

Evaluating Appropriateness of Speech Act of Criticizing by Indonesian EFL Learners: A Pragmatic Comprehension Study

Devi Pratama Putri¹, Agus Wijayanto², Endang Fauziati³

¹ Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia; devipratamap@student.uns.ac.id

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia; aw213@ums.ac.id

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia; endang.fauziati@ums.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Adequate pragmatic competence, or the ability to use language in a social context appropriately, is essential for successful communication, particularly across cultures and societies. Many previous studies in appropriateness focused on speech act production, pragmatic development, and rater evaluations, but only a few investigated pragmatic comprehension. Therefore, this current research attempts to investigate EFL learners' comprehension of the appropriateness of criticism speech acts and the foundation that EFL learners consider in evaluating appropriateness. This study involved 20 EFL learners as participants. The study used a questionnaire with DCTs and open-ended questions to elicit the data. The findings revealed that EFL learners could understand the appropriateness of criticism speech acts. They could indicate which utterances were associated with appropriateness or inappropriateness by considering various criteria such as politeness, power and social distance, linguistic forms, strategies, intentions, reasoning, and settings. This research has implications for English learning in that teachers should promote appropriateness as an important aspect of pragmatic competence to EFL learners so that they can use language appropriately to communicate in the target language.

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Corresponding Author:

Devi Pratama Putri

Universitas Sebelas Maret; devipratamap@student.uns.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the goal of learning a foreign language is to communicate effectively with people from different cultures, pragmatic competence is essential in language learning. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately to communicate and achieve the intended goals and the ability to construe the meaning of the language as intended by the interlocutors while taking into account the roles of participants and the social context in communication (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Fraser, 2010; Taguchi, 2009; Thomas, 1983). Learners with adequate pragmatic competence will be able to interpret language meaning from broader intercultural perspectives and be more sensitive to interlocutor's intended meaning embedded in intercultural interaction, allowing them to respond more effectively and comprehensively in an interaction. If a speaker uses language inappropriately, it can lead to pragmatic failures due to incorrect perception, judgment, or evaluation of the listener in

communication so that the speaker is considered uncooperative, ill-mannered, and humiliating (Bardovi-harling et al., 1991; Clennell, 1999; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Ogiermann, 2009). As a result, pragmatic competence is essential because it assists learners in avoiding pragmatic failures that lead to communication breakdown in intercultural communication.

Understanding appropriateness is part of the pragmatic competence required to perform appropriate speech act functions in a social context. Appropriateness consists of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. L2 students must understand both the linguistic forms and the sociocultural contexts that underpin appropriate speech acts in given situations (Taguchi, 2012). Appropriateness encompasses "locally constructed and dynamic evaluations of and orientations to what is being said and how it is being said from moment to moment within a given communicative interaction" (van Compernelle, 2014, p. 40). To successfully communicate in the target language, language users should produce and perceive appropriate actions by adhering to "speech act community ethnographic norms and communicative action strategies" (Fetzer, 2004, p.89). Otherwise, they will generate inappropriate actions and may cause a communication breakdown.

A considerable amount of research in the area of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has attempted to explore the aspect of appropriateness from various stages, mostly pragmatic production (e.g., al Masaeed et al., 2020; Jeon, 2017; Shleykina, 2019; Tabatabaei, 2019; Taguchi, 2011a; Yeboah, 2021), pragmatic development (e.g., Ren, 2019; Sell et al., 2019; Yang & Ke, 2021), and assessment of pragmatic production (e.g., Alemi & Khanlarzadeh, 2016; Sonnenburg-Winkler et al., 2020; Sydorenko et al., 2015; Taguchi, 2011b). Sonnenburg-Winkler et al. (2020) investigated variation in pragmatic assessment by raters with different linguistic backgrounds. The findings revealed there were different focuses of the raters when evaluating the appropriateness of speech acts. Some raters were more concerned with linguistic forms, such as the directness of expressions, whereas others based their scoring decision on non-linguistic factors, such as the type of reasoning used to make the request. In another study, Tabatabaei (2019) studied the effect of language proficiency on refusal speech act production. The findings revealed that language proficiency was not an influential factor in the degree of pragmatic knowledge, implying that high EFL learners did not perform significantly better in pragmatic production than their low counterparts. Despite the increase in research on appropriateness in L2 settings, only a few studies have delved into pragmatic comprehension. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap by focusing on comprehension of appropriateness from the perspective of EFL learners.

Speech acts have become popular aspects that dive into learners' pragmatic competence. Among many types of speech acts, criticizing in the context of L2 learning is still rarely explored. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), criticizing potentially threatens a listener's negative face because it affects their desire to be free from impositions or restrictions. Criticizing is an act of "finding faults" involving negative evaluation of the hearer's actions, choice, words, and products for which he or she may be held responsible (Nguyen, 2005; Tracy & Eisenbeberg, 2009). Criticisms might not only have evaluations or judgments of people's actions or behaviors but also provide feedback, recommendations, or suggestions that are beneficial to the listener or society in general rather than the interests of the speaker. Although criticism is one of the offensive acts and possibly to attack other faces, critics can be a way to improve people's acts or behavior if it can be delivered appropriately and with good intentions to minimize FTA.

For several reasons, first, the prior studies in appropriateness have focused on pragmatic production of speech acts, pragmatic development and raters' assessments. Second, studies on the speech act of criticizing are rare compared to other speech acts. Accordingly, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge by expanding understudied research strands. This study focuses on how EFL learners evaluate the appropriateness of criticism speech acts. This research attempts to provide an insight into how learners perceive and understand the appropriateness and inappropriateness of criticism speech acts, as well as what foundations they use to recognize appropriateness and inappropriateness of criticism speech acts.

2. METHODS

The study adopted a mixed method because it collected both quantitative and qualitative approaches data. According to Creswell (2014), mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two types of data, and employing distinct designs that may include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses while quantitative data usually includes closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments. The researchers conducted the study at a private university in Indonesia.

20 EFL learners from the Department of English Education participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old. The participants had studied English for approximately three years in middle school, three years at senior high school, and four up to six years at the university. All participants had never previously travelled or lived in English-speaking countries. They were purposely recruited since they had received linguistic-related courses such as semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics start from third year at the university. Therefore, they were expected to have basic knowledge of pragmatic competence.

The study elicited the data through questionnaire consisting of DCT and open-ended questions. The DCT had six criticism speech acts in different situations adapted from the prior research (see Maharani, 2019; Nguyen, 2013; Oktama & Ariatmi, 2019). The DCT included descriptions of the settings, the roles of the participants, and the degree of familiarity between the participants.

Table 1. Situations in the DCT

Situation		Scenario
Situation 1	-D/=P	Criticizing a roommate for leaving the room in a mess
Situation 2	-D/+P	Criticizing younger sister's bad behavior
Situation 3	-D/-P	Criticizing parent's smoking habit
Situation 4	+D/=P	Criticizing a team member for interrupting in a meeting
Situation 5	+D/+P	Criticizing students for presenting incorrect topic
Situation 6	+D/-P	Criticizing a stranger for smoking in a public space

Descriptions: Equal/Equal (=); Distant/Higher (+); Close/Lower (-)

Social Distance/Familiarity (D); Social Status/Power (P)

It also provided 4 points rating scale judgment. Appropriateness rating scale was adapted from the previous research (see Hudson et al., 1995; Taguchi 2011b). The rating was adjusted based on the needs of the research. It used a 4-point scale rather than a 5-point scale to avoid neutral or undecided choices.

Table 2. Rating scale

Rating	Description
4. Very Appropriate	In terms of directness, politeness, and formality, it is nearly perfect. Sentences are well-structured.
3. Appropriate	Not perfect, but adequate in terms of directness, politeness, and formality. Expressions are slightly off target-like, but still quite good and acceptable.
2. Less Appropriate	In terms of directness, politeness, and formality, it is somewhat inappropriate. Expression used are more direct or indirect than the situation required.
1. Completely Inappropriate	Expressions sound impolite, rude, or demanding.

The questionnaire was computerized and administered to the participants by utilizing Google Forms. The participants were required to give an evaluation of provided DCT based on their perception. The participants evaluate each criticism speech act by clicking the number on the rating

scale. After that, the participants answered some questions regarding their evaluations of the appropriateness of each criticism speech act.

In relation to the first research question, how do learners perceive and understand appropriateness of criticism speech acts? The results of EFL learners' evaluations were categorized based on each level of appropriateness. Then, the data were displayed in figure to show the frequency of responses from the participants. Figure can visualize how the participants perceive the appropriateness of each criticism in the DCT. For the second research question, what foundations do they use to recognize appropriateness of criticism speech acts? The study used descriptive qualitative based on the framework by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), namely: data condensation, data display, drawing and verifying conclusion.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, first, the researchers focus on identifying how EFL learners perceive, understand, and give evaluation of appropriateness level on each criticism in the DCT. Based on EFL learners' evaluations: 5 criticisms received positive evaluations: criticism in Situation 1 was mostly rated appropriate, and criticisms in Situations 2, 3, 4, and 5 were mostly rated very appropriate. In the meantime, 1 criticism received a negative evaluation: criticism in Situation was mostly rated completely inappropriate. Second, the researchers look into the foundations that EFL learners used to assess the appropriateness level of each criticism in the DCT. The result indicated politeness, power and social distance, linguistic forms, strategy, intention, setting, and reasoning.

3.1 EFL Learners' Comprehension of Appropriateness in Criticism Speech Act

Situation 1

Anna has lived in a dorm with a roommate for years. They have been friends since high school. She finds that her friend likes to leave dirty clothes on the chair. It makes the room smelly and dirty. Then, as a roommate, Anna criticizes her friend's behavior.

Anna: "Hey! Keep your clothes in the right place! Our room looks so messy."

According to the situation described above, the interaction between speakers appeared in an informal setting. The interaction took place in a dormitory rather than a public space, no other audience members heard what Anna said to her roommate. Anna and her roommate were close because they had lived together for years and had known each other for a long time. Neither of them had more power over the other.

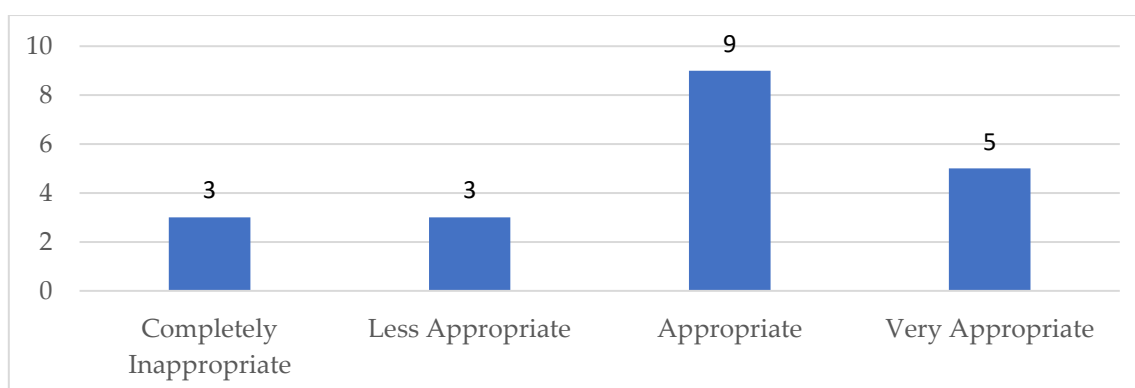


Figure 1. EFL learners' evaluation of appropriateness in Situation 1

EFL learners ($n=20$) assessed the appropriateness of the criticism in Situation 1 differently. Most of EFL learners gave positive evaluation: 9 learners evaluated it as *appropriate* and 5 learners evaluated it as *very appropriate*. They believed that because the participants in Situation 1 had a close relationship, direct criticism was acceptable and did not hurt the listener's feelings. The rest of the EFL students, on the other hand, gave negative evaluation: 3 learners evaluated the criticism as *less appropriate* and 3 learners evaluated it as *completely inappropriate*. They assumed that, despite the participants' close relationship, the direct criticism in Situation 1 was unacceptable because it lacked the politeness marker *please* and it sounded impolite.

Situation 2

Farah is in her sixth semester. She has a cousin who is a second semester student at the same university. Her cousin likes telling her everything, but Farah dislikes it when she mentions someone's flaws or shortcomings. Farah believes that what she does should be changed. Farah criticizes her cousin's behavior in the hopes that she will not repeat it.

Farah: "I'll be frank with you. When you speak negatively about other people, it makes me uncomfortable. Nobody is perfect, including you and me. We should better examine ourselves before passing judgment on others."

According to situation 2 above, Farah's criticism was not uttered in public, so no other audience heard the conversation between Farah and her cousin. Farah and her cousin had a close relationship because they were related. Moreover, Farah was older than her cousin based on their ages.

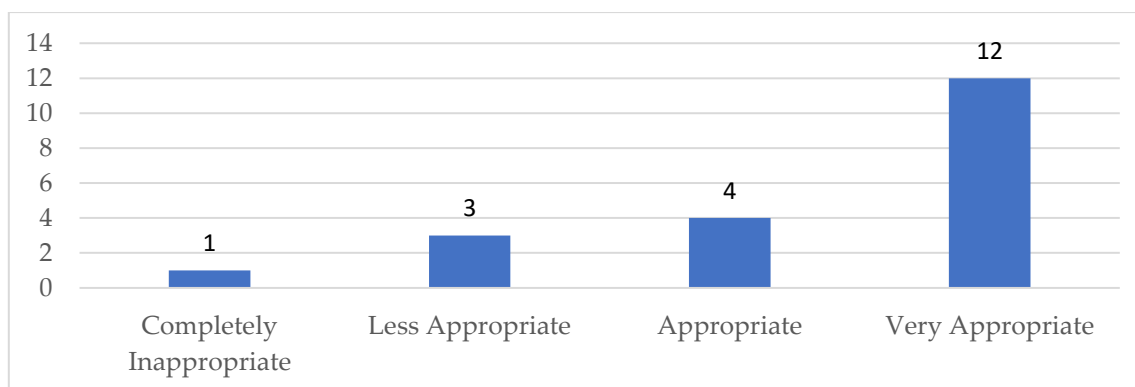


Figure 2. EFL learners' evaluation of appropriateness in Situation 2

EFL learners ($n=20$) rated the appropriateness of the criticism in Situation 2 differently. The majority of learners gave it positive ratings: 4 learners evaluated it as *appropriate* and 12 learners evaluated it as *very appropriate*. They thought the close relationship between the participants and the strategy used by giving reasons behind the act of criticizing made the criticism in Situation 2 acceptable and did not attack the listener's face. On the other hand, there were EFL learners who gave negative evaluation: 3 learners evaluated the criticism as *less appropriate* and 1 learner evaluated it as *completely inappropriate*. They believed that the more verbose words and the strategy were not suitable, so the criticism sounded patronizing.

Situation 3

Danny's father is a heavy smoker. One day, he finds out that his father is constantly coughing. Worried about his father's condition, Danny decides to criticize his behavior.

Danny: "My friend's father was a heavy smoker, but he's getting healthier because he stops it."

According to the circumstances described above, Danny's criticism was not delivered in a public place. Both the speaker and the listener shared a father-son relationship. However, because the speaker was younger than the listener, he wielded less power.

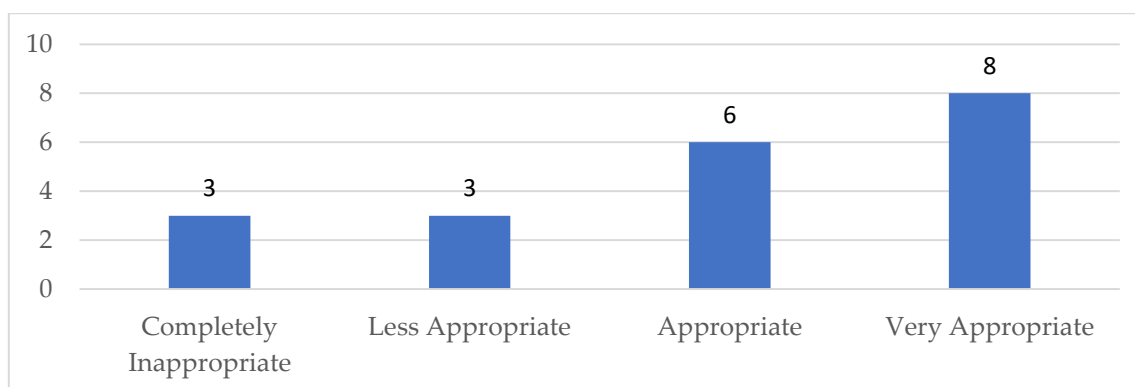


Figure 3. EFL learners' evaluation of appropriateness in Situation 3

The criticism in Situation 3 was rated differently by EFL students (n=20). EFL learners mostly gave positive evaluations: 6 learners evaluated it as *appropriate*; and 8 learners evaluated it as *very appropriate*. They assumed the use of indirect strategy such as giving hints made the criticism acceptable and did not trigger FTA. Furthermore, they believed that the criticism had good intention. Contrarily, 3 learners evaluated the criticism as *less appropriate* and 3 learners evaluated it as *completely inappropriate*. They assumed that Danny had to use more polite expression because he talked to his father. It would be better if he changed the utterance into "I think you would be healthier if you try to stop smoking."

Situation 4

Ryan is a new member of the student organization in the English Department. He is selected to join a committee with organizational members from other departments to manage a faculty's annual event. He attends the first meeting to discuss the faculty's annual event with other department representatives. He barely knows the members of the other departments because the majority of them are new. During the meeting, he becomes irritated with one of the representatives who frequently interrupts others' speech. Ryan decides to criticize his actions because he keeps interrupting.

Ryan: "Excuse me, you have your own turn, but you keep interrupting someone who is conveying his opinion. Please be patient and polite. Thank you."

Based on the situation described above, the interaction occurred in a formal setting because it occurred during a meeting, and other attendees heard Ryan and his friend's interaction. It explained that the speaker and the hearer had a distant relationship. Furthermore, because both the speaker and the hearer were new members of an organization, the speaker did not have more power than the hearer.

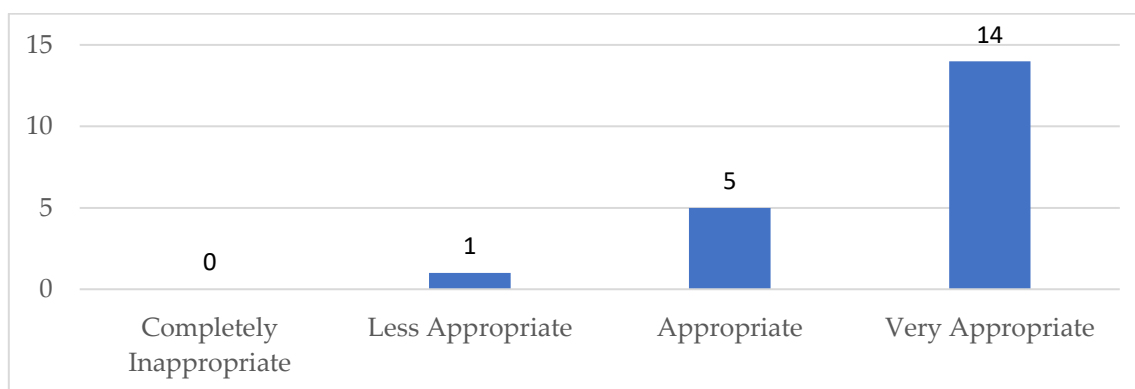


Figure 4. EFL learners' evaluation of appropriateness in Situation 4

EFL learners ($n=20$) evaluated the appropriateness of criticism in Situation 4 differently. Most learners positively evaluated the criticism as *appropriate* (5 learners) and *very appropriate* (14 learners). They argued that Ryan's act was necessary because the listener did not show respect to others by interrupting other members' speeches. Moreover, the criticism was polite because it did not contain offensive words but use "excuse me" and "thank you." Meanwhile, there was another learners who rated the criticism as *less appropriate*.

Situation 5

James is a senior lecturer at a university. He had asked his students to prepare a group presentation to be presented in front of the class on a specific topic given in the previous meeting. Unfortunately, the group in charge of today's presentation delivered material that was not following the supposed topic. After the presentation ended, James gave feedback and criticized their presentation.

James: "Pardon me, Sir. I think I've just checked that nothing relates to our topic today, Sir. It may you've made a wrong explanation today. Would you please check the book then, Sir?"

Based on the event described above, the interaction between James and his students was formal because it took place in a classroom. James and his students did not have a close relationship. As a senior lecturer, James wielded more authority than his students.

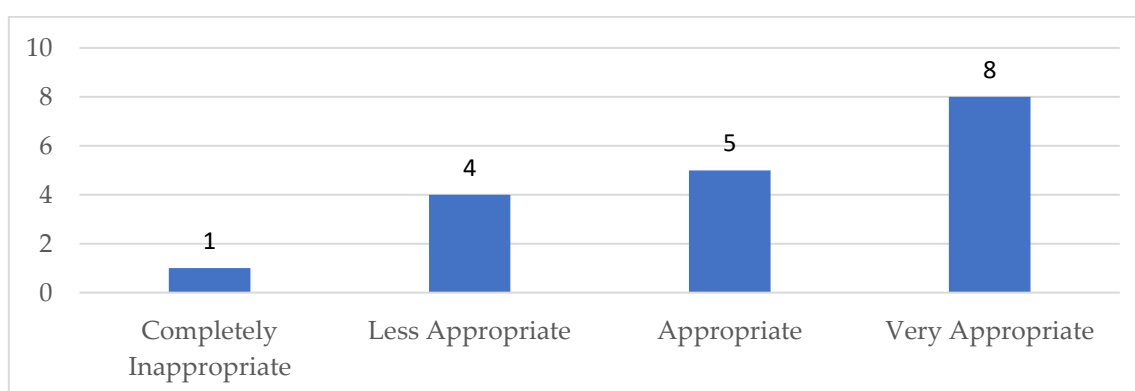


Figure 5. EFL learners' evaluation of appropriateness in Situation 5

EFL learners ($n=20$) evaluated the appropriateness of criticism in Situation 5 differently. The majority of learners provided positive evaluations: 5 learners evaluated it as *appropriate* and 8 learners

evaluated it as *very appropriate*. They found polite word choice and well-structured criticism in Situation 5. Whereas, the rest learners provided negative evaluations: 4 learners evaluated the criticism as *less appropriate* and 1 learner evaluated it as *completely inappropriate*. They opined that the utterances were too polite for a lecturer because James was higher in status than his students.

Situation 6

Jenny will return to her hometown after finishing her college exams. She is sitting in the station waiting area, waiting for the train. There is an older man also waiting for the train while smoking there. She notices that there is a smoking ban in that area. She approaches the older man and criticizes his behavior.

Jenny: "Don't you know that smoking is forbidden in this area?"

Based on the circumstances described above, the interaction between participants took place in a public space, the train station. Other passengers may have heard what Jenny said to the old man. Jenny and the old man had a distant relationship because they met at the station by chance. Jenny was also younger than the man.

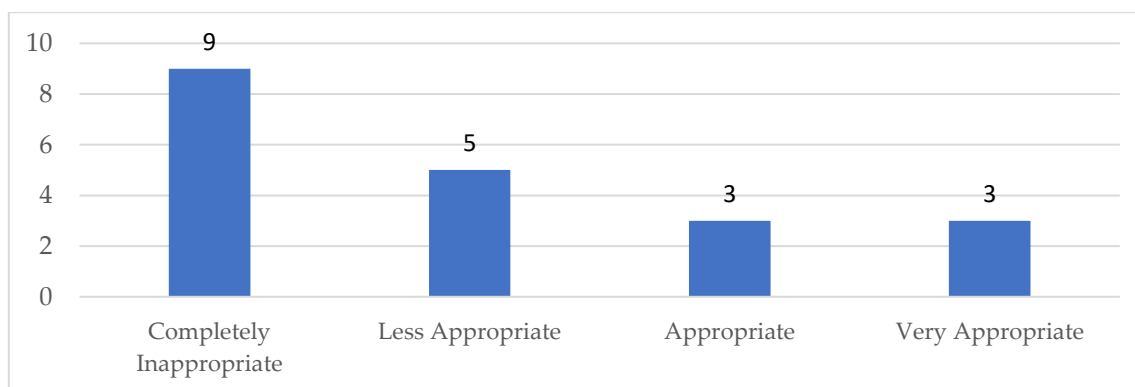


Figure 6. EFL learners' evaluation of appropriateness in Situation 6

EFL learners (n=20) evaluated the criticism in Situation 6 differently. Most learners gave negative evaluations: 5 learners evaluated the criticism as *less appropriate* and 9 learners evaluated it as *completely inappropriate*. Since the criticism was uttered to an elder, they opined Jenny's criticism was rude and impolite because it lacked "excuse me" or "sorry" and did not well-constructed. In contrast, the remaining learners gave positive evaluations: 3 learners evaluated the criticism as *appropriate*; and 3 learners evaluated it as *very appropriate*. They only concerned the reason for criticizing that smoking was prohibited in that place.

3.2 EFL Learners' Foundations in Evaluating Appropriateness of Criticism Speech Act

This study discovered some aspects of consideration in evaluating the appropriateness of the criticism speech acts from the EFL learners' perspectives. The EFL learners considered seven aspects in evaluating the level of appropriateness. Those aspects were politeness, power and social distance, linguistic forms, strategy, intention, setting, and reasoning.

Table 3. Foundation in evaluating appropriateness of criticisms

Situation	Foundations						
	P	PSD	STG	LF	I	SET	R
Situation 1	5	10	3	7	2	-	5
Situation 2	7	4	9	4	2	-	5
Situation 3	12	3	9	-	6	-	1
Situation 4	11	4	1	6	1	-	7
Situation 5	12	3	2	6	-	1	2
Situation 6	13	10	3	7	-	2	1
Total	60	34	27	30	11	3	21

Description: Politeness (P); Power and social distance (PSD); Strategy (STG); Linguistic forms (LF); Intention (I); Setting (SET); Reasoning (R)

3.2.1 Politeness

Politeness is one aspect that EFL learners most often consider to evaluate the appropriateness of criticism speech acts. This is in line with the prior studies (e.g., Perdana et al., 2017; Wijayanto, 2019) that have discovered that EFL learners pay attention to offensive words used in utterances to indicate (im)politeness. The EFL learners evaluated appropriateness by indicating whether the speakers used good or offensive words in their criticisms. They believed that criticisms could be appropriate if they used appropriate good language or refined word choices delivered appropriately that made the utterances sound friendly and polite. Thus, it would not offend or attack the hearer's face and could minimize potential conflicts between them. From the speaker's point of view, "a polite utterance is a speaker's intended, marked, and appropriate behavior which displays face concern", meanwhile, from the hearer's point of view, "addressees will interpret an utterance as polite when it is perceived as appropriate and marked" (Locher, 2006). In other words, producing polite speech acts corresponds to appropriateness; conversely, producing impolite speech acts corresponds to inappropriateness.

The criticisms in Situations 3 and 4, for examples, are associated with appropriateness because EFL learners noticed the criticisms did not use harsh words that made the criticisms sound arrogant, impolite, or unfriendly. Therefore, those criticisms would not hurt or offend the hearer's feelings.

(1) S3/L18

"I think what Danny's said is very appropriate [...] Moreover, *the speech that he used to criticize his father is not that harsh.*"

(2) S4/L2

"[...] *The sentences used also didn't make it look arrogant and very polite.*"

Contrarily, the criticism in Situation 6 did not associate with appropriateness because the speaker did not try to minimize the offense in the criticism, so it sounded impolite and potentially caused FTA to the hearer.

(3) S6/L19

"*It is not polite [...]* Jenny could use another way to deliver her critique so that it will sound polite."

3.2.2 Power and Social Distance

EFL learners considered power and social distance between participants in evaluating appropriateness of the criticism speech acts. This study discovered that Indonesian EFL learners could determine whether the criticisms were appropriate in various situations by considering the social context, such as the relationship and the role of each interlocutor. A close relationship between interlocutors or owning equal or higher status enables a speaker to speak the informal language and

minimize modifications. Otherwise, a distant relationship between interlocutors or owning lower status makes a speaker produce more formal and polite utterances, which need modifications. Therefore, the offense in criticism was not perceived as severe when committed against lower and equal social power interlocutors and when the relationship was close or familiar. This finding supports the study by Al-Khaza'leh & Zainal Ariff (2015) and Allami & Boustani (2017) which found that non-native speakers of English were aware of the hierarchy of social variables such as relational power and social distance in daily interaction.

For examples, the criticism in Situations 1 and 4 corresponded with appropriateness. The criticism in Situation 1 was acceptable because of the closeness between the speaker and the hearer. Meanwhile, the criticism in Situation 4 was also acceptable because the speaker was equally at the same status as the hearer.

(4) S1/L14

"Appropriate. *They had lived together for many years and had been friends since high school. [...] because they are close friends.*"

(5) S4/L8

"It's very appropriate [...] After all, *they were both new members. Ryan didn't criticize the more senior members.*"

In contrast, the criticism in Situation 6 does not correspond with appropriateness because the interlocutor was a stranger, which indicated a distant relationship between the participants. Moreover, he was older than the speaker, so she needed to utter more polite criticism.

(6) S6/L12

"Jenny's expression is less appropriate because *she doesn't care about whom she speaks to, an old man. [...] use the right expression to honor the man who is older than her [...].*"

3.2.3 Linguistic Forms

EFL learners determined appropriateness of the criticisms by identifying linguistic forms of the criticism speech acts. Criticism as one speech act with potential FTA can make the hearer feel offended and uncomfortable because of the negative evaluation they get and imposition to change behavior. Aside from being friendly, the EFL learners agreed that mitigating strategies for softening the force of criticism and minimizing the face-threatening act made the utterances appropriate. Learners took into consideration the use of internal and external modification in criticizing, such as using a polite formulaic expression such as "*excuse me,*" "*please,*" or "*thank you.*" These present findings support the previous studies (e.g., Sonnenburg-Winkler et al., 2020; Taguchi, 2011b) that found linguistics forms such as the level of directness and the use of politeness markers in the utterances could indicate a level of appropriateness of an utterance.

EFL learners assumed that constructing criticism using "*pardon me, Sir*" and "*please*" in Situation 5 made it sound polite. It supports the idea that using respectful forms of address systems "*Sir*" or "*Madam,*" or formulaic utterances, "*please,*" "*excuse me,*" "*sorry,*" and "*thank you*" in English utterances indicate the polite language (Fauziati, 2016). In asymmetric and distance relationships, the modal in the past tense was used to show politeness and indicates a high level of formality (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018).

(7) QS5/L9

"[...] *he didn't need to use too polite sentences like "pardon me, sir."* It was not needed. He could directly state the wrong points, "*would*" was usually used by a younger person to an older one so it's better to use "*will*" or imperative."

In Situation 6, the EFL learners regarded an interrogative with a negative form, such as *"don't you,"* as unacceptable to be uttered to higher H. It was better to change the sentence into an indirect request with a modality such as *"could you"* to show respect and make the critics more polite. Moreover, they believed that the modality in the past form, such as *"could"* and *"would,"* was more appropriate than the modality *"can"* and *"will."*

(8) QS6/L9

"[...] The sentences could be more polite with "excuse me" or "sorry" and use "could you stop smoking?"

3.2.4 Strategy

Fourth, criticism speech act is considered an impolite and face-threatening act that needs more attention to choose appropriate ways to deliver the critics to others, so it does not lead to any conflict among interlocutors. Therefore, the next aspect of EFL learners' consideration in evaluating the appropriateness of the criticism speech acts was the strategies used by the speakers in conveying the critics. These findings support the prior study by Sydorenko et al. (2015), which found that the raters weighed their evaluation on some aspects, one of which was the use of appropriate strategies and expressions in certain contexts.

The EFL learners mostly paid attention to the strategies used in the criticism, especially in Situations 2 and 3. The criticism in Situation 3 was often rated appropriate or very appropriate because it used the strategy of giving hints. Following Nguyen (2005), giving hints is an indirect strategy for criticizing. Giving hints can be used to hide the critics and give awareness to the interlocutors of their wrongdoing. Previous studies about criticism (e.g., Hosseinizadeh & Rassaei Moqadam, 2019; Nguyen, 2008) revealed that NNSs of English tended to use indirect strategies to criticize others. Even so, direct strategies can be used to deliver criticism, which is acceptable if the participants have a close relationship.

(9) S3/L4

"Appropriate. The sentence that is spoken certainly contains the meaning of the language that commands you to stop smoking in order to be healthy, without saying it directly."

Meanwhile, the EFL learners perceived the criticism in Situation 2 as very appropriate, although it used a direct strategy, especially stating others' wrongdoings. Besides, the speaker reinforced her criticism with reasoning.

(10) S2/L20

"Farah explained what she didn't like and why, [...]. So it's nice to hear."

3.2.5 Intention

Sixth, the speakers' intention in employing critics was considered by the EFL learners as influential aspect in evaluating appropriateness. They assumed that the criticism was appropriate as long as the speakers did not have ill intentions toward the listeners. For example, the criticisms in Situations 2 and 3 corresponded with appropriateness because the speakers did not mean ill in criticizing the listeners' behavior. EFL learners found it acceptable to criticize others with intentions to show concern, love, and hope for the listener's betterment.

(11) S2/L6

"Farah shows concern for her cousin and she criticizes her in a kind way."

(12) S3/L15

"[...] *Danny critiques his dad because he loves and worries about him.*"

3.2.6 Setting

The last, the EFL learners considered the setting where the criticism took place in evaluating appropriateness. The criticism in Situation 6, for example, does not correspond with appropriateness because the speaker criticizes one's action in a public space. Employing criticisms in a public space was possibly heard by other people and increased embarrassment or offense to the listener, so the speaker must select the words carefully.

(13)S6/L9

"[...] *And they were in a public place where there might be a lot of people. [...]*"

3.2.7 Reasoning

Fifth, the next aspect considered by EFL learners to evaluate appropriateness was the underlying reasons to criticize others' actions. Some EFL learners did not consider the linguistic features and social context in evaluating the appropriateness of the criticism speech acts. However, they focus on the reasons underlying the speech act of criticizing: whether they had reasonable motives to criticize others' actions.

The criticism in Situation 1, which criticized the listener for not keeping things clean and tidy, was mostly rated appropriate and very appropriate. Learners assumed it was reasonable to criticize because they had to keep the room clean.

(14)S1//L4

"*Anna's actions are very appropriate to criticize or suggest to friends it is dirty and the room is your house they must keep it clean too.*"

The criticism in Situation 4 was also rated as appropriate and very appropriate because the listener kept interrupting others' speaking so that someone should reprimand him for respecting others.

(15)S4/L12

"*I think it is appropriate because he keeps interrupting a meeting without giving a chance for others is such a selfish action.*"

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the overall evaluations of appropriateness in criticism by the EFL learners, they could mostly comprehend appropriateness in criticism speech acts. They could differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate criticism. They managed to comprehend appropriateness and inappropriateness in the criticisms in five out of six situations. In an unfamiliar situation with higher H (situation 5), many EFL learners failed to comprehend the appropriateness of the criticism. They ignored the power and social distance between participants but focused on the word choices that they considered polite and did not offend the hearer. They failed to notice the formulaic expression "pardon me," addresser "sir," and modality "would," which were generally used by lower S to higher H. The EFL learners underlined seven aspects as their foundations to evaluate appropriateness in criticism speech acts. Those aspects were politeness, power and social distance, linguistic forms, strategy, intention, reasoning, and setting. Politeness was the most mentioned aspect they considered in evaluating appropriateness, followed by power and social distance, and the setting was the least considered by EFL learners. Every EFL learner also had different foundations in evaluating appropriateness in each situation.

This study suggests that EFL learners should improve their pragmatic skill since understanding target language appropriateness is crucial to communication. Students must be aware of social signs like who and where they interact. Then, they can determine how to interact with them and use their linguistic understanding to generate acceptable statements. Thus, pragmatic competency should be part of the English language curriculum. Teachers should provide pragmatic information to help students communicate in the target language. Genuine spoken discourse may help students develop pragmatic awareness. It will teach learners how native speakers of the target language communicate, including communication styles, word choices, phrases, and gestures that may differ from their L1. This study examines learners' perceptions of criticism speech acts' appropriateness and its underpinnings. To better understand how length of study, language exposure, and language ability affect learners' comprehension of appropriateness, future research could include more participants and compare learners' understanding.

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