

“I Determine Your Happiness:” Face-Saving Techniques Utilized by Commenters
in Response to Learner Language in Rage Comics

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Introduction

Spurred by the popularity of social networking sites and the prevalence of various forms of communication technology, I have often wondered what it means to belong to an online community. In other words, in an environment that promotes anonymity, how does a person demonstrate that she is a member of a community online, and how do others show that they accept this person as a member of that group? To me, these questions seem particularly significant for English language learners because the internet is a promising source of authentic language and interaction, provided that the learner can actually gain access to such resources. I mean “access” not in the physical sense of whether or not the learner has a computer, an internet connection, and so on (although this is obviously an important factor, too); rather, I mean it in the social sense: can the learner make connections with an English-speaking community so that she will have an interactive, safe place to use her English skills for more than just practice?

When I stumbled upon the comments and comics analyzed in this study, I felt that they produced a sense of community, though at first I could not identify why. I soon realized that, if I wanted to understand how the individuals were recognized as members of a community, it would be necessary to evaluate the comments left by readers of the comics, as the commenters comprise the community members. Thus, the goal of this project is to analyze and better understand how the commenters interpret and respond to the comics created by English language learners. My hope is that I can identify what techniques commenters employ to build community with the learners based on the analysis. In particular, I feel that commenters show sensitivity to the learners’ face. So, I believe that it is imperative to investigate how commenters perform this sensitivity through the use of face-saving techniques and what their implications are for teaching, learning, and making connections in a second language on the internet.

Literature Review

Though the ultimate interest of this paper is face-saving techniques as a category, the existing research available on several topics must be considered. Since an in-depth review of all the topics is not possible due to the limitation of space, the review will proceed as follows: first, the literature relevant to this paper in the areas of face and face-threatening acts are explored; then, the literature relevant to this paper in the areas of hedging, assessment, language play, and correction and repair is considered as it relates to face-saving, second language learning, or computer-mediated communication (CMC). The goal of approaching the review in this manner is to provide both a solid foundation for the usage of important terminology and to explain the ways in which these very different topics converge. By the end of the review, the connections and overlap of these separate topics and their significance to this paper will be made clear.

Face and Face-Threatening Acts

Since face-saving techniques are the main focus of this paper, it is necessary to consider the work that has been completed on face and face-saving techniques as concepts. For this, the review consults the seminal work of Brown and Levinson (1978), who state that “face” is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself,” and that people have both “positive face” (the persona’s need to be a welcomed member of a community) and “negative face” (the persona’s need to be recognized as an individual with personal needs and goals) (p. 66). While Brown and Levinson draw a distinction between positive and negative face, these terms are not used in this analysis; this paper is not concerned with the kind of face to which the techniques appeal, so the term “face” is used as an umbrella term for both kinds of face interchangeably.

Brown and Levinson further posit that “certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee” (p. 70). By this, they mean simply that one person can hurt another person’s face by communicating or interacting with them in a particular way. For example, perhaps roommate 1 notices that roommate 2 never washes her dirty dishes. If roommate 1 decides that he must ask roommate 2 to clean the dishes, this request would be considered a face-threatening act because it may affect what roommate 2 views as her personal needs (perhaps she feels that she does not have the time to wash the dishes, and to have to do so would be inconvenient). Many interpersonal behaviors fall under this category of “face-threatening acts” (as Brown and Levinson term them), including suggestions, criticism, and disagreement (pp. 70-71). The list of potential face-threatening acts provided by Brown and Levinson is actually quite extensive; only a few are mentioned here because, due to the context in which the data were produced, most of those on the original list do not appear in the data or in this analysis.

It must be noted that the term “face-saving technique,” which had been introduced on page 1, is not one that is used by Brown and Levinson. However, techniques which work to save face are the main focus of their article. Brown and Levinson do not assign a term to these techniques; instead, they refer to them as “strategies for doing face-threatening acts” (p. 73). According to them, a person who works either to make an act less threatening or to circumvent having to complete the act altogether has employed such a strategy (p. 73). This paper examines what kinds of strategies are used in the data and how they are used. For the sake of clarity and efficiency, however, the term “face-saving techniques,” which has been adapted from Yule’s term “face-saving acts” is used rather than “strategies for doing face-threatening acts” (1996, p. 61). Yule uses the term “face-saving acts” to denote when a speaker “[says] something to lessen

the threat,” so this term seemed both appropriate and efficient for this paper and thus was adapted for the paper (1996, p. 61).

Hedging

Since it is thoroughly explicated as a face-saving technique by Brown and Levinson (1978), the first technique this analysis discusses is hedging. According to their explanation, hedges work in slightly different ways depending on their form, but their general purpose is to either lessen or increase the strength or degree of whatever it is that they modify (p. 150). In fact, Lakoff defined hedges as “words whose job it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (1973, p. 471). Notice the ambiguity afforded by the item “words” in this quote; the fact that Lakoff does not specify a certain kind of word in this description (for example, a particular part of speech) indicates that there are many kinds of words that can serve as hedges.

In the presentation of their English language examples, Brown and Levinson (1978) narrow the broad category of “words” as hedges down to adverbs/adverbial clauses and words or phrases which appeal to Grice’s maxims¹. One example of an adverbial phrase hedge that they provide can be seen below (1978, p. 167; underlining added):

Example 1

Close the window, if you can.

This adverbial phrase works as a hedge and a face-saving technique because it acknowledges the hearer’s individual needs (that she might not want to open the window, or that she cannot, or that she does not have the time, and so on). The adverbial clause softens the “bossiness,” and thus the threat, of the demand.

The hedges that appeal to Grice’s truth maxim work in a similar fashion. The maxim of truth motivates speakers to avoid lying when they talk to other people (Hatch, 1992, p. 34). Thus, if a speaker knows that the information in his utterance might not be accurate, he can use a

“quality hedge” to recognize this fact and to alert his listener of his uncertainty (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 169). An example of a quality hedge can be seen below (original to this paper):

Example 2

I can't be completely sure, but I feel that she does not like me.

In this example, the speaker's use of the phrase “can't be completely sure” to introduce the statement indicates that he has some uncertainty as to whether his feelings are actually true (that is, if he judges the other person's opinion of him accurately). Therefore, this phrase functions as a quality hedge because it acknowledges the possibility that the speaker's judgment is incorrect.

The information presented here seems to suggest that hedges are quite versatile since they can be used to lessen the intensity of any piece of information. Not many studies on the uses of hedging in online interaction are available, but since interpersonal interaction occurs online as well as face-to-face, it is reasonable to assume that hedging is utilized in online language.

Indeed, Luzon, who studied the behavior of commenters on academic blogs, noted that hedges were one method commenters used to avoid offending others when expressing differences of opinion (2011, p. 530). Thus, for the purpose of this paper, hedges are an important face-saving technique to consider.

Assessments

Another topic that has connections to face is assessment. For this paper, the term “assessment” describes the act of one participant evaluating another participant's contribution. Though assessments may, at first glance, appear to be unrelated to face, there are ways in which the two topics overlap. First, the actual act of assessment may be seen to involve face for the person whom the action targets, as when one individual compliments another in an interaction. In her work on compliment responses, Pomerantz noted that people tend to use “strong positive

evaluative terms” to accomplish praising others (1978, pp. 95-96). It can be argued that, in general, most people would likely want to hear something positive about themselves and would not want to hear something negative. Since one central function of a face-saving technique is for speakers to show that they value what the other person wishes to have for herself, and since one could argue that compliments are something that people wish for, the use of a compliment could be considered to be a face-saving technique (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67).

A second way that assessments are related to face is through the handling of agreement or disagreement made by one person to the assessment made by another. In her article on agreement and disagreement, Pomerantz (1984) organizes the acceptability of responses to assessment in terms of what is “preferred,” or wanted. According to Wong and Waring (2010), if an option is the most comfortably and most often used by speakers and leads naturally to the conclusion of the interaction, it will receive *preference* (p. 63). In most cases, Pomerantz argues, speakers who have provided an opinion about something desire to be agreed with by other participants in a conversation (1984, p. 64). This means that, for example, a speaker who is discussing a play he recently saw with his friends would expect those friends to react similarly to how he did; if he praised the lead actor’s portrayal of a role, he would expect them also to praise it, and if he complained about the uncomfortable seats, he would expect them to say that they felt uncomfortable as well.

In fact, Pomerantz frames speakers’ reasons for agreeing in terms of their relationships to one another: “Put another way,...conversants orient to agreeing with one another as comfortable, supportive, reinforcing, perhaps as being sociable and as showing that they are like-minded” (1984, p. 77). Therefore, the action of agreeing (or disagreeing) in response to an assessment seems to be more important than the meaning conveyed by agreeing. As Pomerantz describes it

in the aforementioned quote, agreement shows respect for the assessor's feelings and care for the relationship between the speakers; exactly what the people agree about seems to truly be secondary to the face-related concern of community.

Even in the one case where Pomerantz argues that disagreement is preferred, her explanation seems to be connected to the concept of face. Pomerantz explains that a speaker expects his listener to discount his claim if he has been critical of himself because to agree would be to corroborate the claim (1984, p. 78). Thus, if a speaker remarks to a listener, "I'm not a very good friend," he would expect the listener to respond with something that negates that claim, such as, "Why would you say that? Of course you are!" If the listener responded with something like, "You're right," or "I don't think you are, either," she would, in effect, be criticizing him by validating his own claim. As was noted in the review of face and face-saving techniques above, Brown and Levinson classify giving criticism as a face-threatening act. Therefore, the main issue behind agreeing with a person's self-criticism seems to be that it ignores his face need of being accepted for who he is as a person. Though they are not termed as such by Pomerantz, the acceptability of agreement or disagreement in response to an assessment seems to be largely related to face.

Language Play

Though the connections between language play and face are less apparent than those between assessment and face, language play is connected to face through its focus on community-building and belongingness. To demonstrate this, several presentations of different kinds of language play are examined in terms of how they function and what they accomplish.

First, however, it should be noted that there does not seem to be a clear or thorough explanation of what, exactly, counts as language play, at least for the texts that were reviewed for

this paper. This issue is highlighted in the divergent concepts of language play reviewed by Broner and Tarone (2001). Broner and Tarone note that “language play” can be used to refer to two different kinds of language: that which is “used for purposes of self-amusement and fun,” and that which is “intended to be rehearsal” (2001, p. 364). In other words, the use of the word “play” within this term might be misleading because not all forms of language play are done for entertainment; it may be used purely for practice. This review will cover texts that deal with both of these kinds of language play, so that the term “language play” should not be taken to refer solely to humor within this literature review.

As noted before, many different ideas of language play and creative language use are offered by the texts reviewed for this paper. For example, the subject of Cook’s book is language play, but the book does not provide an actual definition of what “play” includes (2000). Perhaps “language play” is not clearly defined because the reader is expected to deduce what it means in Cook’s book based on the topics that are covered. It is also possible that the intention of the book was not to provide an exhaustive explanation of language play, which would require defining boundaries to the term. In a similar fashion, North forgoes providing a definition for what language play is, opting instead to describe what language play does, arguing that there is “a natural human propensity to use language not simply to convey ideational or interpersonal meanings, but also for the pleasure of playing with words” (2007, p. 540). According to this description, language use that is enjoyable can be considered playful.

Furthermore, the involvement of other terms demonstrates how language play means different things to different scholars. Bell, for instance, “use[s] the terms ‘humour’ and ‘language play’ interchangeably” in her article, which implies that any language use which is comedic can also be categorized as playful (2005, p. 196). For others, humor does not equal

language play; Forman, for example, views creative language use as the broadest category, language play as a subset of creative language use, and humor as a subset of language play (2011, p. 542).

Though it seems logical to associate play with creativity, as Forman has, others conceptualize the creative use of language in a different way. Similar to Cook's approach to language play, Carter and McCarthy's argument concerning creative language is that, due to discrepancies between perceptions of what is creative, a concrete explanation cannot be articulated (2004, pp. 63-64). For Maybin and Swann, language that is creative fulfills a number of factors, including being dependent on interpersonal context and shared local culture, resulting from collaborative creation, and accomplishing many tasks at once (2007, p. 512). Therefore, there are many interpretations of the terms surrounding language use that is not strictly intended for information transfer.

Research on language play has shown that it can occupy a supportive role in language learning. For instance, Tarone (2000) has argued that language play can help further the process of learning a second language. In other words, she argues that it may be to a learner's benefit to experiment with and use language creatively. For Tarone, play can encourage a student to be more receptive, both cognitively and emotionally, to learning (pp. 45-47). From a teaching standpoint, then, it may be worthwhile to provide opportunities for students to engage in creative language use because it can have positive rewards for the learner.

Since the data analyzed in this study is drawn from or inspired by a humorous genre of language use (comics), the focus here falls more specifically on the examples and effects of language play that is overtly comedic. Therefore, though there are many concepts of what constitutes language play and creativity, this review will examine a limited number of language

play examples that have been described or investigated. The first such examples come from Cook (2000), who explores the clever use of language in puns.

Puns

In Cook's explanation, both the humor and the feelings of closeness that are encouraged by puns come from the subversion they create. According to Cook, a pun is subversive in two ways. First, it upsets the natural order by allowing language to be chosen before meaning is; by this, Cook means that a language construction can be chosen and then the meaning can be built to fit it, rather than meaning being chosen and then language being selected to convey it. Second, Cook argues that puns upset the receiver's expectation that language will be used to communicate a single meaning clearly (2000). Observe the double meaning of the word "cool" in the following example (original to this paper):

Example 3

- S1: There was a whole crowd around him! They all wanted to hear his story about how he got locked in the freezer at work for two days.
S2: So, in other words, he was a really cool guy?

In this example, the pun is amusing because the usage of the word "really cool" allows for S1 to interpret two different meanings for S2's utterance: (1) that the man being referred to was popular because of his story (in other words, "cool" in the social sense), and (2) that the man physically felt cold from being stuck in the freezer ("cool" in terms of temperature). Thus, S2's utterance functions as a pun in the example above.

At first, it might not be apparent how this noncompliance leads to either laughter or intimacy between conversational participants. However, Cook asserts in his book (about humor generally) that, "by getting the joke, the recipient displays both ingenuity and access to shared knowledge and values, including those which are conspiratorial or taboo" (2000, p. 72). If the above summary is viewed through the lens of this claim, then it becomes evident that puns allow

conversational participants to find common ground (or lose it) by creating and comprehending one another's intentionally imprecise language.

Recent studies which explored language play in computer-mediated communication and second language learning environments reported examples of punning that had the effects of solidarity and humor referenced above. In her study on comedic language in CMC, North found that online chat participants often made puns based on words left in other contributors' messages, which led to a sort of "social cohesion" (2007, p. 546). Furthermore, she noticed that the fun of the puns seemed to derive both from understanding the double meaning and from realizing that punning had occurred (p. 546). It seems, then, that puns play a significant role in making the online environment, which is often associated with anonymity, an entertaining and communal place.

Though Forman's study (2011) was conducted in a very different environment, he found similar instances of collaboration used to create puns. In this study, Forman analyzed how an EFL teacher incorporated verbal humor in his teaching. Forman demonstrated that, because the interaction occurred in a foreign language classroom, the teacher and the learners both shared two languages, and thus were able to move between the two languages together when being funny. For example, when reviewing some English vocabulary, the teacher comically proposed in English that an apartment "should actually be called a 'togetherment,'" but he then explained the joke in Thai so that his students (who were native Thai speakers) could fully appreciate the pun and the seeming absurdity of the word "apartment" (2011, p. 554). These examples are particularly interesting because they exhibit the use of punning to achieve camaraderie on at least two levels: at the local level, to create a sense of community with others in the classroom, and at a more global level, to create a sense of community with English users in general.

Double-Voicing

Puns are just one form of creative language use that has been explored in the literature. Another form of language play that is significant to this discussion is double-voicing. For a definition of double-voicing, this paper will turn to that provided by Bakhtin, as summarized by Robinson in his book *Introducing Performative Pragmatics*. According to Bakhtin, double-voicing causes an utterance to be infused with two voices (and, hence, two attitudes) when one person repeats what another person has said (Bakhtin, 1929; as cited in Robinson, 2006, p. 221). For example, Robinson provides the following explanation of how two attitudes converge through a form of double-voicing called *parody* (Robinson, 2006, p. 222):

...someone you despise does a really despicable thing, and says to you, archly, or perhaps defensively, “Hey, I just did what anyone would do.” To you this lame protest is almost as despicable as the original deed, and when you repeat the phrase—“Can you believe it? He said, ‘I just did what anyone would do’!”—you can’t help but charge your repetition with your own contempt and disgust.

In this explanation, Robinson demonstrates how the meaning or effect or restated words can change based on the attitude the speaker portrays. Although Robinson provides a thorough description of the four kinds of double-voicing that Bakhtin identifies, this review does not recognize those distinctions because they do not seem to be immediately relevant to the questions asked in this study; what is important to recognize is that double-voicing can be used for comedic effect (Robinson, 2006). In this kind of language play, the creativity and humor derives not so much from originality as from how the speaker manipulates and reframes the initial remark.

The use and effectiveness of double-voicing in computer-mediated environments is somewhat complicated by the fact that the auditory effects of spoken language, such as intonation and pace, are absent from written language. Despite this fact, studies of online

language play have found instances of double-voicing. Of course, in a conversation that occurs on the internet, participants accomplish double-voicing differently, opting to use features that are unique to written or online language. For instance, North found that “spelling may be disrupted to suggest a particular accent or style, as when Boxer toasts Castaway [two chat participants] in message 27 with, “Casty, my pleasure, darlin”” (2007, p. 542). What North is saying is that spelling that is nonstandard but phonetic can be used while employing double-voicing to conjure a certain identity or emotion. In other words, two different voices seem to be present in Boxer’s comment due to the spelling and word choice. First, the utterance seems to mimic a southern or western dialect of American English through its use of the shortened form “darlin” and the phrase “my pleasure.” Second, Boxer, who does not otherwise seem to use spellings that indicate a southern or western dialect of English in the rest of the data that North presents, conveys an intimate and light-hearted tone due to the language he uses, which has an informal, conversational quality (2007, pp. 542-543).

As with puns, studies have been completed in which English language learners have been documented using double-voicing. One such study was conducted by Bell, who recorded a nonnative English speaker use the following phrase in response to another speaker’s warnings to protect herself from physical attack: “hey you have to *try* me!” (2005, p. 201). Bell explained that the utterance “layers [the learner’s] own voice with that of someone who might best be described as a ‘tough cookie’” (2005, p. 202). To elaborate, the speaker used the quote to comically portray herself as imposing when, apparently, she truly is not. In this example, the student is able to achieve a comical effect through her use of double-voicing.

Repetition

Double-voicing is connected to a third form of language play that this review will discuss: repetition. In fact, double-voicing is a form of repetition. However, whereas double-voicing deals largely with layers of attitude, the term “repetition” is used more broadly to discuss speakers interacting creatively. Though Cook focuses largely on children’s use of repetition, he highlights the fact that it can occur in many ways in language through his use of this quote by Propp: “there is repetition at every linguistic and discoursal level: of phonemes, of syllables, of grammatical structures, of events within in a story, and of elements of stories within a given genre” (Propp, 1928; as cited in Cook, 2000, p. 28). For instance, Cook presents children’s use of language in the following example as playful (underlining added to highlight repeated words; 2000, p. 28):

Somebody has been eating my porridge, said Father Bear in a great, gruff, growling voice.
Somebody has been eating my porridge, said Mother Bear, in a mellow, middle-sized voice.
Somebody has been eating my porridge, said Baby Bear, in a squeaky little voice.

It is important to note that repetition in language play is not necessarily always humorous in nature; thus, while the example above might not exactly be considered amusing, it is meant to be playful in that it is used to tell a fictional story. Of course, in text-based CMC environments, some of the forms of repetition mentioned by Propp (such as phonemic or syllabic) obviously will not occur because such environments lack an auditory component. Even so, Propp’s explanation demonstrates that the opportunities (and, one can infer, purposes) for using repetition in online language are numerous (though repetition might not necessarily be playful or humorous in these circumstances).

Two studies of face-to-face interaction show repetition occurring in different ways or at more than one level in interaction. First, Carter and McCarthy found examples of speakers repeating what others had said exactly or what others had said with some changes, as in the example below (2004, p. 64):

Example 4

- (S 02): [Laughs] cos you come home
- (S 03): I come home
- (S 02): You come home to us

It should be acknowledged that Carter and McCarthy present this example as a form of creativity in language and do not use the term “language play” specifically (2004, p. 65); thus, they are concerned with the broader category of creative rather than playful language use (to review their conception of creative language use, see p. 8 above). Carter and McCarthy asserted that one speaker’s replication of another’s words and structure is symbolic of the connection the conversational participants share, both socially and linguistically (2004, p. 65). In other words, not only does repetition itself occur at multiple levels in language (as, for example, through the repetition of the same structure and the same words, “come home,” in the example above), but it can have different layers of purpose—for Carter and McCarthy, there is the more surface purpose of binding the conversation together, and then there is the underlying purpose of bringing the conversational participants together.

Similarly, the second study found repetition and effects of repetition occurring at more than one level between a single pair of conversational participants. Maybin and Swann reported the following about repetition between the stories of two children, Lee and Geoffrey (2007, pp. 507-508) (italics in original):

...the three-part structure...‘and I had some bread, eaten some bread, so I fed it bits of bread’ is not only an example of repetition within a story but also of repetition across stories. Lee’s story mirrored one told earlier in the interview by Geoffrey about a stray cat, which ended with a similar three part linked structure ‘*it eat a bit, it eat a bit, only a little bit.*’ Geoffrey’s story was also about kindness to lost, vulnerable creatures and...Lee strengthens the evaluative function of his story through linking it to his friend’s in terms of both structure and content. At the same time, through confirming a shared valuing of kindness to small creatures...Lee reflexively displays and affirms their friendship.

Notice that, just as in the study by Carter and McCarthy, this study found multiple instances of repetition occurring at once. Moreover, just as it did for Carter and McCarthy, repetition for Maybin and Swann’s analysis revealed both linguistic and social implications. The findings of these two studies seem to indicate that repetition can be a form of creativity specifically for languages users participating in conversation.

Evidence presented so far shows that repetition has community-building potential. How, then, does it relate to humor? North provides an example of language play from a message board in which the phrase “1 inch,” when manipulated through repetition and variation, is turned from an estimation of an amount of precipitation into an innuendo (2007, p. 547). According to her, “successful humour in these discussions is a joint construction, in which participants encourage each other...by adopting and building on other people’s humor” (p. 547). North’s explanation echoes the same idea of collaboration that Carter and McCarthy and Maybin and Swann do; the only difference is that she identifies a specific purpose in the conversation, which is to be funny. Therefore, repetition can be used in a playful way to help speakers achieve this goal when it is a shared goal.

The review of the literature available on playful or humorous language has shown that puns and double-voicing are forms of language play and that repetition can be employed during the process of language play (though the goal of repetition itself is not always to be playful).

Furthermore, it has demonstrated how these different forms of play are used to develop and strengthen bonds between conversational participants and to create humor and feelings of enjoyment. The fact the same sources were referenced in different sections shows how several of these forms of play can be used in a single interaction; this is especially interesting because the three forms of play were shown to have similar effects. Thus, even though these forms of play are distinct from one another, they will still be categorized together as “language play” for this paper.

Repair and Correction: Recasts and Explicit Correction

The review now switches its focus from language play to two other topics that involve face-saving: repair and correction. Specifically, this review focuses on recasts and explicit corrections, which are two forms of correction, though it will also mention prompts (a third form of correction). Despite the fact that repair and correction may seem very different from the other topics, such as language play, they are indeed connected to the other topics due to the community-building function that they can serve.

Although this paper approaches the comments left on three EFL Comics primarily from a discourse analysis perspective, it involves terminology and topics from other disciplines, such as second language acquisition, as well. Consequently, it is necessary to distinguish between the different meanings of the terms “repair” and “correction,” as both are employed in discourse analysis and second language acquisition. Hall (2007) explained the difference between the two disciplines’ usages of the term in her article studying the incorrect application of the discourse analysis term “repair” in other language studies. According to her, the terms “repair” and “correction” are interchangeable in second language acquisition, while in discourse analysis, repair can be achieved through correction, although correction does not necessarily have to

happen for repair to occur (Hall, 2007). In other words, the terms “repair” and “correction” are not synonymous in discourse analysis. As Hall explains, correction addresses linguistic errors (which may impede comprehension), while repair can also address comprehension issues between speakers (p. 511). The processes are separate, and the occurrence of one does not depend on the occurrence of the other.

Underneath the umbrella of correction are the terms “prompt,” “recast,” and “explicit correction.” According to Lightbown & Spada, prompts “signal the need for a correction but require the student to figure out what the correct form is” and can “include...repetition” (2006, pp. 172-173). Thus, S2’s response in example 6 (p. 19) below can be considered a prompt because S2 repeats S1’s utterance with the correct form used but does not emphasize the correction; it is up to S1 to discover the correction. In contrast, recasts and explicit corrections two techniques are similar in form, though they differ in how they are accomplished. Lightbown and Spada’s (2006) explanation of explicit correction and recast shows that, in both techniques, the goal is to provide an amended structure to the learner that reflects which construction the learner was targeting. In other words, the incorrect part of the language is fixed so that the learner’s original utterance is made correct. Unlike explicit correction, where a speaker “clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect,” however, recasts do not directly express the fact that an error has occurred (Lightbown & Spada, p. 126). So, in example 5, S2’s response to S1 would be deemed an explicit correction, while in example 6, S2’s response to S1 would be deemed a recast (examples original to this paper; underlining used to emphasize correction):

Example 5

- S1: He working at John’s Bakery.
S2: You mean to say, “He is working at John’s Bakery.”

Example 6

- S1: He working at John's Bakery.
 S2: He's working at John's Bakery?

Observe that, in example 5, S2 uses the introductory phrase “You mean to say” as an alert to S1 that a correction is about to be offered. In contrast, S2 does not signal that a correction is about to happen; S2 merely offers the correct form of the construction to S1 without drawing attention to the fact that an amendment has occurred.

Due to the indirectness of recasts, Lightbown and Spada describe them as “generally implicit,” which puts them in plain contrast with explicit corrections (2006, p. 125). Conversely, Ellis and Sheen (2006) question the idea that all recasts are implicit or that recasts are completely implicit; according to them, even if a recast is not introduced by a phrase that identifies it as a correction, the speaker can use other methods to signal that they are fixing an error (such as repetition, intonation, and stress) (p. 583). They argue, subsequently, that “recasts should not be viewed as necessarily implicit, but, rather...they should be taken as more or less implicit or explicit” (2006, p. 583). Thus, recasts and explicit corrections, though defined as two separate techniques in the literature reviewed, are shown to be quite similar in form and, potentially, in directness.

How correction intersects with face is related to the quality of directness. In the process of providing correction, a person may employ acts such as criticism and suggestion; recall that Brown and Levinson classify criticism and suggestions as face-threatening acts (1978, p. 71). Thus, the process of correction as a whole can potentially be face-threatening. Furthermore, the different forms of correction can also be evaluated for their face-threatening quality. For example, Lightbown and Spada explain that recasts are “seen as indirect and polite, a way of giving students the information they need without embarrassing them” (2006, p. 192). In other

words, because a speaker who produces a recast does not frankly admit that the student has made an error, the focus is not on the error. By that logic, this face-saving quality can similarly be found in prompts since, as the definition of prompts reviewed on page 18 showed, they focus on the learner correcting her own mistakes rather than giving the learner a correction. Instead, the recast focuses on the target construction and on the meaning the student tried to convey; that is, when a speaker recasts a student's speech, she demonstrates understanding of the student.

Since explicit correction is, by definition, considered to be straightforward, one may assume that all explicit correction is face-threatening. Nevertheless, a review of different examples of explicit correction offered by the literature reviewed demonstrates that explicit corrections seem to vary in the degree of face threat that they pose. Compare the three examples below (from, respectively: Jepson, 2005, p. 86; Hall, 2007, p. 516; and Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 126; italics and bolding in originals; underlining added):

Example 7

You should say, this city **is** beautiful.

Example 8

S: Put in my box

T: You're missing the direct object pronoun *it*. It should be Put *it* in my box.

Example 9

S: The dog run fastly.

T: 'Fastly' doesn't exist. 'Fast' does not take *-ly*. That's why I picked 'quickly'.

There is clear variation between the examples in how the correction is delivered. For example, the explicit corrections in examples 7 and 8 contain the modal verb² "should." In contrast, the correction in example 9 does not use this modal; forms of "does not" and "is" are used instead to identify and explain the student's error. According to Yule, the modal verb "should" conveys "a weaker sense of obligation than is found with *must*" (1998, p. 107; italics in original). The verbs "does not" and "is," however, do not leave room for interpretation or disagreement. In other

words, to suggest that someone *should* use a certain language construction is to indicate that they could choose not to (but it would be better if they did), but to state that a language construction simply *is* a certain way implies that it cannot be done any other way. The speakers who use “should” seem to be exerting less control over the learner. Consequently, due to their usage of the modal verb “should,” the explicit corrections in examples 7 and 8 seem to be less face-threatening than that provided in example 9.

Furthermore, the corrections in examples 8 and 9 cite the specific error that the student created (absence of the pronoun in example 8 and incorrect formation of the adverb in example 9). Example 7, on the other hand, does not specify what the error is; in this way, it is like a prompt. The error is only implied by the emphasis on the verb. Thus, the explicit correction in example 7 seems less face-threatening than those in examples 8 and 9 because it does not focus on what the student did wrong; instead, it focuses on how the student can correctly form the target construction. Furthermore, the fact that example 7 is like a prompt in its lack of explanation about the specific error seems to indicate that prompts are also not very face-threatening, at least in comparison to the other forms of correction. These differences in wording and delivery appear to create disparities in how face-threatening the explicit correction truly is.

Overall, not many studies have been conducted involving recasts and explicit corrections given to second language learners in online settings (but see Willms, 2011 for a review of studies that have). However, a few studies have been performed on feedback in computer-mediated communication settings that are worth mentioning here. In his study of the different methods of achieving understanding used in text-based and verbal chat, Jepson (2005) discovered that both environments produced instances of recast and explicit correction. Another study by Loewen and Erlam (2007) compared the effectiveness of metalinguistic feedback³ given in a chat room

environment to that of recasts on learners' grammar knowledge. They discovered that neither kind of feedback caused improvement in the learners' performance of the past tense, but they also indicated that the learners may not have been prepared for the past tense yet since they had not studied English for very long (2007, p. 9).

The final study by Lai and Zhao (2006) investigated the effect of text-based chat on learners' abilities to recognize their own errors. They found that "text-based online chat...leads to higher rates of noticing" among learners who participate in it (2006, p. 116). What these studies seem to show is that correction has a presence in online language use, but that much more research needs to be completed in the area of feedback in CMC. The results of these studies are interesting, but together they do not provide a clear indication of whether and which kinds of corrections in CMC environments are effective in helping learners acquire the language. Indeed, this paper will not study the effectiveness of recasts and explicit corrections either.

After a review of the literature, it is evident that the meaning of certain terms as they are used in this paper must be clarified before moving further. First, this paper uses the terms "language play" and "creative language use" interchangeably (though "language play" will be used predominantly), so that "language play" in this paper refers to language that is used creatively for humorous effect. Furthermore, "language play" includes the acts of joking and emulation, which means that these acts fall under the umbrella term "language play." In this paper, "emulation" refers to instances in which commenters repeat or mimic a part of the student's language use in their own comments for humorous effect. In addition, the term "correction" is used to describe any instance in which a commenter proposes a change to the student's language. In contrast, the term "repair" is used only in its discourse analysis context to discuss comments that attempt to clarify meaning or address misunderstanding. All other terms

that have been discussed above (and which appear in the analysis) are used with the same meaning as it has been explained here.

Research Questions

After a review of the literature, coupled with the initial readings and preliminary analysis of the comics, three research questions were developed for the data analyzed in this paper. The research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the different kinds of face-saving techniques employed by commenters who respond to the three comics made by English language learners?
- (2) How do commenters use the English language to accomplish these face-saving techniques?
- (3) How does the use of face-saving techniques vary between the comment sets with respect to the different language issue that each comment set deals with?

After a few readings of the comics, I noticed that there seemed to be a strong sense of community created by the comments. However, it was not immediately evident to me why the comments tended to evoke this feeling. Thus, the preliminary analysis sought to identify specific examples of how the feelings of supportiveness and inclusivity were achieved. Although the analysis at first seemed to yield evidence of several unrelated speech acts being performed by the commenters, it soon became apparent that many of these acts had the effect of saving face. Once I realized this, I developed the first research question. Since face-saving techniques appeared to be used by the commenters, the analysis set out to identify what those techniques were.

The development of the first research question, paired with an initial review of the literature, influenced the formulation of the second research question. In fact, the first and second research questions are connected because the answer to the second question will give

more information about the face-saving techniques, which will help support the answer to the first question. In addition, when early exploration into the existing research on this topic revealed that no work had been done with data like these previously, it became apparent that the face-saving techniques did not only need to be identified—their effectiveness as face-saving techniques needed to be explicated, as well. In this way, I could compare the form and use of face-saving techniques in these data, which were obtained from a unique online community, with that of face-saving techniques that have been used in other contexts.

The third research question emerged after I realized that the comment sets in the data each address a different kind of language use. Due to the fact that the Rage Comics are so similar in their structure and appearance, it was originally assumed that the learners' comics would elicit comments that are very similar to one another in style as well. As will be demonstrated in the analysis section, however, the issues seem to differ in terms of how they affect the comprehensibility and acceptability of a student's language use as judged by the commenters. Consequently, it was decided that the face-saving techniques used within each comment set should be compared with those used in the others to determine if there are differences, which led to the development of the third research question.

Before the analysis can proceed, though, the methods for this project must be explained. In particular, because the context in which the face-saving techniques were used seems to be novel, the data source and participants need to be introduced and described.

Method

Data Source

The data for this paper were obtained from a website titled “EFLComics”⁴. This website, which was created by a professor of English working in Japan, features comics made by English language learners to “to help practice English” (Sukosuti, 2011). Comics are posted in order from most recent to least recent, and readers can comment on the comics provided that the readers are members of reddit, the online community through which EFLComics are hosted. Since the site is open to the public, anyone can view the comics and their respective comments.

The comics that the students created are part of a genre known as “Rage Comics.” Rage Comics are created and shared on another reddit site (as well as at least one other website unaffiliated with reddit) and follow a standard format in terms of the comic’s structure and the images used within it⁵. On the Rage Comics site, the moderators provide an explanation of what qualifies as a Rage Comic (Mythrayn, 2011): “Rage Comics are: (almost exclusively) multi-panel, narrative comics that use rage characters to show what’s funny about often frustrating situations or events common in the day to day lives of most people.” The rage characters mentioned are stock characters that are used in the comics to portray particular emotions; for example, the character in the bottom panel of Comic 1 (See Appendix A) is known as “rage guy,” and the emotion it signifies is anger (Dubs, 2009). As all comics feature them, the rage characters also promote continuity between the comics. Thus, the usage of stock graphics lend these comics their own brand of humor, which readers who are familiar with the images will understand.

It is important to emphasize that EFLComics are featured on their own page, separate from the original Rage Comics. The creators of the EFLComics page make it clear through the

title of the page and through explanations on the site that the comic creators are learners of English, so this fact is highlighted for readers who visit the EFLComics site⁶. In a blog post explaining the lessons leading to the students' creation of comics (which is linked to the EFLComics site), one of the moderators, Professor Sukosuti, noted that he had students create the comics using the "ragemaker," which is a website that contains a Rage Comic template and images of the characters, with which anyone can create a traditional Rage Comic (York, 2011)⁷. Therefore, students who create comics on the EFLComics site are charged with figuring out how to convey their messages using both the English language and the graphic culture associated with Rage Comics.

Participants

Because the data were drawn from an internet source, the contributors of the data were able to maintain a high level of anonymity. Therefore, relatively little information is known about the participants (either the students or the commenters) in the study. It is possible at least to identify whether a participant is a student or not; most students (including the three whose comics were chosen for this study) have screen names which designate them to be members of a certain class. In other words, almost all of the students' screen names contain a "root," or a standardized set of numbers and letters, that all students in that class have; this root is followed by a number which is unique to the individual student. Students also have a "badge" next to their screen name (the word "student" in a box) which identifies them as students. Commenters (unless, of course, they are students commenting on other students' work) do not have these special screen names.

More background information is known about the students as a group than about the commenters. Information available in a sidebar on the main webpage notes that "all students so

far are Japanese university students aged 18-20" (Sukosuti, 2011). The information on the main page also explains that the site was made to feature the work of nonnative English speakers (Sukosuti, 2011). Based on the fact that the comic creators are college students working on English in Japan, it can be assumed that the first language of these participants is Japanese and that they were studying English as a foreign language at the time that the comics were created. It should be acknowledged that the three comics which were analyzed in this study were created by three different students; this is obvious from the fact that each comic was credited to a different screen name.

As was mentioned previously, because the web page is accessible to the public, any person who has a reddit account can comment on the students' comics. The only background information available about individual commenters, then, is that which commenters offer or allude to in their own comments. This lack of information means that this paper cannot even say for certain whether the commenters are native or nonnative English speakers; it can only argue that, since the commenters involved in this study make their contributions in English, they have some knowledge of or experience with the English language. Other than that, not much is known about the commenters as a group.

Data Collection

The comics and comments were collected from the website in late January 2012. Though the data is available electronically, I printed and analyzed them in paper format for ease of reading. Because there are hundreds of comics available on the EFLComics site (and because most of the comics have multiple comments), the initial purpose of the collection process was to narrow down the field to a reasonable amount of data. In the first round of collection, then, I collected and reviewed all of the comics (and their respective comments) which featured use of

the rage guy. Through this process, thirty-seven comics with the rage guy were collected, and all comics which did not contain the rage guy were excluded.

In the second round of collection, I evaluated the comments for each comic in terms of their number and their content. Comics were then excluded if the comments left for them were few in number (generally, the comics needed to have at least 10 comments or there was not enough material to examine) or did not seem immediately remarkable in terms of their structure or content. This process limited the field of potential comics to ten; from these ten comics, I chose three because they contained at least one string of multiple comments that focused on a single language construction in the comic. These three comics and the comments that were left for them comprise the data for this paper, which can be found in Appendices A-H (comments that were considered irrelevant to the analysis were excluded from the appendices).

Data Analysis

Although the comics are included and referenced in this study, the true focus of the paper is the comments that were left in response to each comic. Thus, the data analysis procedure began with comments and only involved the language from the comics if it related to the comments. In the first part of the analysis, I evaluated and categorized the comments according to the speech act(s) that they seemed to accomplish. For example, a comment might be a positive evaluation (such as a compliment), an assessment (such as an expression of agreement or disagreement), a correction, or a joke. Often, I found that comments belonged to more than one category and that some comments were challenging to categorize.

After the comments were loosely categorized, I more closely evaluated them in terms of grammatical structure, vocabulary, and pragmatic function. The purpose of this part of the evaluation was to determine which face-saving techniques the commenters employed and how

they accomplished face-saving through their use of the English language. Rather than starting with a list of established face-saving techniques and searching for evidence of these techniques within the comments, I worked in the opposite direction by completing an in-depth analysis of the comments and then cultivating a list of techniques, some not normally recognized as face-saving, from the analysis. This inductive approach suited my purposes because (1) I enjoyed discovering patterns in the data rather than being told what they were, and (2) there was no existing research that could direct me to answers since the topic is so new.

At this point, it was necessary to evaluate the language construction from the comic that each comment set referred to. The purpose of analyzing language from the comics was two-fold. First, it allowed for me to make distinctions between the different kinds of language issues that the comment sets dealt with. I investigated the learner's language both objectively and through the lens of the comments. In other words, the language constructions were evaluated through the frame of standard North American English rules and through the impressions of the commenters as expressed in their remarks. These issues (as well as their significance) are discussed at length in the analysis and interpretation sections below.

Second, the analysis of the language constructions allowed me to evaluate the connections, both linguistic and semantic, between the language used by the learners and language used by the commenters. In the analysis section, the evaluation of the language construction is presented before the evaluation of the face-saving techniques for each comic in order to provide some background information about how the commenters interpret that particular language construction. Therefore, the analysis handled the comments first and then moved on to the learner language before comparing the two in its final stages.

Before proceeding to the analysis section, I must note some conventions that have been adopted during the process of analysis. First, I replaced the screen names of the users and the commenters with more generic signifiers for the sake of convenience and consistency and in an attempt to give the participants even greater anonymity. Thus, each student is simply referred to as “student” or “learner” (or as “OP” for “original poster” for her or his contributions to the comments) when her or his language or comic is being discussed. In a similar fashion, commenters are given monikers that reflect their order in the set of comments, so that “C1” means “Commenter 1,” “C2,” means “Commenter 2,” and so on. I have applied this naming convention to each comment set separately, so “C1” in comment set 1 should not be assumed to be the same person as “C1” in comment set 2.

Moreover, since the gender of the students and the commenters is unknown, I must explain the pronoun usage in the analysis section. Wherever possible, I avoided pronoun usage and referred to participants by their assigned signifiers. However, sometimes it is necessary to use pronouns to refer to participants. In this case, participants are alternately assigned male and female pronouns in the order that they appear in a discussion, so that the first participant that is introduced is referred to as “she,” the next is referred to as “he,” the following as “she,” and so on. As the language use of participants is often analyzed in small clusters, one participant may be referred to by a male pronoun at one point in the analysis and by a female pronoun at another. I recognize that this practice allows for inconsistency in the way that an individual participant is referred to; nevertheless, I hope that this practice reduces confusion overall by employing pronouns that allow the reader to distinguish quickly and easily between different participants when the references made to them are in close proximity in the analysis.

Now that these conventions have been explained, the paper can proceed to the actual analysis of the data.

Findings

From this analysis, it will be apparent that face-saving techniques are used by commenters in their responses to and discussion of four different kinds of language issues:

- a. language that is considered unidiomatic (or nonnative-like in terms of word choice)
- b. language which commenters disagree on in terms of its grammatical correctness (which may also be referred to as language which is considered “grammatically nonnative-like”)
- c. language with correct grammar but unclear meaning
- d. language that is grammatically incorrect⁸.

These are categories that I created and defined for this paper after a careful and sustained analysis demonstrated that these differences were present. As the findings will show, several distinct forms of face-saving occur in the comments that are studied, and the kinds of techniques used depends somewhat on the kind of situation in which they are performed. In fact, by examining five sets of comments from three comics, it will be seen that eight unique face-saving techniques are employed by commenters:

1. Hedging
2. Defense of the student
3. Praise of the student's language use
4. Language play: Joking and emulation
5. Critique of the English language and/or native speaker habits
6. Interpretation

7. Praise of the student's comic
8. Passive voice

Furthermore, the analysis will describe how all of these techniques are employed to protect the face of the student.

Some of the face-saving techniques occur in multiple sets of comments, while others occur only in one set of comments. The possible reasons for any variation that occurs between the techniques is explored in the discussion section. New techniques (those that have not been discussed previously) are presented first in each section in order to highlight them. Otherwise, the techniques that occur in more than one set of comments are presented in the same order for each comic; this means that techniques are referred to by their numbers above and that they are presented in numerical order. It is hoped that this method of presenting techniques lends order and consistency to the analysis.

The analysis also demonstrates that one of the face-saving techniques, hedging, occurs alongside and within other face-saving techniques; these instances of overlap are identified and explained in the analysis. Despite the fact that such overlap occurs, hedging is considered a separate technique because it can be used independently of the techniques that it occurs with (and vice versa).

Each of the three comics contains at least one of the aforementioned language issues, and each set of comments that is examined refers specifically to one of these issues. The first comic, “The best before date,” includes two language constructions that some of the commenters focus on, one due to word choice and one due to grammar; the second comic, “Jealousy,” contains a language construction that has correct grammar but unclear meaning; and the third comic, “The drink,” contains two language constructions that are grammatically incorrect. In each case, both

the error(s) and the face-saving techniques can be identified by examining the comments left in response to the comic. Thus, each section of the analysis begins with an in-depth exploration of the specific language issue before moving on to an investigation of the face-saving techniques.

Comments for Comic 1: “The best before date”

The comic “The best before date” seems to tell the following story (see Appendix A)⁹: the main character has a craving for eggs (panel 1), so he makes an omelet and eats it (panel 2); after he eats the omelet, he develops an upset stomach (panel 3), which he later discovers is due to the fact that the eggs were expired (panel 4). He learns a valuable lesson about checking to see that his food is fresh from this experience (panel 5). In this comic, there are two examples of student language that commenters focus on through discussions on either whether it is idiomatic (in the first case) or grammatically correct (in the second case). Of course, it should be noted that these descriptions of the commenters’ discussions have been developed through the analysis and are not stated by the commenters themselves. If one looks at the comic, one should notice an error in the top left panel and another in the very bottom panel. First, the analysis examines the language construction in the very bottom panel: the phrase “pay heed.”

Language Construction 1: “pay heed”

Before the face-saving techniques are analyzed, the kind of language issue that the comments respond to must be established and explained. One will notice that all of the comments in the set below deal with the phrase “pay heed”:

Fragment 1

1 **C1:** Pay heed, not exactly a normal thing to say, but sounds a lot
 2 cooler than anything I would normally say.
 3 **C2:** It's not a normal thing to say? I've certainly heard it a
 4 lot before! It's probably fallen out of the average person's
 5 lexicon of late.
 6 **C3:** I generally hear it as "Take heed", never heard it as
 7 "Pay heed" before.
 8 **C4:** 'Pay attention' or 'mind' seem far more common.
 9 **C5:** I wish it was a normal thing, I wanna say it lots!
 10 (unrelated comments deleted)
 11 **C8:** The pay heed was the decisive line in the comic for me.
 12 Haha. Love it. Made me think of Eddard Stark for some reason.
 13 (unrelated comments deleted)
 14 **C10:** I pay no heed to your negative attitude towards paying
 15 heed.

Although the word “native-like” is never used in this exchange, it is evident that the commenters are discussing how close the student gets to a target language construction due to the adjectives and adverbs they use. For instance, C1’s assertion in line 1:1 that the expression is “not exactly a normal thing to say” seems to be the fulcrum upon which the subsequent discussion turns¹⁰.

The use of the adjective “normal” raises a question: what is the normalcy measured against? Or, in other words, in comparison to what is the language “not...normal” (C1)? The assumption has been made that, since the comics and the comments are both made almost entirely in English, the main shared language of the commenters and the students is English. Based on this assumption, it can be argued that the above quote could be expanded to “not exactly a normal thing to say *in English*.” None of the commenters in fragment 1 actually say this, but other comments for the same comic (which do not deal with “pay heed”) do acknowledge English to be the target language through their reference to it or to native speakers.

For example, in reference to a grammatical error, one commenter in comment set 2 notes¹¹:

Fragment 2

C13: A native speaker would say "I love eggs" and "They're so delicious", referring to them in the plural form. I know the singular/plural concept is very different in the Japanese language, but I hope this helps.

In reference to the same grammatical error, another commenter writes:

Fragment 3

C17: All I'd do in this comic to fix its English is to change "I love an egg" to "I love eggs", and delete the "the" before "best before date" ("your food's" acting as the article in that case).

Notice that, in fragment 2, C13 changes the language based on her opinion of what a “native speaker” would say, making the noun “egg” plural, removing the article, and changing the number of the noun and the verb in the sentence that follows “I love an egg” (line 2:1).

Likewise, in fragment 3, C17 focuses on changes to the English usage in the comic, suggesting the same number change and article deletion that C1 had recommended, along with deletion of the article, in the last panel. The commenters don’t indicate any issues with meaning; the only changes they recommend are grammatical. For the above reasons, the adjective “normal” will sometimes be paraphrased as “native-like” in this section of the analysis even though the commenters who discuss “pay heed” do not use this specific term (note that using the term “normal” could itself be a face-saving technique if the commenter intends it to mean “incorrect”)¹².

The use of the term “normal” to evaluate a student’s language production seems to create agreement and disagreement from other commenters about whether or not the student’s language is native-like. The main issue here seems to be whether or not commenters think that the phrase is one that native speakers would actually use. From the fact that none of the commenters question the student’s intended meaning¹³ with the phrase “pay heed” and from the fact that two of the commenters offer synonymous phrases for “pay heed” which have similar meanings to each other, it seems apparent that the actual meaning of the phrase itself is not an issue. Therefore, the commenters are debating an issue which reaches beyond simple intended meaning.

The issue of how native-like the student's language is can be identified through the fact that the commenters in this interaction take one of two positions. As will be further explained, in the first position, they use statements that judge the phrase "pay heed" to be native-like, while in the second position, they use statements that judge the phrase to be nonnative-like (bolding added):

Fragment 5

- 1 **C1:** Pay heed, **not exactly a normal thing to say**, but sounds a lot cooler than
2 anything I would normally say.
3 **C2:** It's not a normal thing to say? I've **certainly heard it a**
4 **lot before!** It's probably fallen out of the average person's
5 lexicon of late.
6 **C3:** I generally hear it as "Take heed", **never** heard it as
7 "Pay heed" before.
8 **C4:** 'Pay attention' or 'mind' seem **far more common**.
9 **C5:** I **wish** it was a normal thing, I wanna say it lots!

C1 takes the first position when she says that the phrase is "not exactly a normal thing to say" (1:1). C2 disagrees by asserting that he has "certainly heard it a lot before"; this establishes C2's view as opposite to that of C1, since C2 attests to the phrase being normal in his experience with the language (if something that is heard frequently is taken to be normal for that language) (1:3-4). Next, C3 and C4 both disagree with C2 by offering contrasting accounts: C3 has "never" heard the idiom (1:6), while C4 offers other idioms that seem "far more common" than "pay heed" (1:8). By disagreeing with C2, C3 and C4 simultaneously construct an agreement with C1. C5's position might seem neutral because she does not openly state whether she thinks the phrase is "normal" or "not normal." However, her use of the word "wish" shows agreement with C1, C3, and C4 by implying that "pay heed" is not native-like since it creates a hypothetical situation in which, if the word were native-like, she would use it frequently (but it is not, so she cannot) (1:9).

Face-Saving Techniques

It is evident that there is doubt among certain commenters as to how native-like the student's language is. How, then, is face-saving accomplished by these commenters in response to language that may be correct yet uncharacteristic of native speaker speech? Four techniques are used by commenters to attempt to protect the student's face in this comment set:

- a. Technique #1: Hedging
- b. Technique #2: Defense of the student
- c. Technique #3: Praise of the student's language use
- d. Technique #4: Language play: Joking and Emulation

Face-saving Technique #1: Hedging

The first technique that commenters use for saving face is hedging. As demonstrated by the bolded words in fragment 5 below, there are several instances of hedging in this interaction:

Fragment 6¹⁴

1 **C1:** Pay heed, **not exactly** a normal thing to say, but sounds a lot
 2 cooler than anything I would normally say.
 3 **C2:** It's not a normal thing to say? I've certainly heard it a
 4 lot before! It's **probably** fallen out of the average person's
 5 lexicon of late.
 6 **C3:** I **generally** hear it as "Take heed", never heard it as
 7 "Pay heed" before.
 8 **C4:** 'Pay attention' or 'mind' **seem** far more common.
 9 **C5:** I wish it was a normal thing, I wanna say it lots!

Notice that three of the four hedges express uncertainty. C1's use of the phrase "not exactly" in line 1:1 implies that, although "pay heed" sounds unusual, there is some normalcy to it. C1 demonstrates reluctance to evaluate "pay heed" as completely atypical of native speaker usage; otherwise, she could have stated that the phrase was simply "not normal." Similarly, when C2 argues that "pay heed" has "probably" become a less commonly-used idiom in line 1:4, he leaves some room for the possibility that the idiom *is* still a commonly-used term; otherwise, he could have left out the word "probably." C4's use of "seem" in line 1:8 acknowledges that the phrases

he offers might not actually be used any more frequently than “pay heed” is utilized by native speakers. Even C3’s hedge, which appears to relates to typicality rather than certainty, serves to express doubt; thought “take heed” is the idiom that C3 is “generally” familiar with, she shows recognition that the phrase “pay heed” might be utilized less generally by native speakers (line 1:6).

Due to the feeling of uncertainty that the comments in fragment 3 convey, hedging serves as a face-saving technique in the interest of the student in two ways. First, it serves to soften the criticism that the student receives. Because none of the critiques asserts with complete certainty that “pay heed” is definitely unidiomatic, the possibility remains that the student’s phrase is commonly used by native speakers of English somewhere; the commenters can only say for certain whether the phrase is idiomatic in their own experiences. In other words, there is recognition that the student’s idiom might in fact be native-like. Second, it narrows the gap between commenters as experts and students as amateurs by showing that even the individuals who are offering the language advice have doubts about how unidiomatic the phrase “pay heed” is. Brown and Levinson have shown that hedges can signal when speakers know that their contributions might be false (1978, p. 169); the commenters downplay their expert status by acknowledging that they might be wrong through their hedge use.

The hedges acknowledge that the commenters’ information might be incorrect and that the student, in fact, may not be incorrect. Notice also that, in these comments, the commenters never use the second person pronoun to identify or refer to the student, which removes the spotlight from the student as the originator of the nonnative-like language. Therefore, the hedges lessen the focus on the student as the “incorrect” one. In these ways, the hedges that the commenters use attempt to save the student’s face.

Face-Saving Technique #2: Defending the Student

Another interesting feature of this interaction is that, regardless of their dissenting opinions, the commenters tend to show support for the student and awareness of the student's face by defending the student. In fragment 7 below, defense of the student is achieved both by questioning another commenter's ability to evaluate the language as a native speaker and by arguing that the student's language is indeed native-like:

Fragment 7

C2: It's not a normal thing to say? I've certainly heard it a lot before! It's probably fallen out of the average person's lexicon of late.

By repeating part of C1's comment as a question, C2 calls C1's judgment into question. With the phrase "not exactly a normal thing to say," C1 asserts in line 1:1 that "pay heed" is not native-like; C2 questions that assertion at the beginning of his comment and then rejects that assertion by providing a personal testimonial: "I've certainly heard it a lot before" (1:3-4). The personal testimonial has the effect of disagreeing with C1 because it gives "proof" that C2 has encountered several instances of the idiom's usage. In addition, notice that, in the final sentence of C2's comment, C2 also criticizes native English speakers' language use by explaining in line 1:5 that the phrase "pay heed" has "probably fallen out of the average person's lexicon of late." In this sentence, C2 implies that others may be unfamiliar with the idiom because "average" English speakers have stopped using it; in this way, C2 makes English speakers, and not the student, responsible for the fact that the phrase sounds unusual to others. Therefore, C2 protects the student's face by implying that the student's language use may indeed be normal and that the other commenters' language use (and the language use of native English speakers in general) is not at the level of the student's language use in terms of being current or extraordinary.

Face-Saving Technique #3: Praise of the Student's Language Use

The third face-saving technique used by commenters is praise of the student's language use. It can be observed that, in some comments, the student's atypical language use is praised by commenters. In the two fragments that follow, the commenters indicate first that they think the phrase "pay heed" is not native-like, but then offer the student encouragement (bolding added)¹³:

Fragment 8

C1: Pay heed, not exactly a normal thing to say, but **sounds a lot cooler than anything I would normally say.**

Fragment 9

C5: I wish it was a normal thing, **I wanna say it lots!**

Both of these commenters appear to suggest that, although the phrase "pay heed" is not something native speakers usually say, it is a creative use of language. C1 openly states that the student's language use sounds better than her own, and C5 even expresses a desire to mimic the student's language use (though C5 does not actually carry through with this desire). These comments function as praise because they indicate that C1 and C5 appreciate and approve of the language that the student utilized. Praise functions as a face-saving technique because it recognizes and respects a need to be seen as a competent language used by other users of that language (regardless of whether this need has been openly expressed by the student). Even though these commenters find the phrase "pay heed" to be unusual, they offer support to the student by praising the student's creativity in using this unusual idiom.

Face-Saving Technique #4: Language Play: Joking and Emulation

Though C5 only expresses a desire to mimic the student's language use in the praise that she gives, another commenter does actually emulate the student's language through a form of language play. Thus, language play through joke-making and emulation is the fourth and final face-saving technique that can be seen being used in this set of comments. Though joking and

emulating can occur as separate actions, they will be considered one technique because emulation in these comment sets seems always to be used for comic effect. In instances of language play and joke-making, the commenter manipulates or explains the language that the student has used in some way to create a joke. In emulation, the commenter actually copies the student's language use or expresses a desire or intention to do so. Observe how C10 uses the phrase "pay heed" in the comment below in a comical manner:

Fragment 10

C10: I pay no heed to your negative attitude towards paying heed.

C10's language play exhibits emulation because C10 uses the phrase "pay heed" in the same way that commenters interpret that the student meant to; in this sentence, "I pay no heed" clearly means "I take no notice of." By emulating the student's language, C10 shows that the phrase can be used in a way that is meaningful and makes sense for the context. In addition, C10 employs the phrase in a comical way by using the phrase itself to express dismissal of the other commenters' rejection of the phrase. This usage of the phrase is funny because it gives the comment a snarky tone; not only does C10 dismiss the criticism of the other commenters, but he expresses the dismissal effectively by using the very phrase that the other commenters claim is an issue. In this situation, language play through emulation and joke-making works as a face-saving technique because it recognizes the validity of the student's language as a usable construction.

As it turns out, expressions of admiration for atypical language use, desire to emulate atypical language use, or even surprise or consternation about the rigidity of English in not allowing a student's atypical language use are utilized by commenters as face-saving techniques in other comment sets. In fact, the set of comments left in response to the language issue in the top left panel of the comic "The best before date" demonstrate two of the three techniques just

mentioned being utilized by commenters. Therefore, putting “pay heed” aside, the focus of the analysis can shift to other comments from the comic “The best before date”: those left in response to the sentence “I love an egg.”

Language Construction 2: “I love an egg”

The comments for “I love an egg,” as seen in Appendix C, exhibit one face-saving technique that was mentioned briefly above being employed by commenters: praise of the student’s creative language use (despite the fact that it is “problematic”). The comments also exhibit another face-saving technique that was not employed by commenters who responded to “pay heed”: questioning and critique of the English language and/or native speaker habits. Since praise has been seen to occur without critique of the English language, these techniques will be considered to be two separate techniques. Nevertheless, they will be analyzed here together because they are intertwined in this set of comments. If one looks at the top left panel of the comic (see Appendix A), one will see the phrase “I love an egg,” which the commenters identify as problematic through the corrections that they suggest, although they are not able to describe exactly why (see Comment Set 2 in Appendix C).

From the nature of the discussion about the sentence “I love an egg,” it is obvious that the commenters consider the language to be remarkable in some way. However, they appear to disagree as to whether the language is grammatically correct, which is why this language construction has been given its own unique category (defined earlier as language issue b., p. 31) rather than being considered grammatically incorrect (language issue d., p. 31). Since, as the following analysis will demonstrate, the commenters who address this language issue seem to agree that the language construction is unusual in terms of what native speakers say (regardless

of whether they attribute this quality to incorrect grammar or not), the language construction will also sometimes be referred to as “grammatically nonnative-like.”

Perhaps the commenters’ disagreement is due partly to the fact that, while the commenters reference the concepts of number and definiteness with respect to nouns, they do not explain the reasoning behind the rules for using a singular versus a plural article or a definite versus an indefinite article. For example, although the changes that C13 recommends are grammatical, her focus seems to be on what would be most native-like rather than what is most grammatical. She does not explain the rules for using a plural form; instead, her correction is based solely on the fact that “a native speaker” would use the form she gives:

Fragment 11

C13: A native speaker would say “I love eggs” and “They’re so delicious”, referring to them in the plural form. I know the singular/plural concept is very different in the Japanese language, but I hope this helps.

Though he still does not explain why a particular rule applies in this circumstance, C17 provides greater explanation than C13 does about the different rules concerning the use of definite versus indefinite and singular versus plural articles:

Fragment 12

C17: The best I can come up with is that “a” or :an” [sic] refer to an indeterminate example of the object, “the” refers to a specific example, and the plural refers to the object as a general concept. Good luck explaining that in simple enough English to explain to a learner though.

C17 does not explicitly state that the language construction he is referring to is “I love an egg,” but it is clear from the context and from the fact that his comment is nested¹⁴ beneath C13’s that this is the sentence he is referring to. Due to his emphasis on explaining the grammar rules that influence article usage, C17’s critique seems to be more about a grammatical error than a non-native like construction. If one reads each comment in this set (see Appendix C), one will notice

that all of the commenters focus on the word “egg” and its article, which shows that, regardless of why, the sentence is considered to be an issue that needs to be addressed.

Part of the confusion that the comments convey may be caused by the fact that “I love an egg” is non-native like in terms of its grammar, but it technically is not grammatically incorrect (according to the prescriptive rules of standard American English grammar). If the student had mismatched a singular article with a plural noun (as in “I love **an** eggs”), there would be a clear violation of the grammatical rule that an article must have the same number as the noun with which it is paired. Moreover, there is no rule stating that the word “egg” cannot be singular or that the word “love” cannot take a singular object (as in “I love a good workout” or “I love a glass of orange juice in the morning”). Obviously, in both of these examples where “love” takes a singular object, other information has been added (an adjective in the first case and a prepositional phrase in the second) that makes the object less indefinite. However, this analysis will not examine those features of the language deeply because they are not the focus. Suffice it to say that, strictly in terms of the mechanics of the English language, the student’s sentence is not grammatically incorrect. Nevertheless, the commenters seem to feel that “I love an egg” does not “sound right” because of the singular article and noun.

Face-Saving Techniques

Perhaps the sentence’s quality of being grammatically non-native like but not technically grammatically incorrect influences the commenters to use two face-saving techniques:

- a. Face-Saving Technique #6: Critique of the English language and/or native speaker habits
- b. Face-Saving Technique #3: Praise of the student’s language

The discussion of “I love an egg” thus far seems to have uncovered another kind of language issue that is distinct from the issue on unidiomatic usage. Commenters found the word choice in

“pay heed” to be nonnative-like; in contrast, they disagreed about whether the grammar (not the vocabulary) in “I love an egg” was correct and, consequently, seemed to judge the grammar to be nonnative-like.

Face-Saving Technique #5: Critique of the English Language and/or Native Speaker Habits

C16 is the first to offer a critique of the English language when she leaves the following comment in response to C15’s suggestion:

Fragment 14

C15: Or even just “I love egg.” That’s quite literally what you say in Japanese.

C16: It’s kind of odd that it wouldn’t be common to say it that way in English. I.E. “I got egg on my shirt” is acceptable yet “I love egg” is not.

C16’s critique focuses on the language as it relates to native English speaker behavior rather than on the grammar itself. Since the only way to determine if something is “common to say” in a language is to analyze the speech of the native speakers of that language, what is being criticized here, evidently, is native speaker habit (despite the fact that such speakers are never mentioned) (line 2:8). C16 continues C14’s use of the word “odd,” but no longer pairs it with a word that will mitigate its negative connotation (line 2:8). As a result, the phrase “kind of odd” here seems to have a negative connotation because of the examples that C16 provides. By showing the contrast in acceptability between the first example, “I got egg on my shirt,” and the second example, “I love egg,” which are very similar in terms of grammar, C16 highlights what seems to be a contradiction (lines 2:9-10). The contrast suggests an important question: Why won’t native speakers allow “I love egg” if they will allow “I got egg on my shirt”? What the native speakers do with the language decides, to some degree, what is acceptable in terms of grammar in the language; since the contrast implies that there is an inconsistency in native English speakers’ use of the language, it seems to be a critique and a questioning of the English language itself.

Though C15 continues along the same line of thought as C16, the criticism of the language as provided by C15's response to the comment by C16 is more overt because English itself, and not select English sentences (as presented by C16), receives the negative focus:

Fragment 15

c15: English is just a weird language. It's completely inconsistent.

Because C15's comment is presented as a response to C16's comment, C15's response appears to be an offer of an explanation for the contrast that C16 observes. Notice that C15 uses the adjective "inconsistent" to describe the language as a whole; as noted before, this is the same quality that C16 suggests through her comparison (though she does not use the adjective itself) (line 2:12). To allege that a language is "completely inconsistent" is to insinuate that it does not follow a pattern of rules; the obvious effect of a lack of consistent rule application in the context of language learning is that the language would be difficult to learn. Thus, inconsistency is a negative quality and C15's comment can be considered a critique of the English language. This idea is only highlighted by the usage of the adjective "weird" in line 2:11 to describe the language, since "weird" has a negative connotation. Because English is described as a "weird language" specifically, it is implied that it is strange particularly in comparison to other languages.

It is interesting that commenters criticize and question the English language and the habits of native English speakers when the purpose of the site clearly is to provide a forum in which English language learners can practice and receive feedback on their English. Why spend time criticizing the language when one could offer feedback to the learner that is plain, concise, and free of questions? Two reasons seem especially relevant in this specific context. The first reason, which will be acknowledged only briefly as it is not the focus of this analysis, is that the criticism might be used by the commenters as a face-saving technique for *themselves* or as a way

to vent frustration. As it was shown earlier, the commenters do not seem to be able to pinpoint why the language is problematic for them; perhaps they pass judgment on the language in order to explain their uncertainty and frustration as a result.

The second reason is that the criticism functions as a face-saving technique in the interest of the student. By suggesting or stating that the language, either as a whole or just in this context, is unreliable or strange, the commenters effectively place the “blame” for the student’s problematic language on the English language itself rather than on the student. These commenters imply that the student cannot be considered at fault for using a construction that was non-native like because the language does not create a favorable condition for students to apply the rules correctly when using the language naturally themselves. In this way, C15 and C16 avoid threatening the student’s face by making it appear that the student, in a sense, could not help being “wrong.”

Recurrence of Face-Saving Technique #3: Praise of the Student’s Language Use

Part of the reason that praise of the student’s language is analyzed alongside critique of the English language is that the praise offered by C14 seems to open the door for the critique offered by C15 and C16. Notice that the comments by C15 and C16 are nested below the comment by C14; this means that C15’s comment is a response to C14, C16’s comment is a response to C15, and so on. In this way, the criticism in the comments by C16 and C15 appears to build on the praise offered by C14. Consequently, it is important to also investigate praise of the student’s language use as a face-saving technique.

It is curious that, as shown in the preceding analysis of the comments made by C13 and C17 (p. 43-44), even though commenters find the sentence “I love an egg” to be problematic, one of them praises the sentence:

Fragment 16

C14: There's still something oddly charming about, "I love an egg." I love when they make that mistake with objects in a sentence :P

For C14, the sentence is appealing precisely because of the grammar; this is evident from C14's assertion in lines 2:4-5 that he "love[s] when they make that mistake with objects." Because C14 provides so little information about the mistake, it is difficult to pinpoint what "mistake" means here. However, due to C14's use of the grammatical term "object," it can be assumed that C14 is referring to a grammatical mistake. Furthermore, since "an egg" is the object of the sentence, it is clear that C14 views "an egg" as the mistake. The positive connotation of the word "charming" gives C14's description of the sentence a supportive, approving tone (line 2:4). Of course, it must be acknowledged that one could also interpret the usage of this word to have a patronizing tone; however, since it is impossible to know the commenter's intention here, the analysis will focus on the possibility that this comment is intended to be praise. One might think that the use of the adverb "oddly" lessens the positive connotation of the word "charming" (since what is strange or unusual is often considered to be bad), but one must consider what "oddly" refers to. In this situation, it seems that "oddly" refers to the fact that the sentence is successful despite using a non-native like structure. Thus, the comment might be paraphrased to say "For some reason, 'I love an egg' is lovable even though it contains this mistake." In this way, C14's comment might be considered praise for the student's language use if the tone is taken to be sincere and not condescending.

In this context, praise works as a face-saving technique in two ways, one of which is more obvious than the other. First, it provides the student with positive feedback rather than critique. As the literature review established, being corrected is a face-threatening act, so the commenter is able to avoid threatening the student's face by not correcting their language. The commenter does not simply pretend that there is no issue with the language; instead, he

recognizes that the language does contain a “mistake” and then explains that the mistake, in his opinion, is a good one because it is endearing or cute. The language is praised rather than picked apart.

Second, the praise implies a disregard for the rules or habits of native speakers that would seem to classify this sentence as “problematic.” When C14 argues that “I love an egg” is “charming” and that he “love[s]...this mistake” as nonnative speakers make it in general, he seems to suggest that the language construction is acceptable to him because of his positive feelings toward it. C14 implies that the student’s language construction is just as acceptable as the more “native-like” constructions suggested by the other commenters and effectively rejects the idea that the “mistake” is a negative thing. Even though he refers to the object as a “mistake,” C14 saves the student’s face by framing that mistake as a positive action on the part of the student.

The analysis so far has shown that six different face-saving techniques are employed by commenters who respond to language that is judged to be non-native-like in the comic “The best before date”:

- a. Face-Saving Technique #1: Hedging
- b. Face-Saving Technique #2: Defense of the student
- c. Face-Saving Technique #3: Praise of the student’s language use
- d. Face-Saving Technique #4: Language play: Joking and emulation
- e. Face-Saving Technique #5: Critique of the English language.

However, this analysis must also consider how commenters attempt to save a student’s face when a comic contains other kinds of language issues. For example, what kinds of face-saving techniques are used by commenters in response to language that is grammatically correct but has

ambiguous meaning, and what are the effects of these techniques? Possible answers to this question can be explored by analyzing an example of such language in the comic “Jealousy.”

Comments for Comic 2: “Jealousy”

Language Construction 3: “I determine your happiness”

In this comic (see Appendix D), a couple sits on a bus or train expressing their love for each other (panels 1 and 2), and an onlooker has to watch these expressions of love while he himself is all alone (panel 3), so he feels angry (panel 4). Notice that a precise description of the interchange in panel 2 is not offered; this is because panel 2 contains the sentence “I determine your happiness,” which has an unclear meaning. In situations where commenters do not understand the meaning of a certain language construction, such as when reading this comic, they continue to use face-saving techniques in their comments, but the techniques have slightly different effects. The types of face-saving techniques employed by commenters include:

- a. Face-Saving Technique #6: Interpretation
- b. Face-Saving Technique #1: Hedging
- c. Face-Saving Technique #4: Language play: Joking and emulation

The confusion about this sentence stems from the word “determine” since it has different possible meanings within this context. For example, the *Cambridge American Content Dictionary* provides the following two definitions for the word “determine” in verb form (Cambridge, 2011):

- a. “to control or influence directly”
- b. “to find out or make certain facts or information.”

In addition to these definitions, the *Cambridge American Content Dictionary* also offers a definition for the word in adjective form, “determined” (Cambridge, 2011):

- c. “showing the strong desire to follow a particular plan of action even if it is difficult.”

Thus, there are at least three distinct meanings of the word “determine.”

In the first three understandings offered by commenters, it is apparent that the different possible meanings of “determine” are the source of their confusion. For example, in the following comment, the word “determine” is taken to mean “control” or “influence”:

Fragment 17

C2: agreed best line ever. He is her everything so, she is only happy when he is, so he can determine her happiness. He decides if she happy or not.

C2 uses both a synonym and an explanation to clarify the meaning of the sentence. By using the word “decides” in line 3:5 of the comment, C2 demonstrates that he understands “determine” to have definition (a), “control”; in this context, “control” and “decide” are synonymous because if one decides how another person feels, one takes control over that other person’s free will. In addition, C2 makes this usage of “determine” fit the comic by providing a short description in the second sentence of a situation in which the phrase would make sense.

The understanding offered by C2 is the only one that is offered by more than one commenter. Although they express it in unique ways, in fragments 18, 19, and 20, the commenters all express the same idea of “control” as C2:

Fragment 18

C7: I like to think of it as “I alone determine your happiness. [look of disapproval emoticon]”

Fragment 19

C18: The subtle misogyny in the line “I determine your happiness” provokes a deep internal dialogue within the viewer normally too taboo for society to notice. Truly, the author of this comic is a progressive visionary, years before his time.

Fragment 20

C7: I love you, thus I now control your emotions.

Notice that two of the comments are offered by C7. In fragment 18, C7 conveys the idea of control through the addition of the adverb “alone” and the emoticon, which is understood in this community to be a look of disapproval (lines 3:16). These two additions portray the seriousness that the word “control” carries when used to discuss personal relationships. In fragment 20, C7 actually paraphrases “I determine your happiness” as “I...control your emotions” in lines 3:42. Furthermore, by suggesting in line 3:38 that the sentence conveys “subtle misogyny,” C18 also uses the ideas of control and powerful versus powerless to imply that “determine” means “control.” Since it seems unlikely that the student was actually trying to provide social commentary on gender roles in this comic, C18’s comment appears to be sarcastic. This comment may even be an example of double-voicing (see p. 12-13), as it evokes two different voices: that of the commenter, and that of a literary critic offering a textual analysis. In any case, the use of the term “subtle misogyny” still brings to light the undertone of control present in the sentence “I determine your happiness” as it is used in this context.

Two other understandings for the sentence “I determine your happiness” that are based on the different meanings of the word “determine” are offered by another commenter, as can be seen in the comment below:

Fragment 21

C6: It is a little bit hard to read back and forth when it isn't clear who is speaking first. the line “I determine your happiness.” can either be “I know you are happy” or “i'm determined to make you/be happy”. I'm not sure which you are trying to go for. But you are using correct rage faces and everything. Nice work.

In the first paraphrase, “I know you are happy,” the word “determine” has been taken to mean “conclude,” since the paraphrase conveys the idea that knowledge has been obtained (line 3:10) (definition (b), p. 50). In the second interpretation, on the other hand, C6 suggests that the student intended to use the adjective form of the word (as evidenced by the fact that C6 actually does use the adjective form in her paraphrase), which gives the word a slightly different meaning

than that proposed by C2: “to be committed to” (definition (c), p. 51). Therefore, according to the commenters, there are three different potential meanings of the sentence “I determine your happiness” based solely on the different definitions of the word “determine”:

- a. to control another person’s feelings
- b. to discover or realize that another person is happy
- c. to be dedicated to causing feelings of happiness in another person

The comments and the face-saving techniques employed within them derive from the unique possible meanings of the word “determine” in this context.

The final three commenters move away from suggesting how the word “determine” might fit into the sentence and instead offer reformulations of the sentence that utilize other structures or other very similar, but ultimately different, words. By doing so, they seem to indicate that student used an inappropriate word for the sentence rather than trying to narrow the word’s meaning and fit it better into its existing context. C11 provides the first instance of this type of reformulation:

Fragment 22

C11: I think it might mean “Are you sure you are happy?”

It is interesting that C11 assumes the student meant to ask a question because what the student wrote did not use question word order or a question mark. Perhaps C11 understood the sentence “I determine your happiness” to be a question because, as mentioned earlier, one of the definitions of “determine” is “to find out,” and one can find out information by asking questions. For this commenter, then, the context of the word “determine” seems to be an issue because C11 changes the structure, and therefore the context, to better convey the idea of the word. In other words, it is more logical to ask a question that would yield the information being sought (as C11 has done with “Are you sure you are happy?”) rather than stating what one is trying to figure out

(as the student could be understood to have done with “I determine your happiness” meaning something like “I am trying to determine how happy you are”).

The other two commenters change the student’s sentence less dramatically. As discussed earlier, the word “determine” can have the meaning “control”; however, in the context of feelings and relationships, it can be argued that the word is too severe when it has this meaning. Since feelings are usually described as things that a person experiences uniquely and independently, “determine” in the “control” sense could be considered too harsh because it implies that one person has power over another. For instance, notice that C12 does not include the word “determine” or any of its synonyms in his reformulation (bolding added):

Fragment 23

C12: In western comics, who talks first is denoted by height. It is also traditional for the first person to talk to be on the left. In panel 2 neither of these are done, so it is a little confusing. **I think that in panel 2 you mean “I make you happy!” but I am not sure...**

Not only has the structure been changed to include an object pronoun and an adjective rather than a possessive pronoun and a noun, but a verb with another meaning is employed. Here, “make,” which is used in line 3:29 in place of “determine,” has a less negative connotation than “determine” because it has the meaning of “influence” but not of “control.” In other words, by using “make” in this context, the commenter redefines the role of the character who utters the phrase “I determine your happiness” from one of commanding to one of causing. C12 utilizes a different word in the context, which removes the unusual (according to American English culture) power dynamic that the first sentence sets up.

C16 also works to change this dynamic, though he does so in a way distinct from that of C12. Notice that (as she explains) C16 changes the pronouns in his reformulation (bolding added):

Fragment 24

C16: I think it was that the pronoun usage [sic] was swapped; what was meant to be said was “**You** determine **my** happiness”. Which can be correct, but if we want to speak awesome english you can say “**You** make **me** very happy” And mean the same thing.

The effect of the changing the subject pronoun from first person to second person and of changing the possessive pronoun from second person to first person is that the word “determine” seems less harsh. This is due to the fact that the speaker of the phrase is no longer asserting control over another person; instead, the hearer is recognized as the agent. C16 seems to assert that the word “determine” fits better in this context before providing a paraphrase that is proposed to be more native-like (this can be seen from the use of the term “awesome english”).

Face-Saving Techniques

As the preceding analysis shows, the meaning of the phrase “I determine your happiness” is unclear to the commenters. Now that the ambiguity of this sentence and the word “determine” within it have been explained, the analysis can move on to the face-saving techniques employed by the commenters. To review, the kinds of face-saving techniques that are present in this string of comments are: face-saving technique #6: interpretation; face-saving technique #1: hedging; and face-saving technique #4: language play: joking and emulation.

Face-Saving Technique #6: Interpretation¹⁵

The first kind of face-saving technique, of which there are a few examples in this comment set, is interpretation. When a commenter provides an interpretation, she offers her understanding of what the student intended to say by rephrasing it. For example, C11 provides an interpretation of “I determine your happiness” in fragment 21 when she states that the sentence “might mean ‘Are you sure you are happy?’,” and C12 does the same in line 3:29 by arguing “I think...you mean ‘I make you happy!’” in fragment 22. Here are two examples of interpretation were left in response to “I determine your happiness”:

Fragment 25¹⁸

C6: It is a little bit hard to read back and forth when it isn't clear who is speaking first. the line "I determine your happiness." can either be "I know you are happy" or "i'm determined to make you/be happy". I'm not sure which you are trying to go for.

Fragment 26¹⁹

C11: I think it might mean "Are you sure you are happy?"

Notice that the interpretations tend to retain something of the student's original language. For example, in fragment 25, the pronouns and some form of the word "happiness" are retained in both of the interpretations; what changes are the main verb and the structure, and even these closely resemble the student's original phrasing. Though the structure of the original phrase has been changed in fragment 26, the second-person pronoun and a form of the word "happy" have been saved. As the discussion of the different meanings of the phrase on pages 50-55 showed, even the components of the sentence that have been changed retain some of the meaning the original sentence carried (though the meaning has been narrowed, so the interpretation does not retain the ambiguity).

It is also worth noting that almost all of the commenters who offer interpretations do so by providing explicit corrections that contain recast-like structures. What this means is that the majority of the interpretations themselves look like recasts, but they are prefaced by phrases which identify them as corrections. Thus, the entire act of offering interpretation is an explicit correction, but the interpretation itself, if isolated, resembles a recast. For example, look at example 26 on page 56 again. The phrase "I think it might mean" signals that some kind of error has occurred in the student's original construction (line 3:21). The interpretation "Are you sure you are happy?" is C11's restatement of the original sentence with the "errors" corrected (line 3:21). Notice that all of the interpretations take this form. In fact, just two of seven commenters, C2 and C18, provide their interpretations in a way other than through explicit correction with recast:

Fragment 27

C2: agreed best line ever. He is her everything so, she is only happy when he is, so he can determine her happiness. He decides if she happy or not.

Fragment 28

C18: The subtle misogyny in the line "I determine your happiness" provokes a deep internal dialogue within the viewer normally too taboo for society to notice. Truly, the author of this comic is a progressive visionary, years before his time.

In fragment 27, C2 explains what he thinks the student means by adding extra information to give the sentence "I determine your happiness" greater context. In fragment 28, C18 provides an analysis of the phrase that implies the student was offering a social commentary. Unlike the recasts made by other commenters, the interpretations offered by C2 and C18 do not obviously provide language for the student to use in her comic. In other words, if the student wanted to use C2's interpretation to revise her language, she would not be able to simply take the interpretation and place it in the panel; she would need to dig the language out of the interpretation and reformulate it to fit into the comic.

In all of the other acts of interpretation in this comment set, then, the commenters use explicit corrections which contain recast-like structures. The commenters could give the student detailed explanations concerning why the phrase "I determine your happiness" is confusing, but instead they attempt to help the student find the language construction that fits the context. The fact that none of the commenters ever explains why the meaning of the original sentence is confusing seems significant because this sort of correction would be much more clear and direct (one must wonder, in fact, whether the student realizes in all of these instances that she is being corrected since the commenters are not very explicit in their offers of correction; however, one would imagine that the student might realize there is an issue with her language solely because the commenters provides so many different interpretations). Of course, the commenters may not

give an explanation simply because they themselves are not certain why they would recommend their own changes.

From the analysis, it can be seen that interpretation is used by commenters in the response to this comic. How does interpretation fit under the category of face-saving techniques, then? It seems to fit due to the two qualities listed above. First, the commenters tend to preserve parts of the student's language when they offer interpretations. This tendency has the dual effects of recognizing the student's language as valid and meaningful and of providing possible hypotheses about what, exactly, is problematic about the construction. By preserving the certain parts of the student's language, the commenters indicate that, even if they would recommend changing some aspect(s) of the sentence, the remaining parts are "correct" enough to leave unchanged. In addition, by including some new words while keeping some of the original words, the commenters demonstrate that they understand the student's meaning enough to choose language that fits well with the student's English. Therefore, the commenters show that the student's language is meaningful to them and that the student has some competency as an English user. In these ways, the commenters demonstrate that they are aware of the student's face and attempt to save it.

Second, they mostly do interpretation through explicit corrections which contain recast-like structures, which attempt to give the student the language she needs without directly explaining how her language is "problematic." Though there is nothing incorrect grammatically about the sentence "I determine your happiness," all of the commenters seem to indicate that its meaning is unclear. Consequently, although commenters do not explain their corrections, they do attempt to revise the language by offering clarification. In terms of correction, then, the

explicit corrections and recasts that they employ seem to decrease the face threat when highlighting the issue and suggesting how to improve the language.

Recurrence of Face-Saving Technique #1: Hedging

Much of what the commenters do when they respond to the sentence “I determine your happiness” is interpretation. A second face-saving technique that they use often prefaces or follows the interpretation: hedging. Hence, here is an instance of hedging being employed within another face-saving technique. As is shown by the underlining, hedging is used often in this lengthy string of comments (see Comment Set 3 in Appendix E).

Commenters hedge their contributions in a few ways. One way that the commenters hedge is through the use of phrases that acknowledge that they might be in violation of Grice’s maxim of truth. Like the commenters who responded to “pay heed” (p. 37-38), the commenters for “I determine your happiness” honor this maxim by acknowledging that certain contributions they make might be untrue. Notice that both C6 and C12 use the phrase “I’m not sure” following their interpretations (lines 3:13 and 3:29); similarly, C11, C12, and C16 all introduce their interpretations with the phrase “I think” (lines 3:21, 3:29, and 3:33). Both of these phrases convey a sense of uncertainty on the commenter’s part. They also emphasize, through the use of the first person singular pronoun, the fact that the interpretation belongs to that individual commenter (rather than being inspired by a prescriptive source such as a reference grammar). Therefore, not only do these commenters acknowledge that their interpretations might be wrong; they also take ownership of this potential wrongness.

By showing uncertainty and stressing that the interpretations are their own, the commenters acknowledge that their contributions might be untrue in two ways. First, the interpretations could be untrue according to meaning that the student intended (since there are

many possible interpretations, as the first part of the analysis indicated on pp. 50-55). Second, the interpretations might not be considered true by other commenters. When the commenters hedge with these phrases, they are able to safeguard both themselves and the student from losing face. The phrases soften the potential blow to the student by lowering the commenters' credibility as judges of the language and the potential blow to the commenters themselves by implying that they are not the authorities on this topic.

Another form of hedging occurs through the use of modal verbs²⁰. Modal verbs are utilized by three commenters to introduce interpretations when they discuss the sentence "I determine your happiness": "can be" (from C6, in lines 3:11-12, and C16, in line 3:34) and "might" (from C11, in line 3:21). These verbs work to reduce the impact of the criticism that the commenters give to the student. For example, when C11 notes that the sentence "might mean 'Are you sure you are happy?'" he recognizes that he could be wrong through the use of the modal verb "might," which implies possibility. C11 does not assert that "I determine your happiness" definitely means "Are you sure you are happy?"; rather, C11 provides the interpretation only as a suggestion in case it was the student's intention. The obligation implied by these two modals is very weak, suggesting that the students' usage of the phrases is optional. In this way, commenters downplay their judgment of the student's language by portraying it as possibly misguided, thereby lessening the criticism the student might receive.

From this analysis, it is evident that the commenters use not only interpretation, but also hedging, as a face-saving technique. Hedging takes two different forms in this context: phrases that acknowledge Grice's maxim of truth and modal verbs. Though modal verbs were not presented in the literature as hedges, recall that Lakoff's description (1973) of hedges allows for a wide range of words to function as hedges (see p. 4 of literature review). Before moving on, it

must be acknowledged that the modal verbs used in hedging here might also function to save the commenter's own face or other commenters' face because, as mentioned on page 60, these hedges recognize that the commenter's own ideas might be incorrect. This hedging works as face-saving for the commenter himself because it lessens the pressure on the commenter to be correct by openly recognizing that he might not be. It works as a face-saving technique for other commenters because it recognizes that their own ideas might be correct according to what the student intended. While the possibility of modal verbs functioning as face-saving hedges for commenters is acknowledged, this paper analysis will focus on face-saving specifically as it applies to the students.

Recurrence of Face-Saving Technique #4: Language Play: Joking and Emulation

The third face-saving technique used by commenters, language play, consists of two actions that are presented in tandem as a single technique: joking and emulation. To reiterate, the reason for this is that both of the instances of emulation of (or a desire to emulate) the student's language occur in comments that are also examples of jokes. Though one might question the role of using jokes to respond to students' uses of language, the goal of the language play seems to be either to demonstrate understanding of the intended meaning of the language or to emulate the student's use of the language in a creative way rather than to make a joke at the expense of the learner.

Before explaining how these two techniques are used to save a student's face, joke-making and emulation will be examined so that it is understood how they occur in this context. In the example that follows, notice how both C8 and C9 use humor in their responses to the phrase "I determine your happiness":

Fragment 29

C7: I like to think of it as "I alone determine your happiness. [look of disapproval emoticon]"

C8: This was a line in the wedding vows I wrote for my wife... ex-wife rather.

C9: Did you determine that she wasn't happy?

As was mentioned previously (p. 48), C7 shows her understanding of the word “determine” to mean “control” through her use of the adverb “alone” and the look of disapproval emoticon. In response, C8 uses C7’s interpretation to make a joke, since the juxtaposition of “wife” with “ex-wife” in line 3:18 shows how this statement could be disastrous to a relationship; it is humorous because most English speakers will assume that the commenter is being sarcastic. It can be argued that commenters who are familiar with or from a background of American culture would recognize that wedding vows are traditionally used by people in a romantic relationship to show love to one another. Therefore, an expression that has the negative connotation of “control,” such as “I determine your happiness,” would seem out of place in a wedding vow because it rejects the traditional ideas of love and positivity associated with a wedding ceremony. Commenters who understand American culture would recognize that a marriage that begins with a vow about one partner controlling the other’s happiness would seem doomed from the start (and indeed it was, as C7’s use of the term “ex-wife” indicates); it is a ridiculous statement to be used in the context of a wedding, which is what makes C8’s comment comical. Finally, the language play continues when C9 uses “determine” again, but in a context that means “realize” (line 3:19). Therefore, the three commenters use the ambiguous meaning of the word “determine” to make jokes.

In the next two examples, both joke-making and emulation (or desired emulation) occur. Consider the following example, which is the first comment that the comic received:

Fragment 30

C1: "I determine your happiness" is the best line ever. I'm gonna dress up like Dr. Doom or somebody for Halloween and be all like "DOOM DETERMINES YOUR HAPPINESS."

Notice that C1 first offers a positive evaluation of the sentence "I determine your happiness," indicating the fact that the commenter does not find the language problematic (in that C1 does not admit confusion). C1 then states an intention to use the student's language as part of a Halloween costume, which demonstrates a desire of the commenter to emulate the student's language use. At the same time that C1 states her intent to use the line, she attempts to make a joke by appropriating the line to Dr. Doom, a comic book villain. This appropriation is comical because it puts the sentence in a context where the severity of the word "determine" (when it has the meaning "control") does not seem unusual. It can be argued that most English speakers who understand villains as a cultural reference would associate the act of trying to control things with villains, and would therefore find the appropriation amusing.

It is less obvious whether the second example of joke-making and emulation is truly meant to be a joke or whether it is simply an interpretation, but one can certainly construe it to be comical, so it will be treated as such:

Fragment 31

C7: I love you, thus I now control your emotions.

Although C7 paraphrases the student's original words with "I...control your emotions" in line 3:42, he still conveys one of the same ideas that the student conveyed (whether or not the student intended to convey it). The comment is comical because it links two events through cause and effect that most English speakers would probably not see as having a causal relationship. Traditionally, the idea of one partner controlling another's emotions is not associated with the idea of love; therefore, the absurdity created by the hyperbole in this comment might be found funny by other commenters or readers.

From the examination of these comments, it is apparent that commenters sometimes imitate the student's language and play with the language to create jokes. Why might these actions be considered face-saving techniques? When the commenter uses the sentence "I determine your happiness" itself or a paraphrase of the sentence to achieve some effect in their comment (such as humor), she demonstrates that it is possible to use the sentence in the same way that the student did (in the context of a happy relationship), which may also have the effect of rejecting the idea that the sentence is unusual or unacceptable. In this way, the use of language play allows the commenter to show that they understand the student and support the student's creative or nontraditional use of the language. Therefore, these techniques appeal to the student's face since the commenters show solidarity with the student by adopting her language use and using it to communicate with others through humor. The effect appears to be that the student's "error" in using confusing language is downplayed, while her creativity is highlighted.

From this analysis of the comments that respond to the ambiguous "I determine your happiness," it can be seen that the commenters utilize three main face-saving techniques:

- a. Face-Saving Technique #6: Interpretation
- b. Face-Saving Technique #1: Hedging
- c. Face-Saving Technique #4: Language play: Joking and emulation

Both hedging and language play have also been observed in comments sets 1 and 2, which deal with nonnative-like language. On the other hand, the other technique, interpretation, was not observed or analyzed in those comment sets. However, attempts at face-saving have not yet been analyzed for the kind of language issue that is perhaps most noticeable to English speakers: language that is grammatically incorrect.

Comments for Comic 3: “The drink”

This comic features two friends sitting at a table (see Appendix F). The first friend tells the second friend that he wants a sip of the second friend’s drink (panel 1), so the second friend offers his beverage to the first friend (panel 2). However, it turns out that the second friend was actually playing a prank, as he takes his drink back just as the first friend is about to grab it (panel 3); this prank makes the first friend feel surprised (panel 3) and then angry (panel 4). In both of the sets of comments that have been analyzed so far, the language constructions that the commenters have focused on have not been incorrect according to standard American English grammar rules; instead, they have been considered unidiomatic, grammatically nonnative-like, or confusing in terms of meaning. The next two sets of comments address the parts of a comic in which a student has made an actual grammatical error, which was defined in the endnote as a grammatical construction that does not follow prescriptive standard American English grammar rules (see note #8, p. 86). Both sets of comments were made in response to the same comic, but they address two separate errors. This analysis sets out to determine if the types of face-saving techniques used by the commenters in response to grammatical errors are the same as those used in response to unidiomatic, grammatically nonnative-like, or unclear language.

The error itself should be made apparent in each case before the face-saving techniques are analyzed. This task can be accomplished by examining the original samples of language and the content of the comments that respond to them. If one reads the comic titled “The drink” in Appendix F, one should notice two grammatical errors: one in the top right panel, and another in the lower left panel. First, this paper will examine the phrase “HERE your.”

Language Construction 4: “HERE your”

The first error involves the phrase “HERE your.” This error is curious because there are two grammatical structures that one could infer the student might have meant to use based on the language and the context. These two structures, which are proposed by the commenters, are discussed here:

- a. The fixed phrase “here you are.”
- b. An unfinished sentence (as may be indicated by the ellipsis after “HERE your...”) in which the contraction was meant to be used, as in “here you’re sitting, asking me for a drink.”

Despite the fact that three structures are possible, one of the structures seems to be the obvious choice due to the context; that is, a person will often say “here you are” when handing something to another person. In any case, the commenters below describe two of the errors through the corrections that they suggest (see Comment Set 4 in Appendix G). One possible way of correcting the error is given by C8, C12, and C13 (lines 4:2-3, 4:11, and 4:19, respectively). All three state the correct form of the phrase as “Here you are,” but this final phrase actually represents the end product of two separate errors being corrected. C8 perhaps best describes the distinct errors, which are:

1. The use of the wrong homonym, and
2. The inappropriate use of a contracted form.

First, C8 suggests that the student meant “‘you’re’ instead of ‘your’,” which shows that the student chose the wrong homonym. Underlying that error is the second, in which the student contracted the pronoun and the copula at the end of the sentence, for which C8 says “the contraction would not be used” (line 4:2).

Another way of correcting the error is proposed by C11; although C11 is corrected by another commenter, C11's contribution is important because it defines the second structure the student might have intended. Like C8, C12, and C13, C11 recommends the student exchange "your" for its homonym, the contraction "you're," but his reasoning is different. From his assertion in line 4:5 that he is "not 100% certain what the rest of the sentence...is supposed to be," it is clear that C11 thinks that the sentence is unfinished. Therefore, for C11, the contraction is acceptable because he assumes that the student meant to add a word after it to finish the sentence.

Face-Saving Techniques

Regardless of which target structure each commenter believes the student intended to use, it is evident that the issue being discussed is the grammatical error. When the commenters identify and suggest corrections for the error, then, what kinds of face-saving techniques do they use, and how do they use them? This analysis will show how the commenters employ four techniques to protect the student's face:

- a. Face-Saving Technique #7: Praise of the student's comic
- b. Face-Saving Technique #8: Passive voice
- c. Face-Saving Technique #1: Hedging
- d. Face-Saving Technique #2: Defense of the student

Face-Saving Technique #7: Praise of the Student's Comic

Commenters use another face-saving technique when they offer the student praise specifically for his comic before or after identifying an error or suggesting a correction. Praise of the comic can be observed happening in both of the comments below (bolding added):

Fragment 32

C11: I'm not 100% certain what the rest of the sentence "HERE your..." is supposed to be, but I believe it's supposed to be "you're" (as in you are) rather than "your" which shows possession rather than a state of being.

But a good comic nonetheless.

Fragment 33

C13: Great job on the comic, but there's one mistake. In the second panel, you should have said "Here you are." When you emphasize the second half of a contraction, don't contract it. For example, you should say, "Here you are," not "Here you're"

In fragment 32, the commenter gives advice about the student's grammar and then offers praise in the form of a modulated²² compliment, which means that the compliment is weakened by the fact that it is paired with criticism about the student's language. In fragment 33, the compliment comes first, and then is followed by a correction of the grammar. The encouragement balances the criticism (somewhat) in each example, since advice, even if it is meant to help improve the student's language, might be seen as negative, and therefore face-threatening, by the student. Though the praise is not necessarily strong, both of the compliments positively evaluate the comic as a whole. Therefore, the commenters both show their recognition that the student was successful in her attempt to create humor despite the fact that the language contained some errors. This acknowledgement has a face-saving effect because the student's ability to make a joke using English in rage comics is celebrated rather than ridiculed. Since rage comics are defined by their format and graphics, it can be argued that, to be part of the community of rage comics, a person's comic would need to be successful (humorous) as a rage comic specifically (using the traditional format and graphics). By recognizing that the student has created a successful rage comic, the commenters demonstrate sensitivity to the desire that might exist to be an included member of this community.

Face-Saving Technique #8: Passive Voice

Besides praise of the student's comic, three other face-saving techniques are utilized.

One of these techniques, which has not been described previously in the analysis, is grammatical voice. Though the comment that C12 makes clearly refers to the student's language (and C11's comment), C12 never directly addresses the student (or C11) and uses no personal pronouns to identify the student (or C11) (bolding added):

Fragment 34

C12: As it would be the end of the sentence it should probably **be written** "here you are" as the contraction should not **be used.**

C12 is able to avoid addressing or identifying the student or C11 by using agentless passive-voice verbs in his comment. By using passive verbs with no agent, C12 draws the attention away from the fact that the student wrote the English in the comic and that C11 misunderstood the comic (according to C12, and later C11 himself, at least) and focuses instead on what he considers to be the correct form of the language. Thus, using passive voice verbs with no agent is a face-saving technique for both the student and C11 because it switches the critique from the student as the originator of the mistake and from C11 as a competent judge of English. By doing so, C12 puts the critique on the language construction itself.

The use of agentless passive voice verbs as a face-saving technique are particularly interesting to consider when one recalls that commenters also use face-saving techniques which focus on connecting and comparing the student's language use to that of native speakers since these two techniques seem to use opposite strategies. However, this contrast can be viewed through the lens of positive and negative face (see p. 2), since the use of agentless passive voice verbs seems might be considered an appeal to negative face (since it shows sensitivity to an individual need to not be seen as the creator of an error), while the comparisons to native speakers' language use might be considered appeals to positive face (since they emphasize the

need that may exist for the student to be seen as part of the larger group of native English speakers). Thus, though these techniques seem opposite, they both work to save face.

Recurrence of Face-Saving Technique #1: Hedging

It has been shown that passive voice is implemented as a face-saving technique in comments that respond to “HERE your.” An additional technique is present within the exchange between C11 and C12 that works to protect the face of the student: hedging.

Two forms of hedging occur in the comments of C11 and C12. Similar to the examples of hedging noticed for “pay heed” and “I determine your happiness,” the first form is words or phrases that appeal to Grice’s truth maxim. For example, C11 uses the phrases “I’m not certain” and “I believe” to preface the description of her understanding of the phrase. Likewise, C12 includes the word “probably” as a modifier of the verb “be written,” indicating that he is not certain that the change he recommends truly represents what the student intended.

The second form of hedging is modal verbs, which were also found to be used as a form of hedging in the analysis of “I determine your happiness” (see p. 60). C12 uses modal verbs such as “would” and “should” to soften the critique he offers. These words reduce the sense of obligation that might be conveyed by other stronger verbs (such as “need”), which gives C12’s suggestion a hypothetical or optional feel. Also, as was mentioned in the analysis of “I determine your happiness” (p. 60), these words and phrases lessen the expert status that C11 and C12 might otherwise display through the act of giving correction because those devices acknowledge the possibility that C11 and C12 might have understood the student’s language incorrectly. Hence, hedging helps C11 and C12 accomplish the act of face-saving.

Recurrence of Face-Saving Technique #2: Defense of the Student

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this data is the use of defense to help save face for both the student and the commenter. Recall that the term “defense” is used here to describe a situation in which one commenter questions or challenges another commenter’s criticism in an attempt to clarify or support a student’s language usage; in other words, it can be considered a sort of face-saving by proxy. Defense is not combative; in fact, it is often softened through the use of hedging. Rather than being used combatively, defense is used benevolently by a commenter to publicly acknowledge his comprehension or appreciation of the student’s language. It is also used collaboratively by the commenters involved to negotiate understanding of the student’s intended meaning.

In the example “HERE your,” defense is used by one commenter to correct another commenter:

Fragment 35

1 **C11:** I'm not 100% certain what the rest of the sentence "HERE your..." is
 2 supposed to be, but I believe it's supposed to be "you're" (as in you
 3 are) rather than "your" which shows possession rather than a state of
 4 being.
 5 But a good comic nonetheless.
 6 **C12:** As it would be the end of the sentence it should probably be
 7 written "here you are" as the contraction should not be used.
 8 **C11:** Oh! I see what he's trying to say now. I thought his
 9 sentence was being cut off. You're correct.
 10 **C5/OP:** Thank you for your comments ! I'm sorry for a mistake.
 11 m(。o.)m
 12 **C11:** It was my mistake, actually. I misunderstood what you
 13 were trying to say. My apologies.

As was mentioned on page 67, C11 understands “HERE your” to consist of two errors: first, the wrong homonym was used, and second, information has been left out after the contraction. C12 demonstrates a different understanding, suggesting instead that the student meant ““here you are””; as noted before, due to the context and the fact that multiple commenters chose this interpretation, it seems to be the most logical, and therefore most likely, meaning that the student

intended. Notice that C12 neither explicitly states that he thinks C11 is wrong nor directly addresses C11 in his comment. However, C12's comment seems to function as a defense against C11's comment for two reasons. First, the comment is nested below C11's comment. Second, C12's argument (that "the contraction should not be used" in line 4:11) contradicts C11's argument (that "it's supposed to be 'you're'" in line 4:6). This disagreement made in nested format shows that C12 understands the student to have intended a different construction than C11 suggests, and thus that C12 attempts to defend the student from being misinterpreted.

This example of defense has face-saving effects both for the student and for C11. There are two ways that defense works as a face-saving technique for the student in this circumstance. First, it indicates that C12 has understood the student's meaning. The student never explains what she truly meant with the phrase "HERE your," so it is impossible to say for certain whether C12 has understood correctly; however, since C12 corrects C11 and does not express uncertainty about his interpretation (as C11 does), he appears to be confident in his interpretation. In this way, it is face-saving because C12 does not critique the student's intelligibility in English; though the language is not grammatically correct, for C12, it achieves its purpose of communicating meaning.

The second way that defense works to save the face of the student is to correct another commenter, which in this case actually causes the commenter to back down and apologize. The public correction draws attention to the fact that the other commenter has misunderstood the student and thus discredits her argument. Notice that C11 responds to C12's defense first by deferring to C12's judgment (with "you're correct" in line 4:13) and then by admitting misunderstanding to the student directly (with "I misunderstood what you were trying to say" in lines 4:16-17). With these responses to the defense, C11 takes responsibility for her confusion

here about the student's language and hence protects the student from any negative focus that her critique might have otherwise caused.

The main effect of C12's use of defense is that it protects the face of the student.

However, C12 also shows awareness of and concern for C11's face through the wording of his comment. One example of a face-saving technique that one might notice being used here is hedging. C12 uses modal verbs such as "would" and "should," along with the word "probably," to soften the critique. As was mentioned in the analysis of "pay heed," these words lessen the "expert" status that C12 might otherwise display through the act of giving a correction because they recognize the possibility that he might be incorrect in his interpretation.

From the analysis of "HERE your," it is evident that four face-saving techniques are utilized by the commenters: praise of the student's comic (#7), passive voice (#9), hedging (#1), and defense of the student (#2). Another comment set, which occurs in response to the same comic as "HERE your" did, showcases a commenter using another face-saving technique to respond to language that is grammatically incorrect. This commenter identifies and explains the humor behind the language construction, and in doing so, provides encouragement and support.

Language Construction 5: "changed mind"

As with "HERE your," the analysis must first begin with identification of the second grammatical error in comic 3, which occurs in the lower left panel. Three commenters address the language error, and though their interpretations differ with respect to the verb tense that the student should use, they seem to agree on the basic phrase that the student intended (see Comment Set 5 in Appendix H):

Fragment 36

C8: "Changed mind" would be written "I changed my mind." Alternatively you could write "never mind" which means "I withdraw my previous statement." Hmm, "I changed my mind" is an interesting phrase. How would a Japanese say that?

Fragment 37

C1: I think what he (tried) to write fits well: I've changed my mind. Literally (if we take a direct translation), yappari yameta means: just as I thought, I've given up. Google may give something like this, I haven't checked.

Fragment 38

C9: Shouldn't it be in this case "I've changed my mind" because he changed mind recently?

All three commenters offer some version of the phrase "I (have) changed my mind," so the main issue seems to be that the student left the first person pronouns "I" and "my" out of the sentence. Given the context of the comic, this phrase appears to be the most logical; besides, any other interpretation would require much more imaginative input from the reader as well as the addition of much more language. Therefore, the phrase is proposed to be grammatically incorrect by the commenters due primarily to the lack of pronouns.

Face-Saving Technique #3: Praise of the Student's Language Use

One commenter, who does not actually restate the phrase as the commenters above do, provides a comment in response to "changed mind" that functions largely as praise of the student's language use and, in this way, also acts as a face-saving technique:

Fragment 39

C10: I laughed really hard at "changed mind." The way I read it, is that he changed his mind so quickly, that he had to say it in the shortest way possible. I heard him saying it in a quick, robotic voice, that really surprised the other guy. big lulz.

By stating in line 5:16 that he "laughed really hard" at the phrase "changed mind," C18 is acknowledging that the student's language is comical not because it is grammatically incorrect, but because it mimics a manner of speaking that the commenter finds hilarious. Thus, this comment goes beyond simply "overlooking" the student's grammatical error to appreciate the

content of the comic as a whole and instead praises the student's creative usage of the language. The student's language is accepted and celebrated for accomplishing what it is supposed to do (tell a joke), and the grammatical error is not recognized as an error at all. In her recognition and description of the humor, then, C10 performs a face-saving technique for the student.

To summarize, the analysis has completed two tasks. First, it has identified four kinds of language issues that are present in the comment sets:

- a. language that is considered nonnative-like in terms of word choice
- b. language which commenters disagree on in terms of its grammatical correctness (which may also be referred to as language which is considered "grammatically nonnative-like")
- c. language with correct grammar but unclear meaning
- d. language that is grammatically incorrect.

In addition, the analysis found eight face-saving techniques and described how those techniques each functioned to save the student's face in that particular case. Not all of these techniques were used by commenters in each comment, however. Table 1 below summarizes which techniques have been identified being used in each comment set:

	Comment Set 1	Comment Set 2	Comment Set 3	Comment Set 4	Comment Set 5
#1: Hedging	X		X	X	
#2: Defense of Student	X			X	
#3: Praise of Student's Language Use	X	X			X
#4: Language Play: Joking and Emulation	X		X		
#5: Critique of English language and native speaker habits		X			
#6: Interpretation			X		
#7: Praise of comic				X	
#8: Passive voice				X	

Table 1. Face-saving techniques organized by comment set.

Next, the discussion section investigates these differences and the possible reasons for or effects of commenters using these face-saving techniques in their comments.

Discussion

The analysis shows that some of the face-saving techniques are utilized in multiple comment sets, while others appear in only one comment set. It seems that none of the comment sets is completely unique in terms of which techniques its commenters use because each comment set shares at least one technique with another comment set. Nevertheless, the variations in technique usage between comment sets must be addressed; since comment sets vary according to the kind of language issue that they address, the discussion focuses on differences in technique usage between the comments for the different language constructions. Specifically, it considers why defense of the student, language play, critique of the English language and/or native speaker habits, interpretation, praise of the comic, and passive voice are each utilized in only one or two of the comment sets.

To review, comment set 1 deals with a construction that is nonnative-like in terms of word choice, while comment set 2 responds to a construction which commenters disagree about the grammatical correctness of and which they seem to consider grammatically nonnative-like. As the discussion will show, this difference between these different forms of “nonnative-like” language is subtle but important. Comment set 3 deals with a language construction that is grammatically correct but has an unclear meaning. On the other hand, comment sets 4 and 5 both focus on language constructions that are grammatically incorrect.

The usage of face-saving technique #2, defense of the student, does not seem to be influenced by the kind of language issue the comment sets respond to. That is to say that the act

of defense does not appear to be unique to either unidiomatic or grammatically incorrect language, despite the fact that it only appears in comment sets 1 and 5. Rather, its usage appears to depend on the commenters themselves and their differing opinions. Observe that only one instance of defense occurs in each comment set; if there were multiple instances of defense within a single comment set, the instances could be analyzed for a pattern to determine if they are influenced by the language issue itself. However, a pattern cannot be found, and the fact that defense is used solely in comment sets 1 and 5 cannot be explained by the language within them.

In contrast, the usage of face-saving technique #4, language play, does seem to be related to the kinds of language issues it responds to. Language play occurs in comment sets 1 and 3; notice that the language issues in these comment sets are the only ones that do not deal in some way with grammar. In both language constructions, the learner has chosen a phrase that the commenters find remarkable because of its wording (the difference between them lies in their comprehensibility). While the data sample is obviously too small to claim that this commonality has any significant implications for Rage Comics as a group, it does seem important at the local level of the three comics. Perhaps the participants in comment sets 2, 4, and 5 do not use language play because the language issue stems from grammar; in each set, the learner has used a grammatical construction that is not allowed by native speakers because it is either incorrect or nonnative-like. Thus, the commenters might be challenged to use the student's language creatively in these contexts without seeming like they are mocking the student (and indeed, as acknowledged on p. 48, commenters' contributions can sometimes be interpreted to be mocking). On the other hand, since there is nothing "wrong" with the language constructions in comment sets 1 or 3, the student can be interpreted to have used the language creatively, so when

commenters play with the student's language, they can be seen to simply be extending the creative language use.

While language play was used in two comment sets, face-saving technique #5, critique of the English language and/or native speaker habits, occurs only in comment set 2. However, this fact is not surprising if one considers what the language issue is. Recall from the analysis that the commenters cannot seem to identify why the language construction "I love an egg" is noteworthy; they can only debate its grammaticality and suggest that it is nonnative-like. While the commenters suggest that the language construction in comment 1, "pay heed," is also nonnative-like, the issue is not related to grammar; it is related to word choice. Because grammar is a system of rules, one would assume that if a construction contains an issue related to grammar, then one would be able to explain the rule behind the issue. However, the participants in comment set 2 do not seem to be able to explain the rule, so their criticism of the English language seems to be a logical face-saving technique. After all, if they, as English users, cannot describe why a language rule exists, then how could the student be expected to make sense of the language rule?

Like the usage of criticism of the English language and/or native speaker habits, the usage of face-saving technique #6, interpretation, in comment set 3 seems sensible when one considers the language issue that it refers to. As the analysis has established, the issue with "I determine your happiness" is that commenters cannot figure out what it means. In this case, the use of interpretations to save face makes sense because, if one's interpretation is correct, then one has exhibited understanding, which implies that the student's language use was not actually that confusing. Thus, the use of interpretation is not necessary in the other comment sets because

the commenters (for the most part) do not indicate having trouble comprehending the student's language.

Conjecturing why the last two face-saving techniques, praise of the comic (#7) and passive voice (#8), were employed in comment set 4 but not in any other is challenging. Notice that comment sets 4 and 5 contain the same kind of language issue. It is difficult to use the differences in language issues in comment sets 1-3 as explanations for the utilization of these techniques solely in comment set 4 because comment set 5, like sets 1-3, does not exhibit utilization of the techniques. Perhaps praise of the comic and passive voice do not occur in comment set 5 because they already occur in comment set 4, and both sets come from the comments for comic 3. It is possible that commenters simply do not use the techniques because they have previously been used in response to the same comic. Thus, it seems that the kind of language issue indeed may have some influence over the usage of these techniques since it might seem imprudent or insincere to praise a student's language, for example, but not to praise his comic.

Overall, it appears that the usage of certain face-saving techniques in these comment sets may be affected by the kind of language issue that the sets respond to. In particular, commenters seem to respond to grammatical language issues differently than they do to meaning- or vocabulary-based issues. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct more research on how face-saving techniques differ between comments in the two categories to determine if there are trends in how commenters respond to grammatical issues versus non-grammatical issues.

Limitations

After completing the project, I realized that there are three substantial limitations to my study. First, the amount of data included in the study is relatively small, especially compared to

the amount of data that is available on the EFLComics site. Though the analysis of the data is fairly extensive, only five sets of comments from three separate comics are included; therefore, it is difficult to determine what the findings of this study mean in the context of EFLComics (and their respective comments) as a whole. In order to identify any trends in face-saving techniques used by commenters in Rage Comics as a group, it would be necessary for me to collect and analyze a much larger sample of data from a wider variety of comics (recall that the comics I selected all contained a rage guy, which means that I immediately excluded all data without this character). By doing this, I could analyze the use of face-saving techniques across the genre.

The second limitation I noticed is that I had very little background information on the study participants. Though it is not necessary to have information about each participant, I feel that knowing some information about the commenters in particular would have allowed me to approach the data using a more complex process. For example, if I had been able to establish which participants were native English speakers and which were nonnative English speakers, I would have been able to discuss native-nonnative speaker interaction in both the literature review and as it appears in the data. In addition, it might have been useful to know the profession of the commenters, because then I would have been able to analyze if and how profession affects contributions, explanation of rules, and usage of face-saving techniques. For example, I presume that some of the commenters are teachers of English to speakers of other languages (though I do not know this for certain), and if I were able to establish that fact, then I could analyze how the teachers' comments differ from the non-teachers' comments (and also, if teachers have been living and teaching abroad, I could examine how being immersed in different dialects of English affects teachers' reactions to student language).

The third limitation I identified is that I did not focus on the interactions of the students with the commenters. My decision not to analyze comments made by the original poster of the comic was influenced partly by the fact that, from what I saw, students generally did not seem to respond to commenters very often. However, some students did respond (including the original poster of comic 2, “Jealousy”; see Appendix E). In retrospect, I feel that it might have been interesting to analyze how students respond to commenters and what face-saving techniques, if any, they use. Now I recognize that the pragmatics of student comments could be a promising next step in my continuing study of the data.

Implications

It may be possible to find some teaching implications in this study. These implications are divided into two basic categories: implications for teaching language and implications for helping learners to access English-speaking communities.

The analysis has suggested that commenters employ several techniques in an attempt to save each learner’s face, so one implication is that such a community could help lower a student’s anxiety toward using English. In fact, a similar idea (not specifically connected to face, however), was proposed by Tarone (2000) in her article on the benefits of language play (pp. 45-46). In a project like EFLComics, the student can both retain anonymity and interact with English users who, at least in these comment sets, demonstrate concern for the student’s (presumed) need to be seen as competent, creative, and so on. Therefore, it provides a comfortable space in which to practice language skills.

Another implication for language is that students can receive valuable English input through the comments left by readers of their comics. Furthermore, such input can be turned into an effective learning experience. Though it is unclear what, if anything, the learners who create

EFLComics do with the feedback they receive, the comments could conceivably be used in a language analysis or revision activity. For example, depending on the level of the student, the learner could analyze the actual language in the comments (as authentic examples of English), or they could revise their own language based on the commenters' suggestions. An instructor might even challenge students by having them investigate the rules behind grammatical or lexical conventions that the commenters cannot explain. In this way, the students can be encouraged to read and process the comments.

While the comments could be useful input for the creators of the comics, they could also be used by English as a second or foreign language instructors (who are unaffiliated with the comics) with their own students to learn about pragmatics. Since the data exhibit several types of face-saving techniques being utilized by commenters, the data would serve as beneficial authentic examples of how members of an English community perform face-saving. Instructors could have their students both analyze the data to determine when, where, and how face-saving occurs and practice using the face-saving techniques they find in their own online writing. Thus, this data could be valuable for students other than those who created the comics.

A final implication for language is that students can increase their understanding of how to use English in a specific genre. Some people may question the usefulness or appropriateness of teaching students how to create Rage Comics due to their informality, their content, or their purpose. Nevertheless, the fact is that such comics are an authentic form of humor on the internet, and knowing how to successfully create or read a Rage Comic requires an understanding of how language is used and manipulated in that particular genre. A site like EFLComics provides a safe place in which to experiment with and receive feedback on language in the genre since the commenters use face-saving techniques to show support for the students.

These implications for teaching the English language are evidently valuable. It would be limiting, however, to only focus on the implications for language when there are implications for students at a broader connective level as well. In the comments analyzed for this study, the commenters as a group display a consistent effort through the use of face-saving techniques to make students feel included in the community of Rage Comic creators. In this way, comments function to instill a sense of belongingness. One possible implication at a broader level, then, is that learners develop connections with others through the use of English, which can encourage them to use English more often and long term in order to keep interacting with the community they have joined. Another implication is that the supportive environment created by a site like EFLComics provides students with opportunities for using the language for something other than practice; of course, the focus may be practice originally, but it can also be about conveying one's sense of humor to others. Widdowson explains the importance of moving beyond a focus on practical language use in the following quote (Widdowson, 2000; as cited in Carter & McCarthy, 2004, p. 81):

While learners undoubtedly have survival needs, and while a language such as English has indeed become a utilitarian object for many of its world-wide users, learners in many contexts around the world pass relatively quickly from purely utilitarian motivations towards goals associated with expressing their social and cultural selves.

Thus, online English-speaking communities can provide an excellent forum in which students can explore and develop their identities as English users. Clearly, the potential implications of this study are concerned with students' needs as language learners and as people.

Conclusion

My goal at the outset of this study was to collect and evaluate comics and their respective comment sets to determine what sorts of face-saving techniques commenters applied when responding to student work. An analysis of the data discovered that commenters used eight distinct face-saving techniques in response to four kinds of language issues. Though the immediate effect of such techniques was to demonstrate concern for the student's face, they also had the effect of portraying a sense of community. The data sample was small, consisting of selected comments from three different comics; nonetheless, these findings have several implications for learning English and for using English to forge connections and express oneself. Now that I have seen the comics that the students create and the kinds of comments they receive, I have become interested in trying this project with my own students in the future. For one, it would be a comfortable environment for learners to practice writing and reading English in. Perhaps more importantly, though, I believe that students would find this kind of language practice both enjoyable and helpful.

Notes

1. Goffman explained Grice's maxims as follows: "communication cannot truly work unless participants generally observe four major norms of cooperation: relevance, truthfulness, quantity, and clarity" (Goffman, 1976; as cited in Hatch, 1992, p. 31). What Goffman means is that speakers regulate their own speech by using these four maxims to decide whether or not (or how) something should be said. For example, a speaker will ultimately avoid saying something if he believes that the hearer might think it is off-topic. The maxim that is important to this discussion is truthfulness, which is explained on p. 4.
2. Yule's description of modals recognizes differences between modals and regular main verbs in grammar and meaning. With respect to grammar, he explains that modals (1998, p. 87):
 - a. do not have the typical -s ending in third person singular present
 - b. only have simple past, simple present, and simple future forms
 - c. do not need the word "do" as support in environments when main verbs need it.

In other words, modal verbs are unique partly due to their form. However, they also differ from main verbs in meaning. According to Yule, one role a modal plays is to be "used interpersonally and have to do with obligation and permission" (1998, p. 89). Thus, this meaning of requirement or of varying levels of requirement is the aspect of modal verbs that is more important to the analysis in this paper.

3. According to Tarone and Swierzbin (2009), metalinguistic feedback is "a comment on a learner's utterance that provides information about the correct form" (p. 168). Thus, this kind of feedback focuses on explaining the rules or reasons behind the correct form rather than on providing the correct form itself to the learner.
4. The URL for the EFL Comics website is: <http://www.reddit.com/r/EFLcomics/>
5. The URL for the original Rage Comics website is: <http://www.reddit.com/r/ragecomics/>
In addition to the Rage Comics site on reddit, there is a Rage Comics page on a website that is unaffiliated with reddit called "Memebase." The page is titled "Rage Comics," and the URL for it is: <http://ragecomics.memebase.com/>
6. According to information available on the EFLComics site, there were 7,157 readers subscribed to the site as of April 9, 2011 (Sukosuti, 2011). Of course, one must take into account the fact that a person does not need to be subscribed to the site in order to read the comics, so it is reasonable to assume that the actual number of readers may be much higher.
7. The URL for "Dan's Awesome Rage Maker" is: <http://ragemaker.net/>
This is the link to the rage comic template that the students who post to EFL Comics use.

8. The terms “correct” and “incorrect,” when used in reference to grammar, describe whether a particular language construction follows prescriptive standard American English grammar rules.
9. The analysis is divided into sections by comic. Therefore, at the beginning of each section, a brief description of the comic is provided to aid understanding. It should be noted that this description is based on personal observation and has not been confirmed by the student who created the comic, so this interpretation may not be what the student intended.
10. References to lines will take the format “comment set number:line number,” so that 1:1 stands for “line 1 in comment set 1.”
11. It may seem unusual to use quotes that do not actually reference “pay heed” in the section regarding “pay heed”; however, these comments are used only to demonstrate that people who commented on this comic referenced native speakers (since the commenters who discuss “pay heed” did not).
12. The interpretation of “normal” to mean “native-like” and the discussion about commenters’ judgments of how native-like the language is are based on my analysis of the data. Therefore, it is acknowledged that there may be other interpretations as to what the term “normal” (and related or synonymous words) is intended to mean. Indeed, there is no way to know for certain what commenters intended when they used this term to describe the student’s language without locating and asking the commenters themselves.
13. In the three comics referenced in this paper (and in their respective comment sets), the students never provide further explanation about what their comics mean. Therefore, the phrase “intended meaning” is used throughout the analysis to refer to this unknown actual meaning or to understandings of the comics and the language offered by commenters as suggestions of what the student might have intended.
14. This is a repeat of fragment 5 (p. 36).
15. In the sections dealing with praise of the student’s language or comic, the terms “praise” and “encouragement” will be used interchangeably.
16. The term “nested” in this analysis refers to a comment that is indented beneath another comment. Nesting, in this environment, is used to show that one comment is a response to another specific comment.
17. In the comments that are examined for this paper, then, commenters use interpretations to explain the student’s meaning. Commenters may change or “fix” the grammar or vocabulary of the student’s language to convey the meaning, and in this way an interpretation can also be considered to be a commenter’s take on the student’s intended grammar. However, interpretations as they are discussed in this paper ultimately focus on clarifying meaning.

18. This is a repeat of fragment 21 (p. 52).
19. This is a repeat of fragment 22 (p. 53).
20. To review the form and meaning of modal verbs, see note #2 above.
21. Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson (1977) present modulation through the lens of correction, observing that the force of a correction can be softened, or “modulated,” by using linguistic structures that make the correction sound like a suggestion (p. 378). In this paper, the application of the term to a compliment means that the compliment is not strongly positive because it is paired with something negative; this structure weakens the compliment.

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Appendix A

Comic 1: "The best before date"



Source of Comic 1: <http://imgur.com/Ny2oq>

Source of comments for Comic 1:

http://www.reddit.com/r/EFLcomics/comments/nnmjq/the_best_before_date/

Appendix B

Comment Set 1

1 **C1:** Pay heed, not exactly a normal thing to say, but sounds a lot
 2 cooler than anything I would normally say.
 3 **C2:** It's not a normal thing to say? I've certainly heard it a
 4 lot before! It's probably fallen out of the average person's
 5 lexicon of late.
 6 **C3:** I generally hear it as "Take heed", never heard it as
 7 "Pay heed" before.
 8 **C4:** 'Pay attention' or 'mind' seem far more common.
 9 **C5:** I wish it was a normal thing, I wanna say it lots!
 10 *(unrelated comments deleted)*
 11 **C8:** The *pay heed* was the decisive line in the comic for me.
 12 Haha. Love it. Made me think of Eddard Stark for some reason.
 13 *(unrelated comments deleted)*
 14 **C10:** I pay no heed to your negative attitude towards paying
 15 heed.

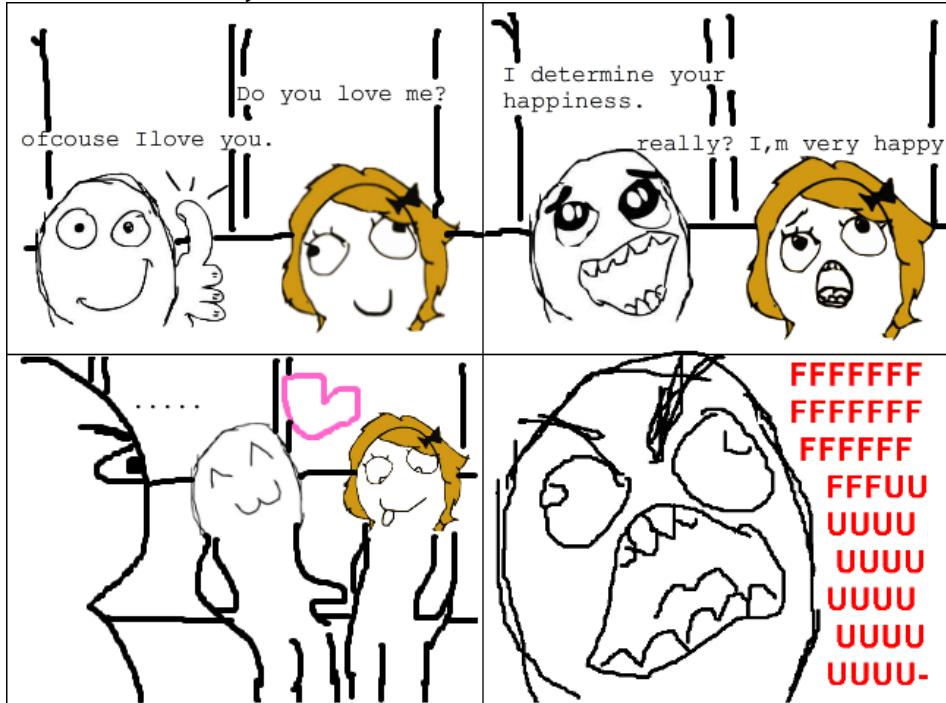
Appendix C

Comment Set 2

1 **C13:** A native speaker would say "I love eggs" and "They're so delicious",
 2 referring to them in the plural form. I know the singular/plural concept is
 3 very different in the Japanese language, but I hope this helps.
 4 **C14:** There's still something oddly charming about, "I love an egg." I
 5 love when they make that mistake with objects in a sentence :P
 6 **C15:** Or even just "I love egg." That's quite literally what you
 7 say in Japanese.
 8 **C16:** It's kind of odd that it wouldn't be common to say it
 9 that way in English. I.E. "I got egg on my shirt" is
 10 acceptable yet "I love egg" is not.
 11 **C15:** English is just a weird language. It's
 12 completely inconsistent.
 13 **C17:** This is actually one of the hardest things for Japanese people to
 14 get their heads around, simply because the Japanese language lacks
 15 separate words for "a" and "the", and that makes it nearly impossible
 16 to explain.
 17 The best I can come up with is that "a" or :an" refer to an
 18 indeterminate example of the object, "the" refers to a specific
 19 example, and the plural refers to the object as a general concept.
 20 Good luck explaining that in simple enough English to explain to a
 21 learner though.

Appendix D

Comic 2: "Jealousy"



Source of Comic 2: <http://imgur.com/ZC7IQ>

Source of comments for Comic 2:

<http://www.reddit.com/r/EFLcomics/comments/lhcpc/jealousy/>

Appendix E
(Note: Underlining has been added)

Comment Set 3

1 **C1:** "I determine your happiness" is the best line ever. I'm gonna
2 dress up like Dr. Doom or somebody for Halloween and be all like "DOOM
3 DETERMINES YOUR HAPPINESS."

4 **C2:** agreed best line ever. He is her everything so, she is only
5 happy when he is, so he can determine her happiness. He decides
6 if she happy or not.

7 **C3/OP:** Thanks your comments. "I determine your happiness" is
8 just my thought word. I very happy that you like this word.
9 *(Unrelated comments removed)*

10 **C6:** It is a little bit hard to read back and forth when it isn't clear
11 who is speaking first. the line "I determine your happiness." can
12 either be "I know you are happy" or "i'm determined to make you/be
13 happy". I'm not sure which you are trying to go for. But you are
14 using correct rage faces and everything. Nice work.

15 **C7:** I like to think of it as "I alone determine your happiness."
16 [look of disapproval emoticon]"

17 **C8:** This was a line in the wedding vows I wrote for my
18 wife... ex-wife rather.

19 **C9:** Did you determine that she wasn't happy?

20 **C10:** user name so apt.

21 **C11:** I think it might mean "Are you sure you are happy?"

22 **C3/OP:** Thanks your comments . Your advice is good. I careful my
23 next comments.

24 **C6:** You are welcome. I hope to read more of your comics
25 soon!

26 **C12:** In western comics, who talks first is denoted by height. It is
27 also traditional for the first person to talk to be on the left.
28 In panel 2 neither of these are done, so it is a little confusing.
29 I think that in panel 2 you mean "I make you happy!" but I am not sure.
30 Also, it is I'm not I,m. When using contractions the apostrophe holds
31 up the statement.

32 *(Unrelated comments removed)*

33 **C16:** I think it was that the pronoun useage was swapped; what was
34 meant to be said was "You determine my happiness". Which can be
35 correct, but if we want to speak awesome english you can say "You
36 make me very happy" And mean the same thing.

37 *(Unrelated comments removed)*

38 **C18:** The subtle misogyny in the line "I determine your happiness"
39 provokes a deep internal dialogue within the viewer normally too taboo
40 for society to notice. Truly, the author of this comic is a
41 progressive visionary, years before his time.

42 **C7:** I love you, thus I now control your emotions.

Appendix F

Comic 3: "The drink"



Source of Comic 3: <http://imgur.com/boYzO>

Source of comments for Comic 3:

http://www.reddit.com/r/EFLcomics/comments/lo69e/the_drink/

Appendix G

(Note: Underlining has been added)

Comment Set 4

1 **C8:** I'm guessing you were trying to use "you're" instead of "your". In
 2 this case the contraction would not be used and would be written: "Here
 3 you are."
 4 (*Unrelated comments removed*)
 5 **C11:** I'm not 100% certain what the rest of the sentence "HERE your..." is
 6 supposed to be, but I believe it's supposed to be "you're" (as in you
 7 are) rather than "your" which shows possession rather than a state of
 8 being.
 9 But a good comic nonetheless.
 10 **C12:** As it would be the end of the sentence it should probably be
 written "here you are" as the contraction should not be used.
 11 **C11:** Oh! I see what he's trying to say now. I thought his
 sentence was being cut off. You're correct.
 12 **C5/OP:** Thank you for your comments ! I'm sorry for a mistake.
 13 m(。o。)m
 14 **C11:** It was my mistake, actually. I misunderstood what you
 were trying to say. My apologies.
 15 **C13:** Great job on the comic, but there's one mistake. In the second
 panel, you should have said "Here you are." When you emphasize the
 second half of a contraction, don't contract it. For example, you
 should say, "Here you are," not "Here you're"
 16 **C5/OP:** Thank you for your comments. m(. .)m

Appendix H

Comment Set 5

1 **C8:** I'm guessing you were trying to use "you're" instead of "your". In this
 2 case the contraction would not be used and would be written: "Here you are."
 3 "Changed mind" would be written "I changed my mind."
 4 Alternatively you could write "never mind" which means "I withdraw my
 previous statement."
 5 Hmm, "I changed my mind" is an interesting phrase. How would a Japanese say
 that?
 6 (*Unrelated comments removed*)
 7 **C1:** I think what he (tried) to write fits well: I've
 changed my mind.
 8 Literally (if we take a direct translation), yappari yameta
 means: just as I thought, I've given up. Google may give
 something like this, I haven't checked.
 9 **C9:** Shouldn't it be in this case "I've changed my mind" because he
 changed mind recently?
 10 **C10:** I laughed really hard at "changed mind." The way I read it,
 is that he changed his mind so quickly, that he had to say it in
 the shortest way possible. I heard him saying it in a quick,
 robotic voice, that really surprised the other guy. big lulz.