AN ANALYSIS OF PRAGMATIC TRANSFER
IN THE
SPEECH ACT OF COMPLAINTS
AS PRODUCED BY
NATIVE SPEAKERS OF GERMAN IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to investigate socio-cultural transfer from German into English within one particular type of speech act, that of complaints. This research investigated how Germans complained in German, their native language, and in English, their second language. The German and English data were compared to data produced by Americans in identical situations in an effort to learn more about what structures and speech strategies tend to be transferred from German into English.

Data were collected from 100 subjects, 50 native speakers of German and 50 native speakers of American English. The German subjects provided two types of data: responses in English and responses in German. The data collection instrument was an open-ended written discourse completion questionnaire designed to elicit complaints from subjects without actually instructing subjects to do so. The subjects responded to five situations in written form. The situations were identical in both the German and the English version of the discourse completion
questionnaire.

Three specific areas in which socio-cultural transfer occurred were considered: 1) the types of semantic response categories used by the subjects; 2) the degrees of directness of the utterances; 3) the types and frequency of directness markers.

The results of this research indicate that the German subjects tended to be more direct in English than is expected or considered appropriate by native speakers of English. This appears to be partially due to pragmatic transfer—the German speakers adhered more closely to German norms of communicative behavior than English ones even as they responded in English.