Title
Indirect Complaints in Japanese and English

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8566d49m

Author
Brenish, Shana

Publication Date
2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Indirect Complaints in Japanese and English

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Shana Brenish

2013
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Indirect Complaints in Japanese and English

by

Shana Brenish
Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures
University of California, Los Angeles, 2013
Professor Noriko Akatsuka, Chair

This paper looks at indirect complaints in Japanese and English from a conversational analysis perspective. It is a study of 83 indirect complaints from Japanese and English conversations. In section one, I will discuss how complainers deal with the negativity that is associated with indirect complaints. Issues of face and self-presentation will be discussed. Section two examines the role that the non-affected party of a complaint has in the construction of complaints. It looks at their responses as well as other ways in which they contribute to complaints. I will talk also about conversational preference in section two and will look at what happens when multiple preferences in regards to responses to complaints are at variance with each other. Furthermore, I will discuss how knowledge functions in indirect complaints. Section three focuses on how complaints are not limited to one complainer or one complaint at a time. Complaints may consist of multiple complainers. Furthermore, separate but related complaints may occur simultaneously or in succession. In the final section, I will talk about the function of
complaints and explore how complaints do conversational work beyond venting frustrations. It will be seen that though complaining in itself is an action, other actions can be performed as well when complaining.

Some of the general findings of this dissertation are as follows. Indirect complaints are the result of co-construction between the parties involved and their outcome is highly subject to negotiation between these parties. Both complainers and addressees may adjust their tone and stance as they negotiate the complaint. Furthermore, this study reveals how indirect complaints fit within the scheme of negative and positive conversational acts. While speakers approach complaints as if they are doing a negative conversational act, complaints are actively pursued by speakers as they have positive aspects as well. Finally this dissertation shows that interpretation stands as an integral part of the construction of complaints. While a particular speech phenomenon may consistently appear in the context of complaints, the function of that phenomenon may vary greatly from complaint to complaint and is subject to interpretation.
The dissertation of Shana Brenish is approved.

Sung-Ock Shin Sohn

Hongyin Tao

Steven E. Clayman

Noriko Akatsuka, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcription Symbols</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Some Preliminaries on Complaints and Conversation Analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Defining Indirect Complaints</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Data</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Literature Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Contents of this Dissertation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dealing with the Negativity of Complaints</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Downplaying a Complaint</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Speaking Positively within a Complaint</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1. Stating the Good Points of a Person or Situation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2. Finding the Silver Lining</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3. Summary of Speaking Positively</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Characterizing Complaining as an Act one Should not Do</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. Routinized Expressions</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6. Summary of Dealing with the Negativity of Complaints</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Role of the Non-affected Party</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Introduction</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Listener Responses</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1. Responding by downplaying a complaint</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.2. Responding positively to a complaint

3.2.2.1. Stating the positive aspects of a person or situation

3.2.2.2. Finding the silver lining

3.2.2.3. Indicating positive aspects of the speaker’s circumstances in general

3.2.2.4. Summary of responding positively to a complaint

3.2.3. Responding with humor

3.2.4. Responding by characterizing complaining as a negative act

3.2.5. Backtracking from one’s response

3.2.6. Summary of listener’s responses

3.3. Beyond merely responding: Other roles of the non-affected party

3.3.1. Introduction

3.3.2. Adding on to a complaint

3.3.2.1. Summary of adding on to a complaint

3.3.3. Instigating a complaint

3.3.3.1. Summary of instigating a complaint

3.4. Summary of the role of the non-affected party

4. Beyond one complainer and one complaint

4.1. Introduction

4.2. Second complaints

4.2.1. Second complaints which do not diminish the original complaint

4.2.2. Second complaints which interrupt the first complaint

4.2.3. Objecting to a second complaint
TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

[ ] - overlapping speech

= - no break or pause, latching speech

(,) - micropause

. - falling or final intonation contour

? - rising intonation contour

, - continuing intonation contour

- - - truncated word or intonation contour

:: - prolongation or stretching of sound

_word_ - (underlining) stress, emphasis

WOOrd - (capitalization) especially loud talk

°° - markedly quieter talk

<> - compressed or rushed speech

>< - slow or drawn out speech

.(h) - inhalation

(hx) - exhalation

hhh - breathing

@ - laughter

<@ @> - said with laughter

X - indiscernible speech

<E E> - English used by Japanese speakers

<X X> - uncertain hearings

<Q Q> - quoted speech marked by changed in voice
- ambient noises, descriptions, comments
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>accusative</td>
<td>direct object particle o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADV</td>
<td>adverbiaform</td>
<td>ku, ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP</td>
<td>aspect</td>
<td>-te iru -te aru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUX</td>
<td>auxiliary</td>
<td>-te oku -te miru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCH</td>
<td>backchannel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUS</td>
<td>causative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLS</td>
<td>classifier</td>
<td>counter nin, mai, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COND</td>
<td>conditional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONJ</td>
<td>conjunctive</td>
<td>te</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>dative</td>
<td>indirect object ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>desiderative</td>
<td>tai, conditional + ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIR</td>
<td>direction</td>
<td>e, ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRT</td>
<td>directive</td>
<td>directive -te</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPH</td>
<td>emphatic</td>
<td>moo, nante etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVID</td>
<td>evidential</td>
<td>soo, rashii, yoo, mitai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HON</td>
<td>honorific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>interactive and emotive</td>
<td>ne, yo, sa, zo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>particle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMP</td>
<td>imperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INJ</td>
<td>interjection</td>
<td>ara, ano, are, uses of sono koo ano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTR</td>
<td>instrumental</td>
<td>instrumental de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>locative</td>
<td>ni, de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOD</td>
<td>modal</td>
<td>have to, may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>negative command</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NML</td>
<td>nominalizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>ga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>passive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>past tense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL</td>
<td>polite</td>
<td>desu / masu form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POT</td>
<td>potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRED</td>
<td>predicative formative</td>
<td>copula and its forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRS</td>
<td>presumptive</td>
<td>yoo, oo, shoo, deshoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>question</td>
<td>ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUOT</td>
<td>quotative marker</td>
<td>to, -tte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RY</td>
<td>Renyoo form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>sentence extender</td>
<td>no wake mono</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STA</td>
<td>stative</td>
<td>-te iru kekkon shite iru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAG</td>
<td></td>
<td>ja nai, deshoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TARI</td>
<td>tari</td>
<td>etc., things like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TE</td>
<td>-te</td>
<td>non-conditional te</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMP</td>
<td>temporal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIT</td>
<td>title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOP</td>
<td>topic marker</td>
<td>wa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xi
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TP</th>
<th>time particle</th>
<th>ni</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VOL</td>
<td>volitional form</td>
<td>yoo, oo, mashoo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Shana Brenish graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Pittsburgh in 1995. She was a dual major and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Japanese Studies and Anthropology. She also received a certificate in Latin American Studies. She was awarded a Master of Arts degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1997. After teaching English for several years at Poole Gakuin University in Sakai, Japan, she reenrolled in the East Asian Languages and Cultures program at UCLA to pursue her Doctor of Philosophy degree. She specialized in Japanese linguistics and was particularly interested in the area of conversation analysis. While at UCLA, she worked as a teaching associate of Japanese language. She currently is an instructor of Japanese Language at Fullerton College, Long Beach City College, and West Los Angeles College.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. SOME PRELIMINARIES ON COMPLAINTS AND CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Complaining is the conversational act of expressing dissatisfaction about someone or something. While linguists generally use the term “complaining” to refer to this act, there are also various synonymous layman terms which denote this action as well, such as ‘griping’, ‘moaning’, ‘bitching’, ‘bellyaching’, and ‘whining’. Researchers have generally divided complaints into two different types: direct and indirect. While both types signify the expression of dissatisfaction, they differ in their audience. Speakers express direct complaints in the presence of the person who they believe is responsible for the less than satisfactory situation or perceived offense. The addressee is thought to be able to affect a change in the situation (for studies on direct complaints in conversation; Dersley and Wootton (2000); Laforest (2002, 2009); Schgeloff (2005); Tatsuki (2000). In the case of indirect complaints, however, the offending party is not present. The speakers are only expressing their grievances to the addressee, not holding them accountable for them. It is the indirect complaint that will be the focus of my dissertation research.

For my dissertation research, I will look at indirect complaints in Japanese and English from a conversation analysis perspective. Conversation analysis is the study of talk in interaction. It attempts to describe the orderliness, structure and sequential patterns of conversation. Complaining, like most conversational acts, exhibits a certain degree of predictability and structure. For example, similarities exist between the way in which different people undertake complaining, the types of responses that one expects from listeners are limited, and the way in which complainers react to certain listener responses also display commonalities. By using the tools provided by conversation analysis, I will attempt to describe what the
common features of complaints are, what speakers are attempting to do and achieve when employing these features of complaints in their conversation, and how complainers and addressees of complaints mutually react and respond to each other.

1.2. DEFINING INDIRECT COMPLAINTS

The term complaint tends to be both broad and vague. Furthermore, the length of a complaint may range from a short simple statement to a long conversational sequence. Thus, defining and delineating the concept of a complaint is not an easy task. In this section, I will clarify what constitutes a complaint and offer some hypothetical examples of what type of expressions would be examples of complaints.

In general, a complaint is a statement expressing discontentment, displeasure, or dissatisfaction about a situation. It is a manifestation of negative emotions e.g., unhappiness, anger, and frustration that arises from an undesirable situation. To be more specific, noisy neighbors, low wages, meager living conditions, or a boring job may result in a complaint.

A complaint may also express resentment. That is, it may convey feelings of indignation or ill will towards something regarded as wrong, offensive, or an insult. Thus, a person may complain if he or she feels that their boss did not recognize their hard work or if he or she is on the receiving end of an unflattering comment about their looks.

Complaints also consist of faultfinding and criticism. It may involve judging someone or something as lacking a certain standard or as unsatisfactory. A person can complain about the actions of the government during an economic crisis, a spouse who constantly forgets anniversaries, or a maid who does a poor job cleaning.
Finally, the word complaint may refer to an expression of physical pain or discomfort. Moaning about one’s backache qualifies as a complaint. So does grumbling about unbearably hot weather.

As seen, the concept of complaint encompasses many different types of negative expressions. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will employ this broad definition. I will look at all expressions that qualify as a complaint as described above and I will not limit my research to a particular kind of complaint.

1.3. DATA

The data for this study comes from recorded conversations of naturally occurring conversations in English and Japanese. By natural, I mean that the content of the conversations was unplanned and the complaints were unsolicited. Any complaints found occurred in the natural course of the conversation.

The English data came from four different corpora. Three of the corpora consisted of face to face conversations of varying lengths and varying number of participants: Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (60 conversations.), Journal of Communication Conversations (6 conversations linked to video), Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English (4 conversations). One of the English corpora, Call a Friend, contained 22 recorded telephone conversations lasting 5-30 minutes. As the participants in this particular research were able to talk up to 30 minutes before having the call terminated, the vast majority of the conversations lasted the full 30 minutes. Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pennsylvania compiled these four corpora through a joint research project entitled TalkBank. In all, I examined 92 English conversations.
The Japanese data is comprised of conversations from three corpora and conversations collected by this researcher. The first corpus, Japanese Call a Friend, was part of the TalkBank research project mentioned above. It consists of 32 conversations collected in the same manner as the English Call a Friend data. The second corpus, Sakura, was also part of the TalkBank research project. It consisted of 18 videotaped conversations between Japanese college students. Four students would be given a topic to start the conversation but were informed that they could diverge from the topic. The videotaping generally lasted from 20-25 minutes. I obtained the third corpus, entitled Call Home Japanese, from the Linguistic Consortium Data. It is a collection of 120 conversations lasting between 5-30 minutes. Again, most of the calls were automatically terminated after 30 minutes. However, some were terminated after 15 minutes. Participants could end the conversation at any time but most talked 30 minutes. In addition, I also included two face-to-face conversations that I taped. Ultimately, I scanned 172 Japanese conversations for potential data.

In all, I examined a total of 264 English and Japanese conversations for data. However, it should be remembered that not every conversation yielded an example of a complaint and some conversations actually yielded more than one example. Not every compliant observed will be discussed. Determining a final count of how many complaints will be discussed in this dissertation was not a straight forward task. One issue is that a general complaint about a particular subject can consist of several more specific complaints. For example, when complaining about their job, a person may touch upon their boss, salary, and co-workers in one complaint sequence. This raises the question of is their one complaint or three. Furthermore, two people can complain simultaneously about separate but similar issues. For example, two people can complain concurrently about their respective jobs. This raises the issues of whether
such incidences should be counted as one complaint or two. Similarly, a complaint can be followed by subsequent complaints which are distinct from but related to the original complaint. Again, it is problematic as to how to count such incidences. I ultimately decided to count “complaint episodes” and determined that a complaint about a general topic and any clearly related complaints immediately following from that topic should be counted as one episode. In all, I will discuss 83 complaint episodes in this dissertation.

1.4. LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, Diana Boxer has done the most extensive research on the subject of indirect complaints. Her works include a dissertation (1991), a book (1993a), and several articles (1993b, 1993c, 1993d, 1989; Boxer and Pickering 1995). In her studies, she approached the topic of indirect complaints from the viewpoints of speech act theory and / or pedagogy. She looked at such issues as social distance (1993a, 1993d) and gender (1993a, 1993c) and their relationship to types of indirect complaints and responses to these complaints. One of her main findings was the role of gender and social distance in the use of complaints as a rapport inspiring device. She concluded that in the case of gender, this use was more closely associated with women than men and in the case of social relationships, strangers as well as friends employed indirect complaints in this manner. From a pedagogical standpoint, Boxer was interested in how second language learners’ indirect complaints and responses to indirect complaints may be different from those of native speakers (1993a, 1993b). She maintained that by developing English language teaching materials that taught appropriate responses to indirect complaints, nonnative speakers could learn to respond in a manner that would build rapport with native speakers (1995, 1993a, 1993b, 1989).
Several studies in addition to Boxer’s have focused on the social aspect of complaints. Similar to Boxer, Günthner (1997a) also talked about how women use complaints to build social relationships. By displaying and affiliating emotions during complaints, German women increase their own solidarity and association. The solidarity building function of indirect complaints has also been discussed in the conversation activity of troubles telling, a larger speech event which may include indirect complaints (Michaud and Warner 1997; Tannen 1990). The act of indirect complaining, though, is not always socially “safe” and can be “risky business.” Sacks (1992, vol. 1:599-600) proposed the idea of a “safe” and “unsafe” complaint. “Safe” complaints are those formulated in a manner in which any member of a particular group would say about the person or object of the complaint. This stands in contrast to “unsafe” complaints, those that co-members of a group would not generally make. According to Roulston (2000), such “unsafe” complaints are subject to disagreement and challenges. Using complaint sequences from research interviews, she discusses how “unsafe” complainers manage and legitimize “unsafe” complaints, how they may reformulate “unsafe” complaints into “safe complaints” and how they formulate and manage “safe” complaints. In a similar vain, Edwards (2005) stated that complaints have a subjective side i.e., they not only index the object of the complaint, but the complainer as well. Thus, speakers manage their complaints in regards to the stance and attitude that they display when complaining. In particularly, they attempt to avoid displaying a disposition or attitude that would characterize them negatively.

Another area of interest in complaints has been affect and emotion. Once again, gender differences become an issue. In a study by Acuna-Ferreira (2002-2003), male and female speakers of Spanish employed different affective intensification devices when engaging in complaint activities. Günthner (1997b) discussed how German speakers display emotion and
affect in both direct and indirect reported speech when reproducing and reconstructing complaints.

Often studies focus on one particular type of complaint. For example, Günthner (1997a) strictly dealt with complaint stories: a narrative in which the narrator portrays himself as a protagonist who is victimized by an antagonist. Drew (1998) also specifically dealt with the transgressions and misconduct of others. He discusses how speakers may be attempting to do moral work by the way in which they give descriptions of another’s behavior. In detailing the conduct of another, they may specifically design their account to denote the moral character of that behavior.

Finally, I would like to mention two other miscellaneous studies on indirect complaints in natural conversation. Drew and Holt (1988), showed how idiomatic expressions may be used as means of summarizing complaints and seeking sympathy from listeners. Mandelbaum (1991) explored cases in which recipients of complaints show lack of conversational cooperation and willingness to engage in the interactional moment by disattending a complaint: i.e. not taking it up.

1.5. CONTENTS OF THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation will focus on the following topics and areas of research. In section one, I will discuss how complainers deal with the negativity that is associated with indirect complaints. Section two examines the role that the non-affected party of a complaint has in the construction of complaints. It looks at their responses as well as other ways in which they contribute to complaints. Section three focuses on how complaints are not limited to one complainer or one complaint at a time. Complaints may consist of multiple complainers. Furthermore, separate but related complaints may occur simultaneously or in succession. In the
final section, I will talk about the function of complaints and explore how complaints do conversational work beyond venting frustrations.

The following theories and concepts will come into play throughout my dissertation. Issues of face and how people present themselves will be discussed, particularly in section one. I will also talk about preference and in section two I will look at what happens when multiple preferences are at variance with each other. Furthermore, in section two, I will discuss epistemics and how knowledge functions in indirect complaints. Finally, in section four, it will be seen that though complaining in itself is an action, other actions can be performed as well when complaining. Hence, action theory will play a role in my paper.
2. DEALING WITH THE NEGATIVITY OF COMPLAINTS

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Complaining is a conversational act which by nature is imbued with negativity. It involves talk that centers on undesirability and unpleasantness. It is also a risky act. Complaints entail taking an unfavorable stance towards someone or something and vocalizing that position. Therefore, it invites affiliation or disaffiliation from the complaint recipients. Furthermore, the negativity that is imbued in complaints can reflect upon the image of the complainer and come to be associated with them. It can have deleterious consequences for the speaker’s face, i.e. the positive social image one tries to maintain when interacting with others. (for more on the concept of face see Goffman 1967, Lerner 1996, Samra-Fredricks 2010). For these reasons, complaining should not be undertaken lightly.

Although complaining is generally regarded as a negative act, this is not say that everything about complaining is negative. Complaining does have positive aspects as well. In addition to analyzing actual speech data of complaints in her book, Boxer (1993a) also performed ethnographic interviews to determine native-speakers thoughts on various aspects of complaining and their perception on how complaints function socially. Her interviews showed that people understand that indirect complaining can have both a positive and a negative affect socially. On the positive side, interlocutors forge a common bond when one party offers a negative evaluation and the other party commiserates and /or expresses a shared sentiment. Conversely, in regards to negative effects, if others perceive someone as constantly complaining, they may label that person as a chronic complainer. In Boxer’s interviews, interviewees demonstrated awareness of this negative effect of complaining. As one informant stated:

I complained to someone I really didn’t know very well today. In the middle of the complaint I started to worry that maybe I shouldn’t be saying anything. And actually said to myself, “boy, I sound like a complainer.” You know when a person complains a lot that bothers me. (123)
Hence, people are aware that others may come to view them in a negative light when complaining.

While Boxer discussed the negative perceptions that complaining entails, she did not discuss how this becomes manifest in conversation. When complaining, and more specifically usually after complaining, speakers may exhibit signs that others may regard complaining negatively. Edwards (2005) stated that complainers may use irony, humor, laughter and displacement (complaining about matters that are incidental to the main offense) to project themselves as not making much of the complainable situation and thus avoid being negatively characterized as moaning and whining. In this section, I will discuss more ways in which complainers deal conversationally with the negativity that is associated with complaining. By dealing with the negativity of complaints, complainers are able to face work and manage the negativity which is projected on them via complaints.

2.2. DOWNPLAYING A COMPLAINT

Downplaying the severity of a complaint is one conversational act that counteracts the negativity of complaining. During the process of complaining about a situation, speakers may make a statement to the effect that the situation is not as bad as it seems. Likewise, if the complaint is in regards to a person, the complainer may backtrack and state the person is actually not so bad. Essentially then, when one downplays a complaint, they are disaligning from the complaint and deemphasizing its gravity on the grounds that it could be worse.

In this first example, two friends, Briar and Maya are talking about Briar’s readjustment to her new life in law school. Throughout the conversation, Anna keeps
insisting that Briar sounds like she is doing well and is developing new friendships.

Briar, on the other hand, keeps alluding to the fact that despite how things may seem, she is having a hard time readjusting. At one point, she complains that her friendships are still in the awkward stage.

Example 1 (CAF English 5000)

01. MAYA: I'm so jealous of all these cool fri:nds. ((whiny tone))
02. BRIAR: u:h (.) see but if: ha::h it's not good though because it's still at that very awkward
03. stage where-
04. (.hhh) like(0.3) especially since I'm livin:g (0.3) off campus and most
05. [of them] are on campus?

Despite Briar’s complaints, Maya continues with her insistence that Briar sounds well. In the example below which occurs latter on in the conversation, Maya once again comments on Briar’s seemingly active lifestyle. Briar, on her part, once again counters by stating that she is not good at readjusting in line 6. This self-complaint denigrates her ability to adjust to a new environment. It is also a general complaint that refers to the difficulty she is feeling in readjusting. Maya challenges Briar’s complaint by contending that she sounds well. Briar then responds by downgrading her complaint.

Example 2

01. MAYA: well Bri:ar: I- I'm just very excited cause you sou:nd like
02. you're (.) going out and having f:u:n:,
03. [ and meeting new peopl::e.]
04. BRIAR: [uh (.) um::? I'm probably] making it soun:d like I:: am:::(0.2) doing
05. (0.5) better than I am: at this::
06. because I'm (.hh) you know I'm not good at it.
Briar downplays her previous assertion by stating in line 8 that she could be worse. Interestingly, this utterance is ambiguous as to whether it refers to the self-complaint aspect of her statements about her skills in developing friendships and adjusting or to the general complaint aspect of her statement in regards to the difficulties one faces when being placed in a new situation. In either case though, Briar downplays the situation by speaking positively and maintaining that at least it is not the worst-case scenario.

In example 2, the complainer expressly and directly states that despite her complaint, she could be a lot worse. In the remaining four examples though, complainers are not so literal in stating that their situation is not the worst-case scenario. Rather, the downplay is less forthright and not stated outright. This can be seen in my next conversation between two Japanese friends, Osamu and Shigeru, who are mutually complaining about being woken up by a phone call to participate in a research study. Although this example starts out as a mutual complaint, one participant ultimately mitigates his complaint and suggests that he may have overstated the unpleasantness of being woken up.

Both Osamu and Shigeru apparently had similar experiences at different times. Thus, the situation is a complainable for both parties. It is Osamu though who seems to be the main complainer in this example. That is, he focuses more on the negativity of the situation than Shigeru does. He starts out by stating how tired he was in line 1 then builds on his complaint in line 2 by stating what he was thinking during the conversation: “Anything is okay, just hurry up and let me sleep.” However, at the end of the complaint
sequence, Osamu proceeds to reformulate his initial assessment and downgrades the complaint.

Example 3 (CAF Japanese 6166)

01. **OSAMU:** (hhh) hontoo ni demo nemutakatta ano toki.

   **for real:** ADV **though**  **sleepy:** DES **PAST** **that time**
   
   *For real though I was sleepy that time.*

02. moo nan demo ii kara hayaku nekashite kure toka omainagara. =

   **EMP** whatever **okay so** **quick:** ADV **let sleep** AUX **IMP QOUT think:** while
   
   *All the while I was thinking whatever you want is okay by me so just hurry up and let me sleep.*

03. **SHIGERU:** okurahomaijijdennajitadeneskakotakaiwarete.

   **Oklahoma** TOP now **what time** **PRED SE PRED Q QOUT say:** PASS **CONJ**
   
   *I was asked like “What time is it now in Oklahoma.” and*

04. **OSAMU:** u:n.

   **BCH**
   
   *mhmm*

05. **SHIGERU:** jikanittara.

   **time say:** TEMP
   
   *when I say the time*

06. a: watashitachi to wa ichi jikan chigaimasu toka itte.

   **INJ us from TOP one hour different QOUT say:** CONJ
   
   *she’s like” Oh you are one hour different from us and*

07. **OSAMU:** a: hontoo.

   **INJ really**
Oh really.

08. SHIGERU: u:n.

BCH

mhmm

09. (.59) <E I hate to you know wake up people E> toka itte itteta.

QOUT say say:ASP:PAST

She says like “I hate to you know wake up people.”

10. (1.10)

11. OSAMU: u:n.

BCH

mhmm

12. SHIGERU: u:n.

BCH

yeah

13. OSAMU: karuku okosareta kedo ne.

light:ADV wake up:PASS:PAST but IEP

I was woken up lightly though.


IEP us GEN voice NOM sleep:PAST SE PRED IEP

Yeah, our voices were sleepy.

In line 13, Osamu disaffiliates with his original position: he downgrades from his original negative evaluation by saying that he was woken up lightly as opposed to being woken up from a deep sleep. Interestingly, there seems to be no cause for Osamu to back down from his complaint in order to avoid the negativity that is associated with complaints. Shigeru had
been woken also and provides no indication that he views Osamu’s complaint as negative. Thus, Osamu’s backing down does not seem to be a reaction to a comment made by Shigeru.

The next example, which is also from Japanese, is an example of downgrading a future complaint. That is, the speaker is not complaining about circumstances that he or she has endured or is presently enduring. Rather, she is complaining about events that are likely to occur in the future. Yoshie is suggesting to Seiko that she should make picture cards in order to teach young children the Japanese writing system of hiragana. Seiko characterizes this extra work proposed by Yoshie as “mendookusai” (a pain). Yoshie responds by stating that she made a lot of her own teaching materials when she herself was a teacher. This comment appears to be a mild rebuke for balking at the responsibilities associated with being a teacher. With this, Seiko backs down from her complaint.

Example 4 (CHJ 1328)

01. YOSHIE: un. a no yoko ni ame no e o kaite [oitari ne.]

BCH A GEN side LOC rain GEN picture ACC write:AUX:SFX IEP

uhuh. You do things like draw a picture of rain next to an “R”

02. SEIKO: [ soi ja ]

well then

Well then,

03. SEIKO: e mo kakerenai to dame da nee*

picture also write:MOD PRED IEP

I guess I will have to draw pictures then too

04. YOSHIE: soo ne?

right IEP

yeah
In lines 7, 8 and 10, Seiko states that as it is only once week, she thinks she can do it. She backpedals from characterizing the extra work as a pain to characterizing it as no big deal. This downgrade differs from the previous two examples in that unlike the previous two examples, it seems to be in response to a comment made by the addressee.

In the previous three examples, the speaker did not downplay the complaint until its end. Now I will look at an example in which the speaker downplays the situation before actually
complaining. Doris is explaining why the air conditioner is emitting dust. Her tone at first is explanatory and she does not clearly take a complaint stance until Lynne utters “ugh” and “god” in lines 3 and 5. With Lynne’s negative assessment, Doris changes her stance. However, before complaining, she minimizes the situation with a hedge.

Example 5 (SBCSAE 1)

01. DORIS: and (.) and then it builds up real bad with (0.4) (.hh) ((coughs)) deposits, out of the water .

03. LYNNE: Oh: . [[ Ugh: .]]

04. DORIS: [[ In other words]] I (.) should be change filters .

05. LYNNE: Go:d .

06. DORIS: I know.

07. It won't last long.

09. DORIS: But it sure does make a mess in the house.

10. LYNNE: Yeah: .

11. it [ makes a mess] .

12. DORIS: [ I need new ] filters .

In line 9, Doris complains that the air condition makes a mess. Before she utters this complaint though, she downgrades the annoyance. First, she agrees with Lynne’s assessment in line 6. Then she mitigates her agreement and downplays the problem in line 7 by stating that it will not last long. In essence, she is stating that the situation could be worse. Thus, unlike the last two examples in which the speakers back down and modify their stances after making their
complaint, in this example the speaker precedes her complaint with a nonchalant and unconcerned attitude.

Now that I looked at the use of downplay both before and after a complaint, I will discuss examples in which downplay is employed in the middle of the complaint. In the next example, a mother and daughter are mutually complaining about a son / sibling, Bobby. The complaint is relatively lengthy and the parties mention several issues that they consider problematic and do not focus on one complaint. In the first of these two examples, which is taken from the middle of the complaint sequence, the daughter, Julie, is ranting and expressing negative feelings in general as opposed to complaining about a specific behavior that she deems egregious. She states that while some people easily excuse Bobby’s conduct, others are not so forgiving. In lines 6-7, Julie rants about what kind of person she thinks Bobby is. Before she states her negative opinion though, she qualifies her statement.

Example 6 (CAF English 5926)

01. JULIE: no I- I mea:n (1.7) I mean i:- when it comes to Bobby sometimes I think that.
02. (.hhh) either peopl:e.
03. (1.2)
04. JULIE: think he's (0.4) a sh:it or he's: (.hhh) or they give him all these excu:ses and it's
05. li:ke (0.7) I don't know. It's- it's just wei:rd. You know?
06. and (0.2) I feel like (.hhh) he's not a bad per:son but he's: (0.2) h:e's, I think
07. he's fu:cked u:p. <@basically@.> (.hhh) [and he.]
08. MOTHER: [oh yeah.]
09. JULIE: he uh.
10. MOTHER: yea:h I do too.
In lines 6-7, Julie states that while her brother is not an evil person who intentionally harms people, his conduct and actions are sometimes inappropriate and unacceptable. The complaint follows the same pattern seen in the previous example. She begins the statement with the hedge “he’s not a bad person.” The implication of the statement is that he could be worse. However the conjugation “but” precedes her statement which indicates a negation of the hedge is to come. Indeed, as predicted, the complaint, “he’s fucked up” follows. The complaint then is the main point of Julie’s talk and is the part of the sentence that she is truly trying to express. The hedge is merely secondary to the complaint. However, this does not change the fact that the complainer downgrades the severity of her brother’s failings in the midst of complaining.

Furthermore, in this particular example, the downgrade occurs in the middle of a complaint sequence (the mother and daughter continue to complain about Bobby), but before a specific complaint statement.

As seen, complainers may accompany a complaint with words and statements that downgrade the seriousness of a complaint. Such downgrades are not limited to one particular location and may speakers may employ them before, after, or in the midst of a complaint. While one potential effect of such downgrades in the softening of the complaint, it is unclear whether they do actually have such an effect. It is possible that the complaint overshadows and outweighs any downgrade that does occur and remains relatively unaffected in its projection of negativity. Such a consideration would be determined on a case-by-case basis and would vary from complaint to complaint. In any case, by downgrading a complaint, complainers distance themselves from the complaint and its negativity.

2.3. SPEAKING POSITIVELY WITHIN A COMPLAINT
Another way in which a complainer may deal with the negativity associated with complaining is to contrast the negative statements with positive statements. Similar to examples discussed in the previous section, focusing on the positive as opposed to the negative has the effect of mitigating the complaint. However, the speaker is not just saying that the situation is not so bad and that it could be worse, but that it consists of good and / or beneficial factors as well. Thus, he or she demonstrates his ability to give a fair description of the situation by stating the positive as well as the negative.

2.3.1. Stating the Good Points of a Person or Situation

When complaining, speakers may state the positive qualities of the object of their complaint. First, I would like to consider examples in which the speaker first complains, then states positive aspects of the person and or situation, and finally resumes his or her complaint. I have three such examples; two from English and one from Japanese. I will start with the English examples.

The first example is a complaint excerpt from the same conversation seen in example 6. Again, the mother and daughter are complaining about Bobby. In this instance, the mother is complaining about how he rarely keeps in contact. In the midst of her negative statements, the mother utters a positive statement.

Example 7 (CAF English 5926)

01. MOTHER: and he xxx- sent me a copy and I- (0.3) it was real interesting.
02. (.hhh) and then u:m (0.4) he wrote Grandma: (0.2) a letter?
03. and then you know we've flip-flopped over xxx.
04. and nothing si:nce.
05. but you know she XwantsX his heart's in the right pla:ce but.
In lines 1-4, the mother relates how Bobby sent one of his research papers and then abruptly ceased communicating. Then, she indicates that she is going to transition her line of talk by uttering “but” in line 5. At first, she is going to make some comment in regards to the grandmother. However, she repairs her talk and utters a positive comment about Bobby. She claims that, “his heart’s in the right place.” This statement both acknowledges his efforts of sending the research papers and maintains that his lack of communication is not intentionally malicious. She ends the complaint with a “reluctant acceptance” attitude and states that is just the way he is.

The next example is from the same conversation with the same participants. As the daughter does not respond in this particular portion of the conversation, only the mother’s words will appear. The mother is complaining to her daughter about a particular hospital. She starts by characterizing the hospital as not being a good hospital in line 1. She then specifies her reasoning in lines 2 and 3 by asserting that it structurally projects a feeling of hardness. After making these negative comments, she proceeds to counter the complaint in line 5 by stating positive aspects of the hospital as well.

Example 8 (CAF English 5926)

01. MOTHER: What a place to go if you're sick.

02. I mean all the xxx is (.hhh) ((clatter)) hard
dges.

03. there's nothing soft there.

04. (0.4)

05. MOTHER: nothing reassuring. you know the people- (.hhh) the people try to do: it.
She praises the hospital staff, particularly the women, for attempting to provide comfort and reassurance to their patients. Furthermore, in the process of offering praise, she contrasts the hardness of the architecture of the hospital with the softness of the people in lines 9 and 10. By stating the positive aspects of the hospital, she portrays that she is giving an accurate description of the hospital and is not just giving a one-sided depiction. Despite the mother’s mention of positive aspects, she reaffirms her complaint in line 14 by once again denigrating the hospital’s surroundings. Thus, the complaint sequence ultimately ends with the negative aspects of the hospital highlighted.

This next example from Japanese follows a similar pattern to the example just discussed. In lines 1-20, Tomoko is complaining to Miri about how busy she is at work. However, in line 22, she suddenly changes her stance and begins to mitigate her complaint by stating positive aspects about her work.
At the company, my work is rapidly increasing and

02. MIRI: aa ma fueru koto wa ii koto ya kedo,

Oh well increase NML TOP good thing PRED but

Oh, well increasing is a good thing but

03. isogashii mon da yo ne?

busy SE PRED IEP IEP

you're busy

04. yappari gendo ga aru mon da yo ne*

ultimately limits NML have SE PRED IEP IEP

Ultimately, you have your limits.

05. TOMOKO u:n isogashikute::,

yeah busy:CONJ

yeah, I’m busy and

06. tada ie ni kaettara wasure-

just home GOAL return:TEMP forget

07. anoo moo wasurareru shigoto dattara ii kedo nee?

INJ EMP forget:POT work PRED:COND good but IEP

if it were just work that you forge- umm you know could forget when you

got home it would be okay but

8. MIRI: un

BCH

mhmm

09. TOMOKO: ie ni made motte kaette kon to,

home GOAL ALL take:CONJ return:CONJ come:NEG if
10. moo (0.4) ma ni awan tte iu na shigoto deshoo?

EMP be on time:NEG QOUT say PRED work TAG

It’s work that you won’t finish on time if you don’t take it home

11. de [, nn]=

and

and mm.

12. MIRI: [soo?] really really

13. TOMOKO: =kasiha ni wa juunijikan gurai ite sore kara ie ni kaette=

Company LOC TOP twelve hours about be after then home LOC return

14. = kite kara nante moo*

come after EMP EMP

after being at the company for around twelve hours and then when you come home.. it’s just.....

15. nani mo [ dekin mo-]

anything can do:NEG EMP

you can’t do anything

16. MIRI: [nani mo dekin] yo ne*

anything can do:NEG IEP IEP

you can’t do anything

17. TOMOKO: soo yo*

right IEP

That’s right
18. moo [uchi-]
   EMP my house

19. MIRI: [hido]i nee.
   cru IEP
   That's awful

20. TOMOKO: uchi no naka hichametchaka da shi nee,
   my house GEN inside messy PRED and IEP
   The inside of my house is a mess and.

21. MIRI: un
   BCH
   mhmmm

22. TOMOKO: maa kaisha wa yoku shite kureru yo::?
   well company TOP well do:CONJ AUX IEP
   Well, the company does do a lot for you

23. so- sono bun ne?
   that part IEP
   on their part

24. MIRI: un [un]
   BCH BCH
   mhmmm mhmmm

25. TOMOKO: [nihon] no kaisha tte iu no wa.
   Japan GEN company QOUT say NML TOP
   Japanese companies do
26. MIRI:  

BCH

mhmm

27. TOMOKO:  

[[de]] chiisai seezoogyoo da kara nee?

and small manufacturing company PRED so IEP

and it’s a small manufacturing company so

28. MIRI:  

[[[un un]]]

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

29. TOMOKO:  

[[[kekko]]] hora kojinteki na soo iu anoo are kiku kara ne?

Really INJ individual PRED that kind of INJ that listen so IEP

eyou know really listen to individual needs and ahh things like that

30. MIRI:  

un

BCH

mhmm

31. TOMOKO:  

maa shachoo to mo naka wa ii shi ne?

well company president with too relationship TOP good and IEP

I get along with the company president and

32.  

anoo sono ten wa ne;,

INJ that area TOP IEP

ahh in that area

33.  

anoo zenzen warui koto nai n da kedo.

INJ not at all bad thing there is:NEG SE PRED but

there is nothing bad at all but
She concedes that the company looks after her needs in line 22 and that her relationship with her boss is good in line 31. Similar to example 8 above, by mentioning positive aspects of her work, she validates her complaint by showing that she is able to comprehensively evaluate the situation. She is giving her working circumstances due process and is not merely providing a partial one-sided description. This being the case, one should note that, just like the previous example, this moment of positivity is fleeting. In line 34, she reaffirms her claim that the workload is unreasonable and continues complaining.

In the previous three examples, speakers dealt with the negativity of the complaint after they utter it. Of course, as one may expect, speakers may also state a positive feature of the person(s) or situation they are complaining before they even complain. This can be seen in the following example from Japanese

In the following example, Yooko expresses ambivalent feelings about her future husband. The couple met through a traditional Japanese omiai, an arranged meeting in which two people are introduced with a view to marriage. Now that she has accepted his proposal, she is
rethinking her decision because of his lack of height. However, before uttering the complaint about his height, she outlines all his good qualities.

Example 10 (CHJ 2237)

1. YOOKO: de hora onaji toshi da shi:,
   and INJ same age PRED and
   and like he is the same age and

2. EIKO: un
   BCH
   mhmm

3. YOOKO: watashi ni au n da kedo:,
   I DAT suits SE PRED but
   he suits me but

4. EIKO: un
   BCH
   mhmm

5. YOOKO: de tottemo ii kata de nee*
   And very good person PRED:CONJ IEP
   And he is a very good person and

6. u::n sugoku ii (s)hito na no.
   yeah extreme:ADV good person PRED SE
   Yeah he is an extremely good person.

7. EIKO: [nani o-]
   what ACC
   What-
8. YOOKO: [betsu ni] ii tokoro bakari narabetateru to nee?

\textit{When you single out just the good points separately}

9. EIKO: un

\textit{BCH}

\textit{mhmm}

10. YOOKO: ato de kyooretsu na no wa kuru kara.

\textit{The extreme (bad) one is going to come next}

11. EIKO [@@@] un

\textit{BCH}

\textit{mhmm}

12. YOOKO: sore de nee*

\textit{and}

13. ato ni ten go karato no nee*

\textit{what’s more}

14. daiya o tsukutte kureta no.

\textit{what’s more is that he had a 2.5 karat ring made for me.}

15. EIKO: heeee! sugoi[::! (.hh) ]

\textit{wow awesome}

\textit{Wow, that’s awesome.}

16. YOOKO: [<E engagement E> ringu ni.}
engagement ring DAT

for an engagement ring

17. EIKO: @sugoi!

awesome

that’s awesome

18. YOOKO: to omou deshoo?

QOUT think TAG

That’s what you think, right?

19. EIKO: un

BCH

mhmm

20. YOOKO: koko made wa sugoi to omou n da kedo:*

here up till TOP awesome QOUT think SE PRED but

You think that everything up to this point is awesome but

21. EIKO: un

BCH

mhmm

22. YOOKO: watashi yori mo*

I than

23. (0.4) yonsenchi segahikui no.

four centimeters short SE

He is four centimeters shorter than me.

24. EIKO: ee?

BCH
Huh?

25. YOOKO: watashi yori mo yonsenchi mo segahikui no.

I than four centimeters EMP short SE.

He is four whole centimeters shorter than me.

26. EIKO: aa hontoo ni?

oh real ADV

oh really?

Yooko builds up to the complaint by stating several good points about her fiancé before lamenting about his shortness: he is the same age, he is a good person, he gave her a considerably large sized diamond engagement ring, and in general they suit each other. Not only does stating the positive aspects counterbalance the upcoming negative aspects, but it also serves as a delaying device. The delaying of the performance of an action is a feature associated with dispreferred actions (Pomerantz 1984, Pomerantz and Heritage 2013). She is delaying the dispreferred action of complaining by performing the corresponding preferred action of complimenting first. Ultimately, Yooko does state the complaint. She signals that she is about to negate her previous utterances by uttering “kedo” (but) in line 20 and then laments about his shortness in lines 22, 23, and 25.

Interestingly, the speaker herself even mentions in lines 8 and 10 that the listener can predict that a negative quality is going to follow. Sacks (1992, Vol 1.: 359-60.) noted this “praise plus ‘but’ plus something else” phenomenon as well. When a speaker begins stating a positive or positives, the manner and tone voice used accompanied with the stating of positive aspect(s) signals to the listener that the speaker is going to say ‘but’ (or some equivalent) and negate what he or she just said. Furthermore, although at the present I have no examples, I have heard in both in scripted and unscripted television dialogue examples of the listener uttering ‘but’
before the speaker, thereby preempting the speaker in his negation. So not only is this a phenomenon in conversation that is apparent to the trained linguist, but one that the average listener is explicitly aware of and can comment on as well.

In summary, complainers may demonstrate that they are not solely focusing on the negative of a situation or a person by stating their positive aspects. This action aids in the legitimization of complaints by depicting the speaker as providing as a clear and accurate portrayal of the complainable situation. Furthermore, it is a means by which complainers convey a reluctance to complain, particularly when they hesitate in stating the complaint by stating the positive aspects first.

2.3.2. Finding the Silver Lining

Proverbs expressing the idea that negative situations can result in something positive are not uncommon and exist in English as well as other world languages. In English, the proverb which best expresses this idea is “Every cloud has a silver lining.” This expression comes from the imagery of dark and ominous thunderclouds that block out the sun. They represent the difficult times. However, at the edge of the clouds there is often silver gleam of sunlight that stands for hope and optimism. In other words, every difficult situation has a bright side and it is possible to derive something positive out of a situation, no matter how unpleasant or difficult may be.

There are at least two proverbs in Japanese that are similar to the English proverb “Every cloud has a silver lining.” However, they actually more closely resemble the English proverb “There is no pleasure without pain and no pain without pleasure.” The first of these Japanese proverbs is “raku areba, ku ari. ku areba raku ari” (literally: “When there is pleasure, there is pain. When there is pain, there is pleasure.”). The second is “raku wa ku no tane , ku wa raku no
“Pleasure is the seed of pain and pain is the seed of pleasure.”). The meaning of these three proverbs is complex and many fold. They convey the idea that pleasure and pain lead to one another and are linked in a cyclical nature. On one hand, one must first experience pain and suffering in order to achieve benefits in life; i.e. no pain no gain. Conversely, when experiencing pleasure, one has to beware of the pain that it may result in. Furthermore, these expressions have an intellectual import as well. One cannot appreciate pleasure and happiness unless they first understand what it means to hurt and vice versa; one would not realize they are in pain and unhappy unless they knew what it feels like to be happy.

I point out these proverbs in order to raise the idea that one can derive positive from negative. When complaining, speakers may attempt to find and state the silver lining in their situation. In some ways, this conversational act is similar to the conversational act discussed in the previous section. As is the previous section, speakers are stating positive aspects amidst a complaint. However, when stating the silver lining, the speakers are not just stating the positive, but that the positive is a direct result of the negative and would not have occurred without it. I will discuss two examples from English and one from Japanese.

In the following example, Brianne is complaining to Maya that she made tentative plans with some people but they did not follow through. The result is that she stayed home waiting for a call that never came. While she admits that she is unhappy about the situation in lines 5 and 6, she concludes the complaint by finding a positive aspect.

Example 11 (CAF English 5000)

01. MAYA: well you sound happy Bri:ar.!

02. BRIAR: I'm generally pretty happy.

03. [I'm-]
04. MAYA: [that's] really good.

05. BRIAR: n:o:t very happy because some people were supposed to ca:ll me tonight and they (.) h:aven't yet.

07. (0.4)

08. MAYA: o:[:h].

09. BRIAR: [and] so now I'm thinking I'm just probably going to go to bed.

10. which is not a bad thing.

In line 9, Briar states that as it unlikely that she is going to go out, she is probably going to go to sleep. Then, in the next line, she clarifies that this is actually a good thing. As a result of her acquaintances failing to keep their promise, she will be able to get more sleep which would have not occurred had she gone out.

The next example comes from the same mother and daughter conversation seen in examples 6, 7 and 8. This time, the mother is complaining about missing her ex-boyfriend Jerry. Apparently, they have ended their romantic relationship but are maintaining a friendship. However, they have not seen each other recently and she is feeling his absence. Despite her unhappiness, she concludes the complaint by stating that his absence may be good thing.

Example 12 (CAF English 5926)

01. MOTHER: anyway I really miss hi:m. (hhhx)

03. JULIE: yea:h ?

05. MOTHER: (.,hhh)

06. JULIE: you don't see him that much now?
07. MOTHER: no:? (hhhx) I haven't seen him. (hhhx) u:m. (hhhx)
08. (0.4)
09. MOTHER: (.hhh) u:m. I haven't seen him since Monday. (hhhx)
10. and he's- I guess we're just trying to let go of each other?
11. (1.4)
12. MOTHER: and u:m.
13. (1.2)
14. MOTHER: I don't know. It just. (.) (hhhx)
15. (0.5)
16. MOTHER: (.hhh) and some things I don't miss.

In line 16, the mother acknowledges that while she does miss Jerry, there are certain things about him that she does not miss. Their relationship is a like double-edged sword. She cannot have the benefits of having a relationship with Jerry without the annoyances. Thus, the silver lining is that with his absence, she does not have to deal with the problems.

For the final example, I will look at a conversation from Japanese. In the following example, Izumi is complaining to Rei about all the work she has as a graduate student and a teaching assistant. As a teaching assistant, she must correct homework, tests and papers. Furthermore, she must read the same materials as her students. This is in addition to all the reading she must do for her own classes. After Izumi details all the reading she must do, Rei responds sympathetically to Izumi’s complaint. She states in line 45 that all the work that Izumi must do sounds rough. Izumi then takes a more positive attitude and states the benefits of her work as a teaching assistant in line 46.

Example 13 (CAF Japanese 6666)
01. IZUMI: de:::

and

and

02. (1.40)

03. IZUMI: u:n atoo assignment toka,

yeah also assignments and

04. shukudai toka attara sore no check toka;

homework and there are TEMP them GEN check and

05. REI: u:n.

BCH

mhm

06. IZUMI: tesuto toka: pepaa no saiten?

test and papers GEN grading

07. REI: un.

BCH

mhm

08. (.86)

09. IZUMI: shinakya ikenai kara::

do:MOD so

Yeah when there are assignments and papers and things like that

I have to check them and grade papers and tests so...

10. (.48)

11. "na"n i ka sore ga da- doo to mawatte kita toki ga isogashii wa ne.

EMP that NOM EMP come around:PAST TEMP NOM busy IEP IEP
When that time comes around, I am busy

12. (.62)

13. REI: sokka: really

14. IZUMI: =u::n.

BCH

uhuh

15. (.70)

16. IZUMI: ima wa maa zatsuyoo shite iru dake da shi:,

now TOP INJ miscellaneous chores do:ASP just PRED and

Now I am just toiling away

17. REI: =u:n.=

BCH

mhm

18. IZUMI: =(.hhh) maa <E reading E> wa ichioo onaji yoo ni shinakya ikenai kara?

INJ reading TOP at least same way do:MOD so

You know, I have to at least do the same reading as them so

19. REI: =u::n.

BCH

mhm

20. IZUMI: da kedo undergrad no reading nante taishita koto nai shi sa?

But undergrad GEN reading EMPH big deal NEG and IEP

But undergrad reading is no big deal
21. REI:  =@ @ [ @ @ @ ] .hh soo*  
really 
oh yeah?

22. IZUMI:  [bunryoo ga].
amount NOM
The amount

23. bunryoo ga ne,
amount NOM IEP

24. [watashi] tachi no ni <@ kurabere ba ne @> @ [ @ @ ] @ @ @
we GEN DAT compare:COND IEP
If you compare the amount to ours

25. REI:  [u:n. ]  [u:n.]
BCH BCH
mhm mhm

26. IZUMI:  @ @ datte sugoi bunryoo yom-asa-reru mon grad tte.=
EMPH extraordinary amount read:CAUS:PASS SE grad student QOUT
Grad students are required to read an extraordinary amount.

27. REI:  =n:: deshoo ne.
BCH PRED IEP
Yeah that’s true

BCH
mhm

29. REI:  u:n.
BCH

mhmm

30. (1.25)

31. REI: fu::n.

BCH

wow

32. IZUMI: ima totte iru kurasu demo isshuukan ni hon ga;

now take:ASP class even one week TP book NOM

Even in the classes that I am taking now in one week

33. (.51) issatsu to;

one:CLS and

34. REI: =u::n.

BCH

mhmm

35. IZUMI: sore: purasu:(.34) article ga ikutsu ka?

that plus article NOM several

36. REI: u::n.

BCH

mhmm

37. IZUMI: tte iu gurai da: to yom-asa-reru desho.

QOUT say about PRED QOUT read:CAUS:PASS IE

I am required to read I would say about one book and

That plus several articles

38. REI: u::n.
39. (1.09)
40. REI: fu::n.

41. (.43)
42. REI: sokka sokka::.

I see    I see
I see.

43. IZUMI: u::n.

44. (2.70)
45. REI: taihen da ne::*.

Rough    PRED IEP

Sounds rough

46. IZUMI: maa demo okage de tuition harawanakya ii-

INJ    but    thanks to tuition pay:MOD

Well but thanks to that I don’t have to pay tuition

47. harawanai de ii kara ne:. hhh hhh

pay:NEG:MOD    so    IEP

I don’t need to pay so...

48. REI: =sore wa yokatta yo ne.
49. IZUMI: u::n.=

**BCH**

_uhuh_

The change in Izumi’s stance is marked by “maa demo” (well but). It indicates that despite everything she just stated and though Rei’s assessment is accurate, she is about to make a comment which stands in contrast to all her previous negative statements. She then states that thanks to her teaching assistant position, she is not required to pay tuition. She ends the statement unfinished with the connective “kara” (so). Such incomplete sentences invite the listener to complete them themselves with their own understanding. In this case, the unspoken sentiment is something to the effect that the situation “is what it is,” there is little she can do to change it and therefore focusing on the negative serves little purpose. Thus, Izumi takes the focus off the negative by finding the silver lining of her situation.

By stating the silver lining of a situation, speakers portray themselves as having a positive attitude and as being able to turn obstacles into opportunities. They indicate that they are not dwelling on the negative, but rather are focusing on the positive that can result from the negative. They realize that sometimes you can not have one thing without the other.

### 2.3.3. Summary of Speaking Positively Within a Complaint

As seen, positive characterizations and negative characterizations are not mutually exclusive of each other. Complainers may do the action of speaking positively within the action of complaining. This includes stating positive attributes of a complainable matter as well as finding the silver lining of a complainable situation. Speaking positively within a complaint has various affects. It distances the complainer from his negative comments, even if only
temporarily. Furthermore, it presents the complainer as offering a balanced comprehensive view of the situation. This serves to mitigate the negativity associated with complaining.

2.4. CHARACTERIZING COMPLAINING AS AN ACT ONE SHOULD NOT DO

The above examples were subtle in their implication that complaining is not a good conversational activity. Complainers may be more forthright in expressing the sentiment that they should not complain and may indeed seem apologetic. In the process of constructing their complaint, they characterize complaining as an act that one should not do.

In the example below, Jamie is griping about her neighbor. She closes the complaint with comments that indicate to her audience that she knows complaining may not be a subject in which they want to participate.

Example 14 (SBCSAE 2)

01. JAMIE: [ (.hh)] Uh . (1.0) They're terrible. (0.8) [ Really] .
02. HAROLD: [ I can't- ] How do you-
03. She just looks pregnant ? [ now ?]
04. JAMIE: [ She's ] pregnant. She's totally pregnant.
05. HAROLD: Oh.
06. JAMIE: It's not (. ) eating too much she's pregnant .
07. HAROLD: So: I guess (0.4.) I mean thi- this- thi- this just happened ? Or.
08. JAMIE: We're gonna have babies crying . (. ) [ in the middle of the night.]  
09. HAROLD: [ ((GROAN)) ]
10. (0.6)
11. HAROLD: Well it's no worse than her screaming at em is it ?
12. PETE: Yeah but now you'll have both .
13. JAMIE: Yeah right. Probably be like <Q shut up you ki- Q> you know? xx Oh:
14. 
15. (1.4)
16. JAMIE: I feel- I s- feel like such an old lady. But I- they just really annoy me.
17. (1.2.)
18. JAMIE: ((SIGH)) [ kay.] =
19. MILES: [ Hunh ]
20. JAMIE: =New subject. @@
21. PETE: Hm.
22. JAMIE: @@ .hh
23. HAROLD: Well it's cause they have no respect?
24. JAMIE: Yeah I guess so.

The complaint is fairly lengthy and has been continuing for several minutes. Jamie finally starts to close the complaint by professing, “Oh god, I feel like an old lady.” This statement refers to the stereotypical image of old lady who is intolerant and has nothing better to do with her time than be concerned with the matters of others. By making this statement, Jamie informs her audience that she feels that complaining is an unappealing behavior that one should not engage in indiscriminately. Granted, her attempt at seeming apologetic is retracted in the next line as she utters the conjunction ‘but’ and reaffirms her view that they are annoying. However, this statement displays her recognition that others may not view complaining as an acceptable behavior. Likewise, her utterance “new subject.” in line 20 further displays her recognition that listening to her complain may be a conversational activity that the audience no longer wishes to engage in.
While in the above example complaining is characterized as negative in general, the speaker may confine the negative evaluation to the specific compliant at hand and provide a specific reason why complaining may be deemed inappropriate in this particular situation. In the following example, Brianne is expressing her unhappiness about being a member of her friend’s wedding party. She is unhappy that she has to pay for the bridesmaid’s dress, particularly because she finds the dress to be unattractive. After complaining at length though, she momentarily acknowledges that complaining may not be appropriate in this particular circumstance. This momentary change of attitude occurs in line 42.

Example 15 (SCoCSE Amy)

01. BRIANNE: it- (.4) (hhx) () and then you know it's supposed to be tea length but comes
down to practically my ankles.

02. ADDIE: [right.]

03. BRIANNE: [so ] they have to adjust it.

04. ADDIE: [[right.]]

05. BRIANNE: [[I have]] to pay extra for it.

06. They have to take it off from the shoulders.

07. ADDIE: uh huh. you have to pay for [all this? ]

08. BRIANNE: [oh yeah.] you have to pay for alterations.

09. ADDIE: oh my God.

10. BRIANNE: it's all like shit. I haven't even gotten my shoes yet.

11. that's another what thirty forty bucks.

12. ADDIE: o::h. and then you try to go and get them dyed that [color.]

13. BRIANNE: [yeah.]

14. ADDIE: right?

15. BRIANNE: mhm mhm.
17. ADDIE: oh jeez.
18. BRIANNE: it's so expensive.
19. ADDIE: o:h.
20. BRIANNE: I mean (.) I don't know. it's just.
21
(1.5)
22. ADDIE: oh yeah.
23. BRIANNE: you know my mum said you know.
24    <@ I can't believe she didn't have all the bridesmaids go together and @> (.)
25    you know usually you kind of collaborate on something that [you-]
26. ADDIE: [oh d'you] have a white shirt?
27.    yeah. I have a wh- white [shirt.]
28. BRIANNE: [yeah.] something you all liked or looked good in you know.
29. ADDIE: yeah.
30. BRIANNE: because we don't even go to church.
31. ADDIE: she just picked out this dress
32. BRIANNE: yeah.
33. ADDIE: and then everybody had to get it?
34. BRIANNE: yeah, like this (.) my mum's point was well it would be different if they were paying
35. for them you [know] then they could do that.
36. ADDIE: [I know.]
37. BRIANNE: buying them you know?
38. ADDIE: yeah.
39. BRIANNE: and I don't even and will probably never wear it [again.]
40. ADDIE: [never wear it] again. that's right.
41. [oh.]
42. BRIANNE: [yeah.] I mean (.) tsk (.) I hate to say that like (.) oh (.) it's a waste.
because you know it's a wedding.

I know.

it's a once in a life time thing.

you just do it.

but I'm on a limited budget [right now.]

[I know.] you don't have that much.

you can't [help it.]

[that's the] thing.

I know.

(2.0)

[yeah.]

[s] thing.

I know.

that's kind of bad.

uh huh. so I wasn't so happy.

no I don't suppose

Brianne concedes that complaining about her responsibilities as a bridesmaid may not be an appropriate conversational act. She says, “I hate to say that like (. .) oh (. .) it's a waste. because you know it's a wedding.” Weddings are supposed to be a happy occasion, and she should view being chosen as a bridesmaid as an honor, not a financial burden. Unlike the previous example in which the speaker deems complaining in general as an inappropriate conversational act, this speaker strictly refers to the inappropriateness of complaining in this particular circumstance, e.g. a wedding. However, like the previous example, the speaker’s professed reluctance to complain is only momentary. Similar to the previous example, she retracts her reluctance with a ‘but’, and continues to maintain her position that she cannot really afford the dress.
In the above example, the complainer delineated a specific situation in which complaining may be inappropriate. Thus, she provided a specific reason for why complaining may be inappropriate. In my data, the most common reason speakers cited for why they should not complain is because they too have some responsibility for the situation. When complaining, speakers may identify themselves as to blame for the circumstances. I will look at two such examples from English and one from Japanese.

In the following, Brianne is complaining to her friend Addie about her schoolwork. She vacillates between complaining about the work and accepting accountability for her situation. Addie starts the complaint sequence by stating that she has work to do. Although she is not finished with her turn, Brianne interrupts Addie’s complaint in line 5 to begin her own second complaint. However, in the next line, she employs self-mockery to transform her complaint about her studies into a self-complaint. Addie too eventually joins in with the mocking.

Example 16a

01. ADDIE: I've got work to do.

02. (1.0)

03. ADDIE: I've got to read Richard the third still.

04. I've read [most of it like-].

05. BRIANNE: [I've got a paper to write.]

06. did I do it?

07 n[oh:]

08. ADDIE: [no.] @@

09. BRIANNE: I'll do that in the motel room [tomorrow night. (@ @ @ @) ]

10. ADDIE: [(@ @ @ @ @ )] (.hh) oh goody.
11. BRIANNE: mhm mhm.
12. ADDIE: that- that'll work well.
13. BRIANNE: oh-
14. ADDIE: could be doing it now of course.
15. BRIANNE: uhhuh.
16. I could but I wouldn't be anyway.[@@@@@@].
17. ADDIE: [@@@@@@] no.

In line 6, Brianne quickly changes the tone of her complaint to that of a self-complaint by rhetorically asking if she already did it (i.e. her schoolwork). The implication of this question is that she is at fault as she had ample opportunity to begin the work but has not. It is phrased in a manner that projects an answer of “no.” Indeed, both Brianne and Addie almost simultaneously answer “no” in lines 7 and 8. When Brianne claims that she will do the work tomorrow in a hotel, Addie continues with the mockery. She sarcastically states that Brianne’s plan is good in line 12. Furthermore, in line 14 she mockingly states that Brianne could be doing the work now. Thus, she repeats the charge Brianne had already made in line 6. In essence, both girls transform the complaint from a complaint about schoolwork to a complaint about Brianne’s lackadaisical attitude.

The conversation continues and Brianne explains her assignment. Addie negatively assesses the assignment in line 28 by stating “yick” and Brianne agrees with this assessment by repeating Addie’s negative characterization in the subsequent line. So once again, the conversation has assumed a complaint tone. Brianne furthers the complaint in line 31 by moaning about not having sufficient time to write two papers. However, she once more mitigates the complaint by placing the blame on herself.
Example 16b

18. BRIANNE: it's the music.

19. it's a concert report.

20. ADDIE: o[:h.]

21. BRIANNE: [I ] had gone to a concert.

22. ADDIE: mhm mhm.

23. BRIANNE: and I have to write a five page paper about it.

24. ADDIE: five pa[:ge.]

25. BRIANNE: [act ]ually and there's another one [too. ]

26. ADDIE: [oh no.]

27. BRIANNE: we have two due at the end- by Friday.

28. ADDIE: yick.

29. BRIANNE: yick.

30. o::h.

31. when am I going to have time to go see another one?

32. of course I had a quarter to do this [and.]

33. ADDIE: [of course. @ ]

34. BRIANNE: I really shouldn't complain.

35. Bu::t.

36. ADDIE: no.

37. BRIANNE: but uhm (.) you know?

38. ha ha.

39. ADDIE: yeah.
Brianne acknowledges that she has had the whole quarter to work on the assignment. Moreover, in line 34, she out rightly admits that she should not complaint. Thus, she once again accepts responsibility for her situation.

After confessing her procrastination, Brianne proceeds to mitigate her complaint even further. She states that these are the only papers she has and the rest of her school work only consists of studying (presumably writing papers is more onerous than studying). This is the same type of downgrading technique seen in section 2.2 in which the complainer maintains that the situation is actually not so bad and could be worse. Then, in line 47, she once again accepts her own role in creating her predicament for the third and final time

Example 16c

40. BRIANNE: but mostly I've no other papers due.
41. [it's just.]
42. ADDIE: [yeah.]
43. BRIANNE: studying.
44. ADDIE: yeah.
45. BRIANNE: so:::
46. ADDIE: that's good.
47. BRIANNE: and this won't even- I mean I'm making too big of a deal out of it cause this teacher's like this is just you know a basic
48. music cla:ss.
49. it's not an honors you know.
50. ADDIE: uhhuh.
51. BRIANNE: you know philosophical
From lines 47 to 70, Brianne states that she is making the paper into a more difficult assignment than it actually is. In summary, Brianne vacillates between complaining about her schoolwork and indicating her own bad actions and responsibility in regards to the situation.
Ultimately, she ends the complaint with an “it’s my fault attitude.” This stands in contrast to those complaints in which the speaker resumes complaining and ends the sequence with the complaint in the forefront, thereby negating the mitigation.

In the next example, Sara and Debbie are discussing Debbie’s relationship with her ex-boyfriend. Debbie is still maintaining a friendship with him although it is making her miserable because she still loves him and wants to be in a romantic relationship with him. On the other hand, she cannot completely let him go because she feels that she would be just as unhappy. It is the proverbial “being stuck between a rock and a hard place.” In the midst of complaining about her situation, Debbie acknowledges that she could be dealing with the situation differently.

Example 17 (CAF English 6239)

01. SARA: that's Tom's bullshit that he was pulling on Bryan.
02. DEBBIE: °I know. ° but he's got a lot of problems.
03. but I don't- I mean I'm not saying like I'm making the right choices necessarily by.
04. (.hhh) continuing to like see him and stuff. [but.]
05. SARA: [m hm:]
06. DEBBIE: I:, (0.3) °am° so miserable.
07. I mean I'm still- you know it's like it sucks.
08. (.hhh)cause he's my best friend too.
09. °and you know it's just like it's the worst.
10. (.hhh) °it's the worst thing.

In lines 3 thru 5, Debbie holds herself accountable for her own misery. She begins the statement with “I mean I am not saying.” This statement indicates that regardless of her previous
talk, she was not trying to formulate a justification for her actions and / or lack of control over her suffering. Then she admits that continuing to see him is probably not a prudent choice. Despite her claim of responsibility, she counters her statement with “but” in line 5 and maintains how miserable the situation is lines 7 through 11. She once again portrays herself as a victim of circumstances.

I will now look at a similar example from Japanese. In the following conversation, Junko is talking to Rieko about her relationship with a male friend. She is not sure if she can trust him and is unsure of the future of their relationship. In this particular excerpt, she is specifically complaining that he is not talkative when around other people. She attributes it to his inability to speak English well. In the midst of her complaint, she claims partial fault for the situation.

Example 18 CHJ (1690)

01. JUNKO: [demo] nan ka shinyoo dekihen <X ga X> yokei ni.
   but INJ trust can:NEG IEP very much ADV
   But I can’t trust him very much

02. RIEKO: aaa

03. JUNKO: u::n

04. RIEKO: aaa (0.7) ee de- demo sono hito shabetteru toki toozen nihongo de shabetteiru yaroo.
   INJ INJ but- but that person speak:ASP when naturally Japanese in speak:ASP TAG
   Oh bu- but when that person is talking naturally he is speaking in Japanese right?

05. JUNKO: mochiron.
of course
of course

06. RIEKO:  na

IEP
right

07. JUNKO:  da kara na,

so  IEP
so

08. kekkoo watashi ga warui na to omotten no yo.

Quite a bit  I NOM at fault IEP QOUT think:ASP SE IEP
I think that I am at fault quite a bit.

09. mada kita toko ya shi na,

still come:PAST just PRED and IEP
We just got here and

10. yonkagetsu gurai yan ka.

Four months about TAG Q
I’ve been here about four months right?


And five months PRED he TOP
And it’s been five months for him

12. RIEKO:  [un]  [[u::n]]

BCH  BCH
mhmm  mhmm

13. JUNKO:  de watashi kyonen ita kara shaberu nan ka
And I was here last year so I can talk.

14. RIEKO: [un un]

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

15. JUNKO: [demo] na,

but IEP

but

16. honma na:? 

true IEP

The truth is

17. XwataXshi jibun toka wa.

I myself and such TOP

I myself

18. shaberu renshuu nan ka se na akan kedo:.

talk:NEG practice INJ do:MOD but

You have to practice speaking

19. RIEKO: un un

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

20. JUNKO: kedo:.

but

but
21. (0.5)
22. nani.
   what
   *what do I want to say,
23. (.)
24. watashi ga oru kara shuumatsu toka zutto <E study E> shite iru kara:

   I NOM be there so weekend and such whole study do:ASP so

   I am there so you know, I am there studying the whole weekend so

25. RIEKO: un
   BCH
   mhmm

26. JUNKO: shaberahen shi*
   talk:NEG and
   *He doesn’t talk and….

27. maa terebi toka miru kedo:
   INJ television and such watch but
   *Well, we watch television and things like that but

28. RIEKO: [un]
   BCH
   mhmm

29. JUNKO: [Chot]to are ka naa to omoitsutsu.
   INJ that Q IEP QOUT think:while
   *All the while I am thinking “whatever”

30. RIEKO: un ((yawning))
31. JUNKO: maa ii ka to @@

**INJ fine Q QOUT**

*It doesn’t matter*

In line 8, Junko says that sometimes she thinks she is at fault too. Then, in lines 11 and 13-18, she specifies her fault by admitting that she spends a lot of time with him on the weekends and therefore he does not practice speaking. Like the previous examples, she mitigates her complaint by stating her own culpability in the situation.

As these three examples have shown, by accepting responsibility, speakers may take the “indirect” out of indirect complaints, even if momentarily. When this occurs, the complaint is no longer the responsibility of a third party entity that is not there or the result of uncontrollable circumstances. Rather, the responsibility has been transferred from a source outside of the conversation to a source inside the conversation; i.e. the complainer. By doing this, complainers mitigate the negativity associated with complaining by acknowledging that complaining is something they should not do in a particular situation due to their culpability.

As seen, complainers may openly acknowledge that they should not complain and by doing so, they demonstrate their understanding to the addressee that complaining is a negative act. In making their acknowledgment, some of the complainers characterized the act of complaining in general as negative while others limited its negativity to complaining in certain situations. Furthermore, while in the majority of the examples the speakers were subtle and indirect in their concession that complaining may be inappropriate or unjustified, in example 16, the complainer out right stated that she should not complain. Displaying one’s awareness that complaining is an undesirable act allows complainers to present themselves as being reluctant to
complain. It indicates their hesitation to perform such an act. Nonetheless, such expressions appear to add little in the way of actual attenuation of the complaint though, as the complainers in all three examples remained firm in their stance after their claims of responsibility.

2.5 ROUTINIZED EXPRESSIONS

In English, the speaker’s need to indicate to addressees their realization complaining is a negative act has resulted in routinized expressions of mitigation that complainers frequently employ when complaining. We have actually already seen one instance of this in example 16b when the complainer says “I really shouldn’t complain.” My native speaker intuition has allowed me to think of several variations of this routinized expression: e.g. “I really shouldn’t say this but …” “I hate to complain but… “I don’t mean to complain but…”. In this section, I will discuss two more examples that I found in my data: “no offense” and “I’m sorry but.”

While speakers commonly employ the expression “no offense” when complaining directly to the offender about their actions, they also employ it when complaining indirectly about a third party. In the case of direct complaints, it functions to soften harsh words directed towards the listener. In regards to indirect complaints, it serves to mitigate the complaint by displaying recognition that complaining about a third party is an undesirable action and claims that no malice is intended despite the complaint.

In the conversation between Alina and Lenore below, Lenore is the first to make a critical remark. She comments that a mutual acquaintance appears to be overly interested in computers. This leads Alina to complain that computers are boring in lines 6 and 8 and to question why anyone would have such an invested interest in computers in line 10 by rhetorically asking, “who cares.” While on the surface the comment is a denigration of computers, the underlying subtext is a criticism of the acquaintance for investing so much energy into computers. Before
continuing with the complaint, she prefaces the next criticism with the routinized phrase “no 
offense” in line 10.

Example 19 (SBCSAE 6)

01.  LENORE:  She said she wanted to go back to schoo:l o:r something
02.     do something with her li::fe, or.
03.   [(.hhh) she's too into] computers.
04.  ALINA:  [(.hhhhhhhhhh) (.hhx) ]
05.     (0.4)
06.  ALINA:  (.hh)(.) They're boring.
07.  LENORE:  @ [ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ ] .
08.  ALINA:  [ You know. aren't they boring? They're] so boring.
09.  LENORE:  [[(hh)]]
10.  ALINA:  [[(hh I ) ]] mean it's like who care[s. No offense but I think that you can]=
11.  LENORE:  @ [ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ ]
12.  ALINA:  = get(.) caught up in computers like within [ what. Five weeks or something? ]
13.  LENORE:  [@@@@@@@@@@ ( .hh)]=
14.  LENORE:  =[@@@@@@@@ ( .hhhhhhhhh)]
15.  ALINA:  [(.hhh) (.h)You gotta sit there] and-
16.     ( hhhx) you- you know.
17.     Oh[: you ]
18.  LENORE:  [ you space out ] on it .

In lines 15, Alina derogatorily states that if a person wants to educate themselves about 
computers, he or she must endure the tedious and mind-numbing process of sitting in front of the
computers for hours. Interesting, it is actually the addressee, Lenore, who finishes and utters the crux of the complaint by uttering, “you space out on it” in line 18. In any case, Alina mitigates the remark by prefacing it with “no offense.” With this preface, she displays recognition to the addressee that her words are denigrating to a third party and denies that she intends any such denigration. However, because the phrase is routinized and because she immediately counters the phrase with a “but” statement and remains intent on expanding upon her complaint, the actual mitigation effect is minimal. Rather than diminishing the actual complaint, its main function seems to be acknowledgement that fault finding is an undesirable action.

In addition to “no offense,” speakers also employ the phrase “I’m sorry” in the contexts of complaints and other forms of negative talk. In the following example, Amy is complaining to Mary about her class schedule for a special program that she is in. At present, her math class is at 8:00 in the morning, which allows for a long break period. However, she would rather have the class at 10:00 and a shorter one hour lunch break. Although she and other students have requested that the class time be changed, the administration has so far refused their request. Amy fails to see the problem in their request and does not see a logical reason for why they cannot move the class. In line 7, Amy prefaces her complaint with “I’m sorry”

Example 20 (SCoSCE Mary – class)

01. AMY: if we move that eight o'clock to (0.8) ten then we’d only have an hour
02. break.
03. which would be for lunch.
04. and we'd be in class just the five hour time.
05. and that'd be better.
06. it's ridiculous having- (.)
07. I'm sorry but (. ) as long as it's only a select group of people,
08. in this one math class it affects no other students.
09. MARY: they're not gonna move it though.
10. AMY: they might.
11. (.2)
12. AMY: if we bitch enough they might.
13. (.2)
14. AMY seriously, because it's only (. ) the people that are really in our class,

The phrase “I’m sorry” precedes Amy’s argument that as her request is reasonable and valid there is no logical basis for the administration’s denial. It marks her recognition that her stance is at variance with that of administration and displays that recognition to the addressee. Furthermore, it acknowledges that in expressing her stance, she is going to convey an impression of superiority and condescension. Thus, “I’m sorry” is not truly an apology for her complaint, but rather a routinized expression which displays her recognition that she is about to perform a negative action.

The examples in this section once again demonstrate that complainers not only employ conversational strategies that indirectly indicate that complaining is a negative act, but they also openly acknowledge to addressees their realization of its negativity by characterizing complaining as an act that one should not engage in. In this section, we saw that complainers may openly display their recognition of its negativity by characterizing complaining as an act that one should not engage in. In this section, we saw that the open acknowledgement of the negativity of complaints also includes the use of set expressions that speakers routinely use as preliminaries to complaints. As in the previous section, such expressions appear to do
very little in the attenuation of complaints as they are routinized and the complainers proceed to complain despite their displays of reluctance.

2.6 SUMMARY OF DEALING WITH THE NEGATIVITY OF COMPLAINTS

In this section, I looked at how speakers attempt to counteract the negative stigma that may accompany complaining. In the course of the complaint, speakers may mitigate their complaints and show addressees that they recognize that complaining may be a negative conversational action and/or that the situation at hand may be one about which they should not complain. By mitigating their complaints, speakers are able to give legitimacy to them. They show the listener that they are grounding their complaints in objectivity and are able to see “the larger picture,” which includes positive aspects as well as negative aspects. Through mitigation, speakers demonstrate their hesitancy to complain and indicate that they would not complain if the matter were not truly a complainable. In brief, it enhances the validity of the complaint by exhibiting that it is based on rationality and fair judgment. Furthermore, these acts may lessen the negativity projected by complaining and aid in the preservation of complainer’s face.

It is noteworthy that in no way were these acts of mitigation attempts to deal with the negativity of complaining a direct reaction to a listeners’ utterance. That is, in these examples, the listener did not leave any verbal indication that they felt the complaint was inappropriate or that they did not want to engage in the complaint. Thus, the counteractions seem to be a self-initiated action by the complainer. Furthermore, in some examples, the attempts seemed to be token actions. In 11 of these examples, the complainers retracted their mitigation with “but” (“kedo” in Japanese) statements thereby negating any mitigation they made. After their mitigation, they quickly returned to complaining and reaffirmed their position that the event was a complainable. The lack of listener initiation and the questionable sincerity of some of these
comments indicate that counteracting the negativity is something complainers were compelled to do regardless of the listener’s attitude and regardless of their own true feelings.
3. ROLE OF THE NON-AFFECTED PARTY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In section 2, I primarily looked at the role of the complainer and the techniques he or she employed in constructing a complaint. In this section, I will turn to look at the role of the non-affected party of a complaint. That is, the person who is not impacted by the negative situation in question. Most commonly, the role of the non-affected party is that of a listener, an addressee or recipient of the complaint whose function is to respond to the complainers’ talk. However, as will be seen, their role extends beyond that of merely providing responses and replies to complaints. They are also involved in other aspects of the complaint process as well. In this section, I will discuss the types of responses speaker’s proffer in a complaint situation and the role they play in developing complaints by inciting them and supplementing them.

3.2. LISTENER RESPONSES

From a conversation analytic perspective, indirect complaints are first actions that initiate conversational sequences. When someone complains then, some type of relevant response is expected. If one were not to acknowledge an indirect complaint, the lack of response would be noticeably absent (Bilmes 1988, Schegloff 2007: 19). Furthermore, the absence of uptake would most likely be to the detriment of the complaint. Indeed Boxer (1993a) says non-responses and topic switches “function to either minimize or terminate an exchange (38)” and that they “were uttered in situations where the addressee was tired of listening to a speaker complain, where the addressee knew the speaker to be a constant complainer, or where there was either intimacy or a high degree of social distance coupled with status inequality (38).” Similarly, Mandelbaum (1991/1992) outlined several ways in which a listener may disattend to complaints. By not responding to an indirect complaint, a speaker shows his unwillingness to engage in conversation...
about the complaint and creates an environment in which the complaint will unlikely develop.

Although in my review of the literature on complaints researchers did not focus on responses to complaints as their sole topic of research, they have discussed it in the literature. Günthner (1997a) discusses how in German, narrators of complaint stories specifically design their stories to invite co-alignment from the recipient. Listeners then in turn may show affiliation with the narrator’s stories by responding with expressions of indignation and empathy. Upon seeing the agreement, the speaker may join the display of indignation. The result is a demonstration of emotional reciprocity between the narrator and recipient. Similar to Günthner, Drew (1998) also states that expressions of indignation may be collaborative. After hearing speakers express their indignation about the transgressions of others, the listener may show his affiliation with the complainant by expressing his own indignation.

To date, the most thorough discussion on various types of responses to indirect complaints is Boxer (1993a). She outlines six different types of responses to complaints. The following table shows the types of responses to complaints, what percentage of the corpus each response comprised, and comments about the responses, mostly in regards to the specific kinds of responses each general category encompassed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% of corpus</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ø or topic switch</td>
<td>10.19%</td>
<td>rhetorical, deliberate topic switch, repeated backchanneling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Question</td>
<td>11.70%</td>
<td>responses requesting elaboration; Challenge question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Contradiction</td>
<td>14.72%</td>
<td>usually involved either intimates or status-unequals with a high degree of social distance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Joke / teasing</td>
<td>6.23%</td>
<td>making light of situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Advice / lecture</td>
<td>13.58%</td>
<td>platitudes, specific advice, moralizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Commiseration</td>
<td>43.58%</td>
<td>agreement, reassurance, exclamations, finishing speaker’s sentence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV: Indirect Responses (Boxer 1993a, p. 38)
As can be seen, commiseration was the most common response. Interestingly, despite the fact that a response is expected, no relevant response at all was not the least common reaction to an indirect complaint as one might expect. Rather it was the second least likely response, with joking and teasing being the least frequent response.

Furthermore, Boxer claimed that an addresses response to an indirect complaint varied depending on gender and social distance. In regards to gender (Boxer 1993a, 1993c), women predominately reacted with commiseration, while men replied with questions; both questions that showed interest and that challenged the complainer’s statements. Boxer concluded that for women, indirect complaining is a rapport-building behavior that is used to create a sense of solidarity; a social function of complaints that is not generally found among men. As for the factor of social distance, Boxer (1993a, 1993d) found that both strangers and friends most frequently responded to complaints with commiseration, while intimates most commonly responded by contradicting the complaint. From this, Boxer explains how strangers as well as friends and acquaintances use complaint/commiseration sequences to both open conversations and sustain interaction.

One aspect that should be made clear when discussing responses to indirect complaints is that one indirect complaint can potentially receive more than one type of response. Addresses can and do respond in a variety of ways within a complaint exchange. As a complaint develops, the listener may change his reaction as he negotiates the conversation with the complainant. Hence one complaint is not limited to one type of response.

As previously mentioned in section one, complaints are a risky action as they involve taking a stance and thus they automatically invite alignment or disalignment from the addressee. When complaining about a particular situation, a speaker is wanting a reaction that shows
support for him and his complaint. A desirable response is one that validates the complainer’s position and gives credence that the situation described is indeed a complainable situation. Complaints about self are an exception to this because the preferred response is to deny the complaint (Boxer 1993a, Pomerantz 1984). Undesirable responses are those which hinder the speaker in his or her endeavor to complain and which classify the speaker’s statement as a non-complainable. In her classification of responses to complaints, Boxer (1993a) categorized responses as supportive, non-supportive, and neutral. Supportive responses were those that encourage the complainer and support the interaction and/or the relationship between the speakers. Non-supportive exchanges were those in which the addressee expressed their superiority. In neutral responses, the listener’s reactions were viewed as neither positive nor negative, and were often a result of the addressee trying to present him or herself in a certain manner.

In my research, it became clear that what the addressee of a complaint intended to convey by his or her response and the way in which the response is received by the complainer are two different matters. In responding, a speaker may endeavor to be supportive and his response may sound as such, however it may still not be a satisfactory response for the complainer. This becomes evident in the complainer’s response to the addressee’s response. Furthermore, a response that is well-received and considered supportive in one situation may not be received as well in another situation. For example, advice, which is generally considered supportive, may be received negatively by a complainer who was hoping for a different kind of response. Alternatively, while the complainer may not have any contentions about receiving advice, he or she may object to the specific nature of the advice.
In this section, I will discuss various kinds of responses to speaker’s complaints. Furthermore, when applicable, I will look at the complainer’s reactions to these responses. While intuitively one may expect commiseration to be the most common type of response and Boxer did find this to be the case in her data, in my personal research I found a broad array of responses that were not commiserative in nature. As will be seen many of these responses involve distancing oneself from the negativity that is imbued by complaints and turning to talk that is more upbeat and positive in nature. This tendency is part of a larger of preference in conversational interaction to focus on talk that is non-problematic and that embodies an optimal situation. For example, Maynard (2003) states that there is a preference for good news over bad news. Therefore, speakers shroud and delay bad news and when exiting from it they focus on the positive by turning to good news. This is what Maynard calls the “benign order of everyday life” in which in interaction, participants prefer to frame their social world as benign as opposed to malign. Similarly, in her research on sequential organization of trouble talks, Jefferson (1988) found that after affiliating with the troubles-teller, speakers tended to exit the troubles by moving on to more positive talk. Finally, this phenomena is also reflected in Heritage’s work (2001) in which British health visitors framed their health questions to patients in a manner that preferred an optimal no-problem response. This preference for talk which focuses on the optimal leads to a conundrum for recipients of complaints. On one hand there is a sequential preference in complaints to respond by embracing the negativity embodied in complaints through affiliative displays such as commiseration. However there is a social preference for talk which is positive not negative. These cross cutting preferences are reflected in some of my data in recipients’ responses to complaints and the complainers’ reaction to these responses.
Finally, by no means are the different types of responses which I am about to discuss meant to be a definitive list. Rather they are common responses that I felt would provide a good descriptive analysis of listener responses to complaints. Furthermore, I would like to reiterate that complaints are often an elaborate, elongated conversational sequence and thus many types of responses may be seen throughout the sequence.

3.2.1. Responding by downplaying a complaint

In section 2.2, we saw that after a complaint, a complainer may downplay the severity of a complaint by stating that it is not the bad and that it could be worse. This practice is available to addresses of a complaint as well. Like complainers, they too may call into question the severity of a complainable situation. While, in my data, this type of response was generally not well-received by the complainer, I did find one example in which the complainer accepts the addressee’s assessment.

In the example below, Akane, Mizuki, Aoi, and Reina are all students at the same university. Akane negatively characterizes her financially situation. She states that money is tight due to tuition. While Mizuki and Aoi merely acknowledge her comment in lines 4 and 6 respectively, Reina agrees with Akane and becomes a co-participant in the complaint by uttering “takai desu ne.” (It is expensive, isn’t it.) in line 8. Akane furthers her complaint in line 9 by expressing the pain she feels when looking at her bankbook. Aoi sympathizes with Akane by uttering “kibishii yo ne.” (It’s hard isn’t.). Despite the Aoi’s initial acceptance of Akane’s complaint, she modifies her stances and characterizes the situation more positively in lines 18 thru 20.

Example 21 (Sakura 11)

01. AKANE: watashi wa pinchi da kara.
Money is tight for me so.

02. (0.4)

03. jugyooryoo ga.

\[
\text{tuition} \quad \text{NOM}
\]

\[
\text{tuition}
\]

04. MIZUKI: @ @ .

05. (0.6)

06. AOI: jugyooryoo ne .

\[
\text{tuition} \quad \text{IEP}
\]

\[
\text{tuition}
\]

07. AKANE: jugyooryoo ga .

\[
\text{tuition} \quad \text{NOM}
\]

\[
\text{tuition}
\]

08. REINA: takai yo ne .

\[
\text{expensive} \quad \text{IEP} \quad \text{IEP}
\]

\[
\text{It’s expensive isn’t it}
\]

09. AKANE: tsuuchoo kekkoo haitte kuru n da kedo ikki ni nakunaru kara ne .

\[
\text{bank book} \quad \text{quite} \quad \text{come-in:AUX SE COP but one breathe ADV disappears so} \quad \text{IEP}
\]

\[
\text{According to my bankbook quite of bit of money is coming in but it disappears in the blink of an eye}
\]

10. AOI: (( imitates looking at her bankbook and putting it down on table))

11. hai- hai .[@ @@[@]]

\[
\text{okay okay}
\]

\[
\text{It’s like okay. Okay.}
\]
12. AKANE: [soo][[ soo soo mata tsumitatebun.@ @ ]] right right right remaining savings reserve

Yeah yeah yeah. Your remaining savings

13. MIZUKI: [[@@@@@@@@@@@@]]

14. REINA: [[@@@@@@@@@@@@]]

15. AOI: @@kibishii yo ne .

hard IEP IEP

It’s hard, isn’t i?.

16. AKANE: kibishii .

hard

It is hard.

17. MIZUKI: u:n .

BCH

mhm

18. AOI: nanka Tookyoo no hoo no ko no hanashi o kiku to saa ,

EMP Tokyo GEN area GEN children GEN talk ACC listen QOUT IEP

If you listen to what kids from the Tokyo area say,

19. (1.2)

20. AOI: yasui mitai yo.

cheap looks lie IEP

it looks like it’s cheap.

21. REINA: jugyooryoo ?

Tuition

tuition?
22. AOI: uchi no gakkoo.
   our GEN school
   our school

23. REINA: a uchi ga?
   INJ we NOM
   We are?

24. AKANE: a. eh? Gen-Gengo?
   INJ INJ lang- languages
   Oh huh Languages?

25. AOI: ((shakes heads affirmatively))

26. AKANE: soo gen[go. un un ]
   yeah languages mhm mhm
   Yeah Languages. mhm mhm

27. AOI: [rikee tte iu ka] iryoo no wari-[[ na noni]]
   science QOUT say Q medical care GEN rate COP even though
   Even though the rate is that of a science school, well a medical care
   school

28. AKANE [[un un]]
   BCH BCH
   mhm mhm

29. AOI: hyakusanjuu yonjuu [[[da kara, ]]]
   130 40 COP so
   It is like 130 or 40 so

30. AKANE: [[[soo soo]]]
right right

yeah yeah


totally cheap looks like IEP

it is totally cheap.

32. MIZUKI: [yasui ne.]

cheap IEP

It is cheap.

33. REINA: [huun]

BCH

ooh

34. AKANE: [datte] uchi ichiban yasui toko sagashite koko ni kita n da mon.

EMP I most cheap place look:CONJ here DIR come:PAST SE COP SE

You know, I came here because I was looking for the cheapest place.

At first, Aoi aligns with Akane in line 15 by agreeing that money is tight for students. However, she then distances herself from the in lines 18-20, by stating that the tuition at their university is not so high in comparison to other schools in Tokyo even though it is a medical care school (Note: such schools are generally more expensive in Japan). While Reina seems surprised by the assessment, Akane agrees with Aoi’s assessment. Reina repair’s Aoi’s talk by uttering “jyuugyooryoo” (tuition) and “uchi no” (ours). Such requests for clarification indicate that the previous talk is somehow problematic. They signify that Aoi’s statement is contrary to her expectations and possibly that she disagrees (Schegloff 2004). Akane on the other hand confirms Aoi’s statement in line 34 by stating that she chose their school based on its lower
tuition. Thus, the initial complainer accepts the addressee’s response that the situation could be worse.

Although complainers themselves may downplay a complaint and although the complainer above accepted the recipient’s drawn grade, such a response by a recipient is often not well received. While it is one thing for complainers to backpedal and state that the situation in question is actually not so bad and could be worse, it is a different matter when listeners respond in such a manner. As will be seen in the following two examples from Japanese, attempting to downgrade a complaint may be met with resistance by the complainer.

In the following conversation, a mother and daughter are talking about the daughter’s impending return to Japan from America. The daughter, Aki, is complaining about how hard it has been and about how tired she is from preparing to come home. In short, she is feeling stressed out. Among her many stresses is the prospect that she has to travel by herself. When she expresses her concerns to her mother, the mother fails to see the situation as problematic.

Example 22a (CHJ 1899)

01. AKI:       tte iu ka nakanaka konkai hitori tabi da kara,
   QOUT say Q  quite this time solo trip PRED so
   *It’s more like that this time I am traveling alone so*

02. yatta koto nai deshoo?
   do:PAST:MOD TAG
   *I have never done that, you know.*

03. ima made ikkai mo.
    until now once even
    *not even once until now*

04. chotto-
little bit

It’s a little bit-

05. MOTHER: kankoku hitori de itta ga ne.

Korea alone go:PAST Q IEP

You went to Korea alone, didn’t you.

06. AKI: un. da kedo kankoku tte itta tte=

yeah but Korea QOUT say:PAST QOUT

Yeah. but.. Korea?

07. =mata zenzen chigau kara sa?

rather totally different so IEP

that’s totally different so...

08. MOTHER: un.

BCH

mhmm

The mother challenges the daughter’s complaint by reminding her that she went to Korea alone. The implication is that therefore traveling alone should be no big deal. While the daughter initially agrees with the factual accuracy of her mother’s statement with “un” (yeah) in line 6, it soon becomes apparent that she objects to her mother’s statement when she utters “da kedo” (but). She then expresses her puzzlement as to why her mother would make this comment by saying “kankoku tte itte ta.” (lit. “You said Korea.”). The expression “tte itta te” conveys the sentiment that her mother’s talk is somehow mistaken and misplaced. Next, she states that her trip to Korea was completely different from her present situation. The final particle “sa” both strengthens her assertion and indicates that her views are at variance with those of her mother. In short than, she does not accept her mother’s evaluation of the situation.
While the speakers temporarily drop the subject at this point, the daughter eventually raises the topic again later on in the conversation. When Aki states once more that she will be by herself (hitori), her mother seeks to clarify that she meant riding on a plane. The daughter begins to clarify what she meant by “hitori” (by oneself) in line 3. However, before she can finish the statement, the mother interrupts the clarification and minimizes the complaint.

Example 22b

01. AKI: konkai zenbu hitori da kara sa?
   
   **this time all alone PRED so IEP**
   
   *This time I am doing it all by myself.*

02. MOTHER: nani ga hitori hikooki o noru no ga.
   
   **what NOM oneself plane ACC ride NML NOM**
   
   *Doing what by yourself? riding a plane?*

03. AKI: iya hitori tte iu ka.
   
   **EMP alone QOUT say Q**
   
   *It’s not just that it’s by myself*

04. ichioo tabi ga sa,
   
   **first of all trip NOM IEP**
   
   *First of all, the trip is*

05. MOTHER: datte rokujikan dake deshoo.
   
   **but six hours only TAG.**
   
   *but it is only six hours right*

06. AKI: iya sono ato mo chanto nihon kaette iku made mo mata ne?
   
   **EMP after that also actually Japan return until even again IEP**
   
   *Even after that, even when I actually return to Japan, once again*
07. MOTHER:  [ un ]

BCH

mhmm

08. AKI:  [Xnan]kai kaX norikae shinakyaaa ikenai kara,

Several times  transfer  do:MOD  so

I have to transfer several times so

In line 5, she states that the plane flight is only six hours, implying that doing it alone should be of no consequence. However, the daughter does not waiver in her position and states that it is not just the plane ride alone from America that will difficult, but also the fact that she will have to transfer several times during her travels. Thus, she once again challenges her mother’s minimization and maintains her complaint.

In the next example below, a father is complaining to his daughter that he is losing his hair. The daughter minimizes her father’s concerns and frustrations by saying that he should be happy because his situation could be worse.

Example 23 (CHJ 1428)

01. MARI:  demo anta  jibun no oya o kangaetara::;

but  you  your own GEN parents ACC think:TEMP

but when you think about your own parents

02. ima goro-  ((goro is repaired in next utterance))

about this time

about this time-

03. ima made  matte yokat-  ((matte is repaired in next utterance))

now till  wait:CONJ  good-

04. ima made motte  yokatta  tte kanji gozaimasen?
now till have:CONJ good:PAST QOUT feeling have:HON:NEG
don’t you feel glad that until now you at least had some till now?

05. FATHER: nnnn ((disagreement sound))

BCH

mmmm

06. MARI: jibun no oniisama atama kangaeta koto aru?
your own GEN older brother:TIT:HON head think:PAST ASP
Have you ever thought about your older brother’s head?

07. FATHER: <X Higashino Kenji X> takusan atta n.

Higashino Kenji a lot have:PAST SE
Kenji Higashino had a lot.

08. MARI: <@ demo anta no oya ja nai nanka. @> [@@@@@@@@]

But you GEN parent NEG INJ
But he is not your parent

09. FATHER: [are ore no ja nai ka. @@]

INJ I GEN NEG Q
Wait. he is not mine

10. MARI: anta ya nai ne,

you NEG IEP
he is not yours

11. anta ya nai ne.

you NEG IEP
he is not yours
12. FATHER: de uchi no yooobo takusan aru zo ke wa*
and my GEN wife a lot have IEP hair IEP
And my wife (i.e. your mom) has a lot of hair.

13. MARI: watashi datte takusan aru mon.
I too a lot have SE
I have a lot too.

14. FATHER: ii na*
good IEP
I wish I did (LIT: must be nice)

15. MARI: u:::n
BCH
yep

16. FATHER: chanto minna aru toki ni aru de ii wa*
rightly everyone has when TP have PRED:CONJ good IEP
Everyone when they have their hair they are lucky to have it

17. MARI: hontoo ni
`
real ADV
really

18. demo anta jibun no oniisama tada mite miyaro.
But you your own GEN older bother:TIT:HON just look:AUX:IMP
But just look at your older brother

19. otoosan motteiru hoo ya de nan ka.
Dad has:ASP side IEP PRED:CONJ INJ
You’re the one who has more, Dad

79
First, in lines 1-4, the daughter tells her father that rather than complain he should think about his parents. Given family history, he should appreciate that he had as much hair as he did until now. The father responds to this in line 5 with a disagreement sound. Then in line 6 and lines 18 and 19, she tells him to look at his older brother who is balder. Again, the father only offers a minimal response; signifying that he is not persuaded. The implication of the daughter’s remarks is twofold. First, the father should be grateful because there are people with less hair than him. Furthermore, he should be grateful because considering genetics and family history, his own situation could potentially be worse. She trivializes the father’s complaint by stating that his situation is not a worst-case scenario and that other people have it worse than him.

The daughter’s intentions in making light of the situation are unclear. This complaint has the characteristics of a self-complaint and the preferred response is to deny the complaint or say that it is not so bad (Boxer 1993a, Pomerantz 1984). Thus, it is quite possible that she meant to console her father by saying that the situation could be worse. However, her father’s non-committal response in lines 5 and 20 suggests that he is not convinced. Responses such as the daughter’s which trivialize the complaint and are light-hearted in tone fail to take into account the importance of the situation for the complainer and the consequences it may have for him. Regardless of how much worse the circumstances of others may be, the situation at hand does affect the complainer and is unpleasant for him. A truly supportive response in a situation like this would be one similar to ‘you look good bald,’ not ‘it could be worse.’

Downgrading another’s complaint is a response that disaligns with the complaint. It calls into question the severity of the complainer’s situation and implies that as the situation could be
worse, the complainer lacks reason to complain. Furthermore, it is an example of recipients deflecting negative, problematic talk by redefining it as “not so problematic.” As it is a disaffiliative stance such downgrading may be met with resistance by the complainer as was seen in two of the three examples.

3.2.2 Responding positively to a complaint

In section 2.3, I showed examples in which complainers made positive comments amidst a complaint. This same phenomenon appears in listener’s responses as well. Listeners frequently contrast the negative comments of the complainer with comments that focus on the positive. Like downgrading, making positive comments against in regards to a complaint is another example of a disaligning response. The positive talk of the recipient stand in contrast to the negative stance of the complainer. Again, whether or not these positive statements are intentionally meant to be unsupportive of the complainer and his situation and whether the complainer accepts them varies. By making positive remarks, a recipient of a complaint may clearly intend to be non-supportive and communicate that he or she feels that the complainer is being overly and unnecessarily negative. And even if the recipient intends to be supportive, the complainer may hear the recipient’s positive statement as not validating his or her complaints. In either case, positive comments are contrary to the complaint.

In this section, I will look at cases in which the recipient of a complaint responds with a positive attitude and how complainers respond to such a response. Many of these instances can be juxtaposed against and clearly resemble previously mentioned examples in section 2.3 in which the complainer made positive comments. However, now it is the addressee of the complaint rather than the complainer who is making the positive statements.

3.2.2.1. Stating the positive aspects of a person or situation
One manner in which a receiver of a complaint may respond positively is to state that although a situation may have bad aspects it may have good aspects as well. I discussed how complainers employed this practice in section 2.3.1. Like complainers, addresses of a complaint may also point out that although one’s circumstances may be unpleasant, hard, disagreeable, etc., there are also aspects to the situation that are pleasant, enjoyable, and satisfying. Similarly, if the complaint is about a person, the listener may juxtapose those negative attributes cited by the complainer against the person’s good qualities or characteristics.

Next I will revisit example 10 in which a young female, Yooko, express ambivalent feelings about her future husband. Recall that now she has accepted his proposal, she is having second thoughts because of his lack of height.

Example 24a (CHJ 2237)

1. YOOKO: de hora onaji toshi da shi:,

   and INJ same age PRED and

   and like he is the same age and

2. EIKO: un

   BCH

   mhmm

3. YOOKO: watashi ni au n da kedo:,

   I DAT suits SE PRED but

   he suits me but

4. EIKO: un

   BCH

   mhmm

5. YOOKO: de tottemo ii kata de nee*
And very good person PRED:CONJ IEP

And he is a very good person and

6. u::n sugoku ii (s)hito na no.
yeah extreme:ADV good person PRED SE

Yeah he is an extremely good person.

7. EIKO: [nani o-]
   `what ACC
   What-

8. YOOKO: [betsu ni] ii tokoro bakari narabetateru to nee?
   separate:ADV good points just single out COND IEP

   When you single out just the good points separately

9. EIKO: un
   BCH
   mhmm

10. YOOKO: ato de kyooretsu na no wa kuru kara. @[@[@[@[@]
   Next severe PRED NML TOP come so
   The extreme (bad) one is going to come next

11. EIKO [[@[@[@[@] un
    BCH
    mhmm

12. YOOKO: sore de nee*
   and IEP
   and

13. ato ni ten go karato no nee*
what’s more two point five karat GEN IEP

14. daiya o tsukutte kureta no.
diamond ACC make:AUX:PAST SE

what’s more is that he had a 2.5 karat ring made for me.

15. EIKO: heeee! sugoi[::! (.hh) ]
wow awesome

Wow, that’s awesome.

16. YOOKO: [<E engagement E> ringu ni.
engagement ring DAT

for an engagement ring

17. EIKO: @sugoi!
awesome
that’s awesome

18. YOOKO: to omou deshoo?
QOUT think TAG

That’s what you think, right?

19. EIKO: un
BCH
mhmm

20. YOOKO: koko made wa sugoi to omou n da kedo:
here up till TOP awesome QOUT think SE PRED but
You think that everything up to this point is awesome but

21. EIKO: un
BCH
While Eiko does not deny this may be a shortcoming of her friend’s fiancé, later on in the complaint sequence she counters by reminding Yooko of his good qualities. Thus, this time it is Eiko rather than Yooko who is expressing the good characteristics of the fiancé.

Example 24b

1. YOOKO: demo kimechatta koto ja na:i::,
   
   But decide:PAST thing TAG

   But it is something that is set, right

2. EIKO: u::[::::.n]
   
   BCH

   mhhmm

3. YOOKO: [arede hontoo ni kotowareru no ka toka omottari toka shite:;,
   
   because of that real ADV refuse:POT SE Q QUOT think:TARI QOUT do:CONJ

   I think like can I really refuse (the proposal) because of that

4. [ato-]
   
   after

   after-

5. EIKO: [demo yu-]
   
   but ex-
6. **demo yuinoo ni natte kara yori yuinoo**

   But exchange of marriage gifts PRED become after than exchange of marriage gifts

7. no mae no hoo ga kotawariyasu wa yo.

   GEN before GEN side NML refuse:easy to IEP IEP

   But it is easier to refuse before the ceremonial exchange of marriage gifts than
   after the exchange of gifts.

8. YOOKO: soo yo nee*

   right IEP IEP

   That’s true.

9. EIKO: [@ @ ]

10. YOOKO: [demo hora.]

    but INJ

    But you know,

11. sono ato doo naru ka wakaranai ja nai.

    after that how become Q know:NEG TAG

    you don’t know how it is going to turn out after that, right?

12. sugoku ii hito na no yo.

    extreme:ADV good person PRED SE IEP

    He is a really good person

13. EIKO: [un]

    BCH

    mhmmm
We get along.

And I myself really

like

but

you can accept him for his background and things like that
BCH

mhmm

23. EIKO: anoo taiken shita koto mo niteiru shi*
INJ experience do:PAST thing also be similar:ASP and

ahh... your backgrounds are similar too and

24. YOOKO: un

BCH

mhmm

25. EIKO: sorede seikaku wa (0.4) yokute*
on top of that personality TOP good:CONJ

on top of that his personality is good and

26. YOOKO: un

BCH

mhmm

27. EIKO: ni ten go karato tte kippu ga ii yo yappari. @@@
Two point five carat QOUT temperament NOM good IEP after all is said

2.5 carats (i.e. a 2.5 carat diamond ring)...no denying that he is generous

28. YOOKO: soo da yo nee*

right PRED IEP IEP

That's true. / You are right.

As seen, Eiko encourages her friend to be confident in her upcoming marriage by persuading her to focus on her fiancé’s good qualities: he has a good personality, he gave her a 2.5 carat diamond ring, and he comes from a good background which is similar to hers. These are all qualities that were at one point mentioned by Yooko herself. Thus mentioning these
qualities is not totally opposite to Yooko’s complaint stance as she recognizes them herself and as she generally views her fiancé in a positive light. Eiko is essentially reinforcing what Yooko has already said. Furthermore, the object of her complaint is her fiancé and possible future husband. To agree that Yooko’s situation is problematic would have meant denigrating her significant other. For these reasons Eiko is able to speak positively about Yooko’s situation. Had Yooko genuinely disliked the object of her complaint, then mentioning his good qualities would have been a position of marked disagreement. As for Yooko’s response, she agrees with Eiko’s positive statements, though weakly. Throughout Eiko’s positive talk she merely gives simple backchannel responses of “un” (mhmm) in lines 22, 24, 26. Then, in line 28, she agrees with Yooko’s assessment with “soo da yoo nee” (that’s true, you are right). In short, Eiko’s positive statements are received without resistance.

In the above example, the complainer accepted the addressees’ positive comments as they were sentiments that she herself previously expressed. However, in general, speaking positively in response to a complaint is disaffiliative, as such comments stand in direct contrast to the negativity of complaints. By stating the positive qualities of a situation or a person about which a person is complaining, recipients of a complaint may be attempting to minimize the speaker’s complaint and characterize it as a non-complainable. This can been seen in the next example. In this example, Satomi is explaining to her mother why she is anxious to move out of the college dormitory. She is complaining about the lack of peace and quiet. As the mother is hesitant to agree to let her daughter leave the supposedly structured and secure environment of the dormitory, she responds by minimizing her daughter’s complaint.

Example 25a (CHJ 1925)

01. SATOMI: maa nan te iu ka.

Well what QOUT SAY Q
well, what am I trying to say?

02. maa ryoo to onaji gurai da kedo,

well dormitory as same about PRED but

It’s about the same price as the dormitory but

03. MOTHER: un

BCH

mhmm

04. SATOMI: ryoo yori wa zettai::,

dormitory more than TOP definitely

05. (.hh) k- (0.5) ne?

k- IEP

06. MOTHER: aa

BCH

unhuh

07. SATOMI: ochitsuku tte kanji jan.

calm QOUT feeling TAG

it would definitely, you know, feel calmer than the dorms, right?

08. MOTHER: @@ soo ka ne.

right Q IEP

You think so?

09. SATOMI: soo da yo::.

right PRED IEP

Yes, it would..

10. MOTHER: [@@]

90
11. SATOMI: [moo] atashi hayaku ryoo <@ detai yo moo.@> =

EMP I soon:ADV dormitory get out:DES IEP EMP

*I want to get out of the dorms soon.*

12. SATOMI: =[@ (hh) @ @ ]

13. MOTHER: [@ @ doo shite?]

why

Why?

14. ryoo raku de ii to omou kedo na::*

dormitories easy PRED:CONJ nice QOUT think but IEP

*I think the dorms are nice and easy to live in.*

Satomi is using the complaint to justify her desire to move out of the dormitory and as a means to convince her mother that it is a good choice. The first indication in this example that the mother is hesitant to accept the daughter’s complaint appears in line 8. The phrase “soo ka ne” (lit. is that right.) is an expression of uncertainty. It expresses a general reluctance to accept the daughter’s proposal of moving into apartment and her assertion that it would be a better environment. The daughter, seeing that her complaint is unsuccessful in persuading her mother, becomes more adamant in her talk. Satomi reaffirms her position in line 9 by saying “soo da yo” (“yes, it would.”). The sentence final particle “yo” shows her strong stance and commitment towards her statement. Furthermore, her declaration in line 11 that she wants to get out of the dormitory is also stated emphatically as is evidenced by her use of two emphatic markers: “moo” and once again the sentence final particle “yo.” Then, in lines 13-14, the mother further questions her daughter’s desire to leave the dormitory and says that in her opinion the dorm is nice and comfortable. Thus, she is not just merely mentioning some advantages of living in the dormitory, but is characterizing the entire experience as positive. Hence, she does not accept her
daughter’s characterization of the dormitory and minimizes the complaint by stating that she thinks the situation is actually a good one.

The mother’s minimization results in Satomi becoming more adamant in her complaint. Until this point, the daughter had not outright expressed her displeasure of the dormitories and her complaint was rather muted and subtle. However, in response to her mother’s minimization, she clearly expresses her negative feelings about her living situation and explains why she does not like it.

Example 25b

15. SATOMI: ya da moo.
   
   hate PRED EMP
   
   I hate it

16. yoru demo gaa toka itte,
   
   night even aah QUOT say:CONJ
   
   even at night they are like "aah" and

17. sanji goro made sa,
   
   three o’clock around till IEP

18. sawaideiru shi sa.
   
   make nosie:ASP and IEP
   
   are making noise till around 3:00 a.m. and...

In line 15, she states that she hates the dormitories and then she complains that the environment is not conducive to studying. In essence, the mother’s positive remark prompted the daughter to strengthen her complaint stance in order to deny her positivity.

3.2.2.2. Finding the silver lining
In section 2.3.2, it was shown that complainers may find a silver lining to their situation in the midst of their complaint. As expected, listeners too may respond by indicating the benefits that one may derive from a less than optimal situation. First I will look at four examples, one from English and three from Japanese, in which complainers do not object when addressees point out that positive may be obtained from the negative. Then I will turn to look at an example from Japanese in which the complainer does object.

In this first example from English, three male college students are discussing their summer plans. Although John’s job is non-paying (assumedly a non-paying internship), it is otherwise a good opportunity at a big university. It is Sam, a non-affected party, who first raises the negative aspect that there is no money involved. John confirms Sam’s statement in line 6 by complaining about the lack of money. Thus, John’s complaint is primarily a function of responding to Sam’s statement. To this complaint, Allen responds by reminding John of the potential gains.

Example 26

01. ALLEN: so w- where are you workin', this summer?
02. JOHN: University of Miami.
03. ALLEN: Really? how'd you pull that off?
04. JOHN: I dunno my dad knew the guy.
05. SAM: there's no money involved.
06. JOHN: yeah, that's the only thing that sucks.
07. ALLEN: well still, then, that should put your foot in with something else.
08. JOHN: I have get like, I have to do my own like thing.
In line 7, Allen reminds him of the future benefits the job may bring. The fact that Allen is going to mitigate John’s complaint is immediately apparent as he begins his utterance ‘well still then.’ He then tells John to think positive by focusing on the fact that it will probably lead to good career prospects in the future. Though his stance is disaffiliative, it is mitigated by the fact that a third party, not the complainer, raised the complaint issue.

The next example from Japanese shows similar attributes to the English example just discussed. Below, a husband is complaining about how difficult his English studies are. Specifically, he is talking about talks is required to do in class. Like Matthew in the previous example, the husband’s wife responds by stating that he should focus on the future benefits.

Example 27 (CHJ 0992)

1. HUSBAND: nikaime wa,
   
   second time TOP
   
   the second one

2. jyugyoo-
   
   class

3. aa karikyuramu ni tsuite eigo no.
   
   oh curriculum about English GEN
   
   it was about class- I mean about curriculum. English curriculum.

4. gakkoo no eigo kyooiku no karikyuramu ni tsuite.
   
   school GEN English education GEN curriculum about
   
   About curriculum for English education in schools.

5. WIFE: un
   
   BCH
   
   mhmm
6. HUSBAND: un toka mondai toka sono.

INJ and such problem and such that

and it’s problems and things like that. That-

7. WIFE: un

BCH

mhmm

8. HUSBAND: sono(.) nan chuu ka..

that what QOUT:SAY Q

That – what do I want to say.

9. gakkoo ni tsuite,

school about

it was about schools

10. hanashi no saigo no (0.2) [ka]dai datta.

talk GEN last GEN topic PRED:PAST

it was the last topic we had to talk about

11. WIFE: [un]

BCH

mhmm

12. HUSBAND: un.

BCH.

Yeah.

13. nnn taihen na n yo hontoo ni.

INJ hard PRED SE IEP real:ADV

Yeah It’s really hard
14. WIFE maa iroiro na benkyoo ni naru wai ne

   well various PRED studies PRED become IEP IEP

   Well, but you will learn a lot of different things

15. HUSBAND: un de sono itsu-

   yeah and INJ when

   yeah and ahh when.....

   Similar to example 23 above, the wife begins her mitigation with a mitigation phrase; she starts her utterance “maa” (well ). The wife then reminds her husband in line 15 that by participating in and completing the program, he will learn a lot. By enduring the negative, he will be rewarded with the positive. In line 15, the husband briefly agrees with her comment and continues with his talk.

   This third example of an addressee finding the silver lining is also from Japanese. A mother is telling her daughter about her inability to sleep on some nights. In particularly, she is focusing on the sadness she starts to feel when she lies in bed unable to sleep. The daughter’s response is to focus on the advantages that not being able to sleep may provide.

Example 28 (CHJ 1925)


   strange PRED lately

   It has been weird. Lately.

02. Daughter: ((sniff))

03. Mother: nerarenai hi wa hontoo moo,

   sleep:POT:NEG day TOP truly EMP

   On the days that I can’t sleep, I kid you naught,

04. sanji goro made moo ne,
3 o’clock around until EMP IEP

I’m up till around 3:00

zenzen nerarende kara kanshiku nattari ne.
not at all sleep:NEG so sad:ADV become:TARI IEP

I can’t sleep at all and so I become sad.

[iroiro.]
various
about this and that

[0i    ya:n]
good:TAG
That’s good, isn’t it?

[0un?]
BCH
Huh?

hon toka yomeru shi.
books and read:POT and
You can read books and things like that.

( kesa wa hora.
This morning TOP INJ
This morning you know-

(0.8)

yoko ni otoosan nete iru no ni anoo.
next to LOC father sleep:ASP although INJ
Even though dad is sleeping next to me
In line 7, the daughter characterizes her mother’s situation as a good thing. She reflects the fact that she is making a characterization contrary to expectation in the construction of her utterance. Rather than making an unequivocal statement, she attaches a tag question to the end of a sentence; “yan” (isn’t it). By doing so, she avoids making a definite declaration and demonstrates that she realizes that others may have a differing opinion. The mother reacts to the incongruity of the daughter’s statement by expressing her confusion with the interjection un? (oh?) in line 8. The daughter then proceeds to clarify her positive characterization in line 9. She states that the mother can enjoy the extra time accorded to her by doing such activities as reading. Thus, while one would generally categorize insomnia as a negative condition, she manages to find an upshot of suffering from the inability to sleep; extra waking hour to accomplish tasks or even relax in a modern society where time is a luxury. The mother, on her part, accepts the comment and admits that she is in fact reading newspapers.

In the examples I have discussed until now, the complainers agreed with the addressee’s assessment and did not object to the listener stating they can derive something positive from their
undesirable situation. Now I will look at an instance in which the complainer does not accept this type of response from the addressee. The initial content of the next complaint resembles example 27 in certain aspects. Once again, a husband is discussing his studies in America with his wife. The wife starts out the topic optimistically by asking if he is having a good experience. Thus, from the beginning, she attempts to frame the topic positively. However, the husband replies negatively by partially employing the wife’s previous utterance. In line 1, the wife employs the phrase “ee keiken shite oru ka na” (having a good experience). In line 4, the husband takes the phrase “ee” (good) and replaces it with “shindoi tte iu” (hard, tiring, exhausting). He then proceeds to complain about the schoolwork that he is required to do such as writing papers. As in example 27, the wife responds by finding the silver-lining of his situation.

Example 29 (CHJ 1109)

01. WIFE: jaa anta wa ee- ee keiken shite oru ka na

   well then you TOP good good experience do:AUX Q IEP

   Well then, you are having a good- a good experience?

02. HUSBAND: Ore ma[a:::]

   I well

   I well

03. WIFE: [Ameri]ka.

   America

   America

04. HUSBAND: shindoi tte iu keiken shite oru ka na, maa hontoo ni.

   Exhausting QOUT say experience do:AUX Q IEP INJ really ADV

   (I think you could say) I am having an exhausting experience.
05. [X ie deX sak-] sakubun kake- kakaseretari.

home LOC comp- compositions wri(te)- write:CAUS:POT:tari

I have to wri- write comp- compositions and things like that at home.

06. WIFE: [aa maa demo]

INJ INJ but

Oh well but

07. ii ya real ex- r- r- real experience ga aru ne

good PRED real real experience NOM have IEP

That’s’ good. You are having an auth- authentic experience.

08. HUSBAND: hun?

INJ

Huh?

09. WIFE: Real experience [(XXX)] ((voice distorted by electrical interference and overlap))

10. HUSBAND: [Maa da kedo.]

well PRED but

Well but

11. Omoni mitai na mon da wa ne.

heavy burden EVED PRED THING PRED IEP IEP

It is like a heavy burden

12. WIFE: ii:: [tanoshimetara ii wa ne]

good enjoy:MOD IEP IEP

It's alright. You should enjoy yourself

13. [Asobi to chigau mon yo.] ((annoymed tone of voice))
It's different from a vacation

14. HUSBAND: asobi dattara ii kedo sa.

play PRED:MOD but IEP

I wish it were a vacation but

15. (0.6)

16. [nan de mo. ]

anything

Anything.

17: WIFE: [Tanoshimetara] ii wa ne

enjoy:MOD IEP IEP

You should enjoy yourself

18. HUSBAND: asobi dake ja nai ya

play only PRED:NEG IEP

It is not just vacation.

The wife characterizes his situation as good and states that by being and studying in America, he will gain real experience. Thus, she maintains the positive stance with which she began the conversation. Unlike the husband in the example 27, the husband in this example raises objection to the wife’s comments. It becomes apparent that he is going to challenge his wife’s comment with his utterance of “maa da kedo” (well but) in line 9. He then responds that his workload is heavy. The wife continues to maintain a positive attitude by advising him in line 12 that he should enjoy himself. At the same time, the man is continuing with his complaint by stating that the situation would be good if he were there to have a good time, but that this is not the case. In addition to his actual words, his irritation in regards to his wife’s comment is
apparent in the intonation of his voice and his manner of speaking from line 13 on. Thus, in this example, the complainer does not positively receive the addressee’s attempts to find the silver-lining.

3.2.2.3. Indicating positive aspects of the speaker’s circumstances in general

It is also possible for the addressee of a complaint to respond by stating positive aspects of a complainer’s situation that do not directly relate to the complaint. Thus, while the addressee is still pointing out the favorable aspects of the complainer’s circumstances, those circumstances differ from and do not pertain to the complaint. The first example I will look at is from English and the second is from Japanese.

The first example is from the conversation between Debbie and Sara seen in example 17. Recall that Debbie upset about the recent ending of her relationship with her boyfriend. Similar to examples seen in the previous chapter, in line 5, Debbie switches from complaining to speaking more positively. In line 5, she claims that what happened is ultimately for the best as she does not need the complications their relationship entailed. Similarly, in line 7, she states that now she can move forward with her life.

Example 30a (CAF English 6239)

01. DEBBIE: But I think he wanted me to break up with him I really really do:

02. SARA: so he could bla:me some[body.]

03. DEBBIE: [Yeah] r[[i:ght.]]

04. SARA: [[ Pro ]]bably .

05. DEBBIE: (.hhh) That's okay- I- I don't need this in my life right now .

06. SARA: no:: you [don't.]

07. DEBBIE: [I can ] just go o:n,
08. SARA: don't [(worry)] about it.
09. DEBBIE:: [(and)] (0.4) that's righ.

As seen, Debbie attempts to portray her situation optimistically by characterizing the ending of the relationship as a positive event. Sara, for her part, responds by affirming her characterization. Nonetheless, despite her attempts at being positive, Debbie reverts to speaking negatively and complaining. In line 11, she moans and in line 13 she utters the expletive “God”. Sara, on the other hand, counters the negativity by remaining positive.

Example 30b

09. DEBBIE:: [(and)] (0.4) that's righ.
10. (1.5)
11. DEBBIE: u:a:h ((exasperated moan))
12. SARA: @@@ @ [ @ ].
13. DEBBIE: [gahd.]
14. (0.5)
15. SARA: (.hhh) [Well at least] you're out there and you're happy though, so.
16. DEBBIE: [ okay. ]
17. DEBBIE: I know.

Before Sara’s response in line 15, there is half a second pause. Furthermore, she prefices her counter with the mitigating phrase “Well at least.” Both hesitating prefaces and pauses indicate that their response is going to be at variance with the speaker’s statement (Pomerantz 1984, Pomerantz and Heritage 2013). Sara reminds Debbie of the positive aspects of her life; she is going to school in a new place and is making new friends. Thus, after agreeing with Sara that there are positives associated with no longer being in a relationship, Sara broadens the spectrum
and states the positive aspects of Debbie’s life in general. Although Sara’s positive statement is at variance with Debbie’s complaint stance, there are at least two factors which enable her to make this statement with minimum dissension. First, she utters the statement at a point when the parties are attempting to move on to different topics. It is not uttered at the beginning of the complaint and Sara has already displayed empathy. Secondly, is the fact that the complainer herself has already made attempts to move to more positive talk in lines 5 and 7. For these reasons, Debbie expresses her agreement with Sara’s statement by responding with “I know” in line 17 and does not attend to its contrariness.

In the example below, Kou, a Japanese male who is both studying and working in the United States, is talking to his friend Masayoshi. He is explaining to Masayoshi why he does not associate with the other Japanese people who live in his apartment complex. The explanation that Kou offers is a complaint.

Example 31a (CAF Japanese 6228)

01. KOU:  e shite mo ii n da kedo;=

   INJ do:MOD  SE PRED but

   *I mean, I wouldn’t mind doing it but*

02. MASAYOSHI:  =u:n.

   BCH

   mhmm

03.  (0.3)

04. MASAYOSHI:  [mendoo kusai.]

   pain

   *It’s a pain*

05. KOU:  [yappari] ne:,  ima ne,
ultimately IEP now IEP

you know, now

06. sore dokoro ja nakute,=

rather PRED:NEG:CONJ

rather it's that

07. MASAYOSHI: [a:::]

INJ

oh

08. KOU: =eikaiwa no shukudai toka [yaranakya ikenai] kara moo.

English conversation GEN homework and do:MOD so EMP

I have to do my English conversation homework and things like that

09. MASAYOSHI: un.

BCH

uhuh

10. KOU: taihen desu yo hontoo. @ @ @

hard PRED IEP seriously

It’s hard, seriously

In line 8, he states that he does not socialize with other Japanese people because he has to do homework for his English conversation class. The implication is that he does not have time for other activities. He then solidifies this comment into a complaint by stating that it is rough. Masayoshi’s response to this complaint is to focus on the positive aspects of Kou’s life in America.

Example 31b

10. KOU: taihen desu yo hontoo. @ @ @
hard PRED IEP seriously

It’s hard, seriously

11. MASAYOSHI: wa: demo ii ne nanka jiritsu shita seikatsu okurete.

INJ but good IEP EMP independent do:PAST life style live:POT

Boy, but it is good that like you are able to live an independent life style

12. KOU <@ jiritsu shita seikatsu @>

independent do:PAST life style

an independent life style (laughing)

First, Masayoshi expresses appreciation for the amount of work that Kou is required to do with the interjection “waa” (boy). Then, he indicates that he is going to counter Mayoshi’s complaint with a positive statement with the conjunction “demo” (but). Masayoshi states that Kou is lucky as he is living an independent and free lifestyle in America. This stands in comparison to Japanese culture, which has the perception of being rigid. Thus, Masayoshi changes the topic from Kou’s homework to his free American lifestyle. In the process of this topic change, he switches the focus from a negative facet of Masayoshi’s life to a positive one. Thus, while he does not find a positive aspect in Kou’s homework, he does find it in some other aspect of Kou’s life in America. Kou’s response in line 12 shows that Masayoshi’s positive comment is disaffiliatory to his complaint. He repeats the phrase “jiritsu shita seikatsu” (independent life style) with laughter. Both the repetition and his laughter mark Masayoshi’s comment as being at variance with his complaint.

In these two examples, the listeners removed the focus off the complaint and placed it on a positive aspect of the speaker’s life. They pointed out that despite the complainable situation, in general the complainer’s circumstances were good. They encouraged the complainer to concentrate on these positive aspects as opposed to the negative.
3.2.2.4. Summary of responding positively to complaint

As seen, there exists various ways in which the addressee of a complaint can make positive remarks in the face of the complainer’s negative remarks. Just like complainers, they too may state the positive aspects of a complainable situation, find the silver lining of one’s circumstances, or implore the complainer to concentrate on the positive happenings in their life. By doing so, they are advocating that the complainer refocus their attention on the positive.

As with downgrading, such comments entail problems of cross-cutting preferences. On one hand, recipients make such complaints because there is a social preference to move away from the negativity of the complaint. However, the structural preference of the complaint itself calls for the recipient to focus on and align with the negativity of the situation. As complaints inherently define a situation or a person as negative, for a recipient of a complaint to make a positive statement about the objects of the complaint is to take a position opposite of that complainer. For these reasons, making a positive comment may be problematic and therefore met with resistance. However, in some of these examples, the complaint recipients were able to make such utterances and still receive agreement from the complainer due to the nuances and specificities of the individual complaint. For example, the complainer themselves were trying to be positive and / or the timing of the complaint. In general though, finding positive in negative has a minimizing effect on complaints.

3.2.3. Responding with humor

As previously mentioned, indirect complaints are generally associated with feelings of negativity and unhappiness. Thus, responding with an attitude that is contrary to these feelings, for example a positive attitude, has the potential for creating discord. The same applies to humor. To joke about a situation that is unpleasant for the complainer and that he or she
probably does not find humorous can convey that the listener does not appreciate the seriousness of the complainer’s trouble. However, when done in a way that still accepts the validity of the speaker’s complaint, humor can be appreciated by the complainer and lighten a serious conversation.

In the following conversation, Sharon is talking about various problems and troubles she is having at work. Mid-complaint, Carol interrupts with laughter. She then proceeds to put a humorous spin on the situation.

Example 32a (SBCSAE 4)

01. SHARON: on Friday I have eigh[teen ] kids.
02. KATHY: [ ((SNIFF))] .
03. SHARON: I'm like great. You know. (.hh) And all these teachers are coming in and saying Well <Q my child is on your role but I'm gonna keep him in my class . Q> You know. [( .hh) ] .
04. CAROL: [ mm ] .
05. SHARON: And I have these three third graders. You know. But the shitty thing is, (.hh) that they (. ) pick (0.2) what the teachers do is they go, oh well this this kid is bad behaved. I mean he's-
06. CAROL: [ mm ] .
07. SHARON: He's really stupid. I'll just send him over to the new [ (.hhh) ] instructor .
08. KATHY: [ Of course ] .
09. SHARON: (.hh) So they s-.
10. (0.4)
11. So the[se are. Th]e kids that I receive are the three (.hh) third graders of the= 12. KATHY: [ Of course. ].
Carol paints a comical image of Sharon’s circumstances. Specifically, she focuses upon a previous frustration that Sharon had mentioned; the fact that as many of her students are of Latin American descent, they do not speak English well. Furthermore, their parents seem unconcerned about their education. In lines 19, 22 and 24, she depicts a humorous image of Sharon venting her feelings of aggravation by screaming. Then, in line 26 she imitates Sharon’s students saying “Senorita Flinn.” She is depicting them as overly rambunctious children who are constantly vying for her attention and who do not speak English well purportedly because of
their parents lack of interest. Through her depiction, she transforms what is a vexing and frustrating situation for Sharon to one that is funny and laughable. As Sharon agrees with Carol’s assessment in line 25 and she herself joins in on the imitation in lines 28 and 30, she does not convey that she considers Carol’s response to be unsupportive.

Later on in the conversation, Carol offers some humorous, albeit non-serious, advice to Sharon. She suggests to Sharon that she employ the techniques used by Mr. Samuel, one of their form elementary school teachers in her own classroom. As Carol continues with the suggestion in more detail, it quickly becomes apparent that she intended for her advice to be sardonic and that in actuality she is not making a true suggestion at all. As will be seen, the manner in which Carol frames the suggestion highlights the outrageousness and inappropriateness of the teacher’s actions and thus should not be taken seriously. Furthermore, it elicits laughter from her audience.

Carol first suggests that, like Mr. Samuel, Sharon should grab the students by their hair and hit their heads together.

Example 32b

| 01. CAROL: | [ I have an idea.] |
| 02.   | (.hh) Choose the Mister Samuel way of teaching. |
| 03. SHARON: | (xhh) [     @     @  ]. |
| 04. CAROL: | [ Take them ] by the hair. |
| 05. SHARON: | .hh @ |
| 06. CAROL: | Boom. |
| 07.   | [ Heads against each other.]. |
| 08. KATHY: | [ @@ @@ ]. |
Cathy embellishes the depiction of the action by using the onomatopoeic word “boom” in line 6. The use of this word serves to underscore the atrociousness of the action by implying that the teacher hit the students’ heads together with such force that it made a loud sound. It also enhances the description of his actions by recreating the moment and reconstructing a sound that could supposedly be heard when their heads collided. Both these factors help to create a more vivid and more appalling depiction of the teacher’s actions. Furthermore, as they are so atrocious, it becomes apparent that she is not sincere in her advice.

Carol’s suggestion creates an environment of laughter. The first person to laugh is Sharon in line 3. Note that she begins to laugh even before Carol finishes her suggestion. Upon hearing Carol’s statement about practicing “the Mr. Samuel way of teaching”, she breaks out in laughter in anticipation that the subsequent action is going to be outlandish and humorous. Then, with Carol’s utterance of the onomatopoeic word “boom,” Kathy joins in with laughter also. Likewise, Sharon resumes with her laughter in line 9. Thus, Carol’s use of the word is effective in eliciting a reaction from her audience. Moreover, their reaction of laughter seems to be a desirable response as she continues with the same line of talk.

The next suggestion that Carol makes involves throwing chalk at the students. As with the last example, her advice is sarcastic. Furthermore, like the previous examples, the manner in which she constructs and embellishes the talk highlights the absurdity of her remarks. The first embellishment disrupts the continuity of the sentence structure. As she is constructing the sentence in line 11, she interrupts herself and embellishes the talk by suggesting in lines 12 and 13 that Sharon can practice the activity on the weekends.

Example 32c
Suggesting that Sharon practice a behavior that would be considered unsuitable for teachers renders the suggestion even more preposterous. As in the last example, the listeners anticipate that something absurd is forthcoming even before Sharon is able to complete her suggestion. In fact, based on Carol’s talk up to this point, one may easily conjecture that her upcoming suggestion will involve throwing the chalk at the students. First, Sharon responds with laughter in line 14 both in expectation that a humorous suggestion is to follow and in response to Carol’s suggestion that she should spend extra time practicing an absurd means of disciplining unruly students. Kathy likewise responds with laughter just a beat latter in line 16.

As can be seen in the continuation of Carol’s suggestion below, she does in fact propose that Sharon should hit the students with the chalk. At this point, Sharon interjects and adds her own embellishment to the talk. In fact, she employs the same type of embellishment used by Carol in the previous example; onomatopoeia. She imitates the sound of the chalk being thrown thru the air in line 18 by making gunfire noise.

Example 32d
Upon hearing Sharon’s enhancement, Kathy once again breaks out into laughter in line 20. Then, in line 24, Carol reiterates that Sharon should spend extra time practicing her technique. As seen then, the others once again show their appreciation for Carol’s humor, as they join in with laughter and the complainer even helps in the construction of the “advice.” It did not subtract from the validity of Sharon’s complaint. Once again, this is in part due to the timing of the response. Sharon has already spent considerable time on her complaint by the time Carol employs this response. However, as I will show in later examples, this is not always the case when addressees employ humor.

I will look at one more example in which the recipient of the complaint employs humor without hindering the complaint. This time the example is from Japanese. Norio, a high end watch salesman at a Japanese department store, is telling Saburo about the annoying things which costumers do. One of them is complaining about the price of repairs.
Example 33a

01. NORIO: uun kureemu na kyaku wa iya da ne?

mhmm complaint PRED costumers TOP hate PRED IEP

I don’t like customers who have complaints

02. SABURO: a[aaa]

BCH

ahhh

03. NORIO: [un] donna-

mhmm what kind of

What kind of

04. maa ichiban ooi no wa yappari shuuri toka ne?

INJ most abundant one TOP in the end repairs and such IEP

Well, the most frequent one we get is repairs and things like that

05. SABURO: aa[a]

BCH

mhmm

06. NORIO: [nan] de konna ni kakaru ya toka ne?

why this much cost PRED QOUT IEP

They are like ”Why does it cost this much”

07. SABURO: maa nanka shuuri ni dashite,

INJ IJNJ repairs DIR hand in:CONJ

So like they hand it in for repairs and

08. shuuridai ga maa niman en to iwaretara,

repair cost NOM INJ 20,000 yen QOUT tell:PASS:TEMP
when they are told like the cost of repairs is 20,000 yen

09. sono nanbaa ki ni naru to.

that number bother QOUT

They are bothered by that number.

10. NORIO: nnn

BCH

mhmm

11. SABURO: aaaa

BCH

aaah

12. NORIO: nande niman en mo kakaru ya to

why 20,000 yen as much as cost PRED QOUT

They’re like “Why does it cost as much as 20,000 yen?”

13. doo iu koto ya nen to.

what kind of thing PRED IEP QOUT

They are like “What is this?”

Another issue that Norio has is customers who can not afford to buy a watch come to the store just to look at watches. He complains that sometimes he expends a considerable amount of effort into explaining various watches to people who have no intention of buying.

Example 33b

01. NORIO: demo, okane o motte inai kara ne.

but money ACC have:ASP:NEG so IEP

But they don't have money so

02. SABURO: sore de muttsu mo nanatsu rno shoohin o daseru.
and six as many as seven as many as merchandise ACC take out:CAUS

and they make you take out as many as six or seven pieces of merchandise

03. NORIO: soo soo soo.

yeah yeah yeah

yeah yeah yeah

04. sore ga hara ga tatsu.

that NOM makes mad

That makes me mad.

Saburo takes Norio’s frustrations and like Carol in the example above puts a humorous spin on them. He claims that there are unwritten rules that customers should follow; one being that they have to buy after the sixth watch shown.

Example 33C

03. NORIO: soo soo soo.

yeah yeah yeah

yeah yeah yeah

04. sore ga hara ga tatsu.

that NOM makes mad

That makes me mad.

05. SABURO: aaa de. (0.2) anoo ruuru toshite wa,

oh then INJ rule as TOP

mhmm. Then umm as a rule

06. itsutsu made wa shoohin dashitara ii to.

five up to TOP merchandise take out:MOD QOUT

You are allowed to have up to five pieces of merchandise taken out.
07. NORIO:  un

BCH

mhmm

08. SABURO: de mutsumee dashitara,

and sixth  take out:COND

and if you take out a sixth

09. (0.8)

10. NORIO:  KAE.

buy:DIR

BUY!!

11. SABURO: @@ @ sore ga    uriba    no ruuru desu    ne.

that NOM sales counter GEN rule  PRED IEP

That’s a rule of the sales counter.

12. NORIO:  soo yo    ne.

right IEP IEP

That’s right.

As seen not only does he make up non-existent rules, but he enhances upon the humor of his talk by requiring Norio to complete the formation of the rule. In line 8, Saburo states “and if you take out a sixth,” and then pauses, obligating Norio to finish the statement. Norio obliges by exclaiming in a loud voice that in that case one must buy. Saburo responds to Norio’s outburst with laughter. Hence, in his response, not only does Saburo formulate an amusing scenario of rules for watch buying, but the actual construction of the response was playful and non-serious as well.
Shortly after the above example, Saburo uses this pattern again for another complaint. This time however, Saburo constructs the complaint issue as opposed to using an issue that Norio has stated.

Example 33d

12. SABURO: de shoohin setsumee ga,

and merchandise explanation NOM

13. sanjuppun ijoo nagaku nattara,

30 minutes over long:ADV become:COND

and if the explanation of merchandise becomes longer than 30 minutes.

14. NORIO: katte hoshii.

buy want

I want them to buy.

15. SABURO: aa shoohin setsumee san yonjuppun toka ichijikan kakete,

INJ merchandise explanation thirty forty minutes or hour spend:CONJ

Mhmm. If the you spend like 30-40 minutes or an hour explaining merchandise

and

16. sono mama kaeru no wa,

as is return NML TOP

they go home without buying.

17. (1.0)

18. NORIO: baka da.

idiotic PRED

That’s idiotic.

19. SABURO: @ @ @ @ @
Saburo creates two complaint sentences for Norio to complete. He incites Norio to state what he thinks when he spends a considerable amount of time explaining an item and when he spends a lot of time explaining a piece of merchandise and they leave without buying. Both these scenarios were created by Saburo and were not mentioned by Norio. Thus, he is expanding his role in the construction of the complaint by raising potential complaint issues for the other party. I will discuss this phenomenon further in section 3.3.

This pattern appears one last time at the end of the complaint sequence. In an attempt to summarize Norio’s complaint, Saburo once again starts listing annoying situations and calls upon Norio to complete his statements.

Example 33e

01. SABURO: ruuru to shite wa

   rule as TOP

   As a rule

02. mutsumee o dashi-

   sixth ACC take out

   If you take out a sixth -

03. shoohin ni (. ) anoo chinrestu kara dashitara,

   merchandise INJ display case from take out:COND

   If you take out a sixth piece of merchandise from the display case

04. NORIO: KAE.

   buy

   BUY!!

05. SABURO: @@ @de shoohin setsume ga sanjuppun ijoo kakattara,

   and merchandise explanation NOM 30 minutes over spend:COND
and if you spend over thirty minutes explaining merchandise

06. (1.2)

07. NORIO: KAE.

buy

BUY!!

08. SABURO: @@@ soshite ne,

and IEP

and

09. anoo shuuri daikin ga amari (. ) takai- takakute,

INJ repair cost NOM too expensive expensive:CONJ

If the cost of repairs are too expensive and

10. komaranakattara,

be a problem:NEG:COND

it’s all the same to you

11. NORIO: kanseru see.

cancel do:DIR

Cancel it!!

12. SABURO: aaa hon de,

INJ and

and

13. uriba onna no hito

sales counter woman

To the woman at the sales counter

14. kyuuke jikan ga nagai to,
break time  NOM long TEMP

iyagatsu        dattara,

show displeasure  PRED:COND

*If she is mad cause your break is long*

16. NORIO:  uuuuuuummmm hisuterii okosu na.

****  *** hysteria cause NC

*** don't become hysterical

As seen, there is now some variation from when these annoyances I previously discussed as part of this example. For example, Norio’s response to what the customer should do if he spends over 30 minutes explaining merchandise is now “kae” (buy) as opposed to “katte hoshii” (I want them to buy). Furthermore, Saburo adds on another work-related issue which they have not yet talked about, female co-workers complaining about him talking long breaks. He thereby extends the talk by proposing another additional complaint.

In short, Saburo’s response is humorous on two different levels in this complaint. First, he employs humor by exposing what salespeople really think underneath their professional facade and creates nonexistent rules. Secondly, he transforms Norio’s complaints into a form of play talk in which one person is completing the other person’s sentences. Norio’s completion of Saburo’s statement demonstrates his acceptance of his response.

In both these examples, speakers were successfully able to respond to the complaints with humor. This is because in both examples, through humor, the respondents were depicting the complainer’s situation as absurd. In the first example from English, Carol’s response conveyed that it is absurd that the school system should force Sharon to teach numerous kids who do not speak English. Similarly, in the second example, Saburo’s response indicates the absurdity of the customer’s actions. By bringing the absurdity to the forefront, they are validating the complaint.
Now, I will look at examples in which humor is not appreciated and is not accepted by the complainer. Previously, I discussed how telling a complainer to look at the positive may be perceived as dismissive and trivializing. The same applies to humor. When a listener jokes about the complainer’s situation, the complainer may view this as minimizing his or her complaint.

In example 25a and 25b, we saw a mother minimize her daughter’s complaint by characterizing dormitory lifestyle positively. The mother then continues to minimize the complaint further by using humor.

Example 34 (CHJ 1925)

01. MOTHER: [@ @]

02. SATOMI: [moo] atashi hayaku ryoo <@ detai yo moo.@@> [@@ (.hh) @@]  
   EMP I soon:ADV dormitory get out:DES IEP EMP  
   I want to get out of the dorms soon.

03. MOTHER: @@ doo shite?]  
   why
   Why?

04. ryoo raku de ii to omou kedo na:*  
   dormitories easy PRED:CONJ nice QOUT think but IEP  
   I think the dorms are nice and easy to live in but...

05. SATOMI: ya da moo.  
   hate PRED EMP  
   I hate it

06. yoru demo gaa toka itte,  
   night even aah QUOT say:CONJ
even at night they are like "aah" and

07. sanji goro made sa,

three o’clock around till IEP

08. sawaideiru shi sa.

make nosie:ASP and IEP

are making noise till around 3:00 a.m.and..

09. MOTHER: un

BCH

mhmm

10. SATOMI: [ nee* ]

IEP

you know

11. MOTHER: [issho ni] natte sawaidereba ii ja nai no yo.

Together PRED:ADV become:CONJ make noise:MOD TAG SE IEP

Why don’t you join them and make noise?

12. SATOMI: sonna koto [itta tte.]

That kind of thing say:PAST QOUT

How can you say that?

13. MOTHER: [@ @ @]

14. SATOMI: datte gaijin wa sa,

EMP foreigners TOP IEP

15. benkyoo suru no nai ja nai hotondo.

study NML there are:NEG TAG almost

Foreigners (i.e Americans) don’t study almost at all
With her mother’s first dismissive response about her desires to leave the dormitories in line 4, the daughter becomes more adamant in her position. She attempts to strengthen her complaint by giving a specific reason as to why she no longer wants to live in the dormitories; she tells her mother that the other students in her dormitory are constantly making noise even in the early hours of the morning. This time the mother replies with a glib response that uses humor. She tells the daughter to join her dormmates in their noise making. This humor is guised in the form of advice. However, rather than actual advice, the mother’s comment displays her reluctance to concede her daughter’s complaint and accept that leaving the dormitories is the best option. She is once again trivializing her daughter’s complaint, this time by making light of the situation with humor. Furthermore, the daughter’s response conveys that she does not appreciate her mother’s comments. She expresses indignation in line 12 in regards to how her mother can make such comments and persists in portraying her living situation as unbearable in lines 14-15. Thus, a complainer may interpret joking by the addressee as labeling the complaint as inconsequential and insignificant.

Aside from the fact that humor may result in minimization of their complaint, on a more general level, complainers may also not appreciate humor simply because they do not regard the situation as laughable. To them, it is a serious situation affecting them and in no way is funny or amusing. In addition, the addressee of the complaint may further compound the inappropriateness of their humor, if he or she laughs and jokes at the complainer’s expense. This is the case in the next two examples from Japanese.

Recall that in section 3.2.1, I discussed an example in which a daughter downgraded her father’s complaint about his baldness. Later on in this complaint sequence, she once again minimizes his complaint with humor. The mother, father, and daughter are all on the same
telephone line and are all talking together. First, the daughter jokes that her mother should take
a picture of his head and send it to her. The mother readily agrees to the daughter’s suggestion.
Next, the daughter jokes that the mother should make a pattern on his head using paper. In
essence, they are taking a situation that is unpleasant for the father and are laughing at his
expensive. Ultimately, the father reacts negatively to these jokes.

Example 35 (CHJ 1428)

01. MARI: okaasan ni ne,

Mother DIR IEP

02. atama no shashin o totte okutte moratte.

head GEN photo ACC take:CONJ send:AUX

Mom, would you take a picture of his head and send it to me.

03. MOTHER: wakatta.

understand:PAST

Got it.

04. MARI: wakatta. @ @ [ @ @ @ @ ]

understand:PAST

Got it?

05. MOTHER: [ neteru toki ] yaru wa.

sleep:ASP when do IEP

I’ll do it when he is sleeping

06. MARI: @ @ [ @ @ ]

07. FATHER: [ XXX ] atama?

head

head?
08. MARI: sore de ga- hageta bubun de koo anoo shiroi kami oite,

*and then ga- bald spot on this way INJ white part put:*DRT

*And then put white paper umm like on his bald spot and*

09. pataan o tsukuru toka sa.

*pattern ACC make and IEP*

*and make a pattern or something.*

10. FATHER: yakamashii.

*noisy*

*Be quiet.*

In line 10, the father tells the mother and daughter to shut up. The father’s negative response shows that well humor may be acceptable in complaints, teasing someone about the very matter they are complaining about is not.

Similar to the example above, the complainer in the following example also responds negatively when the addressee teases her in regards to a complaint. Tomoko is complaining to her friend Miri about the actions of her daughter. The daughter, who is recently married and unstable financially, has become pregnant. The listener, who up to this point has been sympathetic and shown appropriate indignation at the daughter’s actions, teases her friend about her changing status in the life cycle. Miri calls Tomoko an “obaachan” (grandmother / old lady) in line 8. She ends the statement in laughter.

Example 36 (CHJ 1667)

01. TOMOKO: de ichio yatto sore ga moo: (0.5) ochitsuite,

*and for the time being finally that NOM EMP calm down:*CONJ

*And just when you are thinking that things have finally calmed down for*

*the time being and*
02.  yatto kekkon shite,
finally get married:CONJ
that they finally got married and

03.  yatto kuruma katte,
finally car buy:CONJ
that they finally bought a car and

04.  yatto kore kara ya- anoo: (0.5) futari de ne?
finally from now on do- INJ two of them IEP
that finally from now on they can mo- ahh the two of them

05.  MIRI: un
BCH
mhmm

06.  TOMOKO: anoo yatte ikeru to omottara moo ninshin ya ken moo.
INJ move ahead: QOUT think:TEMP EMP pregnant PRED EMP
ahh can move ahead she gets pregnant.

07.  hontoo ni moo.
true:ADV EMP
I swear

08.  MIRI: obaachan da anata [mo.]
grandmother / old lady PRED you too
You too are a grandmother / old lady

09.  TOMOKO: [joo]dan ja nai ((anta/hontoo.))
joke PRED:NEG you / true
It’s not something to joke about.
10. MIRI: joodan ja nai desu yo.

joke NEG:PRED IEP

No, it’s not something to joke about.

11. demo genjitsuteki ni soo yo. [@ @ @ ]

but in reality ADV right IEP

But it reality you are.

12. TOMOKO: [aaa moo iya.] ((creaky voice))

INJ any more hate

Oh, I can’t take it any more

13. MIRI: okinodoku. @ @ @

sorry

I am sorry to say

The term “obaachan,” is ambiguous between grandmother and old lady. While, given the context, it is likely that the speaker meant the former, the latter meaning is also implied. In any case, the complainer’s response shows her lack of appreciation for Miri’s joke. She explicitly states that the situation is not humorous by saying “It’s not something to joke about.” in line 9. Miri agrees that it is not a joke in line 10. Although she sounds sincere in this comment, she reaffirms her joke in line 11 ‘But in reality you are.’ and breaks into laughter. Thus, a complainer may not appreciate being teased during a complaint and may deem an addressee’s comments as not funny.

Once again we have issues of conflicting preferences. Humor is effective for moving away from the negativity of the complaint, which is socially preferable, but it does not align to the complaint by showing commiseration or empathy for the situation. Thus, such a response may result in friction. Various differences exist between these three last complaints and
examples 32 and 33 in which the humor was accepted. For one, in examples 32 and 33 there was no minimization of the complaint or implication that the situation was not a complainable. Furthermore, the addressee was not directly teasing the complainer. Rather, they were ridiculing the culprits of the complaint (i.e. the little kids and the customers). These differences account for the acceptance in these complaints and non-acceptance in the others.

3.2.4. Responding by characterizing complaining as a negative act.

Recall that in section 2.4, complainers characterized complaining as an act that one should not do. This included both the act of complaining in general and complaining in specific situations given certain circumstances. As one might expect, addressees of a complaint may employ this conversational practice as well. In my data, I found one example from English in which the addressee, as opposed to the complainer, designates the situation as one that does not warrant a complaint.

Below, Debbie is complaining to Sara about her car situation. Her parents had originally offered to give her one of their cars but later on rescinded their offer. Thus, Debbie is upset on two accounts. She is mad that her parents reneged on their promise and she is unhappy that she will have to deal with her present car for another year or so until she is able to obtain a new one. Sara, however, sees the complaint as unwarranted and reproofs Debbie for complaining.

Example 37 (CAF English 6239)

01. DEBBIE: °it sucks. another year of my: hhh hhh.°
02. SARA:    oh .[xhhh hhh]
03. DEBBIE:     [ .hhh ] my little putt_putt.
04.             (0.9)
05. SARA:      hmm well [at least it's.]
06. DEBBIE: [ (sigh) ]

07. SARA: totally paid for.

08. (0.6)

09. DEBBIE: (.hhh) °this is° true:. and I didn't have to pay for it.

10. ° so:. I can't really complain but.°

11. SARA: no:. 

12. (0.6)

13. DEBBIE: [ .hhh ]

14. SARA: [°it's amazing.°]

15. (0.8)

16. SARA: [xxx.]

17. DEBBIE: [but ] it's (.) a little piece of shit °though.°

In line 7, Sara reminds Debbie that her parents paid for her current car. The implication is that a free car in poor condition is better than no car at all and therefore she should not complain. The 0.6 pause in line 8 shows that Sara’s response is problematic as it varies with Debbie’s position. Initially, Debbie agrees with Sara’s assessment in line 9. Then, in line 10, she outright states herself that for these reasons she should not complain. Thus, while the addressee, Sara, is the one who first implies that Debbie should not complain; the complainer, Debbie, is ultimately the one to state the idea that “one should not complain.” However, Debbie does not totally concede to Sara’s point. She qualifies the statement with “but” and reiterates her point in line 17 that the car is in poor condition. In fact, her reiteration is quite strong as she characterizes the car as a “little piece of shit.” The expletive “shit” and qualifying words “little
piece of” strongly express her dislike of her car. Thus, Debbie does not fully yield to Sara’s view that the complaint is unjustified.

3.2.5 Backtracking from one’s response

While a recipient of a complaint may initially seem unsupportive, they may quickly change their position to a more supportive one. Though a speaker may utter remarks that disaffiliate with a complaint, they may soon after back down from their initial response and commiserate with the complainer. This can be seen in the next two examples from Japanese in which the addresses amend their stance by changing their positive characterization into a negative one.

Below, Tomoko complains that the amount of work is increasing at her place of employment. Thus, the complainer characterizes “increasing work” as negative. The addressee of the complaint on the other hand, takes an opposing stance and defines ‘increasing work’ as positive. Miri says that it is ‘a good thing.’ in line 2. However, she does not maintain this unsupportive position and ultimately changes her stance to support Tomoko’s complaint.

Example 38 (CHJ 1667)

01. TOMOKO: kaisha wa moo dondon shigoto wa fueru shi nee?
   company TOP EMP rapidly work TOP increase and PP
   At the company, my work is rapidly increasing and

02. MIRI: aa ma fueru koto wa ii koto ya kedo,
   Oh well increase NML TOP good thing PRED but
   Oh, well increasing is a good thing but

03. isogashii mon da yo ne?
   busy SE PRED PP PP
   you’re busy
In lines 3 and 4, Miri adapts a more conciliatory position. She sympathizes with Tomoko, stating that she is busy and that there are limits to how much people can work. Thus, she does not hold on to her positive view.

In the example above, the addressee’s positive remark is fleeting and she modifies her position to a more negative one within the same sentence. In the next example, the addressee’s does not disaffiliate with their positive stance as quickly. Below, four college students are talking about their part-time jobs. Naoki employs a complaint to explain why he wants to quit his job delivering papers.

Example 39a (Sakura 6)

01. KIMIKO: yameru no?
   
   **quit** SE
   
   *Are you going to quit?*

02. NAOKI: yametai.
   
   **quit**:DES
   
   *I want to quit.*

03. ETSUKO: nande?
   
   **why**
   
   *Why?*

04. NAOKI: moo yari- yaritakunai.
   
   **anymore** **do-** **do**:DES:NEG
   
   *I don’t want to do it anymore.*
05. KAZUMI:  

**eh datte shindoi yo.**  

_Huh? It is tiring._

06. NAOKI:  

**tsukareru shi.**  

_become tired and_  

_You get tired and_

07.  

(0.4)

08.  

**samui shi.**  

_cold and_  

_It’s cold and_

09. ETSUKO:  

**un.**  

_BCH_  

_uhuh_

He complains that it is tiring and can be physical uncomfortable during cold weather. Kazumi also backs up his statement by describing his work as “shindoi” (tiring) in line 5.

Later in the discussion of Naoki’s job, Kimiko asks about his salary. Upon hearing his response, Etsuko characterizes his salary positively in line 14 by saying, “hee ii jan.” (wow, isn’t that good). Thus, she finds a positive aspect of his job. However, the participants are quick to negate her positivity.

Example 39b

01. KIMIKO:  

**jikyuu na no?**  

_hourly wage COP SE_  

_You get an hourly wage_

02. NAOKI:  

**gekkyuu.**
monthly salary

a monthly salary

03. KIMIKO: ge[kkyuu?] 

monthly salary

a monthly salary?

04. ETSUKO: [gekkyuu?] 

monthly salary

a monthly salary?

05. NAOKI: gekkyuu. 

monthly salary

a monthly salary.

06. ETSUKO: eh     ikura ?

INJ how much

How much?

07. NAOKI: goman choi gurai .

50,000 little about

About a little over 50,000.

08. KIMIKO: mainichi ?

everyday

Everyday?

09. NAOKI: mainichi.

everyday

Everday.

10. KIMIKO: oh ho ho:
11. KAZUMI: sore jikyu ni kansan suru to dore kurai na no?

**that hourly wage DAT convert** **COND how much about COP SE**

*If you convert that into an hourly wage* **about how much is it?**

12. NAOKI: jikyuu sen choi janai.

**hourly wage 1000 little** **TAG**

*An hourly wage would be little over 1,000, right?*

13. nisen toka.

**2000 or**

*Or 2,000 or something like that.*

14. ETSUKO: hee ii jan.

**INJ good tag**

*Wow, isn’t that good?*

15. NAOKI: [eh demo iyaa ita- kitsui .]

**INJ but no ita- hard**

*Huh? but no it’s hard*

16. KAZUMI: [iyaa demo kitsui yo ne .]

**no but hard IEP IEP**

*No, but it is hard.*

17. NAOKI: [[sono tame ni saa, okiru no ga iya.]]

**that purpose DAT IEP get up NML NOM hate**

*I hate having to get up just to do it.*

18. KAZUMI: [[mainichi chokuchoku ga.]]
everyday a little bit  NOM

It’s a little everyday

19.  ma [[[tomete dokkaan ga  ii.]]]

togethertarget  bang  NOM good

All together, it adds up

Naoki reiterates that delivering papers is hard 15. At the same time, Kazumi once again backs up Naoki by also saying that is hard in line 16. Naoki states another negative aspect of his job in line 17 and complains that he hates waking up in the morning in order to deliver papers. Faced with these negative comments, Etsuko disaligns from her positive stance and adds to the negative portrayal of delivering papers. In line 20, she raises the issue of having to get up on Sundays as well as another potential negative aspect of working as a newspaper deliverer.

Example 39c

19: KAZUMI:  ma [[[tomete dokkaan ga  ii.]]]

together  bang  NOM good

All together, it adds up

20. ETSUKO: [[[  nichiyooobi mo ]]])kiru n desho?

Sunday also get up SE TAG

You have to get up on Sunday too, don’t you

21. NAOKI:  n ?

huh?

huh?

22. ETSUKO:  nichiyooobi [mo.]

Sunday also

On Sunday too
23. NAOKI: [un.]
   yeah

24. ETSUKO: sore wa iya kamo.
   that TOP hate probably/might
   I would probably hate that.

25. NAOKI: deshoo.
   right
   Right?

26. iya desho.
   hate right
   You would hate that right?

27. KIMIKO: eh doko ni mo saa,
   INJ anywhere IEP

28. asobi ni ikenai ne.
   have fun DAT go:POT:NEG IEP
   Ah, you can’t go anywhere to have fun.

29. NAOKI: un.
   yeah
   Yeah.

30. ETSUKO: ah soo da ne.
   INJ right COP IEP
   Oh, that’s true.

Thus, not only does Etsuko negate her positive comment, she also aids in the construction of the complaint by proposing other additional negative aspects of the complaint. When Naoki
confirms her supposition in line 23, Etsuko concedes that she too would probably not like paper delivery job. Then, Etsuko once more acknowledges the undesirability of Naoki’s job in line 30 by agreeing with Kimiko’s assessment that his schedule prevents him from going out and having fun. In short, Etsuko backtracks from her positive comment about Naoki’s situation and joins the others in characterizing the situation as negative. She does this by building upon Naoki’s complaint. I will further discuss this phenomenon of an addressee adding on to a complaint in section 3.3.2.

In this section, I showed two addressees of a complaint make positive remarks about the complaint and then subsequently disaffiliate from their comments. In the first example, the addressee disaffiliated without any prompting from the complainer. In the second example, the disaffiliation ensued the other parties’ rejection of the positive comment. Although I am focusing on the juxtaposition of positive characterizations next to negative characterizations, such change in stance could potentially occur in any type of talk that is unsupportive of a complaint. Furthermore, recall that not only addressees of complaints, but complainers as well would ultimately end their talk in a complaint stance after temporarily disaffiliating from their complaint. However, the reason for doing so varied according to the speaker’s role; i.e. complainer or addressee of a complaint. For complainers, they are disaffiliating in an attempt to mitigate the negativity of the complaint. However, they ultimately end with the complaint because that is their true stance. Addressees of a complaint adjust their stance in order to concede with the complainer. They are disaffiliating with their position in an attempt to reconcile their stance with that of the complainer. Thus, both complainers and addressees of complaint may vary their stances throughout the construction of a complaint.

3.2.6. Summary of listener’s responses
In this section, I looked at various responses by the non-affected party in indirect complaints. I also discussed how complainers reacted to those response. Recipients of complaints showed a broad and varied range of responses. Though there is a preference in complaints to respond with commiseration and empathy there are other kinds of responses which are not commiserative in nature. Many of the responses that I discussed, such as downplaying the severity of complaint, making positive comments, and employing humor were responses that stood in contrast with the negativity of the complaint. Though these types of responses do not align with complaints, recipients of complaints commonly employed them as there is a general preference in conversation to talk in a positive manner as opposed to a negative one. Furthermore, though they may be disaffiliative in nature, complainers did not automatically reject such responses. Factors such as timing (i.e has the complainer complained at length and has the recipient already showed affiliation), how the complainer himself presented his stance, and how the recipient framed the response played a role in how the complainer reacted to such responses. Reactions were highly specific to each individual complaint. These factors, particularly timing, are reminiscent of Jefferson’s (1992) research on the rejection of advice in troubles talk. Advice that is offered prematurely tends to be subject to rejection. Advice is more likely to be accepted if addressees of a trouble first align as a troubles recipient and offer emotional reciprocity. Once this phase has reached closure, then they may switch to the role of advice giver. Furthermore, when a complainer reacts negatively to a response, the speaker may modify their response accordingly.

Of course, sometimes a recipient intends to respond in a disaffiliative manner that challenges the complaint. This brings us back to the first chapter on how complainers construct complaints to minimize the negativity associated with it. They may form the complaint in a
manner that minimizes it potential for a disaffiliative response. Furthermore, upon not receiving alignment or commiseration from the recipient, they may modify their talk and / or disaffiliate from their complaint in reaction to the recipient’s response. Alternatively, they may remain firm in their position and not concede to the recipient’s challenge. In any case, complainers and addressees constantly negotiate their talk as the complaint develops within in the conversation.

3.3. BEYOND MERELY RESPONDING: OTHER ROLES OF THE NON-AFFECTED PARTY

3.3.1. Introduction

Up to this point, we have been looking at how addressees respond to indirect complaints. As seen, through their responses, recipients of complaints play an active role in the construction of complaints. In some situations though, the role of the non-affected party in a conversation involving a complaint may go beyond that of merely being a recipient who responds to the complaint of another. For example, rather than just being a recipient of a complaint, they may be an instigator of a complaint. That is, in some cases it is the non-affected party rather than the affected party who actually raises an issue as a complainable. Alternatively, rather than play the role of addressee who responds to the complaint of another, they may take on the role of complainer and essentially complain about a situation as if it were their own complainable. In this section then, I will look at examples in which the role of the non-affected party of a complaint seems to be more complex than that of just recipient of complaint.

3.3.2 Adding on to Complaint

Addressees of a complaint can participate in the construction of a complaint by adding on to the complaint. Based on what the complainer has already stated, an addressee can raise another complainable issue that builds upon and augments the complaint. However, complainers
do not always accept attempts by the addressee to augment their complaint. First, I will look at examples in which complainers allows the additional complaint proposed by the addressee. Then I will look at those in which they reject the augmentation.

The following example comes from the same conversation see in example 14. Recall that Harold and Jamie are complaining about their next door neighbors to Pete and Miles. Harold first raises the topic of the annoying neighbors when Miles almost mistakes jazz music coming from speakers inside the house for being an actual jazz band next door. He sarcastically states that he would prefer to have a jazz band next door as opposed to the loud salsa music that the neighbors are actually playing. Jamie takes up the complaint in line 19. First, she responds to Harold’s sarcastic comment with sarcasm of her own. She sarcastically states that the salsa parties are fun. Then, she adds a complaint of her own about the teenaged children next door who show unwanted public displays of affection. Now, we have two complaints listed by two different parties. While individuals who were actually affected by the neighbors issued these two complaints, Pete, a non-affected addressee, issues the third complaint involving the people next door.

Example 40 (SBCSAE 2)

01. MILES: [I thought that was the ] real thing?
02. HAROLD: You think we have like a [[jazz ]] [[[ band next ]]] [[[door?]]]
03. MILES: [[In fact I ]] [[[was getting ready]]] [[[ to say,]]]
04. PETE: [[[ ] [ ] ]]
05. MILES: (0.4) is there somebody downstairs playing ?
06. JAMIE: [ @ ]
07. PETE: [ I mean] that was what I first [ thought when when the ja:zz came on. ]
08. JAMIE: [(hh) It's our garage band].

09. PETE: As compared to the other stuff some reason it sounded like it was out there,

10. or kind of [ (. ) coming] in [[ from some ] [[[ place. ]]]]

11. JAMIE: [ Unhunh: ] [[[ Hunh ]]]

12. HAROLD: [[ Hm:]]

13. HAROLD: Well that would be nice to have a little jazz band next [ door. ]

14. PETE: [ Right. ]

15. HAROLD: Wouldn't it.

16. JAMIE: [No:. ]

17. PETE: [Mhm: ].

18. HAROLD: Usually we just have really loud salsa parties across the street.

19. JAMIE: That's fun too. And teenagers: kissing each other on the side[walk.].

20. HAROLD: [hm: ].

21. PETE: Hm:

22. CAROL: (( Kiss. Tongue Clicking Noise))

23. (0.6)

24. PETE: And little kids throwing paint in your back yard.

25. HAROLD: Yeah:.

26. JAMIE: ((GROWL))

27. PETE: @

28. (0.4)

29. JAMIE: [ ((SIGH)) ]

30. HAROLD: [ And in ] the front yard-
31. HAROLD: You saw [ that X .]

32. PETE: [ I saw ] that

33. (. ) right [[ in ]] [[ the front. It was the same]]]

34. JAMIE: [[Well]] [[ what is it paint ? ]]]

35. HAROLD: [[ But-]]

36. PETE: [[[ (. ) color or something. ]]]]

37. JAMIE: [[[ Or is it ch:alk. ]]]]

38. HAROLD: [[[ It was like. ]]]]

In line 24, Pete mentions the fact that the children next door threw paint in Jamie and Harold’s yard. Notice that he states the complaint as though he were adding on to a list. He uses the word “and” to connect his complaint to Jamie’s complaint. Jamie first used this format to append her own complaint to Harold’s. Thus, not only does Pete augment the complaint sequence by mentioning additional offenses of the neighbors, but also he does so by using the same style and format Jamie employed. Both Jamie and Harold accept Pete’s addition. Harold indicates his concurrence with “yeah” in line 25. Jamie signals both her acceptance of Pete’s addition and frustration and anger in regards to the neighbor’s action with her growl in line 26 and her sigh in line 29.

While an addressee may add a complaint that directly relates to the complaint under discussion, they may also mention an additional problem that does not directly relate to the complaint. That is, the addressee may bring up a source of added stress in the complainer’s life as opposed to a problem directly connected to the situation that the complainer is describing. Once again, I will be discussing the complaint sequence first seen in example 9 in which Tomoko is complaining about her work situation to Miri. When Tomoko finishes her complaint,
Miri joins in with her second complaint about her work being difficult too. Tomoko’s first response is to agree that Miri’s circumstances are also rough too. Miri continues to say that she would like to quit if it were a feasible choice. Tomoko then questions Miri on the frequency of her work in line 21. At this point, the complaint seems to wind down. Tomoko and Miri pass the opportunity to take turns in lines 25-27. Furthermore, Miri mitigates her complaint in lines 28 and 29 by stating that the amount of work is not actually that much. Then they return to passing their turns in lines 30 and 31 via backchannel. However, in line 32 Tomoko revives the complaint by raising another potential issue that might be a complainable for Miri.

Example 41 (CHJ 1667)

01. TOMOKO: wakai nara motto baribari nee?

   young if more rapidly IEP

   If I were young I could work more rapidly.

02. atama mo

   head too

03. MIRI: soo [ne.]

   right IEP

   yeah

04. TOMOKO: [ma]waru shi nee?

   go around and IEP

   And the wheels would be turning in my head.

05. anoo kiokuryoku mo aru kedo ne.

   INJ memory ability also have so IEP

   I would have the ability to remember

06. moo toshi totte kitara nee*
EMP get old:CONJ AUX:TEMP IEP

when you get older

07. ki[t sui] bakari de ne.

Hard just PRED:CONJ IEP

It’s just hard

08. MIRI: [kitsui ne.]

hard IEP

It’s hard.

09. un

BCH

yeah

10. TOMOKO: hontoo kit[sui.]

really hard

Really hard

11. MIRI [Wata]shi mo hontoo ni kitsui tte.

I too real ADV hard QOUT

I’ve got it really hard too

12. TOMOKO: u:::::n

BCH

mhmm

13. MIRI: Watashi mo kitsui mon.

I too hard SE

I’ve got it hard too, let me tell ya.

14. TOMOKO: soo yaroo ne,
right PRED:PRES IEP

yeah

15. maa anata mata (0.7) mata (0.5) toozentai kitsui no mon.

well you too too of course hard SE SE

well of course you too got it hard

16. MIRI: nnn nan ka ne,

BCH INJ IEP

It’s just

17. moo nan ka.

EMP INJ

It’s just

18. (0.7)

19. MIRI: nnn (0.7) yamarereru mon nara yametai kedo,

BCH quit:POT something COND quit:DES but

If it were something I could quit I’d want to quit but

20. chotto yameru ni wa chotto hayai ka naa tte iu ki ga suru shi ne.

little quit to TOP little early Q IEP QOUT SAY feel and IEP

but I feel like it’s a little too soon to quit


BCH everyday today ne

uhuh Is it every day? Like today.

22. MIRI: iya moo mainichi ja nai yo.

No EMP everyday PRED:NEG IEP

No it’s not every day.
anoo hora-iku nara ne,

INJ  go  TEMP IEP

ummm  when I do work

tsuki no hanbun gurai yo.

month GEN half about IEP

it’s about half of a month

TOMOKO: aa soo*

INJ right

Oh okay

MIRI: un

BCH

Yeah

MIRI: un

BCH

mhmm

nanka shigoto no ryoo to shitara,

INJ  work  GEN  amount as for

Like as for the amount of work

sonnani ookiku nai kedo nee?

not very big:NEG but IEP

it is not all that much

TOMOKO: un  un

BCH BCH

uhuh uhuh
31. MIRI: un

BCH

yeah

32. TOMOKO: soo shitara,

plus

Plus

33. daikazoku ya no nee sotchi wa.

big family PRED SE IEP you TOP

you have a big family

34. MIRI: hai hai soo desu. (pronounces su)

yes yes right PRED

Yeah yeah I do

35. TOMOKO: [@@@@@@@@]

36. MIRI: [@@@@soo desu@@@@] un

Right PRED BCH

I do. mhmm

37. TOMOKO: fuuu:::::n

INJ

yuup.

38. MIRI: soshite shikata nai ka.

so help there is:NEG Q

I guess that is just the way it is.

In lines 32 and 33, Tomoko mentions that Miri has a large family. This statement presumes that the additional responsibilities Miri has outside of work intensify her sense of being
overwhelmed. It also conveys the idea that Miri has shown restraint in her complaint as she has not mentioned the issues that Tomoko has raised. By building on to Miri’s complaint, Tomoko acknowledges Miri’s situation as a legitimate complainable. Furthermore, she demonstrates that she comprehends Miri’s situation and comprehends the complexity of Miri’s life to the extent that she can aid in the construction of the complaint.

An addressee may also add to a complaint by predicting an unpleasant consequence or outcome that the complainer has not stated in his complaint. Mihoko does this in the next example from Japanese. Mayumi, a Japanese exchange student studying in America, has been telling Mihoko about the various antics of her roommates. Mayumi’s tone when relating the stories is a mixture of amusement and exasperation. In this example, Mayumi is telling Mihoko about how they decorated the bathroom. While listening to the details of how the roommates were decorating the mirror with gummi bears, Mihoko interjects with a possible unpleasant outcome of the decoration.

Example 42a (CAF Japanese 1722)

01. MIHOKO: iroiro [kangaeru ne: @ @]  

   various think IEP

   They think up all kinds of things, don’t they?

02. MAYUMI: [ un @ @ ] (.hhh) de ne gumi o no senaka o ne:.

   BCH And then IEP gummi ACC GEN back ACC IEP

03. MIHOKO: un.

   BCH

   mhmm

04. MAYUMI: setchakuzai de tomete atte ne,

   glue INSTR fasten:ASP IEP
They’ve fastened gummi, the back of a gummis with glue

05. [kagami] ni gumi ga kuttsuite iru no.

mirror LOC gummi NOM stick:ASP SE

There are gummis stuck on the mirror.

06. MIHOKO: [ un ].

BCH

mhmm

07. MAYUMI: [[kuma ]] no.

bear GEN

bears

08. MIHOKO: [[(hhh)] @ @ [@ ] @

09. MAYUMI: [fuku]. (.92) gumi kuma.

good luck gummi bears

Good luck gummi bears

10. (.38)

11. MIHOKO: (.hhh) kusatte iku zo: @ [@ @ ]

rot:AUX IEP

They are gonna rot

In line 11, Mihoko states that the gummi bears will decompose and become rancid. This statement assists in the development of the complaint in two aspects. First, it adds a new aspect to the complaint that Mayumi has not mentioned yet. Up until this point, Mayumi’s description had focused on the immature behavior and actions of the roommates, not the bad smell of the decoration. Moreover, it solidifies the complaint-like tone of the story. Mayumi’s tone previous to this comment was descriptive. She was primarily relating her roommates actions. With this
statement, Mayumi’s tone definitely transitions into that of a complaint. She seizes upon Mihoko’s comment and uses it as a basis for a complaint.

Example 42b

11. MIHOKO: (.hhh) kusatte iku zo: @ [@ @ ]
   rot: AUX IEP
   It’s gonna rot

12. MAYUMI: [moo:] kusai n da yo moo. [@ @ ]
   EMP stink SE PRED IEP
   It already stinks

13. MIHOKO: [@ @ ]

14. (1.02)

15. MAYUMI: moo tte kanji.
   EMP QOUT feeling
   It’s like okay

16. (.46)

17. MIHOKO: doo suru n daroo [doo suru n daroo.]
   how do SE PRES how do SE PRES
   What can you do? What can you do?

18. MAYUMI: [ne: mottaku . ]
   IEP utterly ridiculous
   Right? It’s utterly ridiculous

19. moo ii ya. [@ @ ]
   INJ good IEP
   Enough already
20. MIHOKO: [@@]

Mayumi confirms the accuracy of Mihoko’s prediction in line 12. She complains that the gummi bears have already begun to reek. She further expresses her annoyance in lines 15, 18, and 19. Despite the seeming annoyance expressed in her comments, the laughter that follows her comments suggests that she still regards the situation with some humor. Regardless of Mayumi’s true feelings, it was the addressee, Mihoko, not the complainer, Mayumi, who raised the issue of the smell.

As one may expect, complainers do not accept all attempts by addresses to add on to a complaint. They may also deny the proposed complaint and maintain that it is not the case. Now I will turn to look at two examples in which the complainer rejects the addressee’s efforts to aid in the construction of a complaint through embellishment.

Hiro and Junichi are talking about work in example 43 below. In line 1, Junichi asks if Hiro is working towards being the head of his department; i.e the department of Legal Affairs. It is a declarative; a question in statement form which both seeks confirmation and shows his confidence that his statement will be affirmed (Heritage 2012). However, Hiro denies that this is his goal, as he would prefer for his workload to be easy. Based on this comment, Junichi asks if work has been hard recently in line 5. By doing so, he is proposing a complaint that Hiro may expand upon.

Example 43a (CHJ 1738)

01. JUNICHI: jaa hoomubuchoo ni mezashite.

so then Department of Legal Affairs Head DIR aim:CONJ

So then you are shooting to be the head of the Department of Legal Affairs

02. HIRO: un mezasan kedo.

BCH aim:NEG but
No I am not shooting for it.

03. u::n raku na hoo ga ii ne yappari na.

BCH easy PRED side NOM good IEP ultimately IEP

No, when it comes down to it, easier is better.

04. JUNICHI: raku na hoo ga ii.

easy PRED side NOM good

Easier is better.

05. shigoto shindoi no? ima.

work hard SE now

Work is hard now?

06. HIRO: ima chotto shin- nanka fueta na?

Now kind ot ha(rd) INJ increased IEP

Now it is kind of ha-. I’d say it has increased

07. hoomubu ni natte kara.

Department of Legal Affairs DIR become:CONJ since

Since we’ve become The Department of Legal Affairs.

08. soo iu no mo aru shi,

that sort of NML also there is and

That’s part of it

09. nanka shindoi naa.

EMP hard IEP

Yeah it’s hard

Hiro responds affirmatively that work has indeed been arduous recently since their workplace status has been upgraded from “shitsu” (room) to “bu” (department). Thus, he validates
Junichi’s first suggested complaint. Junichi responds to Hiro’s complaint in line 10 with the minimal response of a backchannel. This indicates that Junichi is giving Hiro an opportunity to elaborate further on his complaint. Hiro also responds with a backchannel, effectively passing the opportunity to continue with his turn and more specifically his complaint. Based on Hiro’s comments about work in lines 6-9, Junichi makes another declarative question about Hiro’s work situation in line 13.

Example 43b

09. HIRO: nanka shindoi naa.
    EMP hard IEP
    Yeah it’s hard

10: JUNICHI: un
    BCH
    uhuu

11: HIRO: un
    BCH
    yeah

12: JUNICHI: soo ka
    right Q
    I see

13. soo suru to (.) amari hayaku mo kaerenai.
    if that’s the case not often early even go home: POT: NEG
    In that case, you can’t often go home early.

14: HIRO: iya hayaku kaette iru yo.
    no early go home: ASP IEP
No I do go home early

15. JUNICHI: @[@ @ @]@

16. HIRO: [un@@@ichiban hayaku] kaette@@ @ @
yeah first one early go home:CONJ
yeah I am the first one to leave

Since Hiro complained that his work has been tiring, Junichi presumes that he is unable to leave work early. However, this time the presumed complaint is wrong and Hiro corrects Junichi’s faulty conclusion in the next line. He jokes that not only does he go home early, but also that he is actually the first one to leave. Thus while Hiro accepts Junichi’s first utterance which initiated the complaint, he does not accept his attempt to build on it.

The next example represents a common complaint among students: tests. Shinichi asks Osamu if he had any tests today. This question results in Osamu complaining about the various tests he had. He gripes about them being difficult in line 3 and employs a curse word in regards to his situation in line 6. Then, in line 9, he complains once again about his studies being difficult. Shinichi continues with his line of questioning and asks if he has any tests the following day as well. Osamu replies that the next day he has a composition test and a first aid test.

Example 44a (CAF English 6166)

01. SHINICHI: shiken atta no kyoo.

test have:PAST SE today

Did you have a test today?

02. OSAMU: atta yo::.

have:PAST IEP

Yeah, I had one.
03. sugee  muzukashikatta yo konkai.

**Extremely difficult:** PAST SE this time

*This time it was really difficult.*

04. SHINICHI: maji de.

*really

oh yeah?*

05. (.67)

06. OSAMU: a: hhh a: hhh anoo moo kuso  babaa @ .hhh.

**INJ EMP shit old lady**

*Freakin’ old lady*

07. SHINICHI: <@ doo na no.@>

**How PRED SE**

*What’s a matter?*

08. (.83)

09. OSAMU: sugee: [muzukashii ] yo.

**extremely difficult IEP**

*It’s extremely difficult.*

10. SHINICHI: [ ashita wa. ]

**tomorrow TOP**

*What about tomorrow?*

11. OSAMU: ashita?

**tomorrow**

*Tomorrow?*

12. SHINICHI: u:n.
13. BCH

yeah

14. OSAMU: konpojishion to: (.40) ato::=

composition and also

I have composition and also

15. SHINICHI: tesuto?

Test

a test?

16. (.40)

17. OSAMU u::n.

BCH

yeah

18. SHINICHI: ara.

INJ

man


Nine test PRED

I have nine tests

20. SHINICHI: hee:::

INJ

Jeez

21. (.83)

22. OSAMU: ato:: wa: hhh. (.64) faasuto eido ka na.
I think I also have my first aid test ((tomorrow)).

At this point, Shinichi attempts to develop the complaint further. As Osamu has already complained that his tests up to this point have been difficult, Shinichi asks if difficult questions are going to appear on the upcoming examinations as well. Though this question is framed to receive a yes answer which confirms it, Osamu denies that this is the case and answers negatively.

Example 44b

22. OSAMU: ato:: wa: hhh. (.64) faasuto eido ka na.

23. (.82)

24. SHINICHI hee:: muzukashii no deru.

INJ difficult ones appear

Is there going to be anything difficult?

25. OSAMU: ((.hhh)) iya a soo demo nai.

No INJ not really

No not really

26. SHINICHI: hontoo.

really

Oh okay

27. OSAMU: u:n demo.

BCH but

Yeah but
28. SHINICHI: moo yama wa koeta no jaa.

*Already mountain TOP cross over:*PAST SE TAG

*Then you already climbed over the mountain.*

29. (.69)

30. OSAMU: iya moo moo kyoo koeta to omou n da kedo ne.

*INJ EMP EMP today climb:*PAST QOUT THINK SE PRED but IEP

*Oh my god, I think I climbed over it today.*

31. SHINICHI: u::n.

*BCH

*Oh yeah?*

As seen, Osamu rejects Shinichi’s proposal that the test will be difficult with “soo demo nai.” Thus, while Shinichi was inadvertently successful in commencing the complaint, he is unable to extend it.

Interestingly, after Osamu’s denial, Shinichi switches from attempting to develop the complaint to displaying an optimistic attitude. He responds in the same manner discussed in sections 3.2.2; i.e.by finding a positive aspect of the situation. Shinichi states in line 28 that Osamu has climbed over the mountain, in other words, that the worst part is over. This time, Osamu agrees and states that he too feels that he has finished the hardest part today in line 30. Osamu’s negation, then, results in Shinichi taking a different more positive approach.

As these two examples have shown, complainers do not accept all additional complaints proposed by a non-affected party. Although attempting to extend a complaint by raising related problematic issues is a means of aligning with the speaker, such affiliative responses are not automatically successful. Complaints ultimately belong to the complainer’s domain and it is their prerogative to delineate what is and is not a personal complainable. The manner in which
the complainer rejects a proposed complaint may range from being short and simple to being relatively elaborate, involving concessions or offering alternative complaints. Thus, even in their rejection, speakers may attempt to display some sort of alignment with the proposed complaint.

**3.3.2.1. Summary of adding on to a complaint**

As seen, addressee’s can play an important role in the construction of a complaint by adding on to it and augmenting it. By doing so, the addressee accomplishes several tasks. First, the very fact that the complainer is augmenting the complaint suggests that the addressee accepts the situation as a complainable. It sanctions the complaint and encourages the complainer in its continuation. Furthermore, they are potentially aiding the other party in developing the complaint by opening up other possible avenues for complaint. Although in these examples the expansion of the proposed complaint was minimal, the complainers may take these proposed complaints and build on them. Finally, by augmenting a complaint, addressees demonstrate their understanding of the complainer’s talk. By “understanding”, I refer to an understanding that attempts to extend beyond the beyond the literal import of the complainer’s words and attempts to demonstrate a deeper knowledge of their situation. Through augmentation, addressees show that they realize there may be more to the situation than the complainer has described and that they comprehend the larger context in which the speaker has framed the complaint. Thus, not only has the addressee carefully followed and listened to the complaint, but has also thought about the deeper implication of the complainer’s talk.

**3.3.3. Instigating a Complaint**

Parties not affected by a complainable situation can also play an important role in the construction of complaints by initiating them. Just as they can add on to a speaker’s complaint by proposing other possible complainable issues related to the complaint, they can also instigate
A complaint in regards to an issue that is not even under discussion. In this section, I will examine examples in which a person unaffected by the situation is responsible for initiating the complaint.

One way a non-affected party may initiate a complaint is to ask a complaint-provoking question. In the following example, the non-affected party actually poses two questions that are responsible for provoking a complaint. Nanami and Hina are talking about Nanami’s return to Japan from America. Hina asks questions that encourage Nanami to express any negative feelings she has experienced since her return to Japan.

Example 45 (CHJ 1263)

01. HINA: Huun. Doo?
   INJ how
   hhmm. How is it going?

02. mada karuchaa shokku mada kanjitenai?
   yet culture shock yet feel:ASP:NEG
   Aren’t you feeling any culture shock yet?

03. NANAMI: iya moo tsuita soosoo kanjte iru.
   EMP EMP arrive:PAST as soon as feel:ASP
   Oh god, I have been feeling it from the moment I arrived

04. HINA: aa hontoo.
   INJ really
   Oh really

05. NANAMI: u[n.]
   BCH
   yeah
06. HINA: [na]ni ga ichiban iya?

what NOM most dislike

What do you dislike the most?

07. NANAMI: eh? Hito ga ippai iru.

INJ people NOM a lot of there are

Hmm? There are a lot of people

08. HINA: @[@@@] @@@)((cough))

09. NANAMI: [@ @]

10. NANAMI: atama ga kuroi.

head NOM blacks

The black heads

11. HINA: atama ga kuroi!=(high pitched voice))

heads NOM black

The black heads

12. HINA: =[@@ @ naru]hodo ne? (high pitched voice))

I see IEP

I see

13. NANAMI: [ @ @ @ @]

14. NANAMI: un

yeah

yeah

15. HINA: atama ga minna kurosu- kuroi no ne?

yeah heads NOM all black black SE IEP

everyone’s head is black- black.,
First, in line 2, Hina asks Nanami if she has felt any reverse culture shock. When Nanami answers affirmatively, Hina asks her specifically what she hates the most in line 6. Nanami responds by complaining about the congested population and the blackness of everyone’s hair. Thus, due to Hina’s first question, Nanami commences her complaint by first admitting to harboring negative sentiments as a result of having to readapt to Japanese culture. Then, on account of Hina’s second question, she proceeds to delineate a specific complaint about her readjustment. Hina’s questions sanction Nanami’s complaint and allow her to complain with minimal concern about the negativity that is associated with complaints.

The next example also involves a Japanese speaker trying to initiate a complaint from another. Below, Hiroki attempts to initiate a complaint from Iwao about his studies. Like example 45, he does so by asking a question that is framed to elicit a complaint.

Example 46a (CHJ 1622)

01. HIROKI: benkyoo no hoo mo taihen na no?

   studies GEN side also hard  PRED SE
   
   Are your studies hard?

02. IWAO: maa taihen tte hodo de mo nai kedo,

   INJ rough QOUT extent PRED:NEG  but
   
   Well, it’s not to the point where I would call it tough but

As opposed to being an open-ended question that asks how his studies are, Hiroki’s question in line 1 carries the expectation that Iwao’s studies are hard. Thus, he frames the question for an affirmative answer. Iwao vacillates in his answer and simultaneously confirms and denies his assumption. First, he disconfirms Hiroki’s assumption by stating that he would not label them as “taihen” (tough). He then begins to mitigate his denial by conceding the importance of getting good grades. However, Iwao does not finish complete his mitigation as he is interrupted by
Hiroki. As Iwao did not answer affirmatively and take up the complaint, Hiroki interrupts Iwao’s statement in line 5 in another attempt to instigate a complaint.

Example 46b

02. IWAO: maa taihen tte hodo de mo nai kedo,

    INJ rough QOUT extent PRED:NEG but

    Well, it’s not to the point where I would call it tough but

03. sore nari ni,

    as it is

04. yappa- (0.4) [ii seeseki tottoki]

    ultimately good grades get:MOD

    Ultima-(ely), getting good grades is-

05. HIROKI: [yappari shiken] ni naru to yappari taihen ka?

    ultimately test DIR become TEMP ultimately difficult Q

    It is tough when it comes down to test time, huh?

06. IWAO: un?

    BCH

    Huh?

07. HIROKI: shiken-

    test

    test

08. (0.4)

09. IWAO: a[aaa.]

    BCH
10. HIROKI: [shiken] ga chikazuku to yappari taihen deshoo.

Test NOM approach TEMP ultimately tough PRS

When test time draws near ultimately it must be tough

11. IWAO: soo da ne.

Right PRED IEP

Yeah

12. maa (.) chanto ii seeseki tottokanakya mazui kara [sa..]

INJ properly good grades get:MOD so IEP

Well, I gotta get good grades so

13. HIROKI: [un.] naruhodo naruhodo.

BCH I see I see

mhmm I see.

In line 5, Hiroki reframes his question to a more declarative style question; i.e. a question in the form of a statement that generally seeks confirmation. He seeks confirmation that Iwao’s studies become difficult around test time. Thus, in the reframing of his question, he limits its specificity so that it is more likely to receive an affirmative answer. In line 6, in Iwao does a listener repair request for clarification. Hiroki obliges the request and repeats the statements in line 10.

However, in his repetition, he grammatically changes the utterance from a question marked with the question particle “ka” to an assertion marked with the presumptive marker “deshoo” (must be) With the addition of the presumptive marker, Hiroki more clearly conveys his conjecture than he did in the previous questions. Iwao hesitantly expresses his agreement in line 11 and once again repeats his point that he needs to be diligent in his studies as there is an expectation
for him to make good grades in line 12. In summary, Hiroki attempts to elicit a complaint from Iwao in regards to his studies by asking questions and expressing conjecture.

As seen in example 46, speakers employ various styles of questions to provoke complaints. They may use direct interrogatives as well as questions that have been framed as assertions, but are essentially questions seeking confirmation (Heritage 2012, 2013, Heritage and Raymond 2013). Regardless of the style of the question, such utterances, signal to the other party that complaining would be an acceptable conversational act and incite the other party to do so. I will continue to discuss the use of questions framed as assertions as a means of initiating complaints by looking at 2 more examples from Japanese.

In the next example, a father is asking a daughter about the weather in the area where she is. As opposed to phrasing the question in a more open-ended manner that asks how the weather is, he specifically asks if the weather is hot. Thus, when questioning his daughter in line 1, he constructs the polarity of the question in a manner to receive agreement that the weather is hot.

Example 47a (CHJ 1041)

01. Father: sotchi atsui ka?

there hot Q

Is it hot there?

02. Daughter: atsui.

hot

It’s hot.

03. Father: hontoo.

really

oh yeah?
While the daughter’s confirmation in line 2, could potentially be a complaint, it is not absolutely certain. While stating that it is hot could imply that it uncomfortable and hard to endure, it is not positive whether such a complaint is implied. However, the father’s next utterance in line 4 clearly contains an aspect of complaint. He seeks confirmation that the second floor of her residence is hot and therefore uncomfortable.

Example 47b

03. Father: hontoo.
    really
    oh yeah

04. jaa nikai wa astukute taihen desho?
    then second floor TOP hot:CONJ uncomfortable PRS

Then the second floor must be hot and uncomfortable.

05. Daughter: un.
    BCH
    yeah

06. Father: un.
    BCH
    mhmm

Again, his question receives affirmation from the daughter. In summary, by suggesting to his daughter a possible source of unpleasantness in her life, he opens up the door for her to complain. Note though, that she does not really take up the complaint. Her response is minimal and she does little beyond confirm the accuracy of her father’s utterances. She does not really delve into the complaint nor does she take a complaining stance. The father was essentially
more verbal than the daughter in stating the negativity of the situation, even though the situation impacts his daughter, not him.

The following is another example from Japanese in which one party seeks confirmation about the existence of a complainable in the other party’s life. Miyuki asks Akane about her work as an English instructor. When Akane informs Miyuki that she has stopped doing this work, Miyuki responds by stating “soo” (yeah) in line 3. This suggests that the fact that Akane quit is not surprising and is to be expected. Miyuki then seeks Akane’s confirmation that the teaching situation was a less than desirable and difficult situation by stating in line 4, “taihen datta deshoo iroiro” (It must have been rough. All those things).

Example 48a (CHJ 2218)

01. MIYUKI: sore de (0.2) anata sono eigo no kyooshi mo mada tsuzukete irassharu no?

   and you that English GEN instructor also still continue:ASP:HON SE

   And are you still continuing as an English instructor.

02. AKANE: a yameta no yo anata.

   INJ quit:past SE IEP you

   Oh I quit that.

03. MIYUKI: soo?

   right

   yeah

04. taihen datta deshoo iroiro. [@@@]

   rough PRED:PAST PRS various

   It must have been rough. All those things.

05. AKANE: [taihen datta.@ @ ]

   rough PRED:PAST
It was rough

06. MIYUKI:  @ soo*@

right

yeah

Notice that Miyuki’s comment ends in laughter. Although laughter may be inappropriate in certain complaint situations, it is possible here because Akane is no longer enduring the negative situation. In essence, it is the proverbial “someday we will look back at this and laugh.” When one is no longer suffering, it is easier to find humor in an absurd situation. In line 5, Miyuki confirms Akane’s question by stating that it was in fact difficult. Not only does Miyuki’s confirmation mirror Akane’s in word choice (i.e. taihen datta), but similar to Akane, she too laughs at the situation. In response to Miyuki validating her proposed complainable, Akane once again utters “soo” (yeah) in line 6. Similar to the previous “soo” in line 3, it reflects that Miyuki has responded in an expected manner by affirming the complaint.

It appears that Akane is going to expand on the situation in line 7 as she utters “sore de” (and). However, Miyuki interrupts Akane’s turn and provides the reason why the work was difficult.

Example 48b

06. MIYUKI:  @ soo*@

right

yeah

07. AKANE:  [sore de,]

and

and

08. MIYUKI:  [naughty-] naughty kids aite. @[@ @ @]
companion

having to deal with naughty-naughty kids as your students

09. AKANE: [@@@@soo @sore de] ne, right and IEP yeah and

In line 8, Miyuki states the children were unruly and misbehaved and thereby offers an explanation as to why Akane’s work was presumably difficult. So once again, Miyuki is more vocal than Akane in pointing out the negative aspects of her work even though it is Akane’s work and thus her complainable.

Akane once again in line 9 attempts to make the comment which she began in line 7. However, Miyuki interrupts her for a second time with another complainable aspect of Akane’s job. This time Miyuki claims in line 14 that Akane is too intelligent for the job.

Example 48c

09. AKANE: [@@@@soo @sore de] ne, right and IEP yeah and

10. MIYUKI: un

BCH

mhmm

11. AKANE: yappari chotto ne. actually EMP IEP

You know it’s actually

12. MIYUKI: un

BCH
In summary, it is Miyuki rather than Akane who is responsible for both the instigation and the subsequent development of the complaint. Like example 47, although Miyuki’s initial utterance about Akane’s situation invites her to complain, Akane ultimately remains in a peripheral role. Her involvement is limited to agreeing to the negative aspects indicated by Miyuki.

Both examples 47 and 48 are effectively a step up from example 45 in terms of involvement of the non-affected party in the construction of the complaint. The speakers have evolved from asking about the existence of potential complainables and allowing the other
person to state what those complainables may be to actually stating themselves what those complainables might be. Furthermore, while the speakers’ role in constructing the complaint could have merely been seeking confirmation for the complainable and then leaving the majority of the complaint construction to the rightful complainer, this is not the case in these two particular examples. Rather, in these two examples, the speakers have evolved from instigating the complaint and then passing the turn to the rightful complainer, to being the primary complainer who mentions the majority of the negative aspects. Lastly, I would like to point out that the speaker must possess some kind of knowledge of the other party’s situation in order to propose a complaint. For example, in example 47 the father knows the daughter’s place of residence and what the weather is generally like in that area during that particular season. Similarly, in example 48, Miyuki must have previously talked to Akane about her teaching situation in order for Akane to reference it difficulty. So, in examples 47 and 48, some degree of familiarity about the others circumstances already exists.

Now I would like to look at examples in which speakers out right state what is complainable about the other party’s situation. Unlike the previously seen examples of questions and questions framed as assertions which seek confirmation, these examples do not seek input from the other party who is actually enduring the complainable situation. They directly state the complainable as if it were an undisputable fact. I will look at one such example in Japanese and two in English.

In the example below, a mother and her son, Akihiro, are talking about the cost of a bus pass. Akihiro inquires about the price of pass in line 5. When Teruko informs him that she pays ¥16,800 (approximately $185) a month, Akihiro exclaims that it is expensive.

Example 49 (CHJ 3001)
1. AKIHIRO:  sore de teeki?
   and pass
   and it’s a pass?

2. MOTHER:  [teeki.]
   pass
   It’s a pass

3. AKIHIRO: [teeki] nan no.
   pass PRED SE
   Is it a pass?

4. MOTHER:  un
   BCH
   yeah

5. AKIHIRO: ikura kakaru.
   how much cost
   How much does it cost?

6. MOTHER:  ikkagetsu?
   one month
   one month?

7. AKIHIRO:  un
   BCH
   uuhuh

8. MOTHER:  ichimanrokusen [ (5) ] happyaku en gurai ka na?
   sixteen thousand eight hundred yen about Q SE
   I think it’s about 16,800 yen (approximately 185 dollars)
Although he is not even the one riding the bus, it is Akihiro, not his mother, who first complains about the high price of the bus. In fact, he does not even wait for his mother to finish stating the price before expressing his unfavorable assessment in line 9. He emphasizes the word “takai” (expensive) through exaggerated elongation. His mother agrees with him in line 11 but stating that the bus is indeed expensive. She ends the statement with the sentence final particle “nee” which shows her agreement with Akihiro’s statement. Akihiro responds to her agreement in line 12 by once again stating that commuting by bus is expensive. The wording he uses is similar to his mother’s immediately preceding statement and in general, it shows his appreciation that his mother has agreed with his assessment. Initially then, Akihiro is essentially complaining for his mother by giving voice to a negative situation which affects her as opposed to himself. Akihiro’s mother limits her role to agreeing with Akihiro’s negative assessment.
Now I would like to look at some similar examples taken from English. In the first example from English, the sequence begins with Lynne asking Doris about a substance that the air conditioner is emitting. Doris responds by explaining that it is dust and by offering an account of why it is blowing out of the air conditioner. This explanation lasts from line 8 to line 14. It is Lynne who first identifies the situation as unpleasant and annoying in line 15.

Example 50a (SBCSAE 1)

01. LYNNE: What is- (0.2) blowing out of there.
02. DORIS: Well that's what happens with that air conditioner .
03. it's just-
04. it gets dust accumulated in it, see it's all over the TV: .
05. (1.4)
06. LYNNE: It was just o:n last night,
08. DORIS: [ We:ll I-]
09. It (.) <X Mae_Lynne X> =
10. =(.2) for one thing the (0.2) filters are dirty because it (.2) it so-
11. been so dry::: .
12. And the- it all comes acrost (0.8) the road . you know?
13. and (.2) and then it builds up real bad with (0.4) .hh ((coughs)) deposits,
14. out of the water .
15. LYNNE: Oh: . [[ Ugh: .]]
16. DORIS: [[ In other words]] I (.) should be (.) change filters .
17. LYNNE: Go:d .
In response to Doris’s explanation, Lynne first utters “oh” which is an acknowledgment of information receipt (Schegloff 2007). This is followed by “ugh” which is an interjection used to express disgust. She then utters another interjection “god.” Interestingly, “god” is generally an interjection of frustration and annoyance. However, for Lynne, the dust is not a situation that she has to deal with. Rather, it is Doris’s problem. Thus, whereas the dust is visibly accessible to her and thus the disgusting nature of the filth is accessible to her comment upon, the frustration and annoyance of the dust is not.

With Lynne’s interjections, Doris also commences to complain about the dust. First, she agrees with Lynne’s negative assessment with “I know.” Then she proceeds to mitigate the upcoming complaint by stating that the situation will not last long. However, as is common in mitigations to complaints, she counters the mitigation with “but” and ultimately complains that it does make a mess.

Example 50b

18. LYNNE: God.
19. DORIS: I know.
20. It won't last long.
21. (3.0)
22. DORIS: But it sure does make a mess in the house.
23. LYNNE: Yeah.
24. it [makes a mess].
25. DORIS: [I need new] filters.

Lynne’s response to Doris’s complaint is to agree by first assenting with the function word “yeah” and then by repeating Doris’s comment about it making a mess. Thus, the
existence of the complaint can be primarily attributed to Lynne. First, she raises the issue by questioning Doris about the dust’s presence. However, Doris’s response is to give an account of the malfunctioning air condition rather than to complain. Furthermore, Lynne is also the first to express disgust and annoyance for the situation as indicated by her interjections. So while Doris does eventually uptake the complaint, the complaint can predominantly be ascribed to a primarily non-affected party of the situation.

In this next example, Adam and Peter are talking about their final examinations. When Adam states that he has finished three of his finals but still has two left, Peter responds by exclaiming “oh that sucks” in line 2.

Example 51a (CAF English 6193)

01. ADAM: Yeah, three subjects I got done with, now I got two subjects left.
02. PETER: Oh, that sucks!
03. ADAM: Yeah, [So-] 

Peter’s remark serves two functions. First, it characterizes the situation negatively. Secondly, it expresses his commiseration. Now whether Peter is commiserating that Adam still has to deal with the drudgery and stress of studying for and taking a final, or that Adam has five finals, or a combination of both, remains ambiguous. In any case, it expresses his sympathy. While Adam casually affirms his characterization with “yeah” in line 3, he does not take up the complaint.

Peter continues with his commiseration in line 4. This time, he clearly specifies the reason for his commiseration and focuses on the fact that Adam had five final examinations.

Example 51b

01. ADAM: Yeah, three subjects I got done with, now I got two subjects left.
02. PETER: Oh, that sucks!
03. ADAM: Yeah, [So-]

04. PETER: [Damn,] you had five finals?

05. ADAM Yeah.

06. PETER I only have- I have three, man.

Although Peter phrases his utterance as a question, it is not a true question that requests unknown information. Rather, it is an expression of both surprise and sympathy at the number of Adam’s finals. This is evident by the fact that Adam has already stated that he has had five final examinations and by the explicative “damn.” Nonetheless, Adam once again treats the utterance like a question by casually answering “yeah” in line 5 and does not deal with complaint aspect of the utterance.

Despite Adam’s lack of take up, Peter continues with the complaint aspect of the conversation. He compares himself with Adam in line 6 by stating that he only has three final examinations. Speakers frequently employ such comparisons in complaints and I will discuss them further in section four. Adam then responds to this comparison by explaining in lines 7-9 that he only has three finals this week as one final was scheduled for last week and one final was a take-home final. Peter interprets this response as an attempt by Adam to mitigate the difficulty of his situation. The can be seen by the fact that Peter begins to counter Adam’s statement in line 10 by saying “but still.” However, before Peter even begins to counter Adam’s statement, Adam himself has already begun to counter his own statement in the previous line 9 with the word “but.”

Example 51c

06. PETER: I only have- I have three, man.

07. ADAM: Yeah, well I had one final this last week.
Thus, Adam himself begins to offset his mitigation before Peter does. Furthermore, he does not relinquish his turn in the face of Peter’s interruption. Rather, he holds his turn and counters his mitigation by complaining in lines 11-12 about the take-home final.

Example 51d

06. PETER: I only have- I have three, man.

07. ADAM: Yeah, well I had one final this last week.

08. uh::, one was a take-home (.) a:nd so: I just only had three finals

09. during finals week, but-

10. PETER: But [still-]

11. ADAM: [The] take-home was uh I was up till like four in the morning last night working on it.

12. PETER: Oh, really?

13. ADAM: Yeah, it was due eleven o'clock this morning .

14. PETER: was it computer thing, or ?

15. ADAM: Uh::, not really computer thing but,

16. (0.4)

17. (hh) it I had to use- I had to use, like, mathematica to: do some- problems.

As seen, Adam gripes that he had to stay up very late in order to finish the final. Thus, Adam finally joins Peter in framing the situation as a complainable.
The complaint sequence ultimately ends with Peter making a sarcastic response in lines 19 and 21.

Example 51e

16. ADAM: Uh::, not really computer thing but,
17. (0.4)
18. ADAM (.hh) it I had to use- I had to use, like, mathematica to: do some- problems.
20. ADAM: so:-
21. PETER: °that's fun.°

Peter sarcastically describes Adam’s situation as “great” and “fun.” Thus, the instigator of the complaint also concludes the complaint. Furthermore, in his conclusion he continues to define the situation as unpleasant.

In the next example, Sara and Debbie are talking about Debbie’s boyfriend. Sara is surprised to hear that Debbie is spending time with her boyfriend despite the fact that they broke up. While Debbie is clearly is upset about the situation and describes it as “messy,” it is actually Sara who first gripes about the boyfriend and defines his behavior as unacceptable.

Example 52a (CAF English 6239)

01. SARA: so- wait you and Pau:l are sti:ll talking.
02. (0.6)
03. DEBBIE: yea:h we talk like every da:y, and we've spe:nt like a- (xhh).
04. I mean, I've stayed over his hou:se probably °like five ti:me since
05. we broke u::p [and.]
06. SARA: [ o:h] shi:t.
DEBBIE: (.hhh) so it's not clean. It's very messy.

but I mean, we're still in love with each other.

°you know, like, I didn't want to break up with him,

DEBBIE: °and (.hhh)°

(0.5)

SARA: [why did > ((breathy))] he.

DEBBIE: [°um:°]

SARA: °oh: god he's so bizarre° ((whispering))

what's his deal.

Sara utters the expletive “oh shit” in line 6 which indicates her disapproval of the current nature of their relationship. Similarly, she once again voices her disapproval in line 14 with the expletive “oh god.” Then she defines the boyfriend’s behavior as bizarre and asks Debbie what his problem is. Thus, it is Sara not Debbie, who first complains about the boyfriend’s behavior.

With Sara’s instigation of the complaint, Debbie also begins to focus on the problematic behavior of her boyfriend. She agrees with Sara in lines 16-17 that his conduct has been less than stellar and that it needs to be rectified. In the midst of constructing her agreement, Debbie pauses in line 5 and leaves her turn grammatically incomplete. Sara takes this opportunity to cut Debbie’s turn short and continues with her criticism of his Debbie’s boyfriend in line 19.

Example 52b

SARA: °oh: god he's so bizarre° ((whispering))

what's his deal.

DEBBIE: (.hhh) °we:ll he really needs ° to like get his shit

together and figure out, like.
18. (0.7)

19. SARA: I don't understand why people have a problem having a person who
20. loves them [near them.]

This interruption is interesting as Sara seemingly just requested an explanation for his behavior. The fact that she does not actually wait for the explanation in its entirety suggests that it was not an actual question but rather an exclamation expressing the unacceptability of his actions.

Sara’s criticism though does not focus strictly focus on Debbie’s boyfriend behavior but rather on people who display that kind of behavior in general. As will be seen, her objective in making the complaint is to raise a similar situation that is occurring to another friend.

Debbie attempts to reclaim the floor in lines 21 and 24. However, her talk overlaps with Sara’s as Sara does not relinquish her turn. Debbie ultimately gains the floor completely in line 26. In her turn, she takes the issue that Sara has raised and uses it as a basis for her complaint. She agrees with Sara and states that her boyfriend has been behaving as Sara declared.

Example 52c

19. SARA: I don't understand why people have a problem having a person who
20. loves them [near them.]

21. DEBBIE: [I know that's ] [[what I don't]] understand either.

22. SARA: [[that’s like-? ]]

23. SARA: [that's like-?]

24. DEBBIE: [like he's ] (0.2) he [loves me (hhh) ] too:

25. SARA: [same thing that Tom's ][saying.]

26. DEBBIE: [[I'm like]] if you: love me,

27. I don't understand.
28. (0.1)

29. DEBBIE: you kno:w why: (0.3) you wouldn't want to be with me.

30. and he's like well it's not a question of what I wa:nt,

31. it's a question of what I can do:.

32. you know?

33. it's like one of tho:se things.

34. it's like or,

35. (hhh) I'm so confused right now I don't kno:w what I wa:nt.

36. °you kno:w?°

After Debbie’s rant, Sara ultimately reclaims her turn and once again begins to construct her complaint in line 37.

Example 52d

36. DEBBIE: °you kno:w?°

37. SARA: xxx that's like (. bu:llshit [you kno:w?]°

38. DEBBIE: [ °I kno:w.° ]

39. DEBBIE: well- but [ he:'s go:t- ]

40. SARA: [that's To:m's] bullshit that he was pulling on Bry:n.

41. DEBBIE: °I know.°

She uses the explicative “bullshit” to describe the kind of behavior that she and Debbie have been discussing. Then, in line 40, she rants about how one of her acquaintances, Bryan, is treating another acquaintance, Tom, in a similar manner.

Sara’s role, then, in the development of the complaint then is pivotal. She is the first conversational participant to raise the issue of the boyfriend’s problematic behavior.
Furthermore, it is her comments that Debbie uses for the development of her complaint. She also
displays more anger than Debbie. This can be seen in her tone of voice, and in her use of
expletives such as “oh god”, “shit”, and “bullshit”. She formulates her talk in this manner
despite the fact that the situation does not affect her but rather her friend.

As seen, the non-affected party of a complaint conversation is not strictly relegated to the
role of simply listening and responding to complaints. Non-affected parties may play an
important role in complaint formation by attempting to initiate a complaint. While the extent to
which they are successful varies, the fact that they are striving to engage the other party in
complaining is unmistakable. Furthermore, as seen in examples 49 and 52, the non-affected party
may be vocal about expressing their negative feelings about a situation and / or being critical
about a situation by indicating its non-positive qualities. Indeed, they may be as equally vocal
as, if not more vocal than, the affected party. In such cases, there is in a sense a reversal of roles
in which the non-affected party is essentially complaining for the affected party and the affected
party becomes the recipient of a complaint. However, the complainable is not a matter that
affects the party who is complaining and therefore is not a matter about which he or she truly has
access to complain. In short, it is the other party’s issue. In some cases, the affected party does
take up the issue and each party reverses back to their expected roles. In other cases, however,
the other party does not really take up the complaint. This occurred in example 47. Regardless
of which occurs, the role of the non-affected party in the initiation and subsequent construction
of the complaint remains vital.

In this section, I have looked at how one party to a conversation may initiate a complaint
by raising certain issues as potential complainables for the other party. I also noted that the
degree of uptake of the complaint by the affected party varied greatly in each example. Despite
the varied degree of uptake though, in every example the affected party at least concurred that the issue was indeed a complainable. However, as one may expect, such concurrence is not always the case. The other party may not deem a situation as complaint worthy or even maintain that the situation does not exist at all. Now I will look at examples in which other party differs and denies that a complainable situation exists. As I was unable to find such examples in my English data, I will strictly be discussing examples from Japanese. First, I will look at three examples in which the speaker holds firm in their rejection of the proposed complaint. Then, I will look at three examples in which the speaker grants some concessions after initially rejecting the complaint. Finally, I will discuss two examples in which one party is correct in suggesting that a complainable situation exists, however the specific nature of the complaint is different from that which they are proffering.

In the first of these eight examples, a wife surmises that her husband is tired due to the sound of his voice. The wife checks on the husband’s well-being by stating that she sounds tired. Similar to examples discussed previously, it expects a response from the husband that either confirms or denies it validity. In this particular case, the husband opts to deny it.

Example 53 (CHJ 1041)
01. WIFE: demo nan ka tsukareta yoo na funiki da ke[do.]
   But EMP become tired:PAST like PRED atmosphere PRED but
   But you sound like you are tired

02. HUSBAND: [un?]
   BCH
   Really?

03. sonna koto nai yo
   that kind of thing there is:neg IEP
No, I’m not.

The husband denies the proposed complaint with the statement “sonna koto nai yo” (No, I am not / That’s not the case). Now why the husband denied the complaint remains unknown. While it could because it truly is not the case, it could also because he did not wish to take up the complaint. In either case, the husband rejects the proposed complaint.

There are a few points that I would like to highlight about the rejection of this complaint. First, the speaker is both firm and succinct in his rejection. Secondly, despite the rejection, such attempts by non-affected parties at identifying complaints are preferred to the affected party raising the issue first. In this particular example, the tiredness of the husband’s voice indicated to the wife that a potential complaint may exist. The wife’s preempting the husband in raising the issue has at least potential two effects. One, by doing so, the wife indicates to the husband that she is truly listening and is attempting to interpret particular details and intricacies of the conversation. Furthermore, by doing so, she expresses her concern for her husband’s wellbeing. Finally, as discussed previously, the wife’s preemption indicates to the husband that it is all right to engage in the action of complaining.

I will look at a second example in which a speaker remains firm when denying a proposed complaint. Below four students are conversing about their part time jobs. Ryota asks Sachiye how much time her commute to her part time job requires. In the midst of her lengthy response, Akio positively characterizes it as a short commute in lines 14 and 17. Hironobu on the other hand describes it as “mendokusai” (a pain, tiresome) in line 27. With this negative description, Hironobu is creating an opportunity for Sachiye to complain about her commute. However, Sachiye does not uptake the negative description.

Example 55a (Sakura 5)
01. RYOTA: Ou-san made ni wa-

Ou to TOP

To Ou-

02. (0.2)

03. Ou-san deshoo?

You work at Ou, right?

04. SACHIYE: un .

BCH

yeah

05. RYOTA: made wa nanpun gurai kakaru no?

to TOP how many minutes about take SE

About how many minutes does it take to there?

ouchi kara.

06. HON:home from

From your house.

07. (1.0)

08. SACHIYE: ((coughs)) (0.4) ouchi kara Nii-eki made juppun jan?

HON:home Nii station to 10 minutes TAG

From my house to Nii station it’s about 10 minutes right?

09. RYOTA: un

BCH

uhuh

10. SACHIYE: densha notte .
Riding the train

11. RYOTA: un soo da ne*

yeah right COP IEP

Yeah. That's about right.

12. juppun jan.

10 minutes TAG

It's ten minutes, right.

13. SACHIYE: [un juppun jan ne].

yeah 10 minutes TAG IEP

Yeah, It's about 10 minutes you know.

14. AKIO: [@@chikkee.]

near

That's close

15. [[((coughs))]]

16. SACHIYE: [[ sonde, ]]

and then

And then

17. AKIO: chikkee naa.

near IEP

That's close, isn't it.

18. SACHIYE: kyuukoo toka ni noru to juu-

express train and LOC ride COND fif-

If I take the express train it takes fif-
If I ride the express train? Or the rapid train,

I arrive in about fifteen minutes but

if I ride the local train

It’s about 20 minutes or 25 minutes or so

and then I walk another

5 minutes from 10 minutes

That sounds like a pain.
29. HIRONOBU:  [@]@ eh?

   INJ

   Huh?

30.  sore datte  baito  desho ?

   that  EMP part-time job TAG

   we’re talking about your part-time job, right?

31.  SACHIYE:  un .

   BCH

   uuhuh

32.  HIRONOBU:  baito  iku no  ni  sanjuppun  gurai kakaru tte  koto desho ?

   part-time job go:NML DAT 30 minutes about take QOUT mean TAG

   That means it takes about 30 minutes to go to your job, doesn’t it.

33.  SACHIYE:  demo ne,

   but

   but

34.  ku ni naranai .

   be a pain:NEG

   But it is not bad

35.  kaeri ni  Nii-eki tooru  kara,

   return DAT  Nii station pass through so

   Returning I pass through Nii-eki so

36.  nani katte  kaeroo  mitai na .

   what buy:CONJ return:VOL EVD IEP

   it’s like what shall I  buy on my way home.
After his initial characterization in line 27, Hironobu farther attempts to emphasize that Sachiye’s commute is long and therefore a complainable issue. He utters an interjection of surprise and line 29 and then clarifies that she is talking about going to work in line 30. Then he confirms that her commute is 30 minutes in line 32. Again, in the formation of his utterance he requests confirmation that his statement is accurate. By requesting confirmation for accuracy, he is actually emphasizing the he finds her commute to be surprising long. Sachiye however rejects his characterization in line 34 and states that she does not mind the commute. She also points out the positive by stating that it gives her an opportunity to go shopping at the train station. Like the husband in the previous example, she denies that the situation is a complainable.

At this point, we get a division among the participants on what qualifies as a reasonable commute to a part-time job. Ryota concedes that being able to shop is a positive aspect of her commute. Akio states that his commute is one hour. While on one level his statement is an example of one-upmanship of who has the worst commute, on another level it gives credence to Sachiye’s assertion that a 30 minute commute is not bad and therefore not a complainable. Ryota and Hironobu then respectively state that their commute is only 5 minutes. Ryota then claims that this is a typical commute in line 45. Thus, it seems that Ryota is now aligning herself with the position that a 30 minute commute is too long.

Example 55b

37. RYOTA: soo da ne;
   right COP IEP
   That’s true.

38. SACHIYE: un.[ @ @ ]

39. RYOTA: [datte.]
   but

191
Finally, Hironobu argues one last time that Sachiye’s commute is long. In line 46, he expresses his opinion that it is best to work in the area where one lives. This comment is met first with pregnant silence and then a noncommittal response of “maa ne” (well) from Sachiye. Both these responses show Sachiye’s reluctance to accept Hironobu’s stance. Next, Hironobu
one more times characterizes riding the train to work as a hassle. This time, Sachiye unequivocally states in lines 52 and 54 that she does not feel that the commute is a hassle.

Example 55c

46. HIRONOBU: yappa ie no kinjo ga ichiban da [to omou.]

        ultimately house GEN neighborhood NOM best COP QOUT think

        I think you’re better off working in the same neighborhood as your home.

47. RYOTA: [ u:n. ]

        BCH

        mhmm

48. (1.0)

49. SACHIYE: maa ne*

        INJ IEP

        Well

50. HIRONOBU: ichiichi saa,

        just IEP

51. baito iku tame ni densha ni noru toka (.) mendokusakute shikata nai .

        part-time job go for train LOC ride and hassle:ADJ can’t be changed
to ride the train and all just to go to your part-time job is a hassle and
there is no changing it.

52. SACHIYE: demo nani? ima betsu ni mendokusai tte iu kankaku nai kara saa .

        but what now particularly hassle QOUT say feeling exist:NEG so IEP

        But, you know it’s, at this moment I don’t particularly feel like it is a hassle so

53. (1.0)

54. SACHIYE: ii n janai?
good SE TAG

what does it matter?

55. HIRONOBU: so: o desu-
	right copula

That’s tr--

56. [ @ <@ soo desu ne. @>@@ ]

right COP IEP

That’s true

57. SACHIYE: [ @ @ @ @ @ ]

58. RYOTA: [ @ @ @ @ @ ]

59. HIRONOBU: soo da ne.

right COP IEP

That’s true

As seen, Sachiye once again firmly rejects Hironobu’s characterization of her commute as a complainable. In the face of Sachiye’s unyielding stance, Hironobu ultimately concedes to the legitimacy of her position. Thus, in this example, the speaker does not easily accept the rejection of his purposed complaint. He attempts several times to define the other party’s situation as complaint worthy but the other party continually rebuffs his attempts.

In the examples just discussed, the speakers were unequivocal in their rejection of the proposed complaint. As one may expect, though, speakers are not necessary always direct in their rejections. They may mitigate their rejections and give some credence to what the other party is suggesting. The speakers may vacillate and display signs of wavering in their rejections. Now I will look at three examples in which the speakers first reject the complaint, but then take a more conciliatory stance.
In the first of these examples, not only does the speaker first deny that there is a complainable, but then he subsequently proceeds to describe the situation in question in a positive manner. He characterizes as favorable what the other party presumes to be unfavorable. Below, Eiji tells Kenichi that he has not been exercising as of recently as he has been focusing on his studies. While Kenichi’s initial response is one of incredulity, he ultimately opens up an opportunity for Eiji to complain about his studies by asking if they are difficult in line 12.

Example 56a (CHJ 1622)

01. EIJI: moo ore zenzen undoo shite nee yo.
    EMP I not all exercise do:ASP:NEG IEP
    I haven’t been exercising at all

02. KENICHI: uso.
    lie
    you’re kidding

03. EIJI: hontoo.
    really
    really

04 (1.0)

05 saikin benkyoo ni mezameyoo to shite ne,
    recently studies DIR focus:try:CONJ: IEP
    Recently I have been trying to focus on my studies.

06. KENICHI: aa.
    BCH
    uuhuh
07. EIJI: hima sae areba yaroo to shiteta kara ne.

*free time as long as have:tryi:ASP:PAST so* IEP

Whenever I have free time I try to do it.

08. KENICHI: soo na no.

*right PRED SE*

Is that right?

09. EIJI: densha n naka de mo yatteru yo.

*train GEN inside LOC even do:ASP IEP*

I’ve even been doing it on the train.

10. KENICHI: uso. (0.2) omae.

*lie you*

You’re lying.

11. (0.8)

12. KENICHI: taihen?

*hard*

Is it hard?

13. EIJI: nani ga?

*what NOM*

What?


*that studies*

You know, your studies.

Kenichi’s frames his question with the expectation that Eiji will answer affirmatively and confirm that his studies are indeed demanding and arduous. Not only does Eiji answer his
question negatively, but he also depicts his studies in a positive light. In lines 15 and 17, he describes his studies as “tanoshii” (fun), an adjective that stands in opposition to Kenichi’s proposed adjective of “taihen” (hard).

Example 56b

12. KENICHI: taihen?
   hard
   Is it hard?

13. EIJI: nani ga?
   what NOM
   What?

   that studies
   You know, your studies.

15. EIJI: iya tanoshii no mo aru yo.
   no fun ones also there are IEP
   No there are fun classes too

16. KENICHI: a soo na no.
   oh right PRED SE
   oh really?

17. EIJI: un. tanoshii no o semon ni shite yatte kara maa,
   yeah un ones ACC major DIR do:CONJ do:CONJ so INJ
   Yeah. I think because I am doing the fun stuff as my major so you know

18. sore hodo ni wa naranai to omou kedo.
   not so much DIR TOP become:NEG QOUT think but
By claiming that some of his classes, particularly those that he is majoring in, are fun, he goes beyond denying the existence of a complaint and actually defines the situation as a positive one. In effect, Eiji rejects Kenichi’s proposed complaint by depicting it in a manner contrary to that which Kenichi proposed. However, he then changes his stance and agrees that in some aspects his studies are hard.

Example 56c

17. EIJI: un. tanoshii no o semon ni shite yatte kara maa,
           yeah un ones ACC major DIR do:CONJ do:CONJ so INJ
           Yeah. I think because I am doing the fun stuff as my major so you know

18. sore hodo ni wa naranai to omou kedo.
           not so much DIR TOP become:NEG QOUT think but
           it doesn’t get to be so bad.

19. KENICHI: huun.
          BCH
          uuhuh

20. EIJI: kenpoo ga muzukashii ne.
          constitutional law NOM difficult IEP
          constitutional law is difficult

In line 20, he states that his constitutional law class is hard. He ultimately agrees that Kenichi’s proposed complaint has some validity.

In the next example below, a son is talking to his mother about living abroad in America. She asks if his wife Eriko is also doing well. The son, Eito, responds that while it was difficult for her at first, she has finally adjusted. The mother latches on to the idea that adjusting to a
foreign culture is difficult and uses it in her next statement. In lines 11 and 13, she counters the idea that the family has truly adapted to their new lifestyle and are free of culturally related issues. She begins the counter with the conjunction “demo” (but) and then states that having relationships with people in the same neighborhood are tough in America. With this statement, the mother raises an issue about which the son could potentially complain.

Example 57a (CHJ 1542)

01. MOTHER: Eriko-san mo genki de okureteru?
   Eriko TIT also well PRED live:PASS:ASP
   Is Eriko also getting along well?

02. EITO: maa ne,
   INJ IEP
   well

03. saisho [no] uchi wa ne,
   first GEN while TOP IEP
   At first

04. MOTHER: [un]
   BCH
   mhmm

05. MOTHER: un
   BCH
   uhh

06. EITO: gyaagyaa to itteta kedo ne.
   arghh QOUT say:ASP:PAST but IEP
   she grumbled
Note that unlike some of the previous examples of proposed complaints that I discussed, she does not frame the utterance to seek validation but rather expresses it with unquestionable certainty. However, the son does not take the opportunity to complain and refutes the mother’s conviction. At first, the son’s rejection is brief and to the point. However, immediately after his rejection, he switches to a more concessionary stance.
Example 57b

14. EITO: soo de mo nai n da yo.

right PRED:NEG SE PRED IEP

not really

15. MOTHER: [soo?]

right

It’s not?

16. EITO: [koko wa] tonari mo ue mo shi- zenzen shiranai kedo sa.

here TOP next also above also kn(ow) not at all know:NEG but IEP

I don’t kn- know either the people above me or below me here at all but

17. MOTHER: a hontoo?

INJ really

Oh really

18. EITO: un

BCH

uhuh

First, the son outright rejects the mother’s statement and characterizes it as incorrect in line 13. His phrasing, “soo de mo nai n da yo” (that’s not so) is somewhat similar to the phrase “sonna koto nai yo” (that’s not the case) which we saw in example 53. Both state that the proposed statement is not the case. Furthermore, like the husband’s denial in example 53, Eito’s denial ends with the sentence final particle “yo.” This particle indicates that he is expressing an opinion that stands in opposition to that of his mother’s and that he is confident and assured in his statement. However, this is the extent of the similarity between the two examples. While the former example ends with the speaker firm in their rejection, in this example the son then
proceeds to mitigate his rejection he just made. In line 16, he concedes that he does not know the people who reside above or below which limits his ability to comment on whether or not developing relationships is easy. In fact, it supports his mother’s point, as he has not even had the opportunity to meet them. Despite the concession, the mother seems to defer to the son’s firsthand knowledge. She accepts his first denial with “soo” (it’s not) in line 15 does not challenge his statement. Nor does she latch on to his following concession but rather she merely states “aa hontoo” (oh really) in line 17. In summary, while the mother initially conveyed a seemingly strong and unyielding viewpoint, she ultimately mitigated her stance.

In this final example, Hiro and Junichi are discussing what it is like to reside alone, particularly without a significant other to take care of them. Hiro assumes that it was difficult for Junichi when he was alone in America. At first, Junichi seems to be considering the validity of this statement. Ultimately, though, he ends up denying the assumption.

Example 58a (CHJ 1738)

01. HIRO: [Junichi-kun taihen] yatta yaroo.=

Junichi:TIT hard PRED:PAST PRS

It must have been hard.

02. JUNICHI: =huh=

03. HIRO: =hitori tte toki wa.

alone QOUT time TOP

Being on your own

04. JUNICHI: untoo boku no hitori wa.

aah I GEN alone TOP

aah when I was alone

05. datte chigau mon.
but different SE

but that was different

06. gakusee da mon.

student PRED SE

I was a student

07. HIRO: soo ka.

right Q

Oh okay

08. JUNICHI: un

BCH

yeah

Initially, Junichi expresses that he is thinking with the interjection “untoo” (aah) which indicates that he is thinking about how to respond. Then, he begins to formulate a sentence with “boku no hitori wa” (when I was alone). His speech is staccato and he utters this phrase in a slow, disjointed manner. This further indicates that he is carefully considering how to formulate his utterance. Ultimately, he ends up unambiguously denying the assumption. He states in lines 5 and 6 that his situation was different than Hiro’s as he was a student at the time. The implication is that it is harder to be alone when you are a working professional as opposed to living a student lifestyle. The sentence final mon both indicates that his statement is at variance with Hiro’s and displays his strong stance in regards to the sentence.

Hiro and Junichi continue to discuss Junichi’s situation further. Junichi proceeds to explain why his situation was not so difficult when he was alone. He states that as he lived in a dormitory, meals and food were readily available for him. As a result, he was not troubled with
making his own meals. After making this claim, Junichi backs down from his strong stance and mitigates his rejection of Hiro’s comment. He admits that the meals did not very good taste.

Example 58b

09. HIRO: un ikkagetsu gurai hitori yatta no ka da kke?

BCH one month about alone PRED:PAST SE Q PRED Q

You were on your own for about a month was it?

10. JUNICHI: soo:: nee?

right IEP

yeah that’s about right

11. HIRO: u(un]

BCH

mhmmm

12. JUNICHI: [i]kkagetsu han gurai hitori datta ka na?

one month half about alone PRED Q IEP

I was on my own for about a month and a half

13. HIRO: uun

BCH

mhmmm

14. JUNICHI: un da kedo anoo shiatoru no toki ni daigaku no ryoo datta kara ne,

yeah but INJ Seattle GEN time TP university GEN dorm PRED:PAST so IEP

yeah but umm when I was in Seattle I was in the university dorms so

15. HIRO: aa [soo ka gak-]

oh right Q sch-(ool)

oh I see sch-(ool?)
16. JUNICHI:  [ryoo ni ] shokuji mo
dorm LOC meal also

17. HIRO:  un
BCH
mhmm

18. JUNICHI:  aru    shi,
there are and
There are meals in the dorms and

19. HIRO:  un
BCH
mhmm

20. JUNICHI:  Tonde mo nai shokuji yatta kedo.
not that great meal PRED:PAST but
The meals weren’t all that great but

21. HIRO:  @ @ @ @

22. JUNICHI:  maa,
INJ
you know

23. HIRO  .hhh un
BCH
mhmm

24. JUNICHI:  kueru to omoeba kueru to.
eat:POT QUOT think:COND eat:POT QOUT
It’s edible
25. HIRO: un

BCH

mhmm

26. JUNICHI: kanji yatta shi ne.

feeling PRED:PAST and IEP

That’s how it was.

27. HIRO: un un un un

BCH BCH BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm mhmm mhmm

He describes the meals at “tonde mo nai” (not all that great) in line 20. However, as seen with previous mitigations, after making the mitigation he soon returns to his previous stance of that it was not all that bad. He maintains that the food was edible in line 25. In summary, though the overall tone of Junichi’s speech was positive, he does briefly provide one instance in which he concedes that not everything was perfect.

In these three examples, while the speakers started out with an unyielding rejection of complaint, they ultimately altered their stance to a more flexible one. This was achieved by conceding that the situation is less than optimal and that there might be some validity to the speaker’s proposed complaint. The effect is that the rejection is slightly softened and mitigated.

Lastly, I would like to look at two examples in which one party is correct in presuming that the other has a complaint, however the specific nature of the complaint is different from that which they propose. These two examples resemble those example just discussed in that the speaker is conceding that there is some validity to the other party’s talk. However, the validity is only in the suggestion that a complaint does exist, not in the details of the suggested complaint. In the rejection of such a proposed complaint, the speaker first denies the proposed complaint
and then offers an alternative complaint that relates to but is different from the proposed complaint.

The next example involves the same two Japanese friends seen in example 26. Recall that Kou is a Japanese male who is working and studying in the United States. He is telling Masayoshi that he is truly living an American lifestyle and he does not associate much with Japanese people. He adds in lines 9 and 11 that this is despite the fact that there are Japanese people residing in his apartment complex. He further stresses his point in line 14 by emphasizing that he is not making effort to do so either. To this comment, Masayoshi responds with the common Japanese listener response “aa hontoo” (oh really) and laughs. With this response, Kou slightly backs down from his strong stance. He amends his statement in line 16 by saying that he is not opposed to socializing with Japanese people.

Example 59a (CAF Japanese 6228)

01. MASAYOSHI: sono kaisha no soto de sa.:  
   INJ company GEN outside LOC IEP

02. sono nihonjin to attari toka anmari shinai sore jaa.  
   INJ Japanese people with meet:TARI and very much do:NEG in that case
   You don’t associate with Japanese people very much outside of the company in that case

03. (.46)

04. KOU: ore wa zenzen shite nai.  
   INJ I TOP not at all do:ASP NEG
   Oh I don’t at all

05. MASAYOSHI: u:n.=
BCH

mhmm

06. KOU: =ore dake wa nanka moo amerikajin to onaji seikatsu shiteru kara.

I only TOP EMP EMP American as same life style do:ASP so

Only I- I am living the same kind of lifestyle as an American so.

07. (.35)

08. MASAYOSHI: a: ii jan sono hoo ga.=

INJ good TAG that side NOM

Yeah, that’s better for you

09. KOU: =anoo::: Apaato ni nihonjin sundeiru rashii n da kedo.

INJ apartment LOC Japanese people live:ASP EVD SE PRED but

Um,It looks like there are Japanese people living in my apartment complex but

10. MASYOSHI: u:n= 

BCH

mhmm

11. KOU: =zenzen kooryuu nai.

Not at all communication there is:NEG

We don’t communicate at all

12. (.48)

13. MASAYOSHI: fu::n.

BCH

Oh okay

14. KOU: shiyoo to omotte nai mon.

do: QOUT think:ASP:NEG SE
I don’t even consider doing it

15. MASAYOSHI: a hontoo @ @ @

    **INJ really**

    **Oh is that right.**

16. KOU: e shite mo ii na kedo;=

    **INJ do:MOD SE PRED but**

    **I mean, I wouldn’t mind doing it but**

Kou ends his statement in line 16 with the conjunction “kedo” (but). This indicates that the statement is incomplete and that the speaker may potentially continue his talk. In the case of Japanese however, speakers frequently leave such statements uncompleted. When this occurs, the other party must infer the unstated portion of the utterance. Furthermore, the use of “kedo” also more specifically signifies that a counter explanation as to why Kou does not associate with Japanese people is to come. Thus, not only is an upcoming sentence completion anticipated, but the content of the completion is forecasted as well.

In response to Kou’s incomplete statement, Masayoshi offers a back channel response “un” which signals that he is passing on taking a turn and that Kou may continue. However, after a brief 0.3 second pause follows in which Kou does not continue with his turn and does not finish his statement. Thus, Masayoshi proceeds to attempt to complete the statement for him. As already discussed, an explanation for Kou’s lack of socialization is expected. Furthermore, as I will discuss in more detail latter on, it is not uncommon for complaints to act as explanations. More specifically, they may be used to explain a particular action or behavior or lack thereof. As seen, in line 19 Masayoshi proposes a complaint in his attempt to complete Kou’s sentence and offer an explanation for his actions.

Example 59b
16. KOU:  e shite mo ii n da kedo;=

INJ do:MOD SE PRED but

I mean, I wouldn’t mind doing it but

17. MASAYOSHI:  =u:n.

BCH

Mhmm

18.

(0.3)

19. MASAYOSHI:  [mendoo kusai.]

pain

It’s a pain

20. KOU:  [yappari] ne;, ima ne,

ultimately IEP now IEP

you know, now

21. sore dokoro ja nakute;=

rather PRED:NEG:CONJ

rather it’s that

22. MASAYOSHI:  [a:::]

INJ

oh

23. KOU:  =eikaiwa no shukudai toka [yaranakya ikenai] kara moo.

English conversation GEN homework and do:MOD so EMP

I have to do my English conversation homework and things like that

24. MASAYOSHI:  un.

BCH
KOU: taihen desu yo hontoo. @ @ @

It’s hard, seriously

MASAYOSHI: wa: demo ii ne nanka jiritsu shita seikatsu okur-ete.

Boy, but it is good that like you are able to live an independent life style

KOU <@ jiritsu shita seikatsu. @>

an independent life style (laughing)

Masayoshi defines the act of trying to socialize with other Japanese people as bothersome. At the same time that Masayoshi is uttering this explanation, Kou is also speaking and still attempting to formulate his own explanation in line 20. Then, in line 21, Kou rejects Masayoshi’s proposed complaint as an explanation for his actions. However, he does offer a different complaint to account for his behavior. He complains that as his schoolwork is so difficult, he has no time to be social and make friends. Thus, while the specifics of the proposed complaint are incorrect, the other party does concur that he or she does in fact have a complaint.

In the next instance of offering an alternative complaint in the face of a proposed complaint, we are once again looking at an example taken from the conversation between Hiro and Junichi. This conversation appeared in example 43 and in fact, the upcoming example is the precursor to this previous example. While this example resembles example 59 above in that the speaker offers an alternative complaint after rejecting a proposed complaint, it differs in that it is a hypothetical complaint. Hypothetical complaints are complaints about situations and circumstances that may potentially occur in the future as opposed to those that are occurring now.
or that are already in the past (Gunther 1997b). Thus, whether or not the situation will come to fruition is unknown. I will discuss such details in greater depth in section 5.5.

In this example, Hiro is informing Junichi that his wife will be temporarily returning to Japan in the month of February and will come back to America in April. Junichi surmises that he will feel lonely being at home by himself during this time. Thus, Junichi proposes to Hiro a less than pleasant situation that he may elaborate upon and make into a complaint. While Hiro agrees that he does not exactly consider being alone to be pleasant, the reason is not because he will be lonely.

Example 60 (CHJ 1738)

01. HIRO: shigatsu gurai ka na kaette kuru no wa:

   April about Q IEP return come SE IEP

   *I think that it is around April that she is coming back*

02. JUNICHI: un soshite hirokun wa sabiishii wake sono aida.

   yeah and Hiro-TIT TOP lonely situation that period

   *yeah and you’ll be lonely*

03. HIRO: u::n sabishii tte iu ka,

   BCH lonely QOUT say Q

   *I wouldn’t say lonely*

04. shokuji wa doo suru yaroo na?

   meals TOP how do PRED:PRS IEP

   *It’s more like what am I going to do for my meals.*

05. JUNICHI: @@@@ soo iu mondai [ ja nai deshoo. @@@ ]

   that kind of problem PRED:NEG TAG

   *You don’t really have that kind of problem do you?*
In line 5, Hiro maintains that the problem is not that he feels lonely, but that he has to provide his own meals when his wife is not there. Note that Junichi does not seem to consider Hiro’s comment as a serious complaint as he laughs and asks “soo iu mondai” (“That’s your problem?”) with an incredulous intonation. Hiro himself seems to have intended the comment to be tongue-in-cheek as he too laughs in line 6. Thus, Hiro takes Junichi’s suggestion that there might be problems when his wife is away and transforms it into a humorous problem. Although the problem may be humorous and the situation is hypothetical, it still follows the previously discussed pattern of rejecting a particular complaint but at the same time offering one in its place.

In complaints 59 and 60, the speakers are both correct and incorrect in their talk. They are accurate in proposing that there is a complaint but mistaken in what they deem the complaint
to be. The result is that the other party does not completely deny the suggested complaint but rather offers a different complaint to the one the speaker raises.

Examples 53 through 60 show that speakers may not accept other parties’ attempts at instigating a complaint on their behalf. Despite their initial denial of a problematic situation, speakers may ultimately renegotiate their rejection. They may do this by conceding some but not all aspects of the proposed complaint or by admitting to a complainable, but not the one proposed by the other party. This reflects that disagreement is dispreferred (Pomerantz 1984, Sacks 1987, Santamaría-García 2006, Pomerantz and Heritage 2013). Thus, speakers work to achieve mitigated agreement with the presumed statements.

### 3.3.3.1. Summary of instigating a complaint by a non-affected party

In this section, I looked at how one party in a conversation may raise an issue that they consider to be a complainable for the other party. In such cases, one can attribute the very existence of the complaint to the non-affected party as opposed to the affected party. Similar to when the non-affected attempts to add on to an existing complaint, the extent to which the affected party uptakes the proposed complaint varies. They may latch on to the other speaker’s talk and take over the complaint. Alternatively, they may simply agree or even outright reject the proposed complaint. In some cases, the non-affected party may be even more instrumental in constructing the complaint than the affected party.

As with adding on to a complaint, the instigation of complaints by non-affected parties raises issues of epistemics and complainer’s domain. For one, complaints were commonly instigated by questions. This denotes that the information is pertinent and relevant to the asker. Furthermore, by instigating complaints, speakers are demonstrating their knowledge of the other person’s life. Finally, for those examples, in which the non-affected party was the more vocal
complainer, there were sometimes special circumstances in regards to epistemic domain which accounted for this role reversal. For example, in example 49, the fact that Akihiro is himself Japanese and has first-hand knowledge of Japanese transportation system enables him to strongly comment on its high price. Similarly, in example 50, as Lynne is personally seeing and experiencing the dust herself as it occurs, she can rightfully comment upon its unpleasantness. Thus, complainer’s domain has some degree of fluidity.

By initiating a complaint, non-affected parties indicate to the affected party that they deem the situation complaint worthy. Furthermore, they project that they do not mind engaging in the conversational act of complaining. In some instances, it may convey concern for the affected party and that the non-affected party is checking to make sure that everything is going smoothly in other person’s life. For these reasons, when the non-affected party initiates a complaint, the affected party can uptake the complaint assured that their complaint will be well received. Furthermore, for these reasons, it appears that having the other party initiate the complaint is preferable to initiating it oneself.

3.4. SUMMARY OF THE ROLE OF THE NON-AFFECTED PARTY

In this chapter, I looked at the role of the non-affected party of a complaint in complaining. While they did primarily act as recipient of complaints, their role extended beyond that as well. For instance, in some cases, they attempted to engage the other party in complaining and even complained more than the affected party. Therefore, I attempted to look at the non-affected party as more than an addressee who reacts to complaints

The non-affected party plays a fundamental role in the development of a complaint. How they react and respond to a complaint is crucial in determining how a complainer proceeds with their talk. If a non-affected party responds supportively, then affected parties can construct their
complaint confident that the other party accepts their complaint. Non-affected parties may even extend the complaint by raising complainable issues that the complainer has not yet mentioned. On the other end of the spectrum, non-affected parties may impede a complaint by negating it. Thus, the non-affected party stands as a key component of the complaint process.

One point that becomes clear in looking at these examples is the versatility of various practices found in complaints. Both complainers and recipients of complaints employ some of the same practices in the construction of complaints. Similarly, a recipient may use the same type of practice to either support a complaint or encumber it. Despite the use of similar practices, the outcome and intention is different. For instance, the intent of a complainer who tries to mitigate a complaint differs from that of a recipient who tries to do so. Furthermore, the minutia of each individual complaint determines how one should interpret these conversational practices. That is, one must look closer at the individual complaint to understand why a particular response such as humor achieved a particular outcome. The context and manner in which speakers utter these conversational practices plays a large role in determining how they will play out.
4. BEYOND ONE COMPLAINER AND ONE COMPLAINT

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Complaints and stories share several common features. Beyond the fact that a speaker can complain in the form of a story, complaining and storytelling resemble each other in other aspects as well. For example, just as there are second stories in which a separate but related story follows a first story, a second complaint that is distinct but related may follow the original complaint. Furthermore, in the case of stories, two people may co-tell a story together. Likewise, two people may complain simultaneously, building the complaint together. This practice may be done for the benefit of a third party as well as being strictly limited to the two parties involved.

In this section, I will examine what I call second complaints and co-complaints. I will show that complaints are clearly not limited to one person complaining and one person responding to that complaint. They may also consist of situations in which both parties take turns complaining and / or build the complaint together.

4.2. SECOND COMPLAINTS

In those cases in which people build a complaint together, the topic of the complaint is accessible to both parties. For example, both people know the person who is the focus of the complaint or both people have endured the same experience. Thus, when one party in a conversation raises a complaint, another party may join in as a co-complainer as he or she has access to the complaint. However, addressees of a complaint are often unable to mutually complain about the exact issues raised by the complainer. The addressee may not possess knowledge of the complainable matter or may not have been personally victimized or offended by the person or situation under discussion. Thus, a specific subject may only be accessible to the complainer, and the listener may not possess the right or knowledge to complain about that
particular situation or person. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the listener cannot respond with his own complaint. The listener may complain about a subject that relates to the topic of the original complaint, but that is accessible to and pertains to him or her. This phenomenon occurs in storytelling as well. When speakers produce stories in a series, the later stories that resemble and relate to the previous stories are called second stories. They are a means by which a recipient of a story demonstrates their understanding of a previous story. (see Arminen 2004; Küntay and Şenay 2003; Rayve 1978; Sacks 1992, vol. 1:764–771, vol. 2:249–260 for more on second stories). Because of their similarities to second stories, I have decided to apply the term second complaint to those complaints that occur as a response to a previous complaint.

In order to better clarify the concept of second complaints, I will first show two examples of this phenomenon, one from English and one from Japanese. Both are short, straightforward examples of second complaints. In the first example, Gary relates to Bill that he has had a one-night stand. First, he utters a self-complaint and criticizes himself for his actions. Then, in line 5, he explains his actions by complaining that he is lonely. In the second example, a mother is complaining to her daughter that she is not feeling up to par. She states that her nose is congested and her voice is strange. Both addressees in these two examples respond to these complaints with complaints of their own.

Example 61 (CAF English 6661)

01. GARY: why did I do that?
02. BILL: @@@@@
03. GARY: @@@@@
04. (0.9)
05. BILL: well.
06. (0.5)
07. GARY: I guess because I'm lonely.
08. (0.6)
09. BILL: yea::h.
10. (0.4)
11. GARY: yeah.
12. (1.7)
13. BILL: that's the reason.
14. GARY: umhm.
15. (0.8)
16. BILL: gof I[-], I'm lonely too, that's one reason I really like, hhh
17. enjoyed your letter because you said I needed to make more friends,
18. it's so fucking true .

Example 62 (CHJ 1710)

01. MOTHER: chotto kyoo koe ga okashikute,

EMP today voice NOM strange:CONJ

My voice is strange today and

02. ya da na.

unpleasant PRED IEP

it is bothering me

03. MIKI: nan de?

why

Why?

04. MOTHER: okaasan no moo sukoshi ano sumiki-
I wish my voice was a little more umm clear and nice.

I am just getting up now and

at least I'm getting up now and

I hope my voice will become a little more clear and nice.

ima neoki ya shi sa,

I am just getting up now and

I hope my voice will become a little more clear and nice.

ima neoki ya shi sa,
I came to the phone thinking that if I at least wash my face and rinse my mouth out first I would be able to talk to you feeling refreshed but

15. MIKI: nn

BCH

hmm

16. MOTHER: konna koe.

this kind of voice

This is my voice.

17. nan ka hana [tsumatta yoo] na

EMP nose become stuffed up:PAST like PRED

It’s like my voice is stuffed up.

18. MIKI: [@ @ @ ]

19. atashi hana tsumatteru.

I nose stuff:ASP

My nose is stuffed up.

20. MOTHER: miki tsumatta no?

Miki stuff up:PAST SE

You’re stuffed up?


BCH

mhmm

22. MOTHER: amerika de mo hana tsumaru n?

America LOC also nose get stuffed up SE
Your nose gets stuffed up in America too?

23. MIKI: nan ka kyoo asa samukatta.

EMP today morning cold:PAST

It was kinda cold this morning.

In example 61, Bill responds to Gary’s complaint by complaining that he too is lonely. Similarly, in example 62, the daughter responds to the mother’s complaint by complaining that she too is suffering from a congested nose. Both addressees take the topic of the original complaint and apply it to themselves. Thus, not only does the second complainer relate the complaints topically, but he or she also takes on the same role as the first complainer. A similar practice occurs in second stories in which second storytellers connect two stories via character-types and become the same character in their own story as the previous storyteller was in his or her story (Sacks 1992). By responding with a second complaint, addressees simultaneously relate the complaint to their own experiences and shift the focus of the conversation from the complainer to themselves.

Jefferson (1984) stated that certain topic types, like troubles-tellings, are “closed topics” meaning that they constrain the types of topics that may follow them. Furthermore, there are certain steps which speakers commonly take when exiting from troubles-telling to other talk about other matters. Likewise, as complaints and troubles are interrelated, various issues arise when transitioning from a first complaint to a second complaints. Although second complaints by an addressee are topically related to first complaints, they are self-attentive and inherently take the focus off the complainer and place it on the addressee. Thus, it is logical to find that some second complaints detract from the first complaint. They may be a dispreferred response type that does not align with the first complaint and support the first complainer in the activity of complaining. They may fail to validate the complaint as a valid complainable. However, not all
second complaints diminish the value of and / or impede the accomplishment of the first complaint. This raises the question of why do some second complaints by a listener demonstrate lack of support while others are supportive or at least neutral. What accounts for such differences? To help answer these questions, I will more closely examine two examples in which the second complaint does not overly diminish the original complaint and then compare it to those examples in which the second complaint is clearly unsupportive.

4.2.1. Second Complaints which do not Diminish the Original Complaint

The following example of a second complaint comes from the same conversation found in examples 9, 36, and 41. Recall that is these examples, Tomoko is complaining to her friend Miri about work. As the two friends do not work in the same place and Miri is not familiar with Tomoko’s work situation, her boss etc.; Tomoko’s work is not a complainable for Miri. However, she can complain about her own work: a subject that relates topically to Tomoko’s complaint. Indeed, this is precisely how she responds to Tomoko’s complaint.

Example 63a (CHJ 1667)

01. TOMOKO: wakai nara motto baribari nee?
   young if more rapidly IEP
   If I were young I could work more rapidly.

02. atama mo
   head too

03. MIRI: soo [ne.]
   right IEP
   yeah

04. TOMOKO: [ma]waru shi nee?
   go around and IEP
And the wheels would be turning in my head.

05. anoo kiokuryoku mo aru kedo ne.

INJ memory abliity also have but IEP

I would have the ability to remember.

06. moo toshi totte kitara nee*

EMP get old:CONJ AUX:TEMP IEP

when you get older

07. ki[tsumi] bakari de ne.

Hard just PRED:CONJ IEP

It’s just hard.

08. MIRI: [kitsui ne.]

hard IEP

It’s hard.

09. un

BCH

Yeah.

10. TOMOKO: hontoo kit[sui.]

really hard

Really hard.

11. MIRI [Wata]shi mo hontoo ni kitsui tte.

I too real ADV hard QUOT

I’ve got it really hard too

12. TOMOKO: u:::::n

BCH

224
mhmm

13. MIRI: Watashi mo kitsui mon.

    I too hard SE

   I've got it hard too, let me tell ya.

14. TOMOKO: soo yaroo ne,

   right PRED:PRES IEP

   yeah

15. maa anata mata (0.7) mata (0.5) toozen dai kitsui no mon.

   well you too too of course PRED hard SE SE

   well of course you too got it hard

16. MIRI: nnn nan ka ne,

   BCH INJ IEP

   It’s just

17. moo nan ka.

   EMP INJ

   It’s just

18. (0.7)

19. MIRI: nnn (0.7) yamerareru mon nara yametai kedo,

   BCH quit:POT something COND quit:DES but

   If it were something I could quit I’d want to quit but

20. chotto yameru ni wa chotto hayai ka naa tte iu ki ga suru shi ne.

   little quit to TOP little early Q IEP QOUT SAY feel and IEP

   but I feel like it’s a little too soon to quit.

Throughout Tomoko’s complaint (which is not displayed in its entirety here), Miri gives
appropriate backchannels and listener responses. In line 8, Miri attempts to show understanding by completing Tomoko’s sentence with the word “kitsu” (hard). While Miri is making this utterance, Tomoko is also completing her own utterance and she too uses the work “kitsu.” Thus, Miri’s and Tomoko’s utterance are similar. Tomoko then restates this assessment in line 10. With this final assessment, Tomoko’s complaint is finished. At this point, Miri uses the word “kitsu” to start her own complaint about her job. She says that her own job is “kitsu.” By using the same wording that ends the first complaint to start the second complaint, Miri clearly links the two complaints. As with any topic shift, speakers generally try to link the new topic with the old one (Jefferson 1984). Using the same wording is one way in which this may be accomplished.

One major reason Miri’s complaint does not detract from Tomoko’s is that Miri allows Tomoko to complain at length before giving her own complaint. While I originally only showed the ending portion of the complaint, the entire complaint actually develops as follow.

Example 63b

01. TOMOKO: sooo yo.  
   right IEP  
   That’s right

02. kaisha wa moo dondon shigoto wa fueru shi nee?  
   company TOP EMP rapidly work TOP increase and IEP  
   At the company, my work is rapidly increasing and

03. MIRI: aa ma fueru koto wa ii koto ya kedo,  
   Oh well increase NML TOP good thing PRED but  
   Oh, well increasing is a good thing but

04. isogashii mon da yo ne?
busy  SE PRED IEP IEP
you’re busy

05. yappari  gendo ga  aru mon da  yo  ne*
ultimately limits NML exist SE PRED IEP IEP
Ultimately, you have your limits.

06. TOMOKO:  u:n  isogashikute:::
yeah  busy:CONJ
yeah, I’m busy  and

07. tada  ie  ni  kaettara wasure-
just  home GOAL return:TEMP forget

08. anoo  moo  wasurareru  shigoto  dattara  ii  kedo  nee?
INJ EMP forget:POT work PRED:COND good  but  IEP
if it were just work that you forge-  could forget when you got home it
would be okay but

09. MIRI:  un
BCH
mhhmm

10. TOMOKO:  ie  ni  made  motte  kaette  kon  to,
home GOAL ALL take:CONJ return:CONJ come:NEG COND

11. moo (0.4)  ma  ni  awan  tte  iu  na  shigoto  deshoo?
EMP  be on time:NEG QOUT say  PRED  work  TAG
It’s work that you won’t finish on time if you don’t take it home

12. de[ , nn]=
and
and

13. MIRI: [soo?]

really

really

14. TOMOKO: =kasiha ni wa juunijikan gurai ite sore kara ie ni kaette=

company LOC TOP twelve hours about be after then home LOC return

15. = kite kara nante moo*

come after EMP EMP

after being at the company for around twelve hours and

then when you come home.. it’s just.....

16. nani mo [ dekin mo-]

anything can do:NEG EMP

you can’t do anything

17. MIRI: [nani mo dekin] yo ne*

anything can do:NEG IEP IEP

you can’t do anything

18. TOMOKO: soo yo*

right IEP

That’s right

19. moo [uchi-]

EMP my house

my house-

20. MIRI: [hidoji nee.

cruel IEP
That’s awful

21. TOMOKO: uchi no naka hitchametchaka da shi nee,
my house GEN inside messy PRED and IEP

The inside of my house is a mess and.

22. MIRI: un
BCH
mhmm

23. TOMOKO: maa kaisha wa yoku shite kureru yo?:?
well company TOP well do:CONJ AUX IEP
the company does a lot for you

24. so- sono bun ne?
that part IEP
so in that regard

25. MIRI: un [un]
BCH BCH
mhmm mhmm

26. TOMOKO: [nihon] no kaisha tte iu no wa.
Japanese companies do

27. MIRI: [[un]]
BCH
mhmm

28. TOMOKO: [[de]] chiisai seezoogyoo da kara nee?
and small manufacturing company PRED so IEP
and it’s a small manufacturing company so

29. MIRI: [[(un un)]]

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

30. TOMOKO: [[(kekko)]] hora kojinteki na soo iu anoo are kiku kara ne?

Really INJ individual PRED that kind of INJ that listen so IEP
y they you know really listen to individual needs and ahh things like that

31. MIRI: un

BCH

mhmm

32. TOMOKO: maa shatchoo to mo naka wa ii shi ne?

well company president with too relationship TOP good and IEP

I am good friends with the company president and

33. anoo sono ten wa ne:,

INJ that area TOP IEP

ahh in that area

34. anoo zenzen warui koto nai n da kedo.

INJ not at all bad thing there is:NEG SE PRED but

there is nothing bad at all but

35. tada mo (. ) ryoo ga oosugite ne,

just load NML there is a lot:SFX too much IEP

it’s just the load is too much

36. shigoto no ne?

work GEN IEP
the work load

37. MIRI: un

BCH

mhmm

38. TOMOKO: de ikkai ni sore o tanshuku shite;

and one time TP it ACC reduce:CONJ

39. anoo nooritsuteki ni yatte ikoo ka nan tte=

INJ efficient ADV do:CONJ AUX:PRS Q like

And one time I am like let’s reduce it and do it more efficiently

40. =yappari koo jibun de kenkyuu shinai to akan ya kedo sa;

ultimately INJ myself by research:NEG:MOD PRED but IEP

(of course) I would ultimately have to do some research on my own but

41. MIRI: un

BCH

mhmm

42. TOMOKO: nanse sonna hima ga nai yo nee?

EMP that kind of free time NOM have:NEG IEP IEP

I don’t have that kind of free time

43. MIRI: soo yo ne[e:*]

right IEP IEP

Yeah

44. TOMOKO: [un] demo soo iu koto kaisha wa kikitaku no yo.

Yeah but that kind of thing company TOP hear:DES:NEG SE IEP

Yeah but the company doesn’t want to hear that kind of thing
45. MIRI: un soo ne.
yeah right IEP
Yeah
46. TOMOKO: sore koojitsu na no yo.
It excuse PRED SE IEP
It’s an excuse.
47. MIRI: soo nee. @ [@ @]@
right IEP
Yeah
48. TOMOKO: [un]
BCH
uhuh.
49. MIRI: (.hhhh) [(.(hhhhhx) XX)] anoo-
INJ
Ahh
50. TOMOKO: [( soo yo. da-) ]
Right IEP there(-fore)
Yeah there-
51. (0.4)
52. MIRI: shigoto wa hima to iu yori ka ii kedo nee,
work TOP not busy rather than good but IEP
it is better than being not busy at work
53. TOMOKO maa ii kedo nee?
well good but IEP
Well it is better but

54. wakai nara motto baribari nee?
young if more quickly IEP

If I were younger I could work more quickly

55. atama mo
brain too

56. MIRI: soo [ne]
right IEP
yeah

57. TOMOKO: [ma]waru shi nee?
go around and IEP

And the wheels in my head would turn too.

58. anoo kiokuryoku mo aru kedo ne,
INJ memory ability also have so IEP
I would have the ability to remember

59. toshi totte kitara nee,
get old:CONJ AUX:TEMP IEP
when you get older

60. ki[tsui] bakari de ne.
Hard just PRED:CONJ IEP
It’s just hard

61. MIRI: [kitsu ne.]
hard IEP
It’s hard.

62. un

BCH

yeah

63. TOMOKO: hontoo kit[sui.]
really hard

Really hard

64. MIRI [Wata]shi mo hontoo ni kitsui de/tte.
I too real ADV hard

I’ve got it really hard too

65. TOMOKO: u::::::n

BCH

mhmm

66. MIRI: Watashi mo kitsui mon.
I too hard SE

I’ve got it hard too, let me tell ya.

67. TOMOKO: soo yaroo ne,

right PRED:PRES IEP

yeah

68. maa anata mata (0.7) mata (0.5) toozentai kitsui no mon.
well you too too of course hard SE SE

well of course you too got it hard

69. MIRI nnn nan ka ne,

BCH INJ IEP
It’s just
70. moo nan ka.

EMP INJ
It’s just
71. (0.7)

72. MIRI: nnn (0.7) yamerareru mon nara yametai kedo,

BCH quit:POT something COND quit:DES but
If it were something I could quit I’d want to quit but

73. chotto yameru ni wa chotto hayai ka naa tte iu ki ga suru shi ne.

little quit to TOP little early Q IEP QOUT SAY feel and IEP
but I feel like it’s a little too soon to quit.

As can be seen, Tomoko is able to develop her complaint. Miri does not come into Tomoko has made a summary assessment of “kitsui” (hard) in line 60 and repeated that assessment in line 63. Such summary assessments are indicative of topic closure and define points where speakers may move on to other matters (Jefferson 1984). Furthermore, Miri offers the appropriate responses of sympathy and understanding before embarking on her own complaint. In lines 4 and 5, she expresses concern for her busyness and states that there are limits to what people can endure. She shows understanding for Tomoko’s situation by completing her utterance in line 17. Likewise, in line 20, she expresses sympathy for Tomoko for having to endure the current situation by characterizing it as “hidoi” (rough). Thus Miri accepts Tomoko’s situation as a complainable. Because she permitted Tomoko to complain without hindrance and adequately expressed her sympathy for Tomoko’s situation, Miri is able to utter her own complaint without undermining Tomoko’s complaint.
The next example from English also consists of a second complaint that does not detract from the original complaint. The crux of the two complaints is couples in which the man is significantly older than the woman. Alina is telling Lenore about a party at which she encountered a younger woman and older man who were a couple. Alina’s main contention is with the woman. Primarily, she is expressing her dislike of the woman and criticizing her status as the younger woman in the relationship. Throughout her complaint, Lenore exclusively responds with laughter.

Example 64a (SBCSAE 6)

01. ALINA: Th- the friend that was there with them is this older guy with this young chick.
02. LENORE: (.hh)
03. (0.6)
04. ALINA: And she was like a real pill you know ((said in whining voice imitating girl))
05. LENORE: [@ @ @@@]
06. ALINA: [ she's sitting there with this hair:] pulled back in a little [pony tail:.] (( said in whiny little girl voice))
07. LENORE: [ @  @ ]=
08. LENORE: [ (hhh) ]
09. ALINA: [ And she's like] sitting there: and ((said in little whiny girl voice)) (.hh) he said
10. <Q I would have been here but she was so late. Q>
11. <Q And getting her any place on time . Q>
12. she's like (.hhh) <Q well I had to get rea:dy:.Q>
13. (.)
14. 15. ALINA: [ I don't know why: . ((SNORT))@@]
16. LENORE: [ @@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@ ]
17. ALINA: (.hh) Nothing was gonna help her.
18. (.hh) No makeup no nothing.
19. Cause she's the little girl, and he's the older man, ((Little girl whiny voice))
20. and [he's taking care of me.] ((said in little girl whiny voice))
21. LENORE: [ .hhhh ]
22. ALINA: ((SNIFF)).
23. LENORE: G[od] It sounds like the tape I made last night.=
24. ALINA: [ tsk].
25. LENORE: = and these guys [start] talking about

Lenore’s laughter in lines 5 and 16 indicates that she shares Alina’s contempt and supports her in ridiculing the situation. This is her only response until it appears that Alina has finished her complaint in line 20. After finishing her statement in this line, she ceases her talk. There is a stretch of non-talk in which neither party claims a turn. This stretch is filled with Alina sniffing. Then, in line 23, Alina proffers a negative assessment of the situation. Her explicative of “god” expresses her disdain for the women and her status. Again, there is another period of non-talk in line 24 in which neither party claims a turn. Alina merely makes an alveolar clicking sound. Alina’s lack of uptake indicates to Lenore that she has finished her complaint. As Alina passes the opportunity to reclaim her turn, Lenore commences with her own second complaint regarding romantic relationships between older men and young women. Her complaint though, differs from Alina’s complaint in that she focuses on disparaging the older men as opposed to the younger women. Notice that similar to example 63, she begins her complaint by referencing the previous complaint, e.g. Alina’s complaint. That is she prefaces it with “it sound likes”
Example 64b

23. LENORE: G[od] It sounds like the tape I made last night,=

24. ALINA: [tsk].

25. LENORE: = and these guys [start] talking about.

26. ALINA: [((SNIFF))]

27. (.)

28. LENORE: you know some-

29. (.)

30. LENORE: (.hh) <Q you know (.) (xhhh) she's so vulnerable. Q>

31. ALINA: [ ((Sound of drinking))].

32. LENORE: [(.hh) She's probably like ] twenty-six and she looks thirteen

33. and it['s just so. ]

34. ALINA: [ @@@ ]

35. LENORE: (.hh) it's like-

36. (.hh) what?

37. They said something like.

38. (.hh) [ <Q you know what. Q>]}

39. ALINA: [ ((sniff)) ]

40. (.)

41. LENORE: <Q it's the butterfly you can'[t catch. Q> (.hh)]

42. ALINA: [ @@@@@]

43. LENOR: <@ And I’m like trying not to vomit [ listening to this. @> @@@@]

44. ALINA: [ Give me: br:eak. Give me a break.]
To recap then, Lenore allows Alina to reach a point of possible completion in her complaint before she interjects with her own complaint. She even provides ample opportunity for Alina to resume her complaint. Furthermore, before, complaining, she actively responds to Alina’s complaint by expressing her shared contempt through laughter and negative evaluations. These two factors play a role in preventing her complaint from diminishing Alina’s.

Lastly, I would like to show that second complaints can also revive a first complaint that is potentially finished. Upon hearing a second complaint, the original complainer may resume complaining; thereby adding on to and extending their original complaint. In the following example, Jun is complaining that his sister makes him call her and thus the expense of the phone conversations primarily lands on him. This results in a second complaint from Koji.

Example 65a (CAF Japnese)

01. JUN: demo aneki to hanasu to nan ka,  
but older sister with speak COND INJ  
but when I talk to my older sister

02. zettai naga denwa ni natte sa.  
certainly long telephone call DAT become:CONJ IEP  
it almost certainly ends being a long telephone conversation.

03. shika mo: nanka aneki no tokoro mo kane ga nai toka itte,  
moreover INJ older sister GEN place also money NOM have:NEG QOUTsay:CONJ  
What’s more is that she says she doesn't have money

04. de taitei: nanka ore ni denwa saseru- saseru n da yo ne.  
and usually INJ I DAT call do:CAUS do:CAUS SE PRED IEP IEP  
and she usually makes me call her.
05. (4)
06. JUN: @@@
07. (6)
08. KOJI: ano ne,
     INJ IEP
     You know
09. sore wa issho da yo.
     that TOP same PRED IEP
     That's the same as me.
10. ore no imooto mo soo da yo.
     I GEN younger sister also like that PRED IEP
     My younger is sister like that too.
11. JUN a soo:
     INJ yeah
     Oh yeah?

Jun's complaint reaches a point of possible completion in line 4. His statement is both grammatically and pragmatically complete. Furthermore, it is followed by a slight pause and then laughter. After his laughter, there is another short pause of 0.6 seconds in which neither speaker takes a turn. This all indicates that Jun is momentarily done with his complaint. At this point, Koji comes in with a second complaint of his own in lines 8 through 10 and line 12; claiming that his younger sister behaves in a similar fashion and would never call on her own. Jun first responds by acknowledging the first part of Koji's complaint in line 11. Then, he revives his complaint by adding more details to his complaint. In lines 14 through 16 and lines
18 through 20, he talks about how his sister calls him and then immediately requests that he call her back.

Example 65b

11. JUN: a soo:

INJ  yeah

Oh yeah?

12. KOJI: sonna onna wa zettai [jibun no tokoro kara kakenai.]

that woman TOP never ever oneself GEN place from call:NEG

That woman would never ever call on her own.

13. JUN: [ @  @  @  @  @ ]=

14. =.hhh de hidoi no wa sa,

and bad NML TOP IEP

And what's really bad is

15. nanka <E call back E> tte iu ka sa,

INJ  call back QOUT say Q IEP

I guess it's called "call back"

16. ichio denwa suru n da kotchi ni.

first call make do SE PRED here DAT

First she calls here.

17. KOJI: u:n.

BCH

mhmmm

18. JUN: de: a Jun-chan toka itte,

and INJ JUN:TIT QOUT say:CONJ
and she says like Jun-chan

19. a chotto warui kedo denwa shinaoshite <@ toka itte, @>
INJ little bad but call do:again:CONJ QOUT say:CONJ
She says I'm sorry but would you call me back and then

20. [<@ kiru n da yo. @> @@@@yoku.]
    hang up SE PRED IEP a lot
she hangs up. A lot.

21. KOJI [ a: sore sore yo:ku aru ne.]
INJ that that often exist IEP
I get that- that a lot

22. imooto no tokoro u:n.
younger sister GEN place yeah
with my younger sister. yeah

23. JUN: hhh hontoo?
    really
Oh really?

24. KOJI: iya da kara sore wa nihon amerika [dake ja nai yo.]
INJ so that TOP Japan America only PRED:NEG IEP
No wait ... That is not only between Japan and America.

25: JUN: [u:n.]
    BCH
    Mhmm

26: JUN: maa [tashika ni koto-.]
INJ definitely re-(fuse)
Well you definitely can't re-

27. KOJI: [tookyoo] oosaka de sore yaru n da yo. @ @ [@ @]

Tokyo Osaka LOC that do SE PRED IEP

She does that too between Tokyo and Osaka

28. JUN: [a: .hhh] soo.=

INJ yeah

Oh yeah?

29. KOJI: =daroo:=

TAG

Right?

30. JUN: tookyoo oosaka de sore yaru no.=

Tokyo Osaka LOC that do SE

She does that between Tokyo and Osaka?

31. KOJI: =tookyoo oosaka de sore yaru gurai na n da kara.=

Tokyo Osaka LOC that do extent PRED SE PRED so

It's to the point that she does it between Tokyo and Osaka.

The main purpose of these added details is to intensify the strength of his complaint. It demonstrates the extent that the sister would go to in order to avoid paying for the long distance calls. Similarly, in response to Jun reviving his complaint stance, Koji also strengthens the severity his complaint by expanding upon it. First, he claims that like Jun's sister, his sister also calls him only to immediately request that he call back. Then, like Jun did in lines 14 through 16 and lines 18 through 20, he attempts to show how egregious his sister's conduct by claiming that she behaves in the same way when calling him within Japan. To summarize, Koji's second complaint has the effect of rekindling Jun's complaint. Furthermore, after Koji's initial second
complaint, both parties take turns complaining about their respective sisters. The complaints go back and forth as the parties compare themselves with each other and attempt to amplify and detail the severity of the sister’s actions. Thus, second complaints do not necessarily have to follow one right after another in order to be effective. The complainers can back and forth with their complaints as they weave their complaint sequence together.

In short, the second complaints found in examples 63, 64 and 65 do not obviously diminish the original complaint. I attribute this to various factors. First, the parties in all these refrain from interjecting their complaints in the midst of the other parties’ complaints. Secondly, in the case of examples 63 and 64, the second complainers responded in a manner that supports the first complainer in their characterization of the situation as a complainable. Tomoko does this through sympathy and Lenor through ridicule. Thus, showing appreciation for and attending to the first complaint before making a second complaint aids in making the second complaint less intrusive. These findings are reminiscent of my findings in section 3 in which positive comments by the recipient are more likely to be accepted when made after the speaker has properly attended to the complaint with commiseration first. Likewise, it is evocative of Jefferson (1992) finding that advice is likely to be rejected by a troubles teller when given too early. Timing and location in regards to the content of the conversation play an important role in the acceptance of second complaints. Finally, I would like to note that first and second complaints can be constructed side by side. This can be evidenced in example 65, in which the formation of one complaint influences the formation of another.

4.2.2. Second Complaints which Interrupt the First Complaint

As allowing the complainer to finish his or her complaint is an important part of a supportive response to a complaint, interrupting with one’s own complaint could obviously v
lessen the complaint. It may express a non-desire on part of the addressee to hear the complaint and may send the message that their own complaint is more worthy of telling. In my data, I found several examples in which addresses of complaints interjected with their own complaints before the complainers finished. While these examples did not overtly express lack of support for the complaint, they did temporarily disrupt the complaint and the original complainer eventually did return to the complaint after the departure.

Upon hearing a conversational partner’s second complaint, a complainer may defer telling his or her complaint and relinquish his turn to his conversational partner. In example 65 below, Laden states that she is going crazy in line 3. While this statement could stand as a complaint on its own, in this case however, it is actually a pre-telling to a complaint. It signifies to the listener that a more elaborate telling of the speaker’s plight is to come. Cindy’s “yeah” in line 4 signals to Laden that she is listening and gives Laden the go ahead to tell the complaint in more detail. Laden does not take this opportunity to elaborate but simply says ‘ah hah’ in line four. At this point, Cindy comes in with her own second complaint in line 6 and states that she too is going crazy. When Cindy does not elaborate, there is a brief moment of silence and Laden responds to Cindy’s complaint with ‘really’ in line 7. Similar to Cindy’s response in line 4, Laden is giving Cindy an opportunity to elaborate on her complaint. However, just as Laden declined the chance to expand upon her complaint, so does Cindy. She only states that she is going ‘really nuts’ without explaining why. Laden then once again provides Cindy with the opportunity to continue with her complaint by giving her an explicit go ahead: she says ‘speak’ in line 10.

Example 66a (CAF English 6062)

01. CINDY: <@so how's it going.@>
02. LADEN: @@ (.hhh) nothing.

03. I've been going crazy. ((smiling voice)).

04. CINDY: ((smacking sound)) yea::h?

05. LADEN: ah ha:h?

06. CINDY: me too du:de.

07. (0.3)

08. LADEN: really?

09. CINDY: rea:lly nu:ts. hhh

10. LADEN: oka:y, [spea:k? ]

11. CINDY: <@ [ you ] should have gue::@>

12. <@ you should have guessed it@> when I called you at like three am.

13. and [I was] like.

Despite Laden’s go-ahead in line 10, Cindy does not specify her complaint. The topic conversation then diverges to a phone call that Cindy made to Laden. As can been in example 66b below, after about 15 seconds, Laden returns the conversation back to specifics of Cindy’s complaint in line 56. She gives Cindy another go ahead to tell her complaint. However, Cindy struggles to formulate her complaint.

Example 66b

56. LADEN : (.hhh) but- so tell me [what's going on.]

57. CINDY: [ (.hhh) ]

58. (0.4)

59. CINDY: ((sigh)) I think I'm all right no:w. @

60. LADEN: yeah really? [ (( silent laughter))]

246
Cindy states, “I don’t know” in lines 63 and 67. She is unable to successfully verbalize her complaint. Laden responds to Cindy’s struggle by joking in line 67 about creating a maudlin atmosphere for complaining. Ultimately, Cindy forgoes telling her complaint her turn in line 71.
79. LADEN: at- sometimes (0.3) it seems like sometimes every Sunday is like
80. a real like (0.7) dullard for me.
81 not like [a real, like].
82. CINDY: [-hhh].
83. LADEN it's like a [big like loser day for me].
84. CINDY [@ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ ] [[@@@@]]
85. LADEN [([.hhh) like.]]
86. CINDY [(hhh)]
87. LADEN [I had this] big paper to write?

In line 71, Cindy relinquishes her turn and gives Laden the go ahead to complain first. Laden accepts the go ahead and launches into her complaint about school and always having a large amount of work to do on Sundays.

As seen, in the face of a second complaint from their conversational partner, speakers may defer telling their complaint. In the above example, both speakers continually deferred expanding upon their complaint until Laden finally took the floor. Furthermore, speakers may encourage their conversational partners to continue with their complaint both subtly as in lines 4 and 8 and more explicitly with clear go-aheads as in lines 10, 56, and 71.

In example 66 above, Cindy interjects with a second complaint only after Laden does not continue with a complaint. Furthermore, she interjects after a preliminary to a complaint, not in the middle of main crux of the complaint. Now I will discuss an example in which an addressee of a complaint interpolates with a second complaint before the complainer is finished. In the example below, Maya and Briar are telling complaint stories about cockroaches. The exchange begins with Maya screaming in line 1. Briar surmises that Maya has seen a bug. Although
Briar’s conjecture is incorrect, it results in Maya relating a complaint story about an encounter she had with a cockroach that day. Then, in line 7, Briar interjects with her own complaint story about cockroaches even though it is unclear whether or not Maya is finished with her complaint in line 6 (it will be seen later on that in fact she was not finished).

Example 67a (CAF English 5000)

01. MAYA: ah:::!
02. BRIAR: wha- what bugs ?
03. (0.7)
04. MAYA: o::h that happened today.
05. BRIAR: oh really ?
06. MAYA: I can’t- I screa:m:ed. It was hu:ge Briar.
07. BRIAR: o::h . (.hh) o::h my god! Uh- uh- th-I had the worst bug experience on Monday.
08. MAYA: what ha:ppen:ed?

Maya accepts Briar’s interjection. She relinquishes the conversational floor to Briar and gives her the go ahead to tell her story in line 8. Briar proceeds to tell her story and Maya evaluates Briar’s experience as disgusting by uttering yuck in line 14. This response shows that she empathizes with Briar and that she too considers Briar’s experience to be revolting and unpleasant.

Example 67b

08. MAYA: what ha:ppen:ed?
09. BRIAR: it was- it was- in:: the law school, in a classroom. And there was- I was like the first 
10. one in the classroom. (.hh) on Monday morning, isn't that shocking.
11. MAYA: (.hh) ye:s. [((xhhh hh) (.hh)]
12. BRIAR: [but anyway] there was this ((two glottal stops)) gi:g:antic like an inch and a
13. half long: (0.3) cockroach. *hhh [flipped upside] down, on the floor and it wasn't dead yet.

14. MAYA: [yuck!]

15. (0.6)

16. BRIAR: ['I (0.2) almost (0.2) died.] ((dramatic effect))

After listening to and responding to Briar’s second complaint, Maya once again reclaims the floor in line 17. When she does resume the story, she refers to Briar’s story. Maya says ‘this one’ when talking about the bug’s size in line 17 and contrasts her cockroach to Briar’s cockroach. Thus, Briar’s second complaint shapes the way in which Maya recommences her own complaint.

Even after Maya resumes the story, Briar continues to interject with her own similar experiences in regards to cockroaches. In line 25, Briar asks if the bug crawled really fast. Briar deliberately poses this question to illicit information that would allow her to compare her own encounter with a cockroach to Maya’s encounter. When Maya confirms that the bug crawled really fast, Briar once again utters another second complaint in line 24 that she had had an incident with a similar cockroach. Thus, Briar purposely questions about the speed of the cockroach, and then uses the information received from this question along with the previous information provided about the cockroach’s length and numerous legs to make a comparison.

Example 67c

16. BRIAR: ['I (0.2) almost (0.2) died'] ((dramatic effect))

17. MAYA: [this one (.) was: (.) about] two [[inches lo:ng.]]

18. BRIAR: [[(.hhh)]]

19. MAYA: had about a baz:illion legs.

20. BRIAR: o::h

21. MAYA: and came craw:ling out of my roo:m.
22. BRIAR: did it crawl really fast?


24. BRIAR: :hhhh I had one of those!

Once again, as in example 63b, we see a second complainer clearly attempting to associate the two complaints. This time the second complainer does it by being other-attentive and directly referencing the other complainer’s complaint.

Despite Briar’s attempts to interject her own complaint, this time Maya does not relinquish the floor to Briar. Rather, she continues with her story and does not allow Briar to expand upon her complaint. However, Briar persists in contrasting and comparing their stories. In line 31, she contrasts how they each dealt with the unpleasant situation. While Maya placed the cockroach outside and allowed it to live, Briar exterminated the cockroach with bug spray. Then, in lines 34 and 37, she insists that the cockroach from the two instances may be the same as in both cases it came crawling out from the bedroom area.

Example 67d

24. BRIAR: :hhhh I had one of those!

25. MAYA: and then Emily, tha::nk (. ) go::d was under contro::l cause I was screaming, and

26. picked it up, and took it [outside] and let it out.

27. BRIAR: [o:h:] she: let [it li:ve]?

28. MAYA: [no on a] pa:per.: 


30. MAYA: [yeah.] . yeah. ((creaky voice)). I- I w- I was, I was in sho:ck [a::]

31. BRIAR: [I]

32. sprayed mine with a lot of bug spray.
33. MAYA: oo:: that was a lot smarter .
34. BRIAR: Maya I th::ink we really did have the sam::e (0.7) bug, !
35. 
36. MAYA: uh [maybe it c:a-]
37. BRIAR: [cause mine came crawling out] of the bedroom too: and I'm not kidding .
38. MAYA: hh ohhhh gro::s !
39. BRIAR: [it was s:o: gross .]
40. MAYA: [that's too- that's the wor:st]. I: was just telling Emily it's so bad
to have them come out of your bedroom cause that's.
41. 
42. BRIAR: [I kno:w. ] !
43. MAYA: [you know] where you are most vulnerable. (xhhh)
44. BRIAR: ex:acty .
45. MAYA: I didn't like it at a:ll ?
46. BRIAR: this is very gross .

In line 40, Maya uses the theme of cockroaches in the bedroom to shift the discussion from an individual level to a more general one. Up until line 42, the telling of the complaint stories focused on the individual situation of each conversational participant. Starting in line 40, Maya attempts to define the complaint more broadly by stating that the bedroom is the worst place to have cockroaches. Thus, she is no longer referring to one specific incident but is complaining about cockroaches in general.

As seen, addressees may join in on a complaint and compare their own situation to that of the complainers. Furthermore, the original complainer may even defer his or her complaint, allowing the addressee to take the floor as the complainer. However, complainers are not always
so accepting of comparisons from their conversational partners and do not always relinquish the floor easily. I will know turn to looking at 2 examples in which complainers stand firm in maintaining their turn in the face of a second complaint.

In the following conversation between Sadaka and Urara, Sadaka is having a coughing fit. This prompts Urara to inquire about Sadaka’s health in line 2. Sadaka confirms that she is suffering from a cold. Her use of the none final verb ending -te in yararechatte (I ended up getting it) in line 9 and her slightly rising intonation at the end of the utterance suggest that she is going to continue with her turn. Despite the fact that Sadaka projects more talk to come, Urara commences with a second complaint of her own in line 10.

Example 68a (CHJ 2217)

01. SADAKA: [((coughing))]

02. URARA: [@@@ @] @@ anta kaze hiiten no?

      you cold catch:ASP SE

      you’ve caught a cold?

03. SADAKA: [((coughing))]

04. URARA: [[ uu? ]]

      BCH

      mmm?

05. SADAKA: a[[noo ne?]]]

      INJ IEP

      aaah

06. URARA: [[[ uu? ]]]

      BCH

      mmm?
07. uun.

BCH

mhmm

08. SADAKA: soo na no.

right PRED SE

yeah I did

09. yararechatte ne,

do:PASS:AUX IEP

I ended up getting it.

10. URARA: uchi mo nee,

our house also IEP

At our house too

11. SADAKA: un

BCH

mhmm

12. URARA: ima uchi no otoosan ne,

now our house GEN father IEP

My husband now has

13. kaze hiite zutto yasunden no.

cold catch:CONJ for the longest time rest:ASP SE

a cold and has been resting for the longest time.

14. SADAKA: ah soo.

INJ right

oh really
Urara continues with the topic of illness by stating that her husband has also caught a cold. As will be seen later, this is a beginning of a complaint about how he became sick at an inconvenient time. At the same time he becomes sick, she herself is dealing with dental problems and had to make an emergency visit to the dentist.

Sadaka minimally responds to Urara’s utterance with an acknowledgement token of “ah soo.” (oh really) in line 14. In turn, Urara responds to Sadaka’s acknowledgement token with “un” (yeah or mhmm) in line 15. While her response addresses Sadaka’s minimal response, it is unclear as to whether or not she is going to continue with her turn. In this example, her response may either indicate a passing of the opportunity to take a turn or it may be an acknowledgement of the previous speaker’s utterance before she continues with her turn (Schegloff, 1982, 2007). In either case, Sadaka does not wait to see if Urara is going to continue with her turn but immediately resumes her complaint in line 16.

Example 68b

12. URARA: ima uchi no otoosan ne,

   now our house GEN father IEP

   My husband now has

13. kaze hiite zutto yasunden no.

   cold catch:CONJ for the longest time rest:ASP SE

   a cold and has been resting for the longest time.

14. SADAKA: ah soo.

   INJ right

   oh really

15. URARA: un.=

   BCH
16. SADAKA: =ano chaarii ga ne,

INJ  Charlie NOM IEP

Um Charlie

17. URARA: un

BCH

mhmm

18. SADAKA: ((clears throat)) ano sanshuukan mae ni seoikonda no nee?

INJ  three weeks ago TP become burdened: PAST SE IEP

Um three weeks ago he came down with it

Thus, while Sadaka does acknowledge Urara’a complaint, unlike the previous examples 62 and 63, she does not relinquish the telling of her complaint when confronted with the addressee’s second complaint. Nor does she give pause in line 16 to see if Urara is going to continue with her turn. As for the second complainer, she does not falter or object in the face of Sadaka’s reclaiming of her turn. Rather, she seamlessly returns to the role of addressee of a complaint and does not resume her complaint until later in the conversation.

Notice that Sadaka’s talk has changed in line 16 from talking about her own cold to talking about her husband Charlie’s cold. Thus, she changes the focus of the complaint to the origins of the cold and from there her talk develops into complaint about how her husband became ill at an inconvenient time; New Years.

Example 68c

18. SADAKA: ano sanshuukan mae ni seoikonda no nee?
INJ three weeks ago TP become burdened:PAST SE IEP

Um three weeks ago he came down with it

19. URARA: un
BCH
mhmm

20. SADAKA: soide ne,
and IEP
and

21. ano (1.0) motto mae ka na?
INJ more before Q IEP
Umm I wonder if it was even earlier

22. nani shiro seikokujatte sa,
Anyways become burdened:AUX IEP
anyways he came down with something

23. URARA: [un.]
BCH
mhmm

24. SADAKA: [cho]odo tankakai o no ne?
right when Tanka poetry party ACC SE IEP
right when we’re about to have a Tanka poetry party-

25. shinnenkai o uchi de yaru n datta shi,
New Year’s party ACC house LOC do SE PRED:PAST and
a New Year’s party at our house

26. URARA: [un]
27. SADAKA: [iso]gashii saichuu datta no yo.
    busy middle PRED:PAST SE IEP
    In the middle of a busy time

28. URARA: [[un un]]

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

29. SADAKA: [[So- sono ]]toki ni anata(.) byooki shite kurechatte ne?
    This time TP you sick do:AUX:AUX IEP
    you end up getting sick on me

30. URARA: un

BCH

mhmm

31. SADAKA: da kara isogashii no ga (.) yoke=
    so busy thing NOM unnecessarily
    so at a busy time I ended up

32. = isogashiku natchatta n [ ne ]

busy:ADV become::AUX SE IEP
    becoming even busier.

33. URARA: [nan ka] soo iu toki=
    EMP that kind of time
    That is the time when

34. = kasanaru no [yo.]
things start to pile up.

35. SADAKA: [kasarnaru wa [[ne::?]]]

36. URARA: [[u::::n?]]

BCH

mhmm

37. SADAKA: yan [na-]

38. URARA: [soo]

right

yeah

39. SADAKA: hiniku na mon yo.

40. anata itsu mo shizuka na no ni sa?

41. URARA: soo na no yo.

42. SADAKA: soide [moo]
and EMP

and

43. URARA: [atashi mo] moo uchi de ne,

I also EMP house LOC IEP

Me too. At my place

44. SADAKA: [[un.]]

BCH

mhmm

45. URARA: [[yap]]pashi soo na no yo.

ultimately right PRED SE IEP

that’s the way it ended up

46. URARA: a[[no ne.]]

INJ IEP

umm

47. SADAKA: [[[a soo.]]]

INJ really

Oh really.

48. URARA: kaze hiite sa,

cold catch:CONJ IEP

My husband caught a cold and

Coincidentally then, Sadaka’s complaint comes to more closer resemble what Urara was

beginning to complaint about in lines 12-13; the fact that her husband’s sickness was ill-timed.

Urara leads into her complaint in lines 33-4 by stating that bad things seem to occur in

succession one right after another at the worst possible time. Then she once more attempts to tell
her complaint in line 43. Though her utterance interrupts Sadaka’s utterance in line 42, this time Sadaka allows her to have the conversational floor.

The following example from English shows another instance of complainers remaining firm in holding their turn in the face of a second complaint. Belinda is upset because her boyfriend ended their relationship via a letter. After discussing other issues, Belinda raises the topic again by saying that she is glad that Stephanie called as she has been depressed in line 4. Stephanie acknowledges Belinda’s comment by responding with “really” in line 5. However, this response focuses on Belinda’s comment on the timeliness of Stephanie’s call rather than the actual complaint. Furthermore, Belinda replies with “seriously” in line 6. The focus is still on the timeliness of Stephanie’s call and she does not elaborate on her complaint.

Example 69a (CAF English 6750)

01. BELINDA: I know, I was so mad, I'm glad you called though.
02.                          (.hhh) you know it's so weird,
03.                          it's like we have this connection because you always call whenever I'm
04.                        <like (( simultaneous with a electric pop))> (.hhh) down or depressed or something.
05.  STEFANIE: really? (( smiley voice)) @@
06.  BELINDA: seriously.

Thus, both parties fail to take up the complaint. Belinda does not expand upon her complaint and Stephanie does not request an expansion.

At this point, Stephanie utters a preliminary to a complaint of her own in line 7. Stephanie’s utterance mirrors Belinda’s utterance in that she states that she too has been depressed all weekend. However, she does not specify the exact nature of her complaint.

Example 69b

05. STEFANIE: really? (( smiley voice)) @@
As seen, Belinda acknowledges Stephanie’s second complaint by offering an expression of sympathy in line 9. She says, “Well bless your heart.” Then, again in line 12, Stephanie continues with another preliminary to a complaint telling by stating that, “This has not been a good weekend.” However, she still does not begin to specify her complaint.

As Stephanie fails to elaborate upon her complaint, Belinda redirects the conversation back to her complaint. She identifies with Belinda in line 13 by saying “I know me neither.” and she once again begins discussing her break-up with her boyfriend. Thus, just as Stephanie compared herself to Belinda to begin her own complaint, Belinda compares her own situation to Stephanie’s in order to redirect the conversation back to the complaint.

At this point, we have both parties vying for the floor. In line 15, Stephanie tries to reclaim the floor and interrupts Belinda’s utterance that she began in line 14. However, Belinda remains firm in maintaining the floor this time. She restarts the line of talk that she began in line 14 and continues to talk about the break-up.
13. BELINDA: [I know me] neither.

14. (.hhh) But [I had-]

15. STEFANIE: [I don't] know.

16. BELINDA: last ni:ght I just kind of like.

17. (0.3)

18. BELINDA: ca:me to one with myself or something be[cause,]

19. STEFANIE: [ @ ]@ @ [ ]

20. BELINDA: [I just] (.woke up and

21. I was like I don't need a ma:n.

Thus, like example 68, the complainer does not defer her complaint in the face of a second complaint. While Belinda did acknowledge Stephanie’s second complaint, unlike examples 66 and 67, she does not allow her conversational partner to elaborate. In fact, Belinda even goes to the extent of cutting off the Stephanie’s second complaint in order to maintain her own turn.

In summary, while addresses of complaints may wait until the complainer has finished before providing a second complaint, they may also interrupt before the speaker is finished. I have shown two contrasting responses to second complaints. The first complainer has the option of either retaining or relinquishing the conversational floor. It should be noticed that even when the first complainer does not relinquish his or her turn, they may still acknowledge the second complaint as seen in examples 68 and 69. Such an action seems to be an intermediate action between outright ignoring the complaint and completely giving up one’s turn. As previously discussed, complaints are a type of conversational act which demand an appropriate response. Thus, if one were to totally disregard the second complaint, the lack of response would be
noticeably absent. Yet the first complainer has the conversational right to finish his complaint. Acknowledging the second complaint before continuing with one’s own complaint maintains a balance between the two extremes.

4.2.3. Objecting to a Second Complaint

Even when second complaints do not clearly interrupt the first complaint, the first complainer may object to having his or her own situation compared to the second complainer’s situation. When addressees respond to a complaint with a second complaint of their own, they divert the focus of the talk from the complainer’s situation to their own. Furthermore, it detracts from the uniqueness of the complainer’s situation by stating that they are not the only one with a problem. In this section, I will look at one example from English in which a second complaint is met resistance from the complainer.

Before discussing these examples, I would like to look at one example in which the complainer verbally accepts the comparison. In example 63, which I discussed previously, Tomoko does not object to Miri’s comparison.

Recap of example 63

64. MIRI [Wata]shi mo hontoo ni kitsui tte.

   I too real ADV hard QOUT

   I’ve got it really hard too

65. TOMOKO: u:::::n

   BCH

   mhmm

66. MIRI: Watashi mo kitsui mon.

   I too hard SE

   I’ve got it hard too, let me tell ya.
67. TOMOKO: soo yaroo ne,

**right PRED:PRES IEP**

yeah

68. maa anata mata (0.7) mata (0.5) toozen (X tai X) kitsui no mon.

**well you too too of course hard SE SE**

*well of course you too have got it hard*

Tomoko agrees in lines 67 and 68 with Miri’s statement that she too has it hard. By doing so, she accepts Miri’s second complaint and allows for it expansion. This example stands in contrast to the next example in which the complainer objects to having his complaint being subject to comparison.

Below, Jason is complaining that his muscles hurt from overexertion; i.e. exercising too much. At first he starts to focus on the calf as the source of his pain, but he self repairs his utterance to say that his entire body hurts. Marks initial response to Jason’s complaint is dispreferred. In line 5, he tells Jason that he is responsible for his own pain as he himself chooses to exercise to the extent that he does.

Example 70a (CAF English 6467)

01. JASON: ⌊oh⌋ my calf is- my (. ) body is just killing me man.

02. (0.3)

03. MARK: right no:w?

04. JASON: oh go:d.

05. MARK: you've chosen this ma:n. @@@

06. JASON: (.hhh) I di:d.

Jason agrees with Mark’s comment and continues to expand upon his complaint. After Jason’s talk in line 13, there is a 0.8 second beat of silence. This silence coupled with the fact that
Jason’s speech is grammatical and pragmatically complete in line 13, singles to Mark that Jason has reached a possible completion point in his turn. Mark takes this opportunity to begin his second complaints in line 15. However, Jason interrupts Mark mid complaint and continues with his complaint. Mark once more attempts to interject with a second complaint in line 21 and this time he is successful.

Example 70b

06. JASON: (.hhh) I di:d.
07. I don't know why:.
08. (1.3)
09. JASON: I- I just don't understa:nd.
10. (0.9)
11. MARK: (.hhh)
13. h:ow much pain I could be in after three days.
14. (0.8)
15. MARK: @@ (.hhh) you know [actually I-]
16. JASON: [actu-] actually it started yesterday.
17. yesterday wasn't like (0.3) as ba:d.
18. (1.1)
19. JASON: <@ go:d.@>
20. after two da:ys.@@
21. MARK: (.hhh) I can- I can kind of rela:te?
22. I mean I'm sure you're experiencing much more pain than I am?
Similar to example 66 discussed previously, Mark begins the second complaint by comparing and contrasting his situation to that of the first complainer. First, he expresses empathy, stating that he can understand Jason’s situation. Note though that he mitigates his claim with the phrase “kind of.” Then, he defers to Jason by stating that Jason’s pain is presumably worse. Both these actions indicate his hesitation to compare himself with Jason. Despite his deference, in the next line he backpedals and claims that in some aspects his pain is worse. Thus, his statement simultaneously reflects his hesitation to compare himself to Jason through a second complaint and claims “one-upmanship” in regards to the severity of the complaint.

Initially, Mark does not state the nature and location of his pain. He only vaguely refers to the pain as “another way too” in line 23. Jason apparently interprets the phrase in a humorous fashion as he begins to laugh in line 26. This laughter interrupts Mark’s turn in line 25. At first, Mark tries to continue with his turn in line 27. However, upon hearing Jason’s laughter and realizing Jason’s interpretation, he laughs and agrees with Jason by stating “yeah, that too, that too.”

Example 70c

21. MARK: (.hhh) I can- I can kind of rela:te ?

22. I mean I'm sure you're experiencing much more pain than I am?

23. (.hhh) but I guess another way I'm experiencing more pain than you are?

24. (.hhh) hhh (.hhh)

25. [I g-] .

26. JASON: [ @@ ] (.hhh) @@ @ [ (.hhh)].

27. MARK: [you:- ] you been xxx, actually we'll <@yea::h.@

28. (.hhh) @@that too:.@@
29. (.hhh) [@ that] too:.@

Although Mark accepts Jason interpretation, he ultimately redirects the conversation back to his second complaint. In line 33, he clarifies that Jason’s interpretation is actually incorrect and that he is actually referring to something else. Jason acknowledges this interpretation with “oh” in line 35.

Example 70d

29. MARK: (.hhh) [@ that] too:.@

30. JASON: [(hhh)]

31. JASON: [[okay.]]

32. MARK: [[@@]]

33. MARK: [(hhh) no:] actually another way too:. ((said with smiley voice))

34. JASON: [ (hhh) ].

35. JASON: o:h .

36. (0.3)

Mark restarts his second complaint in line 38. It mirrors Jason’s complaint about being in pain due to exercise. Essentially, he is comparing his situation to Jason’s.

Example 70e

36. (0.3)

37. JASON: [@ @ (hhh)].

38. MARK: [a- ] you know I've started exercising again you kno:w?

39. (hhh) and like.

40. (0.3)

41. MARK: I'm starting to do some of the different li:ke, you know.
(.hhh) exercise that I haven't done in a long time?

JASON: okay.

MARK: (.hhh) and so now my muscles are going

<Q ow we haven't done this in a long time.Q>

<Q uh, excuse me. Q> @@

Jason rejects Mark’s comparison and contests how similar they actually are. In line 47, Jason claims that he understands how Mark is feeling. While this expression of empathy does acknowledge Mark’s second complaint, its true effect is to reestablish the focus on Jason and his complaint. It conveys the message that Mark is not unique in his complaint. He then proceeds to further negate his initial empathy by stating “but” in line 50 and elaborating upon how his pain is worse than Mark’s in lines 50 to 68.

Example 70f

MARK: uh, excuse me. @@

JASON: well I- I- I understand that feeling and what that's like.

What that's like.

(0.4)

JASON: (.hhh) but I mean.

(0.5)

MARK: (.hhh) imagine your whole body's having a sense of tiredness:

(0.5)

JASON: (.hhh) that all you wa- all you really want to do is go home and go to bed.

o:r go to y-.

go t- (.) ea:t, then go to bed.

(0.3)
Jason is very expressive in the way he describes the extent of his pain and thereby argues that his pain is more intense than Mark’s. At first, he does not directly state that this is how he feels. Rather he invokes Mark to imagine what it would be like to feel this way. The implication is that Mark cannot actually comprehend how Jason feels and is limited to mentally trying to envision...
the extent of his pain. He then offers various examples, some laced with humor and exaggeration, to illustrate his situation. For instance, he has little desire to do anything but eat and sleep, his limbs feel like they are going to fall off, and despite the pain he continues to go to gym more than once daily. As seen, Jason overstates some of these instances and uses colorful language in order to stress that Mark’s situation could not possibly be equal to or worse than his. He describes his muscles as “sore as shit” in line 63 as opposed to just “sore” for emphasis. He exaggerates by suggesting that he has exercised to the point that his arms have fallen off. This depicts an impossible occurrence and the ridiculous of the remark generates laughter from Mark. Likewise, Jason’s depiction of his trainer’s reaction to his multiply trips to the gym also is perceived humorously and elicits laughter from the addressee.

While the aforementioned illustrations manage to elicit laughter from Mark, it is ultimately Jason’s illustration of the amount of ibuprofen he is using that results in Mark deferring to Jason.

Example 70g

67. JASON: [ hhh (.hhh)you're going down to the] trainer every single day and they go.

68. you're ba:ck weren't you just he:re? @

69. (0.3)

70. JASON: (.hhh) [and you're t- you ] ha:ve .

71. MARK: [ ((silent laughter))].


73. (0.3)

74. JASON: (.hhh) u:h, ibuprofen a:nd the: (. ) Flex all four fifty fou:r.

75. (.hhh) sitting on your dresser.
76. JASON: so when you come into the [room-

77. MARK: [I have] ibuprofen too:

78. JASON: [(.hhh)]

79. MARK: [(.hhh)] @@ (.hhh) [I've come to] appreciate it.

80. JASON: [ I have - ]

81. JASON: I have the five hundred.

82. (0.5)

83. JASON pill: @@

84. ((false starts))

85. va:t.

86. [<@ of ibuprofen @> (hhh) (hhh) ]

87. MARK: [oh, I don't- I haven't got- <@ I haven't gone that bad. @>]

88. (.hhh) [ hhh ]

89. JASON: [well, shit] I take nine of those a day.

90. (0.3)

91. MARK: are you serious?

92. JASON: oh yeah.

93. (0.8)

94. JASON: (.hhh) eighteen hundred milligrams a day.

95. (1.2)

96. MARK: I only take two:. hhh

97 (0.4)

98. JASON: well see I take eighteen hundred.
Upon hearing Jason's statement about ibuprofen, Mark at first tries to maintain his similarity to Jason by stating that he too is taking ibuprofen to alleviate his pain. In response to Mark's latest comparison, Jason changes his frame of reference from you (i.e. Mark) to I (i.e. himself) in line 80. He ceases to construct the complaint as though it were a fabricated situation that he is invoking Mark to imagine experiencing and begins to state clearly that this is what he is actually experiencing. Thus, the described situation is no longer imaginary but actuality and the experiencer is no longer Mark but Jason. The apparent objective behind this switch is so that he can up the ante and depict an even more complaint worthy situation in the face of Mark's comparison. Furthermore, he increases the severity of his complaint by specifying in lines 80-86 that not only does he have pain relievers, but also that he is compelled to keep a large quantity readily available (i.e a vat of 500 pills). With this, Mark finally concedes that Jason's condition is worse than his own in line 87. Jason responds to Mark's concession with both braggadocio and satisfaction that Mark has ultimately deemed Jason as the worse of the two. The discourse marker "well" plus the explicative "shit" in line 89 conveys smugness that Mark has admitted to not being as reliant as Jason on pain relievers. He further attempts to impress upon Mark the severity of his own situation in comparison with Mark's by specifying that he is taking nine pills a day. Mark expresses his astonishment at Jason's revelation by asking, "are you serious?" Although Mark's question is rhetorical, Jason confirms the veracity of his assertion in line 92.
and repeats the amount of ibuprofen he is taking in line 94. However, when he restates the amount, he expresses the amount in milligrams as opposed to number of pills. He is once again trying to impress upon Mark the largeness of the quantity by using a different phrasing. Once again, Mark defers to Jason by specifying the quantity that he takes which is significantly less than Jason does. Again, Jason once more responds with smug satisfaction in line 98. He states for the third time the amount of ibuprofen he is consuming; repeating the amount in milligrams. This time, however, he prefaces the statement with “well see.” This preface is similar to the expression “I told you so” and it indicates Jason’s satisfaction that Mark by his own admission had proven the very point that Jason had been trying to make all along (i.e. the severity of his pain in comparison to Mark).

As seen, complainers may view second complaints as a challenge to their own complaint. They may object to the second complainer’s insinuation that their circumstances are similar to or even worse than their own. In essence, complainers may perceive the second complaint as a challenge to their “bragging” rights. However, it is not bragging in the traditional sense of who is better, but rather “bragging” in the sense of whose situation is worse. In the case of the example just discussed, such a perceived challenged lead to the first complainer attempting and ultimately succeeding in proving the greater severity of his situation.

4.2.4. Unsympathetic Second Complaints

Although in example 70 above Mark’s second complaint did not outright question Jason’s right to complain and the challenge was more perceived than actual, second complaints may clearly call into question the severity of the speaker’s complaint. By responding with a second complaint, addressees may clearly express a lack of sympathy for the complainer on the grounds that their own situation is worse. In addition, the first complainer may in turn raise
objections against such unsympathetic second complaints. For the remainder of this section on second complaints, I will examine how addressees may present themselves as being unsympathetic through second complaints and how complainers respond to such unsympathetic second complaints.

First, I would like to look at an example of an unsympathetic second complaint that does not receive an objection from the first complainer. Michi, who is working in America, is complaining about having to return to Japan. He clearly expresses his displeasure in line 4. Kenji then takes the conversational floor and echoes Michi’s sentiment by uttering a second complaint in line 5. Using very similar wording to Michi’s complaint, he states that he too hates the thought of going home. He repeats this statement in line 6. In line 7, he continues his complaint by stating that the thought of it makes him depressed.

Example 71a (CAF Japanese 2167)

01. KENJI:  [u:n]  michi no tokoro wa:?=

    Yeah. Michi GEN place TOP

    Yeah. And what is going with you?

02. MICHI:  =e:  uchi wa moo kaeru  [kara:]  

    INJ  I TOP EMP go home  so

    I am going home so...

03. KENJI:  [u::n.]

    BCH

    mhm

04. MICHI:  a: a:  iya  da  [[  MOO:::::: ]]  

    INJ  unpleasant PRED  EMP
Ah not a pleasant thought

05. KENJI: [IYA DESHOO] MOO::: hate PRED:TAG EMP

Not a pleasant thought is it.

06. hontoo iya da yo ne.

really hate PRED IEP IEP

It really is an unpleasant thought.

07. kangaetara yuuutsu ni naru yo ne.=

think:TEMP depress PRED become IEP IEP

When I think about it, I get depressed

08. MICHI: =moo watashi da tte.=

EMP I PRED QOUT

For me

Thus, similar to example 63a, the second complainer introduces his own complaint by using phrasing similar to that of the first complainer’s.

Michi tries to reclaim the conversational floor from Kenji in line 8. However, his attempt is unsuccessful. Kenji does not relinquish the floor and he utters a statement that diminishes Michi’s complaint in line 9. He states that Michi’s situation is still good in comparison to his.

Example 71b

07. KENJI: kangaetara yuuutsu ni naru yo ne.=

think:TEMP depress PRED become IEP IEP

When I think about it, I get depressed

08. MICHI: =moo watashi da tte.=
For me

09. KENJI: =e michi nan ka ii yo.

INJ Michi EMP good IEP

You’re still okay

10. uchi nante sa,

I EMP IEP

In my case

11. moo kaette kara no soo iu koto mo gocha gocha gocha gocha.=

EMP return after GEN that kind of thing EMP confusion confusion

What I will do after I return and things like that are just like argh

12. MICHI: [ hhh. ]

13. KENJI: =kaeru no nante mada [kimatte] inai deshoo mitai [na sa:]

return NML still decide:ASP:NEG TAG like PRED IEP

It’s like my returning hasn’t even been decided yet

14. MICHI: [.hhh u::n] moo nani ka demo.

mhm EMP like but

It’s like but

15. (.67)


unpleasant PRED IEP

It’s not a fun thought

17. watashi da tte:

I PRED IEP
For me

Kenji says that his situation is more of complainable as his future is still unclear and tenuous. Even though Michi is unhappy about going home, his situation is still better than his own as it has already been determined. Michi does not speak to Kenji’s second complaint, but rather reclaims the floor in line 14 without addressing it. Thus, in this example, Kenji’s second complaint is non-supportive of Michi’s complaint in two aspects. First, he does not allow Michi to develop his complaint before interpolating with his own complaint. Secondly, he minimizes his complaint by saying that his own situation is worse.

In the above example, Michi does not really address Kenji’s second complaint. His main objective seems to be reclaiming the floor. However, second complaints that challenge and dismiss the original complainer’s comments can become a source of contention. Rather than ignore the fact that the addressee is challenging them, complainers may confront the fact that the addressee is contesting their complaint. The next two examples, one that is from Japanese and one that is from English, demonstrate this phenomenon.

In example 72, which is from my Japanese data, Katsuharu complains that he has been suffering from tiredness. In example 73, which is from my English data, Maya is complaining about her inability to make friends. Both addressees respond by contesting the speakers’ complaints with their own second complaints. Furthermore, the issue of jealousy is raised in both conversations. In example 72 below, Tadashi jokingly feigns jealousy by stating that he wished he could experience sitting tiredness in line 14. He then utters a second complaint in line 15 by complaining that he is always standing and moving around at work. Similarly, in example 73, Briar states that Maya should not be jealous as her relationships are not as solid as Maya
presumes. She utters a second complaint by expressing dissatisfaction about the present state of her relationships in lines 7-9 and 12-13.

Example 72 (CAF Japanese 4261)

1. KATSUHARU: nani ka ne: moo.
   you know IEP EMP
   You know

2. chotto saikin: anoo suwari zukareta tte iu no iwayuru.
   just recently INJ sitting tire:PAST QOUT say SE what you call
   Just recently I have been what you would call sitting tired

3. TADASHI: <@suwari zukareta. @>=
   tire of sitting:PAST
   sitting tired

4. KATSUHARU: =suwari zukare.
   sitting tiredness
   sitting tiredness

5. dakara nani ka kaette kite sa:.
   so INJ return:AUX:CONJ IEP
   so like when I come home

6. (.32)

7. koko ni ne nani ka:=
   here LOC IEP like

8. =anoo ima daietto ni moete iru dakkusufunto ga iru no da yo ne.
   INJ now diet DAT be crazy:ASP dachshund NOM have SE PRED IEP IEP
   I have this dachshund here that is crazy about dieting.
9. TADASHI: u:n.
    BCH
    mhm

10. KATSUHARU: moo chotto ima issho ni osanpo ni itte.
    more a bit now together HON:walk DIR go:CONJ
    And it seems like the only thing for me to do is go on more walks together

11. (.61)

12. moo sukoshi suwari zukare o ne:,
    more little tiredness ACC IEP

13. kaishoo suru shika nai ne: @mitai na.@
    solve only NEG PP like PRED
    and try and solve my sitting tiredness a little

14. TADASHI: suwari zukare mo shite mitai yo.
    tiredness from sitting too do:AUX:DES IEP
    I want to experience sitting tiredness

15. zu:tto tatte are da yo ugoite [bakari.]
    always stand:CONJ you know move:CONJ nothing but
    I am always standing. You know nothing but moving

16. KATSUHARU: [Iya ] ugoite iru hoo ga ii yo yahari.
    No move:ASP MOD IEP ultimately
    No but, moving around is better

17. TADASHI: u:n.
    BCH
    mhmm
18. KATSUHARU: un tte iu ka hora

   Yeah or rather INJ

   Or rather it's that

19. boku jishin ochitsuki nai kara ne.

   I personally calm down:NEG so IEP

   I personally can not calm down so

20. (.35)

21. TADASHI: a: @ @ @ @

   INJ

   oh

22. KATSHARU: dakara.

   so

   so (that's the problem)

23. TADASHI: u:n.

   BCH

   mhmm

Example 73 (CAF English 5000)

01. MAYA: I'm so jealous! I never go out.°I have no friends.° ((whispered))

02. BRIAR: °I-° ((whispered)) have you met very many people?

03. MAYA: °I have no friends.° ((louder whisper))

04. BRIAR: (x hhhhhhhhh) (.hh) well I think-

05. MAYA: it's not a secret though.

Part of conversation skipped

06. MAYA: I'm so jealous of all these cool fri:nds. ((whiny tone))
07. BRIAR: u:h (.) see but if: ha::h it's not good though because it's still at that very
awkward stage where (.hhh) like (0.3) especially since I'm livin:g (0.3) off
campus and most [of them] are on campus?
08. BRIAR: like (.h) it would- It's just wei:rd having to call them up and be like
(0.3) [what are you doing] tonight.
09. MAYA: [(hhh)]
10. MAYA: [hh] uh hu::h
11. BRIAR: [and ah]°hhh° (.h) I don't know .
12. MAYA: we:ll: [at least you have] poten:tial::.
13. BRIAR: [you know I'm not very good at that any]wa:y.
14. MAYA: there's poten:tial::.
15. BRIAR: yea:h I mean some peopl:e- it seems like I really: (.h) would like to get to know
better and hang out with °but°
16. MAYA: yea::h.

Both complainers negatively respond to the second complaints by rejecting them.
Tadashi from example 72 reaffirms his complaint in line 16 and maintains that being able to
move around at work is better than having to sit. Similarly, in example 73, Maya insinuates in
lines 18 and 20 that Briar should not complain as she at least has the potential to make friends
while she herself does not. Thus, her rejection of Briar’s second complaint is even more direct
than Tadashi’s rejection in example 72.
While both complainers in the examples above reject the addressees’ second complaints, the focus and the manner of the rejection are different. Tadashi focuses on his own complaint. His main concern is asserting that his situation is indeed a complainable. Conversely, Maya focuses on the second complaint of her conversational partner. Her main concern is minimizing Briar’s second complaint and asserting that it is not a complainable. This difference can be attributed to the content of the second complaint. Katsuharu’s second complaint minimized Tadashi’s complaint by implying that having to sit is “not all that bad.” Thus defending one’s complaint becomes relevant for Tadashi. Briar’s second complaint, however, was not diminishing of Maya’s complaint. Thus defending one’s complaint is not relevant for Maya.

By countering an indirect complaint with an indirect complaint, a listener can send the message “Don’t complain because you are not the only one. I have it just as bad as you.” In those cases in which a listener attempts to state an indirect complaint that depicts a situation that is worse than the previous complaint, the listener is performing a conversational act of “one-upmanship.” The phenomenon of “one-upmanship” commonly occurs in cases of bragging. When one person mentions a good aspect of their life, an accomplishment that they or a member of their in-group has achieved, etc., the addressee may attempt to upstage the speaker by mentioning an aspect or accomplishment that is purportedly better. Such one-upmanship is not limited to bragging but occurs in complaining as well. Just as the term “upstage” suggests in theatre in which one actor pushes another actor to the back of the stage and/or draws the spotlight to himself, a listener may “upstage” a complainer by drawing attention to himself and his situation. By switching the focus to himself, the second complainer may deem the first complaint as less consequential.

4.2.5. Anti-Second Complaints
Second complaints are a smaller part of a larger tendency for people to find similarities and differences between their own circumstances and that of another’s. Upon hearing a complaint, the addressee may offer a second complaint in order to compare their own undesirable situation to that of the speaker’s. However, second complaints are not the only means by which addressees of a complaint may compare themselves and their circumstances to that of a complainer’s. They may also make comparisons by doing the opposite of complaining; i.e. by portraying their own situation positively.

In the following example, Mayumi is talking about her recently born baby. She complains about how for a period of a month or two, she was unable to sleep as the baby was constantly awake. Reiko’s response is to contrast her own child’s sleeping patterns when he or she was a baby.

Example 74 (CHJ 1032)

01. MAYUMI: un. datte sore made sugoi taihen datta.

Yeah but until then really rough PRED:PAST

But until then it was really rough

02. [ikka] nikagetsu zenzen nerarenkatta.=

one two months at all sleep:POT:NEG:PAST

I could not sleep at all for a month or two

03. REIKO: [un]

BCH

mhmm

04. MAYUMI: yoru zutto okiteta no moo.

evening all be awake:ASP:PAST SE EMP

I was up all night

Yeah like Dakko-title NOM something like QUOT that mother NOM

Yeah like Dakko or something like that... that mother??

06. MAYUMI: soo soo. Da kara taihen datta. Nebusoku de taihen yatta.=

Right right so rough PRED:PAST lack of sleep from rough PRED:PAST

Yeah yeah. So it was rough. I was suffering from lack of sleep.

07. REIKO: [(XX) ((distortion)) hontoo?] really

really?

08. MAYUMI: =[kyuu ni korotto] neru yoo ni natte bikkuri shita.

suddenly easily sleep way PRED become:CONJ be surprise:PAST

I was surprised when the baby suddenly started to sleep without problem.

09. REIKO: fuun

INJ

huh

10. MAYUMI: sonna mon ja na no.

that kind of thing PRED SE

That is the way it is

11. REIKO: uchi no ko datte yoo neteta de.

our GEN child as for well sleep:ASP:PAST EMP

Our child use to sleep well

12. MAYUMI: ii na. a da kara saikin-

nice IEP INJ so recently

Must have been nice. Well so recently-
13. REIKO: da kara sonna mon ja nai.

so that kind of thing TAG

Well that is the way it is, isn’t it?

14. MAYUMI: saikin natte moo zutto yoru zenzen okin.

recently become:CONJ EMP whole night at all wake up:NEG

Recently he / she doesn’t wake up at all the whole night long

Reiko contrasts her child’s sleeping patterns to Mayumi’s child by stating that her child slept well. So rather than a second complaint, Reiko portrays her experience positively. Unlike Mayumi who declares a state of suffering, Reiko claims a state of non-suffering.

In the next example two female friends, Briar and Maya are talking about the temperature. Briar complains about the heat in lines 1 and 5. Initially, in line 6, Maya responds by denying that she has a second complaint about the outside temperature. However, she immediately follows this denial with a complaint about the temperature inside her room.

Example 75 (CAF English 5000)

01. BRIAR: I really wish it was a little bit cooler out here.

02. (0.5)

03. MAYA: yea::h.

04. (0.5)

05. BRIAR: °it's too: hot:!

06. MAYA: it's no:t too hot here. it's too hot in my roo:m right no:w. [(hhh)]

07. BRIAR: [(hhh0] u:m: I've been wear:ing jea:ns every day: to classe:.

08. (0.3)

09. because it's so:: co:ld in the cla:ssroo:m.
11. MAYA:  ah ha:h.

12. BRIAR: and then:::  when I get out  I s::weat a::ll the way ho:me.

13. MAYA:  (xhhh) mm (xhhh) [°go:d.h::°!]

14. BRIAR:  [°it's # xxx] sting° !

Maya states that the weather is not too hot where she lives. She contrasts her circumstances to Briar’s by claiming that unlike Briar, she is not enduring uncomfortable temperatures. Despite her initial non-negative response, she then complains about the heat in her room. Thus, Maya compares her situation to Briar’s twice. The first time she focuses on the differences in their circumstances, the second time she states the similarities.

I briefly mentioned the next example in section 3.3.3 as an instance of a non-affected party complaining for the affected party. Now, I would like to discuss it in more depth. It varies from examples 73 and 74 above, in that the non-affected party is not the recipient of a complaint, but rather is complaining on behalf of the affected party. Recall that Adam and Peter are talking about their final examinations. While it is truly Adam’s situation to complain about, it is the non-affected party, Peter, who is essentially complaining for Adam. Again, this can be seen in line 2 with his exclamation “oh, that sucks” and in line 5 with his rhetorical question “damn you had five finals?” Despite these two complaint provoking utterances, Adam does not take up a complaining stance. In response to Adam’s lack of uptake, Peter responds with a comparison to reiterate the complaint worthiness of Adam’s situation.

Example 76 (CAF English 6193)

01. ADAM: Yeah, three subjects I got done with, now I got two subjects left.

02. PETER: Oh, that sucks!

03. ADAM: Yeah, [So-]
04. PETER: [Damn.] you had five finals?

05. ADAM Yeah.

06. PETER I only have- I have three, man.

Peter contrasts his situation with Adam’s by stating that he only has three final examinations. In essence, he is pointing out that Adam’s situation is worse than his own is. Thru his comparison, he is attempting to further develop the complaint he is making on Adam’s behalf.

In summary, comparisons between a complainer and the addressee of a complaint are not limited to second complaints. When addressees of a complaint find themselves unable to complain about a similar situation, they may contrast themselves to the complainer by stating their lack of a complaint. Küntay and Şenay (2003) found a similar pattern in narratives told by Turkish preschoolers in which children would compare themselves to a storyteller by claiming a lack of a similar story. Furthermore, a non-affected party of a complaint may use a comparison in order to illustrate that the other’s party situation is a complainable. In summary, whether making a second complaint or claiming lack of complaint, addressees of a complaint make an effort to point out the similarities and dissimilarities between their situation and the complainers’.

4.2.6. Conclusion of Second Complaints

This section dealt with the issues that arise with second complaints. Second complaints by nature shift the focus of the conversation from the first complaint to the second complaint. By uttering a second complaint, speakers may detract from and lessen a first complaint, both intentionally and unintentionally. The manner in which speakers manage conversations involving second complaints reflects this fact. Speakers may attempt to minimize and prevent any discord that may result from a second complaint. Conversely, in some cases, speakers may
intentionally intend to minimize another’s complaint and may employ second complaints as a means to achieve this result. Finally, second complaints are a smaller part of speakers’ general tendencies to build upon talk through comparison. They use the other speaker’s talk as a basis for creating and interjecting talk about their own situation into the conversation. This tendency has led not only to second-complaints, but to “anti-second complaints” as well.

4.3. CO-COMPLAINTS

4.3.1. Introduction

As stated in the introduction, two or more people may work together to co-narrate a story. Lerner (1992), Leung (2009), Mandelbaum (1987), Norrick (1997, 2004) are just a few of the linguists who have focused on this subject in their research. Similar to co-narration of a story, in a co-complaint, two or more people participate in complaining about the same subject matter. We have already seen examples of co-complaints in examples 2 and 6. Unlike second complaints, they involve two or more knowing parties who are affected by the same complainable situation. Thus, there exists at least two people who are equally qualified to complain. While participants may complain together for the benefit of unknowing parties who are presumably not affected by the complaint, the majority of co-complaints in my data only involved the complaining parties. Thus people tended to complain together simply for the sakes of complaining and were not necessarily informing unknowing participants about a complainable situation.

As mentioned in the introduction, researchers have noted the rapport building effect of complaining. Co-complaining is a major factor in this reported ability of complaints to facilitate social relations. The rapport building effect of complaints is clearly not limited to those cases in which one person complains and an addressee shows concern and sympathy. Obviously,
commiserating and mutual sharing and one’s displeasure, dissatisfaction, etc. about a situation or person is a means by which two people can forge a common bond. In this section, I will look at two particular features of co-complaints that play a role in both the expression and the construction of this rapport: repetition and humor.

4.3.2. Repetition in Co-complaints

The rapport that results from co-complaining is due to two people sharing a common experience and feeling. Both conversational parties possess a similar negative stance towards a person or situation. As noted by Dascălu-Jinga (1999), Perrin, Deshaies, and Paradis (2003) and Tannen (1987, 2007), speakers commonly express agreement and concurrence through repetition. Thus, as one may expect, repetition of what the other complainer said was one means by which co-complainers conveyed their concord of opinion. Furthermore, not only other repetition, but self-repetition of one’s own words as well played a role in building rapport in co-complaints as well. Such repetition included repeating just one word as well as repeating phrases and entire sentences. In this section, I will look at repetition in co-complaints and discuss how it is indicative of rapport between speakers.

Repetition can vary in regards to location of the repeated speech in relation to the original utterance. In the following example, the repetition occurs immediately adjacent to the original utterance.

Example 77 (CHJ 2222)

01. YOSHIKO: nnn moo toshi totta see ka,

BCH EMP get old:PAST because or

mmm. I don’t know if it’s because I am getting older or

02. [X okubyooX ni natta see- @@@@ @@@ (hh) ]=

coward PRED:ADV become:PAST because
because I have become a coward

03. CHIEKO [@@@@@@@@@@@@ nee* yoshikosan moo sanjuu nee, ]

IEP YOSHIKO:TIT EMP thirty IEP

I know. You are going to be thirty.

04. [[san- are sanjuuichi deshoo]] kondo.

Thir(ty) INJ 31 TAG this time

Thir- wait thirty one, aren’t you. this birthday.

05. YOSHIKO: =[[(hhx.) aa! (0.5) soo da yo. ]] INJ right PRED IEP

aah! That’s right.

06. Eeee?

INJ

wow

07. aaa chikai yo nee.

Oh near IEP IEP

It’s coming up.

08. CHIEKO: sanjuuichi yo ne,

Thirty one IEP IEP

You will be thirty one

09. kondo nee.

this time IEP

this birthday

10. YOSHIKO: moo sugu nee?

soon IEP
Pretty soon

11. CHIEKO: u::::n

BCH

mhmm

12. YOSHIKO: soo yuu to oneesan no koso moo sugu sanjuuyon ja nai no.

having said that older sister LNK EMP soon thirty four TAG SE

Speaking of birthdays, aren't you going to be 34 soon?

13. CHIEKO: nee.

IEP

Can you believe it?

14. [XsooX] desu yo.

Right PRED IEP

That's right

15. YOSHIKO: [ @ @]

16. CHIEKO: @@iya da nee,

hate PRED IEP

I hate it.

17. YOSHIKO: iya nee?

hate IEP

I hate it.

18. CHIEKO: iya da yo nee.

hate PRED IEP IEP

I hate it.

19. YOSHIKO: iya da ne.@@@
Yoshiko and Chieko are talking about growing older. Their negative feelings towards aging becomes apparent in line 16 when Chieko utters ‘Iya da’ (I hate it). Yoshiko repeats Chieko’s utterance in line 17. The only difference is that she omits the copula da. This pattern then repeats itself. Chieko repeats her utterance from line 16 again in line 18. The two utterances differ only in that she adds the sentence final particle yo which adds emphasis. Yoshiko once again repeats Chieko utterance, this time using the copula da as Chieko did but omitting the particle yo. From a discourse analysis perspective, Chieko states her feelings and Yoshiko concurs with these feelings and expresses that she feels the same. Upon seeing Yoshiko’s concurrence of sentiment, Chieko restates her feelings, this time stronger. Likewise, Yoshiko once again expresses her agreement through repetition. In summary, the co-complainers are echoing their mutual sentiment and playing off their shared feelings.

The complainers in this next example from English use repetition in a similar way. I previously discussed complaint in example 19 for its use of the routinized expression “no offense.” In this example, the two speakers join together to criticize a mutual acquaintance for being too passionate about computers. Agreement is prevalent throughout the complaint and at the end of the complaint sequence, the co-complainers show one last demonstration of
agreement. When Lenore states that she can not relate to people who are passionate about computers, Alina echoes her sentiment.

Example 78 (SBCSAE 6)

01. LENORE: She’s [[p:assionate]] about it.
02. ALINA: [[((hhx.))] ]
03. LENORE: < @ I'm like- @>
04. I can't relate.
05. Leave me alone. @ @ @ .
06. ALINA: [ I can't relate at all:. I just- I ] don't care: .
07. I really don't care .

Not only does Alina state that she shares Lenore’s feelings in line 6, but she intensifies the force of her statement by adding the qualifying phrase “at all.” This phrase strengthens the depth of her feelings. Next, she further reiterates non-interest by stating that she does not care. She intensifies this statement in line 7 by repeating it and adding the qualifying word “really.” Thus, she employed both repetition and qualifying words to emphasis and intensify the expression of her negative feelings. In short then, the co-complainer expressed agreement and appreciation for the other party’s statements through repetition. Furthermore, in both her allo-repetition and other repetition, she intensified her statements.

While in the above examples the repetitions occurred separately, the stating of identical or near identical utterances may occur concurrently as well. As one complainer is making an utterance, the co-complainer may interject with his or her own utterance that is the same as or almost the same as the utterance already in progress. The result is two overlapping utterances
that are identical or near identical. An example of this type of repetition in co-complaints occurred in the previous discussed example of Mihoko and Mayumi complaining about dormitory food.

Example 79 (CAF Japanese 1722)

01. MIHOHKO: (hhh) e? sore de gohan wa. @ @ [ @ @ ]

INJ and meals TOP

Oh, and what about your meals?

02. MAYUMI: [gohan.]

meals

My meals?

03. moo gero mazu da yo.

EMP disgustingly bad PRED IEP

They are disgustingly bad.

04. gero mazu. @ @ @

disgustingly bad

Disgustingly bad.

05. MIHOKO: (hhh) aikawarazu no buffe buffe. [@ @ ]

never changing GEN buffet buffet

It's a never changing buffet buffet

06. MAYUMI: [-oo:] @ @.

yeah

Yeah

07. mochi- @ @[ @ @ ]

of course
08. MIHOKO: [[@@ (.hhh))] atchi to dotchi ga oishii ka na::?

That and which NOM good Q IEP

That and I wonder what else are good

09. MAYUMI: (.hhh)

10. MIHOKO: moo sore de wakaru yo na. [@ @]

EMP that by know IEP IEP

That is how you know

11. MAYUMI: [(hhx)@ @] @ @ @

12. moo kura beyoo ga nai ne?

EMP compare way to NOM have:NEG IEP

There is no way to compare.

13. onaji da ne? @ @ [@ @ ]

same PRED IEP

It is all the same.

14. MIHOKO:

[.hhh] u::n. <@ mazui tte [[kanji.@>@@ @ @]]

yeah tastes bad QOUT feeling

Yeah. It’s like bad.

15. MAYUMI: [[mazui tte kanji. @ @ @]]

tastes bad QOUT feeling

It’s like bad.

As Mihoko utters “mazui tte kanji” in line 14, Mayumi predicts what Mihoko is going to say and interjects in line 15 with the exact same utterance after Mihoko’s “tte”. Similar to the
previous example of repetition, Mayumi makes an identical utterance to show that her feelings are mutual. It is a means employed to express her agreement. However, unlike the first two examples, the second speaker does not wait until the first speaker is finished to express that agreement. Rather, once she predicts what is going to be said, she immediately interjects by repeating the utterance to demonstrate both her understanding and agreement with her co-complainers’s feelings.

In the above three examples, the repeated portions of the conversation stood alone. That is, they were isolated and not interspersed among other parts of the conversation. Complainers may also repeat the same words and phrases throughout the conversation. When this occurs, the repeated words and phrases become a sort of catchword or catchphrase that the co-complainers state numerous times. In the following example, the words “aikarawazu” (same as always / ever) and “kawatte inai” (doesn’t change) are continually repeated by Yooko and Eiko. I have placed arrows in lines where these two words occur. It should be noted that though these are two different phrases, they are similar in meaning. Thus, they express the same idea.

Example 80 (CHJ 2237)

01. YOOKO: doo datta?
   how PRED:PAST
   *How was it?*

02. genki soo? @@ [@<@ XXXX @>@ @]  
   well EVD
   *Does he seem well?*

→03. EIKO: [@@<@ °aikawarazu tsutte ii.° Aikawarazu. @>]
   same as ever QOUT:say:MOD same as ever
   *I guess you can say he is the same as ever. He is the same as ever*
04. YOOKO:  ee?
   INJ
   Huh?

→05. EIKO:  <@ aikawarazu sukebe jijii dashite iru.@ > (.hx)
   still perverted old geezer present:ASP
he is still acting like the same perverted old geezer

06. YOOKO:  soo na no:[::: hontoo ]ni.
   Right PRED SE true ADV
   He truly is.

07. EIKO:  [iya chot-]
   INJ INJ
   unbelievable

08. YOOKO:  nanka nee,
   INJ IEP
   Like

09. Nijuugosai gurai no josee to kekkon shitai toka ne,
   twenty five years old around GEN girl with marry:DES QOUT IEP

10. wakenowakaranai koto itteru shi ne,
   ridiculous thing say and IEP
   he was say something ridiculous about how he wants to marry a girl who
   is around 25 years old..

11. EIKO:  tonde mo nai::.
   Ridiculous
   That’s ridiculous
12. YOOKO: @@@ soo na no.
   right PRED SE
   It is.

13. EIKO: u:::::n datte sa,
   yeah let me tell you IEP
   Yeah. Let me tell ya.

14. YOOKO: [un]
   BCH
   mhm

15. EIKO: [dare] dakke.
   who was it
   Who was it?

16. kiyokochan?
   Kiyoko:TIT
   Kiyoko

17. YOOKO: Kiyokochan?
   Kiyoko:TIT
   Kiyoko?

18. EIKO: un [ki]yokochan [to] shizukochan to [wata]shi de,=
   yeah Kiyoko:TIT and Shizuko:TIT and I PRED:CONJ
   Yeah. It was Kiyoko and Shizuko and I.

19. YOOKO: [a] [un] [un]
   INJ BCH BCH
20. EIKO: =u::n. ano::::.

yeah INJ

Yeah. Uh..

21. YOOKO: [hontoo* ]

really

Really?

22. EIKO: [hitori de] yappari au no wa kowai ja nai?

alone after all meet NML TOP scared TAG

It would be scary to meet him alone, right?

23. [ano otchan da to.]

that old man PRED QOUT

When you’re talking about that guy

24. YOOKO: [soo, komaru to ] omou wa::::.

right be trouble QOUT think IEP

Right. I think that would be trouble

25. [[un nanka sareru ka mo shi:]]

yeah something do:PASS might and

Yeah, you might have something done to you and

26. EIKO: [[<@un dakara ]] minna de aimashoo toka nan tsutte.@>

yeah so all together meet:VOL QOUT like say:CONJ

Yeah so I said like let’s meet him all together

27. YOOKO: <@u:n@>

BCH
28. EIKO: un sore de ichioo sa,

yeah and first IEP

Yeah and so

29. YOOKO: un

BCH

mhmm

30. EIKO: shoogatsu atta mon de,

New Years meet:PAST SE PRED:CONJ

We met for News Years and

31. YOOKO: un

BCH

mhmm

32. EIKO: nihon ryoori no yatsu chotto ne,

Japanese food GEN thing some IEP

33. YOOKO: [un]

BCH

mhmm

34. EIKO: [ka]tee ryoori mitai no tsukutte,

home cooked food EVD LNK make:CONJ

I made some Japanese food – like home cooked food and.

35. YOOKO: [[un]]

BCH

mhmm
36. EIKO: [[mote]]nashi shita n da kedo:. entertain do:PAST SE PRED but  
I entertained everyone but

37. YOOKO: ee ee [yoro]konda deshoo:. uh-huh uh-huh be happy PRED:PRES  
uh-huh uh-huh they must have been happy

38. EIKO: [un demo] yeah but yeah but

39. EIKO: un kekkoo nee. yeah quite IEP yeah quite

40. un BCH mhmm

41. YOOKO: [aa datte-] INJ but yeah but

42. EIKO: [demo ] kiyokochan ga- but Kiyoko:TIT NOM  
but when Kiyoko

43. aa chigau kensan kaeru toki ni, INJ be wrong Ken:TIT go home when  
I mean when Ken was going home
44. kiyokochan no yoko o sa,

Kiyoko:TIT GEN side ACC IEP

45. kusuguttari nan ka shitete.

tickle:TARI and the like do:ASP:CONJ

he was tickling Kiyoko’s side and stuff like that and

→46. YOOKO: [mata aikawarazu.] [[un]]

still same as always BCH

he is still the same as always mhmm

→47. EIKO: [<Q aa! kimi wa aikawarazu ku[[su]]guttagariya na n da ne Q>

oh you TOP still tickler PRED SE PRED IEP

48. mitai na kanji de.

like PRED feeling PRED:CONJ

it was like ‘oh you still wanting to tickle as always”

49. YOOKO: [hen na hito.]

strange PRED person

He is a strange person

→50. EIKO: [<Q kawattenai ] na kono ojisan Q> to omotta=

change:ASP:NEG IEP this middle-aged man QOUT think:PAST SE

51. [[mo@@@@@@@@]]

SE

I thought “this (middle-aged) guy hasn’t changed at all, has he.

→52. YOOKO: [[kawattenai yo nanka.]]

change:ASP:NEG IEP EMP
He hasn't changed.

53. EIKO: [[[(.hhh) aaa]]]  

    INJ

    ahh

54. YOOKO: [[[nanka ne.,]]]  

    EMP    IEP

    Like

→55. nihon de mo aikawarazu warui jooku banban tobashiteru tte kanji.  

    Japan LOC too still bad joke crack:ASP QOUT feeling

    In Japan too, he’s like constantly telling bad jokes.

56. EIKO: uso. @@

    lie

    You’re kidding me

57. YOOKO: minna wakattenai.  

    everyone understand:NEG

    No one gets him

58. Nani kono hito tte kanji de, @@ @@@[@ @@ @ ]@ @=

    what this person QOUT feeling PRED:CONJ

    They’re like what is with this person.

59. EIKO: [ @@u:::::n]  

    BCH

    mhmm

60. YOOKO: soo na no.  

    right PRED SE
Eiko uses the phrase ‘aikawarazu’ to start out her complaint in lines 3 and 5. Although this is the first thing she states, the fact that he does not change is not the crux of her complaint. Her true contention is his inappropriate behavior. She uses this word three times in the beginning of her complaint in lines 3 and 5 and a fourth time in line 46. Yooko, for her part, also uses the word ‘aikawarazu’ in line 47 which overlaps with Eiko’s speech in line 46. Yooko’s repetition of Eiko’s words expresses her agreement of Eiko’s negative characterization of the man. Then, in line 50, Eiko utters the analogous phrase ‘kawattenai.’ She is once again reinforcing the concept that he never changes. Yooko once again reiterates Eiko’s speech by employing both the phrases “kawattenai” and “aikarawazu” lines 52 and 55 respectively. Thus, in this complaint both speakers use self-repetition to emphasis their views. Furthermore, thru other repetition, Yooko conveys that Eiko has chosen word(s) that express the situation well. She is conceding that she could not have stated it better herself.

As seen, repetition plays an integral in the act of co-complaining. Other repetition allows participants to show that opinions, thoughts, feelings, etc. are in accord. This is not just agreement that the speaker’s utterance is accurate, but agreement of a mutual sentiment based on a similar experience and firsthand knowledge. Furthermore, reiteration of certain points through self-repetition may be a result of other repetition. When complainers receive validation of their talk via other repetition from their conversational partner, they may repeat the target utterance yet again in order to further highlight the mutual sentiments of the speakers. In these ways, repetition indicates rapport between complainers in co-complaints. Another way to describe the relationship between repetition and rapport is that repetition creates rapport, and rapport creates repetition. People bond when they see that someone agrees with them and shares their feeling
and / or problem, they express the bond they feel through repetition. Thus, mutually they work off of each other.

4.3.3. Humor in Co-Complaints

As a complaint is an expression of displeasure and discontent, one may expect the underlying tone and emotions expressed while complaining to be negative ones. For example, one may expect to hear anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction in a complaint. While these emotions did abound in complaints, another tone that was prevalent, particularly in co-complaints, is that of a humorous one. However, this is still humor in a negative sense. The speakers and listeners may laugh and seem to find a complaint amusing, but it is laughter of a contemptuous nature. Thus, while actually enduring the situation may not be fun, both speakers and addresses alike may find entertainment in talking about the complaint at hand. Although speakers cannot derive pleasure from the situation itself, they can derive it through ridiculing the situation and reveling in its absurdity. Furthermore, as noted by Norrick (1992), directing one’s aggression towards a third party through joking and humor can create a sense of solidarity among the speakers.

Even when the humor is not of a contemptuous nature, co-complainers can find pleasure in the fact that someone else truly comprehends their frustrations. They can relish in the fact that they are not alone in their misery and shares their feelings. This aspect of co-complaining can also lead to humor and laughter.

In my data, I found examples of co-complainers being particularly derisive and scornful when the object of their complaint was a person. When co-complaining, speakers may ridicule and belittle a third party as they join together to complain about and criticize that person. In the example below from Japanese, Mihoko and Mayumi unite in belittling a mutual acquaintance,
Cathy. The complaint sequence begins with Mayumi trying to recall Cathy’s name. From the beginning, Mayumi subtly projects her negative attitude towards Cathy. She refers to Cathy as “onna” (that woman) a slightly derogatory, shortened form of onna no hito. Furthermore, she ends this utterance with laughter, which projects that the object of discussion has a history of providing amusement. She laughs again when she ultimately recalls the woman’s name, Cathy, in line 4. Then, she laughs for a third time in line 8, when she seeks confirmation that Mihoko does not like Cathy. In her response, Mihoko not only confirms her negative sentiments for Cathy, but also expresses that her dislike is stronger than Mayumi is proposing.

Example 81a (CAF Japanese 1722)

01. MAYUMI: nan da kke? (nan da kke? anoo:. (.37) onna. @ @ @=

   what PRED Q what PRED Q INJ woman

   What was it? What was it? umm ... that woman.

02. MIHOKO: =a: onna?

   INJ women\textsuperscript{2}

   woman?

03. (.67)

04. MAYUMI: Cathy da kke.

   Cathy PRED Q

   Oh.. Cathy.

05. MIHOKO: a? u:n u:n.

   INJ BCH BCH

   Oh yeah yeah

06. MAYUMI: Cathy.

   Cathy
Cathy

07. (.61)

08. MAYUMI: mihoko [ga kirai na ] Cathy. [[ @ @ ]]

Mihoko NOM dislike IEP Cathy

You don’t like Cathy, do you Mihoko?

09. MIHOKO: [ ((mumbled speech))] [[ daikirai. ]] hate

I hate her.

In line 9, Mihoko confirms Mayumi’s statement but stating that she does not just dislike (kirai) Cathy, but actually hates (daikirai) her.

Mayumi continues with her complaint about Cathy by ridiculing her behavior in line 10. Her utterance “fuzakeru na omae. jindotte iru na yo.” is said in a self-quotative speech pattern. She is imitating herself; i.e. what she is thinking to herself when she see Cathy’s behavior and what she would actually like to say to Cathy. At the same time in which Mayumi is expressing her true thoughts about Cathy, Mihoko is simultaneously reiterating her negative feelings for Cathy in line 11. She once again states that she hates Cathy.

Example 81b

09. MIHOKO: [ ((mumbled speech))] [[ daikirai. ]] hate

I hate her.

10. MAYUMI: @ @[[< Q fuzakeru na omae.]]] jindotte iru na Q> tte kanji.= mess around NC: you boss around:ASP NC IEP QOUT feeling

It’s like “Don’t be messing around. Don’t be bossing around”
11. MIHOKO: 
[[[ daikirai. @ @ ]]]

    hate

    I hate her

12. =@ @ soo soo soo soo.=

    right right right right

    yeah yeah yeah yeah

13. MAYUMI: =°u:n.°

    BCH

    uhhuh

Despite the overlapping speech, Mihoko is able to hear Mayumi’s disparagement of Cathy. She responds to the disparagement with laughter. This laughter begins immediately after her statement of her negative feelings in line 11. She also snickers again in line 12 upon Mayumi’s completion of her self-imitation. Mihoko’s laughter indicates that she agrees with Mayumi’s assessment of Cathy’s behavior and feels the same way. She further exhibits her agreement by saying “soo” (yeah) several times. By repeating this phrase, she displays her delight that Mayumi has accurately conveyed her own personal feelings about Cathy’s conduct.

Mihoko continues to express her accord in line 14. First, she outright states her agreement with “soo da yo ne.” (that’s so true). Then, she states in line 15 that Cathy is bossing people around at this moment.

Example 81c

11. MIHOKO: 
[[[ daikirai. @ @ ]]]

    hate

    I hate her

12. =@ @ soo soo soo soo.=
13. MAYUMI:  

   $^\circ$u:n.$^\circ$

   BCH

   uhuu

14. MIHOKO:  

   soo da yo ne.

   right PRED IEP IEP

   You’ve got that right

15.  

   aitsu ga ima jindotte, [jindotte].

   she NOM now bossing around:CONJ bossing around:CONJ

   She’s bossing people around, bossing people around right now

Thus, she reiterates that “jindoru” (being bossy) is the perfect word to describe Cathy’s behavior. In this statement, Mihoko employs certain speech indicators to show derision toward Cathy and her actions. First, she derisively refers to Cathy as “aitsu.” This is a derogatory way of referring to a third person and lacks that personalization found when referring to someone by his or her actual name. Another indicator of ridicule is the repetition of jindotte. This repetition emphasizes and highlights the action and thereby reinforces its negativity. Furthermore, it reinforces that “jidoru” is an accurate depiction of Cathy’s behavior.

One more incidence of ridiculing Cathy’s behavior occurs a few seconds later in the conversation. Once again, it involves one party stating the complainable action and the other expressing agreement by also ridiculing that very same behavior. However, the speakers have reversed their roles; this time Mihoko is stating the complainable behavior and Mayumi is agreeing through repetition. In line 28, Mihoko postulates that Cathy is probably whining at this moment (Note the literal translation of her statement is “saying buu buu.” “Buu buu is an
onomatopoeic expression which indicates complaining or whining). Mihoko agrees in the next line by partially repeating the offending action in question.

Example 81d

14. MIHOKO: soo da yo ne.

Right PRED IEP IEP
You’ve got that right

15. aitsu ga ima jindotte, [jindotte].

She NOM now ASP ASP
She’s probably bossing people around right now


right PRED IEP Barry
Yeah probably. Barry (University.)

17. MIHOKO: =[hie:::::?]

18. MAYUMI: [dame ] da yo::.

bad PRED IEP
It’s so bad

19. MIHOKO: demo yokatta ne.

but good:PAST IEP
but it’s good

20. demo ((XX)) fukki [shinakute.]

but return do:NEG:CONT
but she didn’t return

21. MAYUMI: [u::n ], @ @ @ @=

311
MIHOKO: =yokatta yokatta.=
\textit{good:PAST good:PAST}
\textit{Good. Good.}

MAYUMI: =yokatta yokatta. @
\textit{good:PAST good:PAST}
\textit{Good. Good}

MIHOKO: Cathy no shita de nanka wa hataaraite irarenai [wa:: ].
\textit{Cathy GEN under LOC EMP work:ASP:POT:NEG IEP}
\textit{I can’t work under the likes of Cathy.}

MAYUMI: [joodan] ja nai [[wa.]]
\textit{joke PRED:NEG IEP}
\textit{No kidding.}

MIHOKO: [[[@]]]@

MIHOKO: (.43)

MIHOKO: (.hhh) mo\o\ buu buu itte iru yo ne.=
\textit{EMP buu buu say:ASP IEP IEP}
\textit{She is going “buu buu” ((translation: She is whining))}

MAYUMI: =buu buu.
\textit{buu buu}

\textit{buu buu}

Thus, similar to the action of \textit{“jindoru”} (being bossy) discussed in the last example, the action of \textit{“buu buu itte iru”} (whining) has become the focus of ridicule. Mihoko attributes this
complainable action to Cathy and Mayumi derisively repeats the action to show her agreement that Cathy is guilty of this action and that it is an action that deserves ridicule.

I would like to point out that in this particular case, the original complainer, Mayumi, already seems to know how the addressee feels about the subject of the complaint. This seems to be the case as Mayumi confirms that Mihoko hates Cathy and does so with confidence. Thus, both parties may have discussed the topic previously. In those cases in which the complainer possesses knowledge of the addressee’s feelings, the speaker is able to rehash the situation confident that the addressee will accept their complaint. More specifically, in this example, Mayumi is able to complain with confidence that Mihoko will appreciate her humor. As seen, not only does Mihoko accept the complaint, but she also joins Mayumi in complaining and employs humor herself.

The next example in which complainers emphasize the complainable actions of another in a humorous manner once again involves Lenore and Alina from example 19 and 78 who are criticizing a mutual acquaintance for being too obsessed about computers. Now, I will start by looking at the beginning of the complaint. While Lenore starts the criticism in line 3, Alina joins the criticism in line 6 by stating that computers are “boring.” This shows her agreement for Leonre’s characterization and she too views being passionate about computers in a negative manner. Leonre reacts to Alina’s comment by laughing.

Example 82a (SBCSAE 6)

01. LENORE: She said she wanted to go back to schoo:l o:r something
02. do something with her li::fe, or.
03. [(hhh) she's too into] computers.
04. ALINA: [(hhhhhhhhhh) (.hx) ]
05. (0.4)

06. ALINA (.hh)(.) They're boring.

07. LENORE: @ [ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ ] .

08. ALINA: [ You know. aren't they boring? They're] so boring.

09. LENORE: [(hh)]

10. ALINA: [(hh) I ]] mean it's like who care[s. No offense but I think that you can]=

11. LENORE: [ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ ]

12. ALINA: = get(.) caught up in computers like within [ what. Five weeks or something? ]

13. LENORE: [ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ .hh]=

14. LENORE: =[@ @ @ @ @ ( .hhhhhhhh)]

15. ALINA: [(hhh) (.)You gotta sit there] and-

16. ( hhbx) you- you know.

17. Oh[: you ]

18. LENORE: [ you space out ] on it.

In lines 7, 11 and 13, Leonore responds to Alina’s rant about computers being boring with laughter. Furthermore, she aids Alina in the constructing of her complaint by completing her sentence in line 18. These actions express both her appreciation and understanding of Alina’s talk.

Leonore continues to complain by stating that the acquaintance as talking about ROM and RAM. Alina humorously responds by making snoring noises in line 22.

Example 82b

19. LENOR: She's like talking about RO:M,

20. and (. ) RA:M,
21. and (.) [ you know. And she- @@ @ <@ I know. @> ]
22. ALINA: [ ((MAKING SNORING SOUND )))
23. LENOR: She’s [[ p:assionate]] about it.
24. ALINA: [[ ((hhx.)) ]]

Alina’s response negatively characterizes the action described by Leonre as boring. Thus, they are once again working together to build the complaint with Lenore stating the complainable and Alina humorously characterizing it. Furthermore, Lenore once again shows both her appreciation and understanding by laughing and saying “I know” in line 21. In short then, agreement and appreciation for the other person’s statements were an integral part of the construction of this co-complaint. The speakers expressed their appreciation for the other party’s statements in part through humor and laughter.

I would like to look at one last example in which speakers talk humorously about their complainable situation. In this example, the co-complaint centers around the topic of small kitchens as opposed to a particular person. Initially, the four Japanese involved in the conversation were talking about cooking. Toshie initiates the complaint sequence by stating that her present kitchen is small. Before she can completely finish her utterance and state the effects of having a smaller kitchen, Tsuyoshi interrupts her to show that he empathizes with her situation and understands the situation. In line 3, he complains that as a result of having a small kitchen, cooking is hard. At almost at the same time, Nishiko also joins in on the complaint by stating that having a small kitchen makes her mad.

Example 83a (Sakura 2)

01. TOSHIE: kitchen semaku natta mon de sa, ((gesturing small size of kitchen))

My kitchen is smaller than before.
02. amma-

not much

I don’t often.

03. TSUYOSHI: kitchin semaku [natte yarizurai yo ne:]

kitchen small become:CONJ do:SUF:hard IEP IEP

When your kitchen is smaller it is hard to do.

04. NISHIKO: [ sore hara tatsu. ]= ichiban .

that make mad number one

That makes me mad. More than anything.

Thus, one student begins to state a negative situation and two of the other students join the complaint before she can finish her negative statement. This shows their excitement that someone is experiencing the same frustration and understands that they are enduring. It also shows their eagerness to demonstrate that they understand the negative situation which Toshie is about to express.

At this point, we have a succession of complaints from three of the four participants. In regards to humor, it is Tsuyoshi’s complaint that draws laughter from the other participants. After Toshie reclaims her turn in line 5 and complains that she is unable to cook because of her small kitchen, Tsuyoshi takes the floor in line 7. First, he defines his emotional state by saying that he gets irritated. Then he provides the reason for his irritation; there is no space to place side dishes when cooking since his kitchen is small. Throughout his complaint, he dramatically gestures preparing food and looking for space. His dramatic gesturing and comment spark laughter and imitation gestures in the other participants.

Example 83b

05. TOSHIE: hontoo ni dekin nen tte .
You really can’t do it.

06. NISHIKO: nee. u::n.

IEP BCH

Right? Mhm.

07. TSUYOSHI: nanka moo iraira suru mon.=

EMP EMP become irritated SE

I get really irritated

08. NISHIKO: [un un un]

BCH BCH BCH

09. TSUYOSHI: ((gesturing problem. gesturing looking for space))

=[nanka koo] kotchi de [[ iroiro saido yattete,]] =

EMP like this here LOC various side do:ASP:CONJ

It’s like, you’re making various sides over here

10. TOSHIE: =[[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@]]=

11. YASAHIRO: =[[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@]]=

12. TSUYOSHI: =[[[amma koko okitai ]]]= ((gesturing problem. ))

hardly here put:DES

you want to put them here

13. TOSHIE =[[[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@]]]= (Gesturing pushing plates aside)

14. YASAHIRO: =[[[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@]]]=

15. TSUYOSHI: =[[[[no ni okenee shi mitai na.@ ]]]=((gesturing problem))

but put:POT:NEG and like IEP

but you can’t put them anywhere and
16. TOSHIE: =[[[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@ ]]]= ((gesturing problem))
17. NISHIKO: =[[[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@ ]]]=
18. TSUYOSHI: =[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@ @]=
19. TOSHIE: =[@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@ @]=
20. NISHIKO: =[nanka moo ikko hoshii tte omou mon ne.] ((gesturing pushing plates aside))

EMP more one:CLS want QOUT think SE IEP

You think, “I want one more burner.”

21. TOSHIE: kirenai shi. ((gesturing cutting))

cute:POT:NEG and

You can’t cut and

22. NISHIKO: soo soo soo ((tapping foot))

right right right

Yeah Yeah Yeah


depth-fried food can not do:NEG and IEP

You can’t make deep fried food and.

24. TSUYOSHI: u::[::: ::::n ]

BCH

mmmm

All three of the other participants laugh as Tsuyoshi is making his comment. Furthermore, Toshie and Nishiko gesticulate the problems of having a small kitchen as well. Toshie gestures pushing plates aside. Likewise, Nishiko makes the same gesture of pushing plates aside immediately after Toshie. At the same time she says that it makes one wish that they had one more burner in line 20 (small kitchens in Japan commonly only have one burner). And finally,
in lines 21 and 23, Toshie complains that one can not cut properly or make fried food. She accompanies her complaint with imitations of cutting with a knife.

In addition to the gestures, I would also like to point out the expressions of agreement and understanding, particularly be Nishiko. In lines 6, 8 and 22 she readily affirms the complainer’s comments. The strength of her agreement can be seen in the fact that she repeats her agreement expressions in lines 8 and 22. She says “un” (mhmm) and “soo” (yeah or right) three times. As with overlap, this shows her excitement as a co-complainer that someone else has shared and understands her negative experience and her eagerness to claim that shared understanding.

Ultimately, one of the participants distances themselves from their complaint. Nishiko states that her kitchen has two burners.

Example 83c

24. TSUYOSHI: u::: :::: deceived

    BCH

    mmm

25. NISHIKO: [uchi are da yo.]

    my place that PRED IEP

    my place it- you know

    niko aru kara mada iroiro .

    two:CLS have so still various

    It has two burners so you can still do various things.

26. TSUYOSHI: ehh niko aru no?

    INJ two:CLS have SE

    It has two?
It is now clear that Nishiko’s previous statement about two burners in line was not an actual complaint about her own situation. Rather, she was demonstrating that she understands the annoyances of having a small kitchen and was adding to the potential complainables of others. By stating that her kitchen has two burners, Nishiko distinguishes herself from the other participants. Although she still suffers the nuisances of dealing with a small kitchen, her situation is better than theirs. Her statement has the effect of braggadocio and elicits expressions of jealous appreciation from Tsuyoshi and Toshie.

In short, the mentioning of a small kitchen by one speaker results in two other speakers joining in on the complaint. The three speakers then build the complaint together and express their mutual dissatisfaction of having a small kitchen. However, when expressing their complaint, they do so with laughter as opposed to true anger or irritability. They find pleasure in the fact that others are experiencing the same dilemma.
One final note I would like to make about this example is that it shows that it is not always possible to clearly distinguish between co-complaints and second complaints. On one hand, the speakers are complaining about small kitchens in general. On the other hand, at some points they are referring to their own personal problems and experiences. Thus, they move back and forth between co-complaining about a general problem that they all share and uttering second complaints in regards to their own personal experiences and frustrations. As seen then, the distinction is not always clearly defined.

In summary, complaints are generally associated with emotions such as anger and frustration. In these particular co-complaints, the complainers employed humor and elicited laughter when delineating their complaints. In all three examples, presentation played a role in the creation of this humor. In example 81, the speakers ridiculed the behavior of another and presented it in a humorous manner; e.g. by using quotative speech and by stressing that her actions are absurd. Similarly, in example 83, one of the complainers employed dramatic gestures and speech in the construction of his speech. This evoked laughter from the other participants and they too employed gestures in their own complaints. Finally, in example 82, a dramatic imitation of snoring conveyed the idea that a mutual acquaintance was boring. In these complaints then, the dramatic presentation of the complaint accounted for the humorous tone of the complaint and achieved the desired effect of laughter.

Aside from the humor, these examples offered insight in the importance of understanding in co-complaints. In these complaints, speakers conveyed that they were “having fun” doing the act of complaining. That enjoyment came in part from being able to share their frustration with someone else who can empathize. Therefore, they expressed excitement that someone else understands their talk. Furthermore, it resulted in constant displays of agreement.
and understanding as speakers aligned themselves as co-complainers and expressed their mutual accord.

Finally, I would like to raise the consideration of humor itself as a function of complaints and specifically co-complaints. Norrick (2004) argued that the tellability of familiar stories arises not from their newsworthiness but rather the humor that may be derived from co-narration. The humor that speakers employ when co-telling a story together make it an enjoyable and desirable act. Similarly, relaying information is not a primary function of co-complaining as both speakers are familiar with the complainable. Rather, in some co-complaints at least, speakers may orient towards humor when co-complaining and transform what is an unpleasant situation to one that has certain social benefits; i.e. the rapport created from co-complaining together. Humor then becomes a reason to do the act of complaining.

4.3.4. Summary of Co-complaints

In co-complaints, we see a change from the traditional roles of complainer and recipient of a complaint to two or more parties building a complaint together. Furthermore, we also see a departure from the expected expressions of anger and frustration by the complainer and offerings of sympathy by the recipient. While these emotions, may still be present, there also may exist a certain amount of pleasure obtained from sharing in the act of complaining with someone else. Speakers revel in the fact that someone shares and understands their feeling and this in turn helps to forge a common bond between the speakers. Thus, giving and receiving sympathy is not the only means by which speakers create a sense of unity. The shared understanding found in co-complaining achieves a similar effect as well.

4.4. SUMMARY OF BEYOND ONE COMPLAINER AND ONE COMPLAINT
This chapter looked at complaints that involved more than one complainer. On one hand, second complaints and co-complaints differ significantly from one another. In second complaints, the parties involved do not possess shared knowledge and thus the conversation necessarily entails imparting new information. Co-complaints, on the other hand, imply shared knowledge among the participants and while some new information may be involved, conveying that information is not the basis for the complaint. However, both types of complaints relied heavily on the other speaker for the formation of the complaint. In second complaints, speakers constructed their second complaints based on first complaints; using similar language, concepts, structure, etc. employed in the first complaint. In co-complaints, speakers work together to construct a complaints. They also used similar language and structure. While naturally all complaints to some extent depend on and are the result of collaboration of both speakers, the interdependence of the speaker is even more prevalent in the case of second complaints and co-complaints.
5. FUNCTIONS OF COMPLAINTS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Indirect complaints differ from direct complaints in their function. As the offender is present in direct complaints, by expressing their dissatisfaction, complainers may effect a change in their situation. With indirect complaints, speakers do not maintain an expectation that they will alter a situation by complaining. This is not only because the offender is not present, but also because indirect complaints include situations that interlocutors cannot alter or change as well. For example, one may complain about unalterable circumstances such as the weather or a losing sports team. This raises the question of what is the function of indirect complaints. What do complainers hope to achieve if the status quo will remain unaffected irrespective of the complaint?

Innumerable reasons exist to why people complain. One rather obvious reason is to vent frustrations. In previous studies, researchers have discussed the therapeutic nature of complaints. In reference to mesibot kiturim, Israeli ‘gripping parties’, Katriel (1985) stated that, “Most informants noted that the function of griping is to relieve pent-up tensions and frustrations (372).” Informants in Boxer’s (1993a) study also cited various functions of indirect complaints. While Boxer’s informants were also aware that complaining was a means of letting off steam, they unanimously mentioned that one of the goals of complaining is to seek agreement and thus forge a common bond (124-126). They particularly cited this function in conjunction with strangers, stating that people used indirect complaints to open and sustain conversations with unfamiliar people (137-138). Other miscellaneous reasons mentioned for complaining were testing the validity of a complaint and as a means of leaking the complaint to the offending party. Finally, indirect complaints are a means by which speakers may obtain advice and thereby solve
a problem. Thus, advice is not merely a response to complaints arbitrarily offered by addresses, but a function of complaints actively sought by complainers in an attempt to rectify a situation.

All of the aforementioned seem to be readily acknowledged and easily recognizable functions of complaints. In this section, I would like to look at less apparent outcomes realized through indirect complaints. While I accept venting and seeking rapport as common functions of complaints, I also maintain that complaints accomplish less obvious tasks as well. I will discuss the work done via complaints beyond just the expression of grievances.

5.2. COMPLAINTS AS EXPLANATIONS

Speakers frequently provide explanations for behavior in situations where one’s actions may be judged to be outside the confines of “normal.” That is, perhaps the speaker is doing something that they would not typically do. Or the maybe their conduct could be regarded as inappropriate or rude. Similarly they may be performing a face-threatening act. When a speaker’s comportment may be considered out of the ordinary, explaining that comportment becomes relevant. Furthermore, in my data, I found complaints in the context of explaining and justifying behavior. That is, speakers used indirect complaints as reasons for performing or having performed a particular action. Likewise, they used complaints as reasons for not performing actions as well. In such examples, complaining seems to be incidental to giving credence to one’s behavior. I will start out by looking at seemingly simple and straightforward examples, and then move on to more complex examples.

For the first two examples, I have chosen two brief examples; one from English and one from Japanese. In example 84 below, Elaine uses a mild complaint about the weather to explain why she is going inside.

Example 84 (SBCSAE 32)
01. ELAINE: I'm gonna go back in.
02. be [cause it's chilly.]
03. TOM: [alright.]

Elaine’s expression of discomfort is secondary to the announcement that she is going inside. The complaint is more about providing an account for leaving the social interaction than about complaining about the uncomfortable weather.

The following is a similar example from Japanese in which a speaker uses a complaint as an explanation for their actions. A daughter in America is talking to her mother in Japan. As they are conversing, the mother realizes that it must be the middle of the night in America. In line 1, she attempts to confirm her realization. The daughter confirms the mother’s statement and then utters a complaint.

Example 85 (CHJ 2206)

01. MOTHER: nee ima yonaka deshoo?
    **IEP now middle of night TAG**
    *Hey, it is the middle of the night for you now isn’t it*

02. DAUGHTER: ima yonaka da yo.
    **now middle of night PRED IEP**
    *Yeah it’s the middle of the night now*

03. MOTHER: [ un ]
    **BCH**
    *mhmm*

04. DAUGHTER: [datte] nemurenai n da mon.
    **but sleep:POT:NEG SE PRED SE**
    *but I can’t sleep*
The underlying implication of the mother’s statement is that the daughter should be sleeping as it is late at night. Thus, the daughter hears the statement as not only asking what time of day it is, but also as questioning her as to why she is calling at this hour. The daughter responds to the mother’s query by complaining that she cannot sleep due to jet lag. Thus, similar to example 84, the complaint is more about providing an account for why she is awake as opposed to complaining about her inability to sleep.

The above are fairly simple and straightforward examples of a complaint functioning as an explanation. Obviously, such examples can be more elaborate and complicated. I will now turn to look at longer, more complex examples.

This next begins with a mother assuming that her daughter wears make-up. When the daughter responds that she does not in line 5, her mother asks, “you don’t wear make up.” in lines 6 and 8.

Example 86a (CHJ 1608)

01. MOTHER: anta ima nani o tsukatte iru no?

   you now what ACC use:ASP SE

   What are you using now?

02. KAORI: hun?

   INJ

   Huh?

03. MOTHER: nan no keshoohin tsukatte iru no?

   what GEN make-up use:ASP SE
What make-up are you using now?

04. KAORI: ima?

now

Now?

05. tsukatte inai?

use:ASP:NEG

I’m not using any.

06. MOTHER: keshoo o shite nai no? {voice sounds far away}

make-up ACC do:ASP:NEG SE

You don’t wear make-up?

07. KAORI: un?

BCH

hmm?

08. MOTHER: keshoo o shite inai no?

make-up ACC do:ASP:NEG SE

You do not wear make-up?

09. KAORI: shitenai yo.

do:ASP:NEG IEP

I don’t wear it.

The mother asks this question twice as the first time the daughter, Kaori, had difficulty in hearing the question. As the daughter has already stated that she does not wear cosmetics, the utterance is not a true question that requires a yes or no answer. Rather, it is a rhetorical question which both expresses the mother’s surprise and which requests clarification as to why she does not wear make-up. However, Kaori does not offer an explanation. Rather she just confirms that she
does not wear make-up in line 9. Her mother responds by making an assumption and supplying a presumed reason for why the daughter does not wear-up. She states “iya da.” (you don’t like it) in line 10.

Example 106b

09. KAORI: shitenai yo  
    do:ASP:NEG IEP  
    I don’t wear it.

10. MOTHER: iya da.  
    dislike PRED  
    You don’t like it.

11. KAORI: un.  
    BCH  
    uh-uh

12. MOTHER: aa soo*  
    INJ right  
    Oh, I see

13. KAORI: datte mendookusai mon.  
    EMP annoying SE  
    It’s a pain

Again, in line 11 the daughter simply confirms her mother’s assumption and does not attempt to provide any reason or insight as to why she chooses not to wear make-up. The mother’s response of “aa soo” (oh, I see) with exaggerated rising and then following intonation shows that while the mother mentally understands her daughter’s reasoning and thus her choice, she is still slightly surprised at her daughter’s personal preference. In reaction to her mother’s
response, the daughter becomes more vocal and detailed in providing a reason for her actions. Her mother has already suggested previously that wearing cosmetics may not be very pleasant. Seizing upon this idea, the daughter complains that the process of applying make-up is a pain in line 13. This complaint is marked by the conjunction *datte* and the particle *mon*. Speakers frequently pair *datte* and *mon* together when offering an explanation. *Datte* has the dual meaning of “because” and “but” and is used to signify that one is going to provide a reason. In particularly, interlocutors employ this conjunction when providing an explanation for a stance that stands in contrast / opposition with another. Thus, in this case it signifies that the daughter is about to supply a defense against her mother’s surprise by offering an explanation as to why she does not wear make-up. Likewise, speakers also use *mon* (because) in the contexts of asserting a complaint. Thus, the daughter characterizes make-up as bothersome and uses this as a defense for her actions. She employs a complaint as an explanation.

In example 86 above, the mother was persistent in trying to receive an answer as to why her daughter does not wear make-up. The daughter, on the other hand, is short on her justification. Now, I will at an example in which the complainer is much more forthcoming in their explanation. While, unlike the mother above, the addressee of the complaint is not demanding an explanation, the speaker still provides an involved account in the form of a complaint.

Below, a mother asks her son, Yuuji, how he did on a test. The manner in which he replies displays his reluctance to answer the question.

Example 87a (CAF Japanese 1612)

01. MOTHER: a: doo?

    INJ how

    *Oh yeah. How was it?*
02. anata tesuto wa doo datta?

you test TOP how PRED:PAST

How was your test?

03. YUUJI: tesuto ne:

test IEP

The test

04. MOTHER: =u:n.

BCH

mhmm

05. YUUJI: wakarana:i.

know:NEG

I don’t know

06. MOTHER: nani itte <@ iru no @> @[ @ ]

what say:ASP SE

What are you saying?

07. YUUJI: [muzukashikatta.]

difficult:PAST

It was difficult.

08. dakara kangaete iru n da:

so think:ASP SE PRED

so I am thinking

09. MOTHER: =a:=

INJ

ahh.
10. **YUUJI:** moshika shitara <E score E> mo yoku nakatta kamo tte.

   *possibly score too good:NEG:PAST may QOUT*

   *My score may possibly not be good*

   While he does ultimately respond that he thinks that he did not perform well on the test, he does not admit this immediately. First, in line 3, he repeats the topic of the question “tesuto” (test) followed by the particle “ne.” In essence, he uses this technique as a means of delaying an answer that is truly responsive to the question. Then, in line 5, he gives a slightly more responsive answer as he says ‘I don’t know.’ However, this answer is also not satisfactory to the mother as she responds to the answer with ‘what are you saying’ in line 6. Finally, in line 10, Yuuji states that he thinks that he did not score well.

   Not doing well on a test is a type of situation that requires an explanation or an account of one’s poor performance. Yuuji does this by attributing his less than satisfactory performance on the test to his poor physical condition.

**Example 87b**

10. **YUUJI:** moshika shitara <E score E> mo yoku nakatta kamo tte.

   *possibly score too good:NEG:PAST may QOUT*

   *My score may possibly not be good*

11. **MOTHER:** [<E soory E>]

12. **YUUJI:** [taichoo] yoku nakatta n da: asa.

   *physical condition good:NEG:PAST SE PRED morning*

   *My physical condition was not good. In the morning*

13. **MOTHER:** a:=

   *INJ*

   ahh.
14. YUUJI: =kinoo no asa:
yesterday GEN morning

Yesterday morning

15. MOTHER: un.

BCH

mhmm

16. (0.4)

17. YUUJI: anoo: nani tabeta no ka shiranai kedo.

INJ what eat:PAST SE Q know:NEG but

aaahh .. I don’t know what I ate but

18. MOTHER: un.=

BCH

mhmm

19. YUUJI: =moshika shitara <E chikin E> ga kusa-

maybe chicken NOM spoiled

maybe the chicken was spoi-

20. are: warukatta no ka shiranai kedo:

that bad:PAST SE Q know:NEG but

I don’t know if it was bad but

21. MOTHER: [u:n.]

BCH

mhmm


diarrhea PRED become ASP:CONJ
I ended up with diarrhea

23. MOTHER: u:n.=

BCH

mhmm

24. YUUJI: =shiken chuu onaka itakute sa:.  

exam during stomach hurt:CONJ IEP

During the exam my stomach hurt

25. MOTHER: u:n.

BCH

mhmm

26. YUUJI: moo zenzen ochitsukinakatta kara:.

EMP not at all relax NEG:PAST so

I didn’t relax at all.

In lines 12-26, he complains that he did not feel well during the examination. In particularly, his stomach hurt and he was suffering from diarrhea. While talking about one’s poor physical condition is a means by which one expresses their discomfort or pain and receives sympathy in return, in this particular example it is first and foremost a defense of his poor performance on the examination. The indirect complaint is a justification that takes the culpability away from the complainer and places it somewhere else.

In this section, I looked at how indirect complaints functioned as a means which speakers explain and justify their conduct. In three of these four examples, interlocutors proffered avoidance of discomfort, displeasure, dissatisfaction, etc, to account for their actions. Similarly, as seen in example 87, speakers may cite discomfort, displeasure, dissatisfaction etc, to account for a lack of achievement and to provide a reason for why they were unable to perform a certain
task successfully. The one common thread that appeared to run threw all these indirect complaints is that explaining one’s behavior seemed to be paramount to expressing one’s negative feelings.

5.3. COMPLAINTS AS A DEFENSE

Speakers may also use indirect complaints as a defense in response to being verbally charged with an offense and criticized. In three of the four examples I am about to discuss, the theme of providing an explanation continues. That is, once again the speaker is performing an atypical or untoward action. However, this time, another party has clearly deemed their actions as out of the ordinary. Thus, explaining one’s behavior becomes even more relevant. By offering an explanation for one’s actions in the form of an indirect complaint, they are also providing a defense for those same actions. In short then, there is some degree of continuity between the previous examples and the upcoming examples. However, regardless of whether or not these indirect complaints are acting as explanations, they are all a response to being censured by their conversational partner.

In example 88, Kaori and her mother, who is in America, are talking about their dog Hana. When the mother asks her daughter if she has been walking the dog, Kaori replies that she only does it about once a week. The mother then rebukes her daughter for neglecting the dog. In line 5, the mother characterizes the dog as “a poor thing” due to her daughter’s neglectful care. She also reminds Kaori how much the dog enjoyed going for walks in line 7. Kaori responds by defending herself with an indirect complaint.

Example 88a (CHJ 1608)

01. MOTHER:  anoo sanpoo ni wa tsuretetten no?
   INJ walk GOAL TOP take:ASP SE
   Are you taking him/her on walks?
02. KAORI: tama:: ni.
sometimes

03. MOTHER: saikin ikanai no?
recently go:NEG SE
You haven’t gone recently?

04. KAORI: sonna- isshuukan ikkai iku ka ikan ka gurai da ne.
that kind of one week once go Q go:NEG Q about PRED IEP
I go about once a week or something like that

05. MOTHER: kawaiisoo ni.
poor thing

06. KAORI: @@@@@

07. MOTHER: anna ni yorokonde iku no ni.
so to be happy go although
Even though he/she was so happy to go

08. KAORI: datte* mendookusai mon.
but a pain EMP
but it’s a pain

Kaori responds to her mother’s criticism in line 8 by complaining that walking the dog is a pain. Incidentally, this utterance follows verbatim the explanation / indirect complaint seen in example 86, line 13. The use of “datte” and “mon” is even more relevant in this instance as they do not just indicate that the speaker is offering an explanation, but that they are making an excuse in response to being rebuked. Thus, they reflect that the daughter is attempting to justify her
actions. The mother does not passively accept her daughter’s complaint as a legitimate defense. In lines 9 and 10, the mother reminds Kaori of how she used to be more attentive to the dog’s needs. Kaori responds by becoming more specific about her complaint. In lines 12 and 14 she states that walking the dog is time consuming and that she has other tasks to do besides walk the dog, specifically to make dinner.

Example 88b

08. KAORI:   da:tte* mendookusai mon.
               but a pain EMP
               but it’s a pain

09.   (0.6)

10. MOTHER:   soo iu koto o iu hito datta?
               that kind of thing ACC say person PRED:PAST
               I don’t remember you being a person who says that kind of thing

11.   hanachan no tame ni mainichi itteta ja nai.
               Hana:TIT GEN for everyday go:ASP TAG
               Didn’t you use to go everyday for Hana’s sake

12. KAORI:   datte kaette kite gohan mo tsukuranakya ikan no ni.
               but return come:CONJ dinner also make:MOD even though
               But I come home and I have to make dinner

13. MOTHER:   soo ka.
               right Q
               I see

14. KAORI:   itte kaeru dake de sanjuppun chikaku kakaru ken ne?
               go come back just thirty minutes nearly take IEP IEP
Once again, she precedes her excuse with “datte.” The “no ni” (although) in this utterance reflects the undesirability of the expectation that she walk the dog given the fact that she has to make dinner. At this point, the mother only offers a limited response in line 13 by saying “soo ka” (I see). This minimal response conveys that she has heard her daughter’s comment, but at the same time remains noncommittal in her acceptance of it as an excuse. The daughter continues with the complaint by framing walking the dog as inconvenient and time-consuming as it will take at least 30 minutes. In summary, the daughter provides an indirect complaint as a justification for not walking the dog.

The following example is from the same conversation as example 88 above. This time the mother asks about the condition of the garden. The daughter’s repetition of the word “niwa” (garden) without giving an immediate relevant answer suggests that the topic of the garden is problematic (Schegloff 2004). The mother then surmises that the garden has become overgrown with weeds in her absence. When the daughter confirms her mother’s conjecture, the participants break down in laughter. The mother then expresses her stance that this is not good. However, she expresses this stance with laughter, which suggests that she has resigned herself to the situation. At this point, the daughter defends herself for the condition of the garden with an indirect complaint in line 8.

Example 89 (CHJ 1608)

01. MOTHER: un. niwa no hoo wa doo?

mhmm garden GEN side TOP how

mhmm. How is the garden?

02. KAORI: niwa?

garden
The garden?

03. MOTHER: kusa booboo?
   weeds
   full of weeds?

04. KAORI: un.
   BCH
   mhmm

05. MOTHER: @@@[@@ @][@ @@@(xhh)

06. KAORI: [@@ @]

07. MOTHER: aa komatta mon da ne.
   INJ be a problem:PAST SE PRED IEP
   oh that’s not good

08. KAORI: datte ka ni tabewareru mon.
   but mosquitoes DAT eat:PASS SE
   but I get eaten by mosquitoes

09. MOTHER: mada ka ga iru ne?
   still mosquitoes NOM there are IEP
   There are still mosquitoes huh?

10. KAORI: ipppai iru yo.
   lots of there are IEP
   There are lots of them

The daughter justifies that fact that she does not take care of the garden by whining that mosquitoes will bite her. As in example 108, the daughter one again employs “datte” and “mon”
in the context of providing an excuse for one’s actions. Furthermore, she once again employs an indirect complaint as a defense.

Similar to the example 88, in the next example Joanne, Lenore and Ken are also talking about the care of a pet. However, in this instance the animal in question is a turtle as opposed to a dog. Joann and Lenore reproach Ken for making what they judge to be a callous comment. As in the example above, the speaker defends himself against the rebuke by employing the complaint.

When Ken comments in lines 5 and 6 that he will give his turtle a swift kick in the river if it grows any larger, both conversational participants respond negatively to Ken’s comment. Lenor expresses his doubt about the sincerity or Ken’s intention in lines 7 and 9. He does not believe that Ken will actually kick his turtle into a river. Joanne, expresses her indignation that Ken would propose such an action by simply uttering Ken’s name in line 8. Uttering a person’s name when that person has said something deemed as unacceptable is a means of expressing one’s disapproval towards their comment. Ken defends his comment with an indirect complaint.

Example 90 (SBCSAE 15)

01. JOANN: (.hh) What are you gonna do when it gets this big? You're gonna have to like
02. transfer it to a bathtub. (0.2) [ You're gonna have to have ] a. like an old-
03. KEN: [ Mm: ]
04. JOANN: Old bathtubs aren't hard- [[ aren't hard to find.]] [[[ (.hh) ]]]
05. KEN: [[ ah p- (0.2) ]] [[[ I give her]]] a qu- swift kick
06. into the LA river at that point.
07. LENORE: tsk Oh come [ now.]
08. JOANN: [ Ke:: n. ]
In line 12, Ken complains about the amount of food that the turtle consumes. In line 14, Joann agrees with Ken’s comment. Thus, the complaint ends with Joanne conceding that his complaint is accurate and that he does have a valid point.

I would like to look at one last example in which the speaker uses a complaint to defend their actions. Again, one party is faulting the other party, but the reproach is not as direct or harsh as the previous two examples. This conversation is between two Japanese female friends: Keiko and Satoko. Satoko asks Keiko, who is residing in the United States, when she plans to return home to Japan. Keiko answers in a vague and evasive manner. This indicates her reluctance to answer the question truthfully.

Example 91a (CHJ 2199)

01. SATOKO: sore de,

and

and

02. eh shooraiteki ni wa doo sun no yo Keiko.

INJ future TP TOP how do SE IEP Keiko

Oh, what are you planning to do in the future, Keiko.

03. KEIKO: shooraiteki-

future
The future?

04. eh  nani::?

INJ what

Oh. What?

05. [nihon-]

Japan

You mean Japan...

06. SATOKO: [kaette] kun no?

come back  SE

Are you coming back?

07. KEIKO: ee  izure   wa  ne*

yes someday TOP IEP

Yeah someday

08. [izure   wa-@@]

someday TOP

someday

09. SATOKO: [izure   tte.  ]

someday QOUT

What do you mean by someday?

10. dono  gurai izure   no yo.

how long  someday SE IEP

When is someday?

Keiko’s response of “izure” (someday) in lines 6 and 7 is indefinite and does not pinpoint a specific time. From Satoko’s perspective, it does not truly qualify as an answer to her
question and therefore in the next line she demands that Keiko provide a more specific answer. Despite Satoko’s persistence, Keiko once again avoids the question. This time she deflects the question with a complaint that defends her seeming lack of hurry to return home and be with her family and friends.

Example 91b

10. SATOKO: dono gurai izure [no yo.]

how long someday SE IEP

When is someday?

11. KEIKO: [datte ] minna ni moo wasurerarechatten mo::n.=

but everyone DAT EMP forget:PASS:SUF:ASP SE

But I’ve been forgotten by everyone.

12. SATOKO: =wasurerarete nai n yo.=

forget:PASS:ASP:NEG SE IEP

You haven’t been forgotten.

13. KEIKO: =honto ni?

really

Really?

14. SATOKO: u[n kinoo- ]

yeah yesterday-

Yeah yesterday-

15. KEIKO: [kaette mo-]

return:CONJ even if

even if I return-

16. u[[::n?]]
Keiko defends herself in line 11 by claiming that everyone has forgotten her. While this statement definitely stands as an example of an indirect complaint, it also could potentially be a direct complaint as well. That is, Satoko may be included as part of the group “minna” (everyone) and thus Keiko may be accusing Satoko of forgetting her as well. However, whether or not this is the case remains unclear and this utterance is ambiguous between a direct and indirect complaint. Regardless of how one classifies this complaint, it has several functions. It serves as a defense against Satoko’s implied accusation in several ways. First, Keiko uses it to justify her behavior by defining the act of returning home as pointless. Furthermore, it removes the focus away from her own actions and places them on the actions of others. In this process, her role changes from that of offender to victim and from that of accused to accuser. Now, she is the innocent party who is suffering as a result of the actions of others. Keiko’s complaint seems to achieve its desired effect. Satoko immediately sets about denying the complaint in line 12. Now she is the one, as opposed to Keiko, who is refuting accusations. She claims that Keiko has
not been forgotten and offers a phone call from a mutual friend, Rumi, as evidence. In summary, Keiko employs an indirect complaint to defend herself against the accusations of others.

In all four of these examples, the speakers responded to criticism and/or accusations from conversational partners with indirect complaints. They employed complaints as a means of justification for their professed or proposed act. Furthermore, by complaining indirectly, the speaker shifted the focus of the conversation from their offense to their troubles. The status of the speaker changes from offender to victim.

5.4. INDIRECT COMPLAINTS FUNCTIONING AS DIRECT COMPLAINTS:

THE INDIRECT / DIRECT COMPLAINT

While the distinction between direct and indirect is generally a suitable means of delineating complaints, researchers have noted that in some cases difficulties arise from trying to classify a particular complaint as one or the other (Boxer 1993a; Sacks 1992). What essentially distinguishes the two is whether or not the responsibility for the speaker’s dissatisfaction lies with the addressee. However, complaints may perform both types of functions simultaneously. That is, while stating a complaint indirectly, a speaker may also be charging the addressee for being the source of their complaint. However, the implication is indirect as opposed to direct. We already saw an example of how complaints may be ambiguous as in example 91. In this section, I will further look at indirect complaints that function as direct complaints.

As stated, in some cases whether or not the complainer is charging the addressee with an offense may be unclear and ambiguous. When the speaker’s feelings and intentions are uncertain, it becomes the listener’s task to determine what the speaker was attempting to achieve through their complaint. Therefore, an addressee may deem a complaint as direct and respond to it as such even though the complainer has phrased the complaint in an indirect manner and has
not placed culpability on the addressee. The following two examples, the first from Japanese and the second from English, demonstrate this phenomenon.

Below Kyooko is complaining to Mayumi that nobody responded to her letter and that she feels as if everyone has forgotten her. Although she phrases the complaint indirectly and does not clearly direct it towards Mayumi, Mayumi reacts as if it were a direct complaint.

Example 92 (CAF Japanese 1684)

01. KYOOKO: soo de (.hhh) watashi tegami dashita deshoo

yeah and I letter sent out:PAST TAG

Yeah and I sent out a letter, right?

02.

demo dare mo ne:,

but no one IEP

03.
nani mo henji konakatta kara: ne.=

nothing reply come:PAST so IEP

But I didn’t get a reply from anyone so

04. MAYUMI: [un.]

BCH

mhmm

05. KYOOKO: =[minna] wasurechatta no [ka na:: toka omotte:::]

Everyone forget:PAST SE Q IEP QUOT think:CONJ

I was thinking like “I wonder if everyone has forgotten me.”

06. MAYUMI: [SONNA koto nai no.]=

That kind of thing there is:NEG SE

It is nothing like that

07. KYOOKO: [(hhh)]
08. MAYUMI: =kyoochan [warui] ne:::. 
   Kyoo: TIT  bad  IEP
   Kyoo, I am so sorry (LIT: that was bad of me)

09. [[kyooko:::.]]
   Kyooko
   Kyooko

10. KYOOKO: [(.hhh) sooshitara.]]
    and then
    And then

11. kon- ni san nishuukan gurai mae ka na:::.=
    this- two three two weeks about ago Q IEP
    I think it was two or three – about two weeks ago

12. MAYUMI: =u:n.=
    BCH
    mhmm

13. KYOOKO: =yatto <@ senpai kara: @> nani ka [tegami kite:.
    finally senior from some letter come:CONJ
    A letter finally came from Senpai (my senior mentor)

Kyooko did not directly charge Mayumi with the transgression of not replying to her letter and forgetting her. Rather she phrased the culprit vaguely as “no one” in line 2 and “everyone” in line 5. Likewise, Mayumi’s immediate response does not necessarily suggest that she has heard Mayumi’s complaint as a direct one. Her statement “It is nothing like that.” in line 6 merely offers assurance that Kyooko has not been forgotten; it does not clearly include herself among the forgetters. However, in line 8, it becomes clear that Mayumi does interpret herself as being a
part of the group “no one” and “everyone,” as she apologizes; a response type that speakers typically utter in conjunction with direct complaints. She says “warui ne” (that is bad of me) which is a common expression of apology in Japanese. Thus, although complainers may not directly implicate recipients in a complaint, recipients may implicate themselves. In summary, through one complaint, the complainer both expresses her general frustration and sadness at not receiving letters, and indirectly includes the addressee as part of this group of transgressors.

In the following example, Pete and Maril as well as some others are preparing food. Pete comments line 6 that a particular item has familiar smell. Although, he does not specifically state what the smell is similar to or that it is unpleasant, Maril is evidently able to discern what he is referring to as can be seen from her response in lines 7 and 10. Initially, Maril responds to the indirect complaint by agreeing that the item has a foul smell. Then she responds as if the indirect complaint is also a direct complaint that implicates her.

Example 93 (SBCSAE 3)

01. MARIL: Would [you like to ] (0.6) string the beans?
02. PETE: [What can I do].
03. PETE: Sure.
04. (1.0)
05. ROY: ((WHISTLE. He whistles in the background from lines 5 to 9))
06. PETE: Oh X it smells like that stuff X.
07. MARIL: I know. It's kind of smelly isn't it.
08. PETE: Mhm.
09. ROY: ((WHISTLE))
10. MARIL: But I got it at a reputable market.
Maril asserts that she bought the item at a reputable market, thereby indicating she is not responsible for the smell. Thus, similar to example 92, although the complainer, Pete, did not specifically charge the addressee, Mari, with some sort of wrongdoing, she responds in a manner that accounts for the possibility that he might be.

In the above two complaints, the speaker’s charge against the addressee is subtle, indeed if it is truly a charge at all. In some cases though, it is clear that a complainer has a grievance with the listener even though they have worded their complaint indirectly as can be seen in the next three examples. The first two examples are from English while the third is from Japanese.

In the example below, certain members of a family have been arguing and bickering throughout the whole recording. In particularly, Kendra has been arguing with her mom Kitty about being unjustly grounded for an offense she claims she did not commit. In line 15, Curt directly complains to the feuding family members about the fact that their fighting is disturbing the peace. However, he does so with an indirect complaint.

Example 94 (SBCSAE 42)

01. MARLENA: MO:M SHE DIDN’T [SPEND THE NIGHT. ]
02. KITTY: [HEY STAY OUT OF IT.] (0.2) STAY OUT OF IT.
03. YOU’RE NOT INVOLVED IN THIS .
04. (0.2)
05. KENDRA: Don't bother with her.
06. CURT: ((Coughs)) (0.2) ((COUGH))
07. KENDRA: She'll just get angry.
08. (0.2)
09. KITTY YOU BEEN CAUGHT IN A LIE KENDRA,
AND THAT’S THE WHOLE THING.

THAT’S WHY YOU’RE PISSED.

(0.2)

Hey

(0.2)

It's gonna be another wonderful Saturday.

[WELL THIS MAKES UP FOR ALL] THE OTHER [LIES I DID] [N'T CATCH YOU] IN.

[[I can (.) ]] [[ tell already .]]

[[@@@]]

And I'm getting out of here.

(0.2)

@@@ @

At least you ca:n.

In line 15, Curt sarcastically states that, “It’s gonna be another wonderful Saturday.” As previously stated, speakers frequently employ sarcasm in complaints. His use of the word “wonderful” is ironic and it actually bears a negative meaning. He is implying that the day is going to be unpleasant on account of their fighting. By indirectly complaining that the day is going to be bad, he is also simultaneously complaining to Kitty and Kendra about their fighting. However, neither Kitty nor Kendra attends to the complaint. In fact, Kendra continues to argue with her daughter in the next line. Nor do they acknowledge Curt’s complaint when he states that he is going outside. That being said, Curt directly complains to his feuding family members by phrasing his complaint indirectly.
In the next example, Lori is exploring the internet on her computer while her boyfriend Jake watches. As she had previously lent her keyboard to Jake and then he returned the wrong one, she is presently using a keyboard that is not hers. In line 1, she complains, “This is not my keyboard.” As both Jake and Lori already know that she is not using her normal keyboard, this statement is superfluous and Lori is not attempting to impart this particular information to Jake. Rather the statement is a complaint expressing her frustrations and difficulties in trying to use the keyboard. She is unaccustomed to it and considers it to be unergonomic. Although she phrases the complaint indirectly about the awkwardness of the keyboard, Jake responds as if the complaint were a direct complaint directed towards him.

Example 95a

((typing))

01. LORI: whoa, this is not my keyboard, Jake:::

02. JAKE: I'm sorry.

In line 2, Jake apologizes for bringing the wrong keyboard. As stated previously, speakers typically apologize in the context of direct complaints. Lori complains indirectly again in line 4 about the confusing layout of the keyboard. Likewise, Jake once again responds as if the complaint were direct.

Example 95b

02. JAKE: I'm sorry.

03. (0.4)

04. LORI: this is very confusing.
05. (1.0)

06. JAKE: I'll grab the right one (. ) [next time. ]

07. LORI: [ yeah, dude. ] (. ) I'm all tryin' to find the arrow keys.

08. (0.6)

09. JAKE: yeah, those are really annoying arrow keys.

10. LORI: yeah dude.

11. (3.0)

12. LORI: what?

13. JAKE: I don't know, you use the arrow keys a lot.

14. LORI: yeah I do.

15. (1.0)

16. LORI: you never realize (. ) until (. ) it's gone.

In line 6, Jake responds by promising to rectify the situation; another typical response to direct complaints. In terms of word choice and content, the only indication that Lori gives throughout the conversation that she is complaining directly occurs in line 7. Her utterance “yeah dude” does indicate Jake’s responsibility for the situation. Thus, through an indirect complaint, Lori is able to perform two functions at one. She is able to simultaneously vent her frustrations about the awkwardness of the keyboard and reprimand Jake for creating the situation in the first place. Jake, for his part, responds to the direct aspect of the complaint by taking responsibility for the situation.

This third example, which is from Japanese, represents a more complex and involved example of an indirect complaint functioning as a direct complaint. Below Miyako complains that her mother is taking too long in performing her request. At first, the mother responds to her
daughter’s complaint by telling her “leave me alone.” in line three. This stands as a typical reaction to a direct complaint in which one is being verbally attacked by another. However, the mother then switches to an indirect complaint in order to rebuke her daughter for verbally attacking her and being impatient.

Example 96a (CHJ 1604)

01. MIYAKO: moo osoi yo.
   EMP slow IEP
   *You are taking too long.*

02. moo zenbu totte oite chooda:i:::
   EMP all take out AUX:DRT please
   *Take them all out already.*

03. MOTHER: urusai wa nee,
   noisy IEP IEP
   *Leave me alone.*

04. dakara ima wa ne,
   EMP now TOP IEP

05. watashi wa ne, monosogoku nijyuuyojikan neteinai de=
   I TOP IEP IEP extreme:ADV 24 hours sleep:ASP:NEG

06. hatariateiru toki mo aru n da.
   work:ASP time EMP there are SE PRED
   *Listen, right now there are times when I am working and I haven’t slept for 24 hours*

07. hataraiteinai toki gakka no junbi >shiteiru no.<
   ((last part enunciated))
When I am not working, I am preparing school lessons.

08. MIYAKO: wata[shi nante-]

 I EMP

Well I-

09. MOTHER: [ima wa] (XichibanX) isogashii jiki na no.

Now TOP most busy time PRED SE

Now is the busiest time for me

In lines 4 thru 7 and in line 9, the mother indirectly complains about how busy she is and about how much work she has to do. The mother’s statements in these lines do not consist of any transgressions performed by the daughter. However, they still carry the illocutionary force of a direct complaint and they serve to chastise the daughter for being demanding.

Interestingly, the daughter responds to the mother’s complaint with her own indirect complaint. As we saw in section 4.2, addressees of indirect complaints commonly respond to complaints with indirect complaints of their own. In this particular example, however, the daughter is responding to both the directness and the indirectness of the mother’s complaint.

Example 96b

08. MIYAKO: wata[shi nante-]

 I EMP

Well I-

09. MOTHER: [ima wa] (XichibanX) isogashii jiki na no.

Now TOP most busy time PRED SE

Now is the busiest time for me

10. MIYAKO: watashi nante konpyuutaa ruumu ka.
Well, I’m either in the computer room or

library or teacher GEN office or

the library, or the teacher’s office or…

((I’m never)) at home

So I want you to ask me these kinds of things

when I am free

I am an extremely busy person

very
very ((busy))

In lines 10 thru 12 the daughter indirectly complains about how busy she is with her schoolwork. On one hand, the tone of the daughter’s voice suggests that she knows her mother is rebuking her and has the effect of letting her mother know that she does not appreciate her reprimand. In this regard, she is responding to the direct aspect of her mother’s complaint. However, by giving her own indirect response, she is also responding to the indirect aspect of the complaint. Her words carry the connotation “I do not want to hear your complaints because I have it just as bad if not worse than you.” In short, through her complaint, the mother simultaneously vents her frustration about events not related to her daughter and rebukes her daughter for adding to her frustrations. Likewise, her daughter also manipulates the indirect / direct complaint dichotomy by giving her own indirect complaint, which allows her to both vent her own frustrations and to respond to both the direct and indirect aspects of her mother’s complaint.

Finally, I would like to point out that indirect complaints can function as direct complaints when they are uttered indirectly to a third party who is not responsible for the complaint but are meant to be overheard by the responsible party. The following two conversations from English demonstrate this phenomenon.

Recall example 94 in which Kendra is arguing with her mother Kitty about being unfairly grounded. The mother has also punished Kendra’s sister, Sabrina, for leaving the telephone in her room and has taken away her telephone privileges. Thus, the mother has disciplined both girls. In lines 6 and 7 in the example below, Gemini expresses lack of sympathy for the girls’ situation. Nonetheless, this does not deter Kendra from expressing anger about her situation and she does so by uttering a dual direct / indirect complaint.

Example 97a (SBCSAE 42)
01. KENDRA: What'd you do Sabrina?

02. (0.2)

03. SABRINA: Nothing. (0.2) I left the phone in my bedroom last night

04. and so I'm grounded from the phone.

05. (.hh) ((YAWN)) (0.2) <((YAWN)) It was [an accident. ((YAWN))]>

06. GEMINI: [ You guys are always in ]

07. trouble. What's up with [that.]

08. KENDRA: [ Mo]m's a b:itch.

In line 8, Kendra complains that, “Mom is a bitch.” She phrases the complaint indirectly in that she addressees it to Gemini and Sabrina, not the mother. This phrasing delegates the mother as the subject of the complaint, not an addressee. Furthermore, the complaint could potentially receive sympathy from its addressees, particularly from Sabrina who has also been reprimanded. This function of generating sympathy is another quality of indirect complaints. However, we find out in line 10 that the mother, Kitty, is also present in the car.

Example 97b

08. KENDRA: [ Mo]m's a b:itch.

09. ((CAR_DOOR_OPEN))

10. (0.2)

11. KITTY: Get your feet off of there.

12. (0.2)

13. Get your feet (.) off of there.

14. ((Car door closes. Car starts)

15. KENDRA: You're so stupid thinking I spent the night.
Thus, the complaint also functions as a direct complaint as Kendra intends for it to be overheard by her mother. In addition to conveying her anger indirectly to her siblings, Kendra is also expressing her angry feelings about being punished unfairly directly to her mother, the source of her anger. Incidentally, the mother does not acknowledge the direct complaint and Kendra ultimately switches from guising her complaint as an indirect one to complaining directly to her mother in line 15.

The next example also deals with the subject matter of complaining indirectly with the intent of having the guilty party overhear the complaint. However, rather than being an actual concrete example of the phenomenon, a speaker is telling an anecdote in which she performs this action. Below, Marie is relating a story involving her coworker, Cassie, and her boss, Kent. She tells her listeners about how she disapproves of some of Kent’s behavior and thus indirectly complains to her co-worker Cassie about people who behave in the same manner as Kent. As Kent is within earshot, her intent is that he will overhear the complaint and recognize himself as the protagonist. In essence then, there are two layers of complaint. Marie is relating the story to Lisa and Kevin in order to criticize Kent and complain about his behavior. On top of this, the story is about her doing a complaint act. Thus, it is a complaint within a complaint.

In her story, Marie feels that Kent is judgmental and she wanted to show him what it felt like to be the target of someone’s harsh judgment. Knowing that Kent is a former drug addict, she complains to her co-worker about drug addicts.

Example 98 (SBCSAE 36)

01. MARIE: (.hh) Well we were sitting there talking ,
02. and she's been in a center for like (. ) rehabilitation and stuff.
03. (. ) for drugs and stuff.
(.hh) and we were talking and (. I- (.)
and I told her do you get offended-
I go do you think that it no I told her,
do you think it's fair,
(.hh) that when people say,
(.) (.hh) y- you know that,
(0.2)
even (. y- y- like you were an alcoholic .
They never say you were .
You're always an alcoholic.
You're just a recovered (. alcoholic.
Do you know what I mean a recovered alcoholic .
LISA: m[hm]._
[(.hhhh) But when (. when you're a drug addict
and you don't do it anymore they say oh you've come clean.
Do you know what I mean I go.
(.hh) that really bugs me and- and- and Kent was in the back.
I was all,
(.hh) I think a person who was a drug addict _
(.) once was a drug addict.
Always is a drug addict .
I go.
they're just a recovered drug addict .
<@ And I was saying it like @> really loud.

LISA: [ Like on purpose though ?]

MARIE: [(.hhh) (.) yes] so that he would hear me.

(.)

LISA: Oh.

MARIE: And I was all,

because that's not- that's not fair I mean.

alcohol is just- (..) is a drug too.

and I was just going off,

<@ and stuff like [that.]@>

KEVIN: [ @@ ]

MARIE: <@ and she was- @>

(.) (.hh) like agreeing with me and.

(hh) and and then I was all,

(hh) [ just being real like] [[ju-]]

SKIP

MARIE: [ I was just saying like]

KEVIN: [ (. ) @ @ @ ]

MARIE: Really judgment[tal.]

KEVIN: [ @@ ]

MARIE: Do you know what I mean?

KEVIN: [(.hh)]

MARIE: [(.hh)] Just [[like.]]
LISA: [[ [ ] ] @@ @ [([@])] ]

MARIE: [[[not]]] m-

Like I didn't mean like half the things I said,

Just- just to like (. ) show him.

Do you know what I mean?

Like I go.

(.hh) God I go,

I honestly don't see how somebody could just snort something up their nose. I mean what kind of satisf:action do you get out of [that.]

[@@] @@ [@ [ @ @ @ ]]

LISA: [xhh] [[@@@@@]]@@@

MARIE: [[You know?]]

And[ [ I was just all.]]]

KEVIN: [[[ (.hhhh) ]]]

MARIE: and I was just like going on an- and saying stuff like that .

And and.

(.hh) an- and not [that I don't-]

LISA: [ What did sh]e do,

I mean that she [[ was a- ]]

MARIE: [[ She was]] just like I know .

Isn't that disgusting.

[ You know ? ]

LISA: [ Was she an ] alcoholic ?
90. Or.
91. (.h)
92. MARIE: [ I don't know really what she was.]
93. BABY: [((CRYING))] [((CRYING))] [((CRYING))].
94. LISA: [[ Awww][www]]
95. MARIE: [[[But she um-]]]
96. (.hh) but it was just rude.
97. I was just being like really judgmental like on purpose.
98. Do you know?
99. [Cause I] would never go up and say something.
100. KEVIN: [ @ ]
101. MARIE: <@ well [[ I don't ]] see how you can sniff that. @>
102. LISA: [[ Yeah. ]]
103. MARIE: Do you know what I [[[ mean?]]]
104. LISA: [[[ Yeah:]]] [[[ .(hhh) ]]]
105. KEVIN: [[[ @@ ]]][[@@@]]
106. MARIE: [[[ (.hh) ]]] I would never say something like
107. [ that but.]
108. LISA: [ Just to sh-] kinda show him how it is-
109. like.
110. (.h)
111. MARIE: Yeah.
112. LISA: [what it feels like.]
As seen, Marie utters various indirect complaints about drug abusers and their behavior. In lines 6 thru 26, she complains that although both drug abusers and alcoholics are addicts, drug abusers do not follow the same principle that alcoholics do of “once an addict always an addict.” Furthermore, she disparages the act of snorting cocaine in lines 73 through 75. Although she does not specifically mention Kent’s name, she is actually referring to him. As Kent is in the back of the store all the while she is complaining, her aim is that he will overhear the conversation. By indirectly complaining to Cassie about this kind of behavior, she is actually complaining directly to Kent about his behavior.

As seen in this section, speakers can simultaneously perform both a direct and indirect complaint with one utterance. Complainer’s can phrase direct complaints indirectly and...
circuitously charge someone with an offense. Although the speaker conducted the complaint in an indirect manner, this does negate the fact that the complaint is primarily functioning as a direct one. Furthermore, as seen in example 86, speakers can respond to both the directness and indirectness of the complaint. In summary, the indirect / direct dichotomy is not always clearly defined and can be manipulated by both the speaker and listener.

5.5. HYPOTHETICAL COMPLAINTS AND NEGOTIATION

Generally, when one thinks about complaints, they think about someone griping about an occurrence that has already transpired or a situation that is presently occurring. However, people also complain about hypothetical events that have not yet happened but may occur in the future. Gunther (1997b) discussed this phenomena and she termed complaints hypothetical complaints. In hypothetical complaints, speakers express displeasure about a prospective happening and convey their unhappiness that they may have to endure a less than pleasant situation. Of course, as the talk pertains to the future, the speaker’s complaints may never actualize. Nonetheless, they express their concerns about the possible happening to another.

Although the functions of hypothetical complaints often differ from non-hypothetical ones, the next example of a hypothetical resembles non-hypothetical complaints in that it primarily serves to express negative feelings. Even though expressing negative feelings is not the main function I am going to discuss in regards to hypothetical complaints, I would like to show it as an example of what a hypothetical complaint is. In this example, Ayumi and Nachiko are discussing Ayumi’s upcoming return to Japan. While Nachiko seems excited by her friend’s return as she tells her friend to hurry home in line 12, Ayumi does not seem so happy. Rather, she remains pessimistic about her future and voices her negative feelings. In lines 21 and 25, Ayumi states that she does not want to leave her current residence as she has many friends there.
and is living a comfortable lifestyle. Furthermore, she has a car in America, which provides her with a sense of freedom and mobility.

Example 99a (CHJ 2188)

01. NACHIKO:  

   eh rokugatsu no sa:::,  

   ah June GEN IEP  

   ah in June

02. AYUMI:

   [un ]  

   BCH  

   mhmm

03. NACHIKO:

   [nani?] do-  

   what  

   What?

04.

   hajime gor- hajime owari?.  

   beginning arou-(nd) beginning ending  

   around the begin- the beginning, the end?

05. AYUMI:

   hajime no hoo ni kaeru to omou.  

   beginning GEN side TP return QOUT think  

   I think we’ll return in the beginning

06. NACHIKO:

   un un [un]  

   BCH BCH BCH  

   mhmm mhmm mhmm

07. AYUMI:

   [un]  

   BCH  

   yeah
08. NACHIKO:

soo ka[[:::. ]] right Q

I see

09. AYUMI:

[[soo da.]] right PRED yeah

10. kaettara.

return:TEMP When I return.

11. NACHIKO:

soo da yo ne. right PRED IEP IEP yeah

12. hayaku[ kaette oide yo @ @=] hurry return come:DIRT IEP hurry up and come home

13. AYUMI: [soo:::. u::nnnn ] right BCH I know

14. NACHIKO: =[@ @ ]=

15. AYUMI: [[demo sa,]] but IEP but

16. NACHIKO: [[@ @ @ @ ]]=

17. AYUMI: [[kaeritaku nai yoo na ki mo]] suru yo:::. 
I also feel like I don’t want to go back.

18. NACHIKO: [[[[ @ @ @ ]]]

19. AYUMI: [ nan ka sa:::]

INJ IEP

It’s like

20. NACHIKO: un un [[un ]]

BCH BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm mhmm

21. AYUMI: [[kotchi]] kekkoo tomodachi mo dekita shi::: ]

here a lot friends also make:PAST and

I have made a lot of friends here and

22. NACHIKO: [un un]=

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

23. =[[[ un un ]]]

BCH BCH

mhmm mhmm

24. AYUMI: [[ nani? ]] what

what do I want to say

25. nan ka seikatsu shi- shiyasui shi:::

INJ life do do easy and

It is like easy to live and
26. NACHIKO: [un]  
   INJ  
   mhmm  

27. AYUMI: [ku]ruma mo katta yo nee?  
   car also buy:PAST IEP IEP  
   I also bought a car  

28. NACHIKO: hee[ :::::::::: ]  
   INJ  
   nice  

30. AYUMI: [de kuruma] unten shite itsu mo kaimono ni ittari:,  
   and car drive do:CONJ also shopping DIR go:TARI  
   And I am always taking my car and go shopping and  

31. [[iroiro ittete]]  
   various go:ASP:CONJ  
   and going various places  

32. NACHIKO: [[] un un un ]]  
   BCH BCH BCH  
   mhmm mhmm mhmm  

The issue of a car becomes the crux of Ayumi’s hypothetical complaint about her future life in Japan. She complains that she will no longer have a car in line 33 and further states in line 37 that the possibility of buying one seems unlikely.

Example 99b

33. AYUMI: nihon dattara mazu kuruma ga nai deshoo?  
   Japan PRED:COND first of all car NOM have:NEG TAG
When in Japan I won’t have a car right.

34. NACHIKO: un un un [un]  
BCH BCH BCH BCH  
mhmm mhmm mhmm mhmmm

35. AYUMI: [de] shoo ga nai shi::,  
and way NOM there is:NEG and  
and that's the way it is (there is no changing it) and

36. NACHIKO: [[un]]  
BCH  
mhmm

37. AYUMI: [[kit]]to kuruma mo ne kau no ga are da shi::,  
most likely car also IEP buy NML NOM that PRED and  
And buying a car is you know and

38. NACHIKO: un[:: ]  
BCH  
mhmm

39. AYUMI: [so]re de::, (1.0) kitto:: (1.0) ((sigh))  
and then most likely  
And then most likely

Ayumi’s use of the word “kitto” (most likely) marks her lament as hypothetical and uncertain. It indicates that while she feels the portrayed situation will probably occur, it is not 100% definite.

Initially, it seems that Ayumi is going to build on her complaint in line 39. She starts to say “sore de” (on top of that) and then pauses as if she is searching for the proper words to say.
Then, she once again says “kitto” (most likely) which projects that she is once again going to state a hypothetical future situation. However, instead of continuing, she pauses once again and sighs. Thus, while the sighing does express her pessimism about her future situation her hypothetical complaint remains unexpressed.

The function of this futuristic complaint mirrors other non-hypothetical complaints that I have shown throughout this dissertation in that it is primarily concerned with venting negative feelings. Ayumi is expressing her apprehension about returning to Japan. The function of hypothetical complaints, however, may extend beyond this. In my data, hypothetical complaints appeared in situations in which the interlocutors were trying to negotiate future activities. Indirect complaints played a role in this negotiation process. Speakers illustrated possible negative consequences if one future path were to be chosen over another.

The following conversation continues from the conversation found in example 15. Recall that two college students, Brianne and Addie, are talking about an upcoming wedding. Brianne’s duties as a member of the wedding party obligate her to be present at the wedding. Addie on the other hand is uncertain as to whether or not she wants to attend. Brianne uses a hypothetical direct complaint and then a hypothetical indirect complaint as a means of persuading Addie to attend the wedding.

Example 100a (SCoSCE Amy)

01. ADDIE: I got invited.
02. BRIANNE: did [you? good. ] @@ @ good.
03    ADDIE: [I got invited]
04. ADDIE: you want me to go?
05. BRIANNE : yes. [ @@ @@@@@ ]
06. ADDIE: [ @@ @@ @@ @ ] my mum’s like-
07 my mum and dad got invited too.
08. BRIANNE: that's nice.
09. ADDIE: she said <Q why don’t you go. Q>
10. <Q maybe Brianne can talk and you’ll go Q>
11. BRIANNE: go.
12. ADDIE: @@
13. BRIANNE: if you don’t go I’ll be mad.
14. I mean-
15. ADDIE: you will?
16. BRIANNE: yes.
17. ADDIE: oh no.
18. BRIANNE: @@
19. ADDIE: @@
20. BRIANNE: go.
22. BRIANNE: I don’t want to be stuck there like talking with Jennifer.
23 so @@ [@ @ ].

In line 13, Brianne states that she will be mad if Addie does not go. Had this statement not been hypothetical, and if Addie actually did not go to the wedding, Brianne might have uttered a direct complaint and said something to the effect of “I’m mad cause you didn’t go.” However, as the events have not yet happened, she can only utter the statement as a hypothetical
complaint as opposed to an actual direct complaint. Similarly, in line 22, Brianne utters a hypothetical indirect complaint. She states that she does not want to be stuck at the wedding presumably with no one to talk to but Jennifer. Again, had the situation actually transpired, Brianne might have said an indirect complaint such as “I was stuck there talking with Jennifer.”

As the conversation continues, the speakers utter more complaints that are hypothetical. Brianne relates that Moira, a guest at the wedding who might provide companionship for Brianne, will probably be leaving early. Brianne does not clearly state her intention for relaying this information. Rather, she just ends the telling with “so” in line 22. At this point, Addie completes Brianne’s utterance in line 22 with a hypothetical complaint. She provides what she believes Brianne intentions were for relaying this information; to complain that she will be alone at the wedding if Addie does not come.

Example 100b

01. ADDIE: well(.) if you want me to come home then I'll [probably come home.]
02. BRIANNE: [yes (. ) do it.]
03.
04. ADDIE: @@[@@@@]
05. BRIANNE: [@@@@] I’m like- ((sigh)) Cause Moira is gonna probably leave early.
06. ADDIE: uhhuh.
07. BRIANNE: leave the reception early.
08. ADDIE: probably.
09. BRIANNE: she- (. ) they uhm (0.2) I think they said they rented a room or house in the territory
10.
11. ADDIE: oh yeah?
12. BRIANNE: yeah.
13. 
14. BRIANNE: mhm mhm.
15. ADDIE: ah hah.
16. BRIANNE: something like that.
17. ADDIE: something like that.
18. BRIANNE: and that they were leaving the next day.
19. ADDIE: uhhuh.
20. BRIANNE: for the airport. [ @@@ ]
21. ADDIE: [oh yeah].
22. BRIANNE: so:::
23. ADDIE: so you're gonna get stuck.
24. BRIANNE: I'll be like u:::h. [@ @:].
25. ADDIE: [nothing] to do.
26. 
27. ADDIE: yeah.
28. 
29. ADDIE: I was like <Q we:::ll. Q>
30. BRIANNE: oh please go.
31. ADDIE: @@ if you want me to.
32. BRIANNE: yeah.

In line 23, Add repeats Brianne’s utterance “so” and completes the utterance with the hypothetical complaint “you’re gonna get stuck.” Brianne affirms the accuracy of Addie’s
completion in line 24 by providing her own similar hypothetical indirect complaint “I’ll be like u:h.” Addie adds another potential complaint on Brianne’s behalf in line 25 by uttering “nothing to do.” Thus, both Brianne and Addie construct potential negative outcomes if Addie does not attend the wedding.

In summary, rather than a means of venting existing frustrations, the speaker is employing complaints as a means of persuasion. Brianne utters these complaints in an effort to convince Addie to come to the wedding. By uttering a potential undesirable outcome, Brianne is trying to get Addie to behave in a manner that suits her wishes. Furthermore, Addie utters hypothetical complaints on Brianne’s behalf to demonstrate that she understands the underlying import of her talk. Thus, the complainer utters the hypothetical indirect complaints primarily as a means of preventing the actualization of the hypothetical situation.

In the next conversation, two college students at Carnegie Mellon University are discussing when they will go to Minneapolis for their summer internships. As their internships start at different times, they are trying to reach an agreement on a date that suits them both. Lori’s program starts on June 16th. Jake’s schedule, on the other hand, is more flexible, though he would ultimately like to start his work at the end of May. Lori’s statement that she has four and a half weeks between the end of school on May 13th and when her program starts in June is actually a hypothetical indirect complaint. She is complaining that she does not want to go early and spend her free time in Minneapolis. Jake responds to this complaint with a hypothetical indirect complaint of his own.

Example 101a

01. JAKE: okay, ummmm.

02. LORI: there's a lot of weeks in here, dude.
one week, two weeks..

(0.4)

JAKE: yeah, that's like a month.

(0.4)

LORI: three weeks, [four weeks]...

JAKE: [yeah that's-] that's- (. ) four weeks,

[[ five weeks. ]]

LORI: [[that's like (. ) four and a half weeks.]]

JAKE: yeah. so that's (. ) yeah I'm not gonna not work for a month.

LORI: yeah.

(0.4)

JAKE: that would suck.

(2.0)

JAKE: um.

LORI: I'm not gonna sit in Minneapolis (0.2) looking at your prett-

pretty face for a month though.

JAKE: so you could play in Minneapolis.

LORI: play in Minneapolis, by myself.

In line 10, Lori emphasizes that if they go on the day that Jake suggests, she will have four and a half weeks before her program starts. Jake responds to Lori’s statement in line 11 by refusing to start work later. This response shows that Jake recognizes Lori’s statement about having four and a half weeks before her program starts as a complaint that she does not want to spend her free time in Minneapolis. He then strengthens his refusal in line 14, by uttering the hypothetical
complaint that it would suck if he were to delay the start of his internship. Lori responds to Jake’s refusal with a refusal of her own. She refuses to spend the month of her free time in Minneapolis in lines 17 and 18. Jake responds to her refusal with a common response to indirect complaints in line 19; i.e. he tries to find a positive in the situation. He says that it will not be so bad because she can play in Minneapolis. Lori rejects this suggestion in line 20. She repeats Jake’s suggestion but adds “by myself.” The emphasis of the statement is on “by myself” and it conveys the message that the idea of playing by oneself is not attractive. As seen, both interlocutors use hypothetical indirect complaints to illustrate a possible course for the summer which they would like to avoid. Lori’s hypothetical complaint expresses her lack of desire to go to Minneapolis early, while Jake’s complaint expresses his lack of desire to start work later.

As the conversation progresses, it seems unlikely that Jake will agree to start his internship later. Although Lori would actually rather arrive on a later date in Minneapolis, she suggests leaving on a date which would suit Jake. However, when she thinks again about the extent of free time she has before her program starts; she recycles the hypothetical indirect complaint she used previously.

Example 101b

01. LORI: so::.
02. ( 1.0 ) I don’t know.
03. we could like,
04. (2.0)
05. you could- we could leave Piittsu::rgh
06. ( 0.8)
07. such that you could start work on the twenty sixth.
like we could leave Pittsburgh on the twentieth or something..

JAKE: mmhmm drive up, arrive on the twentysecond,

settle in over the weekend, start on the twentysixth.

LORI: mmmhmm.

LORI: man, I have a long time in Minneapolis with nothing to do.

JAKE: I really don't think it would be that bad,

you've got like a new city and a car and nothing to do.

LORI: yea:h. (. ) maybe.

I'll just be like lalalalalalala.

JAKE: there'll probably be other kids from your program who already arrived,

and you can go play with them.

LORI: well, if I know who they are?

JAKE: yeah, you could find them probably.

LORI: I don't know about that, Jake.

JAKE: find some punk rock ( . ) shows ( . ) something like that.

LORI: in Minneapolis.

JAKE: Minneapolis punk rock.

LORI: yeah, okay.

so that would be like one week, (1.2 ) two weeks, (0.2)

THREE WHOLE WEEKS,

and some extra that I would be sitting in a city.
31. being like «Q I'm::: sure here.Q»

32. ( 0.4)

33. I could spend, like, at most one of them in Las Vegas.

34. JAKE: yeah so it's two weeks, (.) of, nothing to do, except, have fun.

35. ROR: except have fun, maybe I'll go to Las Vegas and then like, drive out to

36. California, by myself.

After suggesting the departure time in lines 1-8, Lori makes a hypothetical indirect complaint in line 13 about being in Minneapolis with no specific activity to occupy her time. Jake replies in a manner similar to the way he replied to Lori’s previous complaint in example 101a; he states that it will not be that bad. Furthermore, not only does he state that the situation will probably not be as negative as Lori predicts, but potentially there could also be positive aspects to the situation as well. That is, she could have fun exploring the city. By minimizing her complaint, he is attempting to get Lori to see the situation as desirable and to accept the suggested time frame. Lori however disagrees with Jake’s assessment in line 16. As is common with disagreements of assessments, Lori precedes her disagreement with weakened agreement (Pomerantz 1984, Pomerantz and Heritage 2013). She agrees by saying ‘yeah’ and then mitigates her agreement with ‘maybe.’ She then disagrees with Jake’s assessment by uttering another hypothetical indirect complaint. She states ‘I'll just be like lalalalalalala.’ She proffers a hypothetical image of how she will be – bored with nothing constructive to do – if she follows the suggested plan.

Lori utters these hypothetical indirect complaints as a means of showing her dissatisfaction with the proposed plan. The indirect complaints function to convey her reluctance to accept the plan. While these particular complaints are about expressing frustration, the frustrations are not in regards to the actual events mentioned in her complaint. That is, she is not
frustrated about sitting in Michigan with nothing to do because these events have not occurred yet. Rather her frustration is about having to accept plans with an uncertain outcome. Furthermore, based on their conversation, other alternative plans seem unlikely. By complaining, she lets Jake know that she is agreeing to the plan reluctantly as their options are limited. Finally, had an alternative plan been possible, complaining indirectly may have also been a means to persuade Jake to follow another plan as it was in example 100.

In this section, I looked at the functions of hypothetical complaints; i.e. complaints about situations and circumstances that may potentially occur in the future. Speakers uttered such complaints in order to control the outcome of an event. By illustrating possible negative situations, the complainers are attempting to influence the behavior of the recipients of the complaints. Finally, in those instances in which the parties could not seemingly alter the future situation, they employed it as means by which they could bemoan their inability to control the situation.

5.6. SUMMARY OF FUNCTIONS OF COMPLAINTS

In this section, I have attempted to look deeper into the functions of complaints and go beyond those functions already discussed in the literature. Particularly, I have tried to show that complaints may have more complex functions than to simply vent frustrations. For example, in my data they appeared in conjunction with explanations and justifications for one’s actions. In such situations, they were a means of accounting for one’s behavior and making it appear reasonable and justified. Furthermore, speakers can use indirect complaints as a tool to control one’s circumstances and affect the behavior of another. For example, in the case of hypothetical complaints, they functioned as a means of controlling the outcome of future events. In this sense, hypothetical complaints challenge traditional thoughts that speakers do not utter indirect
complaints with the intent of rectifying a situation. As seen in my data, they do have the potential to effect a change in a situation. Similarly, with indirect / direct complaints, speakers can complain to their conversational partner in an indirect manner and possibly alter their actions.

The fact that in certain instances speakers complain indirectly with the intent of changing the recipient’s behavior raises the question of form versus function. While the form of a complaint may be indirect, its function may be direct. Thus, the two do not always coincide.
6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I looked at indirect complaints primarily from a conversational analysis perspective. Throughout this study, several aspects about complaints became apparent. One is that, complaints are the result of co-construction between the parties involved and their outcome is highly subject to negotiation between these parties. To what extent a speaker develops a complaint, what tone they use when complaining, and whether or not they mitigate their stance and / or change their tone to a more positive one largely depends on the response of the non-complainer. Likewise, how addressees respond to a complaint depends on how they wish to align themselves in regards to a complaint. In addition, throughout complaints, both complainers and addressees may adjust their tone and stance as they negotiate the complaint. Such adjustments may occur if one feels that the other party has perceived their stance incorrectly or if their talk is receiving an undesired response from the other party. Commonly, both speakers will negotiate their talk in order to a reach a common ground in which they are displaying mutual stances. If both parties do not achieve a shared stance, their varying alignments may result in friction and tension as the speakers are not in accord. It is this negotiation that plays a large role in how speakers complain and how speakers respond to complaints.

Another aspect of complaints that this study has revealed is how indirect complaints fit within the scheme of negative and positive conversational acts. On one hand, complaints are by definition expressions of negativity and this is reflected in how speakers construct complaints. Complainers frequently attempt to downplay and mitigate their complaints, they attempt to express positiveness in the midst of complaining, and they apologize for complaining. Furthermore, from the addressees’ standpoint, they may censor the complainer for complaining and direct them to think positive. These points attest to the fact that complaints are negative. On
the other hand, parties in a conversation do not necessarily express displeasure at being an addressee of an indirect complaint. Nor do they necessarily attempt to impede it. In fact, there are times when they seem to enjoy it. They may relish in the opportunity to laugh and express contempt for the absurdity of the situation. They may instigate a complaint and encourage the other to complain. In addition, when provided with the opportunity, they may join in on the complaint. In short, complaints possess positive aspects as well. Thus, while speakers generally approach complaints as if they were a negative act, speakers do not automatically perceive them as such. This observation harks back to what I stated in the previous paragraph. Through the addressees’ responses, complainers continually attempt to interpret and gage whether the address is maintaining a positive or negative stance in regards to the complaint.

Interpretation then stands as an integral part of the construction of complaints. While a particular phenomenon may consistently appear in the context of complaints, how one interprets and characterizes the work being done by that phenomenon varies with each complaint. Speakers may employ the same phenomenon with greatly varying results. For example, telling a second complaint in response to a complaint may either be regarded as a means of identifying with the complainer or an attempt to challenge the complaint. Thus, as there is not necessarily a one to one correlation between speech phenomenon and the function of that phenomenon. Rather, the speakers interpret the function of the speech phenomenon. To complicate matters, as interpretation of speech phenomena is not an exact science, how one interprets the exact same phenomenon in the exact same context varies from person to person. These points apply to both the complainer and the recipient of the complaint. Both are subject to the task of conveying meaning through speech and attempting to interpret the meaning being conveyed by and function of a particular speech phenomenon. Finally, to reiterate one last complicating factor, both
complainers and recipients of complaints, may use the same phenomenon to different ends. For example, both complainers and addressees of a complaint may downplay a complaint. However, the effect is different. In short, this complex interaction between function and interpretation of that function results in the same phenomenon achieving different effects from complaint to complaint.

Another aspect of complaints that became apparent in this study is their similarity cross culturally. Although English and Japanese are spoken in two divergent societies, western and eastern respectively, they shared many attributes. This is not to say that they did not boast differences as well. For example, while I did not touch upon it in this study, I did note that the languages differed in their used of profanity. English speakers employed a higher degree of expletives and curse words. Nonetheless, the degree of similarity between the two languages is evident. Particular phenomenon and attributes appeared frequently in both languages. This attests to the universality of complaints.

This study has also shown that issues in conversation analysis that pertain to other types of talk apply to complaints as well. Turn taking and organization, preferred and dispreferred acts, preferred and dispreferred responses, and co-construction are all relevant to the framework of complaints. Along the same lines, complaints both overlap with and emulate other types of talk frequently discussed in conversational analysis, particularly story-telling. In regards to overlap, a complaint can be expressed in the form of a story, thereby performing double duty function and acting as both. Furthermore, in terms of emulation, they resemble stories in that there are co-complaints, which are similar to co-stories, and second complaints, which are similar to second complaints. In short, they are not an island onto themselves. They intersect with other aspects of conversational analysis as well as having their own individual features.
REFERENCES


______ (2007). Sequence Organization in Interaction: A Primer in Conversation

