THE REALIZATION OF DISAGREEMENT STRATEGIES BY NON NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This study is meant to investigate the realization of disagreement strategies by non-native speakers of English by eliciting data through DCT and role plays from two groups of students: first year students and third year students of English Department. The DCTs and role plays contain 24 situations which are designed in different issues and social status. The result showed that most students realized disagreement through contradiction, counterclaim, irrelevancy claim, contradiction and counterclaim, and challenges related to personal involvement and non-personal involvement issues in different social status. The contradiction strategy was dominantly used by the students. Some students realized disagreement through the combination of counterclaim and challenge strategy in equal and high-low status related to personal involvement, and equal and low-high status related to non-personal involvement. In this case, students did not only disagree by producing counterclaim response but also challenged the previous speaker to provide more evidence related to his/her statement. The findings also showed that there is no pragmatic development from first year students to third year students because they produced disagreement strategy in the same way although they had different English proficiency level.

Key Words: pragmatics, disagreement strategies, non-native speakers.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence concerns with the relationship between utterances and the functions that speakers intend to perform through those utterances and the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the appropriateness of utterances. Two levels of abilities required for acquisition of pragmatic competence are proposed: sociocultural ability and sociolinguistic ability. Sociocultural ability is used to determine which speech act is appropriate given the culture involves the situation, the speaker's background variables and relationship. Sociolinguistic ability constitutes the speakers' control over the actual language forms used to realize the speech acts (Cohen, 1996).

The ability to produce and to understand speech act in a given situation is one of the important aspect of pragmatic competence. Austin (1962) defines speech acts as the action performed in saying something and its functional unit in

communication has propositional or locutionary meaning (the literal meaning of the utterance), illocutionary meaning (the social function of the utterance), and perlocutionary force (the effect produced by the utterance in a given context). Therefore, speech act theory tries to explain how speakers use language to meet intended actions and how hearers infer intended meaning from what has been said. Disagreement is one of the examples of speech act which is often used to express different opinion from his/her interlocutors, for example, "No, I don't like this one". From this example, it is known that the speaker disagrees with the interlocutor's opinion. In this case, the speaker can not accept an issue without a strong reason because the speaker has different opinions and perceptions toward the issues. Therefore, expressing disagreement sometime can trigger chaos between communicants.

Concerning the way disagreement is expressed, there are some factors that have to be taken into account. Although, we live in the same community, it is almost impossible that we have the same opinion and perception toward certain issues. We live in the surrounding where people often have different ideas, opinion, perception and point of view with us. Moreover, different culture in intercultural communication is inherently problematic because as individual speaker from different cultural communities bring different values assumptions, expectation, verbal and non-verbal habit in communication. Those cultural values and communication styles underpin the causes of difficulties in the communicative interaction. Therefore, disagreement appears as such a big problem in our daily lives and becomes more complicated in intercultural interaction.

This study deals with the disagreement strategies realized by Indonesian learners of English, and investigates factors that influence the choice of disagreement strategies made by Indonesian learners of English at different proficiency levels.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In general, utterances of disagreement are perceived as undesired or dispreferred reactions and likely cause discomfort feelings. It commonly emerges since a speaker has different opinion and assumption from his or her interlocutors. It can be identified from its verbal structure which shows a different stance from the preceding talk. In friendly conversations, which account for a large amount of conversational encounters, speakers usually show reluctance and hesitance to express disagreement and assume that disagreeable acts will not be issued without good reasoning (Jacobs and Jackson, 1981:122).

Disagreement is defined as a speech activity in which the interlocutors try to keep their own positions by opposing each other. More broadly, he defines conflict talk as a process of opposition which includes

not only the manifestation of opposition but also the whole process of inducement, initiation, development, and management of opposition (Honda (2002:574). Disagreement is culturally determined and may vary according to the situation within a culture, for instance in the Western context it is structurally and socially a disprefered action (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983). Sacks (1973) introduces the concept of disagreement as a dispreferred action which is based on the notion of preference. He points out that preference for agreement should be conceived as part of the structural organization of the talk, as a formal apparatus, instead of a matter of individual preferences (Sacks, 1973: 65). Moreover, he also claims that disagreement is governed by communal attitudes and not individual choices. As a matter of fact, Sacks maintains that when a question requires an agreement, the agreement response will occur contiguously, whereas a disagreement will be pushed rather deep into the turn that it occupies (Sacks, 1973: 58).

In addition, disagreement by its nature is a face threatening act which threatens the solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. The term "face" defined by Brown and Levinson as an individual self-esteem and further distinguish into two kinds of face; positive face, the desire to be approved of, and negative face, the desire to be unimpeded in one action. The notion of face entails both the need for solidarity with others positive face and the need for the approval of others negative face. Therefore, disagreement is considered as a face threatening act which threatens the hearer's positive face (Brown and Levinson, 1987:71). Disagreement is also a highly face threatening act which can result in negative social relations (and Grimshaw, 1990).

There are various types of disagreement which may be used by many people when they want to realize disagreement. Muntigl and Turnbull (1998:229-231) identify four types of disagreements, namely irrelevancy claims (IC), challenges (CH), contradictions (CT) and counterclaims (CC). Irrelevancy claims are meta-dispute-acts that comment on the conversational interactions. They show that a previous claim is not relevant to the discussion of the topic at hand. These are marked by words and expressions, like *It doesn't matter*; *You're straying off the topic*, and *It is nothing to do with it*.

Challenges, as the second types, are preceded by reluctance markers that display disagreement with prior turn and typically have the syntactic form of interrogative with question particles such as *when, what, who, why, where* and *how*. This type does not make a specific claim (e.g. *why* or like *who*); it implicates that the addressee cannot provide evidence for his claim (Muntigl and Turnbull, 1998: 230).

In the third type, a speaker contradicts with uttering the negated proposition expressed by the previous claim. Contradictions are often marked by

negative particles like "no" or "not" i.e. (*No, I don't*), indicating that the contradiction of the prior claim is true.

The last, counterclaims tend to be preceded by pauses, prefaces, and mitigating devices. With contradictions, speakers propose an alternative claim that does not directly contradict or challenge others' claim. They allow further negotiation of the previous claim. Finally, Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) suggest that the four types could be observed in disputes where disagreement types can be combined together mainly contradictions followed by counterclaims.

Studies about disagreement were done in various contexts of culture and situations. Miao (2006) found that the data on linguistic showed the Chinese speakers avoided disagreement more often while the English speakers frequently used direct disagreement characterized by various and original positive remarks such as softening devices. It was also found that the individualistic culture's emphasis on 'I' consciousness might have promoted the English speakers' bald verbal expressions while the collectivistic culture's priority of 'we' concept and face concern have explained the Chinese speakers' harmony orientation in disagreement.

In another study, Liang and Han (2005) used Discourse Completion Task to elicit the data about disagreement strategies for politeness between American English and Mandarin Chinese when they disagree with higher-status, peers, and the lower-status. They found that Chinese students employ more politeness strategies and address form than American students when they disagree with superior. In the case of peers, both American and Chinese students apply less and less politeness strategies. There is positive correlation between the rates of disagreement and the change of the social distance for the Chinese students while negative correlation for the American students. Moreover, they also found that female students behaved more sensitive to politeness and used more politeness strategies than male students did.

In addition, Moyer (2000), who examined the role of the Spanish discourse particle '*no*' for negotiating agreement and disagreement in Spanish-English bilingual conversations from Gibraltar, found that '*no*' can function as a yes-no request where a speaker seeks information from the hearer or as a device a speaker uses to check information or obtain acquiescence. The connection between the discourse functions of 'no', language choice, and the meanings communicated at a metalingual level of the conversation shed light on the complex strategies available to speakers for expressing agreement and disagreement in bilingual talk.

RESEARCH METHODS
The subjects consisted of 60 college students from English Department, distributed evenly between first year

students and third year students. For each group, 15 subjects were male and 15 subjects were female. First year students were regarded to represent low proficiency level of English and third year students represent the high proficiency level of English. The subjects belong to the category age of 20 to 30.

The data were collected by using discourse completion tests (DCT) and role plays. The discourse completion tests (DCT) were used to elicit the speakers' responses to produce disagreement strategies in different situation, and consisted of 24 questions, which include a variety of situations of social interaction such as lecturer – student, parent – child, manager – clerk, friend – friend, and husband – wife conversations. Social status and personal or non-personal involvement are singled out as the moderator variables. Social status refers to social distance. It means the difference in social status between the two interlocutors; equal and unequal status covered high-low and low-high status. Personal involvement is related to the opinions concerning a particular person rather than a group or an organization and non-personal involvement is vice versa.

The role plays consist of simulations of communicative encounters based on role descriptions in which participants take on and act out specified roles often within a predefined social framework or situational blueprint (Kasper & Rose, 2002: 86). The subjects were asked to act out some situations described on the card. For each role play, the subject was given time to read the role play cards and clarify any doubts related to vocabulary or the situation itself. The role plays were audio taped.

The data were analyzed according to the definition and description of the responses to opinions and types of disagreement strategies based on Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998) taxonomy: irrelevancy claims (IC), challenges (CH), contradictions (CT) and counterclaims (CC). Further analysis was conducted to account for the realization of the disagreement strategies by first year students and third year students in terms of interlanguage pragmatics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
General findings
The findings of the disagreement strategies realized by the students are presented in Figures 1 to 4. As mentioned in the previous section, the strategy taxonomy including irrelevancy claims (IC), challenges (CH), contradictions (CT) and counterclaims (CC) from Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) is used.

Figure 1
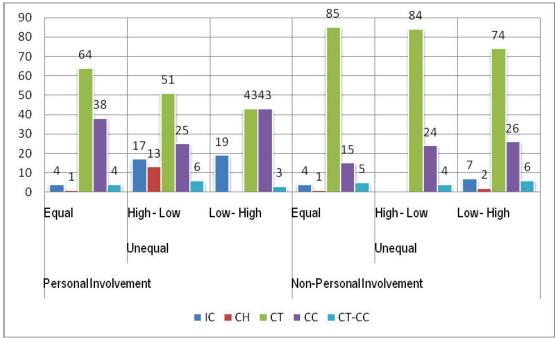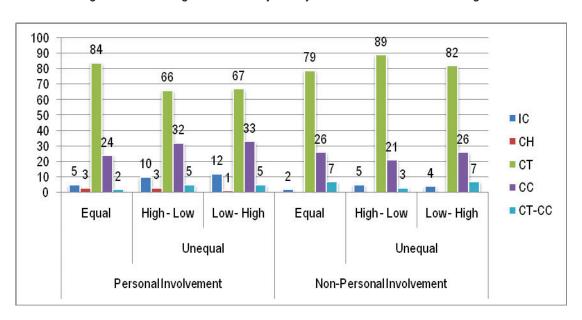Disagreement strategies realized by first year students collected through DCT

Figure 2
Disagreement strategies realized by third year students collected through DCT

Note: IC: Irrelevancy claim, CH: Challenging, CT: Contradiction, CC: Counterclaim, CT-CC: Contradiction and counterclaim
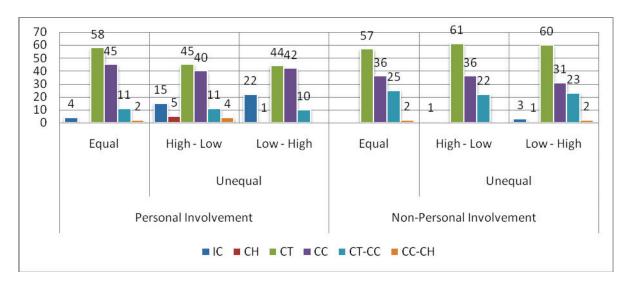
The findings from DCT show that both first year and third year students realized the disagreement by using contradiction (CT) throughout all situations collected through discourse completion tests. With respect to the disagreement related with personal involvement, the first year students produced more contradiction to express their disagreement as compared to the one produced by the third students. However, with respect with the non personal involvement, the third year students produced more contradiction to express their disagreement as compared to the one produced by the first year students. Counterclaim (CC) is ranked second in the realization of disagreement strategy both by the first year and third year students. Other strategies, irrelevancy claim (IC), challenging (CH), contradiction and counterclaim (CT-CC) are not dominantly used by the students.

Similar results are also found with the data from role plays, as presented in the following Figure 3 to 4.

Figure 3

Disagreement strategies realized by first year students collected through role plays
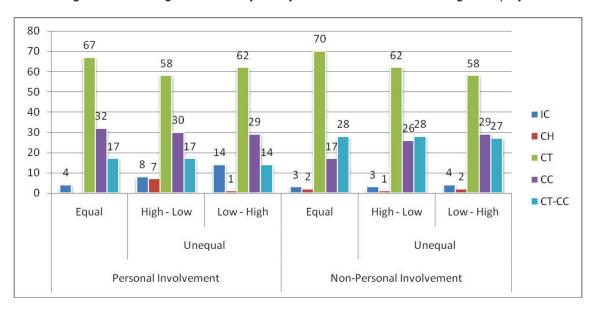

The findings from roleplays show that both first year and third year students realized the disagreement by using contradiction (CT) throughout all situations collected through roleplays. However, the third year students produced contradiction much more dominantly than the first year students. The first year students produced almost similar strategy of contradiction and counterclaim related with personal involvement as compared with the strategy related with non personal involvement.

With respect to the disagreement, the third year students produced less contradiction to express their disagreement related with non personal involvement as compared to the one produced by the third students related with personal involvement. Similar with the data from DCT, Counterclaim (CC) is also ranked second in the realization of disagreement strategy both by the first year and third year students. Other strategies, irrelevancy claim (IC), challenging (CH), contradiction and counterclaim (CT-CC) are not dominantly used by the students.

Figure 4
Disagreement strategies realized by third year students collected through role plays

Note: IC: Irrelevancy claim, CH: Challenge, CT: Contradiction, CC: Counterclaim, CT-CC: Contradiction and counterclaim

Effect of Social Status on Realizing Disagreement Strategies
Social status means the differences of social distance between the two interlocutors whether they were equal or unequal position; high-low and low-high position.
Equal Status

There was no significant difference between first year students and third year students in realizing disagreement related to either personal or non-personal involvement factors. Most of them used contradiction strategy to realize their disagreement with other opinion. DCT data showed that first year students produced 64 strategies of contradiction and third year

students produced 84 strategies of contradiction to realize disagreement related to personal involvement and first year students produced 85 strategies of contradiction and third year students produced 79 strategies of contradiction related to non-personal involvement factors. Then, role play data also showed the same result as DCT data where first year students produced 58 strategies of contradiction and third year students produced 67 strategies of contradiction students related with the personal involvement factor, and first year students produced 57 strategies of contradiction and third year students produced 70 strategies of contradiction students related with the personal non-involvement factor.

In realizing disagreement, the students used contradiction marker like *"I disagree with you", "No, I disagree…", "I don't think so",* and *"I don't agree…"* either related to personal or non-personal involvement factors. In addition, students directly gave contradiction response to the previous statement through those kinds of marker in realizing disagreement. Some students used those markers with no supporting argument but most of them included supporting argument to strengthen their disagreement.

The next strategy which was used by students in equal status was counterclaim. There were 38 responses from first year students and 24 responses from third year students related to personal involvement factor, and 15 responses from students from first year students and 26 responses from third year students related to non-personal involvement factors are in the form of counterclaim strategy to realize disagreement according to DCT data. Role play data also described the same pattern as DCT data where 45 responses from first year students and 32 responses from third year students related to personal involvement factors, and 36 responses from first year students and 17 responses from third year students related to non-personal involvement factors are in the form of counterclaim strategy related to personal and non-personal involvement factors.

In realizing disagreement through counterclaim, students did not directly state explicit contradiction with the previous statement but they gave certain claim which was still relevant with the previous ones to counter the prior statement. Both speakers expressed their own opinion to criticize certain issues involved in the situations related to personal/non-personal involvement factors. Usually, it was marked by saying *"I think….."* at the early of utterances when they wanted to express counterclaim strategy.

Furthermore, DCT data showed that there were 4 first year students and 5 third year students realized disagreement through irrelevancy claim for personal involvement factors, and 4 first year students, 2 third year students also realized it for non-personal involvement factors. Role play data only showed 4 first

year students, 4 third year students related to personal involvement and 3 third year students related to non-personal involvement realized disagreement through irrelevancy claim strategy.

For contradiction and counterclaim strategy, DCT data showed that 4 first year students and 2 third year students used contradiction and counterclaim to realize disagreement related to personal involvement issues. With non-personal involvement issues, DCT data showed that 5 first year students and 7 third year students also used it in realizing disagreement. Different from the previous ones, role play data showed that much more students realized disagreement through contradiction and counterclaim either related to personal or non-personal involvement issues. In this case, 11 first year students and 17 third year students realized disagreement through contradiction and counterclaim for personal involvement issues, and 25 first year students and 28 third year students also used it for non-personal involvement issues.

The data showed that the responses given were in the form contradiction and counterclaim either related to personal or non-personal involvement. This was marked by the use of contradiction pattern like *"no, I don't think so…."*, *"I disagree with you…"* and *"no, I don't agree",* then immediately followed by certain claim to counter the prior statement. In addition, the students were not only realizing

disagreement but also produced certain claim to counter the previous ones. Therefore, it was categorized as contradiction and counterclaim.

Another strategy that was noted in the data either DCT or role play was challenging but it only happened on a minimum number in equal status. DCT data found that there was only 1 first year student either related to personal or non-personal involvement who realized disagreement through challenging, and there were only 3 third year students related to personal involvement issues who used challenging to realize disagreement with other opinion. On the other hand, role play data found that there were only 2 third year students and was no first year students who expressed challenging to realize disagreement related to non-personal involvement issues.

There was an interesting phenomenon in the role play data from first year students, but it was found from third year students, that is the use of counterclaim and challenging to realize disagreement both related to personal and non-personal involvement issues. There were 2 students produced certain strategy related to personal and non-personal involvement issues in equal position. Challenging strategy was marked by the use of question word like *"how…."* and *"what…."*, then followed by certain claim as the realization of counterclaim strategy. Here, students challenged the previous speaker to give detail evidence and counter his/her

statement using certain claim as the realization of their disagreement.

Unequal Status

Unequal status means that both interlocutors have different position and different distance in social relationship. It was divided into high-low status where the level of the first speaker was lower than the second speaker, and low-high status where the level of the first speaker was higher than the second speaker.

Based on DCT data, first year students produced 51 responses and third year students produced 66 responses of disagreement through contradiction related to personal involvement issues and first year students produced 84 responses and third year students produced 89 responses of disagreement through contradiction related to non-personal involvement issues.

Beside that, role play data also found that first year students produced 45 responses and third year students produced 58 responses of disagreement through contradiction related to personal involvement issues and first year students produced 61 responses and third year students produced 62 responses of disagreement through contradiction related to non-personal involvement issues

The data showed that both interlocutors had different status; high and low status. As happening in equal status, high-low status also noted significant result on the use of contradiction strategy to realize disagreement. Students uttered contradiction pattern *"I disagree…."* and *"I don't agree…."* at the early of speech, and sometime entailed by supporting argument to realize disagreement. This happened on both groups of students, on every issues, and related with personal and non-personal issues.

The next most realized strategy was counterclaim. The data from DCT showed that first year students produced 25 responses and third year students produced 32 responses of disagreement through counterclaim strategy related to personal involvement issues and first year students produced 24 responses and third year students produced 21 responses of disagreement through counterclaim strategy related to non-personal involvement issues. Meanwhile, the data from role plays showed that first year students produced 40 responses and third year students produced 30 responses of disagreement through counterclaim strategy related to personal involvement issues and first year students produced 36 responses and third year students produced 26 responses of disagreement through counterclaim strategy related to non-personal involvement issues. In addition, students in high-low status produced certain claim as the opponent to the prior statement and gave impression that the interlocutor had different fact from the previous ones. In expressing counterclaim, they usually used reluctant marker like *"I'm sorry…"* and *"I think…"* to

make the response becoming smooth and polish.

Irrelevancy claim was also one of the strategies which were used by students to realize disagreement both for personal and non-personal involvement in high-low status. DCT data found that there were 17 responses from first year students and 10 responses from third year students are in the form of irrelevancy claim to realize disagreement related to personal involvement and there were only 5 responses from third year students are in the form of irrelevancy claim to realize disagreement related to non-personal involvement. Role play data also found that 15 responses from first year students, and 8 responses from third year students in high-low status realized disagreement through irrelevancy claim for personal involvement and 1 response from first year students and 3 response from third year students are the same for non-personal involvement issues in high-low position.

It is important to note the distribution of the challenging strategy for different situation. Based on DCT data, 13 responses from first year students and 3 responses from third year students used challenging strategy to realize disagreement for personal involvement and there was no response in the form of challenging strategy for non-personal involvement. In addition, the role play data showed that there were 5 responses from first year students, and 7 responses from third year students used challenging strategy for personal involvement issues and only 1 response of this strategy for non-personal involvement in high-low status.

Other strategies that emerge in high-low status were contradiction and counterclaim. There were 6 students from semester 2 and 5 students from third year students who expressed contradiction and counterclaim to realize disagreement for personal involvement and also 4 students from semester 2, 3 students from third year students used it too for non-personal involvement issues based on the DCT data. Furthermore, based on the role play data, 11 students from semester 2, 17 students from third year students realized disagreement through contradiction and counterclaim for personal involvement and 22 students from semester 2, 28 students from third year students used the same strategy to realize disagreement related to non-personal involvement issues in high-low status. They did not only give contradiction response by uttering *"I disagree…"* but also produced certain claim to counter the prior statement. In addition, there was process of developing language where the students were not only able to express contradiction but also produced their own standing opinion related to certain issue.

The last but not least, the role play data also found that there were 4 students from semester 2 who realized disagreement through both counterclaim and challenging related to personal

involvement in high-low status. The combination strategy of challenging and counterclaim was used the students expressed the challenging strategy in the form *"are you sure"* and the counterclaim strategy in the form *"……I think you can learn before the exam".* The students were unsure about the previous statement so that they challenged the prior speaker to give supporting evidence for his/her statement. Further, the students produced the certain claim strategy to counter the prior statement and to strengthen his/her challenging strategy. For these reasons, the combination of both strategies was classified into the challenge and counterclaim strategy although it is not common in use.

DCT data showed that 43 responses from first year students and 67 responses from third year students in low-high position are in the form of contradiction strategy to realize disagreement for personal involvement and 74 responses from first year students, and 82 responses from third year students are also in the form of contradiction strategy in realizing disagreement for non-personal involvement. Similar findings are with the role play data where 44 responses from first year students, 62 responses from third year students are in the form contradiction for personal involvement and 60 responses from first year students, 58 responses from third year students are in the same strategy related with non-personal involvement issues in low-high status. In

this case, students expressed direct contradiction both related to personal and non-personal involvement to high status by saying *"I disagree….."* and *"No…."* as the opening of their utterances. Both markers gave signal that the students contradict with the previous statement. Although there was an additional explanation, its function was only as supporting argument to support his/her contradiction so that it would be more valid and accountable.

Most students also likely used counterclaim strategy in realizing disagreement in low-high position. DCT data found that 43 responses from first year students, 33 responses from third year students are in the form of counterclaim strategy in realizing disagreement for personal involvement and 26 responses from first year students and 26 responses from third year students are in the form of counterclaim strategy in realizing disagreement related to non-personal involvement. Furthermore, role play data showed that 42 responses from first year students, 29 responses from third year students related to personal involvement and 31 responses from first year students, 29 responses from third year students related to non-personal involvement are in the form of counterclaim strategies.

In expressing counterclaim, students sometime used discourse marker like *"I think…."* before producing certain claim, but they also produced direct certain claim more often with no discourse marker. In

this case, students tried to give an alternative claim as the realization of disagreement to counter the previous statement and it was understood that the second speaker disagree with the previous ones.

For irrelevancy claim, there were 19 responses from first year students and 12 responses from third year students are in the form of irrelevancy claim for personal involvement issues and 7 responses from first year students, 4 responses from third year students are in the form of relevancy claim strategy for non-personal involvement issues. Moreover, role play data found that 22 responses from first year students and 14 responses from third year students realized disagreement through irrelevancy claim for personal involvement and 3 responses from first year students, 4 responses from third year students employed the same strategy when they disagreed with other people related to non-personal involvement. Some of them used discourse marker of irrelevancy claim *"it doesn't matter…"* then followed by certain irrelevant claim. Beside that, there was also students who realized disagreement through irrelevancy claim using overlap statement. Overlap statement was one of the characteristics which determined whether certain response belongs to irrelevancy claim or not. In this case, the students added information that there was no one who can interfere her relationship although she knew that such information was not

needed in giving response to the prior statement.

Moreover, DCT data also showed that there was 1 response from third year students who employed challenging to realize disagreement for personal involvement and 2 responses from first year students used challenging too in realizing disagreement related to non-personal involvement. Meanwhile, role play data also found that there was only 1 response from first year students and third year students who employed challenging to express disagreement for personal involvement issues and 1 first year student, 2 third year students used the challenging strategy for non-personal involvement. In this case, both first year and third year students used questions form to challenge the prior speaker.

The data from DCT and role play showed that some first year students and third year students considerably realized disagreement using contradiction and counterclaim simultaneously. DCT data notes that there were 3 first year students and 5 third year students employed contradiction and counterclaim to express disagreement for personal involvement. Beside that, there were 6 first year students and 7 third year students who likely realized disagreement through contradiction and counterclaim for non-personal involvement. Role play data also showed that 10 first year students and 14 third year students employed the same way to express their disagreement for

personal involvement. Further, 23 responses from first year students and 27 responses from third year students are in the same strategy in realizing disagreement for non-personal involvement issues in low-high status.

The role play data showed that there was a special case in which 2 students in low-high status used counterclaim and challenging to realize disagreement related to non-personal involvement. It was described how a son challenged his father's statement by uttering *"how could you say that?"* and also countered his father's statement by saying "*I guess America does by invading Libya can be categorized as colonialism and terrorism. That's violence"*. In addition, it was also found how a daughter countered her mother's statement about food by saying *"…..I want it because I love it"* and challenges her mother to buy it for her.

CONCLUSION

Students learning English realized various strategies in expressing disagreement to different situations and to different people of different status. When the issues are both related to personal and non-personal involvement, the students produced dominantly the contradiction strategy as compared to other strategies. Both first year students and third year students expressed counterclaim, irrelevancy claim, contradiction and counterclaim, and challenge strategy respectively in terms of frequency to realize disagreement related

to personal and non personal involvement in every social status. There is no great differences in the realization of the disagreement strategies used by two groups of the students, that indicate some development of pragmatic competence.

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