Complaining Decreases the Efficiency of Dialogue as a Method of Social Influence

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the paper is to examine the efficiency of complaining as a method of social influence (Doliński, 2005). In Polish culture, complaining seems to be an efficient technique for initiating a dialogue, potentially increasing the effectiveness of persuasive messages expressed in a conversation.

Methodology: The hypothesis was tested in two natural experiments. In the first one, a random sample of persons (n=246) were asked to let the experimenter through to the checkout counter at a supermarket. The request was preceded either by (1) a dialogue, (2) a complaint, or (3) no prior contact. It was either substantially or seemingly justified. In the second study, customers in a shop (n=46) were invited to pursue conversation initiated with (1) a positive statement or (2) a complaint regarding an extensive range of products.

Findings: Study 1 proved that a seemingly justified request preceded by complaining is less effective (65.6 per cent) than a request preceded by a dialogue (93.8 per cent); this result is similar to the result of the control group (53.1 per cent). When the request was substantially justified, both dialogue and complaining seemed equally effective (86 per cent and 90 per cent respectively) – more effective than the results of the control group (46 per cent). In Study 2, positive and negative remarks initiating a conversation triggered similar responses in terms of willingness to pursue the dialogue (73.1 per cent and 78.3 per cent respectively).

Constraints to research: Natural experiments presented in the paper were not controlled for such variables as environmental factors or individual differences.

Originality: Complaining has never been subject to systematized examination as a method of social influence.

Keywords: complaining, dialogue, social influence, manipulation, compliance

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Introduction

We are faced consistently with various requests in many situations. Those who articulate a request strive to ensure – through underlining its urgency and importance – that those to whom the request is addressed put at least a little effort into responding to it. Very often, their request is refused. On the other hand, certain people are highly efficient in persuading others to comply with their requests. The identification of methods of influencing others and the effectiveness of these methods are of interest not only to psychologists, but also researchers and practitioners in a number of fields, such as management, negotiation and marketing, in which various aspects of persuasion and interpersonal communication are examined.

One technique for enhancing the effectiveness of a persuasive message involves establishing a dialogue at an early stage. Conversation helps to break the reluctance of the person to whom a request is addressed and increases the chances of a positive response (Dolinski, 2005). It is widely acknowledged that complaining is commonplace among Poles (see Wojciszke, 2004). It is most evident during everyday casual conversations, when interlocutors start complaining about different things, thus changing the tone of the discussion from neutral to emotionally charged. Complaining is generally negative; its purpose is to point out things that are not as they should be, inconsistent or opposed to the preferences of the complainer, and its essence is the identification of negative aspects of a situation. From this perspective, it would be interesting to determine whether it pays off to complain when the goal is to receive help from one's interlocutor. We shall discuss the potential benefits and pitfalls of complaining as a method of social influence and attempt to verify empirically the role of complaining as a technique of social influence.

Dialogue as a method of social influence

In research on the effectiveness of dialogue as a meta technique of social influence, initiated by Doliński (Dolinski, Nawrat and Rudak, 2001; Doliński, Grzyb, Olejnik, Prusakowski and Urban, 2002; 2005), a hypothesis was formulated which theorised that dialogue is one of the basic procedures underpinning the majority of techniques of influencing others. According to these researchers, striking up a conversation changes the manner in which the person making a request is perceived: he or she becomes familiar, which increases chances of having the request complied with. Dialogue also facilitates entering into a relationship and exerting further influence (one-sided monologue rarely affects the interlocutor as much as a dialogue – cf. Fay,

Garrot, Carletta, 2000). It is worth noting that dialogue was already recognised as a method of persuasion by Ancient philosophers. This approach was advanced by Socrates and his successors, according to whom dialogue was the most effective manner in which to alter the attitudes and opinions of others.

In one particular study on the effectiveness of opening a dialogue as a means of persuasion, the effectiveness of the "every penny counts" technique was analysed (Dolinski et al., 2002; 2005); it involved adding referred phrase to requests for money. As a result of this manipulation, the interlocutor is less inclined to deny the request by using the simple argument of the lack of funds (Cialdini and Schroeder 1976; Fraser and Hite, 1989). The "every penny counts" technique does not work, however, when it is used in writing: in the form of a letter (De Jong and Oopik, 1992) or a notice on collection tins (Perrine and Heather, 2000). It can be assumed that dialogue is conducive to submission, because the person to whom the request is addressed does not wish to create a negative impression on the person making the request (e.g. being perceived as mean or selfish).

Complaining as a specific form of dialogue

Some researchers claim that there is a specific culture of complaining in Poland (Wojciszke and Baryła, 2001; 2005), which has become a widely accepted manner of communication (Wojciszke, 2004). It seems, for instance, to be a fairly common way of initiating a conversation between strangers when travelling on public transport.

In a 100-day longitudinal study carried out by Doliński (1996), students were required to record their mood on a sliding scale in which zero meant "as usual". Study participants declared that their mood was worse than usually, with a negative average. The results of a similar study conducted among American students were completely different: on average, they declared being in a better mood more often than not (Johnson, 1937). In addition to the findings cited above, our own observations suggest that complaining is a widely accepted form of communication in Poland; a complaining person easily communicates with others. The interlocutor is usually willing to engage in conversation provided that the subject of the complaint is a phenomenon commonly regarded as negative (bad weather, corruption, delayed trains etc.). It can therefore be assumed that complaining is a socially acceptable form of dialogue that leads to the establishment of a conventional, stereotypical cultural contact and, as a result, can increase the persuasiveness of a requests addressed to the interlocutor.

Consequences of complaining

Complaining may prove beneficial in the context of social relations and exerting influence. The complaining person inspires certain feelings in the listener, such as sympathy or compassion. As a particular and conventional form of communication, complaining provides the person to whom a request is addressed with key information necessary to assess the request and decide on whether they wish to fulfil it or not (Smith, 1996; 2002; Smith and Cantrell, 2002). Consequently, they can decide whether to take action without the need for any further and more detailed analysis of messages addressed to them: if a person I like asks me for a small favour in a good cause, why should I refuse? Complaining serves one potentially important function: it confirms the validity of the request. Complaining can give the interlocutor a reason to consider that some of the necessary information pertaining to the requests (its aim and justification) have been provided and are sufficient to justify fulfilling the request (Fointiat, 1998).

Advantages of complaining

Authors of the above publications (Doliński et al., 2002; 2005) suggested that the mere opening of a dialogue might have a significant and positive impact on establishing relationships and – as a result – increase one's chances of receiving further assistance. For example, by complaining about bus and train delays, or uncomfortable travel conditions, we open up a dialogue with our interlocutor without breaking certain social norms, as addressing a stranger is justified by the context of travelling. In such cases, it should be expected that the effectiveness of a request preceded by a dialogue will be at least the same as in the case of a request preceded by complaining, as we are dealing here with a stereotypical interaction between people. Communicating in a conventional and routinely polite manner disinclines interlocutors from analysing the exchanged formulas and phrases (Clark and Schunk, 1980).

Breaking the conventionality of a request (e.g. by expressing an order) makes interlocutors reflect and focus their attention on the arguments provided (Bialek, 2012). According to research conducted by Dolińska and Doliński (2006), a command significantly increases the effectiveness of persuasion in certain conditions. It should be emphasized that this is true in situations in which a request is appropriately justified. It is therefore unclear whether acceptance and submission is due to a conscious analysis of the argument, or to mindless and mechanical action.

Negative effects of complaining

Despite the benefits of complaining described above, the vast majority of authors regard it as self-destructive behaviour, adversely affecting the mood of both interlocutors (Flora and Segrin, 2000) and denoting a negative frame of mind, or even symptoms of depression. Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2011) found that recurring complaints in discussions are correlated with passivity and inaction. Among the negative consequences of complaining, Wojciszke (2004) listed the following: (1) general dissatisfaction with life, (2) gloomy mood combined with negative emotions, (3) negative attitude towards society as a whole and others (e.g. accusing them of being selfish, nervous and untrustworthy) and (4) loss of faith in social justice. Information tends to be processed more in-depth by those with a negative attitude (Bless, 2001). Consequently, a more thorough analysis of a request is likely to lead to refusal, especially if the request is poorly justified. On the other hand, however, a negative mood may incite a person to assist others in an attempt to boost his/her self-esteem and, consequently, improve his/her mood (Cialdini and Kendrick, 1976). The impact of a negative mindset on one's willingness to fulfil requests is therefore ambiguous.

Reflection and intuition in information processing

Information contained in statements (including requests) can be analysed on a more or less superficial level. Despite our belief that we examine consciously and rationally a variety of tasks and problems (Pronin, 2008), it turns out that this process is conducted automatically. Distinguishing between reflective and automatic thinking processes has been subject to numerous analyses and descriptions, and it is referred to as the dual-process theory (Evans, 2011; Kahneman, 2011). Advocates of this theory claim that human mind consists of two evolutionarily different cognitive systems: System 1 operates on the basis of simple, mostly innate procedures, while System 2 uses consciously acquired algorithms, requires the involvement of consciousness and large quantities of cognitive resources. Our mind's default setting for problem analysis is System 1. Authors have formulated numerous models to explain how and when automatic processes are overridden by reflective thinking. They agree, however, that it happens relatively rare (Bialek and Handley, 2013; Bialek and Sawicki, 2014; De Neys, 2006; Evans, 2011; Evans and Stanovich, 2013). In the context of deference to requests, we must consider which circumstances are conducive to a reflective analysis of requests in lieu of their unreflective, superficial examination. Automated processes in decision-making manifest themselves, for example, in the unconscious pre-selection of information and their partial analysis (Kahneman and Tversky, 1983; Tyszka, Zielonka, Dacey and

Sawicki, 2009), focus on non-diagnostic information (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973; Pennycook, Trippas, Thompson and Handley, 2013) and a tendency to apply various heuristics (which in new and uncertain situations involves an unwillingness to put effort into data collection and the calculation of risk – cf. Domurat and Zielinski, 2013).

In routine situations, in which behaviour is governed by conventions and cultural norms, the analysis of a given situation is superficial and boils down to maintaining certain forms without questioning the reasonableness of the undertaken actions. For example, boys are taught to let girls through the door and to help them with minor things, and therefore they do not expect a justification when they are asked by a fellow passenger to place her heavy suitcase on an overhead shelf. If the dialogue initiated by a stranger conforms to cultural norms, the interlocutor is willing to focus less on the arguments stated, and thus to fulfil requests that are seemingly reasonable and justified. As proven by Langer, Blank and Chanowitz (1978), if we perceive a requests as minor, we are less prone to expend the cognitive effort necessary for the analysis of arguments for and against the fulfilment of the request. In such cases, the person making the request can provide any justification to substantiate it. Conversely, any breach of the conventional course of social interaction makes the interlocutor focus on the arguments provided, as the automated or mindless processing of information is interrupted (Bialek, 2012).

Experimental questions and hypothesis

It follows from the above discussion that complaining should promote the conventionalization of dialogue and increase one's propensity for the automatic and unreflective fulfilling of requests, as the person to whom they are addressed would rather preserve their image as that of a helpful person than refuse a small favour. Our hypothesis is as follows:

> H: *Complaining prior to formulating a request is conducive to the interlocutor's unreflective obedience.*

We expect, therefore, that requests formulated after complaining are more effective compared to other forms of verbal exchange.

Experiment 1

In order to verify the above hypothesis, an experiment was designed to investigate the relationship between complaining, as a manipulative technique, and the resulting deference of the interlocutor.

Participants

In a field experiment, twelve experimenters, students of Kozminski University, made conversation with randomly encountered people. A total of N=246 individuals were examined (84 women); researchers noted the gender and estimated age of their interlocutors, the results of the conversation and experimental conditions. Researchers sought to maintain demographic consistency among the groups, randomly assigning individuals to one of experimental groups and then searching for persons of the same sex and of a similar age to be included in other groups.

Procedure

The experiment was based on the investigator's request to be allowed to move to the front of a queue in a shop. The experiment was carried out on weekdays, outside of rush hours and in queues that were not excessively long (which might considerably reduce the chances of a positive reaction to the request). Experimenters would stand in line of at least three people. They each had 3–4 products in their basket and would initiate a conversation with the person standing directly in front of them, asking for directions to the train station or complaining about the slow service. It should be noted that, in order to make the experiment more realistic, it was conducted in shopping malls close to train stations in Warsaw (Złote Tarasy, Arkadia, CH Wileńska).

Experimenters tried to incite their interlocutors to engage in a conversation by asking open-ended questions that would require formulating an opinion (e.g. "Are you not annoyed with this slow service? I'm fed up with it!"). As expected, people would respond willingly and, in many cases, continued the conversation. Respondents who ignored the question or complaint were excluded from further analyses (N=7).

Once the conversation was initiated, examiners waited until their interlocutor got to the check out, at which point they asked if they could be let to the front of the queue. Experimenters' baskets contained few (3–4) products, typically associated with train travel (a bottle of mineral water, a chocolate bar, a newspaper etc.), and therefore their request was minor in terms of time. The manipulation used was analogous to the experiment conducted by Langer, Blank and Chanowitz (1978), with apparent or actual differentiation of the justification. Phrases used in the experiment are listed in the diagram in Figure 1.

The study was conducted according to a scheme with the following independent variables: type of conversation predecessor (3 levels: requests preceded by complaining, preceded by a conversation, not preceded by any form of contact) and type of request justification (2 levels: requests seemingly vs. actually justified). Given these

variables, participants were assigned to six separate experimental groups identical in terms of size.

Figure 1. Experimental manipulations applied
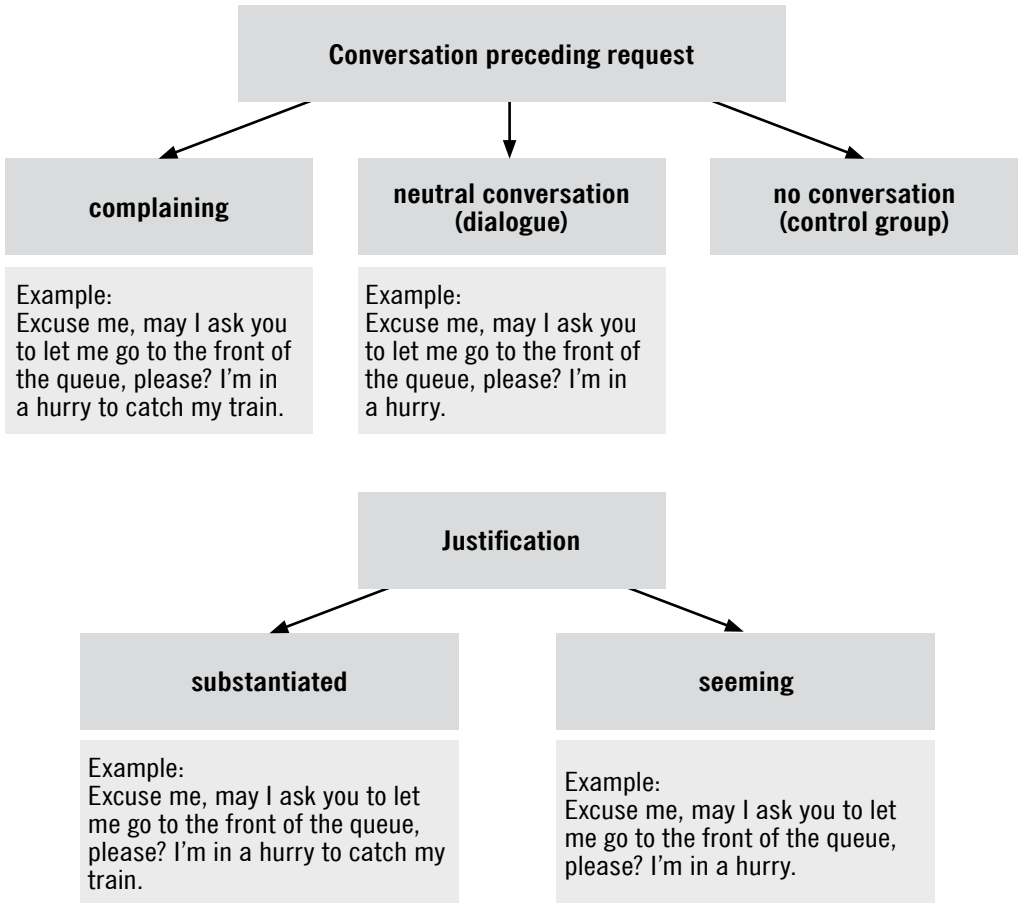
Source: own elaboration.

Results

The results of Experiment 1 are shown in Table 1, showing the percentage of people willing to comply with the request (S), divided into groups on the basis of the type of justification (U) and the type of conversation prior to the formulation of the request (R).

On the basis of data included in Table 1, partial contingency tables were separated. Chi-square tests were conducted in order to verify differences in the compliance,

depending on the manner in which requests were justified and on the type of conversation preceding the request.

Table 1. Impact of the request justification and of the type of prior conversation on the request's effectiveness

Justification of the request (U)	Conversation preceding request (R)	Effectiveness of the request, deference (S)				
		no		yes		total
		N	%	N	%	N
	none (b)	15	46.9	17	53.1	32
	dialogue (d)	2	6.3	30	93.8	32
substantiated (p)	complaining (n)	11	34.4	21	65.6	32
	Total	28	29.2	68	70.8	96
	none (b)	27	54.0	23	46.0	50
	dialogue (d)	5	10.0	45	90.0	50
seeming (r)	complaining (n)	7	14.0	43	86.0	50
	Total	39	26.0	111	74.0	150
Total	none (b)	42	51.2	40	48.8	82
	dialogue (d)	7	8.5	75	91.5	82
	complaining (n)	18	22.0	64	78.0	82
	total	67	27.2	179	72.8	246

Source: own elaboration.

Significant relationships were observed between the type of conversation prior to the request and the effectiveness of the latter („Total": $\chi^2(2)=39.42$, $p<0.001$). This relationship was present for both the apparent justification (p: $\chi^2(2)=13.41$, $p<0.001$) and the actual justification (r: $\chi^2(2)=30.77$, $p<0.001$). Dialogue and complaining was more effective than absence of conversation prior to formulating the request. In the case of apparent justification, dialogue was 40.7 per cent more effective than lack of contact (contingency table p: R[b,d] x S[yes, no], 93.8% vs. 53.1%, $\chi^2(1)=13,54$ $p<0,001$); similarly, it was 44% greater in the case of actual justification (r: R[b,d] x S[yes,no], 90% vs. 46%, $\chi^2(1)=22.24$, $p<0.001$). Slightly different results were obtained through com-

plaining. In the case of apparent justification, although the effectiveness of requests was 12.5% greater than in the case of absence of conversation, the difference was statistically insignificant (p: R [b, n] x S [yes, no], 65.6% vs. 53.1%, $\chi 2$ (1)=1.036, p=0.309). Requests preceded by actual justification proved 40% more effective than those formulated without any prior contact (r: R [b, n] x S [yes, no], 86% vs. 46%, $\chi 2$ (1)=17.83, p <0.001).

Interesting differences were also observed when the effectiveness of dialogue and complaining was compared. In the group of participants to whom apparent justification was provided, the dialogue was significantly (28.2%) more effective than complaining (p: R [d, n] x S [yes, no], 93.8% vs. 65.6%, $\chi 2$ (1)=7.82, p <0.001). The 4% difference observed in the case of actual justification is statistically insignificant and proves that dialogue and complaining are as effective (r: R [d, n] x S [yes, no], 90% vs. 86%, $\chi 2$ (1)=0.379, p=0.538).

Discussion of the results of Experiment 1

Results obtained in Experiment 1 are an interesting addition to Doliński's hypothesis about the effectiveness of dialogue as a means of social influence (Doliński, 2005). Complaining, as a form of dialogue, is just as effective as any other verbal exchange when dealing with a well-justified request. Complaining, therefore, seems to increase the effectiveness of a request. However, when we examine a request that is only apparently justified, the effectiveness of a request preceded by complaining is the same as in the control group and significantly lower than in the group that engaged in a dialogue. How can this be accounted for? The first hypothesis is that complaining discourages people from pursuing conversation.

Experiment 2

In order to verify the hypothesis that complaining disinclines people from continuing a dialogue rather than decreases the efficiency of dialogue as a method of social imfuence, we conducted an experiment in which we assessed the impact of the manner in which a conversation is initiated on the interlocutor's willingness to pursue it.

Experiment participants

A total of N=46 randomly encountered people participated in the experiment. As in Experiment 1, in order to ensure the demographic similarity of the tested groups, the gender of the respondents was noted (29 women and 17 men), as well as their subjectively estimated age.

Procedure

The topic of conversations conducted in the experiment was the problem with picking up a toy for a Christmas present. The study was conducted in supermarkets and in chain toy stores in shopping malls (Tesco, Real, Empik, Smyk) during the pre-Christmas period (18–20 December 2013), on weekdays and outside of peak hours. The experimenter played the role of a parent or a relative interested in purchasing a Christmas gift for a young child; He addressed other customers who happened to be standing by shelves stacked with toys. The role of the experimenter, the place and time, as well as the topic of conversation were prepared to provide the psychological realism of the experiment The participants had a possibility not to engage in conversation. The experimenter, exploring toys on shelves (.) would initiate a conversation with customers standing next to same shelf next, about 1–2 meters away. He kept his eyes on the toys without looking directly at other customers. He addressed only those who were shopping on their own, stood by shelves to which free access was provided from all sides and in the absence of other customers. The person could therefore decline the conversation by ignoring the comments and avoiding eye contact. They could get on with their shopping or walk away without uttering a word, without being forced to go past the experimenter.

Dialogues were initiated in two manners: by expressing satisfaction or complaining about the large selection of toys, and suggesting that the interlocutor expresses an opinion. In the first version, satisfaction was formulated with a smile and in a cheerful tone of voice: "There are so many toys (books, dolls, things) to choose from, we are spoiled for choice, don't you think?". When a token response was given (a laconic sentence or a brief "yes" etc.), the experimenter tried to keep the conversation going by making a statement about the selection ("It didn't used to be like this, the choice was much more limited, it was more difficult"), or about children as recipients of gifts (e.g. "It is easy to chose something that children don't yet have and make them happy"). In the second version, a similar statement was formulated, but voiced without a smile and with a hint of disappointment: "There are so many toys (books, dolls, things) to choose from, one feels lost, don't you think?". In order to keep the conversation going, similar sentences were formulated, although expressed as a complaint ("It didn't use to be like this, the choice was much easier", "Today, children have so many things, it's difficult to choose something they don't yet have", "It's hard to accommodate these children, as they have everything").

It should be noted that Experiment 2 differs from Experiment 1 in the manner in which the conversation is initiated. In Experiment 1, the effect of complaining was compared with the effects of neutral conversation or the absence of a preceding conversation, while in Experiment 2, both types of conversations are emotionally charged

(the selection of toys is being evaluated, either negatively and positively). In this procedure, a maximum resemblance of dialogues was ensured: the sole difference was the choice of words expressing satisfaction or discontent.

The independent variable was the method of initiating a conversation, with two groups of participants ("satisfaction" and "discontent" group). Controlled variables were the gender and the subjectively estimated age of respondents.

Results

The two groups, each of 23 participants, took part in the study. They were differentiated with the way of beginning of the conversation ("satisfaction" vs. "discontent"). There were 9 male participants in the "satisfaction" group and 8 in the "discontent" group. It was considered that a conversation took place when the verbal exchange consisted of at least two longer statements (not offhand responses, a simple nod or "yes"). The following types of conversations were differentiated:

a)   a lack of dialogue: declining a conversation (silence, a nod)
b)   a lack of dialogue: a single response (closing the conversation after the first statement of the experimenter and a lack of response to the second; it occurred only as a response to complaining and it was an expression of agreement – therefore, discontent)
c)   a negative conversation (interlocutors complained and pointed to negative aspects of shopping and buying gifts etc.)
d)   a positive conversation (interlocutors expressed satisfaction with the wide range of goods available, about purchasing gifts etc., declined to complain)
e)   a neutral conversation (mixed content, without a clearly identifiable expression of satisfaction or discontent).

These five types of conversation were combined in broader categories and analysed with a Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test. Detailed results of Experiment 2 are shown in Table 2.

It turned out that there is no significant difference in the willingness to engage in dialogue with regard to the way of beginning a conversation ($\chi2$ (1)=0.119, p=0.730). In the "satisfaction" group, 26.1 per cent of interlocutors refused to engage in a conversation, against 21.7 per cent in the "discontent" group.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from a more detailed analysis of the respondents' answers. Fisher's exact test (FET in short; test statistics: p=0.029) for the contingency

table (2x5) indicates that the course of conversation was different in the two groups. Conversations that started with an expression of satisfaction were rejected relatively more frequently (26.1 per cent) compared to those initiated with a complaint (4.3%; FET: p=0.096, at the statistical trend level). A number of responses were incompatible with the manner in which the dialogue was initiated, i.e. negative responses in the "satisfaction" group and positive reactions in the "discontent" group. It turned out that in the "satisfaction" group, respondents would change the negative tone of conversation four times more often (34.8%) than in the "discontent" group (8.7%; FET: p=0.035).

Table 2. Opening of conversation, character of the dialogue or absence of the latter

Conversation opening		Character of response and of conversation					Total
		none	one sentence	negative	neutral	positive	
satisfaction	N	6	0	8	3	6	23
	%	26.1	0.0	34.8	13.0	26.1	100.0
complaining	N	1	4	10	6	2	23
	%	4.3	17.4	43.5	26.1	8.7	100.0
Total	N	7	4	18	9	8	46
	%	15.2	8.7	39.1	19.6	17.4	100.0

Source: own elaboration.

Discussion of the results of Experiment 2

The results of Experiment 2 show that the respondents' willingness to engage in a dialogue was not less frequent in the "discontent" group than in the "satisfaction" group. The percentage of people who ignored the attempt to establish a dialogue was similar in both groups. An interesting observation is that respondents in the "satisfaction" group relatively frequently changed the tone of the conversation, revealing a tendency for spontaneous complaining. This result is in the line with a common belief that complaining is a widely accepted form of dialogue in the Polish culture. In Experiment 1, the observed lower effectiveness of persuasive messages formulated after complaining cannot be explained by the sole reluctance to converse with someone who complains and, therefore, it was likely to be the result of complaining (e.g. the affect induced in this manner).

Summary and final conclusions

Interpreting results of Experiment 1, we should keep in mind the topic of the complaint, which could deter respondents from providing help, as they also experienced the inconvenience of having to wait in a line at the checkout.

The reason why the preceding conversation could have a particularly important impact on deterrence was that it could, in itself, be perceived as a specific form of justification. If someone asks for directions to the train station, and then asks to be let to the front of the line, it seems more than likely that they are in a hurry to catch a train. Such enthymematic inclusion by the respondents of their own justification might have contributed to the effectiveness of the request. Asking for directions to the train station can also be perceived as a minor request, with the follow-up question about being allowed to go to the front of the queue as a greater request; it accidentally leads to a kind of "foot in the door" manipulation (Freedman and Fraser, 1966).

Despite the above critical observations, we should note that, as (according to our knowledge) reported here research pertains to the yet unanalysed issue of complaining as a method of social impact. The findings may be further discussed and inspire future research. Contrary to what is suggested by Kowalski (1996; 2002) and Doliński (2005), complaining did not turn out to support building positive relationships. It seemed that complaining at the start of a conversation would make people more empathic and friendly towards their interlocutor, and therefore more likely to help. We expected, therefore, that respondents who were asked for help would react in an unreflective mode, accepting any apparent justification. According to the cited authors, establishing a dialogue increases one's chances of getting help from the interlocutor acting in the unreflective mode; in everyday situations, we tend to operate in an unreflective, fast and frugal way.

Experiment 1 showed, however, that people provoked to complaining do not respond positively to a request addressed to them. The effectiveness of a request formulated after complaining is the same as in the case of a request expressed without any prior attempt at establishing a dialogue. Only reasonably justified requests tend to be fulfilled more willingly. This means that a person to whom a request is addressed controls his/her reactions, analysing the available arguments and assessing the possible costs of his/her decision. Establishing contact has a positive impact only if it does not involve complaining or any other negative message (which levels off any positive aspects of initiating a conversation).

As shown by Experiment 2, decreased effectiveness of requests preceded by complaining is not due to a lower quality of dialogue initiated in this manner, as respondents

were just as willing to pursue conversations initiated with a complaint. Analysing the results of Experiment 1, we can assume that complaining has a negative impact on one's mood. We are less likely to operate in an automatic and unreflective mode – as previously mentioned, negative mood is conducive to reflective data processing (Bless, 2001). It is confirmed by the difference between the effectiveness of substantially and apparently justified requests preceded by complaining (Experiment 1). People to whom requests are addressed have two tendencies: the desire to refuse to help a stranger (which probably had a decisive impact in the control group), and a tendency to meet the request of a person who has ceased to be a stranger (which might have played a role in the dialogue group). Complaining prevents the use of automated operating procedures and incites a person to reflect when processing a persuasive message. Consequently, a request is met only when it is well justified; it is rejected when it fails to meet the expectations of the person to whom it is addressed.

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