather than by complainers calling a complaint department to seek an express resolution; a situation in which an 'explicit' statement of the problem is defiantly required (Luke, 2002).

Driven by the claim that there is a lack of agreed understanding of the structure of call centre exchanges, Hui (2014) explores the overall structure of complaint calls between CSRs and customers in a New Zealand call centre. Opening, request for assistance, solution negotiation, and closing are the four generic stages identified. These four generic stages are very similar to Hui's (2010) stages in a complaint call (p.71): (1) greeting, establishing and confirming contacts; (2) identifying the problem and requesting a solution; (3) re-iterating and emphasizing

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<sup>21</sup> Cs (i.e., service recipients) were calling service providers either on behalf of a customer or on behalf of a larger organisation.

the problem; and (4) the closing. The opening stage has obligatory elements (the welcome message and the self-identification of the CSR) and four optional components: greeting from the C, C's self-identification, response to greeting, and the CSR's offer of help. The solution negotiation stage is marked by a long stretch of exchanges dominated by the C who displays more power in these types of calls. The C has an active role of instructing the CSR on what to do. The closing is marked by the CSR reporting her actions to the C and the call ends when there is nothing further that needs to be addressed. In function, the obligatory elements identified serve a transactional goal while optional elements are to facilitate meaning-making negotiations and are means for rapport management (i.e., a relational goal) (see section 2.1.7.2).

While distinctive features of complaint interactions are identified in Hui's (2014) data set (for example, the long negotiation stage, the presence of rapport management devices in complaint interactions, the complexity of power relationships), the structure identified is discovered after the analysis of three types of calls: routine calls, atypical calls and a "small number"<sup>22</sup> of complaint calls (p.122). This casts doubt on the applicability of the structure suggested to complaint calls of a wider data set. Besides, the structure proposed is of a complaint call with an 'indirect' one between a representative of a local government institution and a CSR. The complaint is framed as an inquiry but interpreted as a request for corrective action. This is different from the type of data under analysis in the current research: direct complaint calls between customers and service providers with a clear complaint component evident from the beginning of the call (see section 3.3.1).

Márquez Reiter (2005) and Orthaber and Márquez Reiter (2011) propose unelaborated models for complaint sequences. However, they have the advantage of being discovered after analysing complaint discourse rather than any other type of speech acts. In addition, they are models that have been proposed after the analysis of authentic direct complaint phone calls, which is similar to the type of data used in the present study. More importantly, the two models proposed for analysing the conversational sequence of a complaint call are the result of analysing only institutional/task-oriented complaint phone calls. These two models are discussed in the coming paragraphs.

In their work, the opening sequence in the complaint phone call is the CT's initial contribution, which is made up of three turn-constructive units: organizational identification, a greeting,

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<sup>22</sup> Exact number of complaint calls in the data of this study was not mentioned.

and a self-identification. This opening sequence is followed by the complaint as Example 11 shows (Márquez Reiter, 2005, p.488):

(11) CT: *CSC, good afternoon, Marianella speaking.*

C: *Ah, good afternoon, look Miss I would like to check a service for today since yesterday I don't know there were some mistakes on your part regarding the time.*

This opening sequence is followed by contingency questions initiated by the CT in order to gather some information from the C and to inquire about the service required.

Following that opening sequence, the act of complaint starts. This is a set of long sequences that occurs as a summary of the problem followed by elaboration in subsequent turns (Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011). After stating the initial complaint or service, the CTs respond to the complaint or to the service requested either explicitly or implicitly. They usually adopt the institutional role to save their personal face from any offence committed by the company. A CT might not offer any remedial action and his/her contribution is considered a 'non-affiliative' one.

A complaint call comes to a close when the agent utters "*yes yes, okay sir, look*". This pre-closing token of "*okay*" is followed by a terminal exchange in a form of a final salutation "*bye-bye*". This is followed by a proposed arrangement from the agent and a first pair part of "*thank you*" from the C. The participants then conclude their conversation by exchanging goodbyes as shown in Example 12 below (Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011, p. 3867):

(12) C: *you get me right*

A (Agent): *yes yes okay sir look we will send you an explanation right erm I hope as soon as possible we will try to reply well as soon as possible*

C: *yes yes thank you very much*

A: *thank you goodbye*

C: *goodbye*

In addition to similarities in thematic content, calls analysed in previous research exhibit a remarkable consistency in terms of the overall structure of complaint telephone interactions. Opening, problem negotiation in terms of requesting assistance and offering it, and closing are the three structural stages common in the data of different studies. Yet, the realization of each of these stages differs from one study to another. For instance, the opening stage may constitute three obligatory elements: organizational identification, a greeting, and self-identification

(Márquez Reiter, 2005; Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011) or just one obligatory element: summon-answer adjacency pairs (Hui, 2014) when the C chooses to proceed directly to the request for assistance stage. One possible interpretation for the differences in the realization of the components of the structure is the effect of the contextual factors under which these calls are performed. The norms of the institution may entail specific procedures to CSRs on how to answer the call, handle the problem, and attain the desired goals of the customers and the business. In addition, cultural norms have an influence on how to answer and deal with the complaint while pertaining to acceptable behaviours of interacting in a specific culture (for instance, the greeting sequence being an obligatory or an optional element in the opening sequences of complaint calls as explained in section 2.1.4.4). Orthaber and Márquez Reiter (2011) stress the fact that the construction of complaints in service encounters differs from one culture to another, but in any culture service complaints reflect the failure of a company to meet the requirements and expectations of its customers. Yotsukura (2002) recommends further research in the structure of complaint interactions “in order to better explore the complex inter-relationship between discourse and institutional roles ... and cultural values, as well as the ways in which each of these factors influences conversationalists’ behaviour” (p.164).

Thus, one goal of the current research is to figure out the basic conversational sequence of moves used in complaint business calls in Saudi Arabic shaped by institutional and cultural factors of the Saudi community (research question 1). This is to be done by drawing on the proposed frameworks of Márquez Reiter (2005) and Orthaber and Márquez Reiter (2011). Because of their limited focus on the opening and closing sequences of a complaint call, and being based on Western cultures (i.e., Uruguayan and Slovenian), I will integrate other proposed models identified from natural telephone conversation openings. Schegloff’s (1986) four sequences of telephone conversation openings and Saadah’s (2009) analysis of the ‘How are you’ sequence in Arabic are also considered when analysing the opening of a telephone complaint call in the current study<sup>23</sup>.

#### 2.2.4 Verbal strategies of complaints

The second aspect of analysis in this study is concerned with the customer’s verbal complaint strategies and the verbal response strategies of the CU members.

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<sup>23</sup> See section 3.3.2 for further explanation of the aspects adopted from each model for the current study along with justifications of their usage.

The following two sub-sections present a review of different proposals for the strategies speakers use when constructing (section 2.2.4.1) and responding (section 2.2.4.2) to a complaint. Contextual factors that affect the choice of complaint strategies are explained in section 2.2.4.3. A discussion of empirical aspects from which the proposed systems emerged is presented in detail in the empirical considerations section (see section 2.3).

#### *2.2.4.1 Constructing a complaint*

A complaint is made up of two parts: the head act and supportive moves (Trosborg, 1995). The head act is the actual complaint which shows explicitly what the hearer is complaining about. Supportive moves may precede or follow the head act. They justify the accusation so that it becomes convincing.

The verbal strategies of performing a complaint discussed in the coming paragraphs refer mainly to the strategies adopted for uttering the head act of the complaint. Although a complaint usually consists of only one head act (especially with data gathered through DCTs), the data of the current study reveals the co-occurrence of two or more head acts in a call. Thus, the strategies adopted from the proposed systems discussed in this section are used in the present study to analyze a ‘set of head acts’ that occur after the initial phase of a call and before its closure (see section 3.3.2.2).

The literature provides various verbal strategies used by the complainer when complaining (Chen et al., 2011; Hartley, 1998; Márquez Reiter, 2005; Migdadi et al., 2012; Tanck, 2002). In sum, strategies emerging from complaints performed in semi-naturalistic data and those performed in natural settings are a variety of only partially overlapping lists. Common strategies in these two types of settings include: establishing context or support (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Migdadi et al., 2012; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Tanck, 2002), conveying a sense of urgency (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Tanck, 2002), expressing dissatisfaction (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Chen et al., 2011; Hartley, 1998; Migdadi et al., 2012), accusation (Chen et al., 2011; Márquez Reiter, 2005), requesting a proposed course of action as a solution to the problem (Chen et al., 2011; Migdadi et al., 2012), issuing threat (Chen et al., 2011; Márquez Reiter, 2005) and expressing sarcasm/ridicule (Hartley, 1998; Márquez Reiter, 2005).

Because this study is concerned with analyzing authentic complaint phone calls in an institutional setting, two studies are of particular relevance for identifying verbal strategies. These are the strategies identified by Márquez Reiter (2005) and Migdadi et al. (2012)<sup>24</sup>.

Márquez Reiter (2005) and Migdadi et al. (2012) identify the strategy of *reiterating claim* as occurring in authentic telephone calls of Uruguayan customers and native speakers of Jordanian Arabic when constructing their complaints. The C persuades the CT of the validity of the claim by repeating it. This strategy is probably used as “a consequence of the call-taker’s non-acceptance of the caller’s position, his/her lack of affiliation with the caller” (Márquez Reiter, 2005, p.494). In some cases, reiterating the claim might be followed by ‘deontic expressions’ such as ‘obligation statements’ for which the C is asking the CT to do his/her job better as Example 13 shows.

(13) *I want someone to go today. **I am asking you to look at your records or wherever carefully because I called yesterday to request it.***

Six other strategies that aim to persuade the CT to accept the C’s complaint are listed by Márquez Reiter (2005). These are (p.493):

1. Mention urgency of needs: C expresses the urgency of his/her need in a form of a ‘need’ statement. Typically, these statements are personalized using the first person singular and plural.

(14) *When **am I** going to need a person. When **I need** it.. don’t you think?*

2. Express ridicule: C mocks the company’s procedures and/or policy. It might also be intensified by rising intonation and the use of emphasis.

(15) *One contract gives you a right and the other another, **how odd.***

3. Express disagreement: when the CT refuses the validity of the claim or denies doing the requested act, a direct use of a negative statement initiated with the negative particle *no* is uttered. Disagreement can be emphasized by the repetition of the particle *no* or by including negative adverbs. These are used “in an attempt to reaffirm the truthfulness of the claim being made and the untruthfulness of the company’s account” (p.496).

(16) ***No no no no** until the 18<sup>th</sup>, no way.*

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<sup>24</sup> See section 3.3.2.2 for justifications for using the strategies from these two studies in this research.

4. Accuse company of fault: occurs after a direct disagreement. C attempts to accuse the company of causing the problem he/she is complaining about (company's policy and/or procedures). He/She is not actually accusing the CT in person, but the C accuses the CT on behalf of the company.

(17) *I know that you are an employee and don't make the rules, but **you are** without any doubt **wrong**.*

5. Issue threat: C threatens the company through its CT.

(18) *Well but that is not my problem, so I want to be served and if not very well **I won't pay** anymore.*

6. Seek solidarity: C appeals to the CT's sense of humanity as a person who might suffer from the same problem one day or whose relatives or close friends might go through the same situation. Linguistic devices that might be used with this strategy are: interpersonal discourse markers such as 'look' and 'you see'. The C might also seek solidarity by using endearment terms such as 'my dear' or 'my love' or other lexical items such as 'poor' or 'imagine'.

(19) *and now what do I do. I don't have anyone that can go to the hospital at this time. I have to go to work and it's impossible at this time to find someone that can go. **You know**.*

While Márquez Reiter's (2005) strategies are presented according to the functions they fulfill in a complaint call, the complaint strategies of Migdadi et al. (2012) are discussed according to the position in which they occur in a complaint phone call. A complaint exchange starts by the announcement of the topic in which the C explicitly states the topic of the complaint before explaining the problem. Then, he/she starts stating the problem by expressing dissatisfaction with what the C considers to be unacceptable, offensive, or bureaucratic conduct. After reiterating the complaint, the exchange concludes with the C requesting a solution or a service.

In this study, I build on the work of these two researchers, but modify aspects that are necessary to address in the Saudi Arabic complaint calls corpus. This includes deleting and/or adding certain categories which could not be validated or were specific to the Saudi Arabic data. The verbal strategies for constructing/justifying a complaint that were coded for in the data are illustrated with examples in Table 3.3 in section 3.3.2.2.

Having reviewed the different proposals for the strategies speakers use when constructing a complaint, section 2.2.4.2 moves on to discuss the responding strategies to a complaint.

#### 2.2.4.2 Responses to a complaint

A response to a complaint is “the complainee’s verbal or behavioral reaction to a complaint made by the complainer” (Sato, 2010, p.34). In the last decade, response to complaints has been the subject of much research in the field of business management. For example, the link between the CSR’s response and customer’s loyalty and profit (Johnston, 2001; Homburg & Furst, 2005). It has been confirmed by many researchers that responding to customers’ complaints affects a company’s future business. Inappropriate response to a complaint can lead to poor customer satisfaction, risk of reduction of purchase, and bad reputation (Davidow, 2003; Hui, 2010).

Linguistically speaking, the literature reviewed highlights common response strategies used in personal and institutional complaints. There are four of these: acknowledgment of the problem, apology, offer of repair and providing assurance. The complainee typically admits responsibility for the complainer using expressions such as ‘*sure*’ or ‘*I understand*’ (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Frescura, 1993; Sato, 2010). Apology occurs when the complainee shows his/her regret for what he/she did or has done by uttering phrases such as ‘*I’m really sorry about this*’ (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Frescura, 1993; Sato, 2010). The offer of repair is the offer the complainee utters to make up for damage or loss he/she caused the complainer as in ‘*I’ll make it up for you, how’s that?*’ (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Frescura, 1993; Sato, 2010). Finally, the complainee might assure and promise the complainer that the problem should not occur again as in ‘*it won’t happen again, promise*’ (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Sato, 2010).

For institutional complaints, the type of data in the current research, special response strategies might be used by the complainee to the complaint. These are (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Migdadi et al., 2012; Sato, 2010):

1. Denial of responsibility: a complainee denies responsibility for an action of which the institution was accused.
2. Explanation/excuse: a complainee justifies and defends him/herself by explaining the reasons for what has been done.
3. Showing empathy: sharing the complainer’s feelings and emotions. This strategy is usually used with complaints to an intermediary rather than to the offending party such as in business complaints.
4. Performing an appeal/counter complaint: a complainee argues back at a complainer by making a complaint as an objection.

5. Fixing the problem: resolving or attempting to resolve the problem.
6. Providing compensation: providing a refund or other types of compensation depending on the severity of the offensive action.

Unlike the above-mentioned strategies, a CSR might choose a neutral response such as silence or providing minimal feedback to the complainer's negative emotions while the latter is narrating the undesirable experience (Lam & Yu, 2013). Minimal though they might seem, this sort of response can be successful as they function as "acknowledgments, brief agreements and continuers" (Gardner, 1998, p.204). CSRs uttering 'Mm' or 'okay' with rising tones signal that they understood the customer's concern and encourage him/her to carry on. Silence, according to Lam and Yu, is also another common response strategy especially in English complaint calls. For the customer, silence may be viewed as a negative type of response that can increase his/her frustration. It can be interpreted as a sign reflecting the CSR's inability to deal with the conflict, especially when no other means is present in the telephone encounter that could mediate the communication such as nodding. CSRs, on the other hand, frequently resort to silence, often for the sake of conflict-avoidance.

A complaint response in cases of business communication is different from situations in which a relationship exists between the speaker and the hearer. In business interactions, favourable responses from the complainees are to be expected whatever the customer's degree of dissatisfaction (Linli, 2011; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011). Holmes and Stubbe (2003) mention that workers in workplace interactions tend to avoid direct confrontation with customers. Avoiding explicit confrontation, managing and maintaining the emotional stance and the interpersonal relationship with the customer, and maintaining a good working relationship are part of the agent's professional role in service encounters (Koester, 2006; Leelaharattanak, 2016). Thus, an acceptance of a complaint is the most common response to a business complaint (Guffey, 2003). In some cases, the customer service staff member might, however, refute the customers' claim in order to save the company's reputation and to maximize financial benefits.

Put differently, previous work on disagreement has shown that the context in which the interaction occurs determines whether or not to disagree (e.g., Marra, 2012; Sifianou, 2012; Angouri & Locher, 2012). In some contexts, disagreement is not appropriate such as formal reporting presentations or ritualized wedding ceremonies as opposed to decision-making and debates in which expressing disagreement is typically expected (Angouri & Locher, 2012).

Furthermore, there is a general agreement in the literature that disagreement has specific

recognizable characteristics: problem solving discourse involving participants displaying ‘opposing’ views (McRae, 2009; Angouri, 2012; Marra, 2012; Sifianou, 2012). It is an inherent and unmarked aspect of the process of business negotiation and problem solving in the workplace (Gray, 2001). Angouri, for instance, mentions that disagreement is associated with the genre of problem-solving meetings. Direct expressions of ‘opposing views’ expressed through ‘unmitigated disagreement’ are the norm. Discussing deviating opinions in the context examined by Angouri is an ‘acceptable’ and an ‘inherent’ part of the negotiation process, a contrary view towards disagreement to those who view it as confrontational and thus to be mitigated or avoided (e.g., Pomerantz, 1984; Waldron & Applegate, 1994). To this end, in recent research, Angouri and others (e.g., Locher, 2004; Angouri & Tseliga, 2010) argue that disagreement needs not only to be seen as a negative act. It can be a sign of intimacy and sociability such as among friends. Thus, it is necessary to consider the context in which it is present before judging it as an “unacceptable linguistic behavior” (p.1565).

In principle, the occurrence of disagreement seems to be highly expected in the case of the calls analyzed as complaints are a kind of problem-solving interactions. Speakers introduce and negotiate existing problems and possible remedial work (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997). In practice, however, it is very likely that CTs ‘avoid explicit disagreement’ with Cs. This is for two reasons. First, constraints of the CTs’ organisation require that the staff members comply with the Cs’ needs to maintain the contractual/long-term relationship between the Cs and the company by avoiding argumentation and carrying out actions that best serve the Cs’ interests. It is the CTs’ community norms (i.e., the norms of the CU to calm down the dissatisfied customer and attempt to return him/her to the state of satisfaction) (A.A.Auref, personal communication, April 7, 2016) that hinder the existence of disagreement. CTs are socio-professionally expected to satisfy and serve the customer’s needs (King, 1995). Second, the complaint calls analyzed are marked by “power imbalance” (Marra, 2012) with Cs being more powerful than CTs. Interactants are not “on an equal footing to express different points of views” (Angouri & Locher, 2012, p.1550). Cs can produce ‘on-record disagreement’ (Marra 2012) in a form of *laa laal aa* (no no no) to receive a ‘better’ solution than the one proposed by the CT. CTs, on the other hands, are only ‘intermediaries’ who report the problem and offer ‘bureaucratic’ solutions rather than increasing negative emotions, especially when conflictual disagreement may arouse feelings of anger, irritation, and annoyance (Jones, 2001; Langlotz & Locher, 2013). Because of this contextual constraint (limited power), CTs seek agreement (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and reinterpret attempts at disagreement by listening, calming,

showing seriousness in attempting to solve problems, apologizing, and using terms indicating emphatic agreement to satisfy the Cs' desire to be 'right' such as in *muqudiraah insiaajik ustadhii* (I totally understand why you are angry my good sir); behaviors that are expected in the competitive context of business institutions.

In other cases, a staff member may not be able to solve the customer's problem (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016). This might be due to poor and inadequate service systems that result in powerless staff members and ineffective recovery procedures. The negative, helpless feeling "encourages or rather induces employees to display passive, maladaptive behaviours, such as being unhelpful, withdrawing or acting uncreatively" (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008, p.50). The inability of a staff member to solve a customer's problem is referred to as "*the vicious circle of complaints*": the transmission of complaints from the customer service department to other departments, causing the customer service department to become isolated from making decisions (Fornell & Westbrook, 1984).

As with the strategies used for constructing/justifying a complaint, I adopted some of the responding strategies mentioned in the literature into my model but modified aspects that were necessary to address in the Saudi Arabic complaint calls corpus. The verbal strategies for responding to a complaint that were coded for in the data are illustrated with examples in Table 3.4 in section 3.3.2.2.

Though most of the strategies of constructing and responding to the complaint mentioned above are considered to be universal pragmatic strategies, certain contextual factors contribute to determining the modes of complaining. These are explained in the following section.

#### *2.2.4.3 Factors affecting the choice of complaint strategies*

Linguists generally agree that the choice of complaint discourse strategies of constructing and responding to a complaint is affected by four factors: social status between interlocutors (Tanck, 2002), the cultural norms of a society (Assallom, 2010; Bikmen & Marti, 2013; Sato, 2010), the power each interactant holds in the discourse (Singh, 2010) and the emotional state of the C (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Gustafsson, 2009).

The usage of a complaint verbal strategy is affected by the social distance between interlocutors. More indirect strategies of complaining are used for situations in which the social status of the complainee is higher than the complainer. On the other hand, direct strategies of

complaining are used in situations in which the social status of the complainer is higher than the complainee (Hartely, 1998; Tanck, 2002). For instance, in the complaint of a speaker to a professor, conveyance of a sense of urgency as in “*I need it right away*” does not seem appropriate for this type of relationship. On the other hand, in the scenario of a speaker complaining to a copy shop clerk, excusing self for imposition as in “*excuse me for interrupting*” does not appear while establishing context as in “*I placed an order last week*”, a request as in “*can you please look for it?*”, and finally conveyance of urgency are used<sup>25</sup> (Tanck, 2002).

The socio-cultural norms of the society constitute another factor that affects the speakers’ interactional behaviour of complaining (Assallom, 2010; Sato, 2010; Bikmen & Marti, 2013; Lam & Yu, 2013). Márquez Reiter (2005) argues that the strategies of reiteration of claim, expression of disagreement, and accusation are universal since several studies of different languages, social and situational contexts report them as constitutive of the speech act of complaint. Others, however, are shaped by the socio-cultural norms of the society. In the Uruguayan culture, strategies used to vent to a complete stranger are considered an appropriate mode of behaviour in task-oriented interactions, even if a remedial action is less likely to occur. Thus, one should not expect all of the complaint strategies listed in the literature to be general to complaint phone calls, though it is possible that some of their features may apply to other settings in different cultures.

The power each interactant holds in the discourse also affects the choice of complaint discourse strategies (Singh, 2010). Direct request may be seen as a preferred strategy when the speaker is exerting power over the hearer (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Similarly, refuting the complainer’s claim rather than showing an interest in resolving the problem is an expected strategy when CTs have “bureaucratic authority, whereas callers only have their subjective and therefore un-authoritative account of events” (Márquez Reiter, 2005, p.501).

In such situations, native Saudi Arabic speakers provide accounts (i.e., reasons and explanations after their requests) (Al-Gahtani, 2017). The aim of doing this ‘remedial work’ (Goffman, 1971) is to encourage the requestee to perform the requested action. Accounts given by native Saudi speakers after requests recall Heritage’s claims (1984) that accounts are

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<sup>25</sup> This may relate to the nature of the work. Copying is usually a fairly simple task with a close deadline. Other kinds of service may be more complex with less urgency so other kinds of modifications would then be expected.

conflict-avoidance strategies used to maintain social solidarity between the interactants and soften the illocutionary force of the request. In the context of this research, however, accounts serve a 'transactional' rather than a 'relational' purpose. Due to power imbalance (Angouri, 2012; Marra, 2012), when accounts are given by the C, they are to encourage the CT to perform the request by stressing the validity of the claim. Cs are in a position that allows them to legitimately state explicitly their requests, sometimes even with the absence of accounts, whereas CTs, as mentioned earlier in section 2.2.4.2, may aim to please the company's customers and avoid direct confrontation. To gain the customer's satisfaction is one of the major objectives of the Customer Complaint Centre (CCC) in the company (A.A.Auref, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

Finally, the emotional state of the C, which has been widely neglected in the research of complaints, is a factor that affects the choice of complaint strategies (Martin & White, 2005; Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Gustafsson, 2009; Lam & Yu, 2013). Complaint in conflictual service encounters is a highly emotionally charged event in which negative emotions are present from the beginning of the speech event and might be aggravated as the interaction develops. Thus, the emotional state of the C often overrides considerations of face (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016). Anger and frustration can be expressed either verbally or non-verbally using the strategies of threat, swear words, or raised voice. Apart from these direct realizations of negative emotions, customers can indirectly enact their negative emotions through realizations of 'affect' and 'negative appreciation' (Martin & White, 2005). The former refers to words realized as connotations of negative effects such as '*confused*' and '*not happy*'. With these, the customer's emotion is being assessed. The company/CSR can also be assessed through negative appreciation (equal to sarcasm/ridicule in Hartley, 1998 and Márquez Reiter, 2005) using words that have negative connotations such as '*it's fine when you take the money*' reflecting that the company only cares about making profit. These emotions not only affect the complainer but also the service provider who is challenged to interpret these negative emotions as the customer's way of venting his/her feelings and not as confrontational strategies to attack the service provider's face (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016).

All of the above-mentioned factors were taken into consideration when analyzing the complaint phone calls of this study. The findings of the study confirm that contextual factors such as these affect the speech behaviour of complaining as performed by native Saudi Arabic speakers in institutional discourse. Accordingly, a discursive approach for the analysis of institutional

complaints is developed in which the above-mentioned contextual determinations are taken into consideration (see section 6.1.4).

The third aspect of analysis in this study is related to the modifications used by Saudi Arabic customers to minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint. The discussion now turns to this.

### 2.2.5 Modification of complaints

To help minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint, a complainer can resort to the use of a number of modifications when complaining (House & Kasper, 1981; Leech, 1983; Trosborg, 1995; Hartley, 1998). When used, the speaker aims to avoid direct confrontation with the agent responsible for the offensive act (Leech, 1983).

Two types of modification are found in complaint exchanges: internal modifications (modality markers) and external modifications (supportive moves) (House & Kasper, 1981; Trosborg, 1995; Hartley, 1998; Geluykens & Kraft, 2003). Internal modifications are used within the head act of complaint. In some head acts, one modification could be used while other head acts might have two or more modifications. External modifications, on the other hand, occur within the immediate linguistic context.

#### 2.2.5.1 *Internal modifications/ modality markers*

When two utterances have the same level of directness, they can have different ‘politeness effects’ depending on the kind and number of modality markers used in an utterance (House & Kasper, 1981). Two types of modality markers are: downgraders and upgraders.

On the whole, the most comprehensive lists of downgraders and upgraders in the literature are those of House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995). Their lists are built on the same assumption: the kind and number of downgraders and upgraders in a complaint utterance affect the complainer’s politeness level.

Downgraders refer to modality markers that “play down the impact X’s utterance is likely to have on Y” (House & Kasper, 1981, p.166). They have the function of softening the consequences of the complaint and thus the complaint becomes ‘weak’ or ‘soft’. These are (House & Kasper, 1981, p.166; Trosborg, 1995, p.328):

1. Politeness markers: optional elements added to an utterance to show respect to the addressee such as *'please'*.
2. Play-down: syntactic devices used to soften the effect of the offence on Y. These could be:
  - a. past tense: *'I wondered if..'*
  - b. durative aspect marker: *'I was wondering..'*
  - c. negation: *'mightn't it be a good idea.'*
  - d. interrogative: *'mightn't it be a good idea?'*
  - e. modal: *'mightn't'*
3. Consultative device: optional devices by which X seeks Y's cooperation (usually ritualized formulas) such as *'would you mind if'*.
4. Hedges: adverbials by which X avoids specification. X leaves the option open for Y to complete his utterance such as *'kind of, sort of, somehow, and so on, more or less, rather'*.
5. Understater: modifiers that under-present the problem such as *'a little bit, a second, not very much, just a trifle'*.
6. Downtoner: adverbial sentence modifiers/ adverbials expressing tentativeness such as *'just, simply, possibly, perhaps, rather'*.
7. Committer/Subjectivizers: modifiers that express X's point of view to the state of affairs mentioned in the proposition. These might be *'I think, I guess, I believe, I suppose, in my opinion'*.
8. Forewarn: a device used by X to warn Y and to forestall the negative reactions of Y towards X's opinion. Usually it is a form in which a compliment to Y is followed by an offensive utterance. For example, *'you're a nice guy, but..., this may be a bit boring to you, but...'*.
9. Hesitator: formulas used to show Y that X has qualms about performing the act, such as the use of *'erm, er'*.
10. Scope-stater: elements used to express X's subjective opinion towards P as in *'I'm afraid you're in my seat, I'm a bit disappointed that you did P'*.
11. Agent avoider: avoiding direct attack by not referring directly either to X or to Y, such as using the passive *'this is just not done'* or impersonal constructions with *'people, they, one'*.
12. Cajolers: elements functioning to restore the harmony between the speakers such as *'you know, you see, I mean'*.
13. Appealers: elements (including tags) for the function of eliciting a response from the complainer such as *'okay, right, don't you think?'*.

Hartley (1998) lists mitigating devices used specifically in complaint realizations to soften the negative impact of the complaint. In fact, her list integrates three of Trosborg's (1995) devices (hedges, subjectivizers, and cajolers) and four of House and Kasper's (1981) devices (interrogation, tense, hesitators, and agent avoider). Hartley adds to these devices three new mitigating ones. These are (pp.74-75):

1. Lexical choice: occurs in situations in which the complainer could use a "stronger or more face-threatening word", but he/she decides to use "less" face-threatening lexical items as in "*what the heck...*" instead of "*what the hell...*".
2. Conditional: the complainer uses the conditional "if" which might entail that the complainer is hesitant to complain as in "*can I talk to you about the review you gave me? I would really wish if you would've said something to me about all of this*".
3. Relationship marker: the complainer decides to refer to a previous or current relationship between him/her and the complaine. The speaker is conveying the idea that the complaint is not as severe as it would be if no relationship exists between the participants. An example of that is "*just like old times, you are still messy!*".

Upgraders refer to modality markers that "increase the force of the impact an utterance is likely to have on the addressee" (House & Kasper, 1981, p.169). They have the function of strengthening the complaint by increasing the degree of blame on the complaine. Six types of upgraders are (House & Kasper, 1981; Trosborg, 1995):

1. Overstater: a way of increasing the force of an utterance by presenting P as excessive as in the use of '*absolutely, purely, terribly, frightfully*'.
2. Intensifier: adverbials that intensify part of the problem such as '*very, so, such, quite, really, just*'.
3. + (plus) committer or commitment upgrader: modifiers expressing commitment towards the problem such as '*I'm sure, certainly, obviously, really*'.
4. Lexical intensifier: words expressing a negative attitude including swear words such as '*that's bloody mean of you*', '*you've stained/ruined my carpet*', '*what the hell are you doing?*'
5. Aggressive interrogative: questions used by X to involve Y and thus increase the impact of X's utterance such as '*why haven't you told me before?*'
6. Rhetoric appeal: X attempts to prevent Y from P by using rhetorical appeals such as '*you must understand that, anyone can see that, it's common knowledge that*'.

When complaining, a complainer may not use any mitigating strategies because he/she aims to receive an express, effective response. As Leelaharattanarak's (2016) states, customers in service encounters strongly concentrate on commercial benefits (i.e., the best service for his/her money) and this means that they are less concerned about the agent's face needs and the smooth negotiation of the complaint. Moreover, the use of such mitigating devices may not be effective in eliciting the desired request when complaining (Ho, Henry, & Alkaff, 2012). Even though being polite may be highly valued in a society (Goffman, 1967; Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987), politeness in complaint interactions does not entail receiving what the speaker wants from the hearer. Direct requests in Malay Islamic culture, according to Ho et al., were rated as 'very effective' or 'effective' in getting the situation rectified as they were clear and assertive but not aggressive. At the same time, extremely direct requests such as '*give me back my \$600*' were ineffective because they were too aggressive and very blunt. That is to say that direct requests can lead to the achievement of the desired action even when they are not mitigated, but only when these requests do not border on rudeness or aggression. Indirect requests, therefore polite, may not necessarily be effective in terms of getting the appropriate response from the addressee.

In addition to the above-mentioned internal modifications, external modifications can fulfill the function of "successfully" supporting the validity of the complaint and consequently justifying the complaint (i.e., supportive moves). These are listed in the following section.

#### 2.2.5.2 *External modifications/ supportive moves*

As mentioned earlier, external modifications occur either before or after the head act (i.e., within the immediate context) rather than within the head act. For instance, a request occurs usually after the complainer states the problem. Stating the reasons for complaining is also a supportive move that often occurs before stating the actual complaint as a way of supporting the complaint and enhancing its validity.

A comprehensive list of external modifications that can have effective functions in supporting/justifying a complaint is proposed by Trosborg (1995). She distinguishes the following categories of supportive moves (p. 330):

1. Preparators: utterances that precede a complaint. They prepare the complainees and warn him/her of the upcoming complaint as in *'Listen, Lene, there is something I want to talk to you about; you remember our agreement, don't you?'*
2. Disarmers: for the sake of saving the complainees's face, a complainer might employ 'disarming strategies' such as *'Look, I don't want to be horrible about it'*.
3. Providing evidence: the complainer has to prove that the complainees did the offensive action as in *'It's not a copy. Look, I signed it, the signature is in ink, see'*.
4. Substantiation: facts proving that the consequences of the offensive act are bad as in *'The deadline's today'*.

House and Kasper's (1981) list of supportive moves has two more categories. These are (p. 169):

1. Steers: through which the speaker directs the discourse in a certain direction to fulfill his/her own intent. This is done by introducing one or two topics in common with the business conducted in the complaint. For example, if X wants to borrow Y's records, he/she would say *"would you like to put a record on?"*
2. Grounders: these are clauses that give justification of the act requested to be done (mentioned in the head act). For example, in the clause *"God, I'm thirsty. Get me a beer, will you?"*, the grounder *"God, I'm thirsty"* precedes the head act *"Get me a beer"*.

According to the impact they have on the addressee, supportive moves fit into three major categories (Geluykens & Kraft, 2003): solidarity-enhancing, neutral, and confrontational. Solidarity-enhancing moves are signs that show understanding such as apologies. Neutral supportive moves are those suggesting an alternative option or requests for conciliation. Confrontational moves are orders, warnings, swearing, and threats that aim to prohibit the situation from occurrence. With regards to the face-work involved in these types of supportive moves, solidarity-enhancing moves are less direct and hence, according to Geluykens and Kraft, are more useful in obtaining the desired effect than neutral moves; a point that contradicts Ho's et al. view (2012) (see section 2.2.5.1). Obviously, confrontational moves have the opposite effect: increasing the degree of the FTA and decreasing the chance of obtaining the requested act. It should be mentioned that such a finding is the result of analysing complaints in the context of interlanguage pragmatics, in which the norms of the first language (L1) affect the performance of complaints in a second language (L2). This means that they might not be

applicable to the context of institutional complaints in which the degree of explicitness and the intensity of the attitudinal language in problematic interactions may be tied up with the intensity of the complainer's emotions. These emotions should be considered and rapid remedial action, from a management perspective, is to be offered to maintain customer's loyalty (Brown & Maxwell, 2002; Mattsson, Lemmink, & McColl, 2004; Homburg & Furst, 2005).

In service encounters, Leelaharattanarak (2016) notes, a C's complaint can also be softened/aggravated via the use of nonverbal strategies. For instance, loudness and disaffiliative laughter are means used to aggravate the complaint. In contrast, silence and the use of a pleasant voice mitigate the complaint and reflect the C's concerns regarding the service provider's face needs.

In the current study, House and Kasper's (1981) and Trosborg's (1995) lists of modifications are used as they are built on the same assumption; that the usage of downgraders and upgraders affects the degree of politeness of a complaint. This makes it possible to integrate the two lists for a more comprehensive analysis of the modifications used in complaint exchanges.

Yet, two modifications are made to these lists. First, the term 'grader' replaces the term 'internal modification' to refer to any internal modification used in an utterance whether within the head act or within the strategic supportive acts. External modifications that can have effective functions in supporting/justifying a complaint are dealt with as strategies that are used to successfully strengthen the C's accusation. Second, the assumption on which the two lists are built, that the usage of downgraders and upgraders affects the politeness of a complaint, is refuted in this study. Graders do not always affect the C's politeness level. They are strategies to soften or aggravate the complaint (see section 6.1.2).

It should also be mentioned that all of the above-mentioned lists of modifications were identified after obtaining data through elicited role plays from English, Danish, and German native speakers. Thus, the applicability of these modifications to data gathered in a natural setting from a different culture (as is the case in the current study) requires certain modifications. I have added 'new' graders to address the Saudi Arabic complaint calls corpus. Graders coded in the data are listed in Table 3.5 in section 3.3.2.3.

The fourth and last aspect of analysis in this study is related to measuring the degree of a customer's dissatisfaction and its relation to the verbal complaint strategies and graders used

by the C. The following section reviews the only scale found in the literature to measure the customer's level of dissatisfaction in business complaints.

#### 2.2.6 Levels of dissatisfaction

Complaint in service encounters is a highly emotionally charged event (Gelukens & Kraft, 2016) where customers voice their anger and disappointment. Similarly, the negotiation of the complaint can have an impact on the emotional state of CSRs. The manifestation of this emotional state can be done using different means: verbal (for example swear words), voice quality (for example tone of voice and speed of speech), or through body actions (for example blushing) (Hood, 2006). Such unappealing situations call for expressions of emotions that vary depending on the complainer's level of dissatisfaction (Kreishan, 2018).

Research measuring intensity of emotions in problematic interactions (for example Tatsuki, 2000; Hood & Forey, 2008) typically draws on Appraisal Theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005). Generally, the exploration of the dynamics of emotions in these studies views language as a tool reflecting the rise and fall of emotions through lexico-grammar choices (Martin & Rose, 2006). Obligation, for example, can be realized either by the verb '*must*', the noun '*obligation*', or the verb '*insist*'. Attitude in complaint interactions can be reflected through wordings that carry either a positive or a negative value such as '*very crappy*' and '*absolutely pathetic*' (Martin & White, 2005; Hood & Forey, 2008). Even when explicit negative affect is absent in problematic interactions, C's emotions of being dissatisfied or frustrated can still be interpreted by graduation (Hood & Martin, 2007). The force of the meaning can be graded up or down such as grading up the extent of time using '*almost a month*', frequency '*very often*', or distance in time '*within 24 hours*'. The point to be made is that wordings used by Cs and CSRs enable a level of tracking of the flow of emotions. They are tools that can be considered when measuring the intensity of emotions. From a management perspective, it is argued that the recovery strategy of the problem should be adjusted according to the customer's level of dissatisfaction (Bell & Zemke, 1987; Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990; Johnston & Fren, 1999). 'Annoyed' customers can be satisfied by apology and the correction of the problem. However, 'victimized' customers also require empathy, atonement, and a follow-up.

The most comprehensive explanation of the levels of a customer's dissatisfaction in business complaints found in the literature is the one presented by Cunliffe and Johnston (2008).

To Cunliffe and Johnston (2008), a customer’s intensity of dissatisfaction is the factor that determines the severity level of a complaint. The more dissatisfied a customer is, the more likely that he/she will take a serious action such as leaving the company, encouraging others not to use its services, or insisting on complaining directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) rather than complaining generally to the company.

Cunliffe and Johnston (2008) propose a six-level scale of British customers’ intensity of dissatisfaction as Table 2.2 shows.

Table 2.2 Intensity levels of customer’s dissatisfaction (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008, p.54)

<b>Intensity of Dissatisfaction</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Satisfied (0)	A further inquiry after a complaint.	I believe...and would like...
Slightly dissatisfied (-1)	Customer intimates that he/she is not yet satisfied and/or suggests that minimal action will return him/her to a satisfied state.	Slightly concerned Not yet received satisfactory explanation
Annoyed (-2)	Customer expresses his/her displeasure or incredulity.	Express displeasure Feel disappointed Annoying and frustrating
Very annoyed (-3)	Customer expresses displeasure in a superlative form suggesting that the company will have no further recommendation for him/her.	Total dissatisfaction Extremely disillusioned Will not recommend to friends/family
Extremely annoyed (-4)	Customer expresses his/her concern or desperation. Making it clear that they will personally execute no further business with the company and also dissuade others.	Disgusted Extremely annoyed Dissuade others from doing business with the company
Absolutely furious (-5)	Customer appears incensed and/or exhibits threatening behaviour. Customer removes his/her business.	Absolutely disgusted, enraged, and threatening to complain to other industry bodies. Removal of customer’s business

In this scale, customers have a higher level of dissatisfaction when complaining to a person of a higher position in the company than those who complain through the standard channels (i.e., to the company) (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008). Complaints to the CEO range between annoyed and very annoyed while standard complaints have slightly dissatisfied and annoyed levels of dissatisfaction.

In Cunliffe & Johnston's (2008) data, whether complaining directly to a higher authority in the company or to the company generally, customers tended to have the same aim: the hope to have their expectations met. There was a slightly greater percentage of complainers anticipating that complaining to the CEO would "overturn decisions, speed things up, and change processes" (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008, p. 60).

Initially, my study built on Cunliffe and Johnston's (2008) scale to measure Saudi customer's level of dissatisfaction. Yet, modifications were necessary especially because the scale measured only 'one' level of dissatisfaction: the one that the C reached in the follow-up letters to previous complaints. Customers in the data from the current study had 'one/basic' or 'more/mixed' levels of dissatisfaction during the negotiation of the problem stage. Descriptions and examples of the levels of dissatisfaction coded in the data are given in Table 3.7 and Table 3.8 of section 3.3.2.4.

After presenting important linguistic considerations related to complaint strategies, graders, and levels of dissatisfaction (section 2.2), the discussion now moves on to present an overview of the methods employed in previous empirical studies on complaints.

## **2.3 Empirical considerations: Studies of complaint**

As with other speech acts, the speech act of complaint is realized differently from one culture to another. Several cross-cultural studies have investigated the differences and similarities in realizing and responding to the speech act of complaint. Examples of these studies are presented below in three sub-sections. The first sub-section (2.3.1) includes studies that compare the performance of complaint by native English speakers with speakers from a wide range of societies (East Asian and European languages). The second sub-section (2.3.2) presents studies analysing the performance of Arabs when complaining (different varieties of the Arabic language). The last section (2.3.3) lists the studies that analyse complaints in natural settings and authentic telephone exchanges.

### **2.3.1 Comparative studies of complaints (English to other languages)**

There have been a number of cross-cultural studies on complaints. Many of these investigate how learners produced complaints in their L1 and L2. As noted earlier, languages studied are: Chinese (Du, 1995; Arent, 1996), Danish (Trosborg, 1995), French (Kraft & Geluykens, 2002),

English (Murphy & Neu, 1996; Geluykens & Kraft, 2003), Hebrew (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, 1993), Japanese (Boxer, 1993; Tatsuki, 2000), Korean (Murphy & Neu, 1996), and Spanish (Pinto & Raschio, 2008).

From different languages and contexts, data in most comparative studies of complaints is collected using two controlled data tools: (a) role-plays (Trosborg, 1995; Sato, 2010); and (b) DCTs (Murphy & Neu, 1996; Moon, 2002; Tanck, 2002; Geluykens & Kraft, 2003; Chen et al., 2011; Wijayanto, Laila, Prasetyarini, & Susiati, 2013). Some use natural observation and semi-structured interviews (Prykarpatska, 2008; Farnia, Buchheit, & Salim, 2010).

To assess the abilities of nonnative speakers of English to perform ‘proper’ complaints in English, role-plays of situations similar to real-life ones were used by Trosborg (1995) with Danish learners of English and Sato (2010) with native speakers of Japanese. Situations were designed taking into consideration three factors: *social distance* (the degree of familiarity between the complainer and the complaine), *dominance* (whether the complainer is higher, lower, or equal in status to the complaine) and *severity* (the degree of threat directed to the complaine’s face). Results were analyzed using Trosborg’s (1995) coding system of strategies of complaint: (a) no explicit reproach, (b) expression of disapproval, (c) accusation and (d) blame. Both studies reported that errors were committed by learners of English regarding the proper strategies to be used according to social distance. In addition, the researchers claimed that the strategies used in the complaint exchanges by the complainers were affected by factors such as the participants’ personalities, reactions of the complainer to the complaine and vice versa, and the situation.

Some researchers use a different data collection tool: DCTs (Chen et al., 2011; Moon, 2002; Geluykens & Kraft, 2003; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Tanck, 2002; Wijayanto et al., 2013). Each of these studies compares a particular variety of English to another language. One of their substantial findings is that learners cannot perform fully native-like complaints.

Murphy and Neu (1996) compared the responses to an oral DCT of American native speakers of English and Korean non-native speakers of English. Four components of a complaint were distinguished: (a) an explanation of purpose, (b) a complaint, (c) a justification, and (d) a candidate solution/request. The study indicated that native and non-native speakers were similar in their production of three of these components (explanation of purpose, justification, and solution). Yet, they differed in their production of complaint. While American speakers tended to produce a complaint in each instance, such as “*I think, uh, it’s my opinion maybe the*

*grade was a little low*”, Korean subjects always produced criticism such as “*but you just only look at your point of view and uh you just didn’t recognize my point*”.

Tanck (2002) investigated the differences between native and non-native English speakers’ production of complaints. Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers and native American speakers were given DCTs in which they were asked to write their responses to six scenarios. English native and non-native speakers shared four components in their production of complaints. These were: (a) excusing self for imposition as in “*excuse me for interrupting*”; (b) establishing context or support as in “*I placed an order last week*”; (c) a request as in “*can you please look for it?*”; and finally (d) conveyance of a sense of urgency as in “*I need it right away*”. However, the quality of the components that were produced by native and non-native speakers of English differed. Non-native speakers of English produced linguistically correct but pragmatically false complaints in the sense that these responses lacked the face-threatening elements that enabled them to be perceived as complaints by the interlocutor. Non-native speakers of English, on the other hand, added a more personal element (an emotional plea) to convey urgency “*They are really important to me and I need to have a meeting in a couple of hours*”, which might be considered irritating in English-speaking American culture.

When complaining, socio-cultural factors such as gender and social distance potentially impact the realization of complaint performed by different groups (Geluykens & Kraft, 2003). The effect of social distance has been investigated by examining the correlation between the degree of intimacy between interlocutors and the frequency of occurrence of certain downgrades such as ‘*please*’ and some apologizing expressions such as ‘*excuse me*’ or ‘*I am sorry*’. In comparing British English speakers with English responses from native speakers of German, Geluykens and Kraft’s results indicated that there was a clear correlation between the two: the higher the social distance between the speakers, the more downgraders were employed. Gender of the speaker also influenced the use of downgraders. There was a tendency that female speakers used more downgraders than male speakers. On-record strategies (the least direct way of realizing a FTA by only hinting at it) and fewer confrontational supportive moves were used by female speakers. However, Geluykens and Kraft asserted that these findings were tentative and “far from clear-cut and do not hold across the board” (p.260).

Differences in the linguistic items and semantic content used by native and non-native speakers of English to express complaints were also addressed by Chen et al. (2011) and Moon (2002). Native speakers of English used more explicit complaints as opposed to non-native speakers

of English who mostly used unmarked forms in making a complaint. These findings supported the assumption that complaining is a ‘universal’ speech act, but culture-specificity is also observed in that the performance of complaints differed according to cultural norms and views of politeness (Chen et al., 2011). Thus, the speech act of complaint, Moon suggested, is to be taught in ESL classrooms. Non-native speakers of English need to be made aware of the strategies for performing successful complaints in communication. Some of these strategies are politeness strategies and their effects (Tatsuki, 2000). Learning chunks such as ‘*would you kindly*’ enables non-native speakers of English to produce less severe complaints in English especially in everyday situations where emphasis on indirectness is important to maintain harmony and interpersonal relationships (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987).

In regards to their own claim related to the importance of making foreign language learners aware of proper complaint strategies, Wijayanto et al., (2013) focused on the correlation between the social status level and social distance to the choice of politeness strategies. Analysis considered politeness strategies used in complaints in nine scenarios of an oral DCT performed by native Indonesian students learning English. These were analysed on the basis of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Results indicated that different status levels and social distances induced the same type of Brown and Levinson’s type of politeness. Yet, the frequencies of politeness strategies differed. Bald on record and attention to positive face were the most common politeness strategies across status levels and social distances. Off-record strategies were rarely used. When it comes to complaint strategies, Indonesian learners of English preferred very direct strategies especially when addressing lower-unfamiliar interlocutors. The choice of different politeness strategies in complaint interactions, Wijayanto et al. concluded, was the result of different social contexts, status levels, and social distances.

The last group of data collection tools used by researchers to study complaints were natural observations and semi-structured interviews. Rather than analyzing the performance of complaints by non-native speakers of a language, Prykarpatska (2008) and Farnia et al. (2010) analyzed the production of complaints by native speakers of American English, Ukrainian, and Malaysian. The two studies concluded with a similar finding that differences in the production of the speech act of complaint in different cultures could be justified on the basis of the different socio-cultural norms of a society. For instance, Ukrainian speakers used more direct and severe strategies of complaining to their friends while American speakers used more indirect and less severe strategies. It was argued that this was because the social distance between Ukrainian

friends was less than the distance between Americans. Ukraininas had more open and sincere friendships but Americans typically have a friendship type characterized by respect and personal autonomy (Prykarpatska, 2008).

Table 2.3 summarizes the major comparative studies of complaint discussed above, indicating the sample involved, method used for data collection, and major results.

Table 2.3 Summary of comparative studies of complaint

<b>Study</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Major results</b>
Trosborg (1995)	three groups of Danish learners of English and native speakers of English and Danish	role-plays	four complaint strategies were used by Danish learners of English: no explicit reproach, expression of disapproval, accusation, and blame.
Murphy & Neu (1996)	American native speakers of English and Korean non-native speakers of English	oral DCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• four components of a complaint were distinguished: an explanation of purpose, a complaint, a justification, and a candidate solution: request.</li> <li>• native and non-native speakers of English differed in their production of complaints.</li> </ul>
Tatsuki (2000)	native Japanese speakers	modified version of Picture-Frustration (P-F) questionnaire: a psychological test to measure aggression (Rosenzweig, 1978)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japanese native speakers of English were more aggressive when complaining in English than in Japanese.</li> <li>• politeness levels possible in English are to be taught to native Japanese speakers so as not to use a force when complaining that exceeds the desired intention.</li> </ul>

Tanck (2002)	native and non-native English speakers	DCTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• four basic components were typically found in the production of complaints: excusing self for imposition, establishing context or support, a request, and conveyance of a sense of urgency.</li> <li>• native and non-native speakers of English differed in their production of complaint.</li> </ul>
Moon (2002)	native and non-native speakers of English	a DCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• native speakers used more explicit complaints than to non-native speakers of English.</li> <li>• the speech act of complaint is to be taught in ESL classrooms.</li> </ul>
Geluykens & Kraft (2003)	native British, native German, and German-English speakers	a DCT	social variables such as gender and social distance correlated to the choice of complaint strategies.
Prykarpatska (2008)	native speakers of American English and native Ukrainian speakers	natural observation, participant observation, an open-ended questionnaire	Ukrainian speakers used more direct and severe strategies of complaining to their friends. American speakers used more indirect and less severe strategies.
Farnia, Buchheit, & Salim (2010)	native speakers of English and Malay	an open-ended DCT questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews	there were significant differences in the ways American and Malaysian native speakers complained due to the different socio-cultural norms of each society.

Sato (2010)	Japanese and Americans when complaining in their native and target languages (Japanese and English)	role-play	the choice of complaint strategies was affected by: the participants' personalities, the group and the situation.
Chen, Chen, & Chang (2011)	American and Chinese native speakers	a DCT	no difference was found between the American and the Chinese participants quantitatively in their use of complaint strategies. Yet, qualitative analysis indicated differences in the linguistic items and semantic content used by the two groups to express complaints.
Wijayanto et al., (2013)	Indonesian learners of English	oral DCT of nine scenarios with different status levels and social distances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the choice of complaint/politeness strategies varied across different status levels and social distances.</li> <li>• foreign language learners should be aware of politeness strategies in different social contexts to minimize aggressive interactions.</li> </ul>

In sum, the findings of the studies presented above indicate that the speech act of complaint exists in different cultures and among different social groups. In each culture investigated, researchers were able to distinguish different components of the speech act of complaint related to that culture. The common components shared among different cultures in the production of the speech act of complaint were *justification* and *suggesting a solution* in a form of a request (Chen et al., 2011; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Tanck, 2002).

The issue of culture-specificity is also tackled in some of these studies. Different cultures have different norms and views of 'politeness' in relation to the performance of complaints. For instance, complaining to a friend in the Ukrainian culture in an aggressive manner using

intensifying particles and slang words is considered an “appropriate” way of complaining while the same is not true in the American culture (Prykarpatska, 2008).

Moreover, the findings of the studies reviewed indicate that most researchers were interested in discovering the connection between complaints and language learning. Most of them adopted a pragmatic comparative approach to the study of complaint, comparing the performance of native speakers of English to those of learners of English (Chen et al., 2011; Moon, 2002; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Sato, 2010; Tanck, 2002; Trosborg, 1995). The findings reveal that most learners of English exhibited problems related to the choice of appropriate complaining and politeness strategies according to social distance (Sato, 2010; Tanck, 2002; Trosborg, 1995; Tatsuki, 2000; Wijayanto et al., 2013). As Tanck (2002) states, for achieving optimal pragmatic success, producing and comprehending complaints means taking into account the relationship between speakers as well as the social, and cultural context of the situation.

### 2.3.2 Complaints in Arabic speaking societies

To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, only six recent studies have considered the issue of Arabic complaints performed in various situations and by different social groups. Three studies analyze the performance of complaints by native Arab learners of English (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Kreishan, 2018), one analyze the performance of Jordanian complaints by native Jordanian Arabic speakers in everyday situations (Saleh, 2010), another compares complaint strategies by two groups of native Arabic speakers using their native language, that is Arabic (Al-Shorman, 2016), and the last analyzes institutional complaints as performed by native Saudi Arabic speakers (Badghaish, Fletcher, & Stanton, 2012). The major findings of these studies, and the ones related to the current research, are explained in the coming paragraphs.

In general, analysis suggests the style of Arab learners of English when complaining is affected by the socio-cultural norms of the Arab culture (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Kreishan, 2018). When performing a complaint in Arabic, Arab speakers consider the social status of the addressee before complaining. If the complainer is of a higher social status than the accused (in a situation of the speaker complaining to her younger sister about deleting some important data from the laptop), complaints are more ‘direct’ and ‘impolite’ due to the social dominance of the complainer over the hearer. On the other hand, if the complainer is of a lower social status than the complaine (in a situation of a daughter complaining to her mother who

had refused to allow her to have dinner with her friends in a restaurant), complaints are more ‘indirect’ and ‘polite’. With equal social status (in a situation of the complainer’s friend who damaged an expensive dress of the complainer), remaining silent is used as an indication of ‘respect’ and ‘strong friendship’. Silence in the Arabic culture is found to characterize a person as being “socially acceptable, hospitable, and polite” (Assallom, 2010, p.48).

When performing complaints in English, Arab learners of English regularly performed inappropriate complaints due to the pragmatic transference of the Arab cultural complaint norms to English (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006). With situations in which interlocutors had a power difference and the degree of the offensive act was high, native speakers of English used a high level of politeness. With the same situations, Sudanese Arab learners of English<sup>26</sup>, however, used more direct complaint forms which did not suit the context.

Stressing the finding of Al-Tayib Umar (2006) related to the transference of native cultural and social norms by Arab learners of English, a very recent study by Kreishan (2018) observed differences in the strategies used by Jordanian undergraduate learners of English and native English speakers. A written DCT containing ten everyday complaint situations involving different social relationships and power was distributed to undergraduate Jordanian learners of English. Comparing these strategies to those used by native English speakers, Kreishan asserted that Arabic socio-cultural values affected the choice of complaint strategies and semantic formulas. Hints, requests, and annoyance rather than direct accusations were the most commonly used complaint strategies. This is because, as Kreishan mentioned, these strategies were less direct and more polite. Jordanian culture (and Arabic culture in general) are based on a collectivism in which group harmony is very important (Huwari & Al-Shbooul, 2015). With the semantic formula, vows were frequently used since in Arabic culture these words are used to convince the listener and indicate the speaker’s sincerity. Defining relationships was also frequently used when making complaints. ‘*Dear friend*’, ‘*my father*’, and ‘*lovely sister*’ were included “for showing respect, gaining the approval of interlocutors, and developing an aspect of socialization” (p.75). Unlike Americans, Jordanian learners of English also provided detailed responses when addressing interlocutors of equal social status as friends, but shorter and more formal ones when addressing their professors who were of a higher status. Because of this, Kreishan emphasized the importance of pragmatic knowledge for L2 learners. The lack

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<sup>26</sup> Sudanese Arabs are the Arabic-speaking majority population of Sudan. They are predominantly Muslim and most of them speak the Sudanese Arabic dialect (Wikipedia, 2014). There are many cultural similarities between Sudanese and other Arabic speakers.

of knowledge about English cultural norms and practices may cause intercultural and interethnic communication failures (Sattar, Lah, & Suleiman, 2011).

The three studies of Arab learners of English reveal common features of Arabs' style when complaining<sup>27</sup>. These include (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Kreishan, 2018): (a) frequent use of the imperative form such as "*Go to the waiting line*", (b) a direct style of complaining even when a power difference existed between interlocutors, such as "*why don't you send the recommendation letter?*" uttered by an employee to his/her boss, (c) the use of impolite expressions in complaints of higher to lower social status such as '*ghabiiyaah*' (stupid) and '*qaaliilatadab*' (impolite), and (d) the use of vows and religious words such as "*I have faith in Allah*" to convince and show sincerity.

When it comes to the performance of complaints in Arabic by Arab native speakers in ordinary conversations, oaths were frequently used (Saleh, 2010). Long complaint exchanges characterized Jordanian Arabic complaints as more than one complaint strategy was used in each situation. Like Saleh, Al-Shorman (2016) noticed the use of long complaint sequences by native Arabic speakers. It is argued that this was because they wanted to explain the situation clearly to the listener without any ambiguity. What is even more important in Al-Shorman's study is his finding that differences in complaint strategies can exist among people who belong to almost the same culture (i.e., Jordanian and Saudi both being Islamic Arabic cultures). Saudi participants were more conservative and more direct than Jordanian speakers in the data and this consequently was reflected in their complaint behaviour. Though this observation was asserted by Al-Shorman, it was not explained clearly with examples from his data. The author concluded that it is the role of fellow researchers to investigate reasons behind the differences in language use among people in cultures that share the same nature especially because "these areas are not capitalized on by many researchers" (p.224).

In investigating complaints that occurred in service situations in face-to-face interactions, Badghaish et al. (2012) noted that Saudi Arabic customers' complaints were characterized as being highly-emotional expressions of feelings of anger, dissatisfaction, and aggressiveness. They frequently used expressions of being cheated followed by a threatening action from the customer (Badghaish et al., 2012). Saudi customers expected more respect to be shown to them

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<sup>27</sup> These features are evident when Arab speakers complain in Arabic. When they complain in English, strategies differ. As is clear in the results of the studies presented, Arab speakers use 'direct' complaints when complaining in Arabic, especially in institutional or everyday situations (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010) but they use 'indirect' complaint when they complain in English (Kreishan, 2018). This might be due to lack of knowledge on how to produce appropriate complaint in English.

from the service staff and frequently expected compensation. Finally, Saudis preferred to speak immediately to the manager rather than to the service desk.

Table 2.4 summarizes the major studies analysing Arabic complaints discussed above.

Table 2.4 Summary of studies on Arabic complaint

<b>Study</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Major results</b>
Al-Tayib Umar (2006)	native British speakers of English and advanced Sudanese Arab learners of English	a DCT	some components of complaints were: excusing self for imposition, establishing context or support, a request, conveyance of sense of dissatisfaction, and warning or threat.
Assallom (2010)	Saudi female university students	a DCT	female Saudi students considered the social status of the addressee when performing a complaint.
Saleh (2010)	Jordanian native speakers of Arabic	a DCT	long complaint exchanges characterized the Jordanian Arabic complaints.
Badghaish, Fletcher, & Stanton (2012)	Saudi nationals and Filipino guest workers	focus groups, interviews, and observation	Saudi Arabic customers' complaints were characterized as being highly-emotional expressions of anger, dissatisfaction, and aggressiveness.
Al-Shorman (2016)	Saudi and Jordanian native speakers of Arabic	a DCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• elaborated examples marked complaint exchanges of Jordanian and Saudi speakers complaining in Arabic.</li> <li>• differences existed in the complaint behaviour among speakers who belong</li> </ul>

			to almost the same culture (i.e., Saudi and Jordanian).
Kreishan (2018)	Jordanian undergraduate EFL learners of English	a DCT and role-plays	the choice of complaint strategies and semantic formulas by the participants was affected by the social norms of the Arabic culture.

Generally speaking, the findings of the studies conducted on complaints performed by Arab speakers indicate that, just as with other languages, Arab researchers are able to identify components of the speech act of complaint used by Arab speakers in different situations when complaining either in their native language (i.e., Arabic) or a L2 (i.e., English). Although there exist general principles related to the speech act of complaint (such as it is used to express an unfavourable situation and aims to receive a solution), strategies used by Arab speakers when complaining differed according to the cultural norms of the Arab societies. Therefore, considering the cultural values and norms of a society is crucial for understanding the preference for certain complaint strategies in a particular context, an issue which the current research aims to deal with when justifying the strategies used by Cs and CTs in their complaint interactions.

It should be noted that for the studies reviewed herein, the main instrument used to gather data for analysing complaint strategies in Arabic has been DCTs (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Saleh, 2010; Al-Shorman, 2016; Kreishan, 2018). This could limit the reliability of the data. This is because forcing speakers to perform a certain speech act within a limited time and in limited situations can lead to collecting rather inauthentic data. Since the data gathering method of the current study avoids such a weakness, it is hoped that the ‘natural’ data gathered from segments of spontaneous talk sheds new light on the realization of the complaint speech act in the Saudi culture.

In addition, most scholars mentioned above focus on comparing and contrasting how complaints differ when used by native speakers and learners of a foreign language. Few studies tackle the issue of how complaints are performed by native speakers of Arabic (Badghaish et al., 2012; Saleh, 2010; Al-Shorman, 2016). Very few studies have been conducted using authentic data of telephone conversations by native speakers of Arabic (amongst other languages) in the workplace context as explained in the following sub-section.

### 2.3.3 Complaints in natural settings and authentic telephone exchanges

Another body of work focuses on complaints as they occur in natural settings in personal contexts (for example, Drew, 1998; Laforest, 2002; Haakana, 2007; Drew & Walker, 2009; Dersley & Wotton, 2010) and professional contexts (for example, Roulston, 2000; Heinemann, 2009; Vasquez, 2009). In contrast to studies that adopt an interlanguage perspective (see section 2.3.1), these studies often adopt CA or discursive psychology. Data are not elicited but produced spontaneously by individuals. The focus of most of these investigation is the performance and negotiation of complaints over several turns in natural settings.

Complaint sequences in daily communication comprise adjacency pairs (Drew & Walker, 2009; Dersley & Wotton, 2010). FPP is the initial complaint followed by SPP that either affiliates or disaffiliates with the complaint. However, complaining in personal contexts, as Drew and Walker (2009) mention, is not always located in or restricted to a single turn. The complainer might narrate events at several points of the interaction during which complaints are formulated.

Dersley and Wotton (2010) stated that audio and audiovisual recordings of complaints in personal contexts had initial and subsequent actions. Three of these were: (1) outright denials in which the complainees denied that he/she performed the complained-about action; (2) implicit denial of performing the complained-about action immediately followed by an explicit excuse for its occurrence. The complainer was attempting to justify his/her behaviour; (3) implicit denial followed by an explicit different characterization of the action to be one where the complainees was less at fault or even innocent. As evident, all of these initial responses to complaints are marked by denial from the receiver of the complaint either explicitly or implicitly. Dersley and Wotton went even further. They mentioned that the recipient's response to the complaint affects the ways in which the ongoing discourse unfolds. This recalls Drew and Holt's claim (1988) that "formulating a version of the trouble in a complaint is shaped by interactional contingencies, such as the response of the complaint recipient" (p.399). According to the response of the recipient to a complaint, a complainer may feel the need to adjust subsequent turns of talk.

In personal contexts, personal complaints are usually preceded by prior happenings. These are "pertinent discussions" that prepare the grounds for making the complaint (Dersley & Wootton, 2010). The occurrence of these prior happenings, however, does not always apply to

institutional complaints which are usually “bounded sequences” (Drew, 1998). Complaints in these contexts are less likely to be preceded by prior to complaint sequences because complaint “forms the focus for a distinct topic with an easily identifiable beginning and end” (Dersley & Wootton, 2010, p.380). Hui (2014), however, has a different view<sup>28</sup>. He argued that the pre-sequence is an ‘optional’ element in institutional discourse that may precede the ‘request for assistance’ stage. When this occurred, the pre-sequence functions as a signal to indicate that the extended sequences of requesting and negotiation are about to start. In other words, what occurs before a complaint, according to Drew and Walker (2009), prepares the “ground for possible complaint- is salient to securing or attempting to secure, a recipient’s affiliation” (p.2403). Examples of optional pre-sequence elements in service encounters discourse are “*I just wanted to enquire please*”, “*I just need to ask you something*”, and “*I got a question to ask you*” (Hui, 2014, p.117).

Particularly relevant to the current research are the interesting insights provided by researchers in relation to the role of narratives by individuals in institutional discourse (Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000; Holmes, 2005; Holmes & Marra, 2005; Vasquez, 2009). Generally speaking, in casual settings, narratives can serve a number of different functions: to complain, to construct, to entertain, or to resolve tensions. Haakana (2007) mentions that complaint stories in personal contexts report the thoughts of the narrator. These thoughts show how the complainer evaluates the consequences of the action complained about, consequently, the complainer is also guiding the recipient to evaluate the story for the sake of pushing the latter to provide responses that address the grievance in the narrated stories.

Specifically examining the functions of complaint narratives in the workplace discourse, Vasquez (2009) investigated the interrelation between a complaint story (the narrative) and linguistic politeness between a teacher and her supervisor. She found that the complainer (i.e., the teacher) tended to downgrade her complaint when she received a less than enthusiastic response using phrases such as “*it’s fine*” and “*I’m not so worried about*”. More importantly, indirectness marked narratives in the institutional interaction as a politeness strategy which enabled the complainer to register a complaint but not in an explicit way. This is especially important when interactants are not of an equal status of power (in Vasquez’s study the supervisor had expert power and institutional authority over the teacher). Bamberg (2007)

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<sup>28</sup> It should be mentioned that Hui’s finding (2014) was reached after the analysis of different types of calls (routine calls, atypical calls, and some complaint calls) to a call centre and not just complaint calls. The current research, which is restricted to analysing complaint calls to a CU, may disagree Hui’s finding.

asserts that narratives are context-sensitive just as complaints. Therefore, when analyzing narrative, context is to be considered along with functions that are “embedded in sociocultural practices” (p.167).

More recently, telephone conversations in commercial contexts have attracted the attention of linguists due to several properties they exhibit (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002). One of these features is that telephone conversations are highly structured (Archer et al., 2012). However, the structure of telephone conversations differs. The type of call (a private or a business one) necessitates the use of specific patterns and linguistic formulas.

A socio-pragmatic analysis was done by Márquez Reiter (2005) and Orthaber and Márquez Reiter (2011) of authentic institutional telephone complaints by Uruguayan and Slovenian customers. Participants were *complainants* (customers who were expected to deliver a feeling of annoyance and dissatisfaction through telephone calls), and the *complaint recipient* (the institutional agent who was supposed to answer the call and might or might not satisfy the customer’s demands). Analysis focused on explaining the social norms that controlled the interactions of a particular group of people in a certain context and the verbal strategies used by Cs/CTs to complain/respond to a complaint.

Complaints were uttered explicitly in the opening sequences of the calls as reasons given by the Cs for their calls. Throughout the call, certain verbal strategies were identified for constructing and responding to complaints. These were (Márquez Reiter, 2005): (a) mention urgency/immediacy of needs; (b) reiterate claim; (c) express ridicule; (d) express disagreement; (e) accuse company of fault; (f) issue threats, and (g) seek solidarity (see section 2.2.4.1 for explanation of these strategies). CTs might refute C’s complaint either because the company did not offer the requested type of service or the C’s claim differed from the information in the company’s system.

Cs might resort to techniques that enhance the chances of accepting their complaints (Márquez Reiter, 2005). They stated “factual” information with emotions, interpersonal discourse markers, and endearment terms to appeal to the addressee’s sense of solidarity. However, CTs reacted in a formal, non-affiliative, and depersonalized manner.

A model of analyzing institutional complaint exchanges in Jordanian Arabic was proposed by Migdadi et al. (2012). A complaint call was typically to start with an announcement of the topic followed by stating the problem, reiterating the problem, and lastly requesting a solution.

Responding to these complaints was by using four major strategies: asking questions, showing empathy, addressing authorities on air, and promising to help.

Similar to Márquez Reiter's (2005) and Orthaber and Márquez Reiter's (2011) findings, Jordanian Arabic Cs tried to promote solidarity with the CTs so that the latter believed in the validity of their complaints. Cs in all stages of complaint used emphatic expressions and statements of criticism to lead the CTs to express affiliation with their complaints.

Interest in investigating the interpersonal intensity in problematic interactions led Hood and Forey (2008) to analyze the contributions of both Cs and CSRs in initiating, maintaining, and adjusting interpersonal intensity. Focus was directed towards the expression of emotions, the rise and fall of these emotions throughout the calls, and how speakers managed to end the call 'civilly' even when a solution had not been achieved (p.391). Because of the different roles Cs and CSRs had in complaint interactions, different linguistic choices were available. For the former, and using the terms of Appraisal Theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005), more instances of affect (expressions of feelings or emotion such as '*stress*' and '*love*') and judgment (expressions of evaluation of the character or behavior of a person such as '*not right*' and '*very creepy*') were found in their data. For the latter, the only explicit attitude expression used was appreciation (appraisal of an entity of some kind). In terms of graduation, Cs graded up emotions by expressions such as '*must*', '*need to*' or '*every time*' whereas CSRs graded down the force of the attitude using the concessive contractors '*just*' and '*actually*' rather than the concessive conjunction '*but*'. Arguably, CSR's talk should have the function of establishing "a kind of attitudinal equilibrium in interaction with the caller" (p.397). More importantly, Hood and Forey pointed to a successful strategy that CSRs could employ to contract the emotional intensity of Cs during heightened peaks of emotions: a period of silence followed by a quietly spoken '*yea maam*'.

Similar to the interest of Hood and Forey's (2008) in investigating the management of interpersonal intensity in problematic interactions, Hui (2010) examined expressions of interpersonal meaning transmitted through a telephone exchange between a customer and a CSR from an insurance company outsourced call centre in the Philippines. Unlike Hood and Forey, Hui's focus was only on expressions of emotions used by the C and did not analyze the ways in which the CSR dealt with emotions. It was found that solidarity building language was a tool used by customers for a quick resolution in their favour. The C, a native speaker of English, employed certain lexical choices aimed at evoking empathy and hence gaining the

CSR's understanding, support, and agreement. '*Do not you have my Nov 16 letter?*' was a turn used not only to vent C's anger but also to tell the horrific story (i.e., the insurance company's inefficiency) that the C had experienced during recent months. The same applies to the use of the imperative '*please understand*' through which the C wished the CSR to agree with.

Understanding the function behind the use of such expressions in complaint calls helps management in adjusting complaint response procedures to achieve customer satisfaction (Johnston, 2001; Crosier & Erdogan, 2001). This knowledge also enables CSRs to anticipate the peaks in the C's emotional state and employ strategies that can raise customer's satisfaction.

Analyzing the linguistic strategies CSRs employed and customers used in problematic calls in English and Cantonese, Lam and Yu (2013) correlated, through the use of the conceptual framework of systematic functional linguistics (SFL), text analysis to the analysis of the social context. Due to differences in English-speaking and Chinese cultures, similarities and differences were present in strategies for constructing and responding to complaint calls to an international healthcare insurance organization in Hong Kong. Minimal feedback was a strategy used in both cultures to respond to complaints while silence was only used by English speakers. Complainers' negative emotions were scaled up in both languages with different means: negative affect in English calls (i.e., lexical items reflecting the customer's negative emotions) and judgment in Cantonese calls (assessment of CSR's negative qualities as being inexperienced and making mistakes). Lam and Yu attributed these differences to cultural differences between English and Chinese people: English customers tended to make complaints personal whereas Chinese customers complained by referring to social values such as honesty and cunning.

In a more recent study, Geluykens and Kraft (2016) adopted a mixed method analysis for analyzing authentic complaint telephone calls to a train company. This study was designed to discover the inner mechanisms of complaints behaviour in conflictual service encounters. One of the major findings was that complaint in service encounters were highly context-sensitive. The social distance between speakers played a significant role in complaint production. Moreover, complaints were found to be a speech act that cannot stand alone in conflictual discourse. It was one of many speech acts that stretched over several turns and was surrounded by other speech acts such as requests and apologies. Finally, Geluykens and Kraft claimed that although there was no stable lexical form of a complaint, there were specific strategies that

characterized a complaint exchange and were considered core complaint strategies such as expressions of negative emotions, blaming, and demanding to speak to a manager.

Table 2.5 summarizes the major studies analysing complaints in natural interactions and authentic institutional telephone calls discussed above.

Table 2.5 Summary of studies on complaints in natural settings and authentic institutional telephone exchanges

Study	Subjects	Instrument	Major results
<b>Complaints in Natural Settings (personal &amp; professional)</b>			
Vasquez (2009)	supervisors and teachers teaching EAP to international university students in the US	a naturally post-observation audio-recorded meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• face work interacts with complaints in workplace interactions.</li> <li>• complaint narratives are shaped according to contextual parameters (e.g., participants' relationship, socio-cultural practices, and the responses of the receiver of the complaint).</li> </ul>
Drew & Walker (2009)	native English speakers who disclose their negative stance about an action of personal relevance	eighty indirect complaint sequences	complaining is launched through a series of moves in which the complainable matter is stated and tropicalized in subsequent turns to encourage the recipient to participate.
Dersley & Wotton (2010)	native English speakers	two hours and 40 minutes of authentic recordings of non-institutional complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• initial replies to complaints are some form of denial: "<i>didn't do it</i>" and "<i>not at fault</i>".</li> <li>• when complaining, one of the parties should be the principle complainer and the other the compalinee. They should keep to the alignments to preserve relations between them. When these alignments breakdown (i.e., parties start complaining against each other), the identified shape of the sequences of complaint radically changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional Telephone Complaints</b>			
Márquez Reiter (2005)	Uruguayan customers and caregivers	authentic telephone calls	verbal strategies used for complaint were: mention urgency of needs, reiterate claim, express ridicule, express disagreement, accuse company of fault, issue threats, and seek solidarity.

Hood & Forey (2008)	US customers and CSRs in an off-shore call centre in the Philippines	seven authentic complaint calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explicit attitude is expressed more often by Cs than CSRs.</li> <li>• CSRs can reduce the level of C's emotional intensity by not setting up an oppositional position and by remaining silent during moments of peaks of emotions.</li> </ul>
Hui (2010)	a customer and a CSR from an insurance company outsourced call centre in the Philippines	one complaint call	solidarity building language was a tool used by customers for a quick resolution in their favour.
Orthaber & Márquez Reiter (2011)	Slovenian native speakers	authentic calls to a Slovenian public transport company	complaints were uttered explicitly in the opening sequences of the calls as reasons given by the Cs for their calls.
Migdadi, Badarneh, & Momani (2012)	native speakers of Jordanian Arabic	two-hour radio phone-in program	four strategies were discovered to be used as model of analyzing the complaint exchanges. These were: announcing the topic, stating the problem, reiterating the problem, and requesting a solution. Responses were performed by four major strategies: asking questions, showing empathy, addressing authorities on air, and promising to help.
Lam & Yu (2013)	English and Cantonese customers; CSRs in an international healthcare insurance organization in Hong Kong	nine English, three Cantonese authentic telephone calls; text analysis; ethnographic data (observations, field notes, interviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• minimal feedback and silence were strategies used by CSRs to ease tension.</li> <li>• similarities/differences in complaint strategies reflect cultural differences on how negative emotions are to be expressed.</li> </ul>
Geluykens & Kraft (2016)	customers and employees in the train company 'Eurostar'	seven complaint calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complaints in service encounters were highly context-sensitive.</li> <li>• a complaint is characterized by certain complaint strategies.</li> </ul>

Though the strategies of constructing/responding to a complaint mentioned above are identified after the analysis of authentic telephone complaints, these strategies might not be generalizable to all languages. In the case of my research, strategies might not be generalizable to other Arab speakers speaking different varieties of the Arabic language than those analysed in the studies found. Each Arabic dialect (colloquial spoken varieties such as Saudi Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, or Iraqi Arabic) arguably vary in what is considered a proper complaint. This means that there is a need to investigate further the style of complaining in the varieties of Arabic which have not been studied yet or those that need further investigation, such as Saudi Arabic.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In the light of the above review, a number of observations can be made about the speech act of complaint. First, for the purpose of analyzing discourse in institutional settings, natural data proves to be the most desirable type of data when certain factors in the context have been taken into consideration. Second, the speech act of complaining exists in different cultures but different cultures perceive polite behaviours in complaints differently. Third, social and pragmatic factors such as social distance, social status, and the preconditions of each complaint (i.e., its context) affect the choice of strategies used to complain.

Previous research on complaints provides valuable information on the pragmatic aspects of this speech act. It also identifies the linguistic and cross-cultural differences between English speakers and speakers of other languages when complaining. However, and in spite of the keen interest in research on complaints, studies of the speech act have mainly focused on a limited range of languages such as English, Danish, and Uruguayan. Few studies have examined the speech act of complaint in Arabic spoken or written discourse (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Badghaish et al., 2012; Migdadi et al., 2012; Saleh, 2010; Al-Shorman, 2016; Kreishan, 2018).

Research on conversational strategies used in complaints and their responses in the Saudi Arabic business domain is almost absent in the literature of institutional contexts. No study, to the best of my knowledge, has attempted to shed light on the features of Saudi Arabic telephone complaints to an in-house call centre within the institutional context of furniture trading.

A study of this type will be a starting point for bridging the gap in the literature on Saudi Arabic business complaints and make a contribution to this area of inquiry based on insights derived from the foregoing review.

## **CHAPTER THREE Methodology**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology followed in conducting the present research. It starts with a description of the data format, followed by an explanation of the method used for data collection. The third section of this chapter explains the methodological approach used for data analysis, the framework adopted for data analysis, and the procedures employed.

#### **3.1 Data format**

The study is based upon a data set consisting of ninety anonymized electronic audio recordings of 25 hours of naturally occurring complaint telephone calls to a two-month old in-house CU of the Customer Care Centre (CCC) of a FTC in Saudi Arabia. These anonymized calls were recorded by the electronic system of the Company's Call Centre between the months of February and September, 2015, and copied and saved to compact discs (CDs). Participants of the study, thus, were the general public (Saudi customers) who had complained about issues related to the services of this company and the institutional staff members (service providers) working in this company. Calls involved Cs and CTs who conversed in the same regional dialect: colloquial Saudi Arabic.

The collected complaint phone calls which constitute the research data of this study have the following seven characteristics:

1. They are natural interactions between the customers and the CU staff members. Natural interactions are defined as authentic interactions which are structured according to the participants' views and needs rather than the goals of the researcher (Singh, 2010).
2. They are 'direct complaint' phone calls in which the FTA was directed by the customer towards the service provider as a representative of the company responsible for the perceived offense, who is capable of solving the problem (Linli, 2011; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1985). The customer was dissatisfied with an issue related to the company and tended to explain his/her feelings of unhappiness, annoyance, or disapproval in order to achieve the requested remedial action by the end of the call.
3. They express 'institutional' or 'transactional' complaints rather than 'personal' or 'private' ones. Institutional complaints are those with a goal-oriented nature where "the speakers are

primarily concerned with transactional goals” (Singh, 2010, p.10). Edwards (2005) describes institutional complaints as those “requiring or orienting to formal mediation procedures” (p.25). They are relevant to their contexts and require a specific action related to their institutions.

4. They are exchanges displaying a variety of topics complained about (late assembly, late delivery, not coming to an agreed-upon appointment, or mishandling of urgent cases, etc.). Some calls had one complaint topic while others had two problems expressed in the same call.
5. They are calls of different lengths. The shortest was one minute and 53 seconds and the longest was 41 minutes and a second. The median call length was about 10 minutes.
6. All institutional staff members in the CU who answered the calls were females.
7. The C’s intensity of dissatisfaction varied. This refers to how severe the degree of the customer’s feelings of annoyance and dissatisfaction was.

Applying Márquez Reiter’s (2008) features of situational context for describing service calls to the current research, the characteristics of the research data could be presented as follows:

Table 3.1 Features of the calls of the study

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Type of calls	mainly ‘institutional’ or ‘transactional’ rather than ‘personal’ or ‘private’
(main) purpose	to express displeasure and annoyance about a matter caused by the company that resulted in unfavorable effects to the customer for which the latter is seeking a solution
Roles of participants	service representative and customer institutional and non-institutional participant
Dialect spoken	Colloquial Saudi Arabic

As mentioned earlier, the study is totally based on ‘natural’ interactions between the customers and the staff members of the CU. They were ‘spontaneous’ interactions performed with no interference from the researcher. Several researchers have strongly emphasized the importance of using spontaneous recorded speech when studying a speech act in any language (Boxer,

1993; Holmes, 1990; Laforest, 2002; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010; Wolfson, 1986). Natural data collected for this study reflects real language interactions and presents a direct reflection of how Saudi phone complaints are performed and perceived by Saudi native speakers. It is also a more appropriate type of data than data collected through DCTs because the researcher's aim is to discover the 'actual' use of language and the rules that control complaint interactions (Chen et al., 2011). While DCTs could capture a large amount of data in a relatively short time, their analysis reflects what a native speaker's intuition tells him/her to do rather than what he/she actually does (Boxer, 2010). Simply put, a corpus of *true complaint interactions*, as Laforest (2002) asserts, reflects more 'surprising' and 'broader' complaints as they are collected without being restricted to a number of situations imagined by the researcher.

Apart from its advantages, dealing with naturally occurring complaints has its disadvantages. Collecting and transcribing large amounts of 'natural' complaint data was time-consuming. The researcher had to wait six months to receive the calls from the company and spent four months transcribing. In addition, analyzing this type of data was also difficult. This is for two reasons: (a) most calls were relatively *long* interactional exchanges; and (b) these natural complaint exchanges were *highly unstructured*. It proved impossible to identify a *unified* definite and organized conversational structure of moves and sub-moves that each call adhered to. Though they shared some basic conversational sequences of moves, each differed from the other in its sub-components. Likewise, different linguistic forms and conversational strategies were identified although all speakers were native speakers of the same language.

Though the above-mentioned difficulties might discourage a researcher from using spontaneous recorded speech, the researcher in this study prefers to use 'naturally' occurring complaint phone calls as she strongly agrees with Boxer (2010) that it is this kind of data "that offers the *best* [emphasis added] glimpse into how speech acts are realized among native speakers of any language" (p.169). During the process of data analysis, the researcher tried to be very careful in examining the data by making objective decisions through adhering to the definitions provided for each code in the coding system while bearing in mind that human beings differ in their styles and speech behaviours.

## 3.2 Data collection

Complaint calls that constitute the research data of the current study were copied from the call centre electronic system of a Saudi FTC in Saudi Arabia.

### 3.2.1 The FTC and its CU

The company chosen as the source of the data is one specialized in designing and selling home furnishing products including furniture (beds, chairs, and desks), household appliances, and home accessories. It has a number of stores in different regions of Saudi Arabia: the Central region, the Western region, and the Eastern region.

The FTC runs a telephone service centre for customer services. The aim of this centre is to serve the customer in one possible way by dedicating a free phone line that a customer, in any region of Saudi Arabia, can call to ask questions, register his/her complaint or compliment, follow up on a complaint, check the availability of a product, or share his/her views regarding a product or a service. Each call is electronically recorded as a standard practice for the company to assess, review, monitor, and resolve issues related to the company's services and procedures. A recorded call also serves both customers and company as a reference point for all information mentioned in that call. Yet, the customer is *not* informed that the conversation is being recorded at the beginning of the call. Some customers, especially extremely annoyed ones, assumed that their calls were recorded as they mentioned that in the course of their calls.

The call centre of the company receives calls with various purposes: to compliment, to complain, to inquire, to suggest, or to follow up on an issue. Each call is transferred to the responsible department by the customer's entry of the extension of that department using the phone pad. Deciding the appropriate extension to press depends on the customer's purpose of calling. He/She has seven options to choose from:

1. To enquire about home delivery and assembly.
2. To enquire about the availability of a product or product information.
3. To complain about home delivery and assembly, an already purchased product, or to follow up a past complaint.
4. To inquire about/suggest something regarding an already purchased item.
5. To enquire about opening hours, store location, or any other enquires.
6. To enquire about online shopping.

7. To join the company's team (available jobs).

According to the manager of the CCC (A.A.Auref, personal communication, April 7, 2016), one department had recently been added to the CCC call centre. This is the CU. It was established by the beginning of December, 2014. The objectives of this unit were:

1. To receive, register, and resolve customers' complaints and limit their future occurrence.
2. To gain the customer's satisfaction.
3. To provide remedial actions in coordination with other concerned departments and, consequently, improve the performance of these departments.
4. To ensure the resolution of the complaint within a specified time frame (usually from one hour to 5 days depending on the complexity of the problem complained about).

The whole complaint is recorded by the company's electronic call centre system. While the complaint is recorded, the staff member who answered the call is to register the complaint in the company's electronic database. The registered complaint should provide a clear explanation of the cause of the customer's dissatisfaction or inconvenience. If the customer decided not to call and complain (i.e., perform a spoken complaint), he/she can: (a) send an email to the company explaining his/her problem (i.e., a written complaint); (b) complain through social media (Facebook and Twitter); or (c) visit one of the company's stores and explain his/her problem to the Customer Service Department located within each store. However, the company states to its customers in its website that calling is the *quickest way* to contact the company's staff members. It also encourages customers to call whenever they need help.

The company mostly deals with a middle-class population. Cs were males and females of different ages and with various educational backgrounds. Through the company's website, and as with many other trading companies, customers are guided in what steps to perform to reach possible solutions when facing a problem with a product. These are summarized in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Steps to reach possible solutions when experiencing a problem with a product of the FTC

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Suggested steps</b>
Assembly of a product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refer to assembly instructions.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call the Call Centre.</li> </ul>
Something is missing or damaged from a purchased product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return to store where the item can be replaced by the Customer Returns Department (if possible).</li> <li>• Call the Call Centre with all the relevant details of the missing/damaged part.</li> </ul>
Quality of a product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return the product with the original receipt to the store where the item can be replaced by the Customer Returns Department (if possible).</li> </ul>
Difficult to return the item to the store (large, already assembled, or customer lives far from the store)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send clear photos of the product with a clear explanation of the problem and a copy of the receipt.</li> </ul>

The company makes it clear to its customers that sometimes a manufacturing fault might exist in a product which affects the functionality and/or comfort of this product. Yet, the company promises that if this happens, everything possible will be done to resolve the problem. The damaged product can be repaired, replaced, or a mutually agreeable solution is to be implemented.

At the time data was collected, CTs who were working at the CU were six females. They received any complaint call regardless of the gender of the customer. Put differently, all female CTs were to receive calls from either a male and/or a female customer. CTs were offered general guidance on how to answer a complaint call. They were verbally instructed to:

1. Answer the telephone by uttering the name of the company, greeting the C, identifying themselves followed by offering help.
2. Identify C by asking about his/her name, mobile number, and receipt and/or order number.
3. Deal with the issue expressed by C in the best way possible.
4. End the call by enquiring if C has any other thing he/she wants to ask about, followed by thanking the customer for calling and exchanging goodbyes (A.A.Auref, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

Four procedures are to be followed by a CU staff member when receiving a complaint call:

1. Identify the problem C is complaining about and the cause of his/her dissatisfaction.
2. Report all required information from the customer (e.g., name, number, order number of previously submitted order, receipt number, date of problem, etc.).
3. If the problem cannot be immediately solved by CT and/or C is not satisfied with the solutions offered by CT, the latter is to submit an electronic 'request of service' form with correct and detailed information to the relevant Department within the company who will be responsible for solving the problem.
4. When the problem is resolved, the Follow-Up Department of the company is to call back C and ensure that he/she is satisfied and does not have any other concerns.

It is worth mentioning that professional training is provided to all newly employed staff members who join the company in any Department in a form of a 'Customer Service' program. In this program, employees are taught the required skills to answer/deal with any type of customer calls followed by practical training to practise what is learnt. A new employee has to attend this program before she starts receiving the actual calls. Continuous training is provided to the employee for a period of six months. After completion of the six- month period, the employee gets trained in more advanced skills related to 'Professionalism in Work' (A.A.Auref, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

### 3.2.2 Method of data collection

As just described, the data was audio recordings of complaints made by Saudi customers to the CU staff members. As outsiders were not permitted to access the company call centre's electronic system directly, a staff member working in the CU collected and saved 150 *previously recorded* phone calls received by the CU (31 hours of recordings). These were saved to CDs and given in person to the researcher for transcribing, translating, and analyzing.

The researcher met the General Head of the CU (the effective employer who was authorized by the company to give permission related to his department) one month before having access to the recordings. In this meeting, the aim of the research and the nature of the study were clearly explained. A Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was given to the General Head of the CU. Permission was granted from the General Head of the CU by signing a Consent Form (CF) to access 60-100 hours of *anonymized* recorded complaint phone calls between the employees (CU's operators) and the company's customers.

The researcher informed the General Head of the CU that the recordings would be used for linguistic analysis only. If the information provided in the research is reported or published, this is to be done in a way that does not identify the company as its source. The researcher also assured the General Head of the CU that the de-identified recorded calls are not to be used in any way that could affect the reputation of the company or its relationship with its customers.

The researcher relied on the General Head of the CU to: (a) direct a staff member working in the CU to collect and save 60-100 hours of previously recorded complaint phone calls; and (b) ask a staff member working in the Information Technology Department (IT) within the company to remove all identifying information from the calls (i.e., identification of both C and CT as well as the name of the company). When the calls were de-identified by the IT Department, they were sent back to the General Head of the CU. When ready for submission, the General Head of the CU contacted the researcher and gave her in person the CDs of previously recorded conversations with all identifying parts removed (i.e., secondary data).

The researcher received 150 calls from the company. After listening to all calls received, 20 calls were immediately excluded as they were repeated calls (i.e., a duplication of another call). After listening to all of the remaining 130 calls, it turned out that not all calls were suitable. 40 calls were excluded for one or more of the following reasons:

1. The call was an inquiry rather than a complaint call. In such calls, C's aim was to seek information or knowledge regarding a certain aspect from the CT. For example, C asked about the opening hours of the store, the steps for doing online shopping using the company's official website, the availability of a product, or he/she asked to change or cancel an appointment.
2. It was a follow-up call from the Follow-Up Department to C to check whether a previously submitted spoken or written complaint by C had been resolved, or was in the process of being resolved.
3. The quality of some of the recordings was poor. There was interference from traffic noise or surrounding talk which made it hard for the researcher to understand what was said and transcribe it.
4. The call was incomplete. The recording of the call stopped either at the middle or before the end due to unknown technical problems that occurred in the electronic recording system of the company while recording. With such incomplete calls, the researcher cannot identify all the conversational sequences of moves and linguistic strategies used by C and CT.

5. C was a non-Saudi speaker. He/She was speaking either English or a non-Saudi dialect such as Egyptian Arabic, Iraqi Arabic, or Syrian Arabic. Such calls were discarded as the main focus of the study is studying complaint strategies of *Saudi Arabic* complaint phone calls.

Eventually, the suitable calls totalled ninety calls. These were the ones transcribed and considered for analysis.

### 3.2.3 Justification of method used for data collection and securing data in a challenging context

The method of data collection described above was the only possible method of collecting naturally occurring complaint calls from the company. This is for two reasons. Firstly, this method was the one suggested by the General Head of the CU after initial discussions on the method the company *preferred* for obtaining the data of the research. The General Head of the CU preferred to be the one who would directly approach the data collector and the IT staff member to ensure that the identities of both C and CT were removed before giving the researcher access to the de-identified recorded phone calls. Secondly, outsiders were not permitted by the company to approach its customers or operators directly. Thus, the researcher was not able to approach/record by herself either Cs or CTs. For these two reasons, the researcher received already de-identified recorded complaint phone calls that had been anonymized.

Research goals and design were very much influenced by the strict limits placed on the nature and use of the data imposed by the company that enabled me to gain access to the data at all. Adopting the method suggested by the company for data collection has its advantages and disadvantages. The major advantage of using this method is that it makes this research possible. The researcher contacted a Saudi bank and a Saudi telecommunication company, both of which had Complaint Departments, and asked for permission to conduct research using their companies as the source of the data. Unfortunately, both companies refused due to the sensitivity of the data (i.e., complaint calls). The companies thought that allowing a researcher to access their calls might affect their reputation or relationship with their customers. Additionally, they believed that listening to and analysing complaint calls from their companies might violate the privacy of the customers, as the calls could contain information such as their names, dates of birth, bank account details, mobile phone numbers, and physical addresses. In an attempt to overcome these concerns, I offered to keep the

name of the FTC confidential and to accept anonymized recordings of complaint calls made by the company itself. The FTC, chosen to be the source of data in this study, was the one which agreed to these conditions. This was only achieved because of personal contact with someone reasonably high in the organization and extensive negotiations (see also Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). One positive benefit from this process was the establishment of a long-term reciprocal relationship with the company, which will allow for ongoing research. It was only the establishment of such a relationship that made possible the collection of genuine institutional data that represents a language and a dialect that is severely underrepresented in the literature. Accessing anonymized data also meant the researcher was not able or required to obtain consent from Cs and CTs or to distribute the results of the study to them as the identities of both are unknown.

However, there are also disadvantages of using the method suggested by the company for data collection. It limited the amount of data that could be analysed to ninety complaint calls. Attempts to collect more data by the researcher were unsuccessful because of the limited number of CU employees. Only six employees were working at the CU and just one of them was assigned to collect and save calls for the researcher during her regular paid working hours. In addition, the researcher waited a long time to receive a *reasonable* number of calls and suitable ones that could make this study robust enough. Finally, because the company agreed to only anonymized calls, it meant that very few verifiable facts about the specific workplace context were available. Studying the influence of factors such as age, educational background, and ethnicity on the production of and response to Saudi Arabic complaint calls was not possible. In addition, CTs were anonymous, few in number, and all women. They were not distinguishable except in so far as their voices sounded distinctive. In contrast to others (such as Forey & Lockwood, 2007; Hui, 2014 etc.), there was no information available to the researcher about time constraints placed on calls, instructions to CTs, CTs' training sessions, nor access to supervisors apart from those provided by the General Head of the CU and those that could be discovered from the content of the calls themselves (see section 3.2.1). Despite these constraints, I believe this research makes an important contribution as a preliminary exploration in an area lacking in prior research: calls to in-house compliant departments and complaint calls in Saudi Arabic (see section 2.3), a society with a strong religious character (see section 1.1.2.1).

### 3.2.4 Ethical implications

In accordance with the ethical guidelines issued by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC), privacy and confidentiality were respected throughout the research process (Appendix A).

CFs were obtained from the General Head of the CU (Appendix B) and the data collector (i.e., staff member working in CU of the company) (Appendix C). PIS were also given to the General Head of the CU (Appendix D) and to the data collector (Appendix E). Confidentiality Agreement forms were signed by the data collector (Appendix F) and the IT staff member of the company (Appendix G).

In order to maintain confidentiality of the company, an asterisk (\*) was used whenever there was a reference to the company or any of its services. In transcripts, the code (C) was used for the customer and (CT) for the service provider. Customers' mobile numbers, receipt numbers and the numbers of orders were fabricated by the researcher just to enable a smooth reading of the transcripts. Lastly, the company involved was only referred to as a FTC without revealing its location or the location of any of its stores.

The researcher undertook to provide a report to the company that outlines effective strategies for handling customer's complaints. These strategies can be used to improve the CU staff members' and customers' communicative skills needed for the interactional business workplace. This report will be submitted to the General Head of the CU. A statement indicating this was part of the PIS for the General Head of the CU.

### 3.2.5 Transcription of data

As mentioned earlier, the data is a set of previously recorded complaint phone calls collected by a CU staff member working in the FTC. After receiving the calls, they were transcribed according to a concise version of the Jeffersonian Transcription Notation System (1984), some symbols taken from Powers (2005), and three notations added by the researcher (Appendix H).

Verbatim transcription for each call, from beginning to end, was done using the Arabic alphabet as the transcripts were for my own use. However, calls considered for qualitative analysis, extracts taken from interactions to be presented for discussion, examples given from the data for the coding categories in Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, and 3.8, and transcripts needing to be discussed with the supervisors were re-transcribed using the Roman alphabet and translated by

the researcher into English with some Saudi-specific words and/or expressions transliterated following Saleh's (2002) transliteration system. One transliteration symbol of ع 'ayn (‘) had been replaced by (ʕ) as (‘) might be misidentified as a punctuation mark rather than a transliteration symbol. Translations and transliterations were checked by a native speaker of Arabic. A native speaker of English also checked the English translations to ensure that they were understandable to the readers.

Calls were not transcribed with CA-like accuracy. This means that a *detailed* description of the paralinguistic factors such as intonation, stress, and voice quality was not undertaken due to time constraints. They were, however, taken into account *briefly*, where and when relevant to mention. Speech disfluencies such as pauses and their length (short, medium, long), overlapping, repetition/correction of words, silence, loudness, and interjections such as 'uh-huh,' 'mm,' were maintained in the transcripts as the aim was to present what was said and how it was said. Some of these features were critical to understanding an utterance and indicated signs of hesitation on the part of the speaker. The only punctuation marks used in the transcripts were question and exclamation marks. This was to avoid confusion of other punctuation marks with the distinct meanings of the ones used in the transcription system. Also, these two punctuation marks were associated with two important features that have to be preserved in a complaint interaction (i.e., questioning and astonishment/denunciation).

Before starting transcribing, the researcher developed her own transcript template (i.e., page layout) using Microsoft Word. This template was used to record the basic information that should accompany each transcript. The template had the following information (Appendix I):

1. folder number (as each 10 records/calls or so were saved in a separate folder).
2. record/call number.
3. file duration (length of the call).
4. brief description of the topic of the complaint.
5. number of speakers.
6. identification of the gender of speakers.
7. line numbers (from the beginning, numbered consecutively) and page number placed at every page.
8. text format: name on the right, all speech text indented from name.
9. space to make any necessary comments or context information about the interaction and/or the participants, if any.

Transcribing was done by listening to the whole conversation to make sure that it was a complaint phone call. If it was so, the researcher played back part of the sound recordings and transcribed it. This was repeated with all the parts of a call with stopping and replaying missing parts. Once the researcher finished transcribing the whole call, she listened back to it from beginning to end to edit, revise, and note any aspects in the interaction that were unnoticed in the first playing of the call. Once the transcript was checked, it was then printed and kept in a file for further reference. The electronic format of all transcripts was stored on the researcher's personal computer and a flash drive for an additional backup.

The tools used for transcribing were a Personal Computer (PC), VideoLAN Medial Player (VLC), which has an in-built timer to measure the length of the call and waiting times, a Sony headset with the feature of 'noise cancelling', an Arabic/English keyboard, and finally Microsoft Word to type and save transcripts.

Transcription is to allow a deep focus on "how complaints are delivered and taken up in talk-in-interaction" (Edwards, 2005, p.8). Transcripts, however, were not enough to rely on as the primary data. The researcher had to frequently refer back to the original recordings to check and confirm how a sentence or part of the conversation was said.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

The study adopts a socio-pragmatic approach with a focus on genre to the linguistic investigation. This involves 'scrutinizing' recorded conversations that occurred in an institutional setting to discover various kinds of patterns and organization in relation to the speech act of complaint (Maynard, 1989). More specifically, the current study examines the performance of the speech act of complaint in formal business communication based on a Saudi complaint calls corpus. It focuses on verbal strategies and linguistic realizations. Focus is given to how complainers/complainees open, close, process, refuse, or accept the act of complaining. These discourse features are explained in terms of appropriate cultural norms of interaction in the Saudi Arabic cultural context (see section 1.4).

Because of the small number of studies on complaints in Arabic as well as the high quality, real, and naturally occurring type of data that was obtained, the study employed a mixed methods methodological approach for data analysis. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated to answer the questions of the study (see section 1.4). Quantitative analysis provided a general indication of the most frequent trends used in performing complaints by

members of the socio-economic group who use the services of the company. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, enabled a detailed presentation of in-depth insights about the actual devices and strategies used in performing Saudi Arabic business complaints (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010).

Quantitatively speaking, I identified and grouped similar linguistic aspects of complaint interactions found in the corpus. Frequency distributions of certain linguistic aspects and the correlations between some of them were calculated. This was done to help present unbiased and easy to understand results with the help of numbers as well as to allow a more systematic analysis. Qualitative analysis of some interactions complemented the quantitative analysis. Adopting Patton's 'purposeful sampling' approach (1990), four interactions were intentionally selected to answer the research questions (see section 5.1). The interplay between multiple Saudi cultural norms and the linguistic aspects used in complaint interactions was considered. Aligning with socio-culturally approved norms of behaviour when complaining displays the influence of shared values on the articulation of the communicative purpose in this workplace setting. Such analysis also provides "a more vivid account of specific cases and reveals more clearly the tactical choices that speakers make" (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, p.204).

Detailed explanation of the linguistic aspects considered for analysis and theoretical models used for quantitative and qualitative analysis is to follow.

### 3.3.1 Identifying complaints

In this study, recorded complaint phone calls were discerned using Jacoby and Jaccard's (1981) definition of CCB as an action taken by a customer through which he/she expresses something negative in relation to a product or a service to the firm manufacturing or marketing that product or service. In the case of the study reported here, the dissatisfaction is a post-purchase one related to actions, services, or products of the FTC. CCB is a FTA directed towards the *professional* positive face of the CU staff member who represents the company responsible for the undesirable service or product and is capable of solving the problem. Using Searle's (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts, complaints in this study are *directives* as they are attempts by the Speaker (S) with varying degrees of success to get the Hearer (H) to do some future action (A).

All complaint calls analyzed contained *direct* or *first-party* complaints. There were *institutional telephone complaints* in which the complaints expressed were relevant to an institution and could only be addressed and resolved by that related institution. In each call, there were three roles: a *complainer*, an *object*, and a *complaint receiver* (Edwards, 2005).

The complaint sequences analyzed were characterized by being long sequences similar to story-telling and were included as part of a complex interaction. In other words, they were not neat and tidy like the complaint responses a researcher might get through typical DCTs. Rather, they had several turns through which C expressed in detail his/her feelings of anger and annoyance and at the same time CTs protected themselves by negation, explanation, modification, or by performing a counter-complaint. During that process, C might refuse the solutions offered by the CT or need clarification and, in consequence, extend his/her complaint and the interaction would have become longer. The complaint calls analyzed also did not have a *fixed* and *unified* structure from beginning to end. This was because the structure of each call depended on, among other factors, the nature of the problem, the clarity of C in expressing his/her problem, the severity of the customer's dissatisfaction, and the way CU's staff member responded to the customer's complaint. Yet, they shared basic conversational sequences of moves and verbal linguistic strategies that were identified in almost all calls. These are presented in the discussion chapter (see sections 6.1.1.1 and 6.1.1.2).

### 3.3.2 Framework for data analysis

In order to achieve uniformity in classifying the sequence within complaint calls and to develop a satisfactory categorization system for the naturally occurring data of the Saudi Arabic corpus, calls were analysed by adopting, adding, and modifying the topics and the categories of works in the literature of complaints. The basic theoretical models adopted for quantitative and qualitative analysis are identified in Figure 3.1.

The framework for data analysis used in this study integrates the identified sequential organization and verbal strategies of phone calls in general, and complaint spoken exchanges in particular, found in spoken interactions in Arabic, English, and other languages<sup>29</sup>. Such integration of theoretical models derived from different languages allowed a more comprehensive analysis of the data. The integration of different theoretical models,

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<sup>29</sup> For details regarding each study included in the framework (sample, data analysis methods, and results), see sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

furthermore, provided a detailed analysis of the *entire* conversational sequence of moves that constructed a complaint call: the initial phase, the medial (transaction) phase, the pre-closing phase, and the closing phase rather than focusing merely on the head act of a complaint exchange. Finally, the framework used focused on one element that has not been considered in previous studies conducted using Arabic data: the complainer's intensity of dissatisfaction and how it might be related the verbal strategies of complaint and the graders used in business Saudi Arabic calls.

It should be noted that the researcher built on the work of these earlier researchers, but modified aspects that were necessary to address in the Saudi Arabic complaint calls corpus. Modifications were deleting and/or adding certain categories which could not be validated or were specific to the Saudi Arabic data. Where a category was not relevant to the Saudi Arabic language or a new category was to be added, this is noted and justified in the description of the aspect of analysis to which this category originally belongs. In other words, the analysis of data was "a dynamic and ongoing process that benefited at the start from original theories and research goals, yet had enough flexibility so that later revisions could be made to capture unexpected and interesting distinctions" (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, p.182).

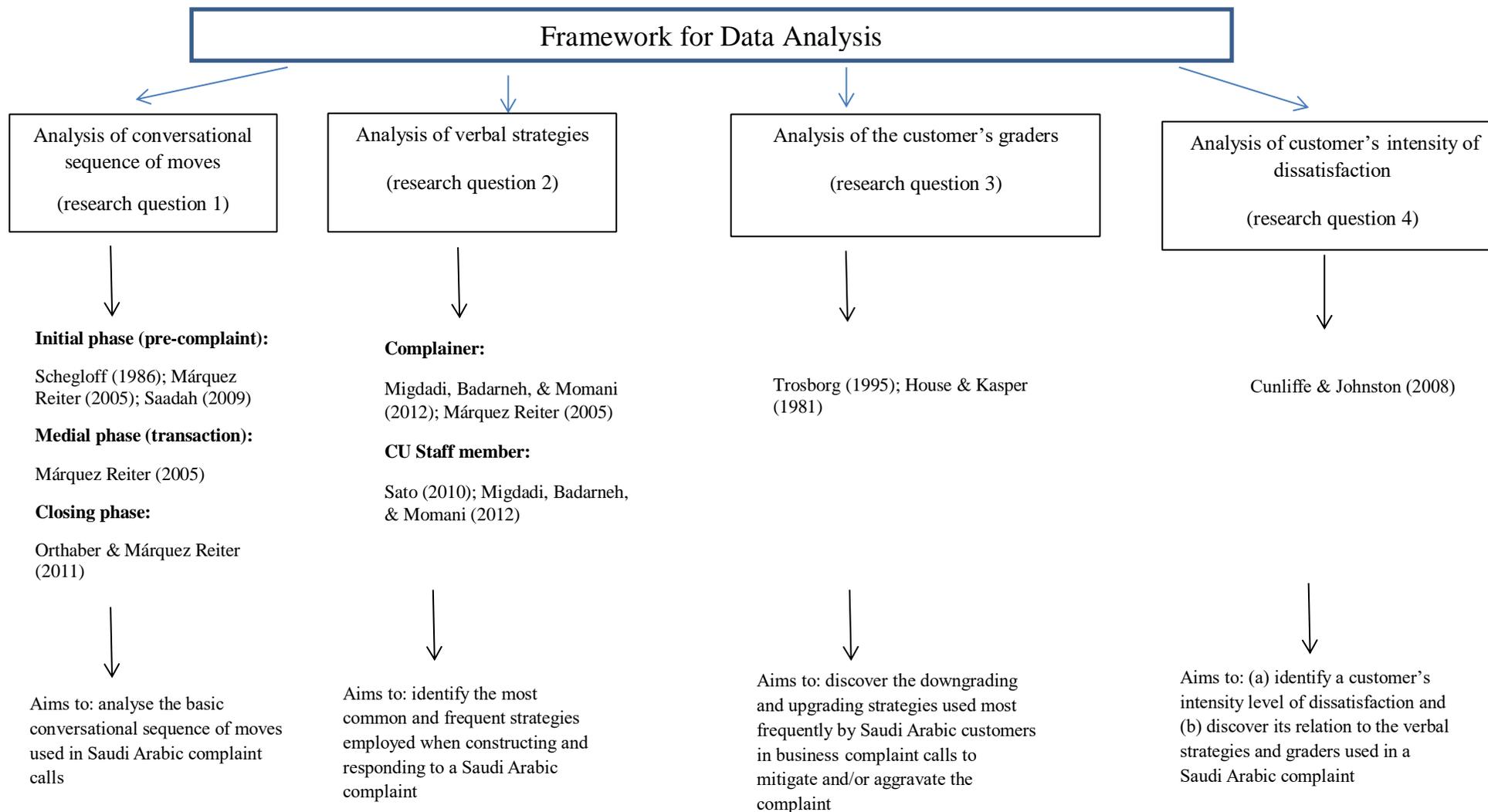


Figure 3.1 Framework for data analysis

An explanation of the aspects adopted from each model for the current study along with justifications of their usage and examples are to follow.

### 3.3.2.1 Conversational sequence of moves

The main purpose of focusing on this aspect in analysis is to determine the unique sequential structure exhibited in Saudi Arabic complaint phone calls under investigation (research question 1). In other words, the analysis of the conversational sequence of moves is to focus on the initial sequences of the complaint calls in order to locate the place where the complaint started in each call. This is followed by an examination of the complaint work in each call, and a description of the closing sequences.

For this purpose, the analysis of the conversational sequence of moves drew on studies of four researchers (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011; Saadah, 2009; Schegloff, 1986). Schegloff (1986) identified four sequences of telephone conversation openings. These are:

1. summons-answer sequence: a telephone ring (a summons) and answering expressions in response to a summons.
2. identification and/or recognition sequence: parties identify themselves and/or recognize each other.
3. greeting sequence: exchange greeting by one party or both.
4. 'How are you' sequence: a series of question-answer pairs which might lead to the 'reason' for the call.

Schegloff's (1986) four core sequences of telephone call openings are illustrated in the following example (p.115):

(1)

[[phone rings]]	}	Summons-answer sequence
R: <i>Hello</i>	}	
C: <i>H'llo, Clara?</i>	}	Identification and/or recognition sequence
R: <i>yeh</i>	}	
C: <i>Hi. Bernie.</i>	}	Greeting sequence
R: <i>Hi Bernie</i>	}	

C: <i>How're you</i>	}	'How are you' sequence
R: <i>I'm awright,</i>		
<i>How're you</i>		
C: <i>Okay</i>		
R: <i>Good</i>	}	First topic
C: <i>"Laura there?"</i>		

Schegloff's (1986) opening sequences were used in this study as they proved to be applicable to a number of studies analysing phone calls in different languages including Arabic. However, these *universal* four core opening sequences were applied to the current data with some modifications deemed necessary due to specific features of the current speech community (i.e., FTC). The modifications to Schegloff's opening sequences were three: (a) deleting the summons-answer sequence as calls were electronically recorded by the company's call centre system. The sound of a telephone ringing was not heard in any call. Instead, calls immediately started with the identification sequence uttered by the company's CT; (b) restricting the greeting sequence to a typical Islamic form of greeting; and (c) limiting the response of the 'How are you' sequence to one formulaic response.

The second and third modifications mentioned above were done based on Saadah's (2009) analysis of the 'How are you' sequence in Arabic telephone conversations (the language spoken in the current data). The common greeting sequence was limited to one: the speaker uttering '*assalaamu ṣalaykum*' (Peace be upon you) and being answered by '*ṣalaykumus salaam wa raHmatullaah*' or '*ṣalaykumus salaam*' (Peace be upon you too and God's mercy) or (Peace be upon you too). This structured formula of greeting has cultural and religious roots for Arab speakers. It is the typical Arabic Islamic greeting to which the addressee has to respond appropriately when being greeted by it. Similarly, the 'How are you' sequence was 'short' as the calls were of a 'business' nature. A formulaic response of '*alhamid lillaah*' (Thanks God) was uttered as a response to the 'How are you' utterance. Such a response is always to be uttered even if recent news or problematic issues are to be revealed. Saadah states that '*alhamid lillaah*' is a typical response to the 'How are you' sequence. It is "shared by all Arab community members and is obliged by religious beliefs" (p.174). An example of the 'How are you' sequence in Arabic telephone conversations is (p.175):

(2) Amjad: *allo*.  
'Hello.'

Kamal: *assalaamu ʿalaykum*.  
'Peace be upon you.'  
Amjad: *ʿalaykum essalaam wa raHmatullaah*,  
'Peace be upon you too and God's mercy'  
Kamal: *=abuhmeid Kaif halaK shu akhbarak*  
'How are you what is your news'  
Amjad: *alHamdulellaah*  
'Thanks to God'

The opening sequence of the conversational sequence of moves also incorporates two elements of Márquez Reiter's (2005) opening sequence of telephone conversation, comprising: (a) organizational identification (name of the company), and (b) self-identification (the operator's name) as illustrated below (p.488):

(3) CT: *CSC* (organizational identification), *good afternoon* (greeting), *Marianella speaking* (self-identification).

These two elements of Márquez Reiter's (2005) opening sequence were chosen for three reasons: (a) they were identified in calls with the *primary goal of complaining*; (b) they occurred with an *institutional context*, and (c) these elements occurred in *authentic telephone phone calls* between service providers and customers. All of these reasons entail the applicability of Márquez Reiter's two elements to the data of the current study as its calls had similar features: naturally occurring phone calls with the primary aim of complaining in the institutional context of trading. The researcher added to Márquez Reiter's elements a semantic formula expected to be attached to this series of identification and/or recognition sequence. Most probably, the word '*tfaDDal*' (how can I help you?) was expected to be uttered as an offer of help that granted the C the right to mention his/her complaint.

For the three reasons mentioned above, Márquez Reiter's (2005) structure of the middle of a complaint call was also used. This phase occurs after the opening sequence. CT initiates and directs a series of question-answer pairs to C to ascertain the identity of the latter and the service required. After collecting necessary information, CT responds to C's complaint and at this stage the actual negotiation of the business exchange starts. C gives a summary of the problem in a form of a narrative "whereby the sequence of events that have led to the complaint are summarized" (p.492). These series of events are elaborated in subsequent turns. The end of the

medial phase is noted by the CT's response to the complaint. An example taken from Márquez Reiter's study which illustrates the medial phase of a complaint call is the following (p.490)<sup>30</sup>:

(4) CT: <i>CSC, good afternoon, Elizabeth speaking</i>	
C: <i>Ah, good afternoon, look to request a nurse</i>	
CT: <i>yes, would you have the identity card number of the client</i>	} Question-answer pairs
C: <i>yes (.) um wait a little bit (.) um X</i>	
CT: <i>yes</i>	} Negotiation of the business
C: <i>X (.) I'll give you digit by digit because I'm wearing (.) my glasses and I still cannot see anything</i>	
CT: <i>Do not worry</i>	
C: <i>XXX (.) hey I don't see very well</i>	
CT: <i>it doesn't matter I've already found it (.) Mr. Pereira Ramos</i>	
C: <i>Exactly</i>	
CT: <i>For when would it be then</i>	
C: <i>And look in the state he is in for [today in the afternoon]</i>	
CT: <i>[No services are already being] booked to start tomorrow</i>	
C: <i>But how come tomorrow (.) and what do we do today</i>	
CT: <i>What happens is that CSC is not an emergency service (.) we need [24 hours notice]</i>	} CT's response

Finally, for the sequential organisation of moves for closing a complaint, Orthaber and Márquez Reiter's (2011) turns of a telephone conversation closing were applied. This is because they *specifically* manifest the expected components that construct an *institutional* complaint phone closure.

Orthaber and Márquez Reiter's (2011) describe the closing sequence of an institutional complaint phone call to be composed of a pre-closing token such as 'okay' which signals the beginning of the closing sequence, followed by a terminal exchange whereby participants reach an agreement, and a final greeting pair such as 'bye-bye'. These components of the closing sequence are shown in the following example (p.3867):

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<sup>30</sup> The translation of this example appears in Márquez Reiter's study (2005).

(5) C (complainant): *you get me right*

A (Agent): *yes yes (.) okay (pre-closing token) sir (.) look (.) we will send you an explanation (.) right (.) erm. I hope as soon as possible (.) we will try to reply (.) well as soon as possible*

C: *yes yes thank you very much*

} Terminal exchange

A: *Thank you (.) goodbye*

C: *Goodbye*

} Final greeting

The four models explained above were applied to 20% (18 calls) of the present data. Generally speaking, each call exhibited three basic sections: (a) the *initial* phase (opening) in which the greeting sequence, identification, offer of help, and initial inquiries took place; (b) the *medial* phase (transaction) in which the complaint was explained and responded to, and (c) the *closing* phase (ending) in which the initial pre-closing sequences and the exchange of goodbyes were identified. This basic structure of a compliant call was then applied to all the data in order to determine the basic conversational sequence of moves used in Saudi Arabic complaint calls<sup>31</sup>.

### 3.3.2.2 Verbal strategies of constructing/responding to a complaint

The main purpose of focusing on this aspect in analysis is to identify the most common verbal strategies used by C and CT to construct and respond to a Saudi Arabic institutional complaint (research question 2).

In analysing the construction of the complaint, the researcher deployed the core verbal strategies listed by Migdadi et al. (2012). The strategies mentioned in this particular study were chosen for a number of reasons. First, Migdadi's et al. list of strategies was developed to analyze Jordanian Arabic authentic complaint phone calls; a context and a language similar to the ones investigated in the present study. In addition, these strategies were the *only* ones found in the literature which were specifically derived from analyzing *Arabic complaint* phone calls. The researchers state that the absence of research on Arabic complaints makes their study "an exploratory endeavor in the area of institutional mediated complaints in Arabic" (Migdadi et al., 2012, p.322). The sub-strategies of Márquez Reiter (2005) were also included in the analysis of the construction of the complaint as they were used by Cs in authentic telephone

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed explanation of the basic structure (i.e., minimal core moves) of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic, see section 5.2.1.

calls in an institutional context. They were used by Cs to persuade the staff member of the validity of the complaint.

The verbal strategies of constructing a complaint that were adopted from the two studies of Migdadi et al. (2012) and Márquez Reiter (2005) referred mainly to the strategies that the complainer resorted to in the head act (i.e., main complaint component). The data of this study, however, had more than one head act in a call. A complainer elaborated and justified his/her complaint in more than one sentence. This means that the strategies used from the two studies mentioned were used in this study in a somewhat different sense. They were used to analyse the verbal strategies of constructing a complaint in *a set of head acts* following the initial phase of the call and preceding its closing phase.

Although the verbal strategies for constructing a complaint observed in the data were expected to match the strategies listed in the studies mentioned above, the data also reflected other special strategies. For example, it was found that some calls included ‘requesting to complain to a higher authority’; a strategy that was not identified in the other researchers’ works. With other calls, it was noticed that Cs ‘narrated’ the circumstances that happened to them or to their peers prior to the complaint.

To address the Saudi Arabic complaint calls corpus, the researcher had to invent her own labels for newly recognized strategies, provide definitions specific to institutional encounters for them, and clarify them with one or two examples from the current data. This was followed by grouping the newly recognized strategies to the already existing ones (i.e., in the work of earlier researchers) and categorizing them together. Some strategies, however, did not belong to any of the already existing categories. Those were added to new categories.

In total, eight new strategies were added by the researcher. These are: accuse company of dishonesty, request to speak to a higher authority, request a compensation, request the CT to put in writing, request an apology, request in a form of a want/need statement, narrating circumstances and narrating peers’ bad experiences.

The verbal strategies for constructing/justifying a complaint that were coded for in the data are illustrated with examples in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Verbal strategies of constructing/justifying a complaint - Coding categories

<b>Construct complaint</b>		
(announce the topic of the complaint; the utterances which convey the illocutionary force of the FTA)		
Strategy	Definition	Example from the data
<b>State the problem</b>	a complaint starts by C stating the problem using a series of sentences to express his/her annoyance.	<p><i>waSalu lii aghradi yuum alkhamiis waa mauʕid altarkiib mafruud fii nafs alyuum baas farii q altarkiib ma Jaa.</i></p> <p>They delivered my stuff on Thursday and the appointment for assembly was in the same day but the assembly team did not come.</p>
<b>Justify complaint</b>		
(strategies used to successfully strengthen the C's accusation)		
<b><i>Dissatisfaction</i></b>		
express disagreement	after a dispreferred response (denial or refusal) from CT, C might express disagreement to indicate that a better solution should be offered.	<p><i>//laa laa laa// tqulii syasaat ya saydatii alkariimah.</i></p> <p><i>//no no no// do not say policies my dear sister.</i></p>
reiterate the problem	C tries to persuade CT of the validity of the claim by repeating it.	<p><i>qadamit alTalab lianuu maHaad ela alaan kalamnii wii maafrif idh HayJuu aw laa.</i></p> <p>I submitted the request because nobody has yet called me and I do not know whether they are coming or not (same sentence repeated three times in a call).</p>
<b><i>Accusation/Blaming</i></b>	C aims to accuse the company for the lack of procedures and/or policies.	<p><i>mafii aHaad ysaʕdnaa fii almaʕraD. Ma nʕrif bDabT aysh alsyassah fii maʕraD al Riyadh.</i></p> <p>There is nobody who can help us in the store. We do</p>

		not know exactly what the policy is in Riyadh's store.
accuse company of dishonesty	C accuses the company of breaching a promise.	<i>liy 'sbuuṣaiin wintuu kil yuwm tquluun lii //bukraah bukraah//.</i>  Two weeks passed and still each day you keep saying //tomorrow they will arrive tomorrow they will arrive//.
<b>Threat</b>	C threatens CT openly by mentioning the consequences of not responding to C's claim.	<i>uqsim bilaah alṣaZim law Tawalat akthaar HruuH lii waziir altJaarah.</i>  I swear to God that if it takes more time I will go to the Minister of Commerce.
<b>Request/Demand</b> to speak to a higher authority	C asks to speak to someone higher in rank than CT (supervisor, executive manager). This could be in a form of an 'order' or a 'request'.	<i>Hawlinnii Ṣalaa akbaar waHid ṣnduukuum fii alsharikaah.</i>  Transfer my call to the highest authority in the company. (order)  <i>Muumkin tHawlinnii Ṣalaa almushrifaah?</i>  Could you transfer my call to the supervisor? (request)
want/need statement	C might express the urgency of his/her needs in a form of a need statement.	<i>abghaa Haal lii mushkilitii alyuum wila Hatfuut Ṣaliy alrHlaah.</i>  I need a solution for my problem today or I will miss my flight.
a compensation	C asks the company to pay instead of him/her because the problem is the fault of the company (i.e., to do the service for free).	<i>lazim tJuu trakbuuh biibalaash.</i>  You have to come and assemble it for free.
a solution	a proposed course of action by C as a way to resolve the problem. This could be expressed in a polite way as a request, or could be performed in a quite	<i>atmanaa yJuu yrakbuu alghurfaah.</i> I would appreciate if they come and assemble the room. (request)

	forceful manner as a demand.	<i>lazim tbadiluuhaa.</i> You ought to exchange it for me. (demand)
CT to put in writing	In order to be more satisfied, C might ask CT to submit a written complaint.	<i>'ktiibii alkalaam hadhaa kashakwaa wa 'rfaʕiihaa.</i> Write this down as a complaint and submit it.
an apology	C asks for an apology from the company for the problem caused.	<i>Tayiib arsluu lii risalaat 'ʕtidhaar.</i> Ok send me a message apologizing for the problem.
<b>Narration</b> narrative circumstances	<p>C narrates the story of the problem (what happened to him/her in the store, during his/her last call, etc.).</p> <p>In long sequences, usually after stating the problem and during the process of persuasion, C narrates in details the events that happened to him/her in the store or during his/her last call. This is to reflect the degree of his/her suffering for which the company is held responsible.</p>	<p><i>amis rHit laiiyiin (Furniture Company) waqabalit waHid 'smaah saleem min qsim altawSiil wqalii khallaaS bukraah bituuSalik alaghraaD wa baʕdaiin qabil almawʕid bi'sbuuʕ taqriibaan 'tiSaal ʕalayii waHiid hindii wqalii mawʕid wuuSuulaah alkhamiis qilti anaa abghaa aaJil qaalkaam qilit 'sbuuʕaiin qaal Tayiib baʕaad'sbuuʕaiin nJiik.</i></p> <p>I went yesterday to (Furniture Company) and met a person from the Delivery Department called Saleem and he informed me that tomorrow the items should arrive and approximately one week before my appointment, I received a call from an Indian guy who told me they would deliver the items in Thursday. I told him I wanted to postpone the appointment and he told me for how long and I said for two weeks and he said that was fine and informed me that they would deliver the items after two weeks.</p>

peers' bad experiences	C narrates the bad experiences of his/her friends/relatives with the company. They suffered similar problems indicating that the company has had a bad reputation.	<p><i>akhuuuii nazal yuum alkhamiis ʕalshaan mushkilaah ʕndaah fiialtarkiib waqalii 'akthar min khamsiin ʕamiil waaqfiin yshkuu min qaDiyyat attarkiib.</i></p> <p>My brother went to the store last Thursday to complain about an assembly problem. He told me more than 50 customers were waiting to complain about assembly issues.</p>
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The verbal strategies of responding to a complaint considered for analysis were taken from Sato's (2010) and Migdadi's et al. (2012) studies. Both analyzed complaint response strategies in settings that varied in their contextual factors. Sato analyzed the response strategies of native speakers of Japanese and English complaining in the situational contexts of restaurants, work places and complaints to friends and relatives. Migdadi et al. analyzed the responses of Jordanian hosts to the public complaints in a two-hour radio phone-in program.

The two studies mentioned above are among the few that present a comprehensive analysis of the strategies used by the complainees to respond to a complaint. Sato's (2010) list was used as it provides a clear link between the strategy used by a complainer and the expected response from the complainees. *An offer of help* will occur after the complainer's *request*, while *gratitude* will be uttered after the complainees' *acknowledgment of responsibility*. Moreover, the flow of strategies used by the complainer and the complainees was clearly exemplified with various extracts of interactions in different situations and among different groups. Migdadi's et al. (2012) list of responses to a complaint, on the other hand, was the only one that was derived from the analysis of Arabic complaint phone calls.

As with the strategies used for constructing/justifying a complaint, the verbal strategies adopted from the studies of Sato (2010) and Migdadi et al. (2012) were used to analyze any response by CT to either the major head act or the strategic supporting acts uttered by C rather than analyzing just one main response that occurred after the major head act (i.e., the one that immediately occurred after the opening sequence). Specific to the Saudi Islamic culture, a new

category was added by the researcher to the list of strategies identified in these studies: cultural/religious responses.

The strategies in Table 3.4 were the ones coded as responses to complaints.

Table 3.4 Strategies for responding to a complaint- Coding categories

<b>C-supportive</b> (responses used to support the face of the customer)		
Strategy	Definition	Example from the data
Offering ‘partial’ repair	after CT admits the company’s fault, she offers to make up for a damage or loss affecting C.	<i>alaan Harsil ‘iymail mustaʕJaal w Hataabiʕ maʕaHuum.</i> now I will send an urgent email and I will follow up with them.
Showing empathy	CT shows agreement and support to C as a way of encouraging more explanation and to absorb C’s anger.	<i>muqadiraah inziʕaJaak ‘ustaadhii.</i> I totally understand why you are angry my good sir.
Apologizing	CT apologizes for the problem caused by the company.	<i>walaah ya ‘ustaadhii aʕtadhir minaak.</i> I swear to God we are sorry.
Promising to help	CT promises to do her best to solve the problem.	<i>ma ySiir khaTriK ‘laa Tayiib.</i> I promise that I will do what makes you happy.
Acknowledging responsibility for the fault	CT admits the company’s responsibility for the problem.	<i>maʕaak Haaq.</i> you are right. <i>hadhaa khaTanaa muu dhanbaak.</i> this is our fault not yours.
<b>CT-supportive</b> (responses used when CTs choose to support their own face)		
Providing explanation	CT justifies and defends herself by explaining the reason for what has been done by the company.	<i>Hadhii syaasaat alsharikaah.</i> These are the policies of the company.

Evasion of responsibility (Placing responsibility on a third party)	CT denies responsibility for an action of which she was accused.	<i>'ustaadhi maʿndi ʿlim hadh khaaS bii fariiq altarkiib.</i>  Sir, I do not know. It is only the assembly team who knows.
Placing responsibility back on C	CT argues back at C by making an objection (i.e., by stating that the C is responsible).	<i>Tayyib entii min albidayaah ma qultii altarkiib baas qultii tawSiil.</i>  but you from the beginning did not ask for assembly. You just asked for delivery.
<b>Cultural/Religious</b>  (specific cultural and religious phrases uttered in an attempt to soothe the complainer. When uttered, CT is reassuring C that the problem will be resolved as desired)		
Optimistic	used <i>to give hope</i> to the C by removing his/her doubts and fears through indicating that the CT was very confident about resolving the problem in the very near future.	<i>'in sha'allah</i> if God wills <i>bi'dhiin allah</i> <sup>32</sup> God willing
Calming	expressions uttered <i>to calm</i> the C by assuring him/her that his/her problem was to be solved as desired.	<i>ma ySiir khaTirik 'lla Tayyib.</i> everything is going to be just as you like/wish. <i>ma yhimik/wala yhimik/ma tshiil haam.</i> do not worry.

The following section explains the graders coded for in the data.

### 3.3.2.3 Graders

The third aspect of analysis focuses on identifying the graders used by Saudi Arabic customers to minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint (research question 3).

<sup>32</sup> In the Saudi Islamic culture, these expressions are religious invocations used “to mark the expression of hope for a desired outcome” (Clift & Helani, 2010, p.374).

Two types of graders were coded for: downgraders and upgraders. Trosborg's (1995) and House and Kasper's (1981) lists of internal modifications were used for this purpose. On the whole, the two lists of internal modifications are built on the same assumption: that the usage of downgraders and upgraders affects the politeness of a complaint. They are strategies to soften or aggravate the 'non-polite' nature of the speech act of complaint.

In addition to being all-inclusive lists, Trosborg's (1995) division of internal modification devices followed House and Kasper's (1981) classification, which made it possible to integrate the modification devices of both studies for a more comprehensive analysis. Yet, in this study, two changes were made to House and Kasper's and Trosborg's internal modification devices: (a) the definition of internal modifications was slightly modified. According to House and Kasper and Trosborg, internal modifications are the use of mitigations or intensifying devices *within the structure of the head act*. However, each complaint call in this study consisted of one or more head acts. Thus, in this study, the term 'grader' was used to refer to any mitigation or intensifying devices used by the customer in the whole call rather than just one main head act. Put differently, the term 'grader' in this study refers to both internal modification devices (i.e., modality markers) and external modifications devices (i.e., supportive moves) used in a call, (b) graders were categorized differently into 'lexical' and 'clausal' rather than 'internal' and 'external' to avoid linking the grader to its position in a call.

Downgraders are used to soften the offence and reduce the blame. They are of two types: lexical and clausal. The former are lexical items used to minimize the force of a C's complaint. Clausal downgraders are clauses used to downplay the impact of the complaint on the CT. Upgraders, on the other hand, are used to increase the impact of a complaint by aggravating the problem. The two types of upgraders are: lexical and clausal. Lexical upgraders refer to words used to boost the force of an utterance by presenting the problem as excessive. Clausal upgraders are sentences expressing a sharp disapproval or criticism towards the company or other aspects of the complaint.

In addition to Trosborg's (1995) and House and Kasper's (1981) modifications, the researcher added 'new' graders to address the Saudi Arabic complaint calls corpus. The five downgraders added are: wishing lexical items, begging/supplication, religious expressions, making allowance for CT, and implicit criticism. For upgraders, four new ones are added. These are: bad consequences, blaming through comparing, C's denial of responsibility, and rejection.

Downgraders and upgraders coded in the data are listed in Table 3.5. Examples are from the data followed by the researcher's translation.

Table 3.5 Graders of a complaint - Coding categories

<b>Downgraders</b> (verbal elements used by Cs to soften the offence of the complaints and reduce the blame)		
<b>a. Lexical downgraders</b>		
Grader	Definition	Examples from the data
Fictive kin terms	terms used by C to show respect to and imply kinship with CT.	<i>Habiibitii</i> (my dear), <i>ukhtii</i> (my sister), <i>qalbii</i> (my sweet heart).
Cajolers	elements functioning to restore the harmony between the speakers, which might be endangered throughout the complaint.	<i>ǧdhraan</i> (sorry), <i>muqadir</i> (appreciate), <i>maǧalayish</i> (never mind).
Wishing lexical items	a request for an action whose performance is highly desirable.	<i>yalaiiyt</i> (wish/would that).
Begging/supplication	C asks CT to perform an action earnestly or humbly.	<i>takfaiin</i> (kindly please, I beg you). <sup>33</sup>
Hesitator	pauses filled with non-lexical phonetic material used to show CT that C has qualms about performing the act.	<i>erm, er, uh, ah</i>
Consultative device	optional devices by which C seeks CT's cooperation (usually ritualized formulas).	<i>tqdriin</i> (if you could), <i>mumkin</i> (if you do not mind).
<b>b. Clausal downgraders</b>		
Polite formulaic expressions	optional elements added by the C to an utterance to show respect to the CT.	<i>ismaHilii</i> (excuse me), <i>law takaramtii</i> (if you please), <i>tfaDalii</i> (a form of being polite to mean take your time).
Religious expressions	Islamic expressions used in the Islamic Saudi culture to show good natured personality and as a tool to ease requesting something.	' <i>allah yiHfaDki</i> (May God protect you), ' <i>allaah ysǧidik</i> (May God please you), ' <i>allah yaǧTiik</i>

<sup>33</sup> Although the use of this lexical item might turn the request into a FTA as it shows a high imposition on the CT, this pressure is considered appropriate in the Saudi culture for it shows sincerity/politeness in making a request (Al-Qahtani, 2009).

		<i>alṢaafiiyaah</i> (May God give you wellness).
Making allowance for CT	C accepts the behaviour of the CT by expressing his/her subjective opinion: it is all right if she is not in a position to help, thus lowering the assertive force of the utterance.	<i>ana Ṣaarif hadhii mahii masuuliyaatik</i> (I know that this is not your responsibility).  <i>antii malik dakhaal</i> (this is not your fault).
Implicit criticism	C avoids direct accusation to the company by employing indirect indications that the fault ought not to happen (i.e., the company always has a good reputation).	<i>mistaghriib in haadhaa altakhiir min (Furniture Company)</i> (I am surprised that this delay happened from this (Furniture Company)).  <i>ma Ṣuumrii twaqaaft ilshariikaah tsawii kiidhaa</i> (I never thought that the company would do so).
<b>Upgraders</b> (verbal elements used by Cs to increase the impact of the complaint by aggravating the problem)		
<b>a. Lexical upgraders</b>		
Lexical uptoners	words expressing negative attitude.	<i>muuSiibah</i> (catastrophe), <i>mahzalaah</i> (ridiculous), <i>Ṣayiib</i> (shame).
Commitment/oath	modifiers expressing C's heightened degree of commitments towards the problem and adverbials responding to that. In Saudi Arabic oaths (e.g., <i>wallah</i> ) are used to show that the speaker is a hundred percent sure of what he/she is saying.	<i>wallah</i> (I swear to God) <i>mutaa'kid</i> (sure)
<b>b. Clausal upgraders</b>		
Intensifiers	clauses that intensify part of the problem, and thus make it more difficult for the CT to excuse. Factors that could 'intensify' the problem could be: long waiting time, more than one request made prior to the call, or calling the CU several times to report the 'same' problem.	<i>maraah takhartuu</i> (they are very late).  <i>lukum alaan iHidaṢash yuum</i> (you are late for eleven days now).

		<i>daqaait flayiikum fashir maraat</i> (I called you ten times).
Bad consequences	C mentions some personal bad consequences that he/she suffers from due to the problem so as to 'successfully' support his/her argument.	<i>albanaat mushaqtariin fii kuul makaan</i> (the girls are scattered everywhere).  <i>raHaat falayii riHlatii</i> (I missed my flight).
Irony	C uses expressions to convey that the solution to the problem is much easier than what the company is doing; to explicitly criticize the company's procedures.	<i>Wallah law inannah fii kawkaab zuHaal</i> (as if we were living in Saturn).  <i>manii sharii min supermarket</i> (I did not buy from a supermarket).
Blaming through comparing	C expresses explicitly that the action performed by the company is 'bad' through comparing the performance of the company to another competitive company; assuming that the complained-about company behaves in a way that is not normal.	<i>(Competitive Company) fii fashir ayaam ishtraytahaa wa 'trakaabaat.</i>  (I brought from (Competitive Company) and in ten days it was delivered and assembled).  <i>(Competitive Company) ytaShuu falaynaa qabil mayJuun.</i> (Competitive Company) calls us before they come).
C's denial of responsibility	C mentions that the problem is not his/her fault, hence increases the degree of the blame.	<i>ana sawaiit kil al'jraat</i> (I made all the required procedures).  <i>altakhiir Jaa minhuum muu minii</i> (the delay was caused by them not me).
Aggressive interrogative	questions used by C to involve CT and thus increase the impact of C's utterance.	<i>iinti shayfaah hadii khdmaat fumalla</i> (do you regard this as a customer service?) <i>Tayib layiih ma balaghtuunii</i> (why do not you inform me?)
Rejection	C utters expressions that indicate the problem ought not to have happened.	<i>mafii mubaarir</i> (there is no excuse), <i>mafii zaHmaah</i> (there was not a crowd).
Rhetorical appeal	C attempts, by implying the non-possibility of accepting the complaint, to ensure that CT must accept the complaint.	<i>al'nsaan al'faqil ma yrDahaa</i> (any human cannot accept this). <i>liilmik</i> (you must know that).

A call can have an unlimited number of lexical/clausal graders. Similarly, downgraders may co-occur with upgraders.

### 3.3.2.4 Customer's intensity level of dissatisfaction

The main purpose of focusing on the customer's level of dissatisfaction in each call is to identify any relationship between the degree of dissatisfaction and the verbal strategies and graders used in a call (research question 4).

At first, building a scale to measure the Saudi customer's level of dissatisfaction made use of Cunliffe and Johnston's (2008) scale. This was chosen because it is specifically designed to assess the intensity of a customer's dissatisfaction in *business complaints*, the type of complaints that the current study is investigating and it is the only one found in the literature.

Cunliffe and Johnston's (2008) six-level scale of customers' intensity of dissatisfaction was given in Table 2.2 and is repeated as Table 3.6 below for the reader's convenience.

Table 3.6 Intensity levels of customer's dissatisfaction (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008, p.54)

<b>Intensity of Dissatisfaction</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Satisfied (0)	further inquiry (perhaps following an original complaint) where customer appears to have no further concerns.	"I believe...and would like..."
Slightly dissatisfied (-1)	customer intimates that he/she is not yet satisfied and/or suggests that minimal action will return him/her to a satisfied state.	"slightly concerned", "disappointment" "not yet received satisfactory explanation"
Annoyed (-2)	customer expresses his/her displeasure or incredulity.	"express displeasure" "feel dissatisfied" "annoying and frustrating"
Very annoyed (-3)	customer expresses displeasure or incredulity in a superlative form suggesting that the company will have no further recommendation for him/her.	"total dissatisfaction" "extremely dissatisfied" "totally disillusioned"
Extremely annoyed (-4)	customer expresses his/her concern or desperation. Making it clear that they will personally execute no further business with the company and also dissuade others.	"disgusted" "extremely annoyed" "irate and agitated"

Absolutely furious (-5)	customer appears incensed and/or exhibits threatening behaviour. Customer removes his/her business.	“absolutely disgusted” “enraged”
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During the recursive coding of the data, it was necessary to depart from Cunliffe and Johnston’s (2008) six-level scale and develop a new system for measuring the Saudi customer’s level of dissatisfaction. This is because their scale measured ‘one’ level of dissatisfaction that the customer reached after a previous complaint had been dealt with but which had not been resolved by close of business the day after it is received (i.e., level of dissatisfaction in the follow-up letters). However, the current study reveals that a customer during the negotiation of the problem stage can have either one level of dissatisfaction; he/she remains with the *same* degree of anger, or a C can have mixed levels of dissatisfaction. The C might start reporting the problem by being ‘moderately annoyed’ then the degree of dissatisfaction reaches a higher point to be ‘intensely annoyed’ by the end of the negotiation phase. Hence, it was necessary to build a scale that could measure two types of C’s level of dissatisfaction: (a) ‘*basic*’ for C’s who maintained one level of dissatisfaction throughout the negotiation of the problem phase; and (b) ‘*mixed*’ for C’s who had two different levels of dissatisfaction.

When coding the C’s level of dissatisfaction, the researcher assessed the level of dissatisfaction that he/she reached during the negotiation of the problem stage (i.e., the complaint work)<sup>34</sup>. The focus on that stage of the call in particular is because it is the stage that is highly marked by the C’s emotional state which reflects his/her level of dissatisfaction. Besides, the stage of negotiating the problem contains one of the vital factors that can either increase/decrease the C’s degree of anger: the type of the CT’s responses.

Determining the C’s level of dissatisfaction was done by analysing two factors during the negotiation of the problem stage: (a) *linguistic* which refers to the C’s self-report of his/her level of dissatisfaction or emotional state such as using the phrases ‘*muustaa Jiidaan*’ (extremely dissatisfied) or ‘*taṣabit*’ (tired); and (b) *paralinguistic* which refers to other non-linguistic aspects reflecting the C’s level of dissatisfaction such as the tone of voice, pitch, and interruption. Also, because of the risk of circularity in assessing correlations between strategies and levels of dissatisfaction, I developed measures of dissatisfaction that did not rely on or refer to either strategies or graders. In other words, features involved in coding the level of dissatisfaction were distinct from those classified as ‘discourse features’:

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<sup>34</sup> See section 5.2.1 for the sub-moves of the complaint work stage.

- ‘Level of dissatisfaction’ was coded on the basis of Cs’ direct statements about their own cognitive, emotional, or physical state or response (e.g. words meaning *believe, concerned, disappointed, disillusioned, sick, devastated*, etc). It makes use of language markers/expressions which express dissatisfaction. Coding the intensity of a customer’s dissatisfaction also considered paralinguistic features used to indicate emotional state such as raised tone of voice, high pitch, hanging up, and repeated interruptions.
- Discourse features and strategies were coded on the basis of the force of a statement (illocutionary force) directed at the CT (e.g. blessings, excusing, blaming, criticising, apology, promising, explaining etc) as well as graders like the use of fictive kin-terms, politeness formulae, and repair work.

The sub-moves of the complaint work stage were first coded on a 3-point scale: slightly dissatisfied (1), moderately annoyed (2), and intensely annoyed (3). Then, the researcher assessed whether a C maintained the same level of dissatisfaction throughout the different sub-moves or displayed mixed levels. If one level of dissatisfaction was maintained, the C was coded as having a ‘basic’ level of dissatisfaction (i.e., one level). Cs who displayed different levels of dissatisfaction during the sub-moves of the complaint work were coded as having a ‘mixed’ level of dissatisfaction (i.e., more than one level). The different levels that they displayed determined to which level of dissatisfaction in the scale they belonged to. For example, a C who started negotiating the problem by being slightly dissatisfied (1) and he/she became intensely annoyed (3) as the conversation developed was coded as a C with level 5 of dissatisfaction (1+3) (see Table 3.8).

Descriptions and examples of the *basic* levels of dissatisfaction are given in Table 3.7. Table 3.8 presents the three *mixed* levels of dissatisfaction. Examples from the data are followed by the researcher’s translation. It should be mentioned that not *all* the description given for a level is to be found in a C’s interaction to be coded in that level. If only some features of the level are applicable to a C, then he/she is coded at that level of dissatisfaction.

Table 3.7 Basic intensity levels of customer’s dissatisfaction during the negotiation of the problem stage - Coding categories

Intensity of Dissatisfaction	Description	Example from the data
Slightly dissatisfied (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C complains and his/her complaint is followed by a further inquiry.</li> </ul>	<i>Tayib khalaas muumtaaz. mitaa byJuun?</i> ok fine that is excellent. When will they come?- after

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C appears to have no further concerns and accepts the justifications/explanations given by CT.</li> </ul>	<p>the ‘first’ remedial action offered by the CT-</p> <p><i>kalaam maaʕquul</i> satisfactory explanation- after the justification offered by the CT of the cause of the problem-</p>
Moderately annoyed (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer states clearly his/her displeasure, that he/she is not yet satisfied, and needs a solution but manage the degree of his/her anger (e.g., not shouting, not using impolite expressions.</li> <li>• He/she agrees to call again to find out when the service would be ready.</li> </ul>	<p><i>mayiiSiir alkalaam hadhaa</i> this is unacceptable.</p> <p><i>muumaʕquul</i> unsatisfactory</p> <p><i>almawʕid dawakhinii</i> the appointment makes me dizzy.</p>
Intensely annoyed (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• customer has a high or extreme degree of anger/dissatisfaction.</li> <li>• He/she might launch into explaining the problem without first identifying his/her name, mobile number, order and/or receipt number.</li> <li>• He/she expresses his/her displeasure suggesting that the company will have no further recommendation for him/her, that he/she will personally execute no further business with the company and also dissuade others.</li> </ul>	<p><i>taraa anaa //maraah maraah// taʕbanaah wa muutaDariiraah</i> <b>I became //very very// sick and I am devastated.</b></p> <p><i>allah yntaqim min ilii kan sabaab ilmuushkilah</i> <b>I wish that God takes revenge on the one who causes the problem.</b></p> <p><i>khalaaS ruuHii</i> <b>go way</b> (in an enraged tone).</p>

Table 3.8 Mixed intensity levels of customer’s dissatisfaction during the negotiation of the problem stage - Coding categories

Intensity of dissatisfaction	Description	Example from the data
4 (1+2)	C starts negotiating the problem by being slightly dissatisfied. As the conversation develops, he/she becomes moderately annoyed.	<i>Tayib ok. mitaa ytwaaSaluun mafii?</i> ok fine. When will they call me back? (after 2 minutes) <i>kaiif alkalaam hadhaa!</i> this is unacceptable.

5 (1+3)	C starts negotiating the problem by being slightly dissatisfied. As the conversation develops, he/she becomes intensely annoyed.	<i>Tayib walHaal?</i> ok fine. What is the solution? (after 4 minutes) <b>antuum fashliin</b> <b>an abortive company.</b>
6 (2+3)	C starts negotiating the problem by being moderately annoyed. As the conversation develops, he/she becomes intensely annoyed.	<i>tafbtuunii fiialtawSiil</i> I became sick because of the delivery. (after 3 minutes) <b>//khalaaS khalaaS// antuum kadhaabiin</b> <b>//enough enough// this company is lying.</b>

Figure 3.2 shows the gradations in the intensity of the C's level of dissatisfaction.

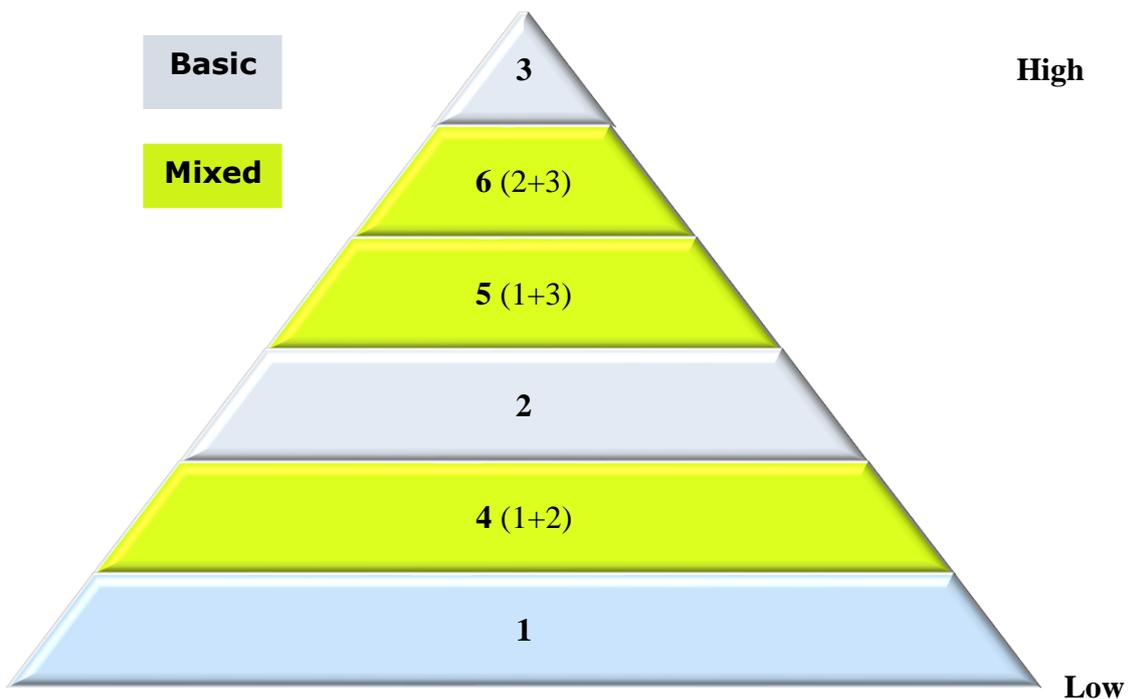


Figure 3.2 Intensity levels of customer's dissatisfaction during the negotiation of the problem stage

Insufficient tokens were found under each of the six levels of dissatisfaction mentioned above for Cs coded with those levels to allow a statistical analysis of correlations. Therefore, for the

quantitative analysis, the six levels of dissatisfaction were combined into three. These were: *high* (mixture of levels 3 and 6), 2 *extremes* (level 5), and *low-moderate* (mixture of levels 1, 2, and 4).

### 3.3.3 Aspects of analysis

As mentioned previously, calls were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. For each type of approach, focus was directed to certain aspects of analysis to help answer the research questions. These aspects are explained in the following two sub-sections.

#### 3.3.3.1 Quantitative analysis

Quantitatively speaking, the researcher developed a list of linguistic features to classify and count the number of calls that shared the same features. This classification of data allowed the researcher to identify and group calls with similar features. It also enabled the researcher to make generalizations and assign frequencies to linguistic aspects identified in the data.

For quantitative analysis, the researcher classified and counted calls that had the same features. Classification of research data was done according to the following ten aspects (Table 3.9).

Table 3.9 Aspects of quantitative analysis

Aspect of analysis	Categories	
Gender (CT with C)	Female with Male	Female with Female
Number of problems in a call	1 2 2+	
Topics of complaint (the <i>major problem</i> for which C seeks a remedial action, usually stated at the beginning of the call)	Late delivery Late assembly Purchased item (missing/added/broken pieces) No reply to prior complaint/request Appointments (missed/changed)	
Length of call (minutes including the waiting time, if any)	Short (1 minute or less to 10 minutes) Medium (more than 10 minutes to 20 minutes) Long (more than 20 minutes)	

Customer's level of dissatisfaction throughout the negotiation of the problem <sup>35</sup>	High 2 extremes Low-moderate
Structural type	<p><i>Minimal</i>: calls consisting of the minimal core moves of a Saudi Arabic complaint call which are: the opening sequence (pre-complaint), the complaint work (head acts and supportive moves) and the closing sequence (post-complaint).</p> <p><i>Expanded</i>: calls comprising additional moves to the core ones which occurred either during the opening sequence, the complaint work, or the closing sequence.</p> <p><i>Deviant</i>: calls lacking one of the core components of the minimal moves of a Saudi Arabic business complaint calls.</p>
C's verbal strategies <sup>36</sup>	<p>State the problem Express disagreement Reiterate the problem Hold company responsible for fault Accuse company of dishonesty Threat Request to speak to a higher authority Want/need statement Request compensation Request solution Request CT put in writing Request an apology Narrative circumstances Peers' bad experiences</p>
CT's Verbal strategies <sup>37</sup>	<p>Offering 'partial' repair Demonstration of empathy Apologizing Promising to help Acknowledging responsibility for the fault Providing explanation Evasion of responsibility (placing responsibility on a third party) Placing responsibility back on C Optimistic Calming</p>

<sup>35</sup> See Tables 3.7 and 3.8 for the definitions and examples of these levels.

<sup>36</sup> See Table 3.3 for the definitions and examples of these strategies.

<sup>37</sup> See Table 3.4 for the definitions and examples of these strategies.

Graders <sup>38</sup>	Downgraders	fictive kin terms cajolers wishing lexical items begging/supplication hesitator consultative device polite formulaic expressions religious expressions making allowance for CT implicit criticism
	Upgraders	lexical uptoners commitment/oath intensifiers bad consequences irony blaming through comparing C's denial of responsibility aggressive interrogative rejection rhetorical appeal
Outcome of the call (Is the issue ever resolved?)	<p><i>Yes</i>, before the call ends.</p> <p><i>Partially resolved</i>: CT was able to help with some aspects of the problem but not all.</p> <p><i>No</i>: CT was not able to help and the problem needed to be transferred to a higher authority.</p>	

The analysis was based on an independent evaluation of each aspect according to the categories provided for each one. Objective decisions based on the definitions and examples developed were taken. Coding labels for each aspect were created. To minimize errors and for the sake of ease of application, codes generated were either actual words of the categories of the aspect they represented as ‘*expanded*’ and ‘*slightly dissatisfied*’ or initials that have “mnemonic resemblance to the name of the coding categories they represent” as ‘*F*’ for a ‘*Female*’ speaker and ‘*M*’ for a ‘*Male*’ speaker (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, p.182).

### 3.3.3.2 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis complemented the quantitative data. Considering the time constraint for

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<sup>38</sup> See Table 3.5 for the definitions and examples of these graders.

analysis, and following Marshall's (1996) 'purposeful sampling' approach<sup>39</sup>, four interactions were qualitatively examined adopting a genre-focused socio-pragmatic approach in order to provide "a more vivid account of specific cases and reveal more clearly the tactical choices that speakers make" (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, p.204).

Detailed analysis of selected interactions was undertaken. Transcripts of these interactions were first made in Arabic script then were translated into English and transliterated into romanized orthography following Saleh's (2002) transliteration system. Analysis was made of each call with a primary focus on:

1. The conversational sequence of moves: how participants opened, developed, and ended their call. Each call was analysed by dividing it into its major four phases: the initial phase (opening), the medial phase (transaction), the initial pre-closing sequence and the closing sequence. This was done by labelling each section of a call, so that comparisons could be made at a broad level, ignoring fine-grained differences.
2. The customer's verbal complaint strategies.
3. Verbal response strategies of the CU member.
4. Modifications used by the Saudi Arabic customer to minimize/maximize the 'non-polite' nature of the speech act of complaint. This included linguistic strategies such as politeness strategies (i.e., upgraders and downgraders) or extra-linguistic strategies such as interruption, silence, and tone of voice.
5. The relationship between the degree of a customer's dissatisfaction and his/her use of verbal complaint strategies and graders.
6. The manifestation of the socio-cultural values of the Saudi society in the linguistic choices made.

### 3.3.4 Procedures for data analysis

As mentioned earlier, the research data for this study is a set of previously recorded naturally-occurring complaint phone calls collected by a CU staff member and transcribed by the researcher (see section 3.2.5). When the transcription of all data was completed, the steps of data analysis started. This was done according to the following five procedures:

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<sup>39</sup> This approach refers to selecting the most productive sample that could answer adequately the research questions. For more details related to the sampling frame, see section 5.1.

1. Transcripts and the coding system were imported into MAXQDA 12 software. This is a professional software program for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis for Windows, which can analyze audio files. The major reason for choosing this software is that it is the only one found by the researcher that can support the Arabic language. As all transcripts were written in the Arabic alphabet, it was possible to analyze these transcripts using MAXQDA 12. This software can create codes and memos using the Arabic alphabet which was a feature needed for making clarifications for certain segments of the transcripts. In other words, MAXQDA 12 made it possible to work with two languages (i.e., Arabic and English) in the same document. Other features of the software which encouraged the researcher to use it were: it enables printing any transcript including its codes, easily marks segments of the transcript for qualitative analysis and has visualization tools that show data connections in a comprehensible way.

2. Contextual information of the conversational exchange was noted. Information noted included who addressed whom, their relationship to each other, and what the complaint was directed to (i.e., topic of the complaint), the length of the call, gender of speakers, number of problems in a call, and any necessary comments about the interaction and/or the participants. This was done as conversation in genre analysis and socio-pragmatics is seen as context-shaped (see sections 2.1.5 and 2.1.6). Gardner (1994) states that “anything anyone says in conversation both builds on what has been said or what has been going on... [as well as] creates the conditions for what will be said next” (p.102).

3. The researcher applied the theoretical framework for data analysis in 20% (18 calls) of the data (see section 3.3.2). To stay within the ethical requirements of the company (Appendix D), it was only possible to check these coded calls with the researcher’s supervisors. There was an agreement rate of 98% for the quantitative and qualitative aspects of analysis identified. The results obtained from these discussions were carefully considered and the necessary changes were made accordingly. Put differently, although the researcher expected that the structure, strategies, graders, and levels of dissatisfaction of most of the calls would match the categories adopted from works in the literature of complaints, these were modified in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion. As mentioned in section 3.3.2, modifications were omissions and additions of some structural moves, strategies, graders, as well as adjusting the levels of dissatisfaction. Such modifications were necessary to address in the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls corpus.

4. After finalizing the coding system on the basis of the modifications, the structural type, strategies used in constructing/justifying the complaint, the strategies used in responding to the complaint, and the graders of the remaining 80% (72 calls) of the data were coded. The customer's overall level of dissatisfaction and the outcome of each call were determined and coded as well. Coding used Arabic key-words, phrases and descriptions developed as counterparts for established categories, in discussion with the supervisors. It was performed by listening to the recordings accompanied by Arabic transcriptions and allocating codes to utterances. New coding categories were developed in response to the data when necessary (see sections 3.3.2.2 and 3.3.2.3).

During this stage, I conducted the analysis myself. Conducting an inter-rater reliability check was not possible in this study. This is because of two reasons: (a) the FTC approved that the data was to be used only by the researcher and her supervisors. Thus, having a second rater to check the accuracy of analysis for the *whole* data set was not permissible, and (b) the aspects of quantitative analysis were clear, minimizing the necessity of checking the analysis by a second rater. However, and as a measure to evaluate reliability, an intracoder reliability check was performed. I repeated the coding of ten calls one week following the 'first' time they were coded. The degree of agreement among these repeated coding was 98%.

The researcher endeavoured to make objective decisions based on the definitions and the explanation developed. Yet, one should also bear in mind that "although definitions may suggest mutually exclusive categories, real world cases may still be difficult to classify...even with clear-cut definitions, there may still be fuzzy cases that can fall into more than one category" (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, p.189).

5. Finally, and after coding was completed and frequencies counted for the entire corpus, four interactions were qualitatively examined (see section 3.3.3.2). The audio-recorded data was examined for the components of the speech act of complaint produced by native Saudi speakers in a FTC. One of the challenges in qualitative research is to warrant analysis by using ways of assessing the extent to which claims are supported by convincing evidence (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Li & Searle, 2007). To offer a suitable warrant for my interpretations, I used the following sources of support: talked about my interpretation with my supervisors, referred back to relevant literature, made multiple revisits to my analysis

(intracoder reliability check mentioned above). Acknowledging that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings, I also engaged in discussions with two native Saudi Arabic speakers, of whom one was majoring in linguistics, throughout the analysis process. Their clarifications were highly consistent and alternative explanations to my interpretation were considered and included in the qualitative analysis.

An example of a transcript analysed quantitatively and qualitatively using MAXQDA 12 is presented in Appendix J and Appendix K.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Broadly speaking, the purpose of the study is to identify aspects of the interactional behaviour of complainers in a particular culture and under specific formal institutional conditions. More specifically, the aim of the study is to analyse the sequential and interactional characteristics of direct complaints and their responses for both local citizens and customer service members in calls to the CU of the CCC in a FTC. For that reason, the study integrated a quantitative and a qualitative approach to data analysis. Quantitative data analysis was carried out to identify the most frequent trends used in performing and responding to business complaints by Saudi Arabic customers and staff members. This was then complemented by qualitative data analysis employing a structural and a socio-pragmatic approach. Both types of analysis adopted the already existing classification systems of the components of the speech act of complaint and the linguistic strategies of works in the literature of complaints, with modifications and additions when necessary. After analysing complaint phone calls quantitatively and qualitatively, conclusions are drawn regarding how Saudi Arabic complaint business calls are performed and responded to in an institutional context. The analysis also identifies typical characteristics that can be used as a framework for what to expect from speakers when complaining in a Saudi business spoken communication.

## **CHAPTER FOUR Results of Quantitative Analysis**

### **Results of Quantitative Analysis**

This chapter presents the quantitative results that address the four quantitative research questions:

1. What is the frequency of each structural type of Saudi Arabic complaint business call in the data?
2. What are the most frequent strategies used in Saudi Arabic business complaint calls:
  - a. by customers to construct their complaints?
  - b. by service providers to respond to complaints?
3. What are the most common graders used by Saudi Arabic customers to minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint?
4. Is there any relationship between the customers’ level of dissatisfaction and their use of:
  - a. graders?
  - b. verbal complaint strategies?

In section 4.1, a descriptive analysis of frequency counts and percentages of occurrence is provided for participants’ demographic information (i.e., gender) and data features (i.e., topics of complaints, length of calls, and number of problems in one call). Section 4.2 presents the quantitative results in four thematic subheadings which correspond to the four quantitative research questions listed above. A summary of the principal quantitative results appears in section 4.3.

#### **4.1 Overview of the corpus**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, ninety anonymized electronic audio recordings of naturally occurring colloquial Saudi Arabic complaint telephone calls to the CU of the CCC of the FTC in Saudi Arabia were considered for analysis. All Cs and CTs were native Saudi Arabic speakers. The majority of Cs were male (66.7%); one-third were female (33.3%). All CTs were female. The exact number of CTs is unknown as calls were anonymized, making it impossible to identify each service provider and how many calls she answered.

Complaint phone calls varied in their topics of complaint, length, and the number of problems each call tackled (see Table 4.1). Almost half of the data was about problems of late delivery (47.8%) followed by the problem of late assembly, which constituted just over a third of the

data (33.3%). Other less common topics of complaint were problems related to purchased items being either broken or lacking some of their parts (11.2%), not receiving a reply from the company to a customer's previously submitted complaint or request (4.4%), or appointments being missed or changed from what was stated in the C's receipt (3.3%).

Calls also varied in their length. More than half of the data (62.2%) comprised short complaint calls in which calls lasted from one minute to less than ten minutes. Approximately one-third of the calls (35.6%) were of medium length (more than ten minutes to twenty minutes). Only two calls were long ones in which C and CT spent more than twenty minutes negotiating the problematic issue complained about.

The vast majority of the calls dealt with one problematic issue (95.6%). However, four complaint calls addressed two problems, which was the maximum number a complaint call had (4.4%). In other words, no call involved complaints about more than two problems.

Table 4.1 shows the distribution of complaint calls by the C's gender according to topics of complaint, length of call, and number of problems addressed in each call. This indicates a diversity in the features of calls considered for analysis mainly with respect to topics of complaint and secondly with respect to duration of calls. There is little variation in the number of problems per call.

Table 4.1 Distribution of complaint calls by gender, topics, length of the call, and number of problems

Variable	Male (n=60)	Female (n=30)	Total (n=90)	%
<b>Topic of complaint</b>				
Late delivery	32	11	43	47.8
Late assembly	18	12	30	33.3
Purchased item (missing/added/broken pieces)	6	4	10	11.2
No reply to prior complaint/request	2	2	4	4.4
Appointments (missed/changed)	2	1	3	3.3
<b>Length of call</b>				
Short	40	16	56	62.2
Medium	20	12	32	35.6
Long	0	2	2	2.2
<b>Number of problems in a call</b>				

One problem	57	29	86	95.6
Two problems	3	1	4	4.4

In each of these calls, different verbal strategies and graders were deployed by Cs and service providers to serve the transactional goals in the interactions. The following section presents descriptive statistics of the linguistic features of the corpus: its structural types, strategies of performing and responding to complaints, linguistic devices used to soften and/or aggravate the complaint, and finally the correlation between the customer's level of dissatisfaction and their choice of graders and verbal strategies of complaining.

## 4.2 Distribution of aspects of analysis

The purpose of this section is to present the quantitative results for the four research questions. Results are discussed according to the four major aspects of analysis mentioned in Chapter 3: (a) structural types of Saudi Arabic complaint business call; (b) verbal strategies of performing and responding to a complaint; (c) graders used by the Cs to minimize/maximize a complaint, and finally (d) the relationship between the degree of a customer's dissatisfaction and strategies used as well as graders resorted to by the complainer when the complaint was dealt with (see section 3.3.3).

### 4.2.1 Research question 1: Structural types

The first research question aimed to determine what structural types are exhibited in Saudi Arabic complaint phone calls and what their relative frequencies are. It asked:

RQ1: What is the frequency of each structural type of Saudi Arabic complaint business calls in the data?

To be able to answer this question, the researcher has to identify the range of structural types evident in the data<sup>40</sup>. Because of the small number of studies on complaints in Arabic, the researcher initially constructed, in a 'top-down' fashion, an established structure for the overall trajectory of the Saudi Arabic complaint interaction. This structure was based on the structure

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<sup>40</sup> A brief explanation of each of these structural types is given in this section as the aim of the question is to show the *frequency* of each structural type identified. More elaboration on each structural type with examples is presented in Chapter 5 (see section 5.2.1).

of complaint calls exhibited in other languages found in the literature (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011; Saadah, 2009; Schegloff, 1986; Wong, 2009)<sup>41</sup>.

After obtaining the data, the researcher examined the preliminary structure in 20% (18 calls) of the data (see section 3.3.2.1). Although the researcher expected that the structure of most of the calls would match the preliminary structure designed, this proposed structure was modified in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion. Modifications were omissions and additions of some moves within the structure of the call.

During the recursive analysis of the rest of the data, the researcher came across cases that departed from the basic structure identified for the Saudi Arabic business complaint call<sup>42</sup>. They either contained *additional moves* to the core components of the basic structure or *lacked* one of these core components. Hence, the researcher ended up with three structural types of the Saudi Arabic complaint call: minimal, expanded, and deviant.

*Minimal* complaint calls consisted of the minimal core moves<sup>43</sup> of a Saudi Arabic complaint call which were: the opening sequence (pre-complaint), the complaint work (head acts and supportive moves), and the closing sequence (post-complaint). *Expanded* calls comprised additional moves to the core ones which occurred either during the opening sequence, the complaint work, or the closing sequence. No single call had extra moves in more than one of these phases. In other words, if a call had an extra move, this additional move was located in just *one* of the three phases of the call; opening, medial, or closing. Finally, the last structural type of the complaint calls was *deviant* calls. These lacked one of the core components of the minimal moves of a Saudi Arabic business complaint calls: the closing sequence. This was because C cut off the line before the call reached a natural end.

Descriptive analysis in terms of percentages and frequencies was conducted to determine the most frequent structural type of Saudi Arabic complaint calls. Deviant calls constituted only 6.7% of the data; more than half of the calls had the minimal structure of a complaint call (55.5%) and over a third had the expanded structure (37.8%) (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 summarizes the frequency of different structural types of Saudi Arabic complaint business calls in the data.

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<sup>41</sup> For justifications of using these particular models, see section 3.3.2.

<sup>42</sup> See section 5.2.1 for the *basic* structure (i.e., minimal core moves) of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic.

<sup>43</sup> In this study, a ‘move’ refers to the unit of data analysis. Moves “identify a new function in the discourse of the speaker” (Perez de Ayala, 2001, p.153). For each move, a major discourse function was identified.

Table 4.2 Distribution of the structural types of Saudi Arabic business complaint calls

Structural type	n	%
Minimal	50	55.5
Expanded	34	37.8
Deviant	6	6.7
Total	90	100.0

In expanded calls, most extra moves occurred during the complaint work (44.2%), followed by those which occurred in the opening sequence (38.2%), with a few noteworthy extra moves in the closing sequence (17.6%) (see Table 4.3).

In the opening sequence of calls, three additional moves appeared. These were:

1. Shortened ‘how-are-you?’: after responding to CT greeting, C might initiate a shortened ‘how-are-you?’ sequence to break the ice between interlocutors and to create ties of union. This is clear in Example 1 below.

Example (1)

CT: (Furniture Company) *assalaamu ṣ laykum* (greeting in Saudi Arabic)

C: *Ṣ laykum assalaam wa raHmatullaah wabarakatu* (respond to greeting). *Kiif alHal?* (how are you?)

CT: *alHamdulellaah* (Thanks to God). *tfaDDal 'ustaadhi kaif mumkin akhdimak?* (how can I help you, please?)

} shortened  
‘how-are-  
you’

2. C’s request to speak to a particular CT: C might ask to talk to a specific CT by giving her name so that the problem is not repeated to a new CT as illustrated in Example 2.

Example (2)

CT: (Furniture Company) *assalaamu Ṣ laykum* (greeting in Saudi Arabic). *tfaDal kaif aqdaar asaṣdaak?* (how can I help you, please?)

C: *hala waṢ laykum assalaam* (respond to greeting). *Abghaa akalim alukht Areej.* (I want to speak to sister Areej)

} request a  
particular  
CT

3. CT identifies herself: CT might identify herself, without being asked by C, after uttering the organizational identification and before offering help as in Example 3.

### Example (3)

CT: (Furniture Company) *assalaamuḥlaykum* (greeting in Saudi Arabic) *ma‘ak Ahlaam* (this is Ahlaam) *tfaDDal kaif aqdaar asaḥdaak?* (how can I help you, please?) } CT identifies herself

Of the above-mentioned three extra moves that took place during the opening sequence of the complaint call, the ‘how-are-you?’ sequence was the most common one (23.5%) followed by the extra move of C requesting to talk to a specific CT (11.8%). It was very infrequent that CT identified herself at the beginning of the call (2.9%) (see Table 4.3).

During the complaint work, two further moves were observed. These were:

1. Further inquiries: In 32.4% of the calls, C sought information from CT regarding an issue related to the problem by asking questions (see Table 4.3). This was done after CT offered a solution to the problem and C accepted it. For example, inquiries were about, but not limited to, the duration C had to wait for the problem to be resolved or about contact numbers of departments within the store. Example 4 shows the occurrence of an inquiry in the medial phase of the call.

### Example (4)

CT: *khlaS anaa rafaḥt alTalaab byakhdh min arbaḥwḥshriin saḥah 'layiin thamanwarbiḥiin saḥah 'layiin ma ytiim alrad w yfiidunik* (Ok I submitted the request. It will take 24 to 48 hours till we receive a reply and are able to inform you)

C: *Tayyib allah yaḥTiik alḥafiyah* (ok may God give you wellness)

CT: *allah yḥafiiik* (may God give you wellness as well)

C: *Tayyib bi titaSluun ḥala hadhaa al talfuun aw ḥala aljawal ilii msaJaal ḥndkuum?* (ok will you call this number I am calling from or will you call the mobile number that you have in your system?) } further inquiries

CT: *ḥalaa aljawal* (we will call your mobile)

2. Second complaint: In four calls (11.8%), Cs complained about another problem (i.e., a second complaint) after being offered a solution to his/her first problem. Example 5 indicates the occurrence of a second complaint in the medial phase of the call.

Example (5)

C: *kaan mauʕid altarkiib yuum thalatiin (...) w lHad alaan ma Jaaw* (my appointment for assembly was on the 30<sup>th</sup> and the assembly team still have not come) } 1<sup>st</sup> complaint: late assembly

CT: *Tayyib 'ustaadhi ana alHiin raH arfaaʕ lik Talaab ʕlaa 'daarat altarkiib* (ok sir I will submit now an order to the administration of the assembly department)

C: *Tayyib (ok) fih mushklaah thanyaah (...) alaan yquluun alshuHnaa salamuha li shakhS thanii 'smah ʕaTiyaah* (ok. There is another problem. They said that the order was delivered to a person named Atyaah) } 2<sup>nd</sup> complaint: wrong delivery

CT: *yaʕnii shakhS thanii gharik 'stalamhaa?* (so you mean that it was delivered to the wrong person?)

In the closing sequence, six calls (17.6%) had one type of additional move (see Table 4.3). This move involved the C asking the CT to identify herself before ending the call (Example 6). This was done so that C could follow up with the same CT if he/she did not receive a prompt reply from the company.

Example (6)

CT: *Tayyib 'ustaadhi alkariim eHnaa Hanirsil al iimail waa enshaallah HytwaSal maʕak fariiq altwSiil* (ok sir we will send an email and if God wills the delivery team will contact you)

C: *miin maʕayaah ʕafuann?* (sorry who am I talking to?) } C asks CT to identify herself

CT: *maʕaak sarah* (I am Sara)

C: *Tayyib enshaallah khaiir. Shulraan. maʕ aslamah* (Ok everything is going to be fine if God wills. Thanks. Goodbye)

Distribution of extra moves by their position in the expanded call are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Distribution of extra moves in expanded calls

Position in call	n	%
<b>Initial phase</b>		
Shortened 'how-are-you?'	8	23.5
Request to speak to a particular CT	4	11.8
CT identify herself	1	2.9
<b>Medial phase</b>		
Further inquiries	11	32.4

Second complaint	4	11.8
<b>Closing phase</b>		
C asked CT identify herself	6	17.6
Total	34	100.0

The last structural type of the complaint calls was *deviant* calls (6.7%). These lacked one of the core components of the minimal moves of a Saudi Arabic business complaint calls: the closing sequence. This was because C cut off the line before the call reached a natural end. This is clear in Example 7.

Example (7)

CT: *anna ma 'ʕrif aysh sabab altakhiir lanuu ma tuuDaH ʕndanaa fatintaZrii eHnaa raH ntwaSaal maʕ nafs alsharikaah nshuuf laysh ma Jukii* (I do not know what the reason is behind the delay because it is not clear in the system so you have to wait until we contact the delivery team and know why they have not delivered your items yet)

C: *shahaar kamil wu entuu ma tʕrifuu layh fariiq altawSiil ma ywasil lili ʕamiil! Hadhii bDaʕatkuum wu entuu ilii makhdhiin minanaa alfluus!* (One month [has passed] and you [still] do not know why the delivery team have not delivered to the customer! These are your goods and you are the ones to whom we paid our money!)

CT: *SaHiiH ʕaziztii* (you are right my dear)

C: *yaʕnii mu maʕquul!* (this is unreasonable!) [C cut off the line]

#### 4.2.2 Research question 2: Verbal strategies of constructing/responding to complaints

The second research question aimed to identify the most frequent linguistic strategies used by customers and service providers in performing and responding to institutional business complaint calls in Saudi Arabic. It stated:

RQ2: What are the most frequent strategies used:

- a. by complainers to construct complaints?
- b. by service providers to respond to complaints?

To answer this question, frequencies of occurrence were assigned to each verbal strategy used by Cs and CTs. These are explained in the coming two sub-sections.

#### 4.2.2.1 Verbal strategies of constructing/justifying complaints

Several verbal strategies were deployed by the Cs when complaining. These refer to linguistic strategies used by customers to serve two functions: (a) *construct* the complaint, or (b) *persuade* the service provider of the validity of the claim.

Only one strategy was identified to construct the complaint. This was ‘stating the problem’. It was an obligatory strategy expressed verbally immediately after the opening sequence to announce the topic of the complaint (the utterance which conveyed the illocutionary force of the FTA). Put differently, this strategy expressed the problem which C was aiming to resolve (i.e., complaint major head act<sup>44</sup>). In Example 8, C stated the problem immediately after the opening sequence.

#### Example (8)

CT: (Furniture Company) *assalaamuḥlaykum* (greeting in Saudi Arabic) *kaif aqdaar asaḥdaak?* (how can I help you?)

C: *ahalan waḥlaykum assalaam wa araHmaa* (responds to greeting) *ḥndi muskilah. elyuum mawḥdii ma Jaa altarkiib* (I have a problem. Today is my appointment for assembly and nobody came) } state the problem

Other verbal strategies served a different purpose. Their function was to “successfully” strengthen the C’s accusation. These strategies are categorized into five types: dissatisfaction, accusation/blaming, threatening, request/demand, and narration (see Table 4.4)<sup>45</sup>. Each category consists of a number of strategies. *Dissatisfaction* consists of the strategies of reiterating the problem and expressing disagreement. *Accusation/Blaming* comprises the strategies of accusing the company of dishonesty and holding the company responsible for fault. *Threat* consists of the strategy of issuing a threat. *Request/Demand* includes the strategies of: (a) request to speak to a higher authority, request that CT put the complaint in writing, or request an apology, a compensation, or a solution; and (b) the making of want/need statements. Finally, *Narration* is made up of the strategies of narrating circumstances and narrating peers’ bad experiences with the company.

All of the justification strategies were uttered during the complaint work. They were used in the immediate linguistic context as supportive moves which were identified either before or after the first head act or other head acts. Example 9 shows the existence of four justification

<sup>44</sup> As noted earlier (section 3.3.2.2), calls analysed, unlike other studies, had more than one head act in a call.

<sup>45</sup> Definitions of all of these strategies with examples from the data are given in Chapter 3 (see section 3.3.2.2).

strategies as supportive moves to the major head act: express disagreement, blame, issue threat, and request to speak to a higher authority, respectively.

Example (9)

CT: (Furniture Company) *assalaamuṣlaykum* (greeting in Saudi Arabic) *kaif aqdaar asaḥdaak?* (how can I help you?)

C: *waṣlaykum assalaam wa araHmaa* (respond to greeting). *anna ṣamlaah Talabyaah w 'lmafruḌ Jayatnii min yuum alkhamiis w 'laa al'aan ma Jaat* (I have an order. It should have been delivered by last Thursday, but until now it has not been delivered)

(CT asked inquiry questions and asked C to hold the line)

CT: *elqTaṣ mahii mutawafraah alaan ya 'ustaadhi* (the pieces of the items are not available madam)

C: *la la la (no no no)*

Strategy 1:

Express disagreement

***Kaif mahii mutawafraah wa anaa dafṣah alfaturaah w qalwlii mawjuudah (how are they not available ; when I paid they told me all the pieces are available)***

Strategy 2:

Accuse company of dishonesty

CT: *fi ṣndilk 'ustaadhi kadh qTṣaah naqSaah* (there are madam some pieces which are not available)

C: *'smṣii Habibtii 'dhaa ma Jatnii bukraah Hashtkii wazaraat alt'Jaraah* (Listen my dear, **if the items have not been delivered by tomorrow, I will complain to the Ministry of Commerce**)

Strategy 3:

Issue threat

CT: *enshallah bukraah tuSalik 'ustaadhi* (by God's will they will be delivered to you tomorrow)

C: *Tayiib maṣalaish ṣaṬinii aHaad masuul fii alsharikah akalmaah* (ok excuse me but **give me a person who is responsible in the company to talk with**)

Strategy 4:

Request higher authority

Results showed that the frequencies of strategies used by Cs' to construct and/or justify their complaints were different (see Table 4.4). There was a clear preference for the use of three particular strategies. These were: stating the problem (21.6%), holding the company responsible for fault (15.9%), and accusing the company of dishonesty (12.5%).

The other eleven strategies of justifying the complaint were very infrequent. All together they accounted for 50% of the data (see Table 4.4). Of these, Saudi Arabic Cs preferred issuing threats (9.4%) over requesting to speak to a higher authority (7.9%) or expressing disagreement (7.2%). Other strategies were seldom used by the Cs such as the strategies of requesting CT to

put the complaint in writing (1.7%), apology (1.7%), and narrating peers' bad experiences (0.5%).

Table 4.4 shows the distribution of strategies used by Cs' to construct and/or justify their complaints.

Table 4.4 Frequencies of C's complaint strategies

Strategy	n*	%
<b>Construct complaint</b>		
state the problem	90	21.6
<b>Justify complaint</b>		
<i>Dissatisfaction</i>		
express disagreement	30	7.2
reiterate the problem	24	5.8
<i>Accusation/Blaming</i>		
hold company responsible for fault	66	15.9
accuse company of dishonesty	52	12.5
<i>Threat</i>	39	9.4
<i>Request/Demand</i>		
to speak to a higher authority	33	7.9
want/need statement	18	4.3
a compensation	16	3.8
a solution	10	2.4
CT to put in writing	7	1.7
an apology	7	1.7
<i>Narration</i>		
narrative circumstances	22	5.3
peers' bad experiences	2	0.5
Total	416	100.0

\* Many of these strategies co-occurred in the same conversational turn and others were uttered more than once in the same call. Each occurrence of a strategy was included in the calculation in Table 4.4. Thus, the total number of strategies exceeded the total number of calls.

When Cs' used these strategies, they received certain types of responses from CTs. What follows is an account of the response strategies used by CTs to respond to Saudi Arabic customers' complaints.

#### 4.2.2.2 Verbal strategies for responding to complaints

Part of the second research question was to identify the most common strategies used by the CTs as responses to the Cs' complaints. To answer this question, the frequency of response strategies was counted and their percentages of occurrence were calculated.

Three categories for responses to complaints were identified. These were: C-supportive, CT-supportive, and cultural/religious. C-supportive responses are those used to support the face of the customer by offering repair<sup>46</sup>, showing empathy, apologizing, promising to help, and acknowledging responsibility for the fault. CT-supportive responses, on the contrary, refer to responses used when the CT chooses to support their own face by providing explanation, evasion of responsibility, and arguing back at the customer. Cultural/Religious responses are specific to the Saudi Islamic culture. They refer to specific cultural and religious phrases uttered in an attempt to soothe the complainer. When uttered, CT is reassuring C that the problem will be resolved as desired.

Results indicated that in all calls, CT responded verbally to customers' complaints by employing explicit strategies as responses, whether the complaints were initial ones (i.e., main problems) or subsequent ones (i.e., secondary problems). As with the complainer's strategies for constructing/justifying complaints (see section 4.2.2.1), response strategies followed either the major/first head act or strategic supporting acts. A call could have C-supportive responses, CT-supportive responses, and cultural/religious responses as indicated in Example 10.

#### Example (10)

C: *lahuu yuum wila yumayyin wanaa antZir wallah shaii mu maʕquul* (it is not just a day or two that I have been waiting. I swear it is something unbelievable)

CT: *SahiiH maʕakii Haaq* (that is true you are right) } C-supportive:  
Show empathy

C: *hadhaa mub taʕamuul alSaraHaah* (this is honestly not the way to treat a customer)

CT: *naʕtadhir minik 'ustaadhi.* (We apologize sir) } C-supportive: Apology

*eHnaa muJaraad nuaSil Sut alʕamiil ma nqdir nsawii shaii* } CT-supportive:  
(We just deliver the voice of the customer we cannot do anything) } Evasion of responsibility

*lakin b'dhin Allah raH ytwaSaluu maʕaak* (but if God wills, they will contact you) } Religious response

<sup>46</sup> All strategies with examples are explained in Chapter 3 (see section 3.3.2.2).

Table 4.5 shows the distribution of strategies used by CTs to respond to complaints. There was a difference in the proportion of strategies used by CTs to respond to Cs' complaints. Most strategies were C-supportive (50.6%). 'Offering partial repair' to C's problem (17.7%) and 'showing empathy' (14.1%) were the two most common responses. There was no noticeable difference in the frequency of two of the CT-supportive strategies though 'providing an explanation/excuse' (13.5%) was used slightly more than 'evasion of responsibility' (12.2%).

The strategies of calming the customer through the use of some specific religious/cultural responses occurred more frequently (22.6%) than the strategies of 'apology' and 'promise to help' (15%). CTs rarely 'acknowledged responsibility' (3.8%) and only occasionally 'placed responsibility back on C' (1.1%).

Table 4.5 Frequencies of CT's response strategies

Response strategy	n*	%
<b>C-supportive</b>		
offering ' <i>partial</i> ' repair	83	17.7
showing empathy	66	14.1
apologizing	35	7.5
promising to help	35	7.5
acknowledging responsibility for the fault	18	3.8
<b>CT-supportive</b>		
providing explanation	63	13.5
evasion of responsibility	57	12.2
placing responsibility back on C	5	1.1
<b>Cultural/Religious</b>		
optimistic	56	11.9
calming	50	10.7
Total	468	100.0

\* Many of these strategies co-occurred in the same conversational turn and others were uttered more than once in the same call. Each occurrence of a strategy was included in the calculation in Table 4.5. Thus, the total number of strategies exceeded the total number of calls.

Taken together, results for the second research question indicate that there are certain strategies used with different frequencies by the Cs to construct and/or justify their complaints. The usage of these strategies was either obligatory or optional. C *should* state the problem for which he/she is calling, but he/she has *the choice* of whether to support his/her claim through other

strategies. The CTs always responded to the Cs' claims. More of the responses were explicitly favourable (i.e., supporting the C's position) than unfavourable.

The next section explains how the Cs' expressed their problems in soft and/or aggravated language through the use of graders.

#### 4.2.3 Research question 3: Customer's use of graders

The third research question attempts to discover the downgrading and upgrading strategies used most frequently by Saudi Arabic customers in business complaint calls. It asked:

RQ3: What are the most common graders used by the Saudi Arabic customer to minimize/maximize the 'non-polite' nature of the speech act of complaint?

To answer this question, frequencies of occurrence were assigned to each grader used by the Cs. The following two subsections present the quantitative results for this research question.

##### 4.2.3.1 Downgraders

Certain lexical items and clauses were used by Saudi Arabic Cs to *mitigate* the offence and reduce the blame. Consequently, the complaint became weak or soft. These are known as downgraders (see section 2.2.5).

Two types of downgraders were identified: lexical and clausal. Lexical downgraders refer to lexical items used to minimize the force of a C's complaint. These were: fictive kin terms, cajolers, wishing and begging/supplication lexical items, hesitators, and consultative devices. Clausal downgraders, on the other hand, are clauses used to downplay the impact of the complaint on the CT. These consisted of: polite formulaic expressions, religious expressions, clauses with the functions of making allowance for CT and those which implied criticism of the company. Both types of downgraders occurred within the structure of the head acts (i.e., internal modification) or in the supporting moves (i.e., external modification) (see section 2.2.5).

Table 4.6 shows the distribution of lexical and clausal downgraders used by Saudi Arabic customers. They preferred the usage of lexical downgraders (52.7%) over clausal downgraders (47.3%). On the level of lexical downgraders, 'fictive kin terms' were most commonly used

(66.5%) followed by ‘cajolers’ (19.4%). However, ‘wish’, ‘begging/ supplication’, ‘hesitator’, and ‘consultative devices’ constituted 14.1% of lexical downgraders.

‘Polite formulaic expressions’ constituted a greater proportion of clausal downgraders (47.9%) than other types. A fairly large number of ‘religious expressions’ were produced when complaining (37.8%). ‘Making allowance for CT’ (7.4%) or ‘implicitly criticizing the performance of the company’ (6.9%) were infrequently used by Saudi Arabic complainers.

Taken together, the most common graders used by the customers to minimize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint were ‘fictive kin terms’ (66.5%), ‘polite formulaic expressions’ (47.9%), and ‘religious expressions’ (37.8%).

Table 4.6 Frequencies of C’s downgraders

Downgrader	n*	%
<b>Lexical</b>		
fictive kin terms	161	66.5
cajolers	47	19.4
wish	19	8
begging/supplication	9	3.7
hesitator	3	1.2
consultative device	3	1.2
Total	242	100.0
<b>Clausal</b>		
polite formulaic expressions	104	47.9
religious expressions	82	37.8
making allowance for CT	16	7.4
implicit criticism	15	6.9
Total	217	100.0

\* Many of these downgraders co-occurred in the same conversational turn and others were uttered more than once in the same call. Each occurrence of a downgrader was included in the calculation in Table 4.6. Thus, the total number of downgraders exceeded the total number of calls.

In contrast to downgraders, the results also revealed the use of certain lexical and clausal graders to increase the impact of the complaint by aggravating the problem: upgraders. The frequency of upgraders is discussed in the following section.

#### 4.2.3.2 Upgraders

Specific linguistic devices were used by Saudi Arabic Cs to *intensify* the complaint by increasing the degree of the blame. These occurred within the structure of the head acts or in the immediate linguistic context, which either preceded or followed the sets of head acts in the call.

Two types of upgraders were identified: lexical and clausal<sup>47</sup>. Lexical upgraders refer to words used to boost the force of an utterance by presenting the problem as excessive. This type consists of commitment/oath and lexical uptoners. Clausal upgraders, on the other hand, are sentences expressing a sharp disapproval or criticism towards the company or other aspects of the complaint. These were: intensifiers, bad consequences, irony, blaming, C's denial of responsibility, aggressive interrogative, rejection, and rhetorical appeal.

Table 4.7 shows the distribution of lexical and clausal upgraders used by Saudi Arabic customers in their complaints. They used more clausal upgraders (79.6%) than lexical upgraders (20.4%). Overall, the most frequently used upgraders were 'intensifiers' (31%), 'lexical uptoners' (15.8%), and 'bad consequences' (11.8%).

On the level of lexical upgraders, 'commitment/oath' (22.2%) was less frequently used than 'lexical uptoners' (77.8%). For clausal upgraders, 'irony' and 'blaming' constituted 23.9% of clausal upgraders. There was relatively little use of 'aggressive interrogative' (4.8%), 'rejection clauses' (4.3%), and 'rhetorical appeals' (4.3%) as devices to maximize the force of the complaint.

Table 4.7 Frequencies of C's upgraders

Upgraders	n*	%
<b>Lexical</b>		
lexical uptoners	70	77.8
commitment/oath	20	22.2
Total	90	100.0
<b>Clausal</b>		
intensifiers	137	38.9
bad consequences	52	14.8
irony	47	13.4
blaming through comparing	37	10.5
C's denial of responsibility	32	9
aggressive interrogative	17	4.8
rejection	15	4.3
rhetorical appeal	15	4.3
Total	352	100.0

\* Many of these upgraders co-occurred in the same conversational turn and others were uttered more than once in the same call. Each occurrence of an upgrader was included in the calculation in Table 4.7. Thus, the total number of upgraders exceeded the total number of calls.

<sup>47</sup> These are explained with examples in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2.3).

In sum, results for the third research question show that Saudi Arabic customers intended to minimize or maximize the effect associated with the complaint by using specific types of graders. It should be mentioned that it is the C's choice to determine whether to 'increase' or 'decrease' the degree of face-threat associated with the complaint. In two calls (2.2%), complainers chose to complain without the use of any graders. Yet, these calls are still considered complaints. If graders appeared in a complainer's discourse, it is more likely that the C intended to preserve and/or attack the CT's institutional face.

The next section moves on to discuss the relationship between the customers' level of dissatisfaction and their use of graders and verbal complaint strategies.

#### 4.2.4 Research question 4: The relationship between the customer's level of dissatisfaction and the use of verbal strategies and graders

Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 demonstrate that Saudi Arabic customers used different verbal strategies to perform business complaints with their force being either weakened or fortified through the use of graders. The choice of any of these strategies and/or graders could be related to the degree of intensity of the customer's dissatisfaction as it has been claimed that the intensity level of a customer's dissatisfaction is a factor that determines how the complaint is formulated (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008)<sup>48</sup>. Hence, the fourth research question aimed to explore whether this is applicable to Saudi Arabic customers. It asked:

RQ4: Is there any relationship between the customers' level of dissatisfaction and their use of:

- a. verbal complaint strategies?
- b. graders?

To test the correlations stated in the fourth research question, correlation statistics were used. Results are presented in the following two sub-sections.

##### *4.2.4.1 Verbal strategies and level of dissatisfaction*

Saudi Arabic customers with different levels of dissatisfaction used different types of verbal strategies to perform complaints. Of these, six strategies were most commonly used (see section

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<sup>48</sup> See section 3.3.2.4 for the three levels used for determining the customer's degree of dissatisfaction.

4.2.2.1). These were: stating problem, holding the company responsible for fault, accusing the company of dishonesty, threatening, requesting to speak to a higher authority, and expressing disagreement.

Table 4.8 presents the distribution of each of these strategies in relation to customers' level of dissatisfaction.

Table 4.8 Distribution of customer's verbal strategies by level of dissatisfaction

Strategy	Level of dissatisfaction			Total* (n=90)
	Low-moderate (n=64)	2 extremes (n=10)	High (n=16)	
State the problem	64	10	16	90
Hold company responsible for fault	48	5	13	66
Accuse company of dishonesty	37	8	7	52
Threaten	12	9	18	39
Request to speak to a higher authority	19	5	9	33
Express disagreement	15	7	8	30
Total*	195	44	71	310

\* Each occurrence of a strategy was included in the calculation in Table 4.8. Thus, the total number of strategies exceeded the total number of calls.

A graphic representation of the different strategies according to level of dissatisfaction can be seen in Figure 4.1.

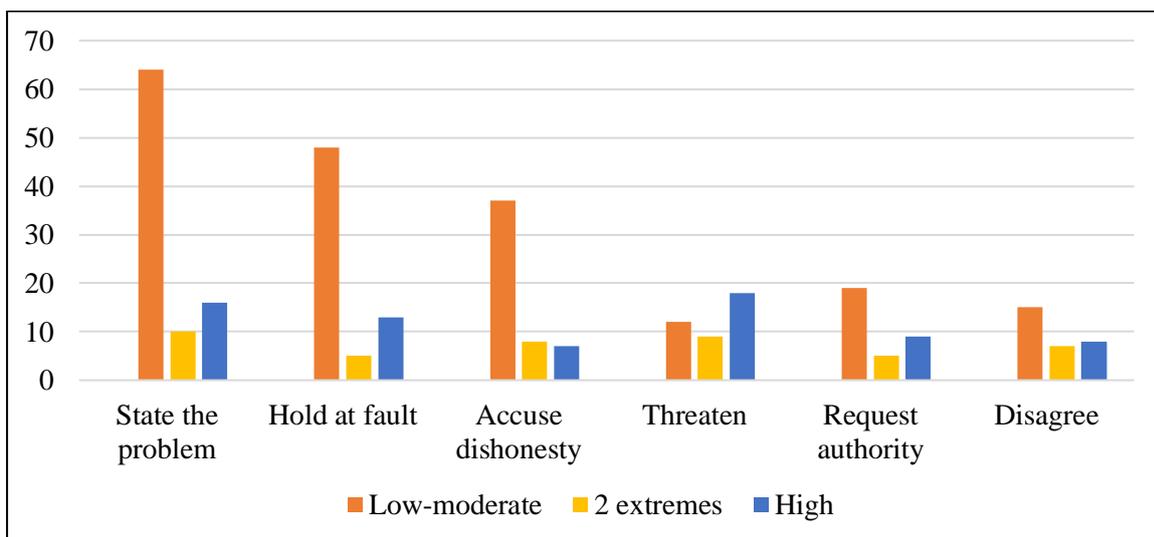


Figure 4.1 Distribution of customer's verbal strategies by level of dissatisfaction

The Pearson chi-square test of association was used to explore whether there was a potential association between two categorical variables: the verbal strategies of performing complaints

and the degree of a customer’s dissatisfaction. Six strategies were considered when conducting the test. This is for two reasons. First, they were the most frequently used by the Cs. Consequently, they were the most important ones to consider. Second, restricting the correlation analysis to these six strategies was necessary in order to meet the assumptions/restrictions for Pearson’s chi-square test on contingency tables: “no more than 20% of the expected counts are less than 5 and all individual expected counts are 1 or greater” (Yates, Moore, & McCabe, 1999, p.734).

Before conducting the chi-square test, the assumptions for the test were checked. All the expected counts were greater than 1 and no more than 20% of expected counts were less than 5. Therefore, the assumptions for the chi-square test were met.

Table 4.9 summarizes the results of the relationship between verbal strategies for constructing a complaint and the customer’s level of dissatisfaction.

Table 4.9 The contingency table for customer’s verbal strategies by level of dissatisfaction

Verbal strategy		Level of dissatisfaction			Total
		Low-moderate	2 extremes	High	
State problem	Observed	64 <sub>a</sub>	10 <sub>a</sub>	16 <sub>a</sub>	90
	Expected	56.6	12.8	20.6	90.0
	% within strategy	71.1%	11.1%	17.8%	100.0%
Hold company responsible for fault	Observed	48 <sub>a</sub>	5 <sub>a</sub>	13 <sub>a</sub>	66
	Expected	41.5	9.4	15.1	66.0
	% within strategy	72.7%	7.6%	19.7%	100.0%
Accuse company of dishonesty	Observed	37 <sub>a</sub>	8 <sub>a</sub>	7 <sub>a</sub>	52
	Expected	32.7	7.4	11.9	52.0
	% within strategy	71.1%	15.4%	13.5%	100.0%
Threaten	Observed	12 <sub>a</sub>	9 <sub>b</sub>	18 <sub>b</sub>	39
	Expected	24.5	5.5	8.9	39.0
	% within strategy	30.8%	23.1%	46.1%	100.0%
Request to speak to a higher authority	Observed	19 <sub>a</sub>	5 <sub>a</sub>	9 <sub>a</sub>	33
	Expected	20.8	4.7	7.6	33.0
	% within strategy	57.5%	15.2%	27.3%	100.0%
Express disagreement	Observed	15 <sub>a</sub>	7 <sub>a</sub>	8 <sub>a</sub>	30
	Expected	18.9	4.3	6.9	30.0
	% within strategy	50.0%	23.3%	26.7%	100.0%

Total	Observed	195	44	71	310
	Expected	195.0	44.0	71.0	310.0
	% within strategies	62.9%	14.2%	22.9%	100.0%

Note: Each subscript letter denotes a subset of the level of dissatisfaction whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level. In Pearson chi-square test, “columns that have different letters as subscripts indicate a significant difference” (Field, 2012, p.746).

Results indicated a significant association between the strategies used and the degree of customer dissatisfaction ( $\chi^2 (10) = 29.549, p < .001$ ). As the probability is small enough (less than .05), then we can confidently conclude that the strategy used by the customer and his/her level of dissatisfaction are related.

To further compare the proportions of customers with different levels of dissatisfaction for each strategy, the Z-test was used. Table 4.9 shows that the significant difference only arose to the strategy of ‘threat’ because it has different subscripts in that column, indicating that these proportions are significantly different. The differences among all the other strategies are insignificant.

The largest difference between the observed and expected values for using ‘threat’ was by customers with a high level of dissatisfaction (46.1%). They used threat significantly more than expected. Customers with low-moderate levels of dissatisfaction used threat significantly less than expected (30.8%), while customers with 2 extremes used threat at levels significantly higher than chance (23.1%).

All in all, results indicated that Saudi Arabic customers deployed different verbal strategies when complaining. A significant statistical difference only arose to the strategy of threat. It was significantly related to the discourse of highly dissatisfied customers. The choice of the strategy of ‘threat’ is significantly related to the customer’s level of dissatisfaction, but the choice of the other strategies is probably not significantly related to the customer’s level of dissatisfaction.

#### 4.2.4.2 Graders and level of dissatisfaction

Downgraders were used by Cs as mitigation devices within the structure of the head acts or as supportive moves (see section 4.2.3.1).

Table 4.10 below shows the distribution of the six most frequent downgraders used by customers with different levels of dissatisfaction.

Table 4.10 Distribution of downgraders by level of dissatisfaction

Downgrader	Level of dissatisfaction			Total* (n=90)
	Low-moderate (n=64)	2 extremes (n=10)	High (n=16)	
Fictive kin terms	97	24	40	161
Polite formulaic expressions	79	7	18	104
Religious expressions	63	9	10	82
Cajolers	36	7	4	47
Wishing lexical items	16	2	1	19
Making allowance for CT	10	1	5	16
Total*	301	50	78	429

\*Each occurrence of a downgrader was included in the calculation in Table 4.10. Thus, the total number of downgraders exceeded the total number of calls.

A graphic representation of downgraders according to level of dissatisfaction can be seen in Figure 4.2.

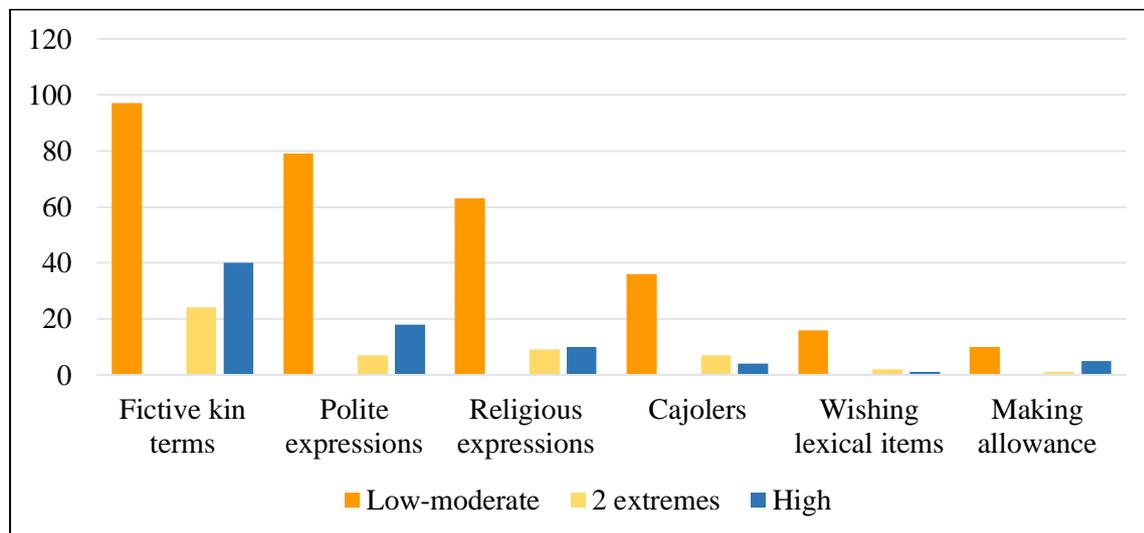


Figure 4.2 Distribution of downgraders by level of dissatisfaction

Figure 4.2 indicates that customers of different levels of dissatisfaction soften their complaints. However, there is a notable difference in the number of downgraders used by each level of a customer's dissatisfaction.

To investigate whether there was a potential association between the two categorical variables of the type of downgraders used by the Cs and their degree of dissatisfaction, Pearson chi-square test of association was used. For the same reasons of limiting the test to six strategies (see section 4.2.4.1), six downgraders were considered when conducting the test.

Before conducting the chi-square test, the assumptions for the test were checked. All the expected counts were greater than 1, but 4 cells (22.2%) had expected counts of less than 5.

Though the assumption of ‘no more than 20% cells should be less than 5’ was violated, the analysis can still be trusted. This is so for two reasons: (a) the deviation was not great as 22.2% is close to the 20% threshold, and (b) similar results were given by the test when it was re-run with only four major categories (i.e., excluding the two downgraders which had cells with an expected count of less than 5).

The crosstabulation Table 4.11 below presents the results of the relationship between downgraders and the customer’s level of dissatisfaction.

Table 4.11 The contingency table for downgraders by level of dissatisfaction

Downgrader		Level of dissatisfaction			Total
		Low-moderate	2 extremes	High	
Fictive kin terms	Observed	97 <sub>a</sub>	24 <sub>a, b</sub>	40 <sub>b</sub>	161
	Expected	113.0	18.8	29.3	161.0
	% within downgraders	60.2%	15%	24.8%	100.0%
Polite formulaic expressions	Observed	79 <sub>a</sub>	7 <sub>a</sub>	18 <sub>a</sub>	104
	Expected	73.0	12.1	18.9	104.0
	% within downgraders	76.0%	6.7%	17.3%	100.0%
Religious expressions	Observed	63 <sub>a</sub>	9 <sub>a</sub>	10 <sub>a</sub>	82
	Expected	57.5	9.6	14.9	82.0
	% within downgraders	76.8%	11.0%	12.2%	100.0%
Cajolers	Observed	36 <sub>a</sub>	7 <sub>a</sub>	4 <sub>a</sub>	47
	Expected	33.0	5.5	8.5	47.0
	% within downgraders	76.6%	14.9%	8.5%	100.0%
Wishing lexical items	Observed	16 <sub>a</sub>	2 <sub>a</sub>	1 <sub>a</sub>	19
	Expected	13.3	2.2	3.5	19.0
	% within downgraders	84.2%	10.5%	5.3%	100.0%
Making allowance for CT	Observed	10 <sub>a</sub>	1 <sub>a</sub>	5 <sub>a</sub>	16
	Expected	11.2	1.9	2.9	16.0
	% within downgraders	62.5%	6.2%	31.3%	100.0%

Total	Observed	301	50	78	429
	Expected	301.0	50.0	78.0	429.0
	% within downgraders	70.2%	11.6%	18.2%	100.0%

Note: Each subscript letter denotes a subset of the level of dissatisfaction whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level. In the Pearson chi-square test, “columns that have different letters as subscripts indicate a significant difference” (Field, 2012, p.746).

Results showed a significant association between downgraders and the degrees of dissatisfaction ( $\chi^2 (10) = 19.976, p < .029$ ). As the probability is small enough (less than .05), then we can confidently state that the downgrader used by the customer and his/her level of dissatisfaction are related.

To further explore how the degree of dissatisfaction correlates with the use of each type of downgrader, the Z-test was conducted. Table 4.11 shows that the significant difference among customers of various levels of dissatisfaction was mainly contributed to ‘fictive kin terms’ because it has different subscripts in that column which indicate that these proportions are significantly different. A slight difference is observed in the use of ‘polite formulaic expressions’ and ‘religious expressions’. The differences among all other downgraders are probably insignificant.

Highly dissatisfied customers and those with 2 extremes of dissatisfaction used ‘fictive kin terms’ significantly more than expected (24.8% and 15%, respectively), while customers with low-moderate level of dissatisfaction used this downgrader significantly less than expected (60.2%).

The difference between the observed count and the expected count for ‘polite formulaic expressions’ and ‘religious expressions’ is relatively minor. While customers with low-moderate levels of dissatisfaction used polite formulaic expressions significantly more than expected (76.0%), customers with 2 extremes used them at levels significantly lower than chance (6.7%). For religious expressions, low-moderate customers used them at levels of little more than chance (76.8%) whereas highly dissatisfied customers used them a little less than expected (12.2%).

In summary, results indicated that Saudi Arabic customers deployed different downgraders when complaining. The choice of the downgrader ‘fictive kin terms’ is significantly associated with the customer’s level of dissatisfaction. It was used significantly more than expected by

highly dissatisfied customers and less than expected with low-moderate customers. The more dissatisfied a customer, the more likely he/she is to use fictive kin terms. The choice of the other downgraders is probably not significantly associated with the customer's level of dissatisfaction.

Similar to downgraders, the Cs resorted to upgraders to intensify the power of their complaints (see section 4.2.3.2). Table 4.12 presents the distribution of the six most frequent upgraders used by customers with different levels of dissatisfaction.

Table 4.12 Distribution of upgraders by level of dissatisfaction

Upgrader	Level of dissatisfaction			Total* (n=90)
	Low-moderate (n=64)	2 extremes (n=10)	High (n=16)	
Intensifiers	81	24	32	137
Lexical uptoners	35	25	10	70
Bad consequences	20	19	13	52
Irony	22	10	15	47
Blaming through comparing	18	14	5	37
C's denial of responsibility	24	2	6	32
Total*	200	94	81	375

\* Each occurrence of an upgrader was included in the calculation in Table 4.12. Thus, the total number of upgraders exceeded the total number of calls.

A graphic representation of upgraders according to level of dissatisfaction can be seen in Figure 4.3.

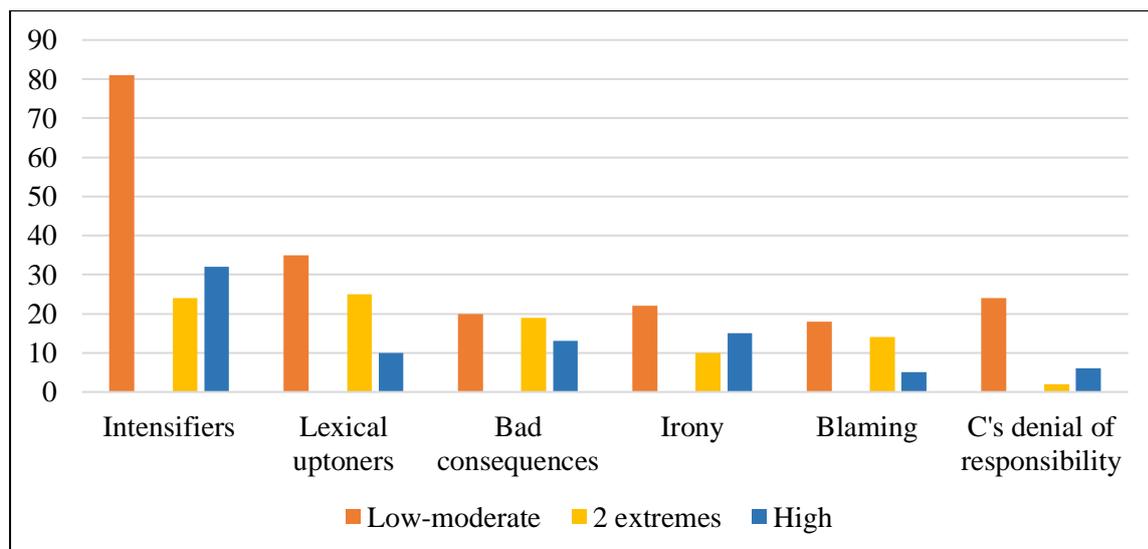


Figure 4.3 Distribution of upgraders by level of dissatisfaction

Pearson chi-square test of association was employed to detect any statistically significant relationship between upgraders and the degrees of C's dissatisfaction. Before conducting the test, its assumptions were checked. All the expected counts were greater than 1 and no cells had an expected count of less than 5. Therefore, the assumptions for the chi-square test were met.

The crosstabulation Table 4.13 below presents the results of the relationship between upgraders and the customer's level of dissatisfaction.

Table 4.13 The contingency table for upgraders by level of dissatisfaction

Upgrader		Level of dissatisfaction			Total
		Low-moderate	2 extremes	High	
Intensifier	Observed	81 <sub>a</sub>	24 <sub>b</sub>	32 <sub>a, b</sub>	137
	Expected	73.1	34.3	29.6	137.0
	% within upgraders	59.1%	17.5%	23.4%	100.0%
Lexical up-toner	Observed	35 <sub>a</sub>	25 <sub>a</sub>	10 <sub>a</sub>	70
	Expected	37.3	17.5	15.1	70.0
	% within upgraders	50.0%	35.7%	14.3%	100.0%
Bad consequences	Observed	20 <sub>a</sub>	19 <sub>b</sub>	13 <sub>a, b</sub>	52
	Expected	27.7	13.0	11.2	52.0
	% within upgraders	38.5%	36.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Irony	Observed	22 <sub>a</sub>	10 <sub>a</sub>	15 <sub>a</sub>	47
	Expected	25.1	11.8	10.2	47.0
	% within upgraders	46.8%	21.3%	31.9%	100.0%
Blaming	Observed	18 <sub>a</sub>	14 <sub>a</sub>	5 <sub>a</sub>	37
	Expected	19.7	9.3	8.0	37.0
	% within upgraders	48.7%	37.8%	13.5%	100.0%
C's denial of responsibility	Observed	24 <sub>a</sub>	2 <sub>b</sub>	6 <sub>a, b</sub>	32
	Expected	17.1	8.0	6.9	32.0
	% within upgraders	75.0%	6.2%	18.8%	100.0%
Total	Observed	200	94	81	375
	Expected	200.0	94.0	81.0	375.0
	% within upgraders	53.3%	25.1%	21.6%	100.0%

Note: Each subscript letter denotes a subset of anger categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level. In the Pearson chi-square test, "columns that have different letters as subscripts indicate a significant difference" (Field, 2012, p.746).

Results indicated a significant association between the usage of upgraders and the degrees of C's dissatisfaction ( $\chi^2 (10) = 28.478, p < .002$ ). As the probability is small enough (less than .05), then we can have confidence that the upgrader used by the customer and his/her level of dissatisfaction are related.

The Z-test was conducted to further explore whether the level of dissatisfaction can be associated with the usage of each type of upgrader. Table 4.13 shows that three upgraders were significantly related to C's level of dissatisfaction because their columns have different subscripts, which indicates that these proportions are significantly different: 'intensifiers', 'bad consequences', and 'C's denial of responsibility'. A slight difference between the observed count and the expected count for the use of 'lexical upgraders' and 'balming' by customers of 2 extremes and high levels of dissatisfaction is observed. The differences between all the other upgraders are probably insignificant.

'Intensifiers' and 'C's denial of responsibility' were used by low-moderate customers more than expected (59.1% and 75.0%, respectively) while they were used significantly less than expected by customers of 2 extreme levels of dissatisfaction (17.5% and 6.2%, respectively). 'Bad consequences', on the other hand, was an upgrader used at levels significantly higher than chance by 2 extreme customers (36.5%) but at levels significantly lower than chance by low-moderate customers (38.5%).

A significant difference between the observed count and the expected count is also observed in Table 4.13 in the use of 'lexical upgraders' and 'blaming' by customers of 2 extreme levels of dissatisfaction. These customers used both upgraders significantly more than expected (35.7% and 37.8%, respectively). Interestingly, the more dissatisfied a customer was, the less likely he/she was to use 'lexical upgraders' (14.3%).

All in all, results show that there is a relationship between the customers' level of dissatisfaction and their use of upgraders. The choice of the upgraders 'intensifiers', 'bad consequences', and 'C's denial of responsibility' is significantly associated with by the customer's level of dissatisfaction whereas the choice of the other upgraders is probably not associated with the customer's level of dissatisfaction.

### 4.3 Summary

Thus far, this chapter presents the results of the quantitative analysis carried out to identify the most frequent structural types, strategies, and graders used in business complaints by Saudi Arabic customers and service providers.

The foregoing results show, on the one hand, similarities in the overall structural organization of Saudi Arabic complaint calls and, on the other hand, differences in the type and amount of strategies and graders used.

Sequential similarities were observed in the overall structural organization of Saudi Arabic complaint calls. They comprised three basic moves: opening sequence, complaint work, and closing sequence. It was in the complaint work (i.e., medial phase of the call) that distinctive extra moves were most likely to emerge.

Variations, on the other hand, were principally observed in the strategies and graders used by the Cs. Fourteen verbal strategies re-occurred in the customers' complaints. Of these, 'stating the problem' was a compulsory strategy for constructing the complaint. 'Holding company responsible for fault', and 'accusing company of dishonesty' were the preferred strategies for justifying complaints. Responses uttered to these strategies were mostly C-supportive.

When making complaints, Saudi Arabic customers used fewer clausal downgraders than lexical downgraders. The majority of lexical downgraders employed were 'fictive kin terms' and 'cajolers'. Differences in the frequencies of upgraders were also observed. Lexical upgraders were underused compared to clausal upgraders. 'Intensifiers' and 'lexical uptoners' accounted for the majority of the upgraders.

A significant correlation was found between the customers' level of dissatisfaction and some strategies and some graders used. Focusing on significant differences, 'threats' was a strategy frequent in the discourse of highly dissatisfied customers. 'Fictive kin terms' were used significantly more than expected by highly dissatisfied customers and those with 2 extreme levels of dissatisfaction. 'Intensifiers' and 'C's denial of responsibility' were more associated with customers of low-moderate level of dissatisfaction.

Having seen what strategies and graders were present in the conversational structure of Saudi Arabic complaint calls, it will be interesting to discover how they are displayed over longer stretches of interaction. The next chapter, hence, moves on to present a qualitative analysis of

the structural types, strategies, and graders employed in Saudi Arabic complaint calls at a discourse level.

## **CHAPTER FIVE** Results of Analysis at the Interactional Level

### **Results of Analysis at the Interactional Level**

Chapter 4 reported the quantitative results for the four quantitative research questions, arguing that the Saudi Arabic complaint call has a basic structure which contains various types of linguistic strategies and graders. This chapter moves on to present an in-depth examination of these strategies and modifications through a qualitative descriptive analysis of Saudi Arabic complaints in service encounters at a discourse level, discussing how the linguistic features applied relate back to the Saudi Arabic socio-cultural norms presented in Chapter 1 (see section 1.1). In general terms, the analysis and discussion presented in this chapter thus seek to provide further knowledge of the cultural norms of interaction that underlie the interactional behavior of Saudi Arabic speakers in complaint calls within an Saudi institutional context. The chapter reports the qualitative results that address the four qualitative research questions:

1. What is the basic structure of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic?
2. What are the strategies used in Saudi Arabic business complaint calls:
  - a. by customers to construct their complaints?
  - b. by service providers to respond to complaints?
3. What graders are used by Saudi Arabic customers to minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint?
4. How does the customers’ level of dissatisfaction correlate with their use of:
  - a. graders?
  - b. verbal complaint strategies?

In section 5.1, the approach used to select the sample for the qualitative analysis is explained. Section 5.2 proceeds to state the results of the socio-pragmatic analysis in four thematic subheadings which correspond to the four qualitative research questions listed above: structure, verbal strategies, graders, and level of dissatisfaction. Discussion and comments in this section consider the use and the role of Saudi Arabic socio-cultural values appearing in various stages of the complaint call such as directness, maintaining a harmonious relationship in conflict negotiation, being brief, being co-operative, deploying politeness markers among others too numerous to list (see section 1.1). Section 5.3 concludes this chapter with a summary of the main qualitative findings.

## 5.1 Sampling frame

Considering the time-consuming nature of qualitative analysis and because of space limitations, only four interactions were qualitatively analyzed by the researcher. Basic theoretical models were referred to for this qualitative analysis (see section 3.3.2). The analysis of these stretches of discourse focused on the aspects of analysis specified in the research questions: the structure of the call, the verbal strategies for performing and responding to the complaint, graders used by the Cs within the head acts or their immediate linguistic contexts, and finally the relationship between the degree of the C's dissatisfaction and the way the complaint was performed and responded to.

After analyzing the whole corpus quantitatively, selecting four calls for qualitative examination was a practical necessity. It enabled the researcher to conduct a comprehensive analysis for a representative yet small and manageable amount of data (i.e., a convenience sample). This, consequently, facilitated access to the *most important* themes and linguistic patterns, that were then interpreted thoroughly.

Driven by Patton's view (1990) that qualitative analysis typically focuses on a relatively small sample that has been selected 'purposefully', the approach followed for selecting the calls to be analyzed qualitatively was 'purposeful sampling'. This is the most common sampling technique for qualitative research (Marshall, 1996). It refers to the selection of the *most productive* sample that adequately answers the research questions. Thus, calls analyzed were intentionally rather than randomly selected according to the needs of the study. Determining the size of the sample was done by the use of the criterion of *saturation* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is the point in the data analysis when new data no longer brings additional 'major' insights to the research questions. By the time calls were selected for qualitative analysis, the entire corpus had been transcribed and coded (see section 3.3.4). Therefore, I was in a position to choose the calls that displayed the seven criteria mentioned below. This also means that I was able to choose calls which displayed a broad array of strategies and adequate data to address the qualitative research questions.

In general, the sample chosen for analysis was affected by "the time the researcher had available to [her], by [her] framework, and by [her] starting and developing interests" (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p.39). More specifically, seven prespecified criteria determined

the selection of the sample. These were:

1. Calls selected had to be more ‘information-rich’ than others. They had to provide more insights and understanding than others. They were judged to do so when they contained a great deal of information as well as variation in relation to the aspects of analysis that were of central importance to the research.
2. They had to exhibit special and interesting features related to the socio-pragmatics of complaining behaviour in the Saudi Arabic culture and its institutional discourse, an area that is almost absent in the literature of institutional business complaints (see section 2.3.2). Analyzing such calls means making a contribution to this area of inquiry.
3. They had to be of different structural types: minimal, expanded, and deviant.
4. They had to contain various types of verbal strategies and graders.
5. They had to be performed by Cs with different levels of dissatisfaction.
6. They had to be complaint exchanges of different lengths and topics.
7. The Cs in all the four calls had to be male speakers. This is because: (a) the researcher is not interested in investigating the difference between genders when complaining in Saudi Arabic; (b) the majority of Cs were male<sup>49</sup>; (c) distinctive verbal strategies specific to the Saudi Arabic culture were found more in the discourse of male rather than female customers, which arise from cultural norms regarding male-female interactions (see section 1.1.2); and (d) male speakers varied more in their levels of dissatisfaction while female speakers tended to be at the lower end.

The features of the sample considered for analysis are summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Features of calls used for qualitative analysis

Call	Feature				
	Call duration minutes: seconds	Topic of complaint	Time between incident and call	Structure	Level of dissatisfaction
Call # 1	04:32	late assembly <sup>50</sup>	more than four days	minimal	low-moderate

<sup>49</sup> See section 4.1 ‘overview of the corpus’.

<sup>50</sup> It is the choice of the customer to assemble/deliver his products by himself or to pay additional costs to the company for assembly/delivery services. The assembly/delivery of the customers’ purchased products is done by assembly/delivery teams who work for the company. No physical contact exists between the CTs of the CU and these teams. The only method of contact between the CU’s staff and the assembly/delivery departments is via email. On receiving any reply from these departments, this should immediately appear in the company’s electronic system. The CT can follow up with the C’s prior requests/inquiries to these departments using either the C’s mobile number, receipt number, or the request/inquiry number.

Call # 2	08:35	a missing piece from a purchased product	eleven days	expanded	2 extremes
Call # 3	20:43	late assembly	one month and a half	expanded	high
Call # 4	13:53	late delivery	not mentioned	deviant	high

The following section reports the findings from the research questions.

## 5.2 Aspects of analysis: Findings

The purpose of this section is to present the answers to the four qualitative research questions. These results are discussed in four thematic subheadings. Each of these subheadings concludes with a ‘discussion’ section that reviews the similarities and differences between the four calls regarding that theme. The complete transcriptions of the four interactions are in Appendices L1, L2, L3, and L4 but due to limitations of space, only selected quotes from the four calls that highlight the main points of analysis are included in these subsections. Each example has, in square brackets, the number of the call from which the extract is taken.

### 5.2.1 Structure of the complaint call

The first research question asked:

What is the basic structure of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic?

As mentioned in section 3.3.2.1, the researcher initially constructed, in a ‘top-down’ fashion, an established structure for the overall trajectory of the Saudi Arabic complaint interaction. This structure was based on the structure of complaint calls exhibited in other languages found in the literature (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011; Saadah, 2009; Schegloff, 1986). The initial expected overall structure for Saudi Arabic complaint phone calls consisted of the following phases:

#### **Opening (pre-complaint)/ initiators**

The summons-answer sequence is followed by the identification and/or recognition sequence in which the CT utters the organizational identification (name of the company followed by

his/her name). The C may identify his/her name at this stage. Then, the CT initiates a series of question-answer pairs for the purpose of ascertaining the identity of the

C. C and CT exchange greeting after which an offer of help is initiated by the CT through a semantic formula granting the C the right to state his/her complaint. Finally, a shortened ‘how-are-you?’ concludes the opening phase.

### **Head Act (complaint act)**

The C states the problem using a series of sentences to express his/her annoyance. He/she supports his/her claims. CT responses (reactions to complaints).

### **Closing (post-complaint)**

A word that signals the beginning of the closing sequence (lexical items that occupy a single turn) marks the beginning of the closing phase. This is followed by the CT reiterating the solution. Participants reach an agreement that ends the conversation. The C agrees and utters the first part of a thank you. The CT offers any other kind of assistance to the C after which they exchange goodbyes.

After obtaining the data, I applied the preliminary structure to 20% (18 calls) of the data (see section 3.3.2.1). Although it was expected that the structure of most of the calls would match the preliminary structure mentioned above, this proposed structure was modified in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion. Modifications were omissions and additions of some moves within the structure of the call. Based on these modifications, the *basic* structure (i.e., minimal core moves) of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic is the following:

### **Opening sequences (pre-complaint)**

Move 1. Organizational identification.

Move 2. Greeting sequence.

Move 3. Offer of help.

### **Complaint work (head act and supportive moves)**

Move 4. Head act. C states problem/complaint.

Move 5. Question-answer sequences (gathers the details of the complaint).

Move 6. CT asks C to hold the line (checks the details of the problem in the company’s electronic system).

Move 7. CT responds to the complaint (offers a solution).

Move 8. C agrees to the proposed solution.

### **Closing sequences (post-complaint)**

Move 9. Terminal exchange. Move

Move 10. CT thanks C for calling.

Move 11. A final salutation pair.

The ‘final’ basic structure of the complaint business call in Saudi Arabic differs from the ‘proposed’ one in three ways. First, it has a clearer presentation of moves; each holding a single function. Second, it has two new moves: ‘the question-answer’ sequence (move 5) and ‘the waiting time’ (move 6). Finally, the shortened ‘*how-are-you?*’ sequence in the final structure is considered an optional rather than a compulsory element in the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint call.

During the recursive analysis of the rest of the data, there were cases that departed from the basic structure identified for the Saudi Arabic business complaint call. They either contained additional moves to the core components of the basic structure or lacked one of these core components. Hence, I present three structural types of the Saudi Arabic complaint call: minimal, expanded, and deviant.

To recall what has been mentioned in Chapter 4 (see section 4.2.1), a *minimal* structure of the complaint call is the one that has the minimal core moves mentioned above. A call with the *expanded* structure is one which included additional optional elements to the core ones. Lastly, a call is classified as *deviant* if its structure lacked one of the core moves of a Saudi Arabic complaint call.

In the following three sub-sections, an explanation is presented on how the initial, medial, and closing sequences in the three structural types of the Saudi Arabic complaint call are structured.

### 5.2.1.1 Opening sequences

As mentioned in Chapter 3 (see section 3.1), calls in the corpus had the initial goal of complaining about a past or an ongoing action caused by the company that resulted in unfavourable effects to the C. Some time elapsed between the occurrence of the problem and the time the complaint call was made.

In all the calls of the corpus, the complaint work did not start at the beginning of the business exchange. Calls started with short opening sequences of exchange between the C and the CT that lasted for one minute or so. Though the sequences were brief, these opening sequences enabled the interlocutors to identify themselves and recognize those with whom they were interacting. This identification/recognition stage was an important element for both speakers especially since they did not know each other before and did not have visual access to one another.

The opening sequences were always initiated by the CT (e.g., Baker, Emmison, & Firth, 2001; Forey & Lockwood, 2007). As in Extract 1, Calls #1, #3, and #4 were initiated by the CT uttering the organization identification (name of the company) which indicated to the C that he had reached this company; his intended goal (line 1) (move 1). This was followed with an adjacency pair of the Islamic greeting-return greeting '*assalaamu ṣalaykum*' (peace be upon you) and the response '*ṣalaykumus salaam wa raHmatullaah*' (Peace be upon you too and God's mercy) (lines 1-2) (move 2). This form of religious greetings comprises a culture-specific connotation (Alsohaibani, 2017). In an Islamic Arabic culture, greeting and response to greeting in the most prevalent form of '*assalaam*' is highly encouraged by religion (Saadah, 2009). The Prophet Muhammad recommends to "promote *assalam* among yourselves [Muslims]" to achieve intimacy and spread love among Muslims (Muslim, 1954, p.378). The greeting speech act functions as an invocative act that demonstrates respect and solidarity (Youssouf, Grimshaw, & Bird, 1976) and reflects the impression that the speaker is righteous and honest (Al-Momani, 2014). It is the norm in Saudi Arabia to start any business conversation with a greeting (Aba-alalaa, 2015) regardless of the situation and the addressee being a friend or a stranger, a male greeting a female or vice versa. This is because the use of Islamic greeting is considered a good deed in Islam (Ellabban, 1993). Just as performing the act of greeting reflects positive politeness in Islamic cultures, responding to greeting has a greater degree of positive politeness. Ignoring or rejecting a greeting threatens the face of the greeter, and consequently affects the interaction (Zuhur, 2011). It also means violating

the Islamic rule of responding to a greeting stated in the Quranic verse “*when you are greeted with a greeting, greet [in return] with one better than it or return it*” (4:86). The C replied using a longer form of a response to the *'assalaam* greeting (line 2). This is justified, as has also been mentioned in my discussion with a native speaker of Saudi Arabic, as an attempt of the C to increase the positivity when addressing the positive face of the CT by invoking three religious aspects: *'assalaam* (peace), *raHmatullaah* (God’s mercy), and *barakaatu* (His blessings), and thus the resulting perlocutionary act could be seen as making the latter more willing to help (F.A.Binfaiz, personal communication, October 12, 2017). This comment confirms Alsohaibani’s (2017) observation that the extended response to *'assalaam* in Islamic cultures “demonstrates greater levels of facework” (p.170). A semantic formula *'tfaDDal*’ (if you please go ahead) granted the C the right to state his complaint and indicated the availability of the CT to provide service (line 3). It is also a quick transition to the business as, according to Islamic ethics, male-female interactions in business contexts are to be formal and limited to the transactional goal (Ali, 2007; Alkahtani et al., 2013). The offer of help (e.g., Luke & Pavlidou, 2002; Reiter & Luke, 2010) is an obligatory element and a part of the standardized welcoming message that is, as mentioned to me by the General Head of the CU (see section 3.2.1), to be uttered immediately after CTs greet and identify themselves so as to deal with the call as quickly as possible. As Alferoff & Knights (2008) state, CSRs are required to follow certain scripts and follow certain time limits administered by the organization which inevitably influence the way CTs interact with the Cs. CT then offered to help the C by asking the question *'kayf mumkin 'akhdimak?*’ (how can I help?) (line 3). As at this stage the C was not yet known to the CT, the latter referred to him as *'ustaadhi*’ (my master/teacher/sir): a high honorific title for a man, who is non-kin, to show respect (Aba-alalaa, 2015). This ‘distant honorific of addressee’ (Farghal & Shakir, 1994) is used commonly among strangers and, as mentioned in section 1.1.3, this manifestation of honorifics is related to the factor of *kulfah* كلفة that characterizes the Saudi culture by showing a high degree of formality as a result of high social distance among interlocutors (Abuamsha, 2010; Al-Ageel, 2016).

Extract 1 [Call #1]

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | CT: (Furniture Company) <i>'assalaamu ṣalaykum</i> (greeting in Saudi Arabic) | } Organizational identification + greeting (move 1 + move 2) |
| 2 | C: <i>ṣalaykumus salaam wa raHmatullaah wabarakaatu</i> (respond to greeting) |  |
| 3 | CT: <i>tfaDDal 'ustaadhi kayf mumkin 'akhdimak?</i> (how can I help you sir,  | } Offer of help (move 3)                                     |
| 4 | please?)  |  |

In Extract 2, the sequence of ‘organization identification-greeting-offer of help’ was slightly different. CT started the call by greeting the C with ‘*assalaamu ʕalaykum*’ (peace be upon you). Without being asked by the C, the CT said her first name followed by the organization identification (lines 1-2). Though the society is highly marked by the conservative nature of the relationship between men and women who are strangers (Al-Adailah, 2007; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Al-Ageel, 2010), in which a female is less likely to mention her name to a male stranger, the CT’s identification in this context is ritualized. In other words, CTs are expected to identify themselves by their names as part of a formulaic expression at the beginning of calls. It is neutral or ‘politic’ behavior (Watts, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005) in which women are allowed to mention their names in formal settings where tasks are to be done (Zuhur, 2001) (see section 1.1.2.1). CTs working in this unit are informed as part of the guidance they receive when working at this unit to identify themselves at the beginning of the call (see section 3.2.1). When the CT chose to identify herself, she differentiated herself from other CTs and made herself accountable for follow-up calls or future complaints. After being greeted by the C, CT offered to help (line 4).

Extract 2 [Call #2]

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1 CT: '<i>assalaamu ʕalaykum</i> (greeting in Saudi Arabic) <i>Sara min</i> (Furniture<br/>2 Company) (Sarah from Furniture Company)</p> | } | <p>Greeting + CT<br/>identified herself+<br/>organizational<br/>identification</p> |
| <p>3 C: <i>waʕalaykumus salaam</i> (respond to greeting)</p>  |   |  |
| <p>4 CT: <i>tfaDDal (...) kayf 'aqdar 'asaaʕdak?</i> (if you please, how can I help?)</p>   | } | <p>Offer of help</p>   |

After responding to the greeting, the C might complement his initial greeting with a shortened ‘how-are-you?’ reciprocal sequence, inquiring about the CT’s well-being. Emery (2000) and Bouchara (2015) state that elaborative and repetitive forms of greeting is culturally unique to Arabs. It is also typical of a collectivist and family-oriented society such as Saudi Arabia (Al-Qinai, 2011) (see section 1.1.2), with the aim of maintaining social relationships, expressing solidarity, and reflecting a high degree of positive politeness (Alsohaibani, 2017). In addition to the function of maintaining a positive relationship and establishing rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Hui, 2014) with the service provider from the beginning of the interaction as one way of increasing the chances that the CT will comply with the C’s request/s, the ‘how-are-you?’ sequence is being used

as a reinforcing technique (F.A.Binfaiz, personal communication, September 15, 2017). As stated explicitly by the C in the content of the call (Extract 3, lines 4-5), he has made two complaint calls prior to this one and repeated the problem several times without receiving any solution. Thus, his greeting and mention of other CTs by name (lines 4-5) was more like a way of establishing his familiarity with the CU and therefore reinforcing his right to re-complain and receive a resolution this time. Put differently, by employing his familiarity with the CU, the C increases the level of entitlement that he assigns to himself; a factor that affects the choice of the request form. He was likely aware of the "contingencies under which the recipient might have to perform that action" (Antaki & Kent, 2012, p. 878).

In Extract 3, the 'how-are-you' sequence (line 2) was very brief and received a very short answer from the CT in a form of '*alhamid lillaah*' (Thanks to God), a form expressing gratitude to the speaker for asking after their well-being. The response to the 'how-are-you?' inquiry is expected to be positive, as Islamic speech communities believe that God causes all good things and that praise is to be for Him in good and bad conditions and at all times (Piamenta, 1979; Saadah, 2009). Response to this sequence, even if minimal, is also expected as part of preventing the C's loss of face, an essential element in the Saudi business environment (Gorrill, 2004; Ali, 2007). There are two likely reasons for the CT's 'short' response to the 'how-are-you' sequence: (a) it seemed that this instance of phatic communication (Malinowski, 1923) was irrelevant to the institutional nature of the call (Sifianou, 2002; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002b); and (b) as discussed earlier, male-female conversation in the Saudi culture should be kept to the minimum especially if that conversation occurs between 'strangers'. The CT promoted a topic change by asking the C for the second time (the first time was in line 1) to state his problem '*tfaDDal*' (please go ahead) (line 3) and another 'go-ahead' response (Schegloff, 2007) and asked the C for the third time to introduce the problematic issue (line 8).

Extract 3 [Call #2]

- 1 CT: *tfaDDal* (...) *kayf 'aqdar 'asaaʕdak?* (Go ahead, please (...) how can I help you?)
- 2 C: *'ahlaa wsahlaa 'ukhit Sara* (...) *kayf alHaal?* (welcome sister Sara (...) how are you?)
- 3 CT: *'alhamid lillaah* (...) *tfaDDal* (Thanks God (...) go ahead, please)
- 4 C: *'anaa ʕrafit 'asaamiikum kullukum* (...) *'anaa kallamit waHdaa qabil ʕaTatnii 'ismahaa*
- 5 *kallamit waHdaa thaanyaa qaalat 'ismii 'amal wan tii alHiin Sara* (I knew all your names
- 6 (...) I talked to some one before who gave me her name. I talked to another one who said my

7 name is Amal and now you are Sara)

8 CT: *uh um (...) 'aysh hiyaa 'ishkalyaatak?* (uh um (...) what is your problem?)

Once self-identification and greetings had taken place, the Cs and the CTs moved to the reason for the call. This is the beginning of the complaint work.

### 5.2.1.2 *Complaint work*

This is the stage in which the task-oriented talk takes place (Dersley & Wootton, 2010). After the CT granted the C the right to state his complaint and before the C elaborated on the complaint, he stated the main problem, an implicit way of asking for the corrective action and assistance (e.g., Yotsukura, 2002; Vine, 2004), which caused his dissatisfaction and for which he sought a remedial action (move 4). This ‘statement of the problem’ is the *first* head act<sup>51</sup> in the interaction which announces the topic of the complaint. It is an obligatory act since this is the main reason for calling the CU in the first place. Stating the reason for the call at the first available opportunity reveals the task-oriented nature of the call (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Orthaber & Márquez Reiter, 2011).

The following three sections explain the complaint work in the three structural types of the Saudi Arabic complaint call: minimal, expanded, and deviant.

#### *Complaint work: Minimal structured calls*

Extract 4 illustrates the structure of the complaint work in a call with a minimal structure. Immediately following the opening sequences, the complaint work was initiated by the C; the requester (Leech, 1983; Atawneh, 1991). He stated his problem in a straightforward manner using a series of sentences that expressed his annoyance (lines 1-2). Although it is a complaint call with a direct statement of the problem, the C used the pre-complaints formulas ‘*aasif*’ (sorry) and ‘*ukhti*’ (my sister) as hedges (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Holmes, 1997) or “imposition minimizers” (Al Ageel, 2010) to mitigate the imposition of the requested act (this is explained further in section 5.2.4.1). To gather the details of the complaint and to make informed decisions, a request for information (lines 5 and 7) and question-answer sequences (lines 10 and 13) initiated and directed by the CT followed the statement of the problem. These

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<sup>51</sup> More than one head act occurred in the medial phase of the expanded/deviant calls as opposed to minimal calls which contained only one head act. See section 3.3.2.2.

“sequences of request for information” or “contingency questions” (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Hui, 2014) and information dissemination are obligatory elements in complaint calls as “there is a need to find out where the problem lies and formulate the next step to deal with it” (Hui, 2014, p.255). The two requests for information differed in the way they were framed. The first request for the C’s mobile number (line 5) was a ‘polite’ one initiated by the word ‘*mumkin*’ (may) as if the CT was asking for permission to have the number. The second request for the receipt/mobile number, on the other hand, was a direct and an assertive one in a form of an imperative ‘*aŕTiini*’ (give me) (line 7). The yes-no questions (lines 10 and 13) ended with the word ‘*SaHiiH*’ (am I right) for which the CT was confirming the details related to the problem. No doubt, requesting/confirming information is expected in service encounters as the CT needed to know to whom she was talking and to be able to have a look at the details of the problem registered in the company’s electronic system (Márquez Reiter, 2005; Lam & Yu, 2013; Hui, 2014). The CTs expected the Cs to provide them with the necessary information as answers to their questions.

Once the necessary information was gathered, the CT asked the C to hold the line in order to check the details of the problem in the company’s electronic system (line 16). She returned with a response after three minutes and three seconds. When the CT took the turn again, she thanked the C for holding the line (line 18), a rapport-maintenance orientation (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) related to the management of interpersonal intensity in problematic interactions (Hood & Forey, 2008). Service providers need to manage satisfactorily the customer’s face for achieving customer satisfaction (Johnston, 2001; Crosier & Erdogan, 2001; Macintosh, 2009). She responded by justifying why this delay occurred and offering a solution that the CT assumed would help speed up the assembly team to come to the C (lines 18-19). The response was accepted by the C. This is evident by the utterance of the word ‘*Tayyib*’ (fine) in the initial position in line 23. It indicated that the C did not have any further concerns and, consequently, was ready to move to the terminal sequences.

Extract 4 [Call #1]

- 1 C: *'aasif 'ukhti, laakin fiindi Talab waSal li baytii min arbaʿ ayyaam wa 'ilal*  
 2 *'aan ma Jaa 'aHad yirakkib. marrah ta'khkharu* (sorry my sister, but I have  
 3 an order that was delivered to my house 4 days ago and still nobody has  
 4 come to assemble it. They are very late) } C stated problem/  
 complaint  
 (move 4)
- 5 CT: *mumkin raqam Jawwalik?* (may I have your mobile number?)  
 6 C: *raqam aTTalab?* (order number?)  
 7 CT: *'aʕTiini raqam 'alfatuurah wa raqam alJawwal* (give me the receipt number  
 8 and the mobile number)  
 9 C: *'abshri raqam alJawwal 1234567* (sure my mobile number is 1234567)  
 10 CT: *'aTTalab bi'isim mHammad SaHiiH?* (the order is registered in the name of  
 11 Mohammed, am I right?) } Question-  
 answer  
 sequences  
 (move 5)
- 12 C: *SaHiiH* (yes)  
 13 CT: *waSalluulaak yuum 'arbaʕah Janwarii, SaHiiH?* (they delivered the item on the  
 14 4<sup>th</sup> of January, am I right?)  
 15 C: *naʕam SaHiiH* (yes right)
- 16 CT: *Tayib bas daqaayiq* (ok just wait a minute)  
 17 [C holding the line for 3 minutes and 3 seconds] } CT asked C hold  
 the line (move  
 6)
- 18 CT: *shaakirah 'intiZaarik. 'ilal 'aan ma waSalnaa rad. naʕtadhir. Harsil*  
 19 *email mustaʕJal li qisim attarkiib. 'anaa muta'kkidah Hayruduu 'alyuum.*  
 20 (Thanks for waiting. We have not yet received a reply. We apologize. I will  
 21 send an urgent email to the assembly team. I am sure they are going to reply  
 22 today) } CT offered a  
 solution (move  
 7)
- 23 C: *Tayyib. 'allaah ysʕidik* (Fine. May God please you) } C agreed to  
 proposed solution  
 (move 8)

### *Complaint work: Expanded structured calls*

In general, the complaint work of the expanded calls had no clear sequential structure. Yet, it exhibited two distinctive features. Firstly, it was the longest section of the call (e.g., Houtkoop, et al., 2005; Vasquez, 2009). Secondly, it contained various linguistic strategies that served different functions.

In expanded calls, after the CTs uttered their *first* explanation of the reason for the problem (henceforth first post-resumption response) (move 7), this response, which lacked an acceptable solution, was dispreferred by the Cs. This was evident in the way the Cs reacted to the CT's response (raised voice, interrupting the CT, or uttering the word 'no'). Thus, the stage of negotiating a better solution started. The C tended to justify his complaint (see section 3.3.2.2) through the use of different strategies such as negation, threat, or narration, of which

some are culture-specific strategies (Assallom, 2010; Bikmen & Marti, 2013; Sato, 2010) as will be explained later (see section 5.2.2). These were the supportive moves used with the aim of explicitly explaining the C's feelings of anger and annoyance and at the same time for providing justifiable reasons for complaining. To these supportive moves, the CT responded using strategies in an effort to offer a remedy to the C.

Because of the CT's unsatisfactory responses to these justifications, the C extended his complaint so the interaction became longer. Since the calls were conflict talk (Lakoff, 1974; Al-Zahrani, 1997; Yu, 2003), which were not easily resolved, justifying the problem stretched over a number of turns which ended up by either achieving a resolution or not. Expressing conflict in the Saudi culture is, as mentioned in section 1.1.3, usually avoided and verbal attacks are structured indirectly so as to avoid the loss of face and the hearer's discomfort (Cassell & Blake, 2012; Alkahtani, Dawson, & Lock, 2013). Yet, in the context of dissatisfaction with a service provider, Saudi customers have been described as "irate" and "activist" complainers (Badghish et al., 2015). Though individuals can differ significantly in their complaining styles (Singh, 1990), Saudis are likely to voice complaints to the provider and express it openly with a straightforward expectation (Bennett, 1997). This could be done even in an aggressive manner, expressing feelings of being cheated or as a threatening action (Badghish et al., 2015). CTs, just as in other cultures, typically aim to avoid direct confrontation with the customers (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003) as part of the professional role of the service providers in service encounters (e.g., Koester, 2006; Leelaharattanarak, 2016), especially when the CTs' organization require that they maintain a long-term relationship and gain a customer's satisfaction (see sections 2.2.4.2 and 3.2.1).

In Extract 5, six minutes of the call (72%) were spent in the complaint work phase. The complaint work was mainly repetitive sequences. After the C's statement of the problem (lines 1-3), the question-answer sequences (lines 7-11), and the waiting time (line 14), the CT kept repeating the solution offered by previous CTs since this was the only possible way she could help (lines 15-19). The C, who was not satisfied by the proposed solution (line 25), kept insisting on receiving a different response to what had always been mentioned to him when he called the CU (lines 40-55). The impact of the social factors of social distance and power (Wierzbicka, 2003) is obvious in the performance of these repeated speech acts of request (Kwon, 2004; Lundell & Erman, 2012; Takano, 2005). The C who is of a higher status asked for several extremely imposing favours (Goldschmidt, 1988) with which it was not guaranteed that the CT would be able to comply. Insistence displayed by the C is not surprising given

that, culturally speaking, Saudis persuade through insistent repetition when negotiating (Zaharna, 1995). This persuasion tactic is used by Saudi Arabians to understand the counterparts' demands, concerns, and needs, which is a strategy appealing to emotions to change direction and reach understanding (Ali, 2009; Semerad, 2015). Alqahtani (2015) stated that insisting on having a favour when the speaker has more power than the hearer is acceptable in the Saudi society and cannot be considered impolite. This is because "Saudi society is based on a hierarchical system in which the members are sensitive to power differences that assign some people to higher ranks and others to lower ranks" (p.82).

Extract 5 [Call #2]

- 1 C: *ʕindii Talabiyyah almafruud tuSalnii fii 24-3-2015 (...) 'anaa daafiʕ fluusahaa wi daafiʕ*  
2 *'aJir annaqil wdaafiʕ 'aJir attarkiib (...) sawwayt killal 'ijra'aat lakin Jabuuha li alikhwaan*  
3 *warakkabuuhaa lakin naaqSah* (I have an order which is to be delivered on 24-3-2015 (...) I  
4 paid the whole amount and paid the delivery fees and paid the assembly fees (...) I carried  
5 out all the required procedures but when the brothers brought it to me and assembled it it had  
6 missing pieces)
- 7 CT: *Tayyib 'aʕTini 'allaah ysʕidak raqamal Jawwaal 'almusaJJal filfaatuurah* (ok, may God  
8 please you give me the mobile number written on the receipt)
- 9 C: *shufii Jarbi hadhaa 5675875* (try this one 5675875)
- 10 CT: *huwa bi'isim 'alustadh Ahmad Ali?* (sir, is it by the name of Ahmad Ali?)
- 11 C: *'aywaa* (yes)
- 12 CT: *Tayyib laHaZaat 'alaah ysʕidak* (ok wait a minute may God please you)
- 13 C: *Tayyib* (ok)
- 14 [C holding the line for 1 minute and 48 seconds]
- 15 CT: *Tayyib Shaakirah 'intiZaarak 'ustaath Ahamd (...) huwa waaDiH maʕaayaa 'itrafaʕ*  
16 *aTTalab fii thamaaniyah w ʕishriin marsh ʕalaa 'asaas ʕindak qiTʕah naaqSah (...) 'al'aan*  
17 *HaSaʕʕid lik ʕalaa 'aTTalab marra thaaniyaah wa Hashuuf 'eyish 'ishkaliyyat 'atta'khiir wa*  
18 *bi'idhin 'allaah Hakhailiikum yirJaʕuu yitwaasalu maʕaak enshallah yifiiduuk matal mawʕid*  
19 *illi Haabib yiwaSlu lak fiih 'alqiTʕah annaqiSah wa yirakkibu lak 'iyyaaha* (ok thanks for  
20 waiting Sir Ahmad (...). It is clear to me that you had a request submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> of  
21 March in which it stated that there was a missing piece (...), now I will pass on the request  
22 again to a higher level and I will know what is the cause behind the delay and if God wills I  
23 will have them call you back to know when you would like them call you back to find when  
24 you would like them to deliver the piece and assemble it)
- 25 C: *laa tirfiʕiin aTTalab (...) mitaa bayiJuun?* (do not pass on the request to a higher level  
26 (...)) when are they coming?)

27 CT: *wallah ya 'ustaathi huwa Sayir ġindanaa ta'khiir bas 'al'aan 'anaa HarJaġ 'aSaġġid lak*  
 28 *ġala Talabak 'ashuuf 'aysh 'ishkaliyyaat 'atta'khiir wa 'akhalliihum yirJaġu yitwaaSalu*  
 29 *maġaak* (I'm afraid we are encountering a delay but now I will pass on the request again to  
 30 find out what is the reason behind the delay and I'll get them call you back)

31 C: *'ukhtii 'intii thalith waHidah 'alHiin tirfaġ Talab (...) 'anaa ma raaH 'attiSil marrah*  
 32 *raabġah wa waaHidah raabġah tquullii nafis 'alkalaam hadhaa (...) 'awal marrah qabalt*  
 33 *wil marrah aththaaniyah qabalt wal Hiin 'aqabalah minik! //Kayf yaġnii? kayf yaġnii?//*  
 34 *haadhaa yaġnii 'as'alik billaah?! (sister you are the third person now who has passed on*  
 35 *the request (...) I will not call a fourth time to have a similar response from the fourth*  
 36 *staff member (...) I accepted the first time and the second time and now you want me to*  
 37 *accept it from you! //How? How?// How is this for God's sake?!)*

38 CT: *wallah ġaarfaġ 'ustaadh Ahmad wa muqadirah haadha ashshay bas lil'aan ma Janaa rad*  
 39 (I swear that I totally understand and I consider that but we have still not received a reply)

40 C: *law samaHtii Tayyib law samaHtii ya //ukhtii 'ukhitii// Sara law samaHtii ana 'aġrif*  
 41 *qudaraatik wa 'aġriif mas'uliyyaatik allah yikhaliik waSliinii ġalla 'akbar waaHid*  
 42 *ġindukum fii (Furniture Company) 'akbaar waaHid tshufiinah huwal mas'uul 'incharge*  
 43 *fil mawDuuġ haadhaa 'allah yikhaliik wa'Tliġii min 'almawDuuġ 'intii (please ok please*  
 44 *//sister sister// Sara please I understand your capacities and responsibilities May God*  
 45 *protect you transfer me to the person of the highest authority in the (Furniture*  
 46 *Company) the highest authority that you can think of who is responsible about the*  
 47 *problem may God protect you and you leave the problem)*

48 CT: *Tayyib allaah ysġidak 'iHina hinaa bas qisim sayydaat (...) 'iHina muumkin nirfaġ lak fii*  
 49 *'aTTalab in 'entaa Haabib titwaaSal*  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \textit{maġa mas'uul} \\ \textit{'aġTinii} \end{array} \right]$  *raqam shakhiS 'antii tittaSliin fiih (...)*  
 50 C:  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \textit{maġa mas'uul} \\ \textit{'aġTinii} \end{array} \right]$   
 51 *shakhiS mas'uul ġan 'aTTalabaat*

52 (CT: ok may God please you we are here a female only Department (...) we can write in the  
 53 request that you would like to contact  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \textit{a person of a higher authority} \\ \textit{give me} \end{array} \right]$  **a number of**  
 54 C:  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \textit{a person of a higher authority} \\ \textit{give me} \end{array} \right]$  **a number of**  
 55 **the person whom you contact (...) a person responsible for the requests)**

*Complaint work: Deviant structured calls*

With deviant calls, the complaint work lacked one of the core moves of the Saudi Arabic complaint call: the closing sequence (moves 9-11). This is because the C did not agree to the proposed solution offered by the CT (move 8). Culturally speaking, it is the norm to greet and part from local people in a polite way, especially because the Saudi communication style is tempered by the need to save face, avoidance of harm, honour, and reciprocal respect (Yueqin, 2011); morals driven from the Islamic ethics in public relations (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001; Hashi, 2011). Yet, if someone loses his or her temper, it is expected that

he/she might perform the ‘violent’ action (Phau & Sari, 2004) of ending the call without a final greeting. Besides relieving the feeling of anger, Badghish et al., (2015) comment that effective complaint handling is always expected by Saudis, especially males, as one of his participants commented that “I am expecting them [members of the customer service] to try their best to take action and respond to my complaint” (p.57). If not received, Badghish et al. continue, adopting an aggressive complaint style is expected. Ineffective complaint handling can lead to aggressive actions (Voinea, 2011; Filip, 2013).

Extract 6 shows part of the C’s insistence on having the name or the location of a specific Department or a particular person to follow up with (lines 1-2). Because his questions were not answered in a way that satisfied the C, the C felt that he was wasting his time with the CT who was not offering him any sort of help. He, therefore, decided to end the call with a conditional threat: ‘if the order is not delivered, I will destroy the store by burning it down’ (see section 5.2.4.3 for an explanation of the strategy of threat in the Saudi context) (lines 11-12).

Extract 6 [Call #4]

- 1 C: *anaa atwaSaal maf sharikaah zibalaah abghaa alsharikaah illii qafdaah twaSil*
- 2 *wayiin makanahaa? alshakhiS almasuul faan altawSiil fayiin makanaah? (I am*
- 3 **dealing with a rubbish company. I want to talk to the company which delivers. Where**
- 4 **is it located? The person responsible for delivery where can I find him?)**
- 5 CT: *thawanii ya ustadhii* (wait for seconds my sir)
- 6 [C holding the line for a minute and 73 seconds]
- 7 CT: *Tayyib ukayiih ustadhii 'Hnaa alaan Saʻadnaa almauduuʻ wa Hantabiʻ maʻahuum*
- 8 *nshuuf ayiish almushkilaah* (Fine ok my sir we passed on your request now and we will
- 9 follow up with them to know what is the problem)
- 10 C: *shufii anaa sawayii shakuaa fii wazaraat altiJaraah wa ʻndii waHid wa qasaam*
- 11 *billah fii wazaraat altiJaraah uqsim billah law ma waSalnii hinaa uqsim billah lilifariʻ*
- 12 *la aHriq abuuuh* (see I submitted a complaint to the Ministry of Commerce and I know
- 13 a person there. I swear to God in the Ministry of Commerce I swear to God if it has
- 14 not been delivered to me here, I swear to God I will come to the store and destroy it
- 15 **by burning it down)**

[C cut off the line]

Overall, the above examples demonstrate that the complaint work is the section in the complaint call in which the C reported how he was affected by the problem by indicating his stance/attitude towards it (Sauer, 2000; Monzoni, 2008; Linli, 2011; Salmani Nodoushan, 2014). This is the essential ‘grievance’ component that serves the function of signalling the

seriousness of the problem (Edwards, 2005). To these claims, the CTs offered affiliative/non-affiliative contributions by (re)stating the same bureaucratic response according to their instructions. They do not have the authority to make any other necessary amends; an issue related to the strictly hierarchical management system in the Saudi Arabic business culture (see sections 1.1.4 and 5.2.2).

### 5.2.1.3 Closing sequences

As for the opening sequences (see section 5.2.1.1), the sequential organisation of moves for closing a complaint call manifests in the expected components that construct an institutional complaint phone closure. The closing moves were short and quick.

In Extract 7, the beginning of the closing sequence was signalled by the pre-closing marker (Schegloff, 1968; Button, 1987; Pavlidou, 2002) '*Tayyib*' (ok/fine) (line 1): a lexical item that occupied a single turn. By this stage, interlocutors had reached an agreement. This was followed by a terminal exchange (move 9) whereby the CT offered to close the call by asking if she could provide any other kind of assistance to the C (line 2). The C agreed to close the call in the second turn by appreciating the efforts of the CT through supplication (line 4). Appreciation through supplication is a cultural component that entails politeness (Bouchara, 2015). According to Alfattah and Ravindranath (2009), Islamic formulaic expressions are usually uttered to show intimacy, appreciation, or to soften the harshness of the request act (for more explanation of the use of formulaic religious expressions as downgraders in the Saudi culture, see section 5.2.3). '*allah yiHfaDki* (May God protect you) (line 4) is a conventionalized and ritualized marker expressing gratitude and respect. It is a closure prayer that is highly expected, but not obligatory, in Arabic formal encounters (Al-Ali, 2005; Al-Khatib, 2006; Al-Ali & Sahawneh, 2008). This closure prayer could be seen as making the CT feel good because the expression takes the form of wishing the receiver strength and God's protection (Al-Momani, 2014). The expression of satisfaction also indicates that there were no more topics to be introduced to the conversation and that the C was ready to end the call. Thus, the CT thanked the C for calling the company (move 10) (line 5). Then, the speakers exchanged a final salutation pair (move 11) (lines 6-7).

Extract 7 [Call #1]

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | C: <i>Tayyib. 'allaah ysfidik</i> (Fine. May God please you)                            |  |
| 2 | CT: <i>wiyyaak. khidmah 'aw 'ay 'istifsaar?</i> (I wish you the same. Any other service | } Terminal<br>exchange<br>(move 9)         |
| 3 | or inquiry I can help with?)  |  |
| 4 | C: <i>'allah yiHfaDki</i> (May God protect you)   |  |
| 5 | CT: <i>shukraan lit tiSaalik bii</i> (Furniture Company).                               | } CT thanked C<br>for calling<br>(move 10) |
| 6 | <i>fii rSayaan Allah</i> (Thanks for calling (Furniture Company). In the peace of God)  |  |
| 7 | C: <i>fi 'amaanil laah</i> (In the peace of God)  | } Final<br>salutation pair<br>(move 11)    |

The C might decide to end the call by thanking the CT and exchanging a final greeting pair even if he did not agree to the CT's proposed solution and was not satisfied with the outcome of the whole conversation. In Extract 8, the CT initiated the closure of the call by reiterating the solution (lines 1-3). No pre-closing marker was used. However, the CT reflected her intention to close the call through uttering the phrase '*zay maafaditak*' (as I informed you), indicating that she did not have any 'new' thing to add (line 1). The C did not accept the reiterated solution. He lost hope and paused for five seconds before he decided to politely end the call by uttering a first part of a thank you (line 6). Though he was angry, the C uttered the first pair of a final greeting '*maSassalaamah*' (goodbye) (line 8). The CT exchanged goodbyes (line 10).

Extract 8 [Call #2]

- 1 CT: *wallahi Saarfah ya 'ustaadhii wa muqaddirah haadhash shay lakin zay maafaditak*  
2 *bi'dhnil laah khilaalas saaSaata alJaayah ytwaaSaluu maSaak yfiiduuk bilqiTaS mitaa Haytim*  
3 *tawSiilahaaw wa ywaSluu lak 'iyyaahaa* (I totally know and appreciate that sir but as I informed  
4 you -God's willing- they will contact you during the coming hours and let you know what are  
5 the missing pieces and deliver it to you)
- 6 C: *(.....) shukran lik ((.....) thank you)*
- 7 CT: *'ay khidmah thaaniyah?* (any other service I can offer?)
- 8 C: *'ay khidmah? Sindkum shay antum? ma Sindkum shay maSassalaamah* (what service? Do  
9 you have anything? You do not have anything good bye) [angry] [sarcastic]
- 10 CT: *suSadaa bikhidmatak fii* (Furniture Company) *fii 'amaanil laah* (we are happy to serve  
11 you in (Furniture Company) good bye)

In six calls (17.6%) (see section 4.2.1), the closing sequence was extended by the C's insertion of an additional move. In this case, the pre-closing sequence did not flow into the next terminal one. In Extract 9, the CT made a move to bring the call to a close by uttering the pre-closing marker '*Tayyib*' (ok/fine) and reiterating the solution (lines 1-2). However, the C indicated that he was not yet ready to end the call. He asked the CT to identify herself (line 5). As he knew her name, the C presumably believed that this CT was then the one responsible to fulfil the stated promise and the one to be accused if the C did not receive a call back.

#### Extract 9 [Call #3]

- 1 CT: *Tayyib ya 'ustaadhii 'anaa 'al'aan rafaʕit 'imayl lilmushrifah wa in'shallah bi'idhin allaah*
- 2 *'awal maa tifiidanii birrad raaH 'arJaʕ wa attwaSal maʕaak (...) naʕtadhir minnak* (ok sir I
- 3 sent now an email to the supervisor. Once I receive a reply, I will - if God wills, God willing-
- 4 contact you (...) we apologize)
- 5 C: *miin maʕaayah?* (Who am I talking to?)
- 6 CT: *maʕaak Latiifah* (I am Latifah)
- 7 C: *Tayyib maʕalaysh 'anaa muntaZir wa 'arJuu 'innik titwaSSalii wa tiddinii Jawaab* (ok I am
- 8 waiting and I hope that you contact me and give me an answer)
- 9 CT: *in'shallah ma ySiir khaaTriK 'illa Tayyib* (If God wills. Do not worry)
- 10 C: *maʕassalaamah* (goodbye)
- 11 CT: *shukraan litaʕaawnak maʕa (Furniture Company) fii 'amaan allaah* (thank you for your
- 12 cooperation with (Furniture Company). In the peace of God)

The deviant call (Call #4) lacked the closing sequences. The furious C hung up without any closing sequence. A threat with a raised voice concluded the call in Extract 6.

#### 5.2.1.4 Discussion of the structure of the complaint call

Taken together, the analysis of the structure of the Saudi Arabic complaint calls presented in section 5.2.1 reveals an important finding: there is a basic structure exhibited in most natural Saudi Arabic complaint calls. I was able to discover and describe the orderliness through a close examination of the occurrence of specific interactional moves in the course of the call.

In function, the opening (pre-complaint) and the final (post-complaint) phases of the calls were 'relational' talk (non-task-oriented talk/social talk) while the middle phase (the complaint work) was 'transactional' talk (task-oriented talk). The opening sequences (moves 1-3) were for

exchanging greetings as a part of the politic behaviour in the social situation of service encounters. The complaint work (moves 4-8) was the most important section of the call because in it the C expressed his displeasure and annoyance towards an offensive action (i.e., topic of complaint) for which he held the FTC, represented by the CT, responsible. During the complaint work, the Cs exhibited their negative evaluation of the problem and requested assistance. The CTs, on the other hand, stated their attempts to solve the problem. The closing sequences (moves 9-11) brought the conversation to a close.

The structure of the four calls analysed had similarities and differences. They were similar in their openings, but differed in their closings and the way their complaint work developed.

The openings of the calls were orderly interactional sequences. They displayed highly routinized and scripted sequential interactions. These opening sequences consisted of three basic moves: an organizational identification (move 1), a greeting sequence (move 2), and an offer of help (move 3). The C uttered the organizational identification (name of the FTC) followed by the Arabic (Islamic) greeting '*assalaamu salaykum*' (greeting in Saudi Arabic). This greeting received a formulaic response from the C '*salaykumus salaam wa raHmatullaah wabarakaatu*' (respond to greeting). The semantic formula '*tfaDDal*' (please go ahead) granted the C the right to state his complaint. The C proceeded to the purpose of the call (move 4). The closing sequences of the sample were made of three core moves: a terminal exchange (move 9), thanking sequences (move 10), and a final salutation pair (move 11). The closing sequence began with a pre-closing sequence: the word '*Tayyib*' (fine) uttered by the C signalled the beginning of the closing sequence and indicated the Cs agreement to the proposed solution (Extract 7 and 9). This pre-closing sequence, however, was expressed non-verbally in Extract 8, essentially because the C was not satisfied with what had been offered. The C paused for five seconds which implicitly indicated his intention to end the call (see section 5.2.4.2 for using silence to avoid direct conflict in the Saudi culture). In calls in which the C agreed to the solution/promise offered by the CT (Extract 7 and 9), the CT uttered a first part of a thank you sequence using the word '*shukraan*' (thank you). The final greeting pairs followed the thanking sequence in which the speakers exchanged goodbyes; CT uttered '*fii rḥayaat Allah /fii 'amaan allaah*' (in the protection of God/in the peace of God) (Extract 7, 8, and 9) and the C replied by either '*fii 'amaanil laah*' (Extract 7) or '*maḥassalaamah*' (goodbye) (Extract 8 and 9). Not all the moves of the closing sequences were evident in the sample. They were all absent in Extract 6. In general, the calls' openings and closings were short turns that lasted from one to three minutes. In the context of institutional talk, brief openings and closings are expected because the goal of

the interaction should be devoted to the 'business transaction' rather than to developing personal relationships (Ide, 1998). The goals of the Cs and CTs were limited and institution-specific.

In contrast to the opening and closing sequences, the complaint work did not occur as a consecutive sequence of ordered elements. The complaint work was a complex 'interactional' type of talk that stretched out over several turns. The statement of the problems (move 4), the question-answer sequences (move 5), and the waiting time (move 6) were found in the complaint work of all the calls. Nevertheless, the remaining sequences of the complaint work were optional expansions. They were turn-by-turn interactions which always followed the first solution proposed by the CT (move 7) to which the C disagreed either explicitly (Call #3) or implicitly (Calls #2 and #4). The C used, in consecutive turns, various types of explanations in an effort to prompt the CT to offer some remedial work. These are the verbal strategies used by the C to justify the complaint. The length of the interactional and collaborative complaint work depended very much on the C's satisfaction and acceptance to the solution offered. In some cases (as in Call #1), stating the complaint (move 4) and accepting the solution offered (move 8) were done in quite a straightforward manner and thus the result was a socially minimal encounter. In other cases (as in Call #3), however, accepting the solution was delayed as the C needed to explain the urgency of his needs through the use of various strategies and thus the negotiation of the problem was done in more than one turn and the interaction was long.

This generic structure of Saudi Arabic complaint calls is likely to be perceived as carrying very little cultural influence. This is because most of the moves identified do exist in different interactional calls of other cultures (e.g., Luke, 2002; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002a; Sun, 2005; Reiter & Luke, 2010) (see section 2.1.7.2). For instance, the organization identification, the greeting, offer of help, statement of the complaint, and the closing sequences have been identified as ritualized moves in calls for help (e.g., Zimmerman, 1984, 1992; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987; Houtkoop, et al., 2005; Landqvist, 2005). The reason for consistency in the generic structure of complaints in different cultures is attributed to the nature of the call (Park, 2002; Sifianou, 2002). Complaint calls are transactional calls with specific communicative goals and usually follow strict scripts shared by professionals of international companies (Xu et al., 2010). The moves are ritualised "monotopical and focused on a single task and [...] the parties are jointly focused on that task and its organisational contingencies" (Heritage, 2005, p.121). Cs and CTs expect and perform routine moves throughout the call such as greetings, identifications, and offers of help. However, there is a higher degree of variation in the realization of these stages resulting from complying with the Saudi socio-cultural practices, for

example, the cultural norms of adhering to Islamic ethics by uttering-responding mostly to the Islamic formal greeting of *'assalaamu salaykum'* (peace be upon you), Saudis insistence as a persuasion strategy leading to long stretches of interaction in the complaint work, and the supplication as forms of appreciation to close a Saudi call in a formal context. Although most of the identified moves are formulaic, not using them can be considered 'rapport-neglecting' (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Not formally greeting the customer or responding to the final salutation pair in the Saudi business environment may lead to a loss of face; an element to be prevented for the sake of success in the Saudi business environment (Gorrill, 2004; Ali, 2007). Similarly, extending the 'how-are-you?' sequence is culturally inappropriate as the Islamic virtue of preserving women's chastity and purity dictates that male-female interaction with strangers is to be formal and kept to a minimum to maintain social distance (Al-Adailah, 2007; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Al-Ageel, 2010).

Restricting the analysis to the structure of the complaint call would not allow reflection on the ways in which various tasks were performed in the calls. Hence, the following section reports the analysis of the verbal strategies used by the Cs and the CTs that lead to successful or unsuccessful accomplishment of transactional goals in these complex interactions containing considerable negotiation.

### 5.2.2 Verbal strategies of constructing/responding to complaints

The second research question aimed to identify the verbal strategies used by the Cs and the CTs for constructing and responding to complaints. It asked:

What are the strategies used in Saudi Arabic business complaint calls:

- a. by customers to construct their complaints?
- b. by service providers to respond to complaints?

As detailed definitions and examples of the verbal strategies for constructing/justifying and responding to complaints that were coded for in the data are illustrated in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 (see section 3.3.2.2), this subsection lists the strategies used by the Cs and the CTs in the four calls analysed. In this chapter, the focus is rather on presenting the strategic choices made by Cs and CTs in relation to three different levels of the C's dissatisfaction (see section 5.2.4);

commenting on how the Saudi cultural values influences the choices of strategies made by Saudi speakers of Arabic in complaint interactions.

The four calls analysed differed in the type of strategies used by Cs and CTs to construct and respond to complaints. The strategies used are summarized in Figure 5.1 below. As mentioned in chapter 2 (see section 2.1.6), different cultures prioritise different cultural values and these values are reflected in what language is used by people to communicate. Culture-specific constraints govern how to say, when, and under which circumstances (Gumperz & Hymes, 1986). To the Saudi culture, for instance, there is an interplay between the cultural component of religion and the production and interpretation of speech acts including complaints (e.g., Farghal & Borini, 1997; Al-Fattah, 2010). To demonstrate this interplay, this study identifies the culture-specific complaint strategies, in addition to prototypical strategies recurring in institutional complaints of different cultures such as expressing disagreement and offering help (e.g., Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Migdadi et al., 2012; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Tanck, 2002), reflecting on how speakers' preferences for using them can be derived from religious ideologies and motivations. Oriented mainly around the social norms of the Saudi culture and the Saudi Arabian management style these strategies include: requesting to speak to a higher authority, narration, CT's showing empathy, and reassurance through cultural and religious expressions. These are explained when they arise in the calls (see section 5.2.4).

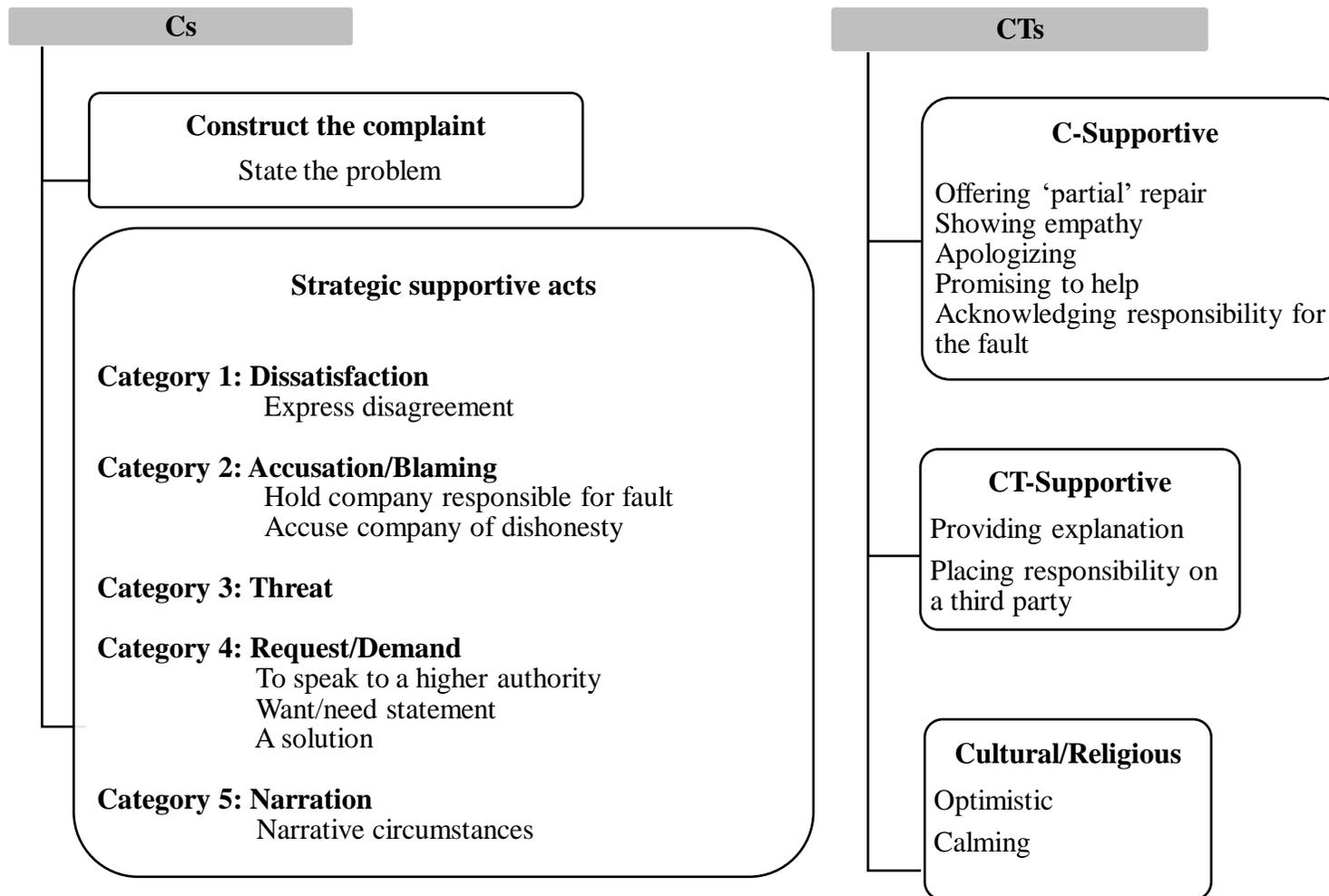


Figure 5.1 Verbal strategies of constructing/justifying and responding to complaints in the sample

*Discussion of verbal strategies of constructing/responding to complaints*

Figure 5.1 lists the verbal strategies that were used by the Cs and the CTs in the four calls analysed. These calls shared similar strategies but were also different in others.

As opposed to previous studies of complaints based on semi-naturalistic data and in which the strategies used to construct/justify complaints referred mainly to the strategies that the complainer resorted to in the head act (i.e., main complaint component) (e.g., Tanck, 2002; Moon, 2002; Wijayanto et al., 2013), more than one head act was found in the natural data of the current study. These are strategic supportive acts through which the Cs elaborated and justified their complaints in more than one utterance. Thus, the strategies analysed in this study refer to the verbal strategies of constructing/justifying a complaint in *a set of head acts* following the initial phase of the call and preceding its closing phase.

For the Cs, the strategy of constructing a complaint was a basic/obligatory component in the Saudi Arabic complaint call. In my analysis, the head act was taken as the start of the complaint work (see section 5.2.1.2). It was the main head act which announced the topic of the complaint (i.e., statement of the problem), or the reason-for-call (Luke, 2002). This head act occurred mostly as the first sequence of the complaint work in a form of one or more sentences uttered by the C in a normal tone of voice. In very rare cases (2 calls- 2.2% calls in the whole data), a ‘pre-complaint’ served as a preparator to the main complaint; “pertinent discussions” (Drew & Walker, 2009; Dersley & Wootton, 2010) or “relevant facts” (Hui, 2014) preparing the ground for the complaint. Call #2 was one of these calls. The function of this ‘pre-complaint’ sequence is explained in section 5.2.1.1. No interruptions were made by the CT while the C was stating his problem.

The Cs’ raised voice accompanied most of the strategies used to justify the complaint (i.e., strategic supportive acts) or ‘side sequences’ (Jefferson & Lee, 1981). These were optional<sup>52</sup> elements added by the C to maximize the effect associated with the complaint. They substantiated the matter complained about and always occurred after the C disagreed with the monotonous response announced by the CT in the first post-resumption response. These supportive acts did not occur as a consecutive sequence of ordered elements. However, they were scattered in different positions within the call. The minimum number of strategic supportive moves within a call was three in Call#2. Recalling what has been mentioned in

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<sup>52</sup> Some complaint calls did not have any strategic supportive acts and were still considered complaints (e.g., Call #1).

chapter 1 (see section 1.1.2.4), Saudi Arabia is a high context culture (Hall & Hall, 1987; Viviano, 2003). This means that paralinguistic aspects such as the tone of voice play significant roles in communication and in conveying information just as the spoken words do. The norm is not to raise your voice especially when talking to elders or during cross-gender interactions. In these situations, and as an expression of politeness, low intonation is expected (Samarah, 2015). However, raising of voice in the highly emotionally charged event of complaining is expected and appears to be an accepted mode of behavior as a style of negotiation (Al-Sugair, 2018), given that the complaint behaviour of Saudis is characterized as being ‘angry’ and ‘aggressive’ (Badghish et al., 2015). In addition, aggression expressed by a raised voice is an attempt at relieving the feelings of the complainer (Bennett, 1997); socio-emotional accounts (Reiter & Luke, 2010) expressing the emotions of anxiety and indignation (this point is also mentioned in my discussion with a Saudi native speaker- see further comments on this issue in section 5.2.4.2).

The occurrence of these strategies added to the length of the call. On average, at least four minutes were spent on performing these strategies and responding to them. Because the function of using these strategies was to verify the complaint, the Cs did not appear to mind spending more time in supporting their claims even though they always received repetitive responses from the CTs. In other words, the Cs decided to continue using strategic supportive acts in spite of not receiving ‘helpful’ solutions from the CTs (see section 5.2.1.2 for the Saudis usage of repetition as persuasion). For instance, the C in Call #2 (Extract 12) kept ‘requesting’ though he consistently received the same response from the CT (i.e., passing the request to the concerned department).

If any difference between the four calls is to be mentioned in relation to the strategies used to justify the complaint, this would be the type of strategy used (i.e., dissatisfaction, accusation/blaming, threat, request/demand, or/and narration). The choice of any of these strategies was related to the Cs’ level of dissatisfaction as the quantitative results show (see section 4.2.4). Hence, these differences are explained in section 5.2.4.

When it comes to the strategies the CTs used to respond to the Cs’ complaints, different types of responses emerged from the analysis: C-supportive, CT-supportive, and cultural/religious responses. A call could contain all of these types of responses (for example Calls #2 and #3) or just the first two types of responses (Calls #1 and #4).

The most frequent responses used by the CTs in the sample were C-supportive. CTs frequently accepted the C's complaints and made the 'best-possible' responses rather than refusing the complaint. Such favourable responses are highly expected in business communication because it is the role of the CTs to mitigate the impact of the undesirable event and to avoid direct confrontation so as not to lose customers (Gremier & Gwinner, 2000). The CT's role as a company representative brings a practical pressure to be supportive of a customer for retention purposes (Harrington, 2018). They are to maintain an appropriate 'rapport-building' style. These C-supportive responses also reinforce a general cultural requirement of being supportive to others. For that purpose, some CTs expressed their concern and understanding and performed an action that satisfied, at least partially, the dissatisfied customer (Call #3).

Explanations in the form of accusing a third party (i.e., assembly and/or delivery departments) were commonly stated as justifications for a delay. These explanations offered very little, if any, remedial work. Hence, the CTs were not performing the role of 'problem-solvers' but rather that of 'mediators'. Their conversational role was to shift the blame to a third party after their uninformatively brief bureaucratic explanations (for example Calls #2 and #4). The transmission of complaints from the CU to other departments isolated the CU from making decisions. It also characterized the CTs of the CU as being unwilling to cooperate with the C; a violation to the Saudi workplace ethic of displaying hard work and cooperation (see section 1.1.4). Badghish et al., (2015) comment that many native Saudis when complaining expect action and effective customer service. Interviewing Saudi citizens, they confirm that Saudi customers need to feel that the receiver of his/her complaint has taken notice to resolve it. One of the participants in their study stated: "apology and better service is the only expected action in Saudi Arabia if it is a good company" (p.61). In this study, the passive and maladaptive behaviour displayed by the CTs were arguably the result of the company's inadequate policy of dealing with the C's complaints. For instance, it was the company's policy not to provide any contact numbers of the assembly/delivery departments to the Cs as mentioned by the CT in Call #4 (Extract 19, line 1).

Besides the differences found in the strategies used to perform/respond to complaints, another interesting type of variation was observed in the type of graders used by the Cs to play down/increase the force of the complaint (see section 4.2.3). The next section moves on to discuss them.

### 5.2.3 Graders

The third research question aimed to identify the graders used by the Cs to mitigate/aggravate the force of the complaint. It asked:

What graders are used by Saudi Arabic customers to minimize/maximize the ‘non-polite’ nature of the speech act of complaint?

All graders identified in the data are mentioned with examples in Table 3.5 (see section 3.3.2.3). Figure 5.2 summarizes the different graders that occur in the four calls.

<b>Downgraders</b>	<b>Upgraders</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fictive kin terms</li><li>• Polite formulaic expressions</li><li>• Religious expressions</li><li>• Cajolers</li><li>• Wishing lexical items</li><li>• Making allowance for the CT</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lexical uptoners</li><li>• Intensifiers</li><li>• Bad consequences</li><li>• Irony</li><li>• Blaming through comparing</li><li>• C’s denial of responsibility</li></ul>

Figure 5.2 Graders in the sample

#### *Discussion of graders*

Figure 5.2 shows the findings from analysis of the graders used by the Cs in the sample. The calls shared some graders but also differed in others.

As with the strategies of constructing/justifying complaints (see section 5.2.2), the graders coded for existed either in the main head act or within the strategic supportive acts used to justify and elaborate the complaint. In other words, the graders explained in this study refer to any mitigation or intensifying devices used by the customer in the whole call rather than just the major head act. As politeness is culturally dependent (Christie, 2005), the norm in Saudi Arabia is to be polite or overpolite (see section 1.1). Praising, paying compliments, and responding positively belong to the cultural “dos” whereas mock politeness, contradiction, and confrontation are impolite pragmatic behaviours. Conflicts are to be dealt with indirectly to preserve harmony and solidarity (Al Ageel, 2010; Al-Ageel, 2016). The analysis of the data shows that besides task-related graders there were four culturally-specific ones used by Cs

and CTs. These were: fictive kin terms, polite formulaic expressions, religious expressions, and bad consequences. The usage of these graders revolves around the Islamic cultural values of Islamic good manners and hence respecting the CT's face needs; and triggering the CT's sympathy and cooperation through producing socio-emotional accounts, a characteristic of the Saudi people being very emotional nation (Ghanem, Kalliny, & Elgoul, 2013; Samarah, 2015).

In each call, the C employed a combination of lexical and clausal graders in order to mitigate and/or aggravate the impact of his complaint. They were optional elements in an utterance. Downgraders were elements used to minimize the force of the FTA (Brown & Crawford, 2009). 'Fictive kin terms' and 'polite formulaic expressions' were the two downgraders used in all the calls. Upgraders, on the other hand, were those elements used to increase the FTA. 'Intensifiers' was the most common upgrader which occurred in three calls (Call #1, #2, and #3).

If any difference between the four calls is to be mentioned in relation to the theme of graders, this would be related to the type of the grader employed by each C. The choice of the grader's type correlated with the Cs' level of dissatisfaction as the quantitative results show (see section 4.2.4). Hence, these differences are explained in the following section.

#### 5.2.4 The relationship between the customer's level of dissatisfaction and the use of verbal strategies and graders

The fourth research question aimed to investigate the relationship between the C's level of dissatisfaction and the choices he made for the verbal strategies and graders. It asked:

How does the customers' level of dissatisfaction correlate with their use of:

- a. verbal complaint strategies?
- b. graders?

The correlation statistics used in section 4.2.4 demonstrated a significant association between the six most commonly used strategies/graders and the degree of the customer's dissatisfaction. A 'significant' difference between observed and expected counts was noticed with one strategy (i.e., threat), one downgrader (i.e., fictive kin terms), and three upgraders (i.e., intensifiers, bad consequences, and C's denial of responsibility) (see sections 4.2.4.1 and 4.2.4.2). On that account, these are the strategy/graders that are given special emphasis when exploring their

usage by the Cs' of three levels of dissatisfaction: low-moderate (Call #1), 2 extremes (Call #2), and high<sup>53</sup> (Calls #3 and #4). If additional factors correlate with the C's level of dissatisfaction (for example, the CT's responses, the complexity of the problem, etc.), these are explained and their relation to the strategies and graders chosen by the C are highlighted.

The contextual information of each conversational exchange is noted followed by discussing the progress of the interaction and finally evaluating the strategies and graders used in that exchange, reflecting on the cultural norms relating to these strategies and graders.

#### *5.2.4.1 Low-moderate level of dissatisfaction: Strategies and graders*

##### *Context*

In Call #1, the C was complaining about the late arrival of the assembly team<sup>54</sup>. When the items were purchased from the store, the C was given a delivery appointment on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January. His purchased items were delivered to his house four days before he made this call, but the assembly team had not yet arrived; the C had been waiting for the assembly team for longer than he had been given to expect when he bought the items.

It appeared from the context of the call that this was the 'first time' that the C was calling the CU to complain. Two elements indicated that: (a) there was no mention in the call, as with more dissatisfied customers, that this was not the first time to call the CU, and (b) the verb '*Harsil*' (I will send) rather than the verb '*aSaʕid/nSaʕid*' (I/we will pass your request to a higher level) was used in the CT's response (Extract 10, line 18). When the latter was used, it meant that there was a previous request that did not receive a reply and for which the CT was to notify the designated responsible parties that the response deadline had passed by 'raising' its importance.

##### *Discussion*

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<sup>53</sup>See section 3.3.2.4 for the explanation of these levels of dissatisfaction. Remember that levels of dissatisfaction were assessed by reference to metalinguistic factors of language use distinct from the strategies/graders themselves.

<sup>54</sup> According to the company's policy of assembling a purchased item, the assembly usually takes place after 24 to a maximum of 48 hours following delivery of the purchased items to the customer. In the receipt, the delivery appointment is specified and an order number is written through which the C can follow up with the company if he has any inquiry related to his order (or he could use his name, mobile number, or receipt number). Customers are informed that the appointments of delivery and assembly are to be in two different days. This information is mentioned under the 'Terms and Conditions' attached to each customer's receipt under which the policy of delivery and assembly is illustrated.

In Extract 10, the C considered the time he spent waiting for the assembly team ‘too long’. He indicated that he was dissatisfied by adding the phrase ‘*marrah ta'khkharu*’ (they are very late) to his statement of the problem (line 2). The use of the word ‘*marrah*’ (very) intensified that the delay was unacceptable as the C waited for so long. It is a persuasive technique that adds power to the complaint (Al-Momani, 2014). The justification given by the CT in her first post-resumption response was that ‘*ilal 'aan ma waSalnaa rad*’ (until now we have not received a reply) (line 18) regarding when the ‘confirmed’ day/time was for the assembly appointment which should be specified by the assembly department according to their schedule. If specified, this information was to appear to the CT in the company’s electronic system. When the CT checked the C’s case on the system, there was no appointment given for the C. Hence, she apologized for that delay through uttering an explicit apology ‘*naʕtadhr*’ (we apologize) (line 18) and offered to make up for the damage through performing a ‘partial’ repair of ‘*Harsil email mustaʕJal li qisim attarkiib*’ (I will send an urgent email to the assembly team) (lines 18-19). Providing explanation, apologizing, and offering partial repair are strategies that attended to the C’s negative face in that they convey respect and deference (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Reiter, 2008). They are acknowledgement by the CT that a violation has been committed and an admission that she, as a company representative, at least partially should help in its resolution (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). These strategies are also aspects of the exchange that have no obvious culture-specific content. They are basic to transactional interactions in any context where some breach of practice or expectations has been experienced by a client (e.g., Frescura, 1993; Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Sato, 2010; Migdadi et al., 2012).

When the CT uttered her first post-resumption response (lines 18-19), the C agreed explicitly to the proposed solution by uttering the word ‘*Tayyib*’ (fine) followed by praying ‘*allaah ysʕidik*’ (may God please you) (line 22) and ‘*allah yiHfaDki*’ (May God protect you) (line 25). These expressions are reflections of the effect of religion on Saudis’ language use (Weeks, 2002; Abdalla, 2006). Muslims use religious expressions as blessings frequently “as invocative acts to bring about God’s conferment or favour” (Alsohaibani, 2017, p. 41) (see section 5.2.1.3 explaining the cultural practice of expressing appreciation through supplication). A number of prophetic sayings encourage Muslims to use invocations for expressing gratitude. For instance, Abu Dawud (2009) mentioned that the Prophet Mohammad said: “whenever being favoured by someone, say: may God reward you with goodness, and indeed you would have thanked him in the most proper way” (p. 5109). In everyday Saudi discourse, such prayers could entail that the person praying is satisfied or pleased with the one prayed for (Al-Ali & Sahawneh,

2008), especially when a favour is being made. In this context, the religious expressions used occurred in the closing sequences as a post-action with the speech act of thanking; a speech act performed after a past act has benefited the speaker (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). Thus, they express gratitude and appreciation. They indicate that the C likely appreciated the CT's perceived effort and was convinced by the remedial work offered. If not indebted, the gratitude would be minimized using the ritualised thanks '*shokran*' (thanks) or '*mashkor/ah*' (I'm thankful) or would be absent; a point reinforced also by a native Saudi participant in Alsohaibani's study (2017) commenting on her tendency not to use religious expressions in thanking by mentioning that "*in reality, he didn't do me any favour, as he was doing his job. So 'shokran' [thanks] is enough*" (p.207). The C in this call did not negotiate the proposed solution with the CT nor reject it. He proceeded to thank the CT, and responded to the final salutation pair initiated by the CT (line 26).

Extract 10 [Call #1]

- 1 C: '*aasif 'ukhti, laakin findi Talab waSal li baytii min arbaʿ ayyaam wa 'ilal 'aan ma Jaa*  
 2 '*aHad yirakkib. marrah ta'khkharu* (sorry my sister, but I have an order that had been  
 3 delivered to my house 4 days ago and until now no body come to assemble it. They are very  
 4 late)
- 5 CT: *mumkin raqam Jawwalik?* (may I have your mobile number?)
- 6 C: *raqam aTTalab?* (order number?)
- 7 CT: '*aʿTiini raqam 'alfatuurah wa raqam alJawwal* (give me the receipt number and the  
 8 mobile number)
- 9 C: '*abshri raqam alJawwal 1234567* (sure mobile number is 1234567)
- 10 CT: '*aTTalab bi'isim mHammad SaHiiH?* (is the order registered by the name of  
 11 Mohammed, am I right?)
- 12 C: *SaHiiH* (yes)
- 13 CT: *waSalluulaak yuum 'arbaʿah Janwarii, SaHiiH?* (they delivered the item on the 4<sup>th</sup> of  
 14 January, am I right?)
- 15 C: *naʿam SaHiiH* (yes right)
- 16 CT: *Tayyib bas daqaayiq* (ok just wait for minutes)
- 17 [C holding the line for 3 minutes and 3 seconds]
- 18 CT: *shaakirah 'intiZaarik. 'ilal 'aan ma waSalnaa rad. naʿstadhr. Harsil email mustaʿJal*  
 19 *li qisim attarkiib. 'anaa muta'kkidah Hayruduu 'alyuum.* (Thanks for waiting. Until now  
 20 we have not received a reply. We apologize. I will send an urgent email to the assembly  
 21 team. I am sure they are going to reply today)
- 22 C: *Tayyib. 'allaah ysʿidik* (Fine. May God please you)

- 23 CT: *wiyyaak. khidmah 'aw 'ay 'istifsaar?* (I wish you the same. Any other service or inquiry  
 24 I can help with?)  
 25 C: *'allah yiHfaDki* (May God protect you)  
 26 CT: *shukraan lit tiSaalik bii* (Furniture Company).  
 27 *Fii r'ayaat Allah* (thanks for calling (Furniture Company). In the peace of God)  
 28 C: *Fi 'amaanil laah* (In the peace of God)

### *Evaluation*

The C in this call had a low-moderate level of dissatisfaction. Throughout the call, the C managed his degree of anger by being calm, not shouting, not using impolite words, and not threatening. Instead, he clearly stated his problem, reflected his feeling of annoyance, and indicated that he was requesting a solution all in a neutral tone of voice. He also responded to the CT's question-answer sequences with a calm temper which never changed throughout the call. In short, the C opted for a polite approach and tried to show his concern for his interlocutor's face.

The C's low-moderate level of dissatisfaction correlated with the choices he made for the verbal strategies and graders. No strategic supportive acts were used in the call after the CT's first post-resumption response to maximize the force of the complaint. The strategy of 'threat' was absent in that call. Moreover, the C did not state his complaint in a 'harsh' way and chose to state it 'peacefully'; an aspect that derives from the socio-cultural value of maintaining harmonious relationships among Muslims even in conflict negotiation. Moreover, the degree of formality and respect resulting from the large power status and social distance between the C or CT (i.e., the factor of *kulfah* كلفة) (see section 1.1.3) necessitated exhibiting politeness behaviour. The statement of the problem was initiated by an apology '*aasif*' (sorry) (Extract 10, line 1); a hedge to mitigate imposition in Saudi Arabic (Al-Gahtani, 2010; Al Ageel, 2010) and a redressive action to decrease the face threat of the coming FTA. This positive politeness strategy reflected that the C was concerned whether what he was about to mention would bother the CT. He also used the addressee term '*ukhti*' (my sister) (Extract 10, line 1) to show respect and imply kinship with the CT. Both terms can be seen as rapport-maintenance orientation (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) because they reduce the force of the complaint and appeal to the CT's quality face.

Three reasons contributed to the way this slightly dissatisfied customer expressed his complaint. Firstly, this was the first time that the C called the CU. He was a 'naïve' customer who lacked the

experience of dealing with this company. He never suffered from repetitive responses or previous promises. Secondly, the problem was a single recent one which lasted for a short duration and had a single concern (late assembly). The C waited for four days after which he decided to complain. Lastly, even after that short duration of waiting, the C received a response which was to him a satisfactory one. He seemed to be returned to the state of satisfaction after the CT's apology and her reassurance that the problem would be sorted '*alyuum*' (today) (Extract 10, line 19)<sup>43</sup>. Because of all of these reasons, the C was satisfied with the closing outcome.

#### 5.2.4.2 Dissatisfaction at two extremes: Strategies and graders

##### *Context*

The C in Call #2 was complaining about the late delivery of a missing piece from a purchased product. He bought an order which was delivered to him on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. Yet, when this order was assembled, the assembly team discovered that there was a missing piece that they should order from the store. The C was told by the assembly team that when that piece became available, the delivery team should set the C another appointment to deliver this missing piece. When the call was made, the C had already made two complaint calls and had been waiting for eleven days for the delivery team.

##### *Discussion*

In Extract 11, the C's level of dissatisfaction changed markedly during the call. Initially, the complainable was expressed directly in the propositional content. The phrase '*lakin naaqSah*' (but missing) announces the topic of the complaint (line 3). The C increased the degree of blame by mentioning that the problem was not his fault. There was no delay in payment from his side. Instead, all C's requirements had been fulfilled (lines 1-2). Yet, the service was not performed as agreed.

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<sup>43</sup> The singular subject pronoun '*anaa*' (I) which accompanied the assertive word '*muta'kkidah*' (sure) added a 'reassurance' component to the response. In Arabic, the subject pronoun is frequently dropped. It is only used in a sentence to 'add emphasis' to the subject (Hassanein, 2006).

The first post-resumption response was ‘acknowledging responsibility’. The CT admitted that the delivery team was accused for the delay because this was not the first time that the C complained to the CU. In lines 15 and 16, the CT stated that there was a previous request on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March; one which contained a request to provide the missing piece. Admitting the fault of the delivery team was not done explicitly at this stage of the call. The CT *implied* that there should be a response from the delivery team since there was a previous request. The implicitness in admitting the mistake by the CT might not be acceptable to the C. According to Ganesan (1994), trust in business is based on the extent a buyer believes that the seller will keep their promise. To build that trust with Saudi customers, honesty and commitments towards mistakes are two fundamental factors (Ben Mansur, 2013). The Saudi customer should be ensured that the organization is fulfilling their promise (Kumar, 2005) and also willing to explicitly admit mistakes and refine them. The C in this case, being a Saudi citizen, would find it difficult to deal with a company that he cannot trust or one that cannot admit mistakes (Al-Ghamdi, Sohail, & Al-Khaldi, 2000; Al-Kahtani, 2011). Previous CTs also promised the C to solve his problem by passing on the request to a higher level but they did not comply with what they promised (lines 32-33).

The CT offered an immediate ‘partial’ repair to pass on the C’s previous request to a higher level (line 17). The C disagreed with the solution offered and he explicitly expressed his disagreement with a negative statement initiated with the negative particle ‘*laa*’ (no) in ‘*laa tirfiyiin aTTalab*’ (do not pass it on to a higher level) (line 24). The flat ‘no’ is a direct refusal strategy (Morkus, 2009). Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari (2016) state that direct refusals in Arabic “may be considered negative, impolite, and abrupt” (p.4). However, this may not work in this context which often demand directness and clear responses. Also, a direct refusal is a preferred strategy when the speaker is exerting power over the hearer (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Because the interaction is marked by “power imbalance” (Marra, 2012), the C has the right to exercise his power and be more direct. In fact, research on the speech act of refusal in Saudi Arabic (e.g., Al-Shalawi, 1997; Al-Kahtani, 2005) has shown that there is a positive correlation between the use of direct refusal strategies and the status of power of the interlocutor.

When the CT suggested for the second time passing on the C’s previous request to a higher level after which the CU would call the C back (lines 26-28), the C declined with a raised voice to call the CU for a fourth time just to receive a similar solution to what had been offered to him in the past (lines 31-32). Recalling what has been mentioned in section 5.2.2., raising voice is an accepted mode of behaviour in the Saudi culture as a style of negotiation. An interesting

insight was given by a native speaker of Saudi Arabic when I discussed this call with him (F.A.Binfaiz, personal communication, August 8, 2017). He mentioned that the raised voice has nothing to do with politeness in this context. As Saudi people, raising voice is an indication of anger and not to be seen as an intention from the C to be impolite. Similar insight is also mentioned by Alsugair (2018). She stated that “although Saudis are loud during conversations in negotiation, that does not mean that they are disrespectful; they are just passionate about the deal” (p.1). Given that he had been promised several times and received uncooperative reactions from the CT, the raised voice was an expected reaction; the C was not satisfied emotionally with what had been offered to him. He presumably was urged to raise his voice to relieve his angry emotions and to speed up the performance of the solution.

Extract 11 [Call #2]

- 1 C: *ʕindii Talabiyyah almafruud tuSalnii fii 24-3-2015 (...) 'anaa daafiʕ fluusahaa wi daafiʕ*  
 2 *'aJir annaqil wdaafiʕ 'aJir attarkiib (...) sawwayt killal 'ijra'aat lakin Jabuuha li alikhwaan*  
 3 *warakkabuuhaa lakin naaqSah* (I have an order which is to be delivered on 24-3-2015 (...) I  
 4 paid all the amount and paid the delivery fees and paid the assembly fees (...) I made all the  
 5 required procedures but the brothers brought it to me and assembled it but it had missing  
 6 pieces)
- 7 CT: *Tayyib 'aʕTini 'allaah ysʕidak raqamal Jawwaal 'almusaJJal filfaatuurah* (ok give me  
 8 may God please you the mobile number written on the receipt)
- 9 C: *shufii Jarbi hadhaa 5675875* (try this one 5675875)
- 10 CT: *huwa bi'isim 'alustadh Ahmad Ali?* (is it by the name of Sir. Ahmad Ali?)
- 11 C: *'aywaa* (yes)
- 12 CT: *Tayyib laHaZaat 'alaah ysʕidak* (ok wait a minute may God please you)
- 13 C: *Tayyib* (ok)
- 14 [C holding the line for 1 minute and 48 seconds]
- 15 CT: *Tayyib shaakirah 'intiZaarak 'ustaath Ahamd (...) huwa waaDiH maʕaayaa 'itrafaʕ*  
 16 *aTTalab fii thamaaniyah w ʕishriin marsh ʕalaa 'asaas ʕindak qiTʕah naaqSah (...) 'al'aan*  
 17 *HaSaʕʕid lik ʕalaa 'aTTalab marra thaaniyaah wa Hashuuf 'eyish 'ishkaliyyat 'atta'khiir wa*  
 18 *bi'idhin 'allaah Hakhailiihum yirJaʕuu yitwaasalu maʕaak enshallah yifiduuk matal mawʕid*  
 19 *illi Haabib yiwaSlu lak fiih 'alqiTʕah annaqiSah wa yirakkibu lak 'iyyaaha* (ok thanks for  
 20 waiting Sir Ahmad (...) it is clear to me that you had a request submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March  
 21 in which it stated that there was a missing piece (...) now I will pass on the request again and  
 22 I will know what is the cause behind the delay and if God wills I will let them call you back  
 23 to know when you would like them to come to deliver the piece and assemble it)

24 C: *laa tirfiʕiin aTTalab (...) mitaa bayiJuun?* (do not pass on the request to a higher level  
25 (...) when are they coming?)

26 CT: *wallah ya 'ustaathi huwa Sayir ʕindanaa ta'khiir bas 'al'aan 'anaa HarJaʕ 'aSafʕid lak*  
27 *ʕala Talabak 'ashuuf 'aysh 'ishkaliyyaat 'atta'khiir wa 'akhalliikum yirJaʕu yitwaaSalu*  
28 *maʕaak* (I swear sir we are encountering a delay but now I will pass on the request again to  
29 know what is the reason behind the delay and will let them call you back)

30 C: *'ukhtii 'intii thalith waHidah 'alHiin tirfaʕ Talab (...) 'anaa ma raaH 'attiSil marrah*  
31 *raabʕah wa waaHidah raabʕah tquullii nafis 'alkalaam hadhaa (...) 'awal marrah qabalt*  
32 *wil marrah aththaaniyah qabalt wal Hiin 'aqabalah minik! //Kayf yaʕnii? kayf yaʕnii?//*  
33 *haadhaa yaʕnii 'as'alik billaah?! (sister you are the third person now who passed on the*  
34 **request (...) I will not call a fourth time to have a similar response from the fourth staff**  
35 **member (...) I accepted the first time and the second time and now you want me to**  
36 **accept it from you! //how? how?// how is this for God's sake?!)**

Failure of the service provider to adequately address the customer's needs and to provide satisfaction can lead the latter to seek the help of the management (Hui, 2014). Culturally speaking, Saudi customers prefer talking to managers if they have not received redress from the service provider (Badghish et al., 2015). This is because Saudi Arabia is classified as a culture with a large power distance (Hofstede, 1983; 2001) with high acceptance of hierarchical status among its citizens (see section 1.1.2.3). Less powerful members of organizations are seen as sometimes incapable of resolving the issue. In Extract 12, when the C felt that the CT could not do anything that could help in solving the problem due to her limited capacities (lines 1-2), he felt that upward escalation to the manager or someone high in the organization was required. He made a 'direct request' to speak to a higher authority. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) commented that though requests are permitted institutionally, they are still considered to be face-threatening as they "attempt to get the hearer do something that he/she would not otherwise do" (p. 3206). Thus, suitable cultural ways have to be found to construct the request. The C seemed to realize that he was making a high imposition request (Al-Ageel, 2016). To restore equilibrium (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), he employed linguistic strategies intended to show goodwill towards the interlocutor and affirm their shared cultural religious beliefs. They are also used as to save face, thus lowering the degree of the request's imposition and to maintain good relations in spite of the conflict. The external modification '*allah yikhaliik*' (May God bless you) was uttered (lines 2 and 4); God-based supplication formula with an affective appeal to do the action and a disarmer (Al-Ageel, 2016) '*ana 'aʕrif qudaraatik wa 'aʕrif mas'uliyyaatik*' (I understand your capacities and responsibilities) (lines 1-2). The C also continued to respect the CT's institutional face by using the five downgraders to mitigate the

force of the request: fictive kin term ‘*ukhitii*’ (my sister) twice (line 1) and the politeness marker ‘*law samaHtii*’ (please) three times (line 1).

Through this request, the C aimed to prevent a repetition of the CTs’ regular promises. Again, the same proposed solution was repeated by the CT (lines 9-10), but this time the CT added a justification for not performing the C’s request so as to account for her failure to provide a remedy (Márquez Reiter, 2008): they were a female only department (line 9). This does not imply that Saudi women do not have authority or refer to the perception of the CT’s accountability as a female. However, it is more related to the cultural issue of segregation (AlMunajjed, 1997; Alkahtani et al., 2013; Hariri, 2017). Women cannot join men in workplaces. The CT indicated that all what she can do is submit a request as she cannot follow up herself with the delivery team, which is presumably a male only team as stated clearly by other CTs in the content of the calls. By then and in a quite forceful manner, the C interrupted the CT and ‘demanded’ in an obligatory statement to have the number of the person who was responsible for the orders. This was done by the imperative form of the verb ‘*aʕTinii*’ (give me) (line 11). Naming the CT in both requests as the principle performer of the act (you give me/you transfer me) served to increase the impact of the imposition. The C had the right to ask the CT to comply with his obligations as he was in a higher position than the CT. He also felt that the higher the position of the staff, the more capable he/she would be of handling the complaint.

Extract 12 [Call #2]

1 C: *law samaHtii Tayyib law samaHtii ya //ukhitii 'ukhitii// Sara law samaHtii ana 'aʕrif*  
 2 *qudaraatik wa 'aʕriif mas'uliyyaatik allah yikhaliik waSliinii ʕalla 'akbar waaHid*  
 3 *ʕindukum fii (Furniture Company) 'akbaar waaHid tshufiinah huwal mas'uul 'incharge*  
 4 *fil mawDuuʕ haadhaa allah yikhaliik wa'Tliʕii min 'almawDuuʕ 'intii (please ok please*  
 5 *//sister sister// Sara please I understand you capacities and responsibilities May God*  
 6 *protect you transfer me to the person of the highest authority in the (Furniture*  
 7 *Company) the highest authority that you can think of who is responsible about the*  
 8 *problem may God protect you and you leave the problem)*

9 CT: *Tayyib allaah ysʕidak 'iHina hinaa bas qisim sayydaat (...) 'iHina muumkin nirfaʕ lak fii*

10 *'aTTalab in 'entaa Haabib titwaaSal maʕa*

<i>mas'uul</i>	}
<i>'aʕTinii</i>	}

*raqam shakhiS 'antii*  
 11 C:  
 12 *tittaSliin fiih (...) shakhiS mas'uul ʕan 'aTTalabaat*

13 (CT: ok may God please you we are here a female only Department (...) we can write in the  
 14 request that you would like to contact a person of a higher authority

15 C: **give me a number of**  
16 **the person whom you contact (...) a person responsible about the requests)**

17 CT: *'Hina ma findinaa arqaam mumkin ntwaSaal maʕahuum (...) ntwaSaal maʕahuum ʕaan*  
18 *Tariiq niZaam muʕayaan bas alwaDiH inuu taHadath amis wa almafruuD yrsluu lak* }

19 C: **wish illi** }

20 **waDiH?! wish tistakhdmuun Hamaam zajil! (...) wish alniZaam illi tistakhdiminaah?!** }

21 (CT: we do not have numbers through which we can contact them (...) we contact them  
22 through a special system but it is clear here that there is an update to your request and

23 [ they should send you ]

24 C: **what is it that is** }

25 **clear?! What system do you use carrier pigeon! (...) what system do you use?!)**

26 CT: *wallah ʕaan Tariiq sistim yaa 'ustaadhi bntwaSaal maʕahuum* (I swear it is through a  
27 system sir that we contact them)

Because the CT was not able to perform any remedial action till this stage, and to attenuate the impact (Hood & Forey, 2008), she showed empathy. Generally speaking, the ability to empathize with customers is regarded as an important skill for customer service agents in call centres (Bordoloi, 2004; D’Cruz & Noronha, 2008). Coulter and Coulter (2003) find that empathy has a great impact on a customer’s trust because it can ameliorate tensions of the customer. An empathetic attitude is reflected through indicating to the customer that “the service provider is caring” (p. 36). Culturally speaking, Saudi Arabia is a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1983, 2001). Individuals are united as an in-group and prefer tightly-knit social frameworks in which individuals’ self-image is defined as “We”. In addition to the collectivist nature of the Saudi culture, Islam is highly collectivist in which the brotherhood nation is supported (Bjerke & Al-Meer, 1993; Al Ageel, 2010). The Prophet’s hadith says: “*The connection between Muslims is like that of a strong building - one part strengthens another*” (Muslim, 1954, p.2585). Empathy, thus, in the Saudi culture is highly expected when a person is suffering distress. In Extract 13, the CT indicated apparent agreement and support to the C by saying that she totally knew and respected the C’s feeling of anger (line 31). She reflected her understanding of the C’s situation by the words ‘*ʕaarfah*’ (I know) and ‘*muqaddirah*’ (I appreciate). To show seriousness and authenticity of what the CT was talking about, she initiated the empathetic response with the vow ‘*wallahi*’ (I swear). “Uttering the name of the Almighty gives credence to the matter at hand and makes Him a witness to the agreement” (Olaofe & Shittu, 2014, p.191). She hoped, using the religious expression ‘*bi’dhnil laah*’ (God willing) (line 32), and in an assertive tone, that the delivery

team will call the C back, let him know about his appointment, and solve his problem by delivering the missing piece. In this context, the religious expression ‘*bi'dhnil laah*’ (God willing) was not used as explained earlier: to express gratitude (see section 5.2.4.1) or as an invocation to mitigate the harshness of the request (see Extract 12). However, it was used by the CT as a reassurance element related to the Islamic virtue of fatalism and to Hofstede’s (2001) dimension of ‘avoidance of uncertainty’ (see section 1.1.2.1). In this context, the religious phrase is a religious invocation used to mark hope for a desired outcome (Clift & Helani, 2010), especially that the future never can be known being only controlled by God. Using such a mitigating phrase had the function of absorbing the C’s anger through indicating to him the validity of his problem. It was also meant to indicate to the C that the company do care about his satisfaction and problems. More importantly, the CT used this strategy to avoid disagreement with the C, especially that the CT was not able to perform any remedial action.

Extract 13 [Call #2]

- 31 CT: *wallahi ʒaarfaah ya 'ustaadhii wa muqaddirah haadhash shay lakin zay maafaditak*  
32 *bi'dhnil laah khilaalas saaʒaat alJaayah ytwaaSaluu maʒaak yfiiduuk bilqiTaʒ mitaa Haytim*  
33 *tawSiilahaah wa ywaSluu lak 'iyyaahaa* (I swear that I totally understand and appreciate that sir but as I informed you -God’s willing- they will contact you during the coming hours and let you know what are the missing pieces and deliver it to you)

### *Evaluation*

In this interaction, the C had ‘mixed’ levels of dissatisfaction. He started the call by being ‘moderately annoyed’ and ended it up by being ‘intensely annoyed’.

When the call began, the tone of voice was normal. The C greeted the CT and produced an additional move of ‘how are you’ (Extract 3, line 2) (see section 5.2.1.1). An obvious increase in the C’s level of dissatisfaction was noticed in line 24 (Extract 11) when the C ‘refused’ the CT’s first post-resumption response. With a raised voice, the C angrily stated that he received and accepted the ‘same response’ from two CTs before, but he would never accept the same response from her this time.

During the negotiation of the problem, different strategies and graders expressed the C’s increased level of dissatisfaction. When it comes to the type of strategic supportive acts used, these changed gradually from the less direct (less FT) to more direct ones (more FT). Directness in this case refers to the explicitness of the illocutionary intent of the utterance (Vasquez, 2009).

The more direct an utterance, the more it is seen to be imposing to the CT (see section 2.1.9 on directness as typically politic behavior in this context). In lines 31-32 (Extract 11), the C expressed his 'dissatisfaction' by mentioning that '*ma raaH 'attiSil marrah raabṣah*' (I will not call a fourth time). This was a 'conventionally indirect' request to perform another remedial act. When no satisfying response was given by the CT, the C 'explicitly requested' to transfer his call to the person of the highest authority in the FTC (Extract 12, lines 2-3). When the CT refused again to comply with his request, the C insistently 'demanded' to have the number of the person to contact him directly (Extract 12, line 12).

Essentially, the use of fictive kin terms accompanied the C's utterances even when he expressed his dissatisfaction (Extract 11, line 30) and when he made the request (Extract 12, line 1). Upgrading the force of the complaint by denying the C's responsibility for it was not frequently used by the C, a finding which confirms the quantitative results that Cs with '2 extreme' level of dissatisfaction used the upgrader of 'C's denial of responsibility' less than expected (observed=2, expected count=8.0) (see Table 4.13). This upgrader was employed only once in the call (Extract 11, lines 1-2). The C was not concerned with who caused the problem as much as he was concerned with reaching a person who could sort out the problem other than the CTs of the CU.

Beyond the verbal strategies and graders used, this call was marked by the C's vocal signs (paralinguistic aspects) indicating the build-up in the C's level of dissatisfaction. With a raised voice and loud amplitude, the C interrupted the CT twice in lines 11 and 19 (Extract 12). He seized the opportunity to express his strong opinion on what had been mentioned by the CT and his forceful disagreement with her justification/explanation or solution proposed. Tone of voice was another cue to signal disagreement and increased level of anger (see section 5.2.2 and Extract 11). The long pause of five seconds before the C decided to initiate the closing sequence (Extract 8, line 6) revealed that the C felt that the situation was hopeless and that this call did not meet his expectations in terms of a speedier remedial action. This silence is also a positive politeness strategy as it is a 'confrontation-avoidance' strategy that reflect the C's concerns regarding the service provider's face needs. Respect in this sense was maintained through patience and self-control (Al-Kahtani et al., 2013). In the Saudi culture, silence is utilized as a time for contemplation and is a characteristic of a polite person (Assallom, 2010). The C ended his call with a 'sarcastic' and an 'angry' tone of voice when he stated that the CU had nothing to offer him (Extract 8, line 8).

Apparently, two characteristics in the CT's responses led to an increment in the C's level of dissatisfaction. Firstly, and because it was not the first time he had been told so, the CT's 'repetitive' responses confirmed to the C that the role of the CT was repeating a 'memorized script'. To him, the institutional representative did not make any attempt to offer any sort of help rather than a few explicit apologies and, procedurally speaking, the routinized action of 'passing on the previous request'. Secondly, the opacity in the CT's responses which had a hidden component not revealed to the C such as '*niZaam muṣayaan*' (a special system) (Extract 12, line 18) and '*ṣaan Tariiq sistim*' (through a system) (Extract 12, line 26) raised the C's degree of anger as he felt that there was not, as claimed, any effort to solve the problem. The C needed to know how his problem was dealt with in order to reach the state of being contented; especially because honesty and commitment towards mistakes are two fundamental factors for building trust for a Saudi customer (see Extract 11). Because of such types of responses, the C was not satisfied with the closing outcome of the call.

#### 5.2.4.3 High level of dissatisfaction: Strategies and graders

As indicated in Table 5.1, two calls had Cs with a 'high' level of dissatisfaction: Call #3 and Call #4. The following sections present a separate discussion of each.

##### Call #3

###### *Context*

The problem in Call #3 was the late assembly of a desk and cupboards. This complaint call was made after the C was given two 'previous promises' by specific persons in the follow-up department<sup>55</sup>. The C was promised that the assembly team would come to his house and assemble the items tomorrow. Yet, this promise had been broken and no one came to him. By the time the call was made, the C waited for a *long* period of time for the assembly team: one and a half months.

###### *Discussion*

As Extract 14 shows, the C started stating his problem using the phrase '*tarkiib 'almafruuD 'amis*' (assembly ought to have been here yesterday) (line1). He supported his complaint

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<sup>55</sup> A department within the company which follows up with a C's previous complaint to check whether and how the problem could be solved. This suggests that this *was not* the first time that the C had called the CU to complain.

through ‘accusing the company of dishonesty’. They misled the C by giving him different and previous appointments which they never honoured (lines 1-2).

The CT’s first post-resumption response, as with almost all the CTs in the corpus, was to pass on the request to a higher level (lines 12-13) to which the C disagreed (line 15). When the C asked for confirmation of whether or not the assembly team was coming, the CT evaded responsibility (line 18). She passed the responsibility for the fault to the assembly department as they had not yet replied to the CU’s request. The CT put the onus for the shortfall onto a third party when she failed to provide a satisfactory remedy. According to Márquez Reiter (2008), shifting the blame like this may be part of a CT’s explanation but it “offer[s] vague and administratively related excuses in an effort not to admit fault, personally or institutionally” (p.12). The evasion of responsibility did not offer any remedial work. However, it reflected a poor procedural issue in where the service provider did not have any information about the assembly team.

What distinguishes this call from others is the narrative sentences through which the C ‘implicitly blamed’ the company for the problem (lines 20- 22). Implicitness could be seen as an ‘imposition minimizer’ (Hariri, 2017) which often has a positive effect on the addressee. The C was assured by two company representatives of the follow-up department that the assembly team was to come that day and finish their work. Yet, they did not comply with their promises. Through this blaming behaviour, the C indicated that he did everything he could do to solve the problem, thereby implying that the delay in solving his problem must be caused by the company and its follow-up department and not by himself. In other words, the narrative statements seemed to be used to resist the pressure that the CT might exercise, a behaviour known to be used by Saudis in business negotiations (Alsugair, 2018). These included ‘factual accounts’ (Iacobucci, 1990) of the procedures followed by the C prior to this complaint call which also invited the CT to evaluate the story, hence, pushing the CT to address the grievance (see section 2.3.3).

The C then assumed that this problem could be rectified by directly contacting those who promised to solve the problem. Hence, he explicitly uttered two hedged performatives: ‘requests’ whose requesting intention was modified by the politeness marker ‘*idhaa takarramtii*’ (please) (line 23). The C asked to be given the number of the person from the follow-up department who made the promise to him using the imperative form of ‘*idinii*’ (give me) (line 23). When this request was politely refused (line 30), the C made ‘another request’ using the imperative verb ‘*arslii*’ (send) with the urgency intensifier ‘*al’aan*’ (now) (line 33). According to Al-Ageel (2016), two generations of Saudis display relatively different behaviour

in their requests in work contexts. Younger Saudis prefer to address negative face by using conventionally indirect strategies when requesting whereas older Saudis tend to use more direct strategies (note that the C is a 70-year old man). In addition to distant relationships between the C and the CT, the imperative form of the verb is acceptable given the impact of the hierarchical system in Saudi culture. In this culture, older individuals are usually treated as higher in power status and thus 'eligible' to use more imperatives in their requests to younger colleagues.

Extract 14 [Call #3]

- 1 C: *law samaHtii 'anaa ġindii tarkiib dawaliib wa maktabah 'almafruuD 'amis wa kul yuum*  
2 *yquuluu lanaa //bukrah bukraH//* (excuse me I have an assembly appointment for  
3 **cupboards and a desk which ought to have been here yesterday and each day they say to**  
4 **us //tomorrow tomorrow//**)
- 5 CT: *tsharrifnii bismak?* (could I please have your name?)
- 6 C: *'ibrahim Saġuud* (Ibrahim Saud)
- 7 CT: *Tayyib (...)* *sharrifnii braqim Jawwaalak?* (ok (...) can I have your mobile number  
8 please?)
- 9 C: 045874937 (045874937)
- 10 CT: *laHazaat* (just a minute)
- 11 [C holding the line for 26 seconds]
- 12 CT: *shaakirah lintiZaarik wa 'aasfah ġalaa al'Talaah bas laHazaat min faDlak arfaġ lak*  
13 *Talab* (thanks for waiting and sorry for the delay. It'll just take a minute please to pass on  
14 your request to a higher authority)
- 15 C: ***laa tirfaġii Talab!*** *yaġnii 'intii mantii ġaarfaH 'idhaa Jayyiin alyuum wallaa mahum*  
16 *Jayyiin?!* (**do not pass on the request!** So you do not know whether they are coming today  
17 or not?!)
- 18 CT: *'ustaadhii ma ġindii ġilim haadhaa bas khaaS bii fariiġ attarkiib* (sir I do not know this is  
19 only known by the assembly team)
- 20 C: *ya 'ukhtii 'amis khalid min almutabaġah 'itaSal bii wa qaalii bukraH wa 'itkallamit maġaah*  
21 *kalaam kathiir wa qaalii bukraH wa baġad kidhaa 'itaSal bii waaHid min almutabaġah*  
22 *thaanii wa qaalii bukraH assaaġah 'iHdaġash wa nuS yJuu yrakibuu lak (...)* *'ana widdii*  
23 *'innii attaSil bi khalid 'idinii 'idhaa takarramtii raqam lii khlid 'aw 'idhaa tiqdarii 'ayii*  
24 *waaHid fii almutabaġah 'as'aluu* (Sister, yesterday Khalid from the follow-up department  
25 called me and he told me tomorrow and I had an endless conversation and he told me  
26 tomorrow. After that I received another call from another person from the follow-up  
27 department and he told me tomorrow at 11:30 they will come and assemble your order (...) I  
28 wish to talk to Khalid. Please give me a number for Khalid or if you can the number of  
29 anyone in the follow-up department to ask him)

- 30 CT: *wallah ya 'ustaadhii naʕtadhir minnak ma ʕindanaa lahum 'ay raqm 'iHnaa nitwaaSal*  
 31 *maʕaahum ʕan Tariiq aTTalabaat wa ʕan Tariiq al'imilaat* (I swear my sir we are sorry, we  
 32 do not have any number for them and we contact them through requests and through emails)  
 33 C: *'al'aan law samaHtii 'arslii luhum 'imayl* (now please send them an email)

The C continued his blaming behaviour in Extract 15. He claimed that even a supervisor, the highest authority in the CU, lied to the C's wife by mentioning promises that were just for the function of 'numbing' her from complaining (line 2). Because of these previous promises, the C's wife suffered from hypertension and hypoglycaemia when she knew that the assembly team was not coming as promised (lines 3-5). The C's choice to discuss the bad consequences that his family suffered from (i.e., private information which is not necessary for the purpose of the call) tells us one method used in the Saudi culture for supporting complaints: appealing to emotions. When a solution to the problem was unlikely to be found, appealing to emotions was a strategy used to persuade the CT of the validity of the claim. Self-disclosing of such circumstances is a socio-emotional account that could open up an empathetic attitude from the CT to speed up the resolution. According to Faerch and Kasper (1989, p.239), "giving reasons, justifications and explanations for an action opens up an empathetic attitude on the part of the interlocutor in giving his or her insight into the actor's underlying motive(s)". Moreover, referring to the sickness of a family member (i.e., C's wife) derives from the cultural premise that family comes first and religiously that a man is compelled to take care of his family and has to seek their happiness (see section 1.1). This strategy is again a sign of imposing cultural values in the institutional context. Linking anger to illness arguably comes from the Saudis typical consideration of anger as an agent that raises the blood sugar level in the body or increases blood pressure (Al-Hadlaq & Maalej, 2012). It entails the incapability of the C to take it anymore. All in all, by mentioning that, the C attempted to enhance his chances of obtaining his goal by 'appealing to the CT's sense of solidarity' as a human who might suffer one day from the same problem and not as an institutional member. He thus made it more difficult for the CT to excuse.

Extract 15 [Call #3]

- 1 C: *kulluhum yquuluu kidhaa Hatta almushrifah alʕaaliyah 'aʕlaa mushrifah aysh*  
 2 *'ismaha? 'amal qalat wallah lii zawJatii 'alkalaam kuluh kaan takhdiir kuluh takhdiir (...)*  
 3 *ma ySiir sukarnaa 'irtafaʕ DaghTanaa 'irtafaʕ 'amis zawJatii wallah 'alʕaZiim lamma*  
 4 *faJa'uuhaa qaaluu lahaa fii 'aakhir laHZaa 'inuu 'alyuum ma Hanrakib bukrah Saar*

5 *ʕindahaa 'inhiyaar wa 'inkhafaD alDDaghiT wa 'inkhafaD assukar ʕindahaa law raHat*  
6 *Hadhi fii dhimmat miin truuH? (...) 'uqsim biJalaal illaah alwaDiʕ 'illi Saayir lanaa*  
7 *bisabab alghurfah haadhii ma yʕlamah 'illa allah wa 'anaa 'adʕuu ʕalaa kul man huwa*  
8 *assabab 'in yantaqim allaah minnah* (all of them say the same thing even the highest  
9 supervisor what's her name? Amal said I swear to my wife things which was just to  
10 anesthetize her all was anesthesia (...) this is not acceptable. We suffer from  
11 hypoglycaemia and hypertension. I swear to God yesterday when they shocked my wife  
12 at the last minute by telling her that today we will not assemble, she had the next day a  
13 nervous breakdown and low blood sugar and low pressure. If she passed away, who will  
14 be responsible? (...) I swear to God that only He who knows what is happening to us  
15 because of this room and I supplicate to God to take my revenge from everybody who  
16 has been a cause for the problem)

When mentioning his age and his academic status (70-year old man and a professor), the C constructed a desirable identity for himself. Culturally, status and respect are of high value (Alsugair, 2018). Islamic moral obligations require that elders be served with respect and obedience. In addition, the status of the person is of socio-cultural value in the Saudi society where academic achievements can be used to assess people's importance (Al-Fattah, 2010). A professor holding a degree is of great significance and should be respected (Al-Momani, 2014). Hence, the C attempted to turn the situation to his advantage and legitimize his urgent request by using the power created through age and professional identity (Grégoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010); a person who should be treated seriously and be differentiated from an 'average' everyday caller and "not to play with" him (Appendix L3, line 82). Being a 70-year old man who was given more than one false promise, the C's degree of anger increased as he felt that the company did not respect his age and did not make any attempt to solve his problem by speeding up the assembly team. To him, 'issuing a threat' was a way to quicken the performance of the remedial action. In lines 1-2 of Extract 16, the C attacked the CT's institutional face twice by stating the negative consequences of not complying with what he was asking for. Through two conditional statements '*idhaa*' (if), the C threatened to complain to the Ministry of Commerce and Investment<sup>56</sup> (MCI) and, to refer the matter up to the King of Saudi Arabia if the assembly team did not finish what they should do. The first threat was intensified by a '*qassam*' (an oath) in '*uqsim billah alʕaZiim*' (I swear by the Great God) (line 1). This functioned to indicate that what the C was saying was serious and should not be taken lightly. It declared, with a reverent appeal to God, the truth of what was affirmed (Olaofe & Shittu, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> In the past two years, MCI urges consumers to report any violation of any Company via a toll-free number or by filing a Commercial Violation Report. The MCI is then to do the necessary follow-ups until the case is closed.

Put differently, the use of oath with the threat added to the face-threatening nature of the complaint. The C's threatening behaviour can be linked to findings that the aggressive and threatening behaviour exhibited by Saudi customers stems from "the strong Saudi link to feeling cheated" (Badghish et al., 2015, p.56). Resorting to threats and engaging high-status people in the complaint could put the CT under pressure to resolve the issue by amplifying the imposition of asking for an action. The strong hierarchical structure of Saudi Arabia business culture (Alkahtani et al., 2013) means that when decisions are to be made by superiors (i.e., the authoritarian leaders), this decision would be implemented down the chain of command by subordinates.

When the CT noticed that the C started to be angrier, she offered 'another' option for remedial work in the form of sending an email to her supervisor 'now' (line 6). The cultural response '*ma ySiir khaTirik 'ilaa Tayyib*' (everything is going to be as you wish) was positive conversational feedback that supported the C's claims and indicated the CT's intention to do what could satisfy the C. More importantly, this expression avoided direct disagreement with the C by agreeing to perform the action as he wished.

All that had been proposed to the C as responses to his claim were considered 'unsatisfactory'. What could satisfy the C was stated explicitly in lines 7-8. The C 'proposed an urgent solution' that '*alyuum yJuu yrakibuu alghurfah*' (the assembly team come and assemble the room today). Placing such a solution in the course of the conversation demonstrated the idea that the complaint was not just made to pass negative judgments but also to repair the problem (i.e., an instrumental complaint).

Extract 16 [Call #3]

- 1 C: '*uqsim billah alSaZiim 'innuu 'idhaa ma Saar almawDuu£ wa Tawwal 'innuu aSa£fiduu*  
 2 *lii waziir attiJaarah wa 'idhaa ma Saar almawDuu£ haadhaa aSa£fiduu lil malik* (I swear  
 3 **by the Great God if this does not happen or if it takes a long time, I will pass it on to the**  
 4 **Minister of Commerce and if nothing happens to the King)**
- 5 CT: *biSaraaHaa ni£tadhir £ala illii Saar 'ustaadhii wa ni£tadhir £an atta'khiir 'illi HaSal*  
 6 *lakin ma ySiir khaTirik 'ilaa Tayyib (...)*  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{'anaa 'al'aan} \\ \text{yes sir} \end{array} \right]$  *khaaTirii Tayyib 'inhum*
- 7 C:  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{'anaa 'al'aan} \\ \text{yes sir} \end{array} \right]$  *khaaTirii Tayyib 'inhum*  
 8 *alyuum yJuu yrakibuu alghurfah* (CT: we really apologize for what happened sir and we  
 9 apologize for the delay but everything is going to be as you wish (...))  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{now I} \\ \text{I will} \end{array} \right]$
- 10 C:  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{now I} \\ \text{I will} \end{array} \right]$

11 **be pleased if they come today and assemble the room**

- 12 CT: *ma ySiir khaTirik 'ila Tayyib 'anaa 'al'aan raH arJaŝ aSaŝŝid 'imayl lil mushrifah*  
13 (everything is going to be as you wish. Now I will send an email to the supervisor)

The CT was even more considerate towards the C's negative feelings when she performed the remedial work while the C was still on the line. As Extract 17 shows, the CT sent her supervisor the email and held herself responsible to follow up with the C once she received a reply (lines 1-2). She mentioned that '*awal maa tifiidanii birrad raaH 'arJaŝ wa attwaSal maŝaak*' (once I receive a reply, I will contact you) (line 2). The unilateral promise was performed using '*arJaŝ*' (I will) which had the hidden subject pronoun '*anna*' (I). As the subject of the sentence was the CT, she bound herself to perform the promised action. The declaration to call the C herself rather than the concerned department reassured the C that his problem was taken into consideration and that 'this' CT was willing to help him as opposed to the other CTs whom he called before. Above all, this promise gave hope to the C to receive good news because '*waŝaad*' (promise) in the Islamic culture is confined to the delivery of good matters in the future (Osman & Jalil, 2013). Though he was extremely annoyed throughout the call, the C ended by 'restoring' the harmony that was endangered through the complaint through the cajoler '*maŝalaysh*' (never mind) (line 7) after the CT's apology which indirectly indicates that he accepted the CT's apology.

Extract 17 [Call #3]

- 1 CT: *Tayyib ya 'ustaadhii 'anaa 'al'aan rafaŝit 'imayl lilmushrifah wa in'shallah bi'idhin*  
2 *allaah 'awal maa tifiidanii birrad raaH 'arJaŝ wa attwaSal maŝaak (...) naŝtadhir minnak*  
3 (ok sir I have now sent an email to the supervisor. Once I receive a reply, I will - if God wills,  
4 God willing- contact you (...) we apologize)  
5 C: *miin maŝaayah?* (Who am I talking to?)  
6 CT: *maŝaak Latiifah* (I am Latifah)  
7 C: *Tayyib maŝalaysh 'anaa muntaZir wa 'arJuu 'innik titwaSSalii wa tiddinii Jawaab* (ok I will  
8 be waiting and I hope that you contact me and give me an answer)

*Evaluation*

Due to previous promises and the long waiting time, the C had a 'high' level of dissatisfaction. Two indications of the C's high level of dissatisfaction were: (a) the C's 'extra raised' voice

when expressing his feelings of anger and frustration such as when he expressed the bad consequences that occurred to him due to the problem (Extract 15); and (b) the C exhibited threatening behaviour in Extract 16.

The C dominated most of the turns with very long sequences produced in a raised voice. Long sequences containing ‘socio-emotional’ accounts were supporters to the C’s claim (Extract 15). The feelings of anger and frustration induced the use of ‘anger phrases’. This included expressions accusing the company of dishonesty as ‘*mawaaʕiid kidhib*’ (false appointments) and ‘*mawaaʕiid munaafiiqiin*’ (hypothetical appointments), and others describing the behaviour of the company when dealing with its customers as ‘*qillat adab*’ (uncivil/impolite) and ‘*iHnaa bashar muu bahaayim ylʕabuu binaa*’ (we are humans not animals to play with). In this moment of extreme anger, the C in line 7 of Extract 15 uttered a ‘*duʕaa*’ (supplication to God) that Allah takes revenge on everybody who has been a cause of the problem. This relates to one of the major Islamic virtues: the concept of *Al-Tawakkul* (entrusting results to Allah after the effort has been made). It means relying upon Him exclusively, especially at moments of helplessness and broken heartedness, because He is predominant over all creatures (Bonaba & Koohsar, 2011).

In spite of the intensity of the C’s anger, a very interesting observation in this call was the occurrence of ‘fictive kin terms’ and ‘politeness markers’. As explained earlier (see section 5.2.4.1), ‘*ukhtii* (sister) (Extract 14, line 20), and ‘*idhaa takarramtii*’ (if you would kindly) (Extract 14, line 23) when addressing the CT indicated respect and politeness. C’s supportive statements to the CT can be seen as having different functions. The C displayed respect towards the CT’s positive face needs presumably as a means to achieve his transactional goal. He also illustrated the general cultural norm of respect and maintaining good relations despite extended negotiations and conflict over a specific issue. The occurrence of supportive statements also shows that extremely annoyed customers in service encounters can still mitigate imposition to offset face threats. They also reveal that if any confrontational strategy was used, it was designed to attack the company’s policy and not the CT’s personal face.

On the whole, this call was marked by the CT’s ability, at least partially, to absorb the C’s anger through her responses. The company representative remained calm, respectful, and non-confrontational even though she could not help the customer in any way other than those she was entitled to perform. In several turns of the interaction, the CT reassured the C that she was to do what would please him through the phrase ‘*ma ySiir khaTirik 'ilaaTayyib*’ (everything is going to be just as you like/wish) (Extract 16, line 6). She also adjusted her response according

to the degree of the C's anger. Her first post-resumption response, as with almost all the CTs in the corpus, was to pass on the request to a higher level (Extract 14). Yet, when she noticed that the C started to be angrier, she performed more remedial work by apologizing and offering to send an email to her supervisor 'now' (Extract 16). The instance of 'now' functions to lessen the negative attitude around past time by performing the act while the C is on the line: reducing waiting time in the future. She was even more considerate towards the C's negative feelings when she promised the C to follow-up with him *herself* once she received the reply from her supervisor (Extract 17). Adjusting the response according to the level of anger during the course of the call can be considered an attempt from the CT to ease tension (Lam & Yu, 2013) and to re-establish an attitudinal equilibrium in interaction with the C (Hood & Forey, 2008). The type of responses uttered by the CT, then, could be a factor that led to a 'normal' closure of this complaint call. It also indicated that the CT's ability to determine the C's heightened peaks of emotion yet not to echo the C's intensity level can possibly contribute to returning the call to a reduced level of emotional intensity.

#### Call #4

##### *Context*

The C of Call #4 called to complain about the late delivery of his order. This was not the first time he called the CU. In the course of the call, he mentioned that '*yawmiyyan battaSil*' (I call every day).

##### *Discussion*

As Extract 18 shows, the CT's first post-resumption response was shifting the responsibility to the delivery team (line 2). Thus, the fault was not the responsibility of the CU. The CT also excused 'her supervisor' from the responsibility.

To this response, the C refused to listen to more '*kalaam faaDii*' (useless talk) and indirectly assigned the company as the cause of the offence to "enhance condemnation" (Toplak & Katz, 2000). He mocked the conditions for the execution of the procedural steps performed to solve a problem. His problem was not 'rocket science' (line 13), but a 'simple' issue that required a 'simple' procedural action. He requested twice in a 'need statement' to talk to a person of higher authority being either a boss, a supervisor, or any responsible person (line 17). The personalized need statements '*abghaa*' (I need) were repeated to indicate the C's insistence to talk to a higher authority as his feelings of anger and frustration were at the maximum. The C assumed that the

company representatives with higher status were the ones capable of bending the company's policy in the C's favour. They could at least direct the C as to whom he could follow up with.

Extract 18 [Call #4]

- 1 CT: *shakirah 'intiZaarak wa 'aasifah Jiddan Salaa al'iTaalaa (...) 'ustaadhii tawaaSalit*  
 2 *mafa almushrifah bas afaadatnii 'illa 'al'aan ma Jahum 'ay rad min nafis alsharikah 'illi*  
 3 *hiya*
- 4 [ *sharikat* ]  
 5 C: [ *ya 'ukhtii* ] *sharikat tawSiil miin? fTunaa raqmuhum wa 'iHnaa nitwaaSal*  
 6 *mafaahum*
- 7 (CT: Thanks for waiting and I am very sorry for being late (...) I contacted the supervisor  
 8 sir but she informed me that until now we have not received any reply from the company  
 9 which is the company [ *sister* ]
- 10 C: *what delivery company? Give*  
 11 *us their number and we will contact them)*
- 12 CT: *ma findii* [ *raqam* ]  
 13 C: [ *ya 'ukhtii 'al'faziizah ma'huu 'khtiraa' Saruukh huu alHiin fii biDaa'ah*  
 14 *mafa miin 'ataabi' fashaan tiJii biDaa'atii? hinaa alziibdaah kalaam faaDii barbaarrah*  
 15 *faaDiyah law samaHtii (...) alma'raD qaaluu lii diq Salaa khidmat alSumalaa 'adiq*  
 16 *Salaykum tquuluu lii diq Salaa alma'raD kalaam zibaalah faaDii ma 'abghaa 'asma' (...)*  
 17 *'abghaa shay mufiid 'abghaa shakhiS atwaaSal mafaah mudiir mushrif shakhiS mas'uul*
- 18 (CT: I do not have [ *a number* ]  
 19 C: [ *my dear sister* ] *it is not rocket science, now there is an order, with*  
 20 *whom shall I follow up to deliver my order? This is the important thing, there is too much*  
 21 **useless talk** please (...) the store told me to call the Customer Service and when I call you,  
 22 you said call the store **rubbish talk which is useless I do not want to hear** (...) I need to  
 23 talk to a useful person I need to contact a boss, a supervisor, a responsible person)

In response to the repetitive and intense requests of the C, the CT in Extract 19 became angrier as she declared in a high tone of voice that she did not have numbers or any number to give to the C (line 1). In contrast with the CT of Call#3, the CT in this call was not able to constrain the negative feelings of the C. Thus, she failed to return the call to a reduced level of emotional intensity by “setting up an oppositional position” (Hood & Forey, 2008, p.406). In the terms of Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) (see section 2.2.6), the CT amplified her ‘attitude’ by explicitly expressing a negative point “I do not have the numbers” (Extract 19, line 1). Because of these irritating responses, the C became angry and in his next turn decided to threaten the CT by issuing a ‘threat’. He issued two subsequent threats which were marked by their high

degree of anger being produced in a very high tone of voice. The first threat had the function of threatening the CT. The C mentioned that he had *already submitted* a complaint (i.e., a past complaint) against the company to the MCI and that he knew a person there with whom he could follow up (lines 15-16). The second threat was even ‘harsher’ because the C repeated his vow<sup>57</sup> that if the order was not delivered to his place, he would perform a threatening act: destroy the store by burning it (lines 16-17). Of particular note in this phase of the interaction is that this extremely angry C decided not to complete the call and cut off the line (line 21). This behavior is typically accepted in this context given that in general complainers often enter the complaint interaction in an angry mood (Gruber, Szmigin, & Voss, 2009). Face-aggravating strategies are inevitable in this emotionally-loaded interaction in which anger seems to be the most common emotion linked to the strong feeling of injustice (Hui, 2010). Saudi customers expect effective customer service and speedy actions (Badghish et al., 2015; Al-Sugair, 2018). However, the CT displayed disengagement within the ongoing state of talk through repetition and passivity. More importantly, hypothesized social norms (Koh, 2013) do consider the cut-off-line in angry situations to be conventionally acceptable. This is because the Saudi customer is able to exercise his power in retail businesses especially in a potential conflict situation (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2000). Also, to perform closure, both participants need to agree. Otherwise, a failure to terminate the call can occur (Button, 1990). In Extract 19 (line 12), the CT signaled for closure twice by the affirmative acknowledgment ‘*Tayyib*’ (fine) and ‘*ukayh*’ (ok), but the C continued to threaten which means that he did not agree with what had been mentioned. Deciding not to complete the parting exchange is seemingly unsurprising here given that the call did not lead to a positive and a satisfactory outcome for the C. Hanging up is recognizable as a means to express dissatisfaction.

Extract 19 [Call #4]

- 1 CT: *ma findanaa 'arqaam walaa 'ay raqam nifiidak fiih* (we do not have numbers so
- 2 **there is no number number we can give to you)**
- 3 C: *layh?! titwaaSaluun mafa almalik salmaan!* (why?! Do you have contact with the
- 4 **King Salman!)**
- 5 CT: *San Tariiq 'al'imayl* (through the email)

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<sup>57</sup> The use of threat with oath ‘ascertained’ the truth of the C’s claim. He called on Allah to support his claim. The C felt that he was wronged by the illogical and the impractical reasons given to him.

6 C: *'anaa 'atwaaSal maṣa sharikah zibaalah 'abghaa alsharikah 'illii qaaṣdah twaSSil*  
7 *wayn makaanahaa? ashshakhiS almas'uul ṣan attawSiil fayn makanah? (I am dealing*  
8 *with a rubbish company. I want to talk to the company which delivers. Where is it*  
9 *located? The person responsible for delivery where can I find him?)*

10 CT: *thawaanii ya 'ustaadhii* (wait for a few seconds sir)

11 [C holding the line for a minute and 73 seconds]

12 CT: *Tayyib 'ukayh 'ustaadhii 'iHnaa 'al'aan Saṣṣadnaa almawDuuṣ wa Hantaabiṣ*  
13 *maṣaahum nshuuf 'aysh almushkilah* (fine ok sir we have passed on your request now and  
14 we will follow up with them to find out what is the problem)

15 C: *shufii 'anaa sawwayt shakwaa fii wazarat attiJaarah wa ṣindii waHid wa qasam*  
16 *billaah fii wazarat attiJaarah 'uqsim billaah law ma waSalnii hinaa 'uqsim billah lilfariṣ*  
17 *la 'aHriq abuuḥ* (see I submitted a complaint to the Ministry of Commerce and I know  
18 a person there. I swear to God in the Ministry of Commerce I swear to God if the  
19 order is not delivered to me here, I swear to God I will come to the store and destroy  
20 it by burning it down)

[C cut off the line]

The emotional involvement heightened the C's concern about his own face and reduced his concern for the CT's face. In other words, this high emotional involvement prompted the C to exhibit more confrontational behaviour through the use of 'impolite words'. The word 'zibaalah' (rubbish) was used twice to describe the responses of the CT (Extract 18, line 16) and the company (Extract 19, line 6). The word connoted that the service provider was uttering worthless speech and that the company was very bad in providing proper service for its customers. Face had been violated in this situation. In a Saudi business context, preventing the loss of face through dignity and respect is important (Ali, 2007). One is expected to express goodwill rather than bluntly criticize another's ideas. Linguistic behavior in Saudi Arabia follows specific rules of interaction of which face management strategies are a priority (see section 1.1.3). Hence, criticism of the CT's response in this case could be seen as a personal insult. If the C is to criticize, then his criticism "ought to be indirect and should include praise of any good points first, accompanied by assurances of high regard for the individual" (Danielewicz-Betz & Mamidi, 2009, p.4).

### *Evaluation*

The C had high levels of dissatisfaction. Certain signs in the course of the call indicated that level of dissatisfaction. These were: (a) stating that the C had already complained to the MCI before he made this call which meant that the problem had extremely annoyed the C and for which he decided to seek the help of a higher authority in the country (Extract 19, line 15), (b)

the very high tone of voice through which the C complained and his frequent interruption of the CT's responses to reflect his refusal of what had been mentioned by her (Extract 18, lines 5 and 13).

It is also noticed in the course of the call that the CT ignored the negative feelings the C had, and perhaps unwisely repeated her routinized response without any apologetic expressions. She also was not explicit in explaining the procedures and/or whom she contacted with regard to the C's problem. For the customer, it was frustrating to be confronted with rules and regulations that seemed pointless and were not explained adequately. This, consequently, led to angry reactions. This observation aligns with that of Hartline and Ferrell (1996) that it is largely the employee's response which influences the customer's satisfaction and the perception of the company's complaint resolution process. After all, the main reason for complaining is to receive a solution to the problem. In addition to solving the problem, customers need to be taken seriously by being shown motivated and helpful responses. For the Saudi customer, "competence" and "taking someone seriously" are strongly linked to the value of "well-being" (Al-Gahtani, 2010).

The anger that the C experienced was mainly due to the constraints in the company's policy for which the CT appeared to be unwilling to cooperate with the C. Expressed differently, the company's policy and the C's expectation clashed. The C called with the expectation that he would come out with a remedial action, especially with the high sense of disappointment he felt. He could not understand that the CT was bound to the company's policy and thus he felt that the CT was unwilling to help. With this "useless" procedure of handling complaints, the company must offer what Chebat, Davidow, and Codjovi (2005) term "psychological compensation". Responses are to be appropriate to the customer's emotions. As a consequence, the company should recruit and train employees on how to detect the emotional state of the customer and deal appropriately with it. Customers, as some of them stated in their calls, spent money on products/services that did not meet their expectations. Yet, they were willing to invest time and effort in solving the problems. Therefore, complainers most likely would expect that the company would make an equivalent investment.

#### *5.2.4.4 Discussion of the relation between level of dissatisfaction and the use of graders and strategies with an emphasis on culture*

Section 5.2.4 presents the results of analyzing the relationship between three different levels of a C's dissatisfaction and the strategies and graders used to express their complaints. These Cs share certain strategies and graders, but differ in others. Though some strategies are basic for the transactional aspects of the interactions such as apology, justification, stating the problem, and expressing dissatisfaction, others are culture-specific reflecting the influence of different socio-cultural contexts on the act of complaining.

The importance of maintaining 'face' underlies Saudi Arabic complaint interactions. Its maintenance appears to be a prerequisite culturally and religiously for an appropriate communication style. Participants are most likely unfamiliar with each other, yet they seem to strive to maintain group harmony, dignity, and respect. This recalls Hofstede's (2001) claim that maintaining harmony in societies that are collectivist is paramount. During negotiation, respectful communication of both parties prevails and polite linguistic strategies are used to negate the force of the FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Although they are complaint interactions, many 'rapport-management' devices are used by both the Cs of different levels of dissatisfaction and the CTs at different moves of the calls to enhance rapport potential. 'Fictive kin terms' and 'politeness markers' are employed by Cs of all the three levels of dissatisfaction. The Cs respect the CT's face needs, seek solidarity, and assume that restoring the harmony between them and the CTs would facilitate the achievement of remedial action. In addition, using brotherhood and kinship forms of address while Saudi customers are interacting with unfamiliar individuals reflect the collectivist nature of the Saudi culture. Religious expressions are also used as in-group language to indicate that the Cs and CTs belong to the same religious group of Muslims. They serve different functions depending on their position in the call such as invocations in post-action expressions of gratitude (Extract 10), downgraders with requests (Extract 12), and a reassurance element when used by the CT (Extract 13). Such an observation supports Alsugair's (2018) comment that Saudi customers show humility even in times of conflict and Alsohaibani's (2017) assertion that the communication of Saudis is marked by high religious orientation. I add to this the comment that the Saudi customer's behavior of complaining show that he is fully aware of his rights as a customer. The persuasive language and the 'lack of tentativeness' (Márquez Reiter, 2005) in negotiation demonstrate that the Saudi customer is not willing to give up asking about his entitlement. For this purpose, Cs displaying a 'high' level of dissatisfaction employ 'bad consequences' as an upgrader for intensifying the

problem (Call #3). This highlights that exaggeration of the importance of the matter is sometimes needed in the Saudi culture to promote actions and that referring to health problems is a strategy to justify the necessity of a solution and to obtain sympathy.

As mentioned above, the analysis indicates that Saudi complainers, to a certain extent, are concerned with interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, Saudi customers are not restricted to this at all stages of the calls especially when they are affected unfavourably (Deveci, 2003). Just as rapport can be enhanced or maintained, it can also be neglected during negotiation especially in the peak of emotions; a finding confirming the earlier analysis of Hui (2014) regarding the complexity of interpersonal relations in call-centre discourse. The strategy of 'threat' is most commonly used by Cs with 'high' levels of dissatisfaction (Call #3 and #4). This strategy is subsequent to the C's aggravated negative emotions. 'Requesting to speak to a higher authority' is used with both 'mixed' and 'high' levels of dissatisfaction (Call #2 and Call #4). The C resorts to this strategy when the CT keeps repeating the same response regardless of the intensity of the justifications given by the C. He feels that the CT would not offer a 'new' remedial work, and thus it is 'useless' to waste time arguing with her. In addition to the degree of dissatisfaction, C's age and power are factors that appear to culturally legitimate the use of politic behaviors (see my discussion in section 6.1.2 regarding Saudi politic behavior in complaint discourse). The Saudi acceptance of power status in the institutional context of a customer and a service provider (Hofstede, 2001) permits the C to show aggression and to threaten and use imperatives in requests and to be sarcastic in his tone of voice. Some Cs (e.g., Call #3) construct their professional identity and indicate familiarity with a person of a higher authority in the MCI (e.g., Extract 19, line 15) as a way of displaying power. The enactment of power consequently seems to add pressure and imposition on the CTs and could ease the achievement of the transactional goal. Additionally, the Saudi cultural norm of deference of younger people to elders contributes to the acceptance of direct requests. Because of the relatively higher status of older speakers, they can perform direct requests to which the younger speakers are expected to show deference. Venting emotions to a complete stranger is considered an appropriate mode of behaviour in Saudi complaint interactions even when remedial action is less likely to occur. All these forms of interacting, that may or may not be applicable to other cultures, reinforce Spencer-Oatey's (2005) way of evaluating a behavior as being polite or not. There is no behavior that is inherently polite, politic, or impolite. However, it is the "subjective judgment" of people that determine politeness beside other factors including interactional roles and socio-pragmatic conventions (see section 2.1.7.2).

As a high context culture, nonverbal acts aggravate the complaint and play a significant role in conveying the C's emotional state. Cs convey their degree of anger not just in what they say but in the way they say it. The paralinguistic features, especially the tone of voice and interruption which are mostly employed by customers with 'high' levels of dissatisfaction, provide nuanced meaning, communicate attitudes, and convey the Cs emotions.

Customers of varying degrees of anger share the belief that the company's representative eventually should solve their problems in favour of them as customers. Only when the solution offered by the CT is 'satisfactory' does the C not need to argue more (Call #1). However, when the CTs are unable to solve the problem in the C's favour and could just offer a 'partial' solution, the conflict discourse ends either by the C's giving up his attempts to negotiate more (Call #2) or without an 'agreed upon' solution at all (Call #4).

It was clear that certain factors play a role in the C's level of dissatisfaction. Two of the most evident factors are: the time-lag and the type of response. The time-lag refers to the length of the period the C has to wait before he make his call. The longer the C waits, the angrier he is (Call #3). Though the Cs of both Call #1 and Call #3 experience the same problem (i.e., late assembly), the former has a 'low-moderate' level of dissatisfaction while the latter has a 'high' one. This is because the C in Call#1 waits for four days whereas the C of Call #3 has been waiting for one month and a half for the assembly team.

Because they can only offer 'partial' remedial action, the CTs' method to calm down dissatisfied customers is relational work or restating the same procedural response. These types of responses consequently play a vital role in increasing and/or decreasing the C's degree of anger (Call #3 as opposed to Call #4). Not only do Cs maintain rapport but also CTs. Repeated explicit expressions of 'apology' and 'assuring' the C that the problem would be solved soon are effective strategies for calming down the 'highly' dissatisfied customer and absorbing his anger (Call #3), especially when the C is expressing his emotions or narrating undesirable experiences related to the complaint. These strategies are presumably used to avoid explicitly confronting the customer. On the other hand, 'repeating' procedural actions and 'evading responsibility' increase the customer's degree of anger and urge him to perform a threatening behaviour before cutting off the line (Call #4). Thus, it could be concluded that the CT's consideration of the 'seriousness' of the negative emotions experienced by the C and her attempts to settle down the C through her responses are key elements to satisfy, to a certain extent, the extremely annoyed customers. Additionally, being a culture with a high level of

uncertainty avoidance (Noer, Leupold, & Valle, 2007) (see section 1.1), CTs' responses are characterized by the Islamic belief of fatalism. Employing optimistic religious expressions such as *'in sha'allah* (if God wills) and *bi'dhiin allah* (God willing) show that CTs avoid uncertainty and rely on God as the only Controller of the universe.

Reinforced by the social order of gender-segregation (Ismail, 2012), CTs remain neutral and formal throughout the calls. Brevity, the quick transition to business, the high honorific titles for addressing the Cs, and the minimal response to the 'how-are-you?' are all strategies used by the CTs to avoid lengthy interactions with male strangers. CTs are less likely to initiate small talk or humour through which an interpersonal relationship can be cultivated (Holmes, 2000). They always keep a more information-oriented style of interacting indicating the transactional nature of the call.

### **5.3 Summary**

At a discourse level, this chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the structure, strategies, and graders employed by Saudi Arabic customers in four complaint calls. It also investigates the correlation between the Cs' level of dissatisfaction and the complaint interactional activity both explicitly and implicitly. In addition, the discussion presented above clarifies certain norms of interaction which underlie the interactional behavior of Saudi speakers when complaining in an institutional context.

The results confirm the possibility of identifying a basic structure for the natural Saudi Arabic complaint phone calls. Orderliness of specific interactional moves is observed in the calls. In addition, compulsory and/or optional verbal strategies are employed by the Cs either to announce or justify their complaints. Within these strategies or in their immediate linguistic context, certain verbal elements are optionally inserted by the Cs to minimize and/or maximize the force of the complaint. The choice of these strategies and graders is significantly related to the C's level of dissatisfaction which might increase/decrease within the course of the call. As the analysis demonstrates, it is necessary to consider Saudi cultural values when analyzing the usage of the linguistic features as these are partly responsible for the characteristics of complaining behaviours in Saudi institutional interactions (see further explanation for the cultural norms as a contextual parameter correlated with the speech behaviour of complaining in section 6.1.3.4).

In the institutional context of the FTC, anger is the result of a ‘transactional’ issue (i.e., the problem that needed to be solved). It is communicated in the illocution and/or through extralinguistic features such as tone of voice and interruption. Rudeness is evident in some complaint exchanges and this is an outcome of the C’s high emotional state of anger.

The final chapter will summarize the main insights gained from the results, evaluate the methodological implications of the research, and discuss avenues for further research.

## **CHAPTER SIX Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the present study is anchored in the fields of genre analysis and socio-pragmatics. It explores the four themes of the research questions (see section 1.5) by looking at a specific genre within a specific cultural context: business complaints reported by Saudi Arabic native speakers in the Saudi Arabic culture. The goal has been to provide specific insights into the social and linguistic features exhibited and needed to understand the genre of the business complaint call in Saudi Arabic institutional contexts. The findings indicate a ‘specific internal shape’ that has been followed by participants in which various strategies are used to construct, strengthen, and respond to complaints. Certain graders have an impact on softening and/or aggravating the complaint. The degree of the customer’s dissatisfaction in the event of complaining has also been found to be related to the type of strategies and graders employed. Considering the socio-cultural elements potentially helps in understanding how interlocutors’ interactional behaviour when complaining is impacted by social and cultural norms such as attitudes towards trust, authority, facework, the hierarchical nature of Saudi institutions, and customer-agent relationships. Saudi customers and service providers refer to these aspects of context, in encoding and decoding linguistic meaning during complaint exchanges (Morgan, 1977).

This chapter discusses the findings of the study (section 6.1), highlights its implications (section 6.2), outlines the limitations of the study and states recommendations for future research (section 6.3).

#### **6.1 Discussion of findings**

This discussion section highlights the distinctive characteristics of Saudi Arabic institutional complaints in relation to their structure and linguistic strategies (section 6.1.1). It also comments on politeness phenomena within the context of the current study (i.e., institutional discourse) where speech activities and role relationships are limited in nature (section 6.1.2). A discussion of the contextual parameters such as power, goals, emotions, and cultural norms that relate to the realization patterns of business complaints produced by native Saudi Arabic speakers is presented in section 6.1.3, followed by the researcher’s proposal for a new discursive approach to the analysis of institutional complaints that could be usefully employed

in other contexts (section 6.1.4).

### 6.1.1 Special features of Saudi Arabic complaints in institutional discourse

Though studies in the literature provide insights about prototypical complaint behaviour, the findings of this study exhibit distinctive features of Saudi Arabic institutional complaints. Two aspects are clearly different: structure and linguistic strategies.

#### 6.1.1.1 *Structure*

The findings of the study show that the structure of the Saudi Arabic business complaints is marked by two features. First, it has a basic overall structural organization. Second, the moves of this structure are different from those of ordinary telephone conversations.

The first feature that characterizes the structure of the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls is the manifestation of a specific structure. Although many of the interactions analysed are long and multifaceted, the basic structure is identifiable in most natural Saudi Arabic institutional complaint exchanges. This structure consists of highly routinized recurring interactional moves: opening sequences (pre-complaint), complaint work (head act(s) and supportive moves), and closing sequences (post-complaint) (see section 5.2.1 for a detailed explanation of the structure of the Saudi Arabic complaint call).

This orderliness observed in the structure of the Saudi Arabic institutional complaints confirms what has been stated by Luke (2002), Heritage (2005), and Reiter & Luke (2010) that it is possible to identify a structure for some kinds of institutional talk. The Saudi Arabic complaint call is one type of these institutional talks which proves to have a common internal shape or overall structural organization: a structure which is built from “phrases or activities that characteristically emerge in a particular order” (p.120).

The major reason behind the existence of a unified structure of Saudi Arabic complaint calls is the goal-oriented nature of the interactions. Because these complaints are instrumental, aiming to achieve a remedial action, formal policies and procedures are to be followed by interlocutors. Cs and CTs utter sequences that aim to lead the conversations to their sole purpose: solving the problem. Thus, CTs follow the company’s policies in each call by uttering the name of the company, the greeting sequence, and the offer of help. They also unify their closing sequences

through thanking the C for calling and exchanging a final salutation pair. Cs also follow a certain pattern in their complaint calls: stating the problem and negotiating a solution.

What could be added to Heritage's (2005) view based on the findings of the study is that the unified structure of Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls is primarily shaped by the CTs. They have to repeat similar actions in each call. The Cs, on the other hand, are led by the CTs and have to respond to what has been initiated by the latter. For instance, the offer of help, the question-answer sequence, the waiting time, the first-post resumption response, the terminal exchange, and the final salutation pair are sequences uttered by the CTs and the ones that shape the structure of most of the calls in the study.

The second feature that characterizes the structure of the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls is that its moves have characteristics different than those of ordinary telephone conversations. Firstly, the greeting sequence in institutional Saudi Arabic complaints is short and quick. Long greetings would waste the service providers' time for they have to receive hundreds of calls each day. The same is true for the Cs, who seem to prefer moving directly to the purpose of the call as they are usually in a hurry. The immediate move to the reason of the call shows that both interlocutors are oriented to the goal of the call, namely, asking for a solution and providing it.

Secondly, the self-identification sequence is not always present in the data. According to Schegloff (1979), a typical telephone conversation usually begins with a self-identification/recognition sequence in which interactants formulate who they are to one another. However, in the current study, it is usually only the CT who identifies herself (2.9%) (see Table 4.3). Customers, on the other hand, never identify themselves. They immediately launch into an account of the problem. If Cs have to identify themselves, this is done only when they have been prompted by the CTs. A possible explanation for the absence of the Cs' self-identification might be that Cs would consider identifying themselves to be a matter not really related to the main goal of the call. Their focus is on reporting the problem once the call starts. Culturally speaking, Saudis' high sense of privacy and their aversion to revealing their names to strangers could be another reason for the absence of the Cs' self-identification sequence at the openings of the complaint calls.

Thirdly, the 'how-are-you' sequence in the present corpus is an optional element existing in only eight calls (23.5%) (see Table 4.3). This result further supports Taleghani-Nikazm's (2002b) and Saadah's (2009) view that the extended 'how-are-you' sequence is an obligatory

move only in informal natural Arabic telephone conversations such as between family members or friends. The result is also in agreement with Zimmerman's (1992) finding which shows that the 'how-are-you' exchanges are routinely produced in 'non-institutional' calls such as calls to acquaintances, but not in 'institutional' ones in which the main focus is on the business of the call. This entails that the reason behind the absence of the 'how-are-you' sequence in most of the current study's interactions is that the calls are impersonal and instrumental. The attention of the participants is directed towards the 'business' transaction rather than in developing 'personal' relationships.

Finally, an important feature in the structure of the Saudi Arabic complaint calls which is seldom discussed in the literature (but see Hultgren, 2011) is the presence of the waiting time move (move 6) following the question-answer sequences (move 5) and preceding the CT's first post-resumption response (move 7). In each call, the CT asks the C to hold the line to check the details of the problem in the company's electronic system. Regardless of the C's level of dissatisfaction, this request always receives his/her acceptance. A possible reason for the absolute presence of the waiting time is that this move allows CTs to meet one of the basic prerequisites of complaints in service encounters: to be a representative able to remedy the problem through at least justifying the reasons for its occurrence.

#### *6.1.1.2 Linguistic strategies*

The findings of the study reveal interesting observations regarding the linguistic strategies used within the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls. Many of the complaint strategies delineated by Western scholars in the literature are present in the Saudi Arabic data, such as the strategies of blaming, seeking solidarity, making direct accusations, threats, and direct requests<sup>58</sup>. This cross-cultural correspondence in complaint strategies leads the researcher to argue in favour of universal and prototypical strategies for recurring complaints in institutional settings. Complainers and service providers select 'universal' complaining strategies suitable for attaining the transactional goal of the interaction.

In addition to universality, culture-specificity is observed with some complaint strategies in the present study, such as the strategies of calming the complainer through the use of cultural/religious responses and the use of oaths when threatening (see section 3.3.2.2). The occurrence of such strategies is oriented mainly around the social norms of the Saudi culture.

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<sup>58</sup> For a list of all the strategies identified in the data along with definitions and examples, see section 3.3.2.2.

Being an Islamic society, Saudi speakers rely on religious expressions when interacting. Their language is “saturated with a rich variety of expressions invoking Allah explicitly or implicitly” (Morrow, 2006, p.45). This includes, as the data indicated, swearing by God’s name when confirming the performance of an action that should not be taken lightly and when the CT attempts to show sincerity in her promise (see section 5.2.4.3).

All in all, the finding related to the ‘universality’ and ‘cultural-specificity’ of complaint strategies in institutional frames further supports the idea of Bikmen and Marti (2013) and Sato (2010) that there are universally available pragmatic strategies associated with complaining behaviour as well as other culture-specific ones. It is also in agreement with Assalom’s (2010) finding that cultural factors contribute to determining the modes of complaining. A strategy might exist in one culture but not in another, depending to a large extent on the interlocutors’ culturally shaped norms that are usually “implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of” (Fairclough, 2001, p.64).

One of the issues worth noting in relation to the linguistic strategies found in Saudi Arabic complaint calls is that these natural interactions are not neat and tidy as typical DCTs are. In the genuine workplace context of the current research, interactions are complex and comprised of more than one head act and a number of supportive moves. More importantly, complaints in this authentic setting not only have an expressive function (i.e., expressing anger and annoyance of the speaker), but they also have a directive component (i.e., requesting a remedial action from the service provider). This finding suggests that analysing the strategies in authentic complaint exchanges should not be done in the Searlian sense as a head act and its supportive move, but as an activity type that stretches over several turns which contain various speech events. It also implies that the strategies emerging in authentic institutional complaints are not restricted to a single turn sequence, but they occur over several turns with no clear sequence till the end of the verbal conflict interaction.

### 6.1.2 Institutional complaints and politeness: Are Saudi Arabic ‘institutional’ complaints face threatening or inherently impolite?

Studies on linguistic politeness widely discuss the connection between the speech act of complaint and the issue of politeness<sup>59</sup>. In general, a complaint is regarded a highly FTA since the speaker has to express a conflict in a number of turns. These turns may include acts that are

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<sup>59</sup> See section 2.1.9 for ‘politeness theory’.

highly threatening to the addressee such as threatening, accusing, cursing, and reprimanding (Trosborg, 1995). Because of the presence of these acts that cause offence and are "highly threatening to the social relationship between speaker and hearer" (p.312), it has been claimed that complaints are inherently and by definition impolite whenever they are uttered (Leech, 1983; Trosborg, 1995).

The results of the current study cast doubt on Leech's (1983) and Trosborg's (1995) claim that complaints are inherently impolite. The researcher argues that it is a mistake to approach institutional complaints as something 'impolite'. The perception of politeness depends to a large extent on the *context* of the interaction. In the context of institutional complaint discourse to complaint departments, complaints are FTAs but *not* inherently impolite in themselves. Cs might perform inherently impolite acts which are perceived as being acceptable by the CTs, namely, politic behaviours<sup>60</sup> (Watts, 2003). For instance, it is a norm that the absence of the 'how-are-you' sequence in the telephone openings in Arabic makes the interaction rigid and impolite and suggests that the C is not friendly (Saadah, 2009). Yet, such an absence in the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls is considered an appropriate linguistic behaviour suitable to the nature of the interaction. As mentioned earlier (see section 6.1.1.1), the goal of the call is directed towards the business of solving the problem. Hence, the CT is most probably not offended by the C going directly to stating the complaint as she understands that the customer is usually in a hurry, and that his/her aim is to attain a specific goal rather than to build interpersonal relationships.

'Direct' requests are another example found in the data of an act considered acceptable in the context of the Saudi Arabic institutional complaint calls. In Brown and Levinson's terms (1987), direct requests are impolite acts because they threaten/impose on the face of the addressee. However, they are considered 'acceptable' in the context of the Saudi Arabic institutional complaints. In this context, directness does not equal impoliteness. This explicitness in requests is a politic behaviour because of the institutionality of the call in which clarity is valued over politeness. Being in a higher power than the CTs, Cs have the right to directly induce the CTs to perform the requested acts. Besides, treating the CT in a direct way is conventionally acceptable in Saudi Arabic as it is generally acceptable in Saudi Arabic discourse, unlike English, to treat any addressee in a direct way (Al-Qahtani, 2009).

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<sup>60</sup> See section 2.1.9 for a detailed explanation of the notion of 'politic behaviour'.

Taken together, the findings of the current study provide evidence in support of Koh's (2013), Locher's and Watts's (2005) premise that politeness needs to be assessed in context. Verbal aggression does not always equal impoliteness. The situational context and its evoked norms should be investigated before the speech act is assessed as polite or otherwise. As the current study shows, institutional complaints could involve a number of face-threatening activities but those are still 'appropriate', 'acceptable', and 'institutionalized' in their specific context.

Another important finding related to politeness, and one that contradicts the views of previous researchers, is the relationship between politeness and graders. Trosborg (1995), House and Kasper (1981), and Hartley (1998) argue that the kind and number of graders in a complaint utterance could affect the complainer's politeness level. This is because a complainer can resort to mitigating devices when complaining to maintain the face of the addressees and lessen the impact that his/her complaint is likely to have on the hearer, thus being more polite.

Though some downgraders are used by C as markers for politeness to help rectify the problem (for example mitigating the request), graders in the institutional context of Saudi Arabic complaint calls do not contribute to politeness and cannot determine the Cs' politeness level. They are merely devices used either to soften or strengthen the complaint. Upgrading complaints does not necessarily maximize the 'non-polite' nature of the complaint. It is expected that customers behave in an intensified manner when they are dissatisfied with a service. The results show that customers who suffered for a long period of time or those who kept receiving similar responses whenever they called the CU upgraded their complaints by ironically criticizing the company or mentioning the bad consequences that they suffered from, a behaviour considered appropriate in that context and its norms and conventions. This is because such dissatisfied customers are less likely to be concerned about politeness and more focused on solving their problems. Besides, customers are aware that CTs are obliged to listen to their complaints and fulfil their requests. In other words, there is no imposition or attack for the institutional face of the CTs. More importantly, the Saudis' complaining behaviour is characterized by being aggressive, angry, and demanding (Badghaish et al., 2012). Hence, Saudi CTs would expect and accept a Saudi Arabic complaint which is being aggravated and not softened. Their role is to listen to the complaints and not react to them. Hence, most of their responses were C-supportive (see section 4.2.2.2), used to mitigate the impact of the undesirable event and avoid direct confrontation.

Accordingly, the researcher posits the view that a more accurate connection in the context of institutional complaints would be between graders and the C's level of dissatisfaction. Results

show that the frequency of graders differs from one level to another (see section 4.2.4). Upgrading the complaint through ‘irony’ was more frequent with Cs of high level of dissatisfaction, whereas softening the complaint through ‘politeness markers’ was common with customers of low-moderate level of dissatisfaction. The choice to resort to graders whatever the customer’s level of dissatisfaction, could be described on the basis of the contextual factors of the problem. As the qualitative analysis reveals, the time-lag (the period the C waited before calling the CU), the nature of the problem (a single or a complex one), and the type of the CT’s responses (satisfactory or not to the C) are three contributing factors to the number/type of graders used within a call (see section 5.2.4).

As mentioned above, the study confirms the importance of context when analysing Saudi Arabic institutional complaints. The following section discusses the major contextual determinants that are influential in shaping the discourse of conflict service encounters.

### 6.1.3 Contextual determinants in conflictual Saudi Arabic business exchanges

The findings of the study reveal that certain contextual parameters such as power, goals, emotions, and cultural norms correlate with the speech behaviour of complaining as performed by native Saudi Arabic speakers in institutional discourse. Considering these determinants is a necessity when analysing natural complaints; a finding which provides support for the work cited by Tanck (2002), Golato (2003), Cunliffe and Johnston (2008), Gustafsson (2009), and Bikmen and Marti (2013).

#### 6.1.3.1 *Power*

In the institutional context analysed, speakers have clearly defined roles: a customer who has the right to complain and a service provider who has the obligation to offer a remedial action for the problem complained about.

With their different roles, the C and the CT have unequal levels of power<sup>61</sup>. The former is more powerful than the latter as he/she is the customer who holds a legitimate power over the CTs to complain and to make requests. The CT, on the other hand, should perform her institutional

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<sup>61</sup> The notion of ‘power’ in this institutional setting refers to the power of control which legitimately enables the customer to force the company representative to carry out actions that serve the customer’s interests. It does not refer to the ‘expert’ power of the service provider: the one who plays a more prominent part in the encounter because she has the authority to make informed decisions. Services encounters in the current study do not have the authority to solve the problems. Therefore, the CTs do not exercise ‘expert’ power over the Cs.

role through answering questions, listening to the complaint, calming the customer, and resolving the customer's requests.

Because of their different power levels, the Cs and the CTs linguistic strategies of performing and responding to complaints differ. Cs' power is evident with their confrontational strategies of argumentation and persuasion. They complain without much requirement for politeness and without the fear of losing 'face' because "customers tend to bring to complaint interactions a preconceived notion that they have certain rights" (Geluykens & Kraft, 2016, p.73). As the results show, Cs threaten to address a person of higher authority (Call #3) or exterminate the store by burning it (Call #4), raise their tone of voice (Calls #2, #3, #4), and use impolite words (Call #4). They do not use politeness markers such as '*law samaHitti*' (please) or '*dhaa takaramtii*' (if you would kindly) whenever they state their requests. Instead, they outwardly issue blame and prefer direct requests (Calls #2, #4). These observations further support the idea of Tawalbeh and Al- Oqaily (2012) that direct requests is a preferred strategy when the speaker is exerting power over the hearer.

Conversely, and though they also hold power over the CTs, some customers opt for non-confrontational behaviour. Their style of complaining remains polite and respectful throughout the interaction. They avoid threats and initiate their statements of the problem with an apology to tone down the intensity of the complaint (Call #1). This could be mainly due to the customer's level of dissatisfaction at the time he/she calls. Highly dissatisfied customers use more confrontational language whereas slightly dissatisfied customers employ non-confrontational strategies.

The findings of the study also show that the CTs' level of power relates to their speech behaviour. Because they are subordinates in the context of service encounters, they have the obligation to comply with the Cs' needs (i.e., the superiors in these speech events). Agreements, reassurances, and commiserations frequently occur in the CTs' responses. They treat the customer with respect and apply a certain degree of politeness such as by remaining silent when the C uses impolite words (Call #4) or by promising to help (Call #3). They avoid confrontation with the customers and preserve the social distance and the formality of the interactions by the use of formal titles as '*ustaadhi*' (sir) and by keeping social talk to a minimum. CTs frequently apologize and try to remain calm and supportive.

All in all, the claim that power correlates with the speech behaviour of interlocutors when complaining in service encounters is in accord with Singh's (2010) finding indicating that the

choice of different linguistic strategies to perform certain speech acts is explained in terms of the power each interactant holds in the discourse.

### *6.1.3.2 Goals*

Customer complaints fall under the category of institutional complaints (see section 2.2.1). This is because they occur in a specific workplace and have to follow certain conditions and procedures for performing and responding to them. In this context, discourse is highly goal-oriented (Heritage, 2005; Geluykens & Kraft, 2016).

The complaint exchanges analysed have two goals (i.e., desired outcomes): (a) instrumental/transactional; and (b) relational/interactional. The transactional goal of solving the problem is more important for the participants than the interactional goal of establishing an interpersonal relationship. This is because interlocutors are strangers who never met before and are unlikely to meet in future. They are only interacting for the specific purpose of this particular institutional context. As part of the CTs ascribed roles, the ‘interactional’ goal includes establishing/maintaining a long-term relationship between the C and the company represented by its CTs. This is to retain the customer, the reason for which the company has a CU in the first place. The relational goal, which is of a secondary importance, serves the function of establishing identities and a good relationship between the interactants.

It is evident that the ‘transactional’ goal of the calls correlates with the linguistic strategies used by the participants. For Cs, they frequently use ‘instrumental’ or ‘task-oriented’ strategies which aim to help them reach their communicative goal (Edwards, 2005). Directness in requesting (Calls #2, #3, #4), and accusation/blaming (Calls #3, #4) are strategic devices used by the Cs for the purpose of achieving the task’s goal. ‘Interactional’ strategies, on the other hand, are infrequently used in these interactions, such as the shortened ‘how-are-you’ sequence (Call #2) and the exchange of goodbyes (Call #1, #2, #3). They are always initiated by the Cs to enhance the chances of complying with their request/s. The CTs end these strategies and shift the social interaction back to its main goal. This finding further supports Norris’s (1998) association between business complaints and the infrequent presence of solidarity and/or commiseration linguistic devices.

When it comes to the service providers, their goal in business complaints should be to solve the problem complained about (Ide, 1998; Linli, 2011). Results indicate that the CTs in the current study are not able to completely fulfil the transactional goal of the complaint exchanges. They

clearly state within the course of the interaction that they do not have the authority necessary to make amends (Call #2, #3, #4). They only have a bureaucratic authority by being able to offer a solution but do not have the authority to solve the problem. In other words, the CTs in the study exhibit what Fornell and Westbrook (1984) refer to as “*the vicious circle of complaints*”: the transmission of complaints from the customer service department to other departments causing the customer service department to become isolated from making decisions. Because of their inability to completely perform the transactional goal of the calls, the CTs depend on the C-supportive strategies (see section 5.2.2) and resort to the use of the calming strategies of cultural/religious responses (see section 5.2.2). This finding echoes that cited by Geluykens and Kraft (2016) where a service provider was unable to solve problems in the customer’s favour due to the constraints of the company’s policy. Yet, it goes further by suggesting that the CT’s inability to fulfil the transactional goal of the complaint call could be a major factor for her resorting to calming responses as a way of complaint management just to pacify the customer.

#### *6.1.3.3 Emotions*

The results of the study show that complaining in the context of Saudi Arabic institutional discourse is a highly emotionally charged event. The emotional state of the customers correlates with their choice of discourse strategies, a result which is in line with those of previous studies (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008; Gustafsson, 2009). Customers voice their anger, displeasure, and annoyance through verbal expressions of emotions and certain paralinguistic features. They do so because they believe that they are entitled to receive a remedial action, having paid for the service. According to the company’s policy, service providers are to try to calm down the dissatisfied customers and attempt to return them to the state of satisfaction through the use of responding strategies that could regain the customers’ composure.

The findings indicate that the emotional accounts deployed by the Cs are geared towards voicing their anger and promoting the CTs to perform a remedial action. Customers use need statements and intensified direct disagreements when they become impatient and demanding (Calls #2, #4) after receiving a non-satisfactorily post-resumption response. Narrating peers’ bad experiences and appealing to the company representative’s emotions, which are unrelated to the task, are strategies attempted to sway the CT’s sense of solidarity and hence attain the transactional goal (Call #3). On certain occasions, the high emotional involvement of the Cs along with not meeting their interactional expectations prompt them to be much more

confrontational, a result which corroborates the ideas of Geluykens and Kraft (2016) that the emotional state of the customers in conflictual service encounters often overrides considerations of face. As a means of venting frustration, Cs use lexical intensification such as swear words (Calls #3, #4) and impolite words (Call #4). They also issue threats (Calls # 3, #4) or decide to cut off the line before the call ends (Call #4). The manner of speaking with a raised tone of voice, a high pitch, and making repeated interruptions communicates the customers' angry emotions (Calls #2, #3, #4).

In addition, the results of the study reveal that service providers approach angry customers with respect. They show empathy; a key ingredient in the complaint management process (Cunliffe & Johnston, 2008). They remain calm and try to quiet the angry customer through not interrupting the latter when he/she is explaining his/her situation. CTs apologize (Calls #1, #3, #4), provide assurance (Call #1), and demonstrate empathy (Calls #2, #3). With some CTs, however, negative emotions are experienced due to the Cs' insistence on achieving a solution (Call #4). The CTs, though trained to handle complaints, cannot control their feelings of annoyance and react angrily by raising their voice. Such a reaction in turn aggravates the Cs' negative emotions. Put differently, CTs' negative response to their customers might have adverse effects on the problem-solving process.

#### *6.1.3.4 Socio-cultural norms*

Different cultures have different norms, behaviours, and actions which are reflected in communication. These values are determined by an underlying system of interactional beliefs (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). Hall and Hall (1987) argue that the cultural context is an inseparable part surrounding an event and helps in giving that event a meaning. In fact, numerous studies in CCB have documented variation in complaint realizations and how different cultural norms may influence individuals' behaviour when complaining (e.g., Liu & Mclure, 2001; Blodgett, Bakir, & Hill, 2008; Sharma, Marshall, Reday, & Na, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 2 (see sections 2.2.4.3 and 2.3), previous studies of complaints in various cultural contexts have identified culture-specific strategies through which a complaint is performed and considered appropriate. The politic behavior and its realization prove to reflect and reinforce the culture-specific norms. This is the factor of 'sociopragmatic conventions' that manage rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). An action can be considered a rapport threat and/or rapport enhancing depending not only on the content of the utterance but also on how interactants react and interpret it under prescribed cultural norms. For instance, Hultgren (2011)

demonstrates that Danish agents differ from British call centre agents in their speech styles. They are unwilling to engage in interpersonal relations with customers and restrict the call to transaction. British agents, on the other hand, are not shy to engage in interpersonal relations. This is explained on the basis of cultural ethos.

The present study adds to the body of research on telephone complaints across cultures. The findings of this research reveal that the realization of complaints by Saudi customers differs from those mentioned in the literature due to the difference in cultural contexts. For example, the performance of a complaint and response to it can be influenced by religion and Islamic ethics. Many Islamic expressions are used by Cs and CTs to increase the locution of invocations and gratitude. The Islamic principles of the Saudi society is also reflected in the standard Islamic greeting of *'assalaamu Ṣalaykum* (may peace be upon you). The majority of Cs open and end their calls with such salutations as a rapport enhancing strategy and for maintaining solidarity. Honorific and fictive kin terms are also used as a way to maintain rapport and indicate a more familiar and respectful relationship. In addition, the relative social status of the complainer governs the use of directives in requests. Driven by the Saudi cultural norms, Cs have the attitude that they are always right, that insisting can lead to receiving any sort of remedial action, and seem to frequently expect effective customer service and find it difficult to accept any limitations imposed by the company on CTs. CTs do not participate in long greeting sequences or interpersonal exchanges. To them, the societal norm and the institutional requirements are to avoid any verbal confrontation which might hinder the relationship between the C and the company and they resort instead to sympathy in order to calm down angry customers.

In terms of judging politeness, the study also shows that an utterance is perceived as (im)polite depending on the interlocutors' personal and culturally shaped norms of appropriate behaviour. A speech behavior that conforms to the norms of the culture is judged as appropriate. This finding reinforces Schnurr and Chan's (2009) claim that culture is a particular salient contextual factor that impacts politeness. The analysis also indicates that Cs and CTs seem to be highly aware of the social and relational aspects appropriate in conflictual service encounters.

In short, norms of communicating in the workplace context of a Saudi CU are situated in the cultural context in which behaviours are managed within wider cultural expectations. Therefore, cultural norms are an important element to be considered in the performance of Saudi institutional complaints.

To sum up, the findings of the study highlight the need to consider certain contextual factors when analysing complaints in service encounters. Discovering the features of complaints in this setting requires going beyond the analysis of single lexical and grammatical utterances. A discursive approach which incorporates the linguistic realization of complaints with their situational context is to be adopted for the analysis of institutional complaints. The main features of this proposed approach are presented in the following section.

#### 6.1.4 Towards a discursive approach for the analysis of institutional complaints

Based on the findings of this research and what has been presented above, this study stresses the importance of adopting a discursive approach for the analysis of institutional complaints. This is an approach which focuses on analysing language use while taking into consideration the situational context, the interlocutors' own evaluation of what is im/polite and appropriate, the goal of the interaction, and the interlocutors' relationships. The purpose of adopting such an approach is to provide a clear and applicable method of analysis containing the essential elements that determine the speech behaviour of complaining in service encounters.

Three features characterize the proposed approach for the analysis of 'natural' complaints in services encounters. These are:

1. Adopt various theoretical models (see section 3.3.2). The framework of data analysis incorporates the insights of the pragmatic models, sociolinguistics, as well as discourse and conversation analysis. This is to allow a comprehensive analysis for naturally occurring data that manages to include all the important factors at work during complaint comprehension and production such as emotions, institutional roles, goals of the discourse, and the discourse linguistic features. Though some aspects of the theoretical model of data analysis employed in the current study are based on studies that analysed 'everyday' complaints, and with the researcher's modifications (see section 3.3.2), the model proves invaluable for the analysis of conflict management and complaints in service encounters.
2. Avoid the attempts to analyse interactions in terms of their head acts only. Instead, analysis is to be done over the whole stretch of discourse. This is because telephone institutional complaints prove to be a speech event consisting of several turns that are vital to the understanding of the problem-solving interactions. In other words, these institutional complaints do not lend themselves to a non-interactional approach. For that purpose, natural data would be the best. Spontaneous interactions, which very few studies have

employed, present a true reflection of the mechanisms of conflict management in service encounter. They highlight the typical sequential organisation of complaints and how different complaint strategies are used to attain a particular goal. Besides, analysing such data would provide illuminating insights into the complexity of institutional complaints in different workplaces.

3. Bring an extensive understanding of the cultural norms and values of the Saudi Islamic context into the analysis. This is defined as “the background knowledge shared by the speakers... on how things should be said” (Yates, 2010, p.11), which consequently influences interactional style. The socio-cultural set of norms and conventions dictate what and how an appropriate complaint is to be performed within its particular context. This includes assessing im/politeness of stretches of natural complaints after identifying the socio/cultural norms of im/politeness in that context.

Adopting this discursive approach to the analysis of institutional telephone complaints provides some insights into the importance of the sociopragmatic features and the linguistic devices for the comprehension and production of institutional discourse.

## **6.2 Implications of the study**

The aim of this study is to identify aspects of the interactional behaviour of institutional complaints in the Saudi Arabic culture. The findings indicate a specific internal structure of complaint calls utilized by the local citizens and the customer service providers. Within these calls, certain verbal strategies are employed when conducting and responding to complaints. The degree of the customer’s dissatisfaction in the event of complaining has been found to be related to the type of strategies and the mitigating devices used. It is hoped that these findings will contribute to the domains of sociolinguistics, pedagogy, and business.

### **6.2.1 Sociolinguistics implications**

Complaint as a sociolinguistic behaviour is rarely investigated in the literature (Deveci, 2003). Few studies analysed this speech act in Arabic spoken or written discourse (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Badghaish et al., 2012; Migdadi et al., 2012; Saleh, 2010). Examining the features of complaints in the Saudi Arabic business domain is almost absent in the literature of institutional contexts.

This research offers an *initial* exploration of the features of Saudi Arabic institutional complaints within a discourse community. Hence, it is hoped that it contributes to the development of an analytical framework for the investigation of the speech act of complaint applied effectively to the Saudi Arabic culture and likely to be equally applicable to other languages and/or to other Arabic dialects. Findings of the study could also contribute to the field of pragmatics by describing the linguistic means and strategies used to express feelings of annoyance and dissatisfaction in a specific culture and given specific situational factors. By adopting some Western theoretical models and modifying them to suit the Saudi Arabic culture (see section 3.3.2), the study emphasizes the existence of cross-cultural differences in the communicative strategies occurring in the customer's complaint behaviour, which might contribute to bridging gaps in intercultural communication.

#### 6.2.2 Pedagogical implications

Teaching language functions is consonant with modern trends in sociolinguistics and learning strategies of foreign languages. Such trends assume that learners must acquire not only the syntax or phonology of a language, but also the rules of language use. Comprehending and producing communicative acts, or speech acts, while taking into account the relationship between the speakers and the social and cultural context of the situation are the basis of achieving optimal pragmatic success (Tanck, 2002). It follows that the inaccurate performance of a complaint may lead to failure in communication (Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Assallom, 2010; Azarmi & Behnam, 2012; Chen et al., 2011; Farnia et al., 2010; Trosborg, 1995).

Thus, a pragmatic approach to Arabic language teaching could take into consideration the implementation of the 'politic' linguistic strategies of institutional complaints in spoken Saudi Arabic. This is to enable learners to perform better in Arabic and consequently help minimize instances of pragmatic failure in authentic situations. Business course teachers can also make use of the findings of the study in teaching their students the pragmatic strategies for responding to customer's complaints in business communication.

Besides teaching, dialect textbook designers might use the findings of this study for designing communicative activities which could help Saudi Arabic learners engage in real-life situations and practice performing and responding to institutional complaints under different contextual determinants.

### 6.2.3 Business implications

The present study yields results that may help the managers in different institutions understand the individual differences among their customers when complaining. Noticeable variation in customers' complaining behaviour was evident although the complaints were produced within the same institutional setting (i.e., FTC). Therefore, institutional managers could use the findings of the study to develop proper and flexible processes to which the service providers could resort in handling customers' complaints other than 'monotonous' responses. For instance, the CT's assurance to take care of the problem and follow up herself rather than placing the onus on the customer to call again in the near future to inquire about further development could have a major effect in calming the highly dissatisfied customer. In addition, CTs should produce extra sympathetic responses with customers who have more difficult circumstances.

Managers can also incorporate the insights gained from this research in training programs developed for the purpose of enlightening customer service staff members about efficient strategies for handling customers' complaint calls. For example, samples of recorded calls containing effective/ineffective response strategies could be discussed with the CTs to enlighten them about the mistakes they make and methods to overcome them. Any service provider has to be aware of the fact that different customers behave differently and should be ready to handle them appropriately, especially when the customer's level of satisfaction with the service recovery affects long-term customer loyalty (Linli, 2011). CSRs may need training in communication skills such as effective problem handling, prosody, and minimizing the customer's emotional intense. Performing such goals can only be done after analysing and determining which areas of weakness these CSRs suffer from. With the dearth of research in Saudi Arabic complaints in a call centre setting, the findings of this study will lead to significant contributions in relation to diagnosing problems and suggesting strategies that can improve the performance of CSRs and support training and assessment especially as the CU was, at the time data was collected, a newly established one (two months old) (see section 3.2.1).

### **6.3 Limitations and directions for further research**

As far as I know, this study is the first piece of research into an in-house complaints department of a major trading company operating in Saudi Arabia. It contributed to the development of an analytical framework (from a wholly non-western context) applied effectively to the Saudi

culture and likely to be equally applicable to other Arabic dialects. It also identified the significant role of religious expressions in rapport management in Saudi complaint calls. Finally, this research demonstrated that threat was the only strategy clearly associated with the level of dissatisfaction. Otherwise, all strategies are equally likely to be used by callers with any level of dissatisfaction.

While this study makes some useful conceptual and managerial contributions, it is also limited by some constraints.

Firstly, the investigation is restricted to one spoken dialect of the Arabic language: Saudi Arabic. Other variations of the spoken Arabic may demonstrate similar and/or different features of institutional complaints. Further research can be conducted to discover these similarities/differences in the other spoken dialects of the Arabic language.

Secondly, calls analysed were collected from one FTC in Saudi Arabia and the analysis was restricted to the discourse features that existed in the obtained corpus. Therefore, caution must be exercised in generalizing the results to the whole Saudi Arabic institutions. Further studies are needed to check the generalizability of the findings on other examples of different uniform communities such as universities, travel agencies, and post offices.

Thirdly, the use of the anonymized natural data in the current research confined the identification of the contributing biographical factors that condition the speech behaviour of complaining such as age and educational background. A combination of the natural data and the ethnographic approach may enable a more thorough understanding of the causes for the variation in the structures and the verbal strategies by different customers and hence attaining better results.

Finally, the majority of Cs were males. Thus, the qualitative results are mainly derived from Saudi male speakers. Gender differences in the production and realization of the speech act of complaint are not dealt with in this study. Further research might compare the linguistic behaviour of complaining by male and female Saudi Arabic customers. This might help verify the results of the assumptions about gender differences in language.

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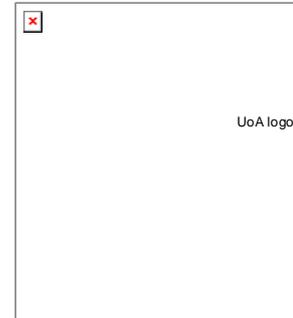
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Ethics Approval

**Office of the Vice-Chancellor**  
Finance, Ethics and Compliance



The University of Auckland Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Level 10, 49 Symonds Street  
Telephone: 64 9 373 7599  
Extension: 87830 / 83761  
Facsimile: 64 9 373 7432

### UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

18-Nov-2014

#### MEMORANDUM TO:

Dr Fay Wouk  
App Lang Studies & Linguistics

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 013138): Approved

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study.

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval is granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 18-Nov-2017.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval

letter to the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote reference number: 013138 on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

*(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)*

UAHPEC Administrators  
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, App Lang Studies &  
Linguistics Mrs Najla Alfadda  
Dr Areta Charter  
Assoc Prof Gary Barkhuizen

## Appendix B: General Head of (CCU) Consent Form



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**NEW ZEALAND**

School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
Arts 1, Building 206  
14A Symonds St  
Phone: +64 9 373 7599 extn. 73158  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### **THE GENERAL HEAD OF THE CUSTOMER COMPLAINT UNIT (CCU) CONSENT FORM**

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD IN A LOCKED CABINET FOR A  
PERIOD OF SIX YEARS AFTER WHICH TIME IT WILL BE DESTROYED**

Project Title: Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study

Researcher: Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have understood the nature of the research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to give permission to access 60-100 hours of naturally de-identified already recorded complaint telephone calls between my employees (CCU's operators) and the Company's customers.
- I understand that the recorded calls will not be used in any way that could affect the reputation of the Company or its relationship with its customers.
- I agree that I will not have the right to edit the recordings.
- I agree that: (a) a staff member working in the CCU (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will collect and save 60-100 hours of complaint phone calls and save them in Compact Discs (CDs) to be given in person to me (in a one month period); (2) an IT staff member (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will de-identify the calls collected by the CCU staff member (in a one month period). This is to be done by removing any identifiable information of both callers and operators. The de-identified calls are to be submitted to me. Data collector and IT staff member will agree that the information within the data is not to be disclosed to, discussed with, or published by anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor(s).
- I give my assurance that participation/non-participation of data collector and IT staff member will not in anyway affect their employment or relationship with the Company.

- I understand that the de-identified audio-recorded data will be transcribed and translated by the researcher.
- I am aware that the recorded material will be stored in a locked cabinet for six years after which it will be destroyed.
- I understand that if the information provided in the research is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify the Company as its source.
- I understand that a copy of a report will be submitted by the researcher to me upon completion of the project.

Name .....

Signature .....

(please print clearly)

Date ...../...../.....

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN  
PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 November, 2014 for (3) years,  
Reference Number 013138**

## Appendix C: Data Collector Consent Form



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**NEW ZEALAND**

School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
Arts 1, Building 206  
14A Symonds St  
Phone: +64 9 373 7599 extn. 73158

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### **PARTICIPANT (DATA COLLECTOR IN CUSTOMER COMPLAINT UNIT) CONSENT FORM**

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD IN A LOCKED CABINET FOR A  
PERIOD OF SIX YEARS AFTER WHICH TIME IT WILL BE DESTROYED**

Project Title: Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study

Researcher: Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to collect the data of this research.
- I understand that my participation is absolutely voluntarily.
- I understand that I have one-week's time to think about my willingness to participate.
- I understand that the General Head of the Customer Complaint Unit (CCU) has given his assurance that my participation/non-participation will not in anyway affect my employment or relationship with the Company. There are no physical or psychological risks to me in the research.
- I am aware that I will need approximately one month to collect 60-100 hours of complaint phone calls. This is to be done during my regular paid working hours.
- I understand that the recordings are for the purpose of analysing the sequential and interactional characteristics of complaints and their responses in calls to the CCU.

- I agree to save a selection of complaint calls in Compact Discs (CDs) to be given in person to the General Head of the CCU.
- I agree that I will not have the right to edit the recordings.
- I understand that the audio-recorded data will be transcribed and translated by the researcher.
- I understand that a staff member working in the Information Technology Department (IT) who will sign a confidentiality agreement will de-identify the calls I collected by removing any identifiable information of both callers and operators. The de-identified calls are to be submitted to the General Head of the CCU.
- I am aware that the recorded material will be stored in a locked cabinet for six years after which it will be destroyed.
- I understand that if the information provided in the research is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source.

Name .....

Signature .....

(please print clearly)

Date ...../...../.....

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 November, 2014 for (3) years, Reference Number 013138**

## Appendix D: General Head of (CCU) Participant Information Sheet



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**NEW ZEALAND**

School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
Arts 1, Building 206  
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Phone: +64 9 373 7599 extn. 73158

The University of Auckland  
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Auckland, New Zealand

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **(GENERAL HEAD OF THE CUSTOMER COMPLAINT UNIT (CCU))**

Project Title: Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study

Researcher: Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda

My name is Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Auckland conducting research in the School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics. I am conducting this research for the purpose of my dissertation on business complaint calls. I am interested in investigating the sequential and interactional characteristics of direct complaints and their responses for both local citizens and customer service members in business calls.

Complaint is a pervasive, forceful, and regularly occurring form of human interaction. This study examining the sequential and interactional characteristics of complaints in a Saudi business community will generate new data which expands our understanding of how the speech act of complaint is produced and dealt with in Saudi Arabic complaint calls, an area that has received little attention until now. The findings will also benefit your Company in terms of training needs and better customer service.

I seek your permission to access 60-100 hours of naturally de-identified already recorded complaint telephone calls between your employees (CCU's operators) and the Company's customers. I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. Your participation is absolutely voluntarily. I assure you that the recorded calls will not be used in any way that could affect the reputation of the Company or its relationship with its customers.

The main data of this study is derived from electronic audio- recorded calls by the Company's Call Center electronic system of interactions between the customers and the CCU's operators at your Company in Saudi Arabia. I would like to have an access to 60-100 hours of de-identified complaint phone call recordings over a period of two months. As outsiders are not permitted to access the Company's call center electronic system directly, I would appreciate if

your goodself: (a) direct a staff member working in the CCU (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) to collect and save a selection of complaint phone calls and save them in Compact Discs (CDs) to be given in person to you. He will approximately need one month to collect and save the calls ; (2) ask a staff member working in the Information Technology Department (IT) of the Company (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) to de-identify the calls collected by the CCU staff member. This is to be done by removing any identifiable information of both callers and operators. He will approximately need one month to de-identify the calls. The de-identified calls are to be submitted to you. Both (data collector and IT staff member) will be asked by you to sign a Confidentiality Agreement Form in which they will agree that the information within the data is not to be disclosed to, discussed with, or published by anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor(s). For the purpose of the validity of results, calls should be *natural* interactions between the customers and the CCU staff members. Thus, you will have no right to edit the recordings of the employees or the customers of the Company.

The audio-recorded data will be transcribed and translated by the researcher herself. The data will be handled only by the researcher and her supervisor(s). The electronic format of the transcripts will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and a flash drive for an additional backup. The computer is password-protected. The CDs (in which the de-identified calls will be saved), the flash drive, and the hand-written transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet for a period of six years after which all the data will be destroyed. The researcher will shred the CDs and the flash drive. Files of electronic written data will be deleted permanently from the researcher's personal computer. Hand-written data will be shredded in a paper shredder machine.

Should you consent to the above, your signature will be required on the attached consent form. If the information provided in the research is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you or your Company as its source. Upon completion of the project, a copy of the report will be submitted by the researcher to the General Head of the CCU. Finally, I request your assurance that participation/non-participation of data collector and IT staff member will not in any way affect their employment or relationship with the Company.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation in making this study possible. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to phone me at the number below or write to me at:

1. English Language Unit  
College of Languages and Translation  
King Saud University (KSU)/ Females Campus  
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Telephone: +966 11 8051108                      e-mail: [nalfadda@ksu.edu.sa](mailto:nalfadda@ksu.edu.sa)
  
2. School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
Arts 1, Building 206 (Room 444)  
14A Symonds St  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone: +64 9 373 7599 extn. 81478    e-mail: [nalf965@aucklanduni.ac.nz](mailto:nalf965@aucklanduni.ac.nz)

My supervisors are:

1. Dr. Fay Wouk

School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
The University of Auckland  
Private bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone: +64 (0) 9 923 8587 extn. 88587 e-mail: [f.wouk@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:f.wouk@auckland.ac.nz)

2. Dr. Helen Charters  
School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
The University of Auckland  
Private bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone: +64 (0) 9 923 8587 extn. 87086 e-mail: [h.charters@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:h.charters@auckland.ac.nz)

The Head of the School is:  
Associate Professor Gary Barkhuizen  
School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
The University of Auckland  
Private bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone: +64 (0) 9 923 8587 extn. 88197 e-mail: [g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz)

For any inquiries regarding ethical concerns please contact:  
The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee,  
The University of Auckland, Research Office,  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand. Telephone +64 9 373 7599 extn.  
87830/83761.  
E-mail: [humanethics@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@auckland.ac.nz)

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN  
PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 November, 2014 for (3) years,  
Reference Number 013138**

## Appendix E: Data Collector Participant Information Sheet



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**NEW ZEALAND**

School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
Arts 1, Building 206  
14A Symonds St  
Phone: +64 9 373 7599 extn. 73158

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **(DATA COLLECTOR IN CUSTOMER COMPLAINT UNIT (CCU))**

Project Title: Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study

Researcher: Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda

My name is Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Auckland conducting research in the School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics. I am conducting this research for the purpose of my dissertation on business complaint calls. I am interested in investigating the sequential and interactional characteristics of direct complaints and their responses for both local citizens and customer service members in business calls.

You are invited to participate in my research and I would appreciate your cooperation to make this study possible. The General Head of the CCU has given his assurance that your participation/non-participation will not in anyway affect your employment or relationship with the Company. There are no physical or psychological risks to you in the research.

As outsiders are not permitted to access the Company's call center electronic system directly, I would like you to agree to collect and save 60-100 hours of electronic audio- recorded calls from the Company's Call Center electronic system of interactions between the Company's customers and the operators of the CCU. This is to analyse the sequential and interactional characteristics of complaints and their responses in calls to the CCU. You will need approximately a one month period to collect and save the calls and this is to be done during your regular paid working hours. Calls should be saved in Compact Discs (CDs) and should be given in person to the General Head of the CCU. For the purpose of the validity of results, calls should not be edited.

The audio-recorded data will be transcribed and translated by the researcher herself. The data will be handled only by the researcher and her supervisor(s). A staff member working in the

Information Technology Department (IT) of the Company, who will sign a Confidentiality Agreement, will de-identify all the calls you will collect. This will be done by removing all identifying information of both callers and operators.

The electronic format of the transcripts will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and a flash drive for an additional backup. The computer is password-protected. The CDs (in which the de-identified calls will be saved), the flash drive, and the hand-written transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet for a period of six years after which all the data will be destroyed. The researcher will shred the CDs and the flash drive. Files of electronic written data will be deleted permanently from the researcher's personal computer. Hand-written data will be shredded in a paper shredder machine. If the information provided in the research is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source.

If you agree to collect the data of the study, please let the General Head of the CCU know by signing the attached consent form and the Confidentiality Agreement Form. You will be given one-week's time to think about your willingness to participate. You can withdraw from the study without giving a reason anytime during the seven days following the date in which you will sign the CF. If you wish to withdraw from the study within that timeframe, please inform the General Head of the CCU.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation in making this study possible. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to phone me at the number below or write to me at:

3. English Language Unit  
College of Languages and Translation  
King Saud University (KSU)/ Females Campus  
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
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My supervisors are:

3. Dr. Fay Wouk  
School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
The University of Auckland  
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Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone: +64 (0) 9 923 8587 extn. 88587                      e-mail: [f.wouk@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:f.wouk@auckland.ac.nz)

4. Dr. Helen Charters  
School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
The University of Auckland  
Private bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: +64 (0) 9 923 8587 extn. 87086 e-mail: [h.charters@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:h.charters@auckland.ac.nz)

The Head of the School is:

Associate Professor Gary Barkhuizen

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For any inquiries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee,

The University of Auckland, Research Office,

Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand. Telephone +64 9 373 7599 extn. 87830/83761.

E-mail: [humanethics@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@auckland.ac.nz)

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN  
PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 November, 2014 for (3) years,  
Reference Number 013138**

## Appendix F: Data Collector Confidentiality Agreement



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND

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The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### DATA COLLECTOR IN CUSTOMER COMPLAINT UNIT (CCU) CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Project Title: Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study

Researcher: Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda

Supervisor: Dr. Fay Wouk

I agree to collect and save 60-100 hours of complaint phone calls from the Company's Call Center electronic system of interactions between the Company's customers and the operators of the CCU for the above research project. I understand that the information contained within them is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, or published by anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Information Technology Staff Member Confidentiality Agreement



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND

School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics  
Arts 1, Building 206  
14A Symonds St  
Phone: +64 9 373 7599 extn. 73158

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) STAFF MEMBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Project Title: Business Complaints Calls in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Discourse Analytic Study

Researcher: Najla Abdulaziz Alfadda

Supervisor: Dr. Fay Wouk

I agree to de-identify the recorded files (CDs) by removing all identifying information of callers (customers) and call-takers (operators) for the above research project. I am aware that I will need approximately a one month period to de-identify collected calls and that this is to be done during my regular paid working hours. I understand that the information contained within the calls is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, or published by anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor. I will dispose my copies of the data at the completion of the de-identification process by deleting any files or documents related to the recordings.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H: Transcription Notation System

Phone calls are transcribed using a concise version of the Jeffersonian Transcription Notation System (1984)<sup>62</sup>, some symbols taken from Powers (2005)<sup>63</sup> and three notations added by the researcher. The following concepts are highlighted in the transcripts using the following symbols:

Symbol	Name	Use
{text }	Curly braces	Indicate the start and end points of overlapping speech
(...)	Round brackets and three dots	A short pause of up to one second
(...)	Round brackets and four dots	A medium pause of one to two seconds
(....)	Round brackets and five dots	A long pause of three or more seconds
[Characteristic of voice]	Square brackets including the characteristics of the voice	Characteristic of the tone as [excited], [sympathetic], or [cheerful]
( text )	Single parentheses	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript
(( italic text ))	Double parentheses	Annotation of vocalizations that are not spelled recognizably such as ((cough)), ((sighs)), ((sniff)), and ((snort))
heh heh	Voiced laughter	Indicates laughter
uh um	Conversational fillers	All fillers
[sound]	Square brackets with a brief description	Non-verbal sounds including interruptions (phones, people, and other sounds that override speech). For example, [phone ring]

### Additional Notations by the Researcher

Symbol	Name	Use
(*)	Asterisk	Confidential company information or personal information of callers or operators to protect their privacy
--	Double dashes	Indicate a false start (i.e., self-correction)
//	Slashes	Surround repeated words or phrases (the left-hand slashes mark the outset of the repetition; the right-hand slashes indicate its resolution)
<b>Bold</b>	Bold text	Indicates shouted or higher volume than the surrounding talk

<sup>62</sup> Jefferson, G. (1984). Transcript notation. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. ix-xvi). New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>63</sup> Powers, W. R. (2005). *Transcription techniques for the spoken word*. Oxford: AltaMira Press.

## **Appendix I: Transcription Template**

This form gives the details for the appearance of the transcript document and the basic information that should accompany each transcript.

### **a. Format**

Margins: Top: 1½; Bottom: 1½; Left: 1½; Right: 1½

Spacing: 1.5 space

Font: Times New Roman

Type size: 12

Line numbering: from the beginning, number consecutively

Justification: right only

Place page numbers at: every page

Text format: name on the right, all speech text indented from name

### **b. Information of each transcript**

Record number:

Interaction (name of the file):

File duration: ..... minutes

Number of problems complained about:

Topic (s) of the complaint:

Number of speakers:

Gender of complainer (C):

Metadata (any necessary comments or context information about the interaction and/or the participants):

**Transcript**

-END OF TRANSCRIPT-

## Appendix J: Screenshot of an Extract of a Transcript and its Codes

The screenshot displays a software interface for analyzing transcripts. The main window shows a transcript in Arabic with several lines of text. To the right of the transcript, a list of codes is visible, each with a corresponding icon and a count. The codes include:

- Gender
- Aggressive interrogn
- ..aggressive interro
- ..acknowledgment of re
- ..active kn terms
- ..accuse company of i
- ..apology
- ..optimistic response
- ..inquiry about a previous complaint
- ..bad experience encountered in Store
- ..not coming to a measurement appointment
- ..changing appointment without C agreeing
- ..no response to a previously submitted request
- ..different desian than what adered upon with the designer

The transcript text includes:

ج: صحيح استاذي الكريم بس عثمان العوض يعطينا الاوكيه (... لازم الاوكيه عثمان يطالع لك الريق مره ثانيه  
 ع: يعني هل في احتمال ما يعطي اوكي؟  
 ج: لا يعطي اوكي طبيعي  
 ع: طب ايش ازيمه الضطوه هذي يعني؟ ايش ازيمه الضطوه يعطينا اوكيه والا ما يعطينا عثمان الطالع مره ثانيه استاذي الكريم طلعواك المره الاولى لازم المره الثانيه يكون فيه اوكيه عثمان فريق الوكيب عثمان يطالعوا لازم ياخذوا الاوكيه من المعروض  
 ج: طب حلو جميل اعني القطعه انتو جيتوها غلط انا ما جيت شيه انتو جيتوا لي القطع كلها من جده وهم جازوا لي دج بالغلط دج كذا زايد  
 ج: صحيح  
 ع: طب يعني ما يحتاج لي اوكيه والا مو اوكيه اوكيه تحتاج عثير ايام حتى تطلع الاوكيه (... يعني انا انتي شايقه يعني هذا كله له داعي؟ مبركه الزبون هذي كلها ليا داعي؟  
 ج: طب استاذي الكريم تقدر منك وان شاء الله خلال اليوم يتم التواصل معاك  
 ع: خلال كم؟  
 ج: خلال اليوم ان شاء الله يتم الرد (... انا حصلت لك التصعيد  
 ع: طب وانا ما تلم؟ وانا ما تم الرد خلال اليوم؟

The interface also shows a 'Code System' panel on the left with a tree view of codes and their counts. The bottom right shows a 'Retrieved ...' panel with a list of codes and their counts.

## Appendix K: Screenshot of a Table of Codes of an Extract of a Transcript

MAXQDA 12 Coded segments (1)xlx - Excel

Document name	Code	Begin	End	Weight score	Segment	Area	Coverage %	Author
Transcript 2-3	Gender\FM	1	1	0	2/3	4	0.05	najla
Transcript 2-3	Length of call/medium	3	3	0	16: 19	6	0.07	najla
Transcript 2-3	Overall dissatisfaction/moderately annoyed (2)	6	6	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	Number of problems\1	7	7	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	CT Expressions\neutral	8	8	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	Structure\minimal (basic)	9	9	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	Outcome\po	10	10	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	Topic of complaint\late assembly	11	11	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	Level of politeness\late assembly	12	12	0	2-3	3	0.04	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\Polliteness markers	18	18	0	ار سحقي	8	0.09	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\NEW\Fictive kin terms	18	18	0	اخي	4	0.05	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (performing)\state the problem	18	18	0	انا التوريت مطبخ من عنكم وجدار الى البو تركبو لكني كانت فيه مطبخ جوارها لي مطبخ زوجنا والسكناني من المروض (....) وبصوت اقصاءت عليكم على اسس بصوت لوكون الفطمة اللي كانت جاية بالمطبخ (....) والآن توريها انا ناظنين فطمة والآن الان ما جاني احد	253	2.98	najla
Transcript 2-3	UG\Intensifiers\waiting for long period of time	18	18	0	اذا ناظنين فطمة المشر	25	0.29	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (responding)\asking questions	19	19	0	طيب تتريني باسمه	17	0.20	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (responding)\New\request to wait	23	23	0	فطمة سوا من سناظنت	19	0.22	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (performing)\New\A breach of promise	31	31	0	علا جحدت لك موعد بزيجتك انكك (....) الى السن ما كلتي احد	61	0.72	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\NEW\honorific	33	33	0	طوبه المر	11	0.13	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\NEW\Fictive kin terms	38	38	0	اخي	4	0.05	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (performing)\New\A breach of promise	38	38	0	فاني جطس لحدت لك موعد ولا الان جيك ما تعرف الا الور	56	0.66	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (responding)\explanation\excuse	46	46	0	عنان البريق بناه على رن المروض بيطهم اركه البريق يطبخ لك مره تايه قسمه التوركيب	87	1.03	najla
Transcript 2-3	Verbal strategies (responding)\offer of repair/compensation\for	48	48	0	محمد طيب اسم التوركيب	21	0.25	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\Hesitator	49	49	0	اه ام	5	0.06	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\exclaimers	51	51	0	مطبخ	5	0.06	najla
Transcript 2-3	DG\NEW\Fictive kin terms	51	51	0	اخي	4	0.05	najla

MAXQDA 12

7:55 pm  
24/01/2018

## Appendix L1: Full Transcript - Call #1

- 1 CT: (Furniture Company) *'assalaamu Salaykum* (greeting in Saudi Arabic)
- 2 C: *Salaykumus salaam wa raHmatullaah wabarakaatu* (respond to greeting)
- 3 CT: *tfaDDal 'ustaadhi kayf mumkin 'akhdimak?* (how can I help you sir, please?)
- 4 C: *'aasif 'ukhti, laakin fiindi Talab waSal li baytii min arba' ayyaam wa 'ilal 'aan ma Jaa*
- 5 *'aHad yirakkib. marrah ta'khkharu* (I'm sorry my sister, but I have an order which was
- 6 delivered to my house 4 days ago and since then nobody has come to assemble it. They
- 7 are very late)
- 8 CT: *mumkin raqam Jawwalik?* (may I have your mobile number?)
- 9 C: *raqam aTTalab?* (order number?)
- 10 CT: *'aTiini raqam 'alfatuurah wa raqam alJawwal* (give me the receipt number and
- 11 the mobile number)
- 12 C: *'abshri raqam alJawwal 1234567* (sure, the mobile number is 1234567)
- 13 CT: *'aTTalab bi'isim mHammad SaHiiH?* ( the order is registered in the name of
- 14 Mohammed, am I right?)
- 15 C: *SaHiiH* (yes)
- 16 CT: *waSalluulaak yuum 'arba'ah Janwarii, SaHiiH?* (they delivered the item on the
- 17 4<sup>th</sup> of January, am I right?)
- 18 C: *naSam SaHiiH* (yes right)
- 19 CT: *Tayyib bas daqaayiq* (ok just wait a minute)
- 20 [C holding the line for 3 minutes and 3 seconds]
- 21 CT: *shaakirah 'intiZaarik. 'ilal 'aan ma waSalnaa rad. naftadhr. Harsil email*
- 22 *musta'jal li qisim attarkiib. 'anaa muta'kkidah Hayruduu 'alyuum.* (Thanks for
- 23 waiting. So far we have not received a reply. We apologize. I will send an urgent email
- 24 to the assembly team. I am sure they will reply today)
- 25 C: *Tayyib. 'allaah ys'idik* (Fine. May God please you)
- 26 CT: *wiyyaak. khidmah 'aw 'ay 'istifsaar?* (I wish you the same. Any other service or
- 27 inquiry I can help with?)
- 28 C: *'allah yiHfaDki* (May God protect you)
- 29 CT: *shukraan lit tiSaalik bii* (Furniture Company).
- 30 *Fii r'fayaat Allah* (thanks for calling (Furniture Company). In the peace of God)
- 31 C: *Fi 'amaanil laah* (In the peace of God)

-End of Transcript-

## Appendix L2: Full Transcript - Call #2

- 1 CT: *'assalaamu ḥalaykum (...)* Sara min (Furniture Company) (greeting in Saudi Arabic (...))  
2 Sara from (Furniture Company)
- 3 C: *wāḥalaykumus salaam* (respond to greeting)
- 4 CT: *tfaDDal (...)* *kayf 'aqdar 'asaaḥdak?* (Go ahead, please (...) how can I help you?)
- 5 C: *'ahlaa wsahlāa 'ukhit Sara (...)* *kayf alHaal?* (welcome sister Sara (...) how are you?)
- 6 CT: *'alhamid lillaah (...)* *tfaDDal* (Thanks to God (...) go ahead, please)
- 7 C: *'anaa ḥrafīt 'asaamiikum kullukum (...)* *'anaa kallamīt waHdaa qabil ḤaTatnīi 'ismahaa*  
8 *kallamīt waHdaa thaanyaa qaalat 'ismīi 'amal wan tīi alHiin Sara* (I knew all your names  
9 (...) I talked to some one before who gave me her name. I talked to another one who said her  
10 name was Amal and now you are Sara)
- 11 CT: *uh um (...)* *'aysh hiyaa 'ishkalyaatak?* (uh um (...) what is your problem?)
- 12 C: *Ḥīndīi Talabīyyah almafrūD tuSalnīi fīi 24-3-2015 (...)* *'anaa daafiḥ flūsahaa wī daafiḥ*  
13 *'aJir annaqīl wdaafiḥ 'aJir attarkīib (...)* *sawwayt killal 'ijra'aat lakin Jabuuha li alikhwaan*  
14 *warakkabuuhaa lakin naaqSah* (I have an order which is to be delivered on 24-3-2015 (...) I  
15 paid the whole amount and paid the delivery fees and paid the assembly fees (...) I carried  
16 out all the required procedures but when the brothers brought it to me and assembled it it had  
17 missing pieces)
- 18 CT: *Tayyib 'aḤTīni 'allaah ysḥidak raqamal Jawwaal 'almusaJJal filfaatuurah* (ok, may God  
19 please you give me the mobile number written on the receipt)
- 20 C: *shufīi Jarbi hadhaa 5675875* (try this one 5675875)
- 21 CT: *huwa bi'isim 'alustadh Ahmad Ali?* (sir, is it by the name of Ahmad Ali?)
- 22 C: *'aywaa* (yes)
- 23 CT: *Tayyib laHaZaat 'alaah ysḥidak* (ok wait a minute may God please you)
- 24 C: *Tayyib* (ok)
- 25 [C holding the line for 1 minute and 48 seconds]
- 26 CT: *Tayyib shaakīrah 'īntīZaarak 'ustaath Ahamd (...)* *huwa waaDiH maḥaayaa 'itrafāḥ*  
27 *aTTalab fīi thamaaniyah w ḥīshriin marsh ḥalaa 'asaas Ḥīndak qīTḥah naaqSah (...)* *'al'aan*  
28 *HaSaḥḥīd lik ḥalaa 'aTTalab marra thaaniyaah wa Hashuuf 'eyish 'ishkaliyyat 'atta'khiir wa*  
29 *bi'idhin 'allaah Hakhailiikum yirJaḥuu yitwaasalu maḥaak enshallah yifīiduuk matal mawḥīd*  
30 *illi Haabib yiwaSlu lak fīih 'alqīTḥah annaqīSah wa yirakkibu lak 'iyyaaha* (ok thanks for  
31 waiting Mr. Ahmad (...). It is clear to me that you had a request submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> of  
32 March in which it stated that there was a missing piece (...), now I will pass on the request

33 again and I will know what is the cause behind the delay and if God willing I will let them  
34 call you back to find when you would like them to deliver the piece and assemble it)

35 C: *laa tirfiʕiin aTTalab (...) mitaa bayiJuun?* (don't pass on the request to a higher level  
36 (...) when are they coming?)

37 CT: *wallah ya 'ustaathi huwa Sayir ʕindanaa ta'khiir bas 'al'aan 'anaa HarJaʕ 'aSaʕʕid lak*  
38 *ʕala Talabak 'ashuuf 'aysh 'ishkaliyyaat 'atta'khiir wa 'akhalliikum yirJaʕu yitwaaSalu*  
39 *maʕaak* (I'm afraid we are encountering a delay but now I will pass on the request again to  
40 find out what is the reason behind the delay and I'll get them call you back)

41 C: *'ukhtii 'intii thalith waHidah 'alHiin tirfaʕ Talab (...) 'anaa ma raaH 'attiSil marrah*  
42 *raabʕah wa waaHidah raabʕah tquullii nafis 'alkalaam hadhaa (...) 'awal marrah qabalt*  
43 *wil marrah aththaaniyah qabalt wal Hiin 'aqabalah minik! //Kayf yaʕnii? kayf yaʕnii?//*  
44 *haadhaa yaʕnii 'as'alik billaah?! (sister you are the third person now who has passes on*  
45 **the request (...) I will not call a fourth time to have a similar response from the fourth**  
46 **staff member (...) I accepted the first time and the second time and now you want me to**  
47 **accept it from you! //How? How?// How is this for God's sake?!)**

48 CT: *wallah ʕaarfaH 'ustaadh Ahmad wa muqadirah haadha ashshay bas lil'aan ma Janaa*  
49 *rad* (I swear that I totally understand and I consider that but we have still not received a  
50 reply)

51 C: *law samaHtii Tayyib law samaHtii ya //ukhitii 'ukhitii// Sara law samaHtii ana 'aʕrif*  
52 *qudaraatik wa 'aʕriif mas'uliyyaatik allah yikhaliik waSliinii ʕalla 'akbar waaHid*  
53 *ʕindukum fii (Furniture Company) 'akbaar waaHid tshuʕiinah huwal mas'uul 'incharge*  
54 *fil mawDuuʕ haadhaa allah yikhaliik wa'Tliʕii min 'almawDuuʕ 'intii (please ok please*  
55 *//sister sister// Sara please I understand your capacities and responsibilities May God*  
56 **protect you, transfer me to the person of the highest authority in the Furniture**  
57 **Company, the highest authority that you can think of who is responsible for the**  
58 **problem may God protect you and you leave the problem**

59 CT: *Tayyib allaah ysʕidak 'iHina hinaa bas qisim sayydaat (...) 'iHina mumkin nirfaʕ lak fii*  
60 *'aTTalab in 'entaa Haabib titwaaSal*  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{maʕa mas'uul} \\ \text{'aʕTinii} \end{array} \right]$

61 C:  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{maʕa mas'uul} \\ \text{'aʕTinii} \end{array} \right]$  *raqam shakhiS 'antii tittaSliin fiih (...)*  
62 *shakhiS mas'uul ʕan 'aTTalabaat*

63 (CT: ok may God please you we are only a female Department here (...) we can write in the  
64 request that you would like to contact  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{a person of a higher authority} \end{array} \right]$

65 C:  $\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{give me} \\ \text{a number of the} \end{array} \right]$   
66 **person whom you contact (...) a person responsible for the requests)**

67 CT: *'iHina ma ʕindinaa 'arqaam mumkin nitwaaSal maʕaahum (...) nitwaaSal maʕaahum*  
68 *ʕan Tariiq niZaam muʕayyan bas 'alwaaDiH 'inu taHaddath 'amis wal*

69 [ *mafruuD yrsluu lak* ]

70 C: [ *wish illi waDiH?!* ]

71 *wish tistakhdmuun Hamaam zaaJil! (...) wishshal niZaam 'illi tistakhdiminah?!*

72 (CT: we do not have numbers through which we can contact them (...) we contact them

73 through a special system but it is clear here that there is an update to your request and

74 [ they should send you ]

75 C: [ **what is it that is** ]

76 **clear?! What system do you use, carrier pigeon! (...) what system do you use?!**

77 CT: *wallah fan Tariiq sistim yaa 'ustaadhi bntwaaSal maSaahum* (I swear it is through a

78 system sir that we contact them)

79 C: *wishas system? 'imayl yaSnii? wishas system Haqkum?* (what system? You mean

80 **email? What is your system?**)

81 CT: *'aywa 'iHnaa bnSaSsid lak ilaan fala* [ *'imayl mustaSjal* ]

82 C: [ *//ayii mustaSjal?!* ]

83 *'ayii mustaSjal?!// lukum 'al'aan 'iHdaSash yuum lita'khiir 'iTalabiyyah Sindi (...)*

84 *'iHdaSash yuum (...)'ayii 'imayl haadhaa?! (...)'antuu mHaffZiinkum dibaaJah*

85 *muSyyanah tquuluunhaa lil naas 'illii yshtukuun!*

86 (CT: yes we will pass on for you [ an urgent email ]

87 C: [ *//what urgent?!* ] **what urgent?!// you are late for**

88 **eleven days now (...) eleven days (...) what email is that? (...) Do you memorize a script**

89 **which you are asked to repeat for everybody who complains!)**

90 CT: *Tyyib HaDir zay ma afaditak 'al'aan 'ana HaSaSsid lak falayh wa Haktub fii aTTalaab*

91 *'in 'intaa Haab titwaaSal maSa mas'uul humma HayrJaSuu ytwaaSaluu maSaak wiy Hlluu lak*

92 *'al'shkaalyah wa b'idhinal laah ywaSluu lak 'aghraDak annaqiSah* (ok sure, as I informed

93 you I will now pass on your request and I will write in it that you would like to contact a

94 person in the administration. They will call you back and will solve your problem and - God

95 willing - will deliver your missing pieces)

96 C: (...) *ma Sindhikum antum shay falal khidmah? yaSnii 'iZghaT raqam falal khidmah suu*

97 *alkidmah 'aw mathalan kuwaysahal khidmah 'aw mu kuwaysah? ma Sindhikum shay antum?!*

98 ( (...) *do you not have anything I can press to evaluate the quality of the service provided?*

99 *For example whether the service was good or not? Do you not have anything?!*)

100 CT: *wallah 'ustaadhi haadhaa muumkin 'iHnaa ndawwinuu fiTTalab tabaSaak niktub kilal*

101 *kalaam 'illi 'intaa b'tqullii 'yaaah (...)'ay Khidmah thaaniyah?* (we can write all that you

102 have informed me of sir in your request (...) any other service?)

103 C: //yaʕnii mitaa tkallmuuni? mitaa tkallmuuni?// (//so when will you call me back? when  
 104 will you call me back?//)

105 CT: *wallah ya 'ustaadhii kaHad 'aqSaa 'iHnaa aTTalaab biyaakhidh 'arbaʕ wa ʕishriin*  
 106 *saaʕah laakin 'iHnaa HanSaʕʕid lak ʕalayh b'idhnii laah khlaal assaʕaat aJJaayah*  
 107 *ytwaaSaluu maʕaak wa yHilluu lak 'al'ishkaaliyyah* (usually sir the request takes a maximum  
 108 of 24 hours to respond to, but we will pass on your request and - God willing - during the  
 109 coming hours they will call you back and solve your problem)

110 C: **'arbaʕ wa ʕishriin saaʕah 'akhadhat 'iHidaʕash yuum ʕndukum! (24 hours took eleven**  
 111 **days in your Company!)**

112 CT: *wallahi ʕaarfah ya 'ustaadhii wa muqaddirah haadhash shay lakin zay maafaditak*  
 113 *bi'dhnii laah khilaalas saaʕaat alJaayah ytwaaSaluu maʕaak yfiiduuk bilqiTaʕ mitaa Haytim*  
 114 *tawSiilahaaw wa ywaShluu lak 'iyyaahaaw* (I totally understand and appreciate that sir but as I  
 115 informed you - God willing- they will contact you during the coming hours and let you know  
 116 what are the missing pieces and deliver them to you)

117 C: (.....) *shukran lik* ( (.....) thank you)

118 CT: *'ay khidmah thaaniyah?* (any other service I can offer?)

119 C: *'ay khidmah? ʕindkum shay antum? ma ʕindkum shay maʕas salaamah* (what service? Do  
 120 you have anything? You do not have anything good bye) [angry] [sarcastic]

121 CT: *suʕadaaw bikhidmatak fii (Furniture Company) fii 'amaanil laah* (we are happy to serve  
 122 you in the Furniture Company. Good bye)

-End of Transcript-

### Appendix L3: Full Transcript - Call #3

- 1 CT: (*Furniture Company*) 'assalaamu ḡalaykum tfaDDal kayf aqdar 'asaḡdak? (*Furniture*  
2 *Company*) greeting in Saudi Arabic. Please go ahead how can I help you?)
- 3 C: waḡalaykumus salaam war raHmah (responds to greeting)
- 4 CT: tfaDDal 'ustaadhii (...) kayf aqdar asaaḡdak? (Go ahead please sir (...) how can I help  
5 you?)
- 6 C: law samaHtii 'anaa ḡindii tarkiib dawaliib wa maktabah 'almafruud 'amis wa kul  
7 yuum yquuluu lanaa //bukrah bukrah// (excuse me I have an assembly appointment for  
8 cupboards and a desk which ought to have been here yesterday and each day they say  
9 to us //tomorrow tomorrow//)
- 10 CT: tsharrifnii bismak? (could I please have your name?)
- 11 C: 'ibrahiim Saḡuud (Ibrahim Saud)
- 12 CT: Tayyib (...) sharrifnii braqim Jawwaalak? (ok (...) can I have your mobile number  
13 please?)
- 14 C: 045874937 (045874937)
- 15 CT: laHazaat (just a minute)
- 16 [C holding the line for 26 seconds]
- 17 CT: shaakirah lintiZaarik wa 'aasfah ḡalaa al'Talaah bas laHazaat min faDlak arfaḡ lak  
18 Talab (thanks for waiting and sorry for the delay. It'll just take a minute please to pass on a  
19 request for you)
- 20 C: **laa tirfaḡii Talab!** yaḡnii 'intii mantii ḡaarfaḡ 'idhaa Jayyiin alyuum wallaa mahum  
21 Jayyiin?! (**do not pass on a request!** So you do not know whether they are coming today or  
22 not?!)
- 23 CT: 'ustaadhii ma ḡindii ḡilim haadhaa bas khaaS bii fariiḡ attarkiib (sir I do not know this  
24 is only known by the assembly team)
- 25 C: ya 'ukhtii 'amis khalid min almutabaḡah 'itaSal bii wa qaalii bukrah wa 'itkallamit maḡaah  
26 kalaam kathiiir wa qaalii bukrah wa baḡad kidhaa 'itaSal bii waaHid min almutabaḡah  
27 thaanii wa qaalii bukrah assaaḡah 'iHdaḡash wa nuS yJuu yrakibuu lak (...) 'ana widdii  
28 'innii attaSil bi khalid 'idiniḡ 'idhaa takarramtii raqam lii khlid 'aw 'idhaa tiḡdarii 'ayii  
29 waaHid fii almutabaḡah 'as'aluu (Sister, yesterday Khalid from the Follow-up Department  
30 called me and he told me tomorrow and I had an endless conversation and he told me  
31 tomorrow. After that I received another call from another person from the Follow-up  
32 Department and he told me tomorrow at 11:30 they will come and assemble your order (...)  
33 I wish to talk to Khalid. Please give me a number for Khalid or if you can the number of  
34 anyone in the Follow-up Department to ask him)

35 CT: *wallah ya 'ustaadhii naʕstadhir minnak ma ʕindanaa lahum 'ay raqm 'iHnaa nitwaaSal*  
36 *maʕaahum ʕan Tariiq aTTalabaat wa ʕan Tariiq al'imilaat* (I swear my sir and we are sorry,  
37 we do not have any number for them and we contact them through requests and through  
38 emails)

39 C: *'al'aan law samaHtii 'arslii luhum 'imayl (...) 'anaa raaJil ʕumrii sabʕiin sanah*  
40 *batkalam maʕaakii wa kul yuum bii yilʕabuu ʕiinaa (...) (Furniture Company) kaanat fii*  
41 *alqimmah Saarat fii anniʕaal wa 'uqsim billaah law 'aʕrif almuʕaamlah haadhii ma*  
42 *'akhallihaa tishtaraha law qaaluu lahaa khudhii bibalaash ma taakhidh l'iannuu*  
43 *(Furniture Company) 'anaa 'aʕrifhaa qabil khamistaʕish sanah biDaasah Jayyidah*  
44 *'al'aan muDawallah wa kalaam ma yaʕTuuk kalimah waaHidah wa mawaaʕiid*  
45 *munaafiiqiin wa qillat adab fill //qilat qilat// 'al'adad (...) 'alkalaam haadhaa 'anaa qultuu*  
46 *lii khalid 'amis wa qaalii malik 'illa allii ysurrak alyuum yiJuuk alyuum bi'idhin allah*  
47 *'intii 'al'aan tiquulii 'adinii raqim alfaatuurah 'adinii 'aysh shikluu ma ʕindanaa 'arfaʕ lik*  
48 *Talab haadhaa alkalaam kuluh ma yaSluH!* (now please send them an email (...) I am a  
49 70 year old man talking to you and every day they play with us (...) Furniture  
50 Company had a top reputation but now it's at the bottom and I swear to God if I had  
51 known this was your way of dealing with customers, I would not have allowed her to  
52 buy it even if they were giving it away for free I would not have allowed her to have it  
53 because I've known the Furniture Company for 15 years and it had good products, but  
54 now they are wasting time and they do not give you one word and make hypocritical  
55 appointments and are impolite. They are //very very// impolite (...). I mentioned all this  
56 to Khalid yesterday and he told me that he will do what would please me and they will  
57 come to you today - God willing - but now you are asking me to give you the receipt  
58 number, we do not have, pass on a request. This is not acceptable!)

59 CT: *ma ySiir khaTirik 'illaa Tayyib (...) 'anaa 'al'aan raaH 'aSaʕʕid 'imayl lill mushrifah*  
60 *bikaafat tafaaSiilik* (everything is going to be as you wish (...) now I will pass on an email to  
61 the supervisor with all the details you mentioned)

62 C: *'uqsim billah alʕaZiim 'innuu 'idhaa ma Saar almawDuuʕ wa Tawwal 'innuu*  
63 *aSaʕʕiduu lii waziir attiJaarah wa 'idhaa ma Saar almawDuuʕ haadhaa aSaʕʕiduu lil*  
64 *malik (...) ghirfat nuum 'al'awlaad fii ʕashar 'ayyaam 'shtaraytahaa wa tirakkabat wa*  
65 *'twaSalt wa kluu maJaani min (Competitive Furniture Company) bas 'iHnaa*  
66 *'iHtaramnaa nZamaaha waqulna haadhaa haq attarkiib wa haadhaa haq attawSiil wa*  
67 *'intaZarna lii mudat shahar wa nuS wa 'iHnaa Saabriin ʕala duulaabhum 'albanaat*  
68 *mushaʕtariin fii kuul makaan ʕashaan alghurfah titrattab haadhaa Haraam ʕalaykum*  
69 *mahuu maʕquul illi biiSiir maʕaana* (I swear by the Great God if this does not happen  
70 or if it takes a long time, I will pass it on to the Minister of Commerce and if nothing  
71 happens with the King (...) the boys' room was bought and assembled and delivered in  
72 ten days and all for free from the Competitive Furniture Company but we respected  
73 your Company's policy and we said this is the cost of assembly and this is the cost of  
74 delivery and we waited for one month and a half and we were patient waiting for their

75 cupboard. The girls are scattered in every place because of the room. What are you  
76 doing is unlawful and what is happening to us is unbelievable)

77 CT: *biSaraaHaa niStadhir fala illii Saar 'ustaadhii wa niStadhir fan atta'khiir 'illi HaSal*  
78 *lakin ma ySiir khaTirik 'ilaa Tayyib (...)* { 'anaa 'al'aan }

79 C: { ySiir } *khaaTirii Tayyib 'inhum*  
80 *alyuum yJuu yrakibuu alghurfah wa ykhalSuunaa min almashaakil wa raaJifii fii tariikh*  
81 *alfaatuurah mita t'arakhat alfaatuurah wa shuufii mita waSSaluhaa (...)* *Talaḥ ḥindik kil*  
82 *shay muthbat ḥindik (...)* *'iHnaa bashar muu bahaayim yḥabuu binaa 'anaa 'usthaadh*  
83 *Jaamiḥii ḥayb illi biSiir min sharikah ḥaalmyyah ḥayb alshay haadhaa illi biSiir 'innuu*  
84 *sharikah tiḡṣud shahar waa nuS ḥalashaan tirakib dulaab (...)* *wi bimawaaḥiid yaḥnii*  
85 *kullhaa kidhib!*

86 (CT: we really apologize for what happened sir and we apologize for the delay but  
87 everything is going to be as you wish (...)

88 C: { I will } **be pleased if they come today and**  
89 **assemble the room and end the problem. Check the date of the receipt when the item**  
90 **was bought and see when it was delivered (...)** you can see everything and everything is  
91 written (...) we are humans not animals to play with and I am a professor. This thing  
92 happening from a well-known Company is a shame. It is shameful that a Company  
93 spends one month and a half to assemble a cupboard (...) and makes appointments that  
94 are all false!)

95 CT: *ma ySiir khaTirik 'illa Tayyib 'anaa 'al'aan raH arJaḥ aSaḥḥid 'imayl lil mushrifah*  
96 (everything is going to be as you wish. Now I will send again an email to the supervisor)

97 C: *kulluhum yquuluu kidhaa Hatta almushrifah alḥaaliyah 'aḥlaa mushrifah aysh*  
98 *'ismaha? 'amal qalat wallah lii zawJatii 'alkalaam kuluh kaan takhdiir kuluh takhdiir (...)*  
99 *ma ySiir sukarnaa 'irtafaḥ DaghTanaa 'irtafaḥ 'amis zawJatii wallah 'alḥaZiim lamma*  
100 *faJa'uuhaa qaaluu lahaa fii 'aakhir laHZaa 'inuu 'alyuum ma Hanrakib bukraH Saar*  
101 *ḥindahaa 'inhiyaar wa 'inkhafaD alDDaghiT wa 'inkhafaD assukar ḥindahaa law raHat*  
102 *Hadhi fii dhimmat miin truuH? (...)* *'uqsim biJalaal illaah alwaDiḥ 'illi Saayir lanaa*  
103 *bisabab alghurfah haadhii ma yḥlamah 'illa allah wa 'anaa 'adḥuu ḥalaa kul man huwa*  
104 *assabab 'in yantaqim allaah minnah* (all of them say the same thing even the highest  
105 supervisor what's her name? Amal said I swear she only said a whole lot of things just  
106 to calm my wife (...) this is not acceptable. We suffer from high blood sugar and high  
107 blood pressure. I swear to God yesterday when they shocked my wife at the last minute  
108 by telling her that today we will not assemble, she had the next day a nervous  
109 breakdown and low blood sugar and low pressure. If she passed away, who will be  
110 responsible? (...) I swear to God that only He who knows what is happening to us  
111 because of this room and I supplicate to God to take my revenge from everybody who  
112 has been a cause for the problem)

113 CT: *niʕtadhir minnak ya 'ustaadhii wa 'anaa 'al'aan raH aSaʕʕid 'al'imayl bikul illi afattanii*  
114 *fiih* (we apologize sir and I will now pass on the email including everything you have just  
115 mentioned)

116 C: *khalaas wa'idhaa kaan musaJJal 'irfaʕii Suutii kamaan* (ok and if my voice is recorded,  
117 send the call as well)

118 CT: *'almukaalamah musaJJalah yaa 'usthaadhii* (the call is recorded sir)

119 C: *khalaas 'irfaʕii Suutii //wallahii wallahii wallahii // 'alʕaamiliin fii* (*Furniture*  
120 *Company*) *waDaʕuu* (*Furniture Company*) *fii mawDiʕ 'almadaas wallahii waladii nazal*  
121 *yuum 'arrubuuʕ 'allii raaH ʕalaa 'asaas yquulahaahum ya Habayyib 'intuu addaytuunaa*  
122 *mawʕid tarkiib min yuum al'arbiʕaa wmaJaa yqullii 'akthar min khamsiin ʕamiil waaqfiin*  
123 *ʕalaa assaaʕa thalaatha baʕid aZZuhur kullahum yshkuu min qaDiyyat attarkiib wa*  
124 *attawSiil (...)* *yaʕnii 'anaa 'aquul lii waladii 'iyaak wa* (*Furniture Company*) *wallah*  
125 *yʕadhibuuk yJiibuu laak almaraD 'ilayn ywaSSluu lak biDaaʕatak wa 'iyaak wa*  
126 (*Furniture Company*) *'idhaa almustahlik 'akhadh albiDaaʕah min sharikah sayy'ah wa*  
127 *sayy'ah fii attawSiil wa sayy'ah fii attarkiib wa maahii dhiik* (*Furniture Company*) *'illii*  
128 *kinaa naʕtaqid wa niʕrifhaa 'intahat alsharikah* (ok send my call //I swear to God I swear  
129 to God I swear to God// those who work in the (*Furniture Company*) weaken the  
130 performance of the Company extremely. I swear to God my son went to the store last  
131 Wednesday to tell the people working in the store that you gave us an assembly  
132 appointment last Wednesday but nobody came. He told me more than 50 customers  
133 were waiting at around 3pm. All of them were complaining about assembly and  
134 delivery issues (...). I told my son beware of dealing with Furniture Company. I swear  
135 to God they will only deliver your goods when they torture you and cause you diseases  
136 and beware of Furniture Company. If the customer bought an item from a bad  
137 Company and its delivery was bad and its assembly was bad it is not anymore the  
138 Furniture Company we used to know. The Company ended)

139 CT: *Tayyib ya 'ustaadhii 'anaa 'al'aan rafaʕit 'imayl lilmushrifah wa in'shallah bi'idhin*  
140 *allaah 'awal maa tifiidanii birrad raaH 'arJaʕ wa attwaSal maʕaak (...)* *naʕtadhir minnak*  
141 (ok sir I have now sent an email to the supervisor. Once I receive a reply, I will - if God  
142 wills, God willing- contact you (...)) we apologize)

143 C: *miin maʕaayah?* (Who am I talking to?)

144 CT: *maʕaak Latiifah* (I am Latifah)

145 C: *Tayyib maʕalaysh 'anaa muntaZir wa 'arJuu 'innik titwaSSalii wa tiddinii Jawaab* (ok I will  
146 be waiting and I hope that you contact me and give me an answer)

147 CT: *in'shallah ma ySiir khaaTriik 'illa Tayyib* (If God wills. Do not worry)

148 C: *maṣṣalaamah* (goodbye)

149 CT: *shukran litaṣaawnak maṣa (Furniture Company) fii 'amaan allaah* (thank you for your  
150 cooperation with Furniture Company. In the peace of God)

-End of Transcript-

#### Appendix L4: Full Transcript - Call #4

- 1 CT: (*Furniture Company*) 'assalaamu salaykum tfaDDal kayf aqdar asaaʕdak? (*Furniture*  
2 *Company greeting in Saudi Arabic. Please go ahead how can I help you?*)
- 3 C: 'aywaa waflaykumus salaam wa raHmat allaah (*yes responds to greeting*)
- 4 CT: tfaDDal 'ustaadhii (*Go ahead sir, please*)
- 5 C: **shufii fii ʕindii khidmat tawSiil ma waSalat (look I have a delivery service which is not**  
6 **yet delivered)**
- 7 CT: Tayyib ya 'ustaadhii mumkin tsharifnii bi 'ismaak? (*ok sir can I have your name please?*)
- 8 C: muHamaad ʕali (*Mohammed Ali*)
- 9 CT: Hayyaak allah 'ustaadhii (...) min 'ay manTiqah? (*welcome sir (...) from which City?*)
- 10 C: min Jiddah (...) mafruud 'inii Sirit maʕruuf yaʕnii yawmiyyan battaSil layn tiTlaʕ ʕaynii  
11 (*from Jeddah (...) I ought to be known to you because I call every day until my eyes are out*)
- 12 CT: Tayyib ya 'ustaadhii bas thawaanii maʕay law samaHit (*ok sir just wait for a minute*  
13 *please*)
- 14 [C holding the line for 82 seconds]
- 15 CT: shaakirah 'intiZaarak wa 'aasfah ʕalaa al'iTaalah (...) 'ustaadh muHamaad 'ilaa 'al'aan  
16 ma Jaanaa rad bikhSuus attawSiil 'iHnaa mSaʕʕdiin aTTalab li qisim almukhtaS 'illii  
17 hummaa
- 18        { fariiq attawSiil }  
19 C:        { //min huu? min huu?// } wayn huu alqisim almukhtaS dhaa? //waynah?  
20 waynah?// fii 'ay qisim? fii 'ay fariʕ?
- 21 (CT: thanks for waiting and sorry for being late (...) until now we have not received a reply  
22 regarding delivery Mr. Mohammed we raised the request with the concerned Department  
23 which is the { Delivery team }  
24 C:        { //who are they? who are they?// } where is this concerned Department?  
25 //where? where?// in which Department? In which branch?)
- 26 CT: fii qisim mukhaSSaS luhum 'illii humma fariiq tawSiil (*there is a special Department for*  
27 *them which is the Delivery team*)
- 28 C: laa tiJibii saalfat sharikat attawSiil 'anaa ma 'aʕrif sharikat attawSiil 'anaa 'aʕrif  
29 (*Furniture Company*) (**do not say the Delivery Company I do not know the Delivery**  
30 **Company I know Furniture Company**)
- 31 CT: bas thawaanii maʕay law samaHit (*just wait a second please*)

32 [C holding the line for 3 minutes and 52 seconds]

33 CT: *shakirah 'intiZaarak wa 'aasifah Jiddan 'alaa al'iTaalah (...) 'ustadhii tawaaSalit*  
34 *ma'a almushrifah bas afaadatnii 'illa 'al'aan ma Jahum 'ay rad min nafis alsharikah 'illi*  
35 *hiya*

36 [ *sharikat* ]  
37 C: [ *ya 'ukhti* ] *sharikat tawSiil miin? 'Tunaa raqmuhum wa 'iHnaa nitwaaSal*  
38 *ma'aahum*

39

40 (CT: Thanks for waiting and I am very sorry for being late (...) I contacted the supervisor  
41 sir but she informed me that until now we have not received any reply from the Company  
42 which is the [ Company ]  
43 C: [ sister ] **what Delivery Company? Give us their number and we**  
44 **will contact them)**

45 CT: *ma 'indii [ raqam ]*  
46 C: [ *ya 'ukhtii 'al'azizah* ] *mahuu 'khtiraa' Saruukh huu alHiin fii biDaa'ah*  
47 *ma'a miin 'ataabi' 'ashaan tiJii biDaa'tii? hinaa alziibdaah kalaam faaDii barbaarah*  
48 *faaDiyah law samaHtii (...) alma'raD qaaluu lii diq 'alaa khidmat al'umalaa 'adiq*  
49 *'alaykum tquuluu lii diq 'alaa alma'raD kalaam zibaalah faaDii ma 'abghaa 'asma' (...)*  
50 *'abghaa shay mufiid 'abghaa shakhiS atwaaSal ma'aah mudiiir mushrif shakhiS mas'uul*

51 (CT: I do not have [ a number ]  
52 C: [ my dear sister ] **it is not rocket science, now there is an order, with**  
53 **whom shall I follow up to deliver my order? This is the important thing, there is too much**  
54 **useless talk** please (...) the Store told me to call the Customer Service and when I call  
55 you, you said call the Store **rubbish talk which is useless I do not want to hear** (...) I  
56 need to talk to a useful person I need to contact a boss, a supervisor, a responsible person)

57 CT: *Tayyib ya 'ustadh 'anaa ma 'indii 'ay SalaaHiyyah 'a'Tiik raqam 'a'Tiik [ 'ay shay ]*  
58 C: [ *laa 'indiik* ]

59 //ma'laysh ma'laysh ma'laysh// //'indik 'indik 'indik// alkalaam haadhaa

60 (CT: ok sir. I do not have any authority to give you a number or to give you [ anything ]  
61 C: [ no you have ]

62 //sorry sorry sorry// but //you have you have you have// this thing)

63 CT: *'ustadhii 'anaa a'fadh minnak ma 'indii 'ay raqam 'afidak fiih (Sir I apologize.*  
64 **I do not have any number that I can give to you)**

65 C: *kayf ma 'indik 'ay raqam ?!* (how come you do not have any number?)

66 CT: *yaa 'ustadhii [ 'anaa ]*

67 C: [ *ma'a* ] *miin nitwaaSal ya bashar?! // ya bashar ya bashar// //ma'a*  
68 *miin nitwaaSal?! ma'a miin nitwaaSal?!//*

69 (CT: sir [ I ]  
70 C: [ whom ] can we contact you human?! //you human you human// //with whom  
71 can we contact?! with whom can we contact?!//)

72 CT: *'iHnaa niwaJJih Talabak lilqisim almukhtaS bas nintaZir minnhum arrad* (we will  
73 send your request to the concerned Department and we will wait for their response)

74 C: *wayn alqisim almukhtaS dhaa? warrinii 'iyyaah qulii 'ismah almukhtaS alqisim huu*  
75 *qisim kaadhaa wa makaanah almakaan alfulaanii hinaak 'anaa 'aruuH 'ataabiS Tayyib*  
76 *bas (...) Talama 'antum faashliin 'abghaa 'alqisim haadhaa alfaashil faynah? 'aysh*  
77 *'ismah?* (where is this concerned Department? Show it to me tell me its name is so  
78 and so and its location is so and so there I can go and follow up ok but (...) as long as  
79 you are useless, I want to speak to this useless Department where is it? What is its  
80 name?)

81 CT: *ma findanaa 'arqaam walaa 'ay raqam nifidak fiih* (we do not have numbers so  
82 there is no number we can give to you)

83 C: *layh?! titwaaSaluun maSa almalik salmaan!* (why?! Do you have contact with the  
84 King Salman!)

85 CT: *San Tariiq 'al'imayl* (through the email)

86 C: *'anaa 'atwaaSal maSa sharikah zibaalah 'abghaa alsharikah 'illii qaaSdah twaSSil*  
87 *wayn makaanahaa? ashshakhiS almas'uul San attawSiil fayn makanah?* (I am dealing  
88 with a rubbish company. I want to talk to the company which delivers. Where is it  
89 located? The person responsible for delivery where can I find him?)

90 CT: *thawaanii ya 'ustaadhii* (wait for a few seconds sir)

91 [C holding the line for a minute and 73 seconds]

92 CT: *Tayyib 'ukayh 'ustaadhii 'iHnaa 'al'aan SaSfadnaa almawDuuS wa HantaabiS*  
93 *maSaahum nshuuf 'aysh almushkilah* (Fine ok sir we have pass on your request now and  
94 we will follow up with them to find out what is the problem)

95 C: *shufii 'anaa sawwayt shakwaa fii wazarat attiJaarah wa findii waHid wa qasam*  
96 *billaah fii wazarat attiJaarah 'uqsim billaah law ma waSalnii hinaa 'uqsim billah lilfariS*  
97 *la 'aHriq abuuH* (see I submitted a complaint to the Ministry of Commerce and I know  
98 a person there. I swear to God in the Ministry of Commerce I swear to God if the  
99 order is not delivered to me here, I swear to God I will come to the Store and destroy  
100 it by burning it down)

101 [C cut off the line]

-End of Transcript-